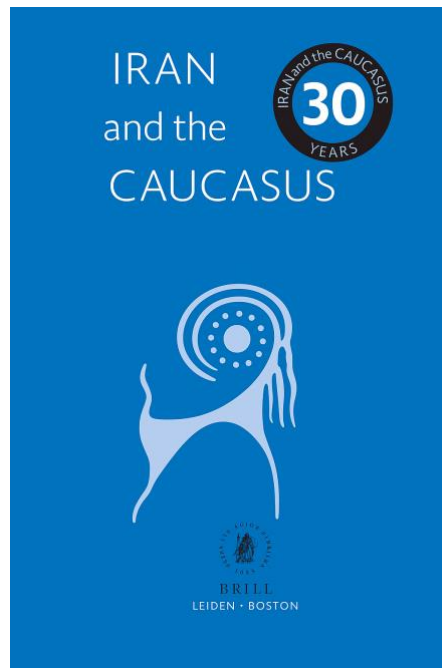




## **30 YEARS OF “IRAN AND THE CAUCASUS”: A PROUD MILESTONE**

**International Conference Dedicated to the 30th Anniversary of  
*Iran and the Caucasus***

**19-21 September, 2026**

Yerevan, Armenia

**Abstracts**

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## **Abstracts**

### **Keynote lectures**

#### **Three Decades at the Crossroads: The Journey of *Iran and the Caucasus* Garnik S. Asatryan**

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The presentation marks the 30th anniversary of *Iran and the Caucasus* and reflects on three decades of the journal's scholarly activity and development. Since its foundation, the journal has provided an international and interdisciplinary forum for research on Iran, the Caucasus, and the wider regions connected to them through historical, linguistic, cultural, and political interactions. The presentation will highlight major stages in the journal's development, its contribution to Iranian and Caucasian studies, and the broad range of disciplines, regions, and scholarly traditions represented in its pages. It will also consider the journal's role in fostering academic dialogue across disciplinary and geographical boundaries and outline its perspectives and priorities for the future.

#### **Between Preservation and Adaptation: Zoroastrian Oral Songs in the Wider Iranian Cultural World**

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Scholarship on song as a genre of oral literature has gradually moved beyond the older conception of songs as merely “folkloric survivals” or ancillary musical material, and has instead treated them as complex forms of performed verbal art. Ruth Finnegan's foundational studies of oral literature and oral poetry showed that songs, chants, praise poems, ritual lyrics, work songs, laments, and devotional verse must be understood as central genres of oral literature rather than as marginal or secondary forms (Finnegan 1970/2012; Finnegan 1977). Albert B. Lord's work on oral composition further emphasised the figure of the singer as composer-performer, whose art is shaped by memory, formulaic language, genre conventions, and the performance situation itself (Lord 1960; Foley 1988). Richard Bauman's performance-centred approach shifted the analytical focus from the song as a fixed “text” to the song as a communicative event involving performer, audience, occasion, social role, aesthetic framing, and cultural competence (Bauman 1977). Within Iranian studies, this broader theoretical orientation has been particularly useful, since Iranian oral literature comprises narrative and lyrical forms, prose and verse, spoken and sung traditions, and a wide range of religious, epic, festive, domestic, and affective repertoires (Kreyenbroek and Marzolph 2010; Allison and Kreyenbroek 2022, Kreyenbroek 1999). In relation to Zoroastrian traditions, however, the

scholarship remains more dispersed. Studies of Zoroastrian Monājāt, Parsi garbās, pilgrimage songs, Ziyārat-nāmes, and contemporary Iranian Zoroastrian devotional songs have demonstrated the richness of the material, but have rarely treated songs as a coherent oral-literary genre in their own right (Russell 1989; Schmermbeck 2008; Farridnejad 2020; Bernard 2020; Goshtasb 2026). A focus on Zoroastrian songs as oral literature therefore offers a particularly productive framework: it allows us to analyse language, melody, performance, ritual memory, pilgrimage practice, gendered and domestic transmission, communal identity, and cultural adaptation together, showing that Zoroastrian songs function not simply as music or devotion, but as a vital medium through which a minority tradition preserves itself while negotiating its place within the wider Iranian cultural world.

Building on this theoretical and scholarly framework, this keynote examines Zoroastrian oral songs in Iran as an important yet understudied archive of minority memory, devotional expression, and cultural interaction. While Zoroastrian ritual practice is often marked by liturgical conservatism, priestly authority, and the preservation of inherited forms, oral songs belong to a more flexible, socially mobile, and affectively charged sphere of communal life. Circulating through households, pilgrimage contexts, local performance, women's and elders' memory, and everyday religious practice, they provide a privileged lens through which to examine how Zoroastrian communities have preserved a distinct religious and linguistic identity while participating in the wider Iranian cultural world.

By analysing selected songs associated with Jamshidiyan Mobarakeh, this lecture shows that Zoroastrian song should not be understood either as evidence of cultural isolation or as a symptom of assimilation. Rather, it constitutes a dynamic oral-literary medium through which minority identity is sounded, negotiated, and transmitted. These songs sustain communal distinctiveness through Zoroastrian religious imagery, ritual memory, sacred geography, and, in some cases, linguistic features associated with Zoroastrian Dari. At the same time, they draw upon melodic idioms, devotional affects, folkloric motifs, and popular-classical musical styles shared across Iranian culture more broadly. The central claim of the lecture is therefore that Zoroastrian songs represent cultural survival through selective adaptation: they preserve Zoroastrian memory, language, and sacred imagination while engaging creatively with the musical and folkloric vocabulary of the surrounding Iranian environment.

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## **Road conditions and exchange patterns in charas and opium trade in the Xinjiang Triangle**

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Commodity exchange across borders has been an indicator for bilateral relations over long periods of time, affecting all actors and participants along these routes. Looking from the South the roads to Kashgar were important thoroughfares and competing trade corridors across the Hindukush, Karakoram and Himalaya for the export of Badakhshani opium (*Papaver somniferum*) to China and for the import of high-quality Xinjiang-grown hashish (*charas*) into Kashmir and for its distribution in British India. Based upon trade statistics and reports from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century archival sources the importance of these two commodities is evaluated in terms of their effects on route development, traders' relations and the communities residing in these corridors and enabling the exchange of goods across high mountain passes. Both provided income to rural elites and shaped the consumption patterns, income and livelihood situation in roadside principalities such as Chitral, Wakhan, Hunza and Sarikol as well as the relations between dominating trading communities and local cultivators in oases towns such as Kashgar and Yarkand. In the mid-1930s, exchange relations significantly changed and almost came to a standstill as a result of political upheavals. Border closures and interrupted trade affected the situation at both ends of the routes as well as in between. The paper deals with the period of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and analyses the mutual interests, the relationships between the players and the economic significance prior to the advent of motor traffic and modern communications.

## **Presentations**

### **The Effect of Teaching Reading through Critical Pedagogy Principles on the Reading Comprehension of Persian as a Foreign Language (PFL) Learners**

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The present study was an attempt to investigate whether teaching reading through critical pedagogy principles positively affect the reading comprehension of PFL learners. The study also aimed at finding the views of the learners about teaching L2 reading based on Critical Pedagogy (CP) principles. Sixty intermediate level male and female PFL learners with the age range of 18 to 35 studying Persian at Baran language school in Tehran were chosen through SAMFA as a homogeneity test. These participants were also pretested through a validated teacher made multiple-choice Persian reading comprehension test. Then, they were divided into two equal groups, namely Experimental Group (EG), and Control Group (CG). Both the groups received the same materials but the experimental group were exposed to teaching reading through Critical Pedagogy (CP) principles. The steps the experimental group was supposed to go through were designed based on the 10 principles of CP (Mazdaee & Maftoon, 2012). In the control group, however, there was no CP based assignment. After eight weeks of instruction, the researcher administered the validated reading posttest to measure the reading comprehension of the PFL learners. Also, the participants of the experimental group of the study who had experienced CP principles were asked to complete the Critical Pedagogy Attitude Questionnaire. The data collected was analyzed through using SPSS software version 26 and the reading comprehension development of the participants was taken into consideration. The outcome of the posttest data analysis clarified that the participants in the experimental group significantly outperformed the subjects in the control group. Therefore, the obvious conclusion is that the devised treatment i.e. the application of CP principles in the PFL classroom has helped the participants in the experimental group to perform better than the control group in which the learners relied on the conventional methods. The study findings could be used by PFL teachers and researchers.

### **What is the Yezidi hereafter?**

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The Yezidi conception of the Hereafter does not constitute a coherent theological doctrine but rather represents a multilayered synthesis of indigenous Yezidi beliefs, Islamic eschatology, pre-Islamic Iranian traditions, and ideas characteristic of the broader Near Eastern non-dogmatic religious milieu. Owing to the absence of canonical theology, various eschatological

concepts coexist within the tradition, allowing the reconstruction of a complex vision of posthumous existence from religious hymns, ritual practices, and oral lore.

Death is understood as the departure of the soul (*rūh*) from the body (*qālib*), marking the beginning of its journey into the Other World. This transition is supervised by psychopompic figures, including angels of death, the Yezidi Šēx Kirās, and Davrēš Ārd, while the soul must ultimately cross the Širāt (Salāt) Bridge separating this world from the next. Passage across the bridge depends not only on moral conduct but also on fidelity to the Yezidi community and is facilitated by the unique institution of the Brother or Sister of the Hereafter, who intercedes on behalf of the deceased.

Paradise is portrayed as a peaceful garden reserved for the righteous, whereas Hell appears as a narrow place of punishment for sinners and unbelievers. Unlike Islamic tradition, however, Yezidi religious discourse places relatively little emphasis on either celestial rewards or infernal torments. Instead, the ethical dimension of the Hereafter is most fully articulated in the recently published text *A 'lī Šērē Xwadē Āxiratēdā* ("Ali the Lion of God in the Hereafter"), in which 'Ali is granted a visionary journey through the Beyond. Observing individualized punishments corresponding to specific sins, he is instructed to return and warn humanity, transforming the Hereafter into a moral revelation rather than merely a place of judgment.

The tradition also preserves traces of an older belief in reincarnation (*tanāsux*), which appears to have coexisted with the concepts of Paradise and Hell. The resulting eschatological system reflects the syncretic and non-dogmatic character of Yezidism, where moral accountability, communal identity, ritual solidarity, and diverse religious inheritances converge into a distinctive vision of the world beyond.

## **The Indo-Iranian Conception of the Divine and the Formulation of Monotheism**

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It has long been recognized that certain conceptions of the singular deity find early expressions in the Indian and Iranian worlds, with Zoroastrianism often considered the most ancient “monotheistic” faith even though this designation is debatable. What is certain is that the evolution of monotheism as a conceptual framework occurred under or in close proximity to the Iranian sphere of influence over a relatively long period of time and through a complex conceptual process. The idea of a singular ever-existing yet personal creator deity that is distinct from creation yet active personally in the life of its adherents is complex and in many ways contrary to nature. Such a concept first developed in the Indo-Iranian world and has no direct parallel in other cultures such as the Egyptian or Mesopotamian conceptions of the divine. This paper seeks to offer a comprehensive analysis of the philosophical and theological developments found in Indo-Iranian sources—especially in the RīgVeda and the Avesta but also in later derivative works—that would eventually serve to formulate major conceptions of the one-god in the so-called “Abrahamic” religions. These developments are non-linear and complex. Thus, I will also analyze, under the same prism, primary sources from various inscriptions from central and western Asia as well as datapoints that can be found in various archives in the region. Finally, this paper will show how these concepts contributed to the

development of the central tenant of Islam – the Tawhid – and the development of modern monotheistic thought thenceforth.

## **Sabean and Manichaeon Impact on the Nuṣayrī Doctrine**

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Some Nuṣayrī ideas are quite distinctive even against the backdrop of the legacy of extreme Shī'a (*ghulāt*). René Dussaud also suggested that one of the sources of Nuṣayrī beliefs could have been the ideas of the Sabeans of Ḥarrān (commonly identified with the Mandaeans). The Sabeans were considered People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), along with Jews and Christians, and enjoyed widespread favor with the authorities during the 'Abbasid period. The Sabeans were scattered throughout Iraq and Northern Syria. Al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān Khaṣībī, one of the founders of the Nuṣayrī community, temporarily migrated to Ḥarrān. The Sabean influence on his ideas was entirely possible. However, reliable knowledge of Sabean doctrine is so fragmentary that Dussaud hypothesis remains little more than a reasonable assumption. This presentation discusses a number of obvious parallels between Nuṣayrī and Mandaean mythology: *qabbān* 'scales', *bahrāmī* and *hāšimī*, the figure of Abel (*Hābil*) etc. On the other hand, direct contacts between Nuṣayrī leaders and the Manichaeans were not excluded. The Manichaeans, including their leaders, returned to Iraq after the Arab conquest. In the region, their particular activity is recorded at the beginning of the 'Abbasid period. In a recent publication, Mushegh Asatryan and Dylan Burns concluded that the doctrine of *ghulāt* (expounded in some Nuṣayrī works) resembles the doctrine of the Ophites and Sethites, while the authors caution against the customary application of the term "Gnostic" to the *ghulāt* and *nuṣayriyya*. It seems that a direct Manichaean influence on Nuṣayrī doctrine was not total. However, this impact is revealed in the use of certain concepts that have no parallels in either the general *ghulāt* tradition or other currents of Gnosticism (especially Mandaean text). One such example is the concept of *'amūd al-ṣabah* (literally, "phantom pillar") of the Nuṣayrī texts. This word is entirely marginal in the context of early Islamic mysticism, but can be interpreted as a distortion of the well-known concept *'amūd al-ṣubḥ* "the Pillar of Glories" (a translation of the Syriac *eṣṭūn ṣubḥā* 'the Column of Glory'), which is frequently mentioned by Arab authors in their descriptions of Manichaean doctrine (i.e., in the Arabic Manichaica). This is a key concept of Manichaean cosmology. Moreover, the distorted rendering of *ṣbh* instead of *ṣbh* is found in Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's *Kitāb al-radd 'āla 'l-zindīq al-la'īn Ibn Muqaffa*. Several such examples will be offered for discussion during the course of the presentation.

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## A Textual-Based Semantic Study of the New Persian lexeme *bōr*

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The traditional and ongoing prominence bestowed on the phonological aspects of linguistics without a systematic parallel diachronic and semantic analysis, has resulted in a number of speculative interpretations and etymologies in Persian. Although some of the readings may look right phonologically, they are hazardous semantically, leading to a proliferation of unrealistic glosses for the same word with irrelevant and on occasions contradictory meanings — one such inopportune case has been the lemma *bōr* which has suffered from scholarly *ad hoc* glosses and etymologies for more than one and a half centuries, being the subject of our present case study.

The speculative connotations and etymologies of the lemma *bōr* have passed from generation to generation without any questioning and text referral, being mostly based on dictionaries that have copied one another without any true textual backing. The reason for this has been the obvious difficulty of the time consuming search process in literature on the one hand, and the intricacy associated with semantic analysis on the other, to which is added the indiscriminate copying of one lexicographer from another.

This investigation is a case study that displays how the lexeme *bōr*, when given as “horse” has been wrongly interpreted as the cognate of *asp / asb* (اسب / اسب) “horse” whereas it actually designated a particular “fast, agile, nimble, intelligent, type, breed or brand of horse,” or when given as a “colour label,” has been defined as سرخ متمایل به قهوه ای in Persian, brown, rose-brown, reddish-brown, bay, chestnut in English, braun, rothbraun (vom Ross), Fuchs (Pferd) in German, while the *bona fide* meanings of *bōr* as a colour label has been “blue roan or light grey.”

Interestingly, the authentic gloss of the lexeme *bōr* as a *type, breed or brand of horse* and a *colour label* have been placed under the ghost word *bōz* (بوز) in most dictionaries for almost a millennium, and erroneously designated as of Turkish origin.

The use of *bōr* with the connotations of “horse” and the related “colour label” have completely vanished from the current Persian vocabulary, while the lexeme *bōr* denoting “yellow; blond; light complexion” and the pejorative expression of *bōr šodan* (بور شدن) “to fail, become embarrassed, lose face” which are imports from Ossetic are current and appear in Persian writing for the first time in the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in writing by Āl-e Aḥmad in 1958 and ‘Āref-e Qazvīnī in 1968.

## Etymology of Persian and Sanskrit ‘coconut’ revisited

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Identification of early Indo-Aryan borrowings in Middle and New Iranian is definitely of great interest for both cultural history and methodology of areal linguistic research. However, it has not yet become a subject of a systematic study. Apart from particular etymologies, whether self-evident, such as the Iranian origin of the Old Indian epigraphic term *kṣatrapa* ‘governor, satrap’, or dubious, as the conventional wisdom concerning the botanic term to be discussed today, no attempt was made to put such a study on a solid theoretical footing. The

purpose of the presentation is to review the issue of determining the direction of borrowing in disputed case and to propose some methodological approaches to solving problems of this kind. As a case study, the terms for ‘coconut’ in Persian and Sanskrit agricultural terms are examined, i. e. Phl. ’n’lg(y)l(w) / *anārgīl(ū)*, NP نارگیل / *nārgīl* ~ Skt. *nārikela-*, *nālikera-*.

## Types and motifs of the Pashto folktales

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Alongside written literature, which began in the 16th century (see Pelevin 2025), Pashto also boasts a rich oral tradition, which began to be published in the second half of the 19th century, initially by the British, but later also by local authors. Within this oral tradition, in addition to poems, *landāy*, and other literary productions, we also find numerous folk-tales, which can be divided into three main types: *afsāne*, *naqluna* and *hikāyatuna*. The first (*afsāna*) are true folk-tales, linked to adventure and to the magical, whose purpose is to entertain the audience; the second (*naql*) are legends and epics deeply rooted in the specificities of local customs and traditions, situated halfway between popular culture and official religion; the last (*hikāyat*) have a distinctly moral and religious character, to the extent that it has been adopted as an educational and edifying tool within Islam, also including accounts of the lives of Sufis.

The first British repertoire is the *Ganj-i-puxto*, “the treasury of Pashto”, published at Peshawar in 1872 by the missionary T.P. Hughes (and translated in 1875 by T.C. Plowden) as a part of the *Kalid-i-Afghani. Selections of Pashtu prose and poetry* [“the key of the Afghans”]: from now on, the editions of folk-tales will become more and more consistent. Among others, we can mention the works of Thornburn (1876) and Darmesteter (1888-1890), Malyon (1910-1914), Ahmad Jan (1929 and 1930), Inayat-ur-Rahman (1968 and 1984), Heston and Mumtaz Nasir (1987) and Septfonds (1994). But above all, a special mention deserves *Melli Hendāra*, “the mirror of the nation”, published in 3 volumes by Muhammad Gul Nuri in Kabul for the first time, between 1940 and 1947, and republished in Quetta in 1955, in the most famous and cited edition.

At the same time, we have numerous collections of folk-tales gathered from the areas surrounding the Pashto-speaking region: examples include the Persian tales collected and studied by Boulvin (1975) and Marzolph (1984), the Kurdish tales (for a comprehensive study, see De Chiara and Guizzo 2015), the Ossetian tales (see Arys-Djanaeva and De Chiara 2021) and the Turkish tales (see Eberhard and Boratav 1953).

In my presentation, I will first provide an overview of the current state of the art in Pashto folk-tales; then, in light of the classifications of Aarne-Thompson-Uther (see Uther 2004) and Thompson (1955-1958), I will outline the main types and motifs present in this area. Finally, drawing on existing repertoires and studies on the folklore of this region, I shall attempt to present some exemplary cases of comparison with the folk-tales traditions of the surrounding geographic areas, namely the Iranian, Central Asian, and Indian worlds.

## **Clay Sculptures from Penjikent Temple II: Proposals for the Identification of an Enigmatic Sogdian Deity**

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Approximately in the center of Penjikent archaeological site (western Tajikistan), there are two temples featuring an internal and external court which painted and sculptural decorations have attracted much attention among scholars. Experts of Iranian studies have proposed to identify some of the paintings and statues that embellish the so-called "twin temples" at Penjikent with deities of the rich and variegated pre-Islamic Sogdian pantheon. The Sogdians professed a polytheistic faith whose deities presented very strong connections with Zoroastrian ones mentioned in the Avesta. This paper is focusing on the possible identification of a very fragmentary clay statue that originally stood on a podium in front of the northern wall of a portico before the access from the outer to the inner court of Temple

## **External light on the development of the Ossetic prothetic vowel**

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The Ossetic language has innovated prothetic vowels in two positions: before clusters resulting from the regular pre-Ossetic metathesis of Proto-Iranian clusters of two fricatives, and before inherited but non-metathesized Proto-Iranian initial clusters \*xš- and \*fš-. The chronology of the development of prothetic vowels in these positions, and their merger with the reflex of Proto-Iranian short \*a to give Ossetic æ-, is uncertain. The only direct Alanic evidence is *χσινά* 'lady' in John Tzetzes (cf. Ossetic *æxsin* id.) where a prothetic vowel is seemingly absent. In spite of the view of Cheung (2002: 36) that this dates the prothetic vowel to after Tzetzes, this example is difficult to interpret because elision is easily possible in verse after a vowel (cf. the preceding word *μέσφιλι* 'my lord'). The other three sources for medieval Alanic, namely the Alanic glosses in a Greek liturgical script (Lubotsky 2015), the thirteenth-century Jász wordlist (Németh 1959), and the Zelenčuk inscription (Zgusta 1987), do not contain any words which would reflect this development.

This paper compiles the entire body of evidence for the Ossetic prothetic vowel from two external sources that shed much light on the prehistory of Ossetic. The first source is the Sarmatian and Alanic anthroponymy in Greek and other scripts from the first centuries AD. The second external source is the Alanic-era borrowings into the Uralic languages, namely Hungarian, Mari, Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha), Ob-Ugric (Khanty and Mansi), and Permian (Udmurt and Komi), concerning which there is a corpus of previously published etymologies as well as the author's ongoing research. When placed together, these external sources can help to determine the chronology of the pre-Ossetic development of a prothetic vowel in the aforementioned positions, as well as to determine a more precise phonetic realization of the vowel.

## **Sacred sites in the Pamir mountain landscape: Symbolic worldview**

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Worship of holy places incorporated into the natural environment was prevalent throughout ancient Central Asia. This paper examines the evolution of such sacred sites in the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan, from early natural settings (stone altars, megaliths, mounds, watercourses and groves) to modern Muslim man-made shrines, as well as the terms used to designate them.

We focus on the history of the conceptual representations and vocabulary of these sites, which imbue the natural environment with spiritual substance. The study examines the vocabulary associated with those features of the natural landscape considered sacred (mountains, rocks, stones, caves). Such sites often combine several environmental characteristics, being located at high altitudes and distinguished by their form, frequently featuring a flowing watercourse (glacier, river, stream, brook, or spring), a grove or a solitary tree.

We discuss how, during the Islamic period, a tradition of pilgrimages to shrines emerged, incorporating a strong Sufi and environmental pre-Islamic ethos. This evolving trend reflected ancient beliefs and integrated previous symbolic signs, manifested in the spatial arrangement of the sacred site, its structure, and objects of worship, such as solitary slabs, piles of stones or goat horns. In the latter case, wildlife is represented by the personification of a sacred mountain goat in the name of a shrines. We demonstrate that a cult associated with this animal, evidenced by the presence of goat images and horns, was reflected in sites throughout the Western Pamirs, among the Wakhi people living in China and Pakistan, and more broadly in the region of Hindu Kush.

This paper analyses how the evolution of these natural features, from pagan cult sites to their function as Islamic shrines, serves as a prism through which we can uncover key aspects of the worldview of Pamir peoples, and insights into its resonance.

In this regard, we examine the spiritual exploration of the environment underlying the selection of these particular sites, the status of which, elaborated over time, constitutes an enduring nexus of beliefs, rituals, and legends. The uniqueness in the Pamir languages of such distinctive, treasured spatial objects is confirmed by the usage of lexemes containing a specific semantic component expressed verbally by the terms “holy place” and “sanctuary”. Thus, we consider the correspondence between the names of places and their conceptual representation and distinguish the designations of these sites, falling within several main categories.

# **Clerical and Leftist Religious Opposition to the Shah's Regime on the Eve of the Islamic Revolution in Iran: Mutually Exclusive Paradigms or a Common Liberation Theology”?**

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1. In the second half of the 20th century, several ideological movements emerged in Iran in opposition to the authoritarian regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, which quickly gained practical expression. The most prominent and popular among them were the left-wing religious opposition (Nakhshab, Shariati, Banisadr, etc.), and also the religious opposition led by the Shiite clergy (Khomeini, Jannati, Beheshti, Mottahari, etc.).

2. Despite the fact that both camps of the Shah's opponents were religious and sought to transform society and the state based on Sharia, there were ideological differences between them on a number of issues: the role of Muslim clergy in society, the accessibility of ijtiḥād and the interpretation of Islamic sources, the political structure of the state after the victory of the revolution, etc., as well as purely technical and even personal contradictions between the leaders and ordinary supporters of the two ideological currents.

3. Nevertheless, as society and opposition groups moved toward the Islamic revolution, one can note the overcoming of a significant portion of these differences - partly under the influence of revolutionary practice and work with the masses, partly due to the physical elimination of some charismatic leaders (such as Ali Shariati), partly due to the need to consolidate the largest possible number of supporters, etc. By the late 1970s, clerics increasingly voiced demands for social transformation, and secular religious oppositionists joined them during and after the 1979 Revolution and collaborated with them (as did A. Banisadr).

4. Thus, it makes sense to speak of a gradually emerging common ideology and political practice, which some experts call "liberation theology" and others the ideology of the Islamic Republic. This symbiosis, a product of the evolution of the views of Iranian religious revolutionaries, has been projected onto the structure of the modern Iranian state and society. Given the latter's survivability and ability to confront even the United States in open military conflict, this phenomenon is extremely relevant and interesting for study and, perhaps, for the extraction of practical lessons.

## **And on Earth Peace, Good Will Toward Men**

### **Anthropologies of Achaemenid Kingship: Hybris and Cosmocracy in Early Persia**

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This paper leverages recent anthropological debates around the issue of religion as a driver for political change in world history and theories concerning modes of rulers' sacralization to make a case for reconsidering, under theoretically more grounded premises, the longstanding issue of whether or not the Achaemenid kings considered themselves, where – or could – be taken by their subjects as, or at least acted in ways that could be taken as signifying their being, divine. In that his reign witnessed both the culmination of the Empire's prodigious expansion

and (partially a consequence of this) a few potentially compromising setbacks, it is argued here that Darius I's tenure on the throne offers a compelling case study through which to test the paper's theoretical framework. On a more general level, this contribution seeks to raise awareness among Achaemenid scholars of the anthropological literature's potential for approaching anew, and productively, vexed questions in the field. At the same time, discussion of the Īrānian material may afford anthropologists interest in world-historical comparison compelling (and so far rather neglected) additional evidence.

ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς· Ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου'. (John 18:36)  
And Jesus said: «My kingdom is not of this world».

θāti Dārayava.uš xšāyaθiya: || māna A.uramazdā || A.uramazdahā adam. || A.uramazdām ayadaī || A.uramazdamāī upastam baratu. (DSk § 2)

Saith Darius the king: «I am Ahuramadā's and Ahuramazdā is mine. I worshipped Ahuramazdā: may Ahuramazdā support me.

### Question-Answer Literature in Middle Persian

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Most of the extant literary production in Middle-Persian is in the form of questions and answers. Notwithstanding its use in Sasanian (or precedent) times (e.g., *Zand ī Fragard ī Jud-Dēw-Dād*, *Mādayān ī Jōišť ī Friyān* and partly *Mēnōy ī Xrad*) starting from the IX century there is an enormous increase in the production of collections of *Pursišnīhā* “Questions” in the former territories of the Sasanian Empire. Some of these *Pursišnīhā* received at a later date the title of *Rivayāt* “exposition” and were generally attributed to prominent members of the community, as the *Rivayāt* of Ēmēd ī Ašawahišt (REA) and the *Rivayāt* attributed to Ādurfarnbay and Farnbay-Srōš (RAF). Other collections are unauthored, as the so called *Pursišnīhā*, followed by a group of thirty questions in codex TD2 and the Pahlavi *Rivayāts* preceding (PRDd I) and following (PRDd II) the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (DD). The PRDd I and II take as a model the dialogue between Zaratuštra and Ahura Mazdā present in the Avestan *Widēvdād*, in which religious teaching is transformed into a catechistic form, conveyed by the god to the prophet. To this genre is also ascribed the DD, which according to §3 (ed. Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998), is a *pursišnīg-nāmag* “inquiring letter”.

At exactly the same time, after the Islamic Conquest, the East-Mediterranean world sees an enormous increase in the production of dispute poems dealing with religious matters, collection of citations, and question-answer literature (ἐρωταποκρίσεις, ζητήματα, etc.). These collections in the Byzantine world dealt with the correct procedure in relation to eucharistic, moral and sexual matters, beliefs about fate and paradise and problems related to everyday life and, amongst the other topics, regulation of social interactions with Muslims.

Thus, in this presentation we would like to address the following topics: is there a difference within the genre of *Pursišnīhā*? How are the questions connected to each other? Do the *Pursišnīhā* have its only roots in the “*frašna*-literature” (i.e., Zaratuštra's questions and Ahura Mazdā's answers)? Is there a link in the increase of production of this genre in Byzantine and Middle Persian literature? Are they connected or are they independent developments that respond to the same threat?

## Beyond Pronominality: Exceptional Behaviours of the Persian Enclitic *-eš* in Colloquial Spoken Persian

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The Persian third-person singular enclitic *-eš* is typically analysed as a pronominal clitic expressing possession and third-person object reference. However, colloquial spoken Persian exhibits a range of uses that do not fit comfortably within this traditional description.

A corpus of naturally occurring spoken data shows a number of exceptional uses of *-eš* that are difficult to analyse solely in terms of possession or argument realization. The data include constructions in which the enclitic shows grammaticalization-like behaviour and semantic or functional bleaching, occurring in environments where its contribution appears primarily pragmatic rather than syntactic.

Among the phenomena examined are the use of *-eš* in contexts where it compensates for the absence of overt third-person subject agreement marking in the past tense, its unexpected occurrence with certain present-tense forms of some verbs, its function as a resumptive element in colloquial Persian, and cases of sequential occurrence of the enclitic. These patterns suggest that the distribution and function of *-eš* extend beyond its traditionally recognised pronominal role.

I argue that these constructions are systematic rather than marginal and should be analysed as evidence for an expanded functional profile of *-eš* in colloquial Persian. The data reveal a continuum between pronominal reference, grammatical marking, and discourse-related functions, highlighting the interaction of cliticization, grammaticalization, and conversational pragmatics.

The paper concludes by proposing a typology of exceptional *-eš* constructions and discussing their implications for existing accounts of Persian clitics.

## The Notable Features of Pāzand

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Pāzand has remained largely neglected, because experts have drawn their attention to Pāzand much less than to Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Persian etc. In my talk, I will be discussing the important features of Pāzand in detail. The Pāzand text, which will be discussed, is based on the preserved texts by Antiā (1909), (JamaspAsa 1982) and Geldner (1896, 60). In what follows, I will briefly sum up the notable features, which could be divided up into several groups, of Pāzand.

1. The development of consonants in Pāzand. Some of the developments show similarities with new Iranian dialects such as *caharāmqdi* ‘chariot’ (JamaspAsa 1982, 38), Pāzand *suhar* ‘red’ (Antiā 1909, 122), (compare Av. *suxra-* ‘red’, MP *suxr* ‘red’). One sees the development of *xr*

to *hr*, which is also shared with Iranian dialects such as Maryam Ābādī in Yazd province *sahr* ‘red’, in the dialects of Fars, Awazī, Bastakī, Bīyerdī dialects *cahra* ‘spinning wheel’.

2. The influences of the Avestan language on Pāzand. This is divided up into two: 1. spelling such as Pāzand *mainiiō* (JamaspAsa 1982, 31) ‘spiritual, spirit’, Av. nom. sg. *mañiiō* ‘*ibid*’, 2. Loanwords such as Pāzand *tum* Geldner (1896, 60) ‘you’, YAv. *tūm* nom. sg. ‘*ibid*’.

3. Pāzand texts show sometimes the graphic variations such as *manišnī* ‘intention, thought’ and sometimes phonetic variations such as *mənəšne* ‘*ibid*’ vs. mp. *menišn* ‘*ibid*’ (Antiā 1909, 171, 246). The graphic variations are mostly seen by š, š, š.

3. The influences of the non-Iranian language Arabic and the loanwords of Arabic language. These loanwords could be divided up into two groups: 1. The daily Arabic words such as Pāzand *muškel* ‘problem’, Arabic *muškil* ‘*ibid*’, Pāzand *‘ažim* ‘big, huge’, Arabic *‘ažim* ‘*ibid*’, 2. The specific Islamic words such as, Pāzand *halal* ‘Halal’, Arabic *ḥalāl* ‘*ibid*’, Pāzand *nəkah* ‘engagement ceremony’, Arabic *nikah* ‘*ibid*’. It seems that the newer Pāzand texts contain of more Arabic words than the older Pāzand texts.

4. I will also discuss the cities names, such as Neyšābūr, attested in the Pāzand texts.

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### Existential Negation and Related Constructions in Zazaki, Harzani, Kurdish, and Neo-Aramaic: A Comparative Analysis

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This paper examines the functions and distribution of formally related *čV* and *tV* particles in Zazaki, Harzani (Northern Tati), Kurdish, and Neo-Aramaic. Although these languages belong to two distinct language families, Iranian and Semitic, they display strikingly similar forms associated with existential negation, negative indefinites, and negative polarity.

In Zazaki and Harzani, *či-/čī-* occurs in existential-negative constructions in combination with forms of the copula. Central and Northern Kurdish exhibit related forms, *či/čī/ci/ču*, which occur in negative clauses with meanings corresponding to ‘any’ or ‘no’. Particularly interesting is Kurmanji *t’u*, which occurs both in existential negation and in negative indefinite constructions, including *t’uk’as* ‘nobody’ and *t’utišt* ‘nothing’. Comparable uses of *ču* are attested in Eastern and Western Neo-Aramaic.

The paper provides a comparative analysis of the syntactic and semantic functions of these *čV/tV* forms, focusing on the relationship between existential negation and negative indefinites. It further considers whether their formal and functional similarities across Iranian and Neo-Aramaic can be explained in terms of language contact and grammaticalization.

## On the origin of Bactrian *n*-extended (oblique) plurals

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With our growing knowledge of Bactrian, an increasing number of attestations of oblique<sup>2</sup> plural forms with an *n*-extension of the stem has emerged (see, e.g., Sims-Williams 2025a: 5–6). These forms have endings such as <sup>o</sup>*avavo*, <sup>o</sup>*ivavo*, <sup>o</sup>*ovavo* in place of the more expected endings like *-avo* < *\*-ānam*, *-ivo* < *\*-īnam* etc., which are also attested (e.g., *πουραvano*, *φραζινδivano* next to *πουραvo*, *φραζινdivo*). They have usually been interpreted as pointing to an original athematic *n*-stem, though this cannot account for their appearance with nouns that historically belong to other stem classes, or for their co-variation with the regular forms.

In some cases, the attestation of *n*-extended forms has led to the postulation of Proto-Iranian *n*-stems even where other etymological derivations for the Bactrian word in question are phonologically preferable, e.g.:

- *χοαδηο* < *\*xwatāwan-* (Sims-Williams 2007: 278) rather than < *\*xwatāwya-* (Davary 1982: 291–292) with regular *\*ā* > *ē* / *\_y* (cf. Gholami 2014: 65).

- *pao* ~ *pavo* < *\*xšāwan-* (Sims-Williams 2007: 283; 2025a) rather than < borrowed Parthian *šāh* (Halfmann et al. 2023: 21, fn. 18).<sup>3</sup>

The most recent discussions still describe the *n*-extended forms as a “problem” (Sims-Williams 2025b: 197, fn. 25) and “leave [...] the question of the origin of this ending open” (Lurje 2026: 157).

The present talk attempts to resolve this problem by explaining the *n*-extended forms as secondary analogical creations resulting from an interaction of the pronominal inflection with the inflection of nouns, which led in turn to the *n*-stems affecting the inflection of thematic *a*-stems and other vowel stems.

It is argued that this interaction was initiated by pronominal instrumental singular forms of the type of Old Persian *anā*, *avanā* introducing a variant ins.sg. *\*-anā* into the nominal *a*-stem paradigm, thereby producing an analogical pivot between the inflection of *a*-stems and *n*-stems. Comparisons will be drawn to similar phenomena in Old Indo-Aryan, Khotanese and Munji nominal inflection and, based on this, a historical account of all relevant attested forms in Bactrian will be offered.

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<sup>2</sup> In the later language, these endings are also used for the direct case, becoming general plural endings.

<sup>3</sup> This interpretation has also caused epigraphical problems (cf. Lur’e 2024: 338–340; transl. 2026: 155–157; Sims-Williams 2025b: 197).

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### **On the Ossetic Deity of Beekeeping**

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The present study seeks to find the origin of the Ossetic bee-deity *Anigol/Anægol* (*Nykula* in Iron dialect) within the broader Caucasian linguistic and cultural area. A hypothetical and unattested intermediate form *\*Anagun-* is suggested as a possible source of the Ossetic form. The analysis further considers the etymology of *Akula/Agunda*, two heroines of the Ossetic Nart epic, who have been linked to this deity in prior scholarship. The recurring theophoric elements *-kwyloj/-k'loj/-klo / -glo/-gol*, attested in a range of related lexemes, are analysed as possible instances of sound-symbolic patterning within collective semantic fields, particularly those connected with bees and swarms. Drawing on the comparanda from Kartvelian, Northwest Caucasian, and Indo-European traditions, the study argues that these names may be more adequately explained through phonosemantic processes than through direct borrowing.

### **Etymological Figures in the Texts of Yeznik Koghbatsi**

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This paper examines etymological figures in the works of Yeznik Koghbatsi as a linguistic and stylistic feature of one of the major authors of Classical Armenian literature. Etymological figures, understood as constructions based on the repetition of words sharing a common root

or semantic connection, function as significant expressive and structural devices in Koghbatsi's language, yet remain insufficiently studied.

Based on a close reading of the texts, a corpus of 67 examples has been identified and analyzed from both structural and functional perspectives. The study distinguishes the main types of etymological figures, including root-based, semantic, lexical, and derivational patterns.

The analysis demonstrates that these figures are not merely formal repetitions, but serve as means of semantic condensation and expressive intensification. Furthermore, it is argued that in Koghbatsi's language etymological figures function as mechanisms for guiding thought, organizing discourse around a shared semantic axis and ensuring conceptual coherence.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of stylistic and cognitive structures in Classical Armenian texts and highlights the role of etymological figures as an important component of textual organization.

### **Syunik as Geopolitical Future of the Caucasus: Perspectives of Iran-Armenia Cooperation**

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This presentation offers a tentative analysis of the evolving geopolitical situation surrounding Syunik, Armenia's southern region, with particular attention to its significance for the future geopolitical configuration of the South Caucasus. Given Syunik's strategic location and its role in regional connectivity, security, and access to Iran, developments concerning the region have implications extending beyond Armenia's national borders. The presentation examines Syunik through the perspective of Iran-Armenia relations, considering the two countries' shared interests in regional stability, the preservation of established borders, and the development of transport and economic cooperation. It argues that closer Iran-Armenia cooperation may become an important factor in shaping emerging regional dynamics and maintaining geopolitical balance in the South Caucasus.

### **Current field research on the Eastern Hindukush and its preliminary outcome**

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On the northwestern edge of South Asia, researchers have specified the Pamirs-Hindukush ethnolinguistic region. It is home to the minorities primarily speaking the Indo-Iranian idioms of various branches, as well as Tibetan dialects and the language isolate Burushaski. In the 2020s, the development of transportation systems, trade relations, and telecommunications is fueling rapid modernization even in the most remote mountainous districts. However, the indigenous populations of the formerly "pagan" zone (Kafiristan) still retain linguistic and, to some extent, cultural distinctiveness. In addition to filling gaps in ethnographic and linguistic descriptions — areal studies of various aspects of local languages, culture, everyday life, folklore, and history are of particular interest here.

The ethnolinguistic zones of Central Asia, the Himalayan-Tibet mountains, and the plains of South Asia naturally influence the periphery of the Pamirs-Hindukush region. In modern literature it is increasingly referred to as Peristan — “the land of fairies” — due to the belief in spirits prevalent among most local peoples, regardless of their current religious affiliation. The core, high-altitude zone of indigenous cultures, stretching from Nuristan to Ladakh, if not further, has historically been less subject to diffusion, managing in many respects to preserve the structural peculiarities common to the region, partly rooted in the pre-Indo-European era.

On the Eastern Hindukush, the western part of Peristan core features the Afghan provinces of Nuristan and Kunar. During three “warm” field seasons in 2023–2025, after a long break and for the first time on purpose, Russian researchers conducted a comprehensive scientific reconnaissance beyond the natural sciences. Linguistic material was collected on more than 35 dialects, data on toponymy, anthroponymy, oral history, archaeology, ethnography, and ethnobotany was recorded. Abundant audiovisual material, artifacts, and specimens of various sorts were collected for study and exhibiting. Materials concerning the hill population of the adjacent provinces of Nangarhar, Laghman, Kapisa, Panjshir, and Badakhshan were collected as well (*in situ* or remotely in the city).

The report will feature a brief though saturated summary of the preliminary outcome of the accomplished field incursions series, including a few published articles, numerous conference reports, and several launched projects, now in progress.

### **A Survey of Nuristani Pre-Islamic Personal Names**

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The personal names used by the non-Muslim and pre-Islamic peoples of the Hindu Kush form a fascinating, yet underexplored corpus for onomastic studies. Though most of the older naming tradition has disappeared with the conversion of its bearers to Islam, a relatively large amount of names from the pre-Islamic period has been documented both while still in use and from the memory of the first few generations after conversion. Some names remain in use as informal nicknames, family names or aliases.

As a result of a strong tradition of lineage exogamy, accurate memorization of the names of many generations of patrilineal ancestors was a necessary skill in the region in pre-Islamic times (Cacopardo & Cacopardo 2001: 105–107) and many remembered genealogies have been recorded by local and foreign researchers (e.g., Morgenstierne 1973; Tāza 2019 among many others). This allows insights into the onomastic inventory far beyond the last few generations before conversion. In this way, the corpus of remembered personal names also acts as a reservoir of linguistic material that has otherwise fallen out of use and can be of considerable interest for etymologists.

This talk presents the first results of a comparative corpus study on the pre-Islamic names used by speakers of the Nuristani languages, which were etymologized wherever possible and classified according to semantic spheres. Questions of interest included the structural composition of names, the extent of continuity and comparability with pre-Islamic Middle Iranian and Indo-Aryan onomastic traditions of the region known from antiquity, the proportion of inherited vs. borrowed material, the semantic types and possible reflections in them of cultural values, as well as the extent of permitted influences from Persianate Islamic naming traditions in more recent times.

The findings show that the attested Nuristani names structurally resemble those from the pre-Islamic traditions of antiquity, though there is relatively little direct cognacy between them. The Nuristani traditions make use of both inherited and borrowed linguistic material to form mostly semantically transparent names. Influences from the Islamic naming tradition are present, but limited to certain semantic spheres, particularly worldly power.

The most significant identified semantic spheres are wealth, power, rank, strength, success, fertility, livestock, crops, wild animals, bodily features and ethnic groups. Particular categories of commemorative and deprecativ names are also found. Cultural values placed on possessions, rank, warfare and feastgiving are particularly apparent in the personal names, whereas religious references are less prominent.

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### **Rethinking the site of Beniamin (Shirak province, Armenia): From the “Achaemenid palace” to the “Roman enclosure”**

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Launched in 2024, the ongoing Armenian-French collaborative project in the southern part of the Shirak province aims to study the territorial dynamics of the region from the 6th century BC to the 7th century AD. Among the numerous archaeological sites in Shirak, the site of Beniamin stands out for its significance. Covering several dozen hectares, Beniamin is typically considered an *ex-nihilo* foundation dating back to the Achaemenid period. It thus represents a rare example in present-day Armenia of the geopolitical transformations that occurred during this period and are particularly well-documented for the South Caucasus in the Kura Valley.

Since the early 1990s, excavations at Beniamin have confirmed its long occupation from at the least the 6th century BC to at least the 4th century AD. The site's occupational history has long been interpreted within a broader historical framework that remains poorly understood for the Shirak region during this extended period. The paucity of both textual and epigraphic sources, and, more generally, artefacts in context, hinders comprehension of the various phases that have succeeded one another at the site. The interpretations rely on incomplete evidence regarding chronology, evolution of building morphology, and functional analysis of the remains at Beniamin. Consequently, our current fieldwork challenges the use of labels such as "Achaemenid palace," "Hellenistic basilica," and "Roman enclosure" to define the architectural complexes excavated at the site. Instead, we propose that these labels be reassessed through a detailed study of the vertical and horizontal stratigraphy of the occupation layers across the entire site. Using a significant and renewed archaeological dataset, we aim to situate Beniamin within its broader archaeological context. Our work seeks to contribute to the reconstruction of the history of Shirak by examining political and territorial changes both at local and macroregional scales.

The presentation will draw on the results of the fieldwork that has been conducted at Beniamin since 2023. The team has produced a new archaeological map of the site, reanalysed the architectural phasing of the remains, and excavated trenches to better characterize and date the features. This fieldwork has been complemented by a study of the archives and collections from previous excavations at Beniamin, which are mostly housed at the Shirak Regional Museum, but also at other Armenian institutions. The data enable us to outline preliminary conclusion and new directions for future research on the occupational history of the site.

## **Verbal Prepositions in Zazaki and Some Etymological Notes**

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The verbal prepositions *a* ~ *[e]ra* and *ro* ~ *[e]ro* occur mostly in Northern-Zazaki in dialectally restricted verbal constructions with indirect or goal-oriented objects, in some cases also yielding semantic differentiation depending on whether the preposition is present or omitted. E.g. *[r]a xo amaene* (pres. ind. *yen- [r]a xo*) "to come around", *ro ĵi ništene* (pres. ind. *nišen- ro ĵi*) "to get in, to mount". The syntactic position generally corresponds to that of

preverbs; however, some verbs preserve the same constituent order irrespective of the prepositional element, e.g. *ro jî geyraene / feteliyaene* (pres. ind. *ro jî geyren- / feteliyen-*) “to search”.

In contrast to most other Iranian languages, Zazaki exhibits a system of preverbs and verbal prepositions which, depending on mood, tense, or negation, may become syntactically separable from the verbal stem, a phenomenon functionally comparable to the separable preverbs (“trennbare Verben”) of German. This feature represents an innovative development built upon important archaism and provides valuable evidence for the diachronic development of verbal syntax within the Northwestern Iranian domain.

The paper further examines the etymology and diachronic development of these verbal prepositions. Particular attention is devoted to the prepositional elements *a ~ ra* and *ro*, which can be traced back to Old Iranian directional particles. The Zazaki verbal preposition *a* (variants *era*, *ra*), attested in formations such as *a [jî] vistene* “to ignite, to set on fire”, *aver* “forward; before”, and *vera* “towards; against”, is compared with Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, and Khotanese Sakian *ā* “towards, hither” (cf. Av., OP *āgam-* “to come hither”), as well as Vedic *ā-*. From a broader Indo-European perspective, cognates may be connected with PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>éh<sub>1</sub>- ~ \*h<sub>1</sub>óh<sub>1</sub>-* and related directional particles preserved in early Germanic, Greek, and Latin formations.

Likewise, the verbal preposition *ro* (variants *[e]ro*, *-o*), as in *ro [jî] geyraene* “to search”, appears to continue Middle Iranian directional particles attested in Middle Persian and Parthian *ō* “towards, to”. The study analyses the semantic extension and grammaticalization of these inherited Iranian particles in Northern Zazaki and discusses their role in the formation of complex verbal predicates.

In addition, the paper includes selected etymological notes on unknown Northern Zazaki etymological links and cognates with Common Iranian and related Iranian varieties. E. g. *senēn* ~ (*~ se[n-]*) (< *\*sān* (cf. NP *sān*) “similar” “how”, *hiré* m. “consciousness” (cf. Av. *xratu-*, Ved. *krātu-*), *namé* m. “name” (< *\*nām-aka-*), *seré* m. “head” (cf. Av. *sarah*), *juwen* m. “threshing floor” (cf. NP *jaun ~ javan*, Krd. Krm. *cuxwîn*, *coxwîn*).

Keywords: Iranian Languages, Northwestern Iranian, Zazaki, Northern Zazaki, preverbs, verbal prepositions, etymology, historical linguistics, Iranian linguistics

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### **State, Media, and Minority: The Formation Zaza Identity in Turkey's Socio-Political Context**

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The Zaza people, an Iranian-speaking ethno-linguistic group predominantly residing in the eastern regions of the Republic of Turkey, with a significant proportion adhering to Alevism. This study examines the policies and discursive approaches of the Turkish state toward ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious minorities, with particular emphasis on the Zaza community. Building on an analysis of Zaza-related topics in Turkish media, the study identifies recurring narrative frameworks that shape the construction of minority identities. In doing so, it aims to elucidate the socio-political dynamics underlying the state’s engagement with minority groups. By situating the Zaza case within broader debates on ethnicity, language, and religion, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the intersections between identity and state policy, highlighting both the constraints and opportunities for pluralism and inclusivity in contemporary Turkish society.

### **On Some Unpublished Persian documents in the Central Historical Archive of Georgia referring to the Armenian Maliks of Transcaucasia**

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The main part of the Persian decrees of the shahs of Iran kept in archives of Georgia has been researched by V. Puturidze, I. Todua, M. Shams and published in Soviet period in the two volumes edited by Hakob Papazian. However, other Persian documents issued by shari‘a courts

and orders of the kings of Kartli Kakheti and khans of Transcaucasia still are not published and unknown to the wide scholarly circles.

During our research in the Central Historical Archive of Georgia accomplished last year we found some interesting documents referring to the Armenian maliks of various regions of Transcaucasia that have considerable historical significance. Sometimes they supplement the data available in the Persian documents of the Matenadaran and help us identify the maliks more precisely. Often these documents also add details and enrich the history of Armenian maliks.

Thus two orders of Husayn Khan of Yerevan preserved in the archive of Georgia add details referring to the identity of Malik Avanes who by the order of crown prince ‘Abbās Mīrza was appointed as malik of Yerevan and Nakhijevan regions in 1808. The orders of the khan of Yerevan issued a year before mention him as the leader of the Armenians of Cholmakchi and Kanaker and point his efforts to defend the fortress of Yerevan during Russian attack. The documents also state that for his faithfulness and devotion to Iranians he was rewarded with the post of the elder and malik of the mentioned villages around Yerevan, and an annual pension (vazifa) of 30 tumans.

There are few other documents referring to the Armenian maliks of Ganja-Qarabagh, such as malik Yusuf of Voskanapat (Songhorabad), Malik Harutyun of Melik-Mnatsakanyans of Getashen (Chaykend), Malik Abov of Qulistan in Qarabagh and Malik Aghajan of Yerevan. All these documents contain many new details on the Armenian maliks of Transcaucasia in 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries which supplement and confirm the data available in the other sources of the period.

### **The Magic of Fruit Trees – Iran and Europe**

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In 1912 a Polish ethnologist J.S. Bystron published an article on the of fruit trees fertility magic in Europe, with a special stress on its east and central regions. Bystron formulated some hypothesis about the possible origin and diffusion of the beliefs and practices concerning the fruit trees. Persian field material, personal memories and literary texts (Hedāyat, Āl-e Ahmad, Behrangi and Taraqi among others) reveal the presence of parallel magic practices in different parts of Iran. Both the European and Iranian material testify to the fruit tree magic being a part of the seasonal festivals and fertility rites with their complex scenarios. Striking similarities of the East European and Iranian peoples' beliefs and magic (in particular: the ritual of threatening a “lazy” tree to be cut down and its saving by an intercessor) testify to a territorial continuity and possibly common origin of fertility magic and its conceptual background in the cultural areas in question. The Iranian evidence allows one to broaden the scope of the research proposed by Bystron to the Middle East and, therefore, to revise his conclusions.

## A Versified Arabic-Kurdish Glossary from the 19th Century

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Niṣābs are versified academic texts which are composed to teach several skills, especially new words. From the time of Niṣāb al-Ṣebyān as the first teaching aid in the instruction of Arabic, several linguistic Niṣābs have been produced, mostly during the Qājār era, among which Niṣābs for teaching Arabic, Turkish, French and English stand out. However, some Niṣābs of the Iranian languages and dialects exist, which have not yet received the attention they deserve. The present study deals with a lesser known text of the 19th century, which is an Arabic-Kurdish Niṣāb by an anonymous composer. The types of the words presented in this manuscript, together with the methods of providing the meanings of the words, will be discussed in this research as well.

## Speeches and Wisdom Sayings from the Pahlavi Manuscript MK

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Middle Persian wisdom texts have generally been classified according to thematic distinctions, usually dividing between pragmatic advice and religious prescriptions. However, the Pahlavi manuscript MK, with the most varied collection of such evidence after that in the sixth book of the *Dēnkard*, offers other possibilities of typological sorting. This presentation studies some samples of speeches in MK, which are abundant both in the briefest works and in the longer pieces of a more narrative nature. These textual expedients can assume the form of perorations, incantations, direct discourses, or other exchanges of questions and answers, and may address more than one topic at a time, including both secular recommendations and spiritual admonitions.

The materials presented will focus mainly on the *Andarz ī Husraw ī Kawādān* and the *Stāyēnīdārīh ī sūr āfrīn*. The first composition relays the supposedly last words of the Sasanian king Husraw I (531–579) as a sort of spiritual testament. Hypotheses have been advanced that this small section may derive from an actual record of the king's words, to be read aloud in front of the mourning populace: the passage, however, has only a little hint at a gathering of people, which nonetheless presents interesting aspects to discuss. The second text, the so-called "Banquet Speech", is one of the longest works of this kind in MK. It provides a wealth of information not only on a festive recurrence of some sort, at present still elusive even if often considered to have been the *Nowruz*, but also on some philological aspects that seem to point to a composite history of transmission reusing previous pieces in Avestan, *Pāzand*, and Pahlavi.

This combined analysis wishes to highlight the need to reconsider in a less stringent way the classification of *andarz* texts, focusing on their possible original purpose and taking into account both their ancient framework of creation (oral vs. written, "original" vs. assembled) and our present understanding of it.

## Protecting the Garden from Within and from Without: Internal and External Conflicts in the Sasanian Empire

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A core responsibility of the Sasanian king was to protect his territory and peoples from corrupting foreign elements (*Mir. Man.* 2.295-6; *Šāh-nāma* 7.275-82). Yet the king also had to combat threats originating within the limits of Iran, sometimes from the royal family or his governors, thereby diverting resources and manpower that could otherwise have been spent defending the *Ēranshahr* against external threats.

This paper sheds light on political thought during the Sasanian period and how internal and external conflicts were understood as part of statecraft and presented in imperial propaganda. It also reflects on the usefulness of scholarship in distinguishing internal from external conflicts, in light of our extant sources, whose understanding of the peoples or regions (e.g. Armenia) considered to be Iranian or non-Iranian shifted depending on historical context, and were not clearly nor consistently differentiated according to ethnic, linguistic, political, or religious criteria.

Scholarship on conflict and warfare in the Sasanian Empire has largely focused on interrogating literary and visual sources to address questions of historicity, such as reconstructing military campaigns against internal threats (e.g., revolts by nobles, governors and the royal family) and external foes (e.g., Romans, Turks, Hephthalites, Kushans). Recent scholarship has also examined how foes of the Sasanian king, especially the Romans, were vilified within the Zoroastrian worldview and allegorised as part of the struggle between good and evil, and between truth and lie (Agostini 2022). Less attention has been paid to the differences and similarities in the portrayals of internal and external conflicts, as well as to the justifications provided for engaging in such conflicts.

This paper addresses this gap by comparing how conflicts between Iranians (*Ērān*) and between Iranians and non-Iranians (*an-Ērān*) during the Sasanian period are portrayed in Iranian literary and visual sources and Islamic texts. The paper discusses specific passages about internal and external conflicts in the following sources, which provide insight into justifications for and portrayals of conflicts against internal and external opponents: the inscriptions at Paikuli, Bishapur reliefs 5 and 6, the reliefs and inscriptions at Naqš-e Rostam and Bandiyan, the *Kār-Nāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān*, *Letter of Tansar*, as well as the *History of Al-Tabarī*, *Fārs-nāma* and *Šāh-nāma*.

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## **Living as a Minority Everywhere: The Autobiography of an Armenian Convert from New Julfa in Safavid Iran**

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This paper examines the Persian-language autobiography of Abgar ‘Alī Akbar, an Armenian merchant from New Julfa in Isfahan who converted to Islam in the late seventeenth century. His memoir, written around 1707 after nearly three decades of wandering across Safavid Iran, the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, Italy and parts of Europe, and the Caucasus, offers an exceptionally rare first-person account of religious conversion and mobility in an age of intensifying ‘confessionalisation’. While the Valijanian family to which he likely belonged was deeply embedded in New Julfa’s prosperous merchant networks, Abgar’s conversion severed his ties to this patriarchal commercial world and forced him into a life shaped by displacement, precarity, and the constant negotiation of religious identity.

Through a close reading of his autobiography, this paper explores how Abgar narrates his experiences of living as a religious minority everywhere he went—whether as a Muslim among Christians in Europe, a Shi‘ite in Sunni Ottoman lands, or a convert viewed with suspicion by both Muslims and Armenians in Yerevan and Iran under Safavid rule. His account vividly conveys the emotional and social consequences of conversion: fear, regret, longing for familial acceptance, and the search for spiritual certainty. At the same time, it reveals the constraints and possibilities of early modern mobility, as Abgar’s journeys were shaped not by commercial strategy but by the vulnerabilities of a convert navigating multiple imperial and confessional regimes.

By situating this autobiography within the broader context of Safavid–Ottoman religious tensions, New Julfa’s merchant networks, and the early modern Mediterranean and West Asian world—a world increasingly defined by sharpened Christian–Muslim boundaries and the pressures they imposed on mobile individuals—the paper argues that Abgar’s narrative provides a unique window into the lived experience of confessional boundaries. His memoir not only enriches our understanding of Armenian social history and Safavid Iran but also illuminates how individuals articulated selfhood and belonging in a world where religious identity increasingly determined one’s place—and displacement—within society.

## **Kocheks – the Shamanic Dimensions of Yezidism**

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The envisaged study will investigate the *kocheks* of the Yezidi community, focusing primarily on the male representatives of this distinct, non-hereditary socio-religious group. It will delineate their historical and contemporary roles, specifically contrasting their functions with those of the *feqirs*—a group that is also, at least partially, non-hereditary. Central to this

analysis is the "becoming" (*werdegang*) of the shaman: a developmental trajectory initiated in childhood that culminates in communal recognition. Notably, this process of legitimization occurs independently of institutional endorsement from religious dignitaries such as the Mir or Baba Sheikh. The contribution will further engage in a comparative analysis of Yezidi healing and divination practices. Finally, by situating the *kocheh* within the broader framework of global shamanism, the study will highlight critical phenomenological differences, most notably the unconventional absence of drums or other musical accompaniment in a *kocheh*'s ritual practice.

## **Waterways in the Daily Records of the Khatak Chieftains**

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The original part of the historiographical compilation in Pashto, *Tārikh-i muraṣṣa* (completed in 1724), consists of various historical accounts and personal records of the Khatak chieftains, Khushhal Khan (d. 1689) and Afzal Khan (d. ca. 1740/41). These writings contain the most reliable and often unique information on the daily life of the Pashtun tribes in the early modern period, before the establishment of the Durrani monarchy in 1747. Many of them fall into the diary and memoir genres and represent remarkable specimens of early Pashto narrative prose. These texts are thus valuable both as primary sources on tribal histories and everyday culture of the Pashtuns in the period covered mainly by Persian works of outsiders and as essential milestones in the evolution of the Pashto literary language and writings.

This paper analyzes the facts reported by the Khatak chieftains about the aims, methods, means and particular circumstances of the movements of Pashtun tribesmen along waterways in the north-eastern areas of Pashtunkhwa, located in the Indus basin. The accounts of Khushhal and Afzal provide detailed documentary evidence of how geographical conditions and uncommon practice of bridge construction created a natural need for the population of this region to regularly cross large and small rivers and use them as waterways for everyday purposes or more specific military and political missions. These accounts indicate that rafts (*jāla*) and various types of boats (*beṛay*) were as customary a means of transportation among Pashtuns as horses, mules, and camels on land routes. Khushhal Khan's brief note on swimming in his didactical treatise *Dastār-nāma* (1665) proves that this skill was considered very important for survival in the Pashtun tribal territories to the west of the Indus. On the other hand, the Khatak chieftains' narratives about movements across and along rivers offer useful material for studying the thematic diversity, narrative styles, and vocabulary of Pashto literature during its formative period. The clear emphasis on incidents related to crossing and navigating rivers suggests that this topic was also popular in Pashtun folk storytelling traditions.

## **Architecture and Regional Variation in the Kura-Araxes Oikumene: Comparative Analysis of Voskeblur (Armenia) and Yanik Tepe (Iran)**

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This paper proposes to examine the architecture of two sites associated with the Kura-Araxes (KA) cultural phenomenon: Voskeblur, located in the Ararat Valley of Armenia, and Yanik Tepe, situated east of Lake Urmia in Iran. Voskeblur is currently being excavated as part of the Armenian-French Mission Caucasus (dir. Ruben Badalyan and Bérengère Perello). Over five seasons of fieldwork since 2020, approximately 600 m<sup>2</sup> of a KA II settlement (c. 2900–2600 BC) have been uncovered, revealing a complex network of mudbrick architecture.

Yanik Tepe has produced one of the most extensive bodies of KA architectural evidence known to date. For most KA sites, architectural exposure is too limited to provide a satisfactory understanding of habitation and settlement patterns. Published evidence from Yanik Tepe offers a valuable comparative framework for examining the KA architectural repertoire. Both sites belong to the broader KA cultural horizon and are located in steppe environments characterized by a continental climate with hot summers, harsh winters, and relatively low annual precipitation.

The occupation of Voskeblur is roughly contemporaneous with the ETC IIB (2800–2600 BC) level of Yanik Tepe. This level is characterized by G. Summers (2013) as comprising « round freestanding huts ». While Voskeblur also features circular structures, these appear to coexist with rectangular constructions, which may reflect functional differentiation, social distinction, or the hybridization of architectural traditions within the settlement.

The paper will first present the architecture of Voskeblur before offering a comparison with Yanik Tepe, highlighting shared architectural features as well as regional variations in construction techniques and spatial organization. The aim is to shed light on patterns of local innovation and interregional interaction during the Early Bronze Age. This formal and physical analysis will serve as a foundation for a deeper exploration of the social dimensions of Kuro-Araxes groups.

By juxtaposing the two sites, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the Kura-Araxes phenomenon, emphasizing the interplay between environmental constraints, material resources, and cultural practices. This comparison is expected to shed light on both the coherence of KA architectural traditions and the diversity of regional responses across the South Caucasus and northwestern Iran during the KA II period, when the culture expanded beyond its original homeland.

## Light-bringing tears: specialized lexicon and ritual praxis in the Ossetic lamentation ritual

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The Ossetic lamentation ritual is a composite, multipart ritual, which accompanies different phases of the funeral from the moment of death to the burial, with elements further reprised during the memorial celebrations. Its performance takes place in different locations – mainly along an inside-outside spatial axis –, and may be analyzed as assuming two essential forms: a static one (i.e. inside the room in which the body of the deceased is laid out; in the yard of the deceased's house; at the graveside), and a dynamic one (i.e. during the procession towards the yard entrance; from the gate to the room; towards the coffin displayed in the middle of the yard).

This internal complexity of the lamentation ritual is reflected lexically in the fact that there is no single word to designate it, but rather a range of specialized lexical items recorded in lexicographic, ethnographic and folkloric-textual sources. Most of these have fallen out of use in the modern language, or have lost their ritual technical meaning, as e.g. with the word *maroj*, which survives mostly in curses. Besides, none of the existing ethnographic descriptions uses – and thus elucidates in context – all of them at once, leaving both gaps and overlaps, that make determining their exact denotation and ritual referents challenging. Thus, no fewer than four items – *mærdaz* | *mærd(w)azæ*, Ir. *maroj*, Ir. *ironvændag*, Ir., Dig. *mærdægdaw* – are somewhat generically glossed by V. Abaev in his dictionary (1958: 548, 122; 1973: 74, 96-7) as “*obrjad oplakivanija pokojnika*” or “*obrjadovoe oplakivanije pokojnika*” (‘ritual lamentation for the deceased’), while the absence of Digoron counterparts for two of them remains conspicuous.

The present talk sets itself a threefold aim: to identify and ritually define as precisely as possible the terminology associated with the Ossetic lamentation ritual; to establish the etymologies of the terms and how they relate to the ritual functions of the designated items; finally, to assess them from a reconstructive perspective, highlighting discrepancies between Iron and Digoron as well as measuring their relative distance (in terms of preservation/innovation) from Porto-Iranian.

For this purpose, a multidisciplinary approach is adopted, integrating historical linguistics, oral-text philology, and ethnography. Ethnographic data are drawn from a first-hand examination of the primary materials compiled from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> cent. to the present, prioritizing the most valuable Ossetic-language sources (for Iron: Karġiaty Bekyzæ, Ajlarty Izmail, Aġnaty Gæstæn, Xozity Fedyr, Cġojty Xazbi, Xæwytaty Kosta, etc.; for Digoron: Gardanti Mixal, Tamati Tajmuraz, etc.), which have so far remained virtually inaccessible to non-native scholars.

## **400–500: A pivotal century for the Caucasus and World and Mihr-Narsehs role in it**

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The fifth century was a pivotal era, characterised by nomadic migrations and the emergence of new kingdoms. These developments forced the ancient empires of *Ērānšahr* (the Sasanian Empire) and the *Imperium Romanum* (Eastern Roman Empire) into a tense peace. However, in the shadow of these external threats and amid a supposed internal calm, new conflicts began to emerge. In *Ērānšahr*, there were well-known conflicts among the nobility and with the crown, which escalated into regional conflicts due to the strain of war. Meanwhile, the Christian and Zoroastrian churches – which were supposed to support the rulers of both empires – plunged them into serious distress through their power struggle. In the Roman Empire, a power struggle over the unity of the Christian Church and the correct creed sent shockwaves throughout the empire, particularly following the Council of Chalcedon. In *Ērānšahr*, however, the increasingly assertive Christian clergy threatened the long-established Zoroastrian clergy, not least through apostates. All these lines of conflict converged and intensified in the Caucasus, reigniting much older conflicts in the process. For decades, the statesman Mihr-Narseh – whose character has been portrayed as everything from an archdemon to the ideal vizier – had been entrusted by several Great Kings (who were mostly absent) with resolving these conflicts. This lecture will take a closer look at the internal conflicts in the Caucasus and Mihr-Narseh's career and influence. Topics covered will include the intertwining of politics and religion during this period, and the various conflicts among the nobility within the empire and in the Caucasus.

## **Prophets and Messengers of God: Hermes, Mercury, and Sheikh Hasan**

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According to medieval Islamic theologians, it was Hasan ibn Adi – the grand-nephew and successor of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir – who was responsible for steering the Adawiyya Sufi order away from orthodoxy and for diverging from the teachings of its founder. This paper examines how the portrayal of Sheikh Hasan Shams ad-Din Taj al-Arifin ibn Adi within Yezidi oral tradition, which perceives him as a manifestation of Angel Sheikh Sin, aligns with the model of a messenger of God represented not only by Muhammad but primarily by the Greek Hermes, whose persona and planetary association (Mercury) played a significant role in Northern Mesopotamia during the period when Yezidism was only beginning to take shape as an autonomous religion.

## **Botanical trails across Southeastern Afghanistan: Ecosystem diversity and conservation challenges**

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Afghanistan is floristically highly diverse and largely underexplored. Its flora consists of over 5000 recorded plant species with an endemism rate of up to 25%. These data, however, are largely outdated; due to decades of continuous conflict, the region has remained largely inaccessible to the scientific community, with major botanical collections predating the 1980s. Consequently, there is a serious knowledge gap regarding the real diversity of Afghanistan's flora. In recent decades, both climate change and profound social shifts have drastically impacted local ecosystems. Furthermore, no formal conservation policy had been effectively implemented prior to the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 2021. To investigate the current situation and establish the initial framework for a systematic study of Afghanistan's flora, a botanical field expedition was conducted in July 2025. This fieldwork focused on the conservation of rare almond species and the assessment of ecosystem diversity in xeric environments across Southeastern Afghanistan. Here, we present the preliminary findings of this expedition, demonstrating an urgent need for a systematic reassessment of the country's flora and vegetation. Finally, we advocate for the development of sustainable conservation policies that explicitly take into account the long-term dynamics across nomadic and rural communities.

## **Naf-žijak: Alanic half-calque in Balkar toponymy**

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The study of historical and cultural exchanges among the diverse North Caucasian peoples is yet to be properly comprehended, especially from methodological point of view. In this respect, of utmost importance seems to be a well-known Balkar toponym *Naf-žijak*, which denotes a place in *Upper Chegem* village, where until recent times the ritual meetings of the members of close relatives were conducted. As a matter of fact, this toponym is a compound, consisting of two elements, where the last one – *žijak* is reliably interpreted as original Balkar (i.e. Turkic) noun meaning 'cheek, side, slope'. Having in mind the meaning of the composite, there is no other choice, but to treat it as a half-calque of Ossetian religious term *Naj-fat* – a historical compound, etymologically consisting of *Naf* 'kin, family' and *wat* 'place' (Abayev). In this case the first element of Balkar toponym *Naf-žijak* – *Naf*, is a borrowing from the Alanic (Indo-European) language of Middle Ages, which survived as designation of Ossetian cult, devoted to the patron of the close relatives. Being part of the Turkic world, the Balkars are living in the Caucasian region and for centuries on were in contacts with their neighbours – the Alans. Despite the conversion into Muslim religion, the Balkar culture has preserved the basic

elements of this cult not only as a linguistical substrate, but also in the form of choreographic performance.

The study of the *Naf* cult provides a solid basis for solving the problem of continuity between the Early medieval Alans and Late medieval Ossetians, who can be treated as their direct heirs not only as far as their Iranian language is concerned, which is a common knowledge, but also from social-historical point of view, which is nowadays not taken for granted. The *Naf-žijak* composite serves as a reliable source of the Pre-Christian religion of the Alans, which survived in its original state in Balkar rituals and undergone certain transformations in Ossetian tradition. In other words, Ossetian data (of linguistic, ethnographic and folklore character) can and should be used for the study of Alan Medieval religious tradition. It is the only way to obtain reliable methodological grounds for the passage from the study of the remnants of Pre-Christian religion of the Alans to investigation of a complete and coherent system, which has undergone long and deep historical evolution.

### **Conflict, Interaction, and Boundary-Making in a Multi-Ethnic Village: A Transactionalist Analysis of Ivanovka (Azerbaijan)**

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This paper examines ethnic and religious diversity in the village of Ivanovka, located in the Ismayilli region of Azerbaijan, through a transactionalist perspective. Ivanovka represents a complex social setting where Molokans coexist with Baptists, Charismatics, Lezgis, and Azeris, forming a multi-layered structure of ethnic and religious plurality. Rather than treating ethnicity as a fixed or primordial category, this study approaches it as a dynamic and relational process continuously constructed through interaction, negotiation, and conflict.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the paper focuses on how everyday practices—such as neighborhood relations, marriage patterns, and forms of social distance—as well as economic interactions within collective and post-collective structures shape and redefine group boundaries. In this context, religious and denominational differences are not merely markers of cultural diversity but function as ideological instruments that intensify social distinctions and reinforce symbolic boundaries between groups.

The transactionalist framework highlights that ethnic identities gain meaning only within processes of encounter and exchange. In Ivanovka, both intergroup and intragroup tensions contribute to the ongoing construction of ethnic identities. Conflict, therefore, should not be understood solely as a disruptive force but also as a constitutive mechanism that sustains and sharpens group boundaries. Religious differences, in particular, deepen perceptions of alterity and play a central role in defining the limits of collective belonging.

The findings demonstrate that ethnic boundaries in Ivanovka are neither rigid nor entirely fluid; rather, they are situationally negotiated and strategically activated depending on context. While economic cooperation and shared spaces occasionally blur these boundaries, moments of tension tend to reassert and solidify them. This dual process reveals the inherently unstable yet persistent nature of ethnic differentiation.

In conclusion, the paper argues that ethnic and religious diversity in the Irano-Caucasian context cannot be adequately understood without adopting a relational and process-oriented approach. The case of Ivanovka illustrates how identities are continuously reproduced through

everyday interactions and conflictual dynamics, offering a micro-level contribution to broader debates on ethnicity, religion, and social boundaries in the region.

## Unexpected loan relations among Hindu Kush Indic languages

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It comes as no surprise that the Indic (Indo-Aryan) idioms of the Hindu Kush–Karakoram region contain many loanwords from the superstrate languages of Persian, Pashto, and—in Pakistan—Urdu, as well as English. Neither are borrowings from smaller adjacent languages in any way unexpected, though some intra-Hindu Kush loanwords point to prehistoric contacts between varieties that are no longer contiguous. But additionally, some languages can be shown to have incorporated lexical material from Sanskrit at a rather recent date, as indicated by the relative chronology of sound changes. While the speech communities in question mostly embraced Islam over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century (cf. Cacopardo & Cacopardo 2001: 25–44), regional centers of learning and power had become Muslim significantly earlier, raising the question of how Sanskrit vocabulary might have been preserved in such an environment.

The existence of individual *tatsamas* (i.e., borrowings from Sanskrit) in languages such as Pashai was already proposed by Morgenstierne (e.g., 1973: 11) and Buddruss (e.g., 1960: 20), who refrained from treating the matter in detail. Additional research has not been undertaken since, but a bounty of new language data now allows for a closer analysis and for inferences regarding the time and place of borrowing events. The proposed talk will for the first time provide an overview of *tatsamas* in the Hindu Kush region and set them in historical context, including pinpointing mediator languages such as Kalasha, Burushaski, and also Persian. I will address candidates for *tatsama* status by establishing new sound laws and etymologies for multiple Hindu Kush languages. For instance, Kalasha *kríṣṇa* ‘black’ can be securely identified as a loanword from Sanskrit *kṛṣṇá-*, as Old Indic *-ṛ-* regularly results in Kalasha *-i-* unless between two stops (cf. *drīw* ‘inflated goatskin’ < *dṛti-*), as in *číṣṭa-ka* ‘bitter’ < *trṣṭá-* and the etymological doublet dialectal Kalasha *kíṣṇa* ‘black.’

Additionally, I argue that the “Dardic” (i.e., Hindu Kush Indic–type) lexical substrate shared by all documented Pashto varieties—likewise barely studied, but suggested by Morgenstierne et al. (2003: *passim*), e.g. *barj* ‘birch-bark’, cf. Sanskrit *bhūrjaḥ*—can be traced back to a language shift event hypothesized to have taken place in the area of today’s Paktia province of Afghanistan. Recent advances in the relative chronology of Pashto sound changes (e.g., Kreidl ms.) can be exploited in order to reconstruct an early language contact scenario.

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## **Voices of Survival, Records of the Empire: Armenian refugees and the Russian military in Erzincan 1916-1918**

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This paper examines the experiences of Armenian refugees who, in an attempt to flee persecution and genocide in the Ottoman empire, crossed the Dersim region to reach the town of Erzincan which was under Russian control starting from 1916 to 1918. Drawing on Armenian survivor testimonies alongside reports produced by Russian military personnel during the First World War, the study reconstructs the routes, conditions, and encounters that shaped this displacement. Armenian narratives underline their feeling of relief and rescue when they reached Russian-held territory. In parallel, Russian military accounts document the arrival and condition of refugees in Erzincan, offering insight into the logistical and humanitarian challenges faced by imperial forces on the frontline.

Beyond reconstruction of the course of events from survivor memoirs, reports and eyewitness accounts, the paper engages critically with historiographic debates and the role of collective memory in shaping interpretations of these historical events up until the present. It interrogates how Armenian testimonies have framed the Russian Army as a force of protection and, later, of abandonment—particularly in the context of the Russian retreat following the 1917 revolution. The paper argues that the depiction of “abandonment” is less a reflection of the lived experience of the Russian military withdrawal than a product of evolving collective memory, shaped by subsequent historical narratives and political choices. Ultimately, the journey through Dersim and the reception in Erzincan emerge not only as a critical episode in the Armenian refugee experience, but also as a key site for understanding how memory, narrative, and historical interpretation intersect in the aftermath of genocide.

## **Jiroft as the Earliest Civilization?**

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Unexpectedly, in 2001, there came to light a distinct Bronze Age culture in southeastern Iran called Jiroft (sometimes Hallirud), evinced most clearly at the exposed flooded site of Konar Sandal (near Jiroft, the capital of the Iranian province of Kerman), and touted by its leading excavator Iranian Yusef Madjidzadeh as “the cradle of civilization,” or “the earliest Oriental Civilization.” It was allegedly pre-Sumerian, with its inscriptions in the oldest (still mostly indecipherable) script known. As distinct from Mesopotamian Sumer, its cultural connections were more eastward, to the Bronze Age Helmand civilization of west Afghanistan (2500-1900 BC), and to that of the Indus Valley.

Such claims have caught scholars by surprise and have been highly contested, and much more moderate chronological assessments have been made by other archaeologists involved - the Americans Oscar Muscarella and Holly Pittman.

There is now a crying need for more detailed archaeological information. Questions of how extraordinary Jiroft art (bronze-ware hair-styles, images of ‘competing’ dragons and serpents, etc.) fit into the ancient history of Iranian art. Artificial Intelligence may be needed in the decipherment of the Jiroft script and the working out of linguistic relationships with Sumerian, Elamite, and the language of the still not-fully-disentangled Indus Valley pictograms. Pittman also raises questions from the finds about changes to the human mind in the transition from pre-urban to urban life.

This paper attempts to assess the current state of play.

## **History and Story of Gulistān Banu: The Zoroastrian Community at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century**

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The *Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Zoroastrians in Persia* (SACI), established in 1853, marked a turning point in the history of the Iranian Zoroastrian community. As is well known, it arose in the wake of Westergaard’s letter, published by the Rev. Wilson in 1848 in the *Oriental Christian Spectator*. In that letter, Westergaard described the dire economic and social conditions in which the Zoroastrians of Iran were living, going so far as to warn of their possible future disappearance. To the letter’s contents, Wilson appended his well-known personal note, in which he questioned why the prosperous Parsis of India showed no concern for their co-religionists in Iran, a challenge that provoked a forceful response among the Parsis and ultimately led to the foundation of SACI and the dispatch, in 1854, of their most celebrated emissary, Manekji Limji Hataria.

In the scholarly literature, this event is noted for having broken a long silence that had enveloped relations between the Zoroastrian communities of Iran and India, effectively “reminding” the Parsis of their brethren across in Iran. Relations between the two communities had lapsed following Mullā Kā’us’s journey between 1768 and 1780, and for the subsequent seven decades or so the two communities had lived entirely separate and diametrically opposed histories: the Indian community embarked upon its remarkable economic ascent, eventually becoming exceptionally wealthy and influential, whilst the Iranian community suffered a catastrophic decline whose consequences are recorded most vividly in several travellers’ accounts. The sole exception to this silence is the figure of Gulistān Banu, a figure frequently overlooked in the scholarly literature, or mentioned only in passing, either as a telling example of the persecution endured by Zoroastrians, or because her story is conventionally invoked to introduce the association that preceded SACI.

The present study investigates the history of Gulistān Banu by bringing together the available sources, with the following objectives: (a) to restore greater historical prominence to this figure and illuminate her significance within the broader history of Iranian Zoroastrianism; (b) to contextualise her story within the history of the eighteenth-century Zoroastrian community, with particular attention to the city of Kermān; (c) to contextualise her story in relation to the phenomenon of the Zoroastrian migration from Iran to India, frequently mentioned but rarely

verified; and (d) to examine the possible reasons for the apparent failure of the association connected with her name, which predated SACI.

### **Trials of Love, trials of Space: Geopoetics of Separation in ‘Aṣṣār Tabrīzī’s *Mehr-o Moštārī***

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Composed in the 14<sup>th</sup> (8<sup>th</sup> H.) century by ‘Aṣṣār Tabrīzī, a poet, Sufi and astronomer from Tabrīz in present-day Iranian Azerbaijan, the *Mehr-o Moštārī* is a Persian mystical maṭnavī in which love unfolds through distance and wandering. The protagonists, whose names refer to stars and planets, travel across seas, deserts, foreign cities, where displacement functions as a fundamental structuring element of the narrative.

This paper proposes a geopoetic reading of the romance. Drawing on spatial approaches to literature, it argues that the journeys of the protagonists should be understood not merely as narrative adventures but as a structured system of spatial trials in which movement through space becomes a medium of trials and transformations. Particular attention is given to liminal spaces: deserts, seas, borders, places of captivity, which function as transitional zones where identities are tested and transformed.

The paper examines the successive displacements of Mehr and Moštārī across a wide transregional landscape extending from Eṣṭakhr to Khwārazm, via Ray, Azerbaijān, the Caspian Sea, and Central Asian regions. Each major spatial environment corresponds to a distinct phase of experience: exile and loss in the desert, trial and disorientation at sea, captivity in fortified spaces, recognition and integration at court, and finally restoration and return to the royal centre. These movements form a coherent geography of separation, trial, reunion and sovereignty, in which trials of love take the form of trials of space.

By situating these itineraries within the broader Irano-Caucasian world, this paper suggests that this romance reflects historical patterns of circulation across these regions, while transforming them into a symbolic geography, that is both real and imaginary. The paper therefore proposes to read *Mehr-o Moštārī* as a mystical romance in which trials of love take the form of trials of space, and contributes to the study of space in Persianate literature.

## **Seeing the Present in the End Reinterpreting and Actualising a celebrated Myth**

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The Zoroastrian end of the world is a lengthy and laborious affair, as every diligent student of pre-Islamic Iran knows from the faith's fundamental texts. After two thousand years of protracted disasters alternating with brief periods of peaceful existence characteristic of the reigns of Ušēdar and Ušēdarmāh, lastly the long expected Sōšyans appears, under whose guidance the ultimate process of purifying the world from all evil is finally set into motion. Thanks to the combined efforts of gods and men, all agents of evil are rendered ineffective, the dead arise from their graves, and sinners get punished for the final time. Ahriman is eliminated, the spiritual and material spheres merge, and mankind, unified with the gods and clad in new, ideal bodies, enters a state of unlimited, post-existential bliss. This series of dramatic events is rigidly placed within a framework spanning 12,000 (or, in some texts, 9,000) years, from Ohrmazd's initial creation to the end of time. In the same context, Zoroastrian dogma calls upon every believer to actively reject evil and perform tirelessly good deeds in order to bring about Renovation and with it Ohrmazd's final victory over Ahriman. The latent contradiction between a predestined outcome and constant human initiative mandatory for a positive outcome is one of the most striking features of traditional Zoroastrian perceptions of world history. The author of "The Story of Jōišť ī Friyān" skilfully plays on this inconsistency, adapting elements of the traditional eschatological narrative and integrating them into his tale. The aim of my presentation is to examine the role played by the modified myth within the narrative.

## **Medieval Armenia and Italy: The Iconography of Franciscan Martyrdom in an Irano-Caucasian Context**

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The Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries occupied a critical geopolitical position at the heart of Irano-Caucasica, bordered by the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, the Mamluk Sultanate, and the Mongol Ilkhanate as well as the Byzantine Empire and the Latin Crusader states. In this volatile setting, King Het'um II pursued an extraordinary path: he repeatedly abdicated the throne to embrace Franciscan spirituality, welcoming the Spiritual Franciscan Angelo Clareno and his companions to the Armenian court.

Building upon research that identifies the iconographic roots of collective martyrdom scenes in Italian Franciscan convents from the 1310s onward — in Padua, Verona, and Siena — in Armenian precedents, most notably the depiction of the martyrdom of St. Hripsime and her companions in the Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator at Ani, this paper revisits and expands this argument by situating the Armenian-Italian artistic relationship within the broader context of Irano-Caucasica, foregrounding the Franciscan presence in Ilkhanid Persia and the

missionary networks that connected the Italian peninsula, Cilician Armenia, and the Mongol Empire, including China.

The Iranian dimension of this network deserves closer scrutiny. Franciscan missionaries operating in and around Cilician Armenia were active and martyred across territories within the Ilkhanid sphere: Anthony of Armenia and Aldobrandino degli Ammannati were killed at Salmas in northwest Persia in 1284; three Franciscans were martyred at Erzincan in Eastern Anatolia, then under strong Ilkhanid influence, in 1314; Thomas of Tolentino, who had served as Het'um II's envoy to the papacy and was later martyred at Thane near Mumbai in 1320 while en route to China via Ilkhanid territory. These episodes unfolded within an expanding Franciscan institutional network in Ilkhanid Persia, with Roman Catholic archbishoprics at Sultaniyya, Maragha, and Tabriz, and friars serving as key intermediaries in Mongol-European diplomacy.

By reconsidering the iconographic transmission of martyrdom imagery through the lens of these Irano-Caucasian itineraries, this paper aims to cast new light on the Italian representations of Franciscan martyrdom, particularly the frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Franciscan convent of Siena, where figures with distinctly Mongolian physiognomy and apparel appear prominently alongside the dying friars — a visual testimony that invites closer examination in relation to the artistic and human exchanges traversing Ilkhanid Persia and Cilician Armenia.

### **Ethnic vs. Genetic Identity: Boundaries and Bridges**

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Through the efforts of individuals lacking basic biological knowledge, a persistent notion has taken root in popular consciousness: the idea that, alongside *ethnicity*, there exists a distinct *genetic identity*, supposedly defined by a unique set of hereditary traits or even specific genes characteristic of particular groups. According to this misconception, such genetic uniqueness guarantees the continuity of national identity across generations. Many continue to believe that people are inherently different by origin and that no form of upbringing or education can overcome these differences.

Is this truly the case? Are distinct peoples genetically different from one another, regardless of similarities in language, culture, or customs? What separates us as biological individuals of the same species (*Homo sapiens*), which appeared on this planet relatively recently? Conversely, what unites us into non-biological categories such as nations, peoples, or tribes? And what role does the genetic component play in shaping the ethnic diversity of the world's population?

Here, we address these questions and demonstrate that the concept of *national genetic identity* has a legitimate place only in the frame of a statistical approach, when scientists can measure it with precision. Theoretically, such a category could be represented as a comprehensive table of mutation frequencies within the gene pool of a given population.

Nevertheless, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that the genetic structure of populations is profoundly influenced by the factors shaping the distinctive ethnic identity of their members – language, religion, territory, mythology, and cultural legacy. This underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary projects as the most productive approach in ethnological research, one that should become standard practice in both academic and applied contexts. Although human genetics is biological in its subject matter and methodological principles, it

frequently intersects with ethnography, archaeology, history, demography, and sociology. These points of convergence establish a strong basis for reciprocal understanding and constructive collaboration between geneticists and ethnologists, transforming disciplinary boundaries into bridges of shared inquiry.

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