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Voices from far away: Bashkardi material at the Ancient India and Iran Trust

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INDIRAN

The newsletter of the Ancient India and Iran Trust

Issue 10: Summer 2015



Above: Bashkardi landscape. Photo: Behrooz Barjasteh Delforoos

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Editor's Letter: *News from the Ancient India & Iran Trust*

Welcome to the tenth edition of **Indiran**, the newsletter of the Ancient India and Iran Trust.

In this issue we report on some of our recent events, including the second Allchin Symposium on South Asian Archaeology, our workshop on 'Bactria and the Transition to Islam' and visits from the Uzbek Ambassador, curators from the British Museum's International Training Programme and a film crew from Malaysia.

We are delighted to have in this edition a special interview with Anna Dallapiccola, one of our distinguished Honorary Fellows. She is in conversation with Richard Blurton of the British Museum. Also, Agnes Korn writes about her attempts to interpret and reconstruct *Bashkardi* dialects using the unique material held at the Trust. And Charles Li (opposite) writes about making his film 'Bodhisatta and the Big Stick' (part of which was filmed at the Trust) with Margaret Cone.

This year's series of lectures have focused on Iran in Late Antiquity, Central Asia and most recently, India. The Friends of the Trust continue to be active and have enjoyed a screening of Eszther Spät's film on the Yazidi (Ezidi), 'Following the Peacock', and special lectures by AIT Chair Nicholas Sims-Williams on his research into Sogdian language and literature and by Trustee Sam Lieu, who used archaeological findings from last century to tell the stories of Palmyra and Dura Europos, two so-called 'caravan cities' now in war-torn Syria. We are planning some improvements to our lecture room (see opposite for details).

Our annual Garden Party (photos below) did not enjoy last year's excellent weather but attendance was good and we are most grateful to friends old and new who braved



photo: Paula Allchin

the uncertain weather conditions to attend. Earlier this year, work began on improvements to the garden and restoration of the lawn and shrubbery, thanks to last year's generous donation from the Neil Kreitman Foundation.

This year, for the first time the Trust supported the *Symposia Iranica* (held at Downing College, Cambridge in April) by awarding a prize for the best paper on pre-Islamic Iran. It was won by Aleksander Engeskaug from Bergen for his paper on *Villages and Rural Settlements in the Imperial Economy of Sasanian Persia*.

We are delighted to announce that this year's Harold Bailey Memorial Lecture will be held on 11th December at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Cambridge. The distinguished historian and specialist in the history of the ancient Near East, Professor Amelie Kuhrt, has kindly accepted our invitation to deliver the lecture, the title of which will be confirmed shortly.

Finally, we are very pleased to report that the Royal Asiatic Society have recently announced that the Denis Sinor Gold Medal for Inner Asian Studies will be presented to our Chair Professor Nicholas Sims-Williams in 2016, in recognition of the contribution he has made to Inner Asian Studies. We offer him our heartfelt congratulations!



photo: Paula Allchin

We are pleased to announce that we are planning improvements to our lecture room at the Ancient India and Iran Trust, in order to make the facilities more comfortable and to minimise the inconvenience of outdated equipment which we feel can sometimes detract from the experience of attending our events.

Our plan is to install a new, bright, powerful and flexible projector, which will be wall-mounted and will work in conjunction with a new screen. The audio for the room will be via remotely controlled, mounted speakers. Cabling will be hidden as far as possible, which we feel will preserve the character of the room while freeing it from potentially hazardous cabling on the floor. We also plan to improve our seating, replacing most of the current chairs with interlocking padded (and stackable) seating.

The costs of these improvements are in the region of £5000, which we will raise from various sources including, we hope, private individuals. Any contribution, no matter how small, or any suggestions or comments from you, our visitors, on the current proposal (or any suggestions for further improvements you would like to see carried out), would be most welcome.

For further information, please contact the Administrator by e-mail on info@indiran.org or by 'phone on 01223 356841.

Voices from far away: Bashkardi material at the AIIT

Agnes Korn

The treasures kept by the Ancient India and Iran Trust include precious data on the Bashkardi language. This material, collected by the late Ilya Gershevitch in 1956 in Iran, consists of tapes of recordings and notebooks, complemented by folders with grammatical notes and boxes with vocabulary cards that Gershevitch produced when he worked on his materials after his return. His attention then rather turned to other Iranian languages, though, and the Bashkardi collection, which Gershevitch left to the Trust along with other materials, has so far remained an unexplored treasure.

Much the same can be said about Bashkardi in general. 'Bashkardi' is the name for a group of dialects spoken in Bashakerd, a region in the south of Iran, inland from the strait of Hormuz [see map below]. Bashakerd was, and still is, a particularly remote region of Iran. When Ilya Gershevitch and his wife Lisbeth spent three months there in 1956, there were no paved roads -- nor any other infrastructure, and travel was on camel, donkey or mule, as Lisbeth Gershevitch recalls, smiling at the memory of travel companions who gave up and returned to the coast when faced with the difficulties

of the terrain.

Some infrastructure has reached Bashakerd in the meantime, including a paved main road and electricity, but the region remains remote in many senses, and at times it is difficult to go there even for Iranian citizens. Accordingly, Bashkardi is very little-studied even when compared with other minority languages of Iran.

During the first month of his stay in



Above: a Bashkardi woman interviewed at home. Photo: Behrooz Barjasteh.

Bashakerd, Gershevitch made recordings with a tape recorder (after that, the machine broke down, according to Lisbeth Gershevitch). These recordings were in the meantime transferred onto CD and are thus available as

audio files. Disregarding tapes containing re-arrangements of the initial recordings, the recordings are roughly eight hours (in widely varying sound quality). Not all of this is Bashkardi language

material: some is music (with or without singing), some is in Persian or Balochi, but still there is quite a substantial amount of Bashkardi data.

Linguistically, Bashkardi is not easy to lay hands on either. Though often presented as one language, Bashkardi is in fact a group of dialects that differ considerably. 'South' and 'North' Bashkardi refer to the main dialect division, which corresponds to a distinction made by the speakers themselves, and to major differences on all levels of grammar.

But North and South Bashkardi are by no means dialectally homogenous. Indeed, a look at the data reveals that every village or town needs to be treated separately at least for a start. It even seems that Bashkardi may represent the result of a convergence of Iranian varieties of different origins which formed a linguistic area and assimilated to each other while preserving some traces of the heterogenous history.

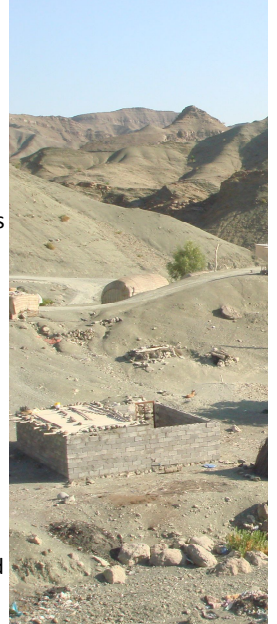
It is perhaps these difficulties that have contributed to Bashkardi being so little-studied. While some work has been done in more recent years on the somewhat more accessible varieties spoken on or close to the coast, the dialects spoken



Above: Bashkardi interviewees. Photo: Behrooz Barjasteh.

there are rather different from the inland varieties. So far as Bashkardi proper is concerned, words and sentences have been quoted in scholarly articles by Ilya Gershevitch himself and others after him, but no text has ever been published in a

Below: a Bashkardi village. Photo: Behrooz Barjasteh.



Location of Bashakerd in south-eastern Iran



Map by Christine Bammer

Behrooz Barjasteh Delforoos.



scholarly journal or book to this day, nor is there any grammar beyond short handbook overviews.

In a research project funded by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), Behrooz Barjasteh Delforoos and I aim at a documentation and description of Bashkardi. He also had a close look on the chosen texts with

Bakhtiar Seddiqi-Nezhad, a student of Zahedan University, who is a speaker of a variety on the border of the Bashkardi area. They arrived at a preliminary transcription of a certain amount of text along with a translation into Persian (some of it written, some as sound file). From these parts, Behrooz made a choice of texts suitable for being studied in terms of sufficient sound quality and in terms of contents (for instance, there are linguistically somewhat less interesting lengthy Moharram mourning).



Behrooz Barjasteh Delforoos.

less interesting lengthy Moharram mourning).

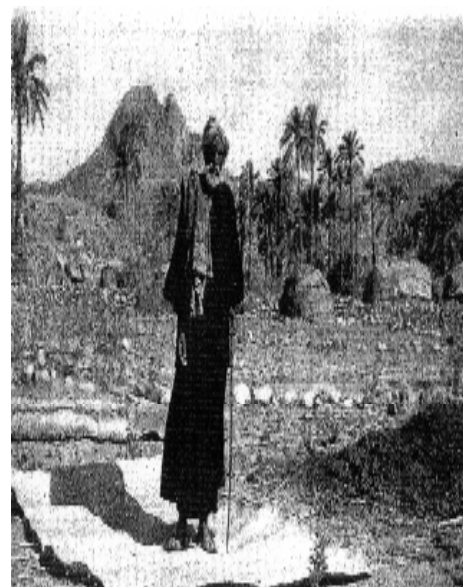
While Behrooz is collecting and studying Bashkardi varieties of today, I have started working on Gershevitch's recordings in the Trust's collection, selecting first those of

sufficiently good sound quality. Using up-to-date language documentation software, I am transcribing these texts, translating them, and adding a grammatical analysis to the transcription, with numerous rounds of doublechecking the latter against the sound file, etc. Doing so, I am also making use of a preliminary transcription and translation into Persian of some texts by Bakhtiar Seddiqi-Nezhad, as well of Gershevitch's vocabulary cards.

The study of these texts already permits some insights into Bashkardi grammar. For instance, the nominal system, hitherto noted as more or less unknown, now seems reasonably clear, presenting, as does later Middle Persian, Parthian and Bactrian, a system without case distinction, but with various particles and adpositions that have not yet been grammaticalised for the syntactic functions in which they are found, for instance, in Balochi or New Persian.

It is very fortunate that the Trust holds these interesting language data on varieties so little studied as Bashkardi, and which are all the more precious because they date from a time before the advent of mass media in remote regions [see photos] -- a situation which has had dramatic effects on all minority languages of Iran. We are thus able to compare two stages of Bashkardi spoken today.

Work on this material is both a treasure and a challenge, as anyone will know who has tried to analyse recordings that are not their own and the circumstances of the recordings are likewise unknown (e.g. whom is an informant addressing when he seeks a confirmation or comment from the others present). At the same time, by comparing contemporary Bashkardi, we hope to be able to arrive at a comprehensive description



Above: an elderly Bashkardi at Darkaah. Photo: Mrs L. Gershevitch, 1956 of the language.

In the course of this year, I will concentrate further on the Bashkardi project by way of a prolonged stay in Cambridge where I am currently a Visiting Fellow of Clare Hall.



Above: Ancient fortress in Bashkerd. Photo: Behrooz Barjasteh Delforoos.

The Minorsky Pictures

James Cormick

Below: unidentified portrait by Sayyid Muhsin, right: Nadir Shah (r. 1736-47). Photo: AIIT.



The two watercolours in the Iran Room were given to Sir Harold Bailey by Mrs Minorsky. They seem to be from the late Qajar period (late 19th Century or early 20th Century) and appear to be copies made to order by the artist.

The first of them is oval in shape and is of a richly dressed man wearing the contemporary Persian rather mitre-like crown. The inscription on the bottom left of the painting identifies him as 'Shahinshah-i Iran Nadir', and the inscription on the right tells us it is Number 7, presumably its copy number. Nadir Shah was, of course, the famous 'Alexander' or 'Napoleon' of Persia who invaded the Mughal Empire and looted the Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Noor Diamond.

The other watercolour is rectangular in shape and appears stylistically to be by a different artist. It is of an older man, probably a tribal leader, wearing a warm jacket and a karakul hat more typical of North-Eastern Iran. The inscription in the bottom left corner indicates that it is painted by ('raqam') Sayyid Mohsin, and the opposite corner gives us the rather surprising copy number as Number 311.

They make a very attractive and appropriate addition to the décor of the Iran Room, but they are not being promoted here as great works of art. Their interest to us lies perhaps more in their unusual provenance.

The Minorskys took up residence in Cambridge when SOAS evacuated to Cambridge during the Second World War. Vladimir Minorsky had by then become Reader in Persian Literature & History at SOAS, but was nearing the age of retirement. So when he finally did retire in 1944 at the age of 67, he and his wife Tatiana decided to stay on in Cambridge in their house in Bateman Street, where they continued to live happily until their deaths in 1966 and 1987 respectively.

Minorsky had had an extremely interesting life before that, being born in Russia in 1877, and after graduation from university joining the Russian diplomatic service. His 20 years as a diplomat from 1903 to 1923 were largely spent in Persia on assignments concerned with Persia and Central Asia. And it is probably while he was there that he acquired the two Qajar watercolours.

He became a world expert on the Persians and Kurds and after a number of years in Paris was appointed lecturer in Persian at SOAS (then only called SOS) in 1932, where he became a friend and colleague of Harold Bailey's. Bailey was appointed to the post of Professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge in 1936, and his friendship with the Minorskys continued and prospered when they joined him in Cambridge four years later, largely due to the generous Russian hospitality of Tatiana Minorsky and the proximity of Bateman Street to Queens' College.

Sir Harold told me that when he was knighted in 1960 he took two 'special friends' as guests with him to Buckingham Palace: Tatiana Minorsky and Alan Ross. Ross had been an undergraduate at

Oxford with him, and had then just become famous for his essay distinguishing between U and Non-U English in 'Noblesse Oblige', the book edited by Nancy Mitford that was to become a terror to the socially insecure in the 50s and 60s. - I often wondered if Sir Harold hadn't invited Ross along to provide a witty commentary on the Royal Family's English as they took the train back to Cambridge.

Undoing the frames of the watercolours to see if any further information could be found there, I made an interesting discovery. The original pictures had been pasted onto cardboard and mounted rather cheaply with thin paper by the framer: H.C. Payne of 2 Emmanuel Street, Cambridge. He had also re-used a large Edwardian photograph of a young couple with five children as backing for one of them.

The general war-time austerity of the framing led me to the conclusion that the Minorskys hadn't had the pictures framed until they came up to Cambridge in the 40s, perhaps to supplement the meagre furnishings of their new house. My intention now is to reframe them more suitably.



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