

[A Grammar of the Shina Language of Indus Kohistan](#)

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Ruth L Schmidt, Razwal Kohistani

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in Collaboration with
Mohammad Manzar Zarin

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of the Shina Language
of Indus Kohistan

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Preface

This grammar is corpus-based, that is to say the grammatical structures presented here have emerged from analysis of the following texts: (1) six short texts included in the *Shina Environmental Primer* (Kohistani and Schmidt 1996), (2) a collection of twenty-four proverbs made by Razwal Kohistani (see also Kohistani and Schmidt 1999), and (3) one long folktale, the *nesmánee qasá* (“Poor man’s tale”), told by Ropi Jan on 14th June 2000, in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. This tale is discussed in Schmidt 2006.

To supplement this data, the authors have collected nominal, pronominal and verbal paradigms, and elicited examples to fill in lacunae in the corpus data. This elicited data has been carefully double-checked.

The authors have chosen as the basic form of the language Razwal Kohistani’s speech, which belongs to the Palas Valley. The speech of Manzar Zarin, who has lived in lowland Pakistan most of his life, has many forms that vary from Razwal’s even though both of them have Palas Valley Shina as their mother tongue. The readers of this grammar will find many competing (variant) forms. This reflects the reality that an unstandardized language varies from village to village and generation to generation. By choosing Razwal’s speech as the basic dialect, the authors have—although this was not their intention—taken a step toward standardization of Kohistani Shina. Speakers of different dialects may object to our analysis. This is the fate of all grammarians who work with unwritten languages.

To the extent permitted by time and resources, we have also made preliminary efforts to trace the historical roots of Kohistani Shina and its development, drawing on work by other scholars. Shina may be spoken largely by illiterates, but it is a treasure-house of information about Indo-Aryan languages, something its speakers should surely be proud of.

The authors wish to thank the following for supporting our work over the years: the Himalayan Jungle Project, Islamabad; the British High Commission, Islamabad; the University of Oslo, The Benneches Legat, Oslo; the Nansen Fund, Oslo, and the European Association of Lexicography. Among our friends and colleagues, Carla Radloff, Claus Peter Zoller and Lars Martin Fosse deserve special thanks for their advice and practical help.

1. The Geographic and Historical Setting

1.1 Location and dialect groups of Shina

Indus Kohistan lies on the south-western margin of the Shina-speaking zone, which includes Gilgit, Hunza, the Astor Valley, the Tangir-Darel Valleys, Chilas, Indus Kohistan, and also the upper Neelam Valley and Dras, and parts of Ladakh. Morgenstierne classifies Shina as a member of the Dardic branch of Indo-Aryan languages,¹ and historians have long attempted to identify the speakers of Shina with an ancient ethnic group known as the Dārada. Classical Greek, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and epigraphic sources place the country of the Dards, or *Dāradadeśa*, in the Neelam/Kishanganga valley.²

The rock carvings and inscriptions discovered by Jettmar in the Indus valley show that Chilas was between the 5th to the 8th centuries A.D. probably a frontier district of a Dārada kingdom with its seat in the Neelam/Kishanganga.³ A Brahmi inscription mentioning a “*śri palola śāhi surendrādityanandī*”, read by Hinüber,⁴ links Chilas to the Paṭola or Palola dynasty of Gilgit, ca. 5th to the 8th centuries, known also as Bolor. Jettmar argues that sometime prior to the 10th century, the Dārada kingdom probably merged with this Paṭola dynasty, becoming powerful enough to exert pressure on Kashmir.⁵ In the 11th century, Alberuni found “Shiltas” (Shilathasa) part of a “Bhatta-Shāh” kingdom whose people plagued Kashmir with their inroads.⁶ The title *bhaṭṭa*-, *bhaṭṭāraka*- appears in several of the Brahmi inscriptions read by Hinüber, and means ‘lord’, ‘master’. This suggests the reading *Bhaṭṭa Śāh* for the kingdom mentioned by Alberuni. The interpretation of *śāha* as ‘king’ is based on the reading of *śāhī* as ‘ruler’, with the Persian palatal sibilant treated as a retroflex sibilant in Dardic.⁷

1 Morgenstierne 1961.

2 Vohra 1981: 53-66; Jettmar 1977: 411-433; 1989, 2: 114.

3 Jettmar 1989, 1: xix. These petroglyphs date from prehistoric times until the 10th or 11th century.

4 Hinüber 1989: 64-5.

5 Jettmar 1989: 104-5.

6 Sachau 1910, p. 207. See also Richard Strand’s (2001b) website on the *Bhaṭṭesa* zip, where he relates the ethnonym *Bhaṭ*- of the people of *Bhaṭera* (located in Indus Kohistan, across the Indus from Besham and well south of Palas) to CDIAL 9402, MIA *bhaṭṭa*-, ‘lord, noble’ < *bhāṭṭ* or CDIAL 9366 ‘mixed caste of bards’. The *Bhaṭṭas* seem to have been powerful in Indus Kohistan in former times.

Fussman cites linguistic evidence linking the Shina language with the Gandhari Prakrit of the lower Kabul and Swat River valleys, which is attested in the Ashokan (3rd century B.C.) and later inscriptions, and postulates that when this area was conquered by Pashtun tribes, between the 11th and early 16th centuries, groups of Shina-speakers may have migrated or been pushed north into the valleys tributary to the Indus.⁸

Bailey divides modern Shina into three main dialect groups: Gilgiti, Kohistani (including Kohistani and Chilasi) and Astori (including Guresi and Drasi).⁹ Strand classifies the Shina dialects into two main groups.¹⁰

The dialect around Chilās in the east-west portion of the Indus valley above Indus Kohistan is probably the source of the speech that spread upstream along the Indus basin to form the Eastern Shina dialects and downstream to form the

- 7 Hinüber (1989: 63-4) discusses the title *śāhī* twice, rendering it variously as the title of a family or the title of a dynasty: *kṣatraśāhī vajranandī* ... “might have been the son of the ruler” (p. 63); *śrī palola śāhī surendrādityanandī* ... “This king should be identical with *surendrāditya* ... ruling approximately between 720 and 725 as the last ruler belonging to this dynasty” (p. 64). The title *śāha* also occurs, but Hinüber finds no interpretation for it.

Vajranandī means “he who delights in the *vajra* [the thunderbolt]”, apparently a ruler’s name, as it points to Indra, the king of the gods (L. M. Fosse, p.c., 1 November 2003). *kṣatrā* means ‘might’, ‘rule’ [√ कृ] (CDIAL 3648), and is cognate with the Persian word *šāh* (Vullers 1855: 392, Platts 1911: 719 give the Zend form *khshaya* [from the root *khshī*]). *kṣatraśāhī* appears to be a translation-compound of two words meaning the same thing in different languages (a common phenomenon in multilingual regions): ‘ruler-ruling’. If so, *kṣatraśāhī* can be translated: ‘ruler, of ruling lineage’.

The retroflex sibilant seems puzzling at first glance, as retroflex sibilants did not occur in Middle Persian (Fridrik Thordarson, p.c., 1 November 2003). The inscription itself is the only evidence that it was pronounced that way, as Alberuni wrote in Arabic, which lacks a way to represent retroflex sibilants.

If *śāha* was indeed borrowed from Persian, there is no rule which states that a Persian palatal sibilant invariably corresponds with the the Sanskrit palatal sibilant श (ś) (although in fact it does so in modern Shina, which also has a three-way sibilant contrast). Its treatment would have depended on the actual phonetic values of श (ś) and ष (ṣ) in Chilas at the time, and on the actual phonetic value of Persian ش (š) in the eastern Iranian zone. In fact, there are other examples of the Persian palatal sibilant ش (š) corresponding with Dardic or Nuristani ş: Pers. *bādšāh* ‘king’ > Khowar *bāça* ~ *bāša* ‘king’, Pers. *dānišmand* ‘learned’ > Khowar *dašman* ‘maulvi’ (Elena Bashir, p.c., 3 November 2003); Pers. *šahr* ‘town’ > Kamviri *şor* ‘winter (lowland) grazing ground’ (Richard Strand, p.c., 2 November 2003). See also Richard Strand (2002), “Phonological processes on the Indo-Iranian Frontier”. It appears that the tongue is backed in Eastern Iranian as one gets closer to the Indo-Iranian frontier, and that the palatal sibilant tends toward laminal post-alveolar in this zone.

- 8 Fussman 1989: 55-6.

- 9 Bailey 1924: xii-xiv.

- 10 Strand 2001a.

kohistyō dialect of Indus Kohistan. Another dialect centers on Gilgit, with an outlying Tibetanized offshoot (Brokskat) in Ladakh. In addition there are dispersed dialect enclaves to the west of the Indus: *ušuj'u*, spoken beside Torwâli in the Chail Valley of upper Swat, the archaic dialects *palôlâ'* and Sâwi, spoken in enclaves off the Kunar-Chitral River, and perhaps KalkoTi, spoken in one part of KalkoT in Dir Kohistân.

Schmidt compared lexical and grammatical data from four dialects of Shina: the Kohistani, Gilgiti, Guresi and Drasi.¹¹ The Guresi and Gilgiti dialects retain archaic features, and appear to occupy a central position within the Shina speech zone. The Kohistani and Drasi dialects (spoken on the western and eastern fringes) present different and unique innovations. This fits nicely with the placement of the ancient country of the Dards in modern Gures, north of the Kashmir valley,¹² and suggests diffusion of Shina speakers east and west from a central zone stretching from Gures through Astor up to Gilgit. An oral tradition says that the Darṃá lineages¹³ of Chilas and Kohistan migrated from Gures.¹⁴ A population of the Darṃá lineage still exists in Astor.

Guresi perfective verbs show no trace of transitive verb perfective tense formation with the conjunctive participle (§6.3.3.3) which Gilgiti, and to some extent Kohistani, perfective verbs preserve. This permits a second hypothesis, that the original dialect split is between Gilgiti and the ancestor of the remaining three dialects, with the subsequent separation of Kohistani and Drasi. It does appear that Drasi, with its innovative grammaticalization of 'come', and Kohistani, with its innovative future tense, assumed their peripheral roles in fairly recent times.¹⁵

An archaic form of Shina, called Palula (*palôlâ'*, *paaluulaā*) is found in the Biyori and Ashret valleys of southern Chitral, and this language and its associated oral histories and genealogies provide evidence for a migration from Chilas to Chitral.¹⁶ The similarity between Palula and the name of the 5th to 8th century dynasty, Paṭola or Palola, seems unlikely to be coincidental.

11 Schmidt 2004: 33-55.

12 As postulated by Jettmar 1989: xix.

13 The Darṃá are a clan of the *Šiñ* ethnic group living mainly in Indus Kohistan.

14 Called *Gurāt* in Indus Kohistan. The oral tradition was recorded from Razwal Kohistani November 2006 in Rawalpindi. In 1989 Schmidt played a tape of Kohistani Shina to a Guresi speaker. He understood it perfectly, but found it "quaint".

15 Schmidt 2004: 52.

16 Palula has been studied by Morgenstierne (1940), Buddruss (1967), Strand (2001b) and Liljegren.

Unfortunately, no *Shina* records or inscriptions trace any of the migrations discussed here. The only Dardic language with a pre-modern literary tradition is Kashmiri. There are however many oral histories telling of migrations, and we shall hear three versions of the story of the migration of the Darṁá to Kohistan.¹⁷

1.2 The oral history of Kohistan

Among the Darṁá of Indus Kohistan, oral history plays several important roles. It is used to validate claims of property ownership, since there are no written records of the *wesh*, or land distributions, in which land was allocated to *záats*, or lineages, in equal amounts. It preserves the memory of feuds between different lineages, feuds which in some individual cases remain unresolved. Legends are cited to enhance the collective reputation of one's lineage; for example, Darṁá lineages point to their historic overthrow of the mighty adversary Dam Siṅg as testimony to their courage. Conversely, false histories are invented to discredit some lineages, claiming that their ancestors were originally artisans, such as carpenters or ironsmiths, or were merely found under a tree. Most Kohistani oral history has a secular character, even when the subject is the bringing of Islam to Kohistan, that is to say, the legends are considered history (*tazkirá*), and are not usually associated with any rituals.

In Palas, "The story of Bóṭi Siṅg and Dam Siṅg" is passed on from generation to generation, told by old men called *qasmáar*, on request from interested listeners. It describes the migration of the Darṁá lineage of the Shin of Indus Kohistan from the north, and the invasion of Kohistan or overlordship of it by two men, usually said to be Sikhs, also coming from the north. We have collected three versions of this story, which we summarize here.

In an interview in Lahore in 1980, the Shin tribal elder Haréq told Manzar Zarin that Daṛóomo, the ancestor of the Darṁá lineage, originally migrated from Chilas to Kohistan at a time when Sikhs ruled Kohistan, and the region still lay in darkness, i.e., the light of Islam had not reached it. According to Haréq, the Palas Valley was then ruled by a Sikh named Dam Siṅg, and the Jalkot Valley by a Sikh named Bóṭi. Daṛóomo's nephews, Tóolo and Dodoóko, are converted to Islam by another uncle, Soróomo, who has secretly converted

17 A more detailed account of the oral history of Kohistan is presented in Schmidt 2003/2004: 61-79.