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Traces of language contact in Niya Prakrit: Bactrian and other foreign elements

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CHAPTER 7 A sociolinguistic scenario

This chapter briefly addresses the fourth research question formulated in §1.2: which sociolinguistic scenario accounts best for the Bactrian influence on Niya Prakrit? In §7.1, the conclusions reached in Chapters 3–6 are summarised. Based on them, I will in §7.2 distinguish two levels of language contact, viz. (i) a casual form of contact between Bactrian and Gāndhārī at large that resulted from the Kuṣāṇa conquest of Gandhāra, and (ii) a more intense type of contact between Bactrian and the predecessor of Niya Prakrit. §7.3 argues that this second level of contact is due to Kuṣāṇa officials using dialects of Gāndhārī for written administration, a hypothesis which, as pointed out in §7.4, receives further support from a comparison with the Old Persian influence on Achaemenid Official Aramaic.

7.1 Summary of Chapters 3–6

As Chapters 1–2 were introductory, the actual investigation into traces of language contact in Niya Prakrit started in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I aimed to compile an updated corpus of Iranian loanwords in Niya Prakrit, in which the words studied were classified according to their most likely donor language and the trustworthiness of the etymology. Importantly, of the 97 words with a possible Iranian etymology, it turned out that 56 were probably, and another 24 potentially borrowed from Bactrian (respectively 57,7% and 24,7%). Thus, the Bactrian influence on Niya Prakrit appears more extensive than previously realised, while influence from other Iranian languages seems to have been restricted. The corpus of foreign names in the Niya documents remains to be examined in depth. Yet, we saw that some previously unetymologised names could likewise originate in Bactrian.

Chapter 4 concerned Iranian loanwords in Niya Prakrit as well. The focus lay, however, no longer on individual etymologies but on the chronological layering of these loans and the phonology, morphology, and semantics of loanwords securely or possibly ascribable to a Bactrian source. We arrived, amongst others, at the following conclusions: the Bactrian loanwords were adopted in the Kuṣāṇa period (1st–3rd century AD), presumably before Niya Prakrit was introduced to the Tarim Basin; overall, these loans are well integrated phonologically and morphologically; and the majority of them are administrative, political, military, and economic terms.

Chapter 5 was a non-exhaustive study of grammatical borrowings from Bactrian. I first examined the Niya Prakrit appurtenance suffixes *-ani* and *-ci* and interpreted both as loans from Bactrian. Subsequently, I concluded (i) that the reciprocal pronoun *eka b(h)iti*, literally ‘one another’, is calqued from Bactr. *ωγο βιδδιγο* ‘idem’, less likely from a cognate in another Iranian language and (ii) that morphosyntactic parallels between the Niya Prakrit and Bactrian reflexives suggest them to have been mutually intertranslatable. Finally, I proposed that the Niya preterite and the verbal adj. in **-taka-* are instances of “contact-facilitated grammaticalisation” inspired by morphologically comparable formations in Bactrian. Barchi and Peschl’s (2022) proposal that the agent-orientation of the Niya preterite points to Khotanese substrate influence was shown to be unlikely.

Chapter 6 dealt with Burrow’s idea that Niya Prakrit underwent substrate influence from “Tocharian C”, an undocumented language which Burrow considered to be the native language of the Shanshan people. Critically reviewing the lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic arguments adduced to support Burrow’s hypothesis, I aimed to show that none is compelling proof of a Tocharian substrate in Niya Prakrit. We further saw that some loanwords and grammatical features previously ascribed to the Shanshan substrate are more likely attributable to Bactrian. It obviously cannot be excluded that the undocumented Shanshan language did exert substrate influence on Niya Prakrit. Yet, so far, it has proved impossible to safely ascribe specific loanwords or grammatical features in Niya Prakrit to this presumed substrate or to determine to which language family the Shanshan language would belong.

Based on the various observations made in Chapters 3–6, one can draw a more general conclusion: language contact between Bactrian and Niya Prakrit was more extensive than has been recognised so far, whereas, according to my findings to date, contact with other languages (Iranian and non-Iranian) seems to have been limited to the occasional adoption of loanwords. The next question is how this Bactrian influence should be defined in sociolinguistic terms.

7.2 Two levels of language contact

To assess the intensity of a particular contact situation, Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 74–76) have developed a borrowing scale in which they distinguish five stages of contact: (i) casual contact; (ii) slightly more intense contact; (iii) more intense contact; (iv) strong cultural pressure; and (v) very

strong cultural pressure. Adopting this model, I will now argue that we should distinguish between two levels of contact: (i) a casual contact situation between Bactrian and Gāndhārī at large (stage 1); (ii) a more intense contact between Bactrian and the predecessor of Niya Prakrit (stage 2 or 3).

A stage 1 type of contact is characterised by lexical borrowing, especially the adoption of content words that belong to the non-basic vocabulary of a language (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 77f.). Since the Bactrian loanwords in Niya Prakrit are typically cultural borrowings—administrative, political, military, and economic terms; textiles and clothing; or fauna, flora, and food—one could think it sufficient to posit a casual contact situation, i.e. stage 1.

If, however, it is accepted that Bactrian influence on Niya Prakrit was not limited to lexical borrowing (cf. Chapter 5), a stage 1 type of contact will not suffice. Borrowing grammatical morphemes like the suffixes *-ani* and *-ci* and the occurrence of slight structural borrowing, as with the reciprocal pronoun *eka b(h)iti* ‘one another’ or the Niya preterite formations, would suggest that the Bactrian influence on Niya Prakrit represents the second or third stage of Thomason and Kaufman’s borrowing scale (1988: 78–83).⁹⁴⁷

Significantly, the reciprocal pronoun *eka b(h)iti*, the synthetic preterite, and the suffixes *-ani* and *-ci* are restricted to Niya Prakrit; they are not (yet) attested in other forms of the Gāndhārī language. Although the Bactrian elements in these types of Gāndhārī should still be studied systematically, traces of structural influence have not yet been detected there. Yet, the same cannot be said about loanwords: some of the Bactrian loanwords in Niya Prakrit likewise occur in South Asian Gāndhārī (see §4.2.1), and there are Bactrian loans (including names) in Gāndhārī inscriptions of the Kuṣāṇa period not occurring in Niya Prakrit but covering the same type of semantic domains.⁹⁴⁸

⁹⁴⁷ Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 74) mention the addition of foreign derivational affixes to native vocabulary as one of the features that are typical of stage 3, but not stage 2. If the Niya suffixes *-ani* and *-ci* are loans from Bactrian (§5.2), they would be examples of this kind. I nonetheless hesitate to use these suffixes as the sole evidence that the contact between Bactrian and Niya Prakrit was truly of a stage 3 rather than a stage 2 type; in any case, the difference between these two stages is one of degree, not of kind.

⁹⁴⁸ Falk (2010b: 76–79 = 2013a: 247–250) gives an overview of Kuṣāṇa titles and names attested in Gāndhārī inscriptions and other Indian sources. For Iranian loanwords in Indian languages, see now also Ollett (2024: 89–98), who likewise

Because structural influence from Bactrian is only visible in Niya Prakrit and not in other forms of Gāndhārī, I would like to distinguish between two levels of language contact, one between Bactrian and Gāndhārī as a whole, the other between Bactrian and the ancestor of Niya Prakrit.

The first would have been a casual contact situation (Thomason and Kaufman's stage 1), in which Bactrian functioned as a politically dominant and prestigious superstrate language because of the conquest of Gandhāra in the early-mid 1st century AD by the Kuṣāṇa emperor Kujula Kadphises. As a result of his conquest, Gandhāra was ruled by the Kuṣāṇa dynasty for about two centuries.⁹⁴⁹ During this period, a Kuṣāṇa administration was established, which could explain why Bactrian administrative and political vocabulary, e.g. bureaucratic titles, entered various dialects of Gāndhārī, not only the ancestor of Niya Prakrit.⁹⁵⁰ The Kuṣāṇa kings also facilitated trade over the land routes connecting northern India with Bactria and other parts of Central Asia.⁹⁵¹ Textile products produced in Bactria could, together with their Bactrian names, have spread via these trade routes. Since travelling caravans needed pack animals for transport, a similar argument may be made about an animal term such as *stora* 'large animal, horse, camel' (cf. Schoubben 2022b: 353).

Under this scenario, native speakers of Gāndhārī would have borrowed words from Bactrian because of the prestige enjoyed by the latter as a superstrate language spoken by a politically dominant elite. In other words, the borrowing mechanism responsible for these loanwords would be adoption rather than imposition.⁹⁵²

The contact between Bactrian and the predecessor of Niya Prakrit would be a second, (slightly) more intense contact situation that resulted in more

emphasises that these loanwords are often administrative and/or military terms.

⁹⁴⁹ On the conquests of Kujula Kadphises and the Kuṣāṇa rule in South Asia, see e.g. Sims-Williams & Cribb (1996: 107); Neelis (2011: 132–135); Falk (2015b: 88); Benjamin (2018: 185).

⁹⁵⁰ On the administration of the Kuṣāṇa empire, see in more detail §7.3.

⁹⁵¹ Cf. Neelis (2011: 144): "From about the second half of the first century CE to the middle of the third century CE, the Kuṣāṇas maintained control over important nodes on a network of overland routes connecting Bactria in western Central Asia with the heartland of northern India." The role of the Kuṣāṇa empire in facilitating long-distance trade is also highlighted in Benjamin (2018: 176ff.).

⁹⁵² For the difference between these two mechanisms, see §3.1.1 and the references mentioned there.

loanwords as well as structural borrowings (Thomason and Kaufman's stage 2 or 3). A hypothesis as to why the latter contact was more intense and how we should conceptualise it will be offered in the next section.

7.3 An administrative language of the Kuṣāṇa empire

In my opinion, the Bactrian influence on Niya Prakrit should be interpreted against the backdrop of the Kuṣāṇa administration system. The Kuṣāṇa dynasty ruled over a vast empire, which brought with it a need for an efficient official administration of its culturally and linguistically diverse territories. Although our knowledge of how this administration worked is sketchy at best, it has been plausibly suggested that, by taking over a patchwork of already existent regional administrations, the Kuṣāṇas continued pre-existing administrative traditions (Bracey 2020: 115–125). Dating formulae were, for instance, not standardised in the different parts of the empire, and local eras in use before the Kuṣāṇas survived the change of dynasty (Bracey 2020: 128f.).

Gāndhārī literacy goes back at least to Aśokan times (3rd century BC), and the continuation of formulaic phrases and writing practices from Achaemenid Official Aramaic, the earlier chancellery idiom of the region,⁹⁵³ suggests that Gāndhārī was used for administrative purposes in, for example, monasteries long before the Kuṣāṇa conquest. When the Kuṣāṇa rulers took over previously established administrative structures, it would have fitted their pragmatic policy likewise to continue the use of Gāndhārī as an administrative language (cf. Harmatta 1994: 434).

Indeed, it is widely accepted that Gāndhārī was used for official purposes by the Kuṣāṇas.⁹⁵⁴ There are good reasons to think so: Gāndhārī inscriptions have been found in the heartland of the Kuṣāṇa empire in Afghanistan, where

⁹⁵³ For the Aramaic heritage in Gāndhārī, see §2.1.1 and the references cited there.

⁹⁵⁴ “The language used by the Bactrian-speaking Kushans in administrative documents was Prakrit [i.e. Gāndhārī]” (Hitch 2009: 19); “It was ... particularly under the Kuṣāṇas in the first to third centuries A.D. that Gāndhārī came to be ... an international language of administration and diplomacy” (Salomon 2011b: 180); “The Gandhari Prakrit in its Kharoshthi script ... came to dominate the administration of the Kushan Empire” (Baumer 2014: 52). See also Cribb (1998: 86).

Bactrian was the main vernacular;⁹⁵⁵ when conquering Gandhāra in the early-mid 1st century AD, Kujula Kadphises continued to mint coins with Kharoṣṭhī script legends;⁹⁵⁶ the Bactrian inscription erected by Vima Taktu in Dasht-e-Nawur is accompanied by a Gāndhārī version (CKI 231); a ledger recording gifts of Vima Kadphises to a Buddhist monastery is written in Gāndhārī (CKM 297; Allon 2019); and so is the Khalatse inscription (CKI 62; Falk 2015b: 109), which could have officially demarcated the northeastern extent of the Kuṣāṇa dominions at the time of Vima Kadphises (Skinner 2017: 63f.; Salomon 2024: 524).⁹⁵⁷

More than likely, Niya Prakrit is an offshoot of a type of Gāndhārī used for administrative documents by the Kuṣāṇas. This conclusion is, *inter alia*, supported by the official titulature of the Shanshan kings, which, especially in the earliest Niya documents, undoubtedly continues a Kuṣāṇa prototype (see Brough 1965: 596f. = 1996: 291f.). If the ancestor of Niya Prakrit was used by the Kuṣāṇas, this may also explain some of the palaeographic peculiarities of Niya Kharoṣṭhī; the modified akṣara 𑀘 ya, for instance, is so far only attested in the Niya documents and on Kuṣāṇa coins (cf. Glass 2000: 98; Falk 2009: 111 = 2013a: 190) and may have been created by the Kuṣāṇa chancellery to represent the Bactrian sound /w/ (cf. §4.3.22).⁹⁵⁸

Orthography and grammar are also somewhat more standardised in Niya Prakrit than in other forms of Gāndhārī, and its phraseology is characterised by formulaic phrases, which suggest that it has been used as a chancellery idiom for a considerable time. Indeed, in the form as we have it, Niya Prakrit

⁹⁵⁵ CKI 50; 152; 155; 159; 174; 179; 181–183; 223; 227; 231; 233; 238; 362; 368; 370; 447; 448; 455; 460; 481; 508–511; 542; 551; 557; 600; 688–690; 698–706; 1118. Cf. Salomon (2011b: 181f.).

⁹⁵⁶ Adopting Gāndhārī as an administrative language may have happened concomitantly. The use of the Kharoṣṭhī script on Kuṣāṇa coins was discontinued during the reign of Kaniṣka I in the 2nd century AD, but this does not prevent that accounts, letters, and contracts continued to be written in Gāndhārī.

⁹⁵⁷ Kuṣāṇa inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī script have been found as far east as Mathura (CKI 48; 49; 157; 440), but most of the contemporary inscriptions from this findspot are in Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit written in Brāhmī script.

⁹⁵⁸ Some of the ligatures not found in other Kharoṣṭhī sources (collected in Glass 2024), e.g. -pg- (~ Bactr. -βγ-) and -tg- (~ Bactr. -δγ-), may also have been developed by the Kuṣāṇas. One could make the same argument about the Niya Kharoṣṭhī sign 𑀧 kṣa, if Hitch (1984: 199f.; cf. also Brough 1962: 72f.) is correct that 𑀧 kṣa developed from an earlier conjunct 𑀧 khkṣa (e.g. attested in the *Khotan Dharmapada*), and both signs were originally intended to write the Iranian cluster xš.

probably was not anybody's native language, even when we should not dismiss it as an artificial hybrid jargon (Jamison 2000: 64f. fn. 7 *contra* Fussman 1989: 440). It is therefore conceivable that (the ancestor of) Niya Prakrit was also used by Kuṣāṇa officials, who had to fulfil official duties in Gandhāra and lived there, but whose mother tongue was Bactrian.⁹⁵⁹

Against this background, it becomes understandable why the ancestor of Niya Prakrit underwent more profound influence from Bactrian than other types of Gāndhārī seem to have. The many administrative and political terms borrowed may have belonged to an institutionalised legal code in Bactrian authorised by the Kuṣāṇa dynasty. Since exact equivalents for these terms were not available in Gāndhārī, they had to be adopted as loanwords from Bactrian, which, as the official language of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty, should at least have been a spoken medium in the imperial chancellery.⁹⁶⁰

If it is accepted that native speakers of Bactrian used Niya Prakrit as a chancellery idiom as well, morphological and syntactic convergences become understandable too. The morphological parallels between the Bactrian and Niya preterite or the mutual intertranslatability of the Bactrian and Niya reflexives would have made it easier for speakers of Bactrian to learn and eventually use Niya Prakrit as a second language for administrative purposes.

The exact modalities of the type of bilingualism assumed here await a more detailed investigation, as they are hard to disentangle. Loanwords from Bactrian found both in Niya Prakrit and South Asian Gāndhārī or another

⁹⁵⁹ Some Iranian names occurring in Indian inscriptions can also be linked to Kuṣāṇa administrators working in these parts of the empire (cf. Falk 2010b: 81 = 2013a: 252). Ollett (2024: 85) likewise postulates the existence of an "Iranicised" Gāndhārī employed by speakers whose native tongue was an Iranian one. As noted in §7.1, it should still be investigated how many foreign names in the Niya documents can be Bactrian in origin and if people having Bactrian names also functioned as scribes.

⁹⁶⁰ Salomon (2011b: 187), too, connects the presence of Iranian loanwords in Gāndhārī, including Niya Prakrit, to its being employed as an administrative language by Iranian-speaking dynasties such as the Kuṣāṇas. For the idea that Bactrian was used as a spoken medium in the imperial administration, cf. Tavernier's (2017: 344–347) argument that Old Persian loanwords and calques in Aramaic, Elamite, and Demotic imply that Old Persian was used as a non-written administrative language of the Achaemenid empire. More parallels between the sociolinguistics of the Kuṣāṇa and Achaemenid empires are given in §7.4.

Indic language are, as noted in §7.2, probably examples of adoptions by native speakers. Yet, it does not follow from this that all the Bactrian elements in Niya Prakrit are due to adoption from a prestigious superstrate. There could also be instances of imposition from Bactrian-speaking scribes who had imperfectly learnt Niya Prakrit and, for example, calqued their reciprocal pronoun $\omega\gamma\omicron\beta\iota\delta\delta\iota\gamma\omicron$ ‘one another’ as Niya *eka b(h)iti* ‘one another’. In this case, Bactrian would not be the superstrate but the substrate language.⁹⁶¹

7.4 A comparison with Achaemenid Official Aramaic

The idea that the use of Gāndhārī for administrative purposes by Kuṣāṇa officials was responsible for the Bactrian influence visible in Niya Prakrit can be strengthened further by comparing the language policy of the Achaemenid empire and the role played therein by Achaemenid Official Aramaic.⁹⁶² The official language of the Achaemenid dynasty was Old Persian, an Iranian language documented on monumental inscriptions commemorating politically important events. Yet, Aramaic served as a nation-wide chancellery language for official correspondence, legal documents, financial accounts, and so forth.⁹⁶³ Other languages spoken in the empire, such as Elamite or Demotic, were used for bookkeeping at a more local level of the administrative structure.

The language policies of the Kuṣāṇa and Achaemenid empires have been compared to each other by Tassob (2018: 74f.). Drawing attention to the Bactrian legends on coins that were used throughout the Kuṣāṇa empire, Tassob emphasises the use of Bactrian as a nation-wide official language. She

⁹⁶¹ A future study on phonological influence from Bactrian on Niya Prakrit may help to clarify this issue, as phonology is frequently affected in an imposition situation (cf. Haspelmath 2009: 50 and see Matras 2020²: 241–253 for a general treatment of contact-induced changes in phonology). A possible example of substratal phonological influence from Bactrian and other Iranian languages on Niya Prakrit is writing unaspirated consonants where aspirated ones are expected historically (cf. §2.1.3 and §5.1.2 with further ref.).

⁹⁶² The term “Achaemenid Official Aramaic” is taken from Gzella (2015: 158–160). Other names for the same language are “Official Aramaic”, “Imperial Aramaic” (calqued from German *Reichsaramäisch*), or “Achaemenid Imperial Aramaic” (Folmer 2011: 577f.). On the use of different languages in the administration of the Achaemenid empire, see e.g. Tavernier (2017).

⁹⁶³ On the available text corpus in Achaemenid Official Aramaic, see e.g. Folmer (2011: 588–590) and Gzella (2015: 165–168; 2023: 156–171; 177–183).

also compares the use of Aramaic as the *lingua franca* of the Achaemenids. However, Aramaic was not the official language of the Achaemenid dynasty but a language used for official administration in different parts of the empire. Therefore, the role played by Bactrian in the Kuṣāṇa empire is, I suggest, more closely paralleled by that of Old Persian in Achaemenid times; like Old Persian, Kuṣāṇa Bactrian was the official language of the ruling dynasty;⁹⁶⁴ used in their stylistically refined inscriptions;⁹⁶⁵ and only understood by people in the heartland of the empire, not in conquered territories.

Whether Kuṣāṇa Bactrian was also used to write official correspondence and financial accounts remains uncertain because all the administrative texts in Bactrian discovered so far date from after the Kuṣāṇa period. If Bactrian was used in the written administration of the Kuṣāṇa empire, this does, however, not invalidate the comparison with Old Persian, for at least one administrative tablet in Old Persian has been discovered in the Persepolis archive (Stolper & Tavernier 2007; Tavernier 2017: 343).

Achaemenid Official Aramaic can be more fruitfully compared to Gāndhārī in its function as a chancellery language of the Kuṣāṇa empire. Salomon (2011b: 187) aptly remarks that “in both cases, what was originally (like all languages) a local dialect became, through various accidents of history and geography, the administrative language of a vast super-regional empire”. With its written tradition tracing back to Aśokan times, Gāndhārī was probably used for administrative purposes long before the Kuṣāṇa dynasty ruled over Bactria and conquered Gandhāra (cf. §7.3). As the Achaemenids did with Aramaic, the Kuṣāṇa rulers took over an already existing administrative tradition in a language that was spoken by a significant part of the population of their empire.⁹⁶⁶ For the Kuṣāṇa officials, Gāndhārī was not their mother tongue, but nor was Aramaic the native

⁹⁶⁴ Bactrian may have taken over its function as the official language of the Kuṣāṇa empire from Greek during the reign of Kaniška I (cf. e.g. Fussman 1976; Sims-Williams & Cribb 1996: 110f.; Cribb 1998).

⁹⁶⁵ The phraseology of the Old Persian and Kuṣāṇa Bactrian inscriptions likewise resembles each other (Sims-Williams & Cribb 1996: 83; Skjærvø 1998: 654–656).

⁹⁶⁶ After all, “it would have been an obvious decision for the chancellery of any newly-emerging imperial power to embrace such an already widely-used means of communication and incorporate its infrastructural underpinnings, such as scribal schools and administrative centres, rather than to replace them” (Gzella 2015: 162).

language of Achaemenid administrators (cf. e.g. Gzella 2023: 146–149). Achaemenid Official Aramaic may have been “a written norm to which no spoken variety of Aramaic corresponded exactly” (Gzella 2015: 164), precisely how Niya Prakrit and its immediate predecessor may have been a more standardised form of Gāndhārī only used for administrative texts.⁹⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly given these parallels, the semantics of the Old Persian loanwords in Achaemenid Official Aramaic resemble those of the Bactrian loans in Niya Prakrit. In §4.5.2, we saw that “administrative, political, military, and economic terms” make up the lion’s share of the Bactrian loanwords in Niya Prakrit. The same holds for the Old Persian loans in Aramaic (Folmer 2011: 595; Gzella 2015: 179f.; Tavernier 2020: 77; 82).⁹⁶⁸ Examples include Aram. *ʾzgnd* ‘messenger’ ← OP **azganda-*; *hmrkr* ‘accountant’ ← **hamāra-kara-*; *hndyz* ‘garrisoned’ ← **han-daiza-*; *hndrz* ‘instruction, order’ ← **han-darza-*; *krtnk* ‘bodyguard’ ← **kāra-tanū-ka-*; *ptgm* ‘message, report’ ← **pati-gāma-*; *ptp* (also *ptp*; *ptw*) ‘ration’ ← **piθfa-*; and *ʾsprn* ‘in full, entire’ ← **us-prna-*.

In addition, Niya Prakrit borrowed words for “textiles and clothing”, “fauna, flora, and food”, and “emotions and values” from Bactrian (§4.5.3–4.5.5). These semantic domains are likewise represented among the Old Persian loans in Aramaic, as can be exemplified by Aram. *ʾkrst*, a type of garment ← OP **ā-kṛsta-* (textile); *ʾspmng* ‘horse-hemp’ ← **aspa-manga-* (plant name); *dwg* ‘yoghurt, sour milk’ ← **dūga-* (food); and *yʾsšt* ‘in the most desirable manner’ ← **yāsišta-* (value).

As with the Bactrian influence on Niya Prakrit, the Old Persian influence on Achaemenid Official Aramaic was not restricted to loanwords. There is additional evidence that Old Persian expressions and idioms were being calqued into Aramaic; the use of Aram. *ʾhr* ‘then, afterwards’ in Achaemenid-period texts has, for instance, been argued to be modelled after OP *pasāva*

⁹⁶⁷ A minor difference between Achaemenid Official Aramaic and Gāndhārī is that the latter was never used throughout the whole territory of the Kuṣāṇa empire; cf. e.g. the use of Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit rather than Gāndhārī in the Kuṣāṇa inscriptions from Mathura, and note Strauch (2012: 164 fn. 32): “What we know of the language policy [of the Kuṣāṇa empire] seems to indicate that the language and script of the respective region was used in administrative affairs”.

⁹⁶⁸ For an up-to-date overview of the Old Persian loanwords in Achaemenid Official Aramaic, see Tavernier (2020: 77–82), especially his tables and fn. 6. The examples given below have been taken from there.

‘idem’.⁹⁶⁹ Morphosyntactic influence has been posited too, a plausible case being the occasional occurrence in Achaemenid Official Aramaic of a word order object-infinitive which is atypical for a Semitic language but the default pattern in Old Persian.⁹⁷⁰

The most well-known example of Old Persian influence on Aramaic morphosyntax is the *qṭyl l-* resultative construction, which is generally assumed to be based on the Old Persian *manā kṛtam* construction.⁹⁷¹ This example is particularly relevant when assessing language contact between Bactrian and Niya Prakrit, as it provides a parallel for the hypothesised Bactrian influence on the Niya preterite and the resultative constructions involving the verbal adj. in **-taka-*.

To summarise, the influence exerted by Old Persian on Achaemenid Official Aramaic is in many respects comparable to the Bactrian influence on Niya Prakrit. A plausible reason for these commonalities is that Achaemenid Official Aramaic and the predecessor of Niya Prakrit fulfilled a similar role in respectively the Achaemenid and the Kuṣāṇa empire, i.e. that of a chancellery language.

⁹⁶⁹ For a list of Old Persian expressions and idioms calqued into Aramaic, including *ʾhr*, see Tavernier (2017: 344–347; 2020: 84–87).

⁹⁷⁰ On the word order object-infinitive in Achaemenid Official Aramaic, see recently Folmer (2023: 343–345), who notes that “it is especially frequent when the object of the infinitive is a loanword from Old Persian, which can be interpreted as a clear clue to the origin of this specific word order”.

⁹⁷¹ Cf. e.g. Gzella (2004: 184–194), Ciancaglini (2008: 30–37), and Coghill (2016: 162ff.).