

“The Ossetic transitive preterite: origins and implications”

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Among the Iranian languages, Ossetic stands out in having a transitive preterite marked by a geminate dental and special set of person-number endings, e.g. sg. *kaldton*, *kaldtaj*, *kaldta*, pl. Digor *kaldtan*, *kaldtajtæ*, *kaldtoncæ*, Iron *kaldtam*, *kaldtat*, *kaldtoj* ‘poured’. Both of these features set it off from the intransitive preterite, which is transparently the past participle (in **-ta-*) + copula, e.g. 3sg. Digor *kald-æj*, Iron *kald-i(s)* ‘(was) poured’. It is argued that the transitive preterite originates in a periphrastic construction consisting of **-ta-* participle plus inflected forms of Proto-Iranian **dā-* ‘put’ (< Proto-Indo-European **d^heh₁-*), as first proposed by Christol (1990). Since **dā-* formed a reduplicated present, the attested forms must have arisen by haplology followed by syncope, e.g. **kartam dadāmi* ‘I made X poured’ > **kardu (da)dān* > **karduddān* → Proto-Ossetic **kalddan* > *kalddon* ‘I poured’.

This derivation has interesting implications, since the simplex verb **dā-* largely disappeared after the Old Iranian period (Cheung 2006:45–6 s.v. **daH²*), and the semantic shift from ‘put’ to ‘make’ is almost certainly independent of that in Old Persian *dā-* ‘put, make, create’. The pre-Ossetic transitive preterite does bear a strong resemblance to the Germanic weak preterite, now generally considered to derive from a periphrasis of **-ta-* participle and the imperfect of PIE **d^heh₁-* ‘put’ > ‘do’ (cf. Old English *dōn*). The remainder of this talk will evaluate the hypothesis that the transitive preterite arose in ancient times through language contact between the Scytho-Sarmatian tribes and Germanic peoples in the late centuries BC, and the consequences of this scenario for the position of Ossetic in Iranian dialectology.