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# Ergativity in Bactrian

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## 1. Introduction

Bactrian belongs to the Eastern Middle Iranian language group and was originally spoken in Northern Afghanistan. It is the only Iranian language that is known to be written with the Greek alphabet. As the language of the Kushan kings, Bactrian must have been widely known throughout a great empire, in Afghanistan, Northern India and parts of Central Asia. It is attested by coins, seals and inscriptions of the Kushan period (first to third centuries AD) and the following centuries and by a few manuscript fragments from a much later period, perhaps the eighth or ninth century<sup>1</sup>.

It is well known that a number of Iranian languages, such as Middle Persian, Pashto, Kurdish and Hawrami, are described as having an ergative construction. This construction is restricted to the past in Iranian languages. Ergative constructions of the past tenses in Iranian languages derive from constructions based on the Old Iranian perfect participle in *-ta* and are called *manā kartam* construction. These constructions are interpreted by some scholars as passive<sup>2</sup>, and others prefer to see them as possessive<sup>3</sup> or call them free genitive<sup>4</sup>. According to Payne an ergative construction is one in which the subject of an intransitive clause (S) has grammatical properties identical to those of the object of a transitive clause (O), and distinct from those of the subject of a transitive clause (A)<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted that ergative in Iranian languages generally exhibit what is known as split ergativity<sup>6</sup>, since the ergative construction is found only in clauses based on the past stem of the verb.

Here the question whether the ergative is to be interpreted as passive or possessive shall not be brought up again. The characteristics of the constructions and its typical features in the Bactrian language shall be presented here.

These constructions and the analysis of their case marking are the topic of this talk. But before embarking on the discussion of this theme, a short look at the noun morphology and inflectional categories of the verb is necessary.

## 2. Noun morphology

Sims-Williams points out that Bactrian has a system of two numbers and two cases<sup>7</sup>. It can be added that a difference can be perceived between the older inscriptions and the documents.

### 2.1. Gender

In Bactrian feminine stems are no longer distinguishable from masculines. But there are some remnants of the original feminine ending *-α* in older texts such as the Rabatak and Surkh Kotal inscription. For example the *α*-ending of some words such as *λιζα/λιζο* "citadel"<<sup>\*</sup>dizā-<sup>8</sup>, *αγιτα* "the whole(?)" *αμσα* "lady, mistress(?)"<sup>9</sup> helps to distinguish them from

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<sup>1</sup> Sims-Williams 1985: 344

<sup>2</sup> see Skjærvø 1985: 211-227 and Cardona 1970: 1-12

<sup>3</sup> see Benveniste 1966: 176-186 and Anderson 1977: 317-363

<sup>4</sup> see Haig 2004: 186

<sup>5</sup> Payne 1985: 555

<sup>6</sup> see Dixon 1994: 14

<sup>7</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 24

<sup>8</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 24

<sup>9</sup> Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996: 90

masculines such as **βαγο** "god" <\* *baga-* . Similarly, the articles **ι** and **μo** have feminine forms **ια** and **μα**, but these are not used consistently.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2. Number and Case

### Case morphology

	<b>SG.</b>	<b>PL.</b>
<b>DIR.</b>	<b>-o</b>	<b>-ε</b>
<b>OBL.</b>	<b>-ι or -ε</b>	<b>-ανο</b>

The distinction between direct and oblique in the singular can be still seen in the inscriptions, whereas in the documents it is very rare. In the inscriptions plural nouns are found both in the direct and in the oblique case. In the documents they are found almost exclusively in the oblique (even when syntactically in the direct case).

## 2.3. Pronouns

### 2.3.1. Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns only distinguish a direct and oblique form in the singular.

<b>Person</b>	<b>direct</b>	<b>oblique</b>
1s	αζο	μανο, or-μαγο with preposition
2s	το(τοι,τοο,τογο,τοουο)	ταο(ταοι,ταοο), or -φαγο with the preposition
3s		
1p	αμαχο	αμαχο, ιαμαχο
2p		τωμαχο, τομαχο, ταμαχο
3p		

As in other languages the enclitic pronouns function exclusively as oblique.

<b>Enclitic pronouns</b>
1s μo
2s δηο
3s ηο
1p μηο
2p δηο
3p ηο, ιηο

### The Function of Enclitic Pronouns

The enclitic forms function usually as:

(i) Subject of transitive verbs in the past

<sup>10</sup> Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996: 91

οτο=μηγο αγγιτι-νδο ι οαυαγο οισπο ασποριγο  
 and=WE.OBL receive-PST.3p ART price all complete  
 And we received the price all complete<sup>11</sup>

(ii) Object of transitive verbs in the present

κιδ-ανο αβα=φαγο ζηρο ... αφκαρ-αδο  
 who Q-You.OBL. Zer pursue-SBJV.3s  
 Who might pursue you, Zer<sup>12</sup>

(iii) Pronominal possessive on noun

χοβο=μο πιριφο  
 own-I.OBL. inheritance  
 my own inheritance

(iv) RECIPIENT/ Indirect Object

φαρα=φαγο πιδοοσημο  
 to-YOU.OBL. declare-PRS.1s  
 I declare (it) to you.

(v) Governed by the preposition

ασα=φαγο  
 from-YOU.OBL.  
 from you

### 2.3.2. Demonstrative pronouns

The demonstrative pronouns show a case distinction only in the plural in the inscriptions:

**Plural.direct**            **Plural.oblique**  
 ειμι                            ειμοανο

In the documents we only have one form, the oblique form is generalised.

**Plural.direct+oblique (common)**

ειμουανο

### 3. Verbal endings

Finite verbs inflect obligatorily for tense and person. In Bactrian, as in other Middle Iranian languages, the verbal system is based on a contrast between the present and the past stem.

	<b>Present</b>	<b>Preterite</b>
1s	-ιμο, -ημο	-δ-ιμο
2s	-ηιο, -ηι	*-δ-ηιο

<sup>11</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 66

<sup>12</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 46

3s	-ιδο, -δο	-δο
1p	-αμο	-δ-αμο
2p	-ηδο	
3p	-ινδο	-δ-ινδο

The preterite is formed by the former perfect participle and the present indicative of the verb "to be", which is used as an auxiliary. Some of the endings are irregular, presumably enclitics<sup>13</sup>.

	Present "to be"
1s	=ιμο, =ημο
2s	=ητο
3s	αστο, neg. νιστο
1p	=αμο, neg. ναμο
2p	
3p	=ινδο, neg. νινδο

After a short look at the noun morphology and the inflectional categories of the verb, I would like to focus on the past transitive or ergative constructions.

#### 4. Ergativity in Bactrian

Bactrian shows split ergativity with agreement of the verb with the patient in person and number. Bactrian ergative constructions show the subject in the oblique and the object in the direct case. But the usage of these endings is not consistent in the documents and very often nouns do not show a case distinction. In principle transitive forms derived from the past stem agree with the direct object<sup>14</sup>.

The ergative construction in Bactrian does not show a chronological difference. In the extant material it cannot be observed that the number of ergative constructions increases or that they become rarer. Examples of αβο are found very rarely, only in the Rabatak inscription and in the documents A and F.

In the documents:

κοοαδο αμαχο αβο ραλικο χοαδο ζιϋτο  
 that WE.OBL Q PN own request.PST.3s  
 ... that we ourselves have requested Ralik.<sup>15</sup>

κοοαδο=μο αβο ζηρο ... χιρδο  
 that-I.OBL Q PN buy.PST.3s  
 ...that I bought, Zer.

In the Rabatak inscription:

ταδι βαι κανηβκε αβο βαφαρο καραραγγο φρομαδο  
 then king.OBL PN.OBL Q PN Karalrang order.PST.3s  
 Then king Kanishka gave order to Shafar the Karalrang.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 25

<sup>14</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 26

<sup>15</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 34

<sup>16</sup> Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996: 78-79

## The classification of the past transitive constructions (Ergative):

According to the present material two main types can be distinguished. The first type may be further divided into five subtypes. The main difference is object marker and different word classes. In the documents subject is usually an enclitic<sup>17</sup> or rarely a full personal pronoun<sup>18</sup>, whereas in the inscriptions a noun. The object may be a noun<sup>19</sup>, article with noun<sup>20</sup>, full personal pronoun<sup>21</sup>, enclitic pronoun, demonstrative<sup>22</sup> in the ergative constructions.

The first group has no marker for object, whereas in the second group the object is marked by the preposition αβο.

The first example is given to show the general structure of the construction in which the subject stands in the oblique case. Both subject and object are pronouns, the subject in oblique and the object in the direct case.

### Type I

#### Subject

PRON.OBL

(in the document)

στο=μο το

and-I.OBL YOU.DIR

I released you, Zer..<sup>23</sup>

#### Object

PRON.DIR

ζηρο αζαδο ... υιρτ-ητο  
PN free set-PST.2s

(a)PRON.OBL

(in the document)

στι= μ[ο πωστογο] μανο νιβοχτι

and-this document I.OBL write.PST.3s

And I wrote this contract.

ART+N<sub>common</sub>

(b)PRON.OBL

(in the document)

ταδο=μο ωσο ... οαυαγο σποριγο αγγιτο

and-I.OBL now price complete receive.PST.3s

And now, I received the full price

N<sub>common</sub>

(c) PRON.OBL+ N<sub>common</sub>

(in the document)

μισιδο πιδοροβ-δο μανο μοζ[δο ι χαρα]γανο...ιαοι

now receive-PTS.3s I.OBL PN grain

Now, I, Muzd[khara]gan, received ... grain.

N<sub>common</sub>

(d) PRON.OBL+ N<sub>common</sub>

(in the document)

μισιδο ζιρτο μανο βαγοφαρνο ...ειο ζινο.

now request.PST.3s I.OBL PN this woman

DEM<sub>common</sub>

<sup>17</sup> See examples a ,b.

<sup>18</sup> See example c.

<sup>19</sup> See example c.

<sup>20</sup> See example a.

<sup>21</sup> See type I.

<sup>22</sup> See example d.

<sup>23</sup> Sims Williams 2000:44

Now: I, Bag-Farn, requested...this woman.

(d) N<sub>common</sub> (in the document) N<sub>common</sub>  
 δανομανο μαρλο ζιγο βηλαδδτιο κιρ-δο  
 such and such man damage unlawful do-PST.3s  
 such and such man did the damage and unlawful(acts)...

N.OBL. N.DIR  
 (in the inscription)  
 ταδι βαι κανηβκε αβο βαφαρο καταραγγο φρομαδο  
 then king.OBL PN.OBL Q PN Karalrang order.PST.3s  
 Then king Kanishka gave orders to Shafar Karalrang<sup>24</sup>

## Type II

In Bactrian the preposition αβο, originally meaning "to, in, according to, etc." is used occasionally to mark a definite direct object. It is also described as marking animate objects only. This is an unusual type of case marking in Bactrian.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Object</b>
PRON.OBL	αβο+N.DIR
or	
N <sub>common</sub>	

αγγιτιδο αμαχο μανο βαβο οδο πιδοκο αβο ραλικο ολο  
 receive.PST.3s WE.OBL. IOBL. PN and PN Q PN wife  
 We received-I, Bab, and [I], Piduk-Ralik [as our] wife.

In O6 the preposition αβο is used with an inanimate noun:

ακιδαβο χοησαοοβωστιγο ταβδο  
 who-? contract of undertaking seal. PST.3s

According to Sims-Williams the direct object of the verb ταβδο is either a word describing the document on which the seal is placed or a word for seal, but in O6 χοησαοοβωστιγο can not be the direct object, since the preposition αβο marks only animate direct object<sup>25</sup>

The αβο construction is comparable with the use of the preposition in some Pamir languages like for example "az" in Shughni-Roshani and "z" in Yazghulami. Both prepositions originally have the meaning "from" and are used in similar constructions to mark direct object<sup>26</sup>. These constructions are restricted to personal pronouns in these languages.

Payne quotes that one possible development in the decay of the ergativity include the further grammaticalization of the prepositions or postpositions as object-markers.<sup>27</sup>

In Bactrian in the later (dated) documents the number of αβο construction does not increase. It can therefore not be concluded that the αβο construction is to be seen as a sign of decay of the ergative in Bactrian.

<sup>24</sup> Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996: 78-79

<sup>25</sup> Sims-Williams 2007: 14

<sup>26</sup> Wendtland, forthcoming : 2

<sup>27</sup> Payne 1985: 557

## Abbreviations

<b>ART</b>	Article
<b>DEM</b>	Demonstrative
<b>DEM<sub>common</sub></b>	Indeclinable
<b>DIR</b>	Direct
<b>N</b>	Noun
<b>N<sub>common</sub></b>	Indeclinable
<b>OBL</b>	Oblique
<b>PL</b>	Plural
<b>PN</b>	Personal name
<b>PRON</b>	Pronoun
<b>PRS</b>	Present
<b>PST</b>	Past
<b>Q</b>	Marker
<b>SBJV</b>	Subjunctive
<b>SG</b>	Singular
<b>1s/2s/3s</b>	First person singular/second.../third
<b>1p/2p/3p</b>	First person plural/second.../third

This table shows the Greek alphabet and the supposed phonetic values in Bactrian.<sup>28</sup>

<b>α</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>γ</b>	<b>δ</b>	<b>ε</b>	<b>ζ</b>	<b>η</b>	<b>θ</b>	<b>ι</b>	<b>κ</b>	<b>λ</b>	<b>μ</b>
a,ā,ə	b,β	g,γ,γγ=ηg	d	e,εi=ī	z,ž,dz	ē,final- ηιο=ē	θ	y,i,ī	k	l	m
<b>ν</b>	<b>ο</b>	<b>π</b>	<b>ρ</b>	<b>ϕ</b>	<b>σ</b>	<b>τ</b>	<b>υ</b>	<b>φ</b>	<b>χ</b>	<b>ω</b>	
n	w,u,ū,o,ə,ø	p	r	š	s,ts,dz	t	h	f	x	ō	

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<sup>28</sup> Following Sims-Williams 1989:233



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