

Chapter 2

2. Dialects

2.1. Two distinct dialects

Today Ossetic falls into two distinct, mutually locally comprehensible dialects: Digor (West Ossetic) and Iron (East Ossetic); the literary language is based upon the latter. The South Ossetic idiom of Georgia is a local variant (or a bundle of local variants) of Iron. There are some local varieties within each dialect. The transitional dialect of the Uællagkom region is basically Digor but shares some features with Iron. We have practically no evidence of earlier dialectal differences, but considering the previous extension of the language in the Northwest Caucasus at least some local variation must be presumed.

In their grammatical structure the two dialects are closely related to one another. The morphological categories are mainly the same, fulfilling similar functions in all essentials. Morphological and syntactical innovations are to a large extent common to both dialects. In some instances structural reorganisations have been carried through with different materials. In the system of the demonstrative pronouns two degrees of proximity are distinguished, roughly corresponding to English “this”, “that”. But there is reason to believe that this two-term system has replaced an earlier three-term system, approximately corresponding to classical Latin *hic, iste, ille*. In both dialects *a-* (< **ā*) indicates proximity to the speaker. In Iron *u-* (< **awa-*, or a conflation of **awa-* and **haw-*?) indicates remoteness from the speaker, whereas in Digor this notion is expressed by *ie-* (nominative; < **ayam*), *uo-* (oblique cases; < **awa-*). Both dialects have made the same development, but differ partly as regards the materials used (cf. 5.5.4. below).

2.2. Inflection of “to be”

Among differences that possibly reflect ancient dialectal diversity the inflection of the verb “to be” (I. *uin*, D. *un*) can be mentioned. In Iron the past tense is based on a participle stem *uid* (< **būta-*): *uid-tæn* “I was”. In Digor this function is fulfilled by the stem **hāta-*, from the Aryan root **as-* / *s-* (Ir. **ah-* / *h-*): *ad-tæn*. But *ad-* is also found in some Iron forms (the past optative *fæ-c-ad-ain* beside *fæ-uid-ain*). In the protodialect **būta-* and **hāta-* must therefore have coexisted.

In the inflection of the present, there are considerable differences between the two dialects:

	Iron	Digor
Sg. 1	<i>dæn</i>	<i>dæn</i>
2	<i>dæ</i>	<i>dæ</i>
3	<i>u, i, is</i>	<i>æi, ie, ies</i>
Pl. 1	<i>stæm</i>	<i>an</i>
2	<i>stut</i>	<i>aitæ</i>
3	<i>sti</i>	<i>æncæ</i>

The forms of the 3rd person singular of both dialects represent ancient demonstrative pronouns: **awa-*, **aya-*, **aiša-* (Benveniste 1959: 73 ff.; Weber 1983: 84 ff.). The other forms have not been satisfactorily explained in all details. The plural forms of Digor apparently derive from a stem **ah-* (**as-*). The same stem seems also to be at the base of the 1st and 2nd persons singular in both dialects; the *d-* may reflect an old demonstrative pronoun (Weber 1983). Forms without *d-* are found in the future tense: *cær-zin-æn* / *cær-zæn-æn*, *cær-zin-æ* / *cær-zæn-æ* “I, you will live” (from *cærin* / *cærun* “to live”). Thus we obtain a Digor paradigm derived from **ah-* in the plural and in the 1st and 2nd persons singular. The plural forms of Iron are probably based on the stem **stā-* “to stand” (Bielmeier 1977: 162 ff.; Thordarson 1989: 477). If this holds true, the verb “to be” is an amalgamation of the ancient roots **baw-*, **ah-* and **stā-*. But the derivation of the 3rd person plural is difficult to understand; we expect **stīnc*, cf. *cær-inc* “they live”, *kæn-inc* “they do” etc. Weber (o.c.) therefore prefers to derive *sti* from **asti*, the ancient 3rd person singular, which was ousted in its original function by demonstrative pronouns and reinterpreted as a plural form; from *sti* a stem *st-* was extended analogously to the other forms of the plural. If the latter explanation is conclusive, we have to do with a separate Iron development that may very well be comparatively recent; an earlier paradigm analogous to that of Digor could accordingly be postulated for Iron (or its immediate ancestor). It should, however, be pointed out that the divergences of the dialects appear also in the future paradigm:

Plural:	Iron	Digor
1	<i>cær-z-istæm</i>	<i>cær-zin-an</i>
2	<i>cær-z-istut</i>	<i>cær-zin-ai</i>
3	<i>cær-z-isti</i>	<i>cær-zin-dæncæ</i>

2.3. Vocabulary and phraseology

As regards vocabulary and phraseology, there is a considerable difference between the two dialects. This is especially true of terms and fixed phrases referring to farming and other branches of economic and social life. Animal and plant names differ to some extent as well. Kabardian loanwords seem to be more numerous in Digor than in Iron. The lexical influence of Georgian has been far stronger in South Ossetia than in the north. But the majority of the lexical divergences between the dialects is confined to semantic fields which relate to the local conditions of the speakers. In their basic core vocabulary – lexemes referring to the elementary parts of human experience – the dialects are identical to a high degree. It is noteworthy that a large part of the lexical innovations that have given Ossetic its peculiar profile are common to both dialects. Thus, e.g., the native words for “hand”, “foot” and “mouth”, *arm*, *fad*, *kom*, have been supplanted by the same words in both dialects (probably loanwords): *k'ux* / *k'ox*, *k'ax*, *zix* / *zux*, *c'ux* resp., the native words having only been retained in secondary functions (compounds, metaphorical usages, fixed phrases; see Thordarson 1984: 186 ff.).

Except for a local variant of Digor, the Caucasian system of vigesimal counting was adopted by both dialects.

The greater part of the 291 (D. 296) words treated by Bielmeier in his study on the “basic core vocabulary” of Ossetic (Bielmeier 1977; cf. in particular 48 ff.) are common to both Digor and Iron.

The following words are peculiar to Iron or have here a meaning divergent from that of Digor:

æpparin “to throw” (IES I 169; D. *gælzun*; ib. I 512); *ævzær* “bad” (ib. I 210 f.; D. *læyuz*, ib. II 24 f.); *bik*’ “navel” (ib. I 260; D. *naff(ſ)æ*, ib. II 149 – D. *bek’æ* means “projection”); *diry* “fruit” (ib. I 383; D. *ræzæ*, ib. II 398 f.); *k’annæg* “little” (ib. I 618; D. *mingi(i)*, *mink’i*, *mænk’i*, *mænkæi*, *mængæi*, ib. II 122); cp. I. *giccil* = D. *giccil* “id.”, I. *čisil* “id.”; ib. I 528, 614); *k’ubal* “neck” (D. *k’obalæ* “head”, with a derogatory connotation; cp. I. D. *bærzæi* “neck”; ib. I 638, 254); *lenk kænin* “to swim” (D. *nakæ kænun*, but *lenk kænun* is also used in the same sense; ib. II 41 f., 152); *tu(tæ) kænin* “to spit, spew” (D. *lixsun*; ib. III 308 f., II 46 ff.); *xus* “dry” (also *xuisk*’ “id.” = D. *suxæ*, ib. IV 250 f.); *xirtt-xirtt kænin* “to scratch” (ib. IV 203; cp. I. *nixin*, D. *nixun* “id.”, ib. II 222); *č’izi* “dirty” (also *čif*, *č’illon* “id.”, D. *c’ifæ*, *c’umur*; ib. I 635, 338, 633, 337); *nad* “road” is confined to Digor; *fændag* “id.” is common Ossetic (ib. II 147, I 445 f.).

Other words peculiar to Digor are:

t’aff(ſ)æ “leaf” (I. *sif*, D. *sifæ*; ib. III 351, 183 f.); *qæstæ* “belly” (ib. II 298; cp. I. *guibin*, D. *gubun* “id.”); *quæcæ* “damp, smoke” (ib. II 320; cp. I., D. *fæzdæg* “id.”); *fæsmærun* “to recognise” (ib. I 459; cp. I. *zonin*, D. *zonun* “id.”).

Obviously I. *si(k’a)* and D. *siuæ* “horn” (ib. III 179, 192; MF II 1099) are two different derivatives from the same stem.

D. *istun* “to stand” corresponds etymologically to I. *stin* “to rise” (IES III 156); for the meaning “to stand” Iron has formed a new verb, *læuuin* (< **ram-* plus *uin*, lit. “to be (stand) still”, cf. D. *ræmun* “to wait, stand”, Av. *ram-* “to rest, stay” (IES II 37 ff.)). In Digor *læuu-un* is found in the sense “to remain, last, abide, wait”; I. *fællæuuin*, D. *fællæuu-un* “to stay, remain, wait”.⁵

The greater part of these words are onomatopoeia or have an expressive or emphatic connotation (note the glottalic consonants), i.e., they belong to those parts of the vocabulary which are particularly exposed to innovations and the intrusion of foreign elements.

A few more words and expressions can be added to this list: Instead of D. *fælværæ* “the year before last” (< **fær-faræ* < **para-pārā* lit. “beside, next to the last year”; cp. D. *faræ*, I. *faron* “last year” < **pārā*, **pārāna* resp., NPers. *pār* (-*sāl*), *pārīn* “id.” etc.; IES I 442), Iron has created a new expression, *ændær-az* lit. “the other year”, cf. I., D. *ændæræ-bon* “the day before yesterday” (ib. I 155).

I. *æmbis-bon* “noon” (< *æmbis* “(a) half” and *bon* “day”; ib. I 138) is clearly an innovation. In Digor, however, the ancient word for “noon” has been preserved: *ræftæ* < **rapitwā-* (with syncope of the pretonic **-i-*; the inherited **-i-* must have been lost after the sound law **-θw- > -pp-* ceased operating, cp. *cippar / cuppar* “four” < **čatwāra-*, Av. *rapituuā-*, aram.*pituuā-* (Y. 44.5) “noon” (“die zum Mahl passende Zeit”, Bartholomae 1904: 1509), Sogd. (B.) *rypδβh* **rēpitβbah* “id.”, Phl. *rabiḥ*, Khot. *ravyepa*, *rravyepa*, *rravyāpata*, etc. (IES II 366). The ancient word is preserved in Iron, in the adverbial expression *bon-ræfti* “midday, noon; in broad daylight”, while the other derivatives of *ræftæ* seem to be confined to Digor: *ræfton* “noon” (adj.), *ræftiad* “(time for) dinner” (I. *sixor*, D. *sexuar*; IES III 116), *ræftigon* “at noon time, in the middle of the day”, *ræfti-badæ* (-*badt*) “siesta”, *fæsa-ræftæ* “(in the) afternoon”, *fæs-ræftiad* “after dinner, after noon”. But note that the neologism *æmbes-bon* is also found in Digor (MF I 120).

Furthermore, the relation between D. *faræ*, I. *faron* is found in the temporal adverbs D. *ædosæ*, I. *dison* “last night” (IES I 384), D. *æzinæ*, I. *z(i)non* “yesterday” (ib. IV 313 f.). The final *-æ* of Digor probably dates back to an old instrumental in **-ā*,

⁵ For the exact meaning cf. the respective entries in MF and IES.

whereas in Iron we have the traces of an adjectival suffix **-āna-*, clearly a secondary derivative: **dušāna-* / *daušā* (cf. OInd. *doṣā-* “evening”, Av. *daošatarā-* “gegen Abend gelegen, westlich” (Bartholomae 1904: 674, NPers. *dōš* “last night”); **zin-āna-* / *zinā* (cf. OInd. *hyāh* “yesterday”, Sogd. *ʾzyy myō*, NPers. *dī, dīg* “id.”) etc. The initial *æ-* of D. *ædosæ*, *æzinæ* derives from the demonstrative stem *a-*, cf. Av. *a-xšafni* “im Abenddunkel” (Bartholomae 1904: 550), *a-sūiri* “im Morgendunkel”, “was bis zum Morgen hin reicht”, (Bartholomae 1904: s.v.; cf. OInd. *a-svar*), OInd. *adyā* “today”⁶.

In Digor *sozun* “to burn” is used solely as a transitive verb; the corresponding intransitive verb is *caəfsun*, which in Iron (*caəfsin*) means “to warm oneself, get warm”. Iron *suzin* is both transitive and intransitive (cp. the past forms *siyḏton*, *siyḏtaen*; IES III 165).

Iron *ficin* means “to cook, boil, bake”. In the sense of “to boil”, Digor uses *iraiun*, which in Iron (*raiin*) is found in the metaphoric sense “to be glad, bubble, spark” (IES I 487 f.).

Iron *uəndin* “to dare” corresponds semantically to Digor *ənde(u)un* (cf. IES IV 85 f. and ib. I 156).

In Digor, *ær(u)agæs* (*ir(u)agæs*) *un* is commonly used in the sense “to believe, trust” (IES I 184); the logical subject (agent) is put in the ablative: *dalisæi* (*abl.*) *i dærkʼi zurditæ raruagæs æncæ* “das Lamm traute den Worten des Böckleins zu” (sic! MF: I, 598). In Iron the ancient verb *uirnin* is used in the same sense (*uirni mæ, dæ etc.* “I, you believe”), cf. Av. *var-* (*vərənauu-*, OPers. *v(a)rnava*) “to choose, believe”, OInd. *vṛṇitē* “to choose” etc.; IES IV 123 f., KEWA III 244 f.). *urnun* is also found in Digor (MF III 1324).

Abaev (1949: 449) gives D. *fælyazun* as a synonym of I. *færazin* (= D. *færazun*) “to be able to” (IES I 450 f.). The verb is not found as a separate item either in MF or IES.

Semantic discrepancies, or synonymity, of this kind are neither a matter of surprise, nor do they contradict our assumption of a close genetic relationship between the dialects. In most instances Digor turns out to be the more archaic of the two dialects.

2.4. Lexical doublets

There exist some lexical doublets whose phonetic divergences cannot be accounted for by the regular sound correspondences between the dialects.

2.4.1. I. *axadin* “to swell, grow bigger, increase in quantity or importance” (past stem *axadid*) can hardly be separated from D. *axedun* “id.” (past stem *axid(d)*, *axit*, also used as an adjective “abundant, frequent”. Abaev (IES: I, 88) reconstructs **a-* (preverb, not productive in modern Digor) plus **xad-/xaid-* (**xid-*), which he compares with OInd. (RV etc.) *sādhati* “goes straight to a goal, succeeds, obtains an object” (tr., intr.), Av. *hādišta-* (Yt. 12,8) “am besten zum Ziel führend, geleitend” (Bartholomae 1904: 1802) = OInd. *sādhiṣṭha-* “straightest (as a path), most efficient (as a sacrifice)” (Monier-Williams 1899: 1201), Av. *hādrōiū* (Y. 32.7) “in a straight course” (<**hād-ra-*, cp. OInd. *sādhyā* “id.”; cp. Humbach 1959 ad locum): OInd. *sidh-* / *sedh-* “reaches, succeeds” (*sidhyati*, *siddha-* “accomplished”, *sidhra-* “successful”; etc.; – *sedhati* “repels, drives on/back/out”; *siṣedha* (perf.; RV 1.32.13) “was of use”⁷). If *sād-* / *sidh-* and *sedh-* belong together – and this seems a natural conclusion as far as *siṣedha* is

⁶ Cf. Benveniste 1959: 109 (whose Av. *zyo* is a ghostword, cf. Mayrhofer, KEWA: III, 614).

⁷ RV 1.32.13: *nāsmā vidyūn nā tanyatūḥ siṣedha nā yām miham ākirad dhrādūniḥ ca* “nicht fruchtete ihm Blitz und Donner, nicht Nebel und Hagel, den er ausstreute” (Geldner); – “Ni l’éclair ni le tonnerre n’a assuré le succès à ce (démon)” (Renou, EVP, XVII, p. 12).

concerned – the latter must be a secondary *guna* form of the root, created on the basis of *sidh-* (*sādh-* / *sidh-* < I.E. **sə-* / *sə-dh-*, cf. Pokorny 1959:892; LIV 468 f.: **seHdʰ*). If we accept Abaev's etymology, the Digor verb shows the same (independent?) development. For semantic reasons it seems doubtful, however, whether *sedh-* “to repel, drive” can be connected with *sādh-* / *sidh-* “to attain an object”. For further details I refer to Mayrhofer, KEWA III, 456, 466 (with bibliography), who does not mention the Ossetic verbs, however.

In Ossetic, OIran. *h-* is preserved as *x-* in front of *i/e* < **ai*, cf. *xid* / *xed* “bridge” < **haitu-*. Initially, it is dropped preceding *a*; cf. *avd* “seven” < **hafta*. The preservation of *h-* in I. *a-xadin* may then be due to the influence of the synonymous *a-xedun*.⁸

In this case the preverb does not function as an orientational marker, nor does it lend the verb an aspectual (perfective) force; the verbal stem and the preverb have amalgamated into one unanalyzable lexical unit. As to the “dead” preverbs, cf. Thordarson 1982: 251 ff., and 3.4.3. below.

The relations between D. *erun* (*ierun*, past stem *ird*) “to find, obtain, conceive a child (of the woman)” and I. *arin* (past stem *ard*; S.Oss. *uarin*) “id.” are not analogous to those between *axadin* and *axedun* treated above. Benveniste (1959: 86 ff.) derives both verbs from OIran. **ar-*, cf. Av. *ar-* “gewähren, zu teil werden lassen”, in *aipi.əratō.gātar-* “der einen fest bestimmten, fest zugewiesenen Platz hat” (cf. Bartholomae 1904: 83), *aiβi.əratō.gātar-* “der, der sich still verhalten muss, seinen Platz nicht verlassen darf” (Bartholomae 1904: 88: *aiwi...*); Sogd. *byr-* (*’byr’t* “to obtain, find” (Gershevitch 1961:12, 92); Khwar. *byr-* “id.” (Samadi 1986: 44); Yaghn. *vīr-*, *vīorta* “to find, earn, acquire” (Andreev / Peščereva 1957: 345); Shgh. *viri-*, *viray-* etc. “to find, obtain, get hold of” (Morgenstierne 1974: 84 ff.), all from **abi-ar-*. The *e* of the Digor verb may be due to the palatalizing effect of a preverb (**abi-?* or **vi-*, **ni-?*). But the South Ossetic form remains unexplained; **abi-ar-* would probably have resulted in **əvæ-*, as Abaev points out (IES: I,73 f.). Possibly *uarin* owes its initial *u-* to an ancient preverb **awa-*, cf. Av. *auua-bar-* “hinzu-, herbringen, verschaffen” etc. (cp. Bartholomae 1904: 937), *auua-aē-* “herabgehen, kommen zu” etc. (Bartholomae 1904: 149); Khot. *va-* (Emmerick 1968: 241); Sogd. *’w-*, **o-* (Gershevitch 1961: 11, 104; Gauthiot/Benveniste 1914-29: II, 59); Pashto *wa*, preposition, preverb “to”, Phl. *w* **ō* “id.”. In Ossetic **awa-* is found as an unproductive (“dead”) preverb in a few verbs: cp. I. *u-læfn*, D. *uo-læfn* “to breath, sob, rest” < **awa-lap-* (cf. OInd. *lāpati* “chatters, talks”, etc.; cf. IES IV 14 and KEWA III 88 f.) and I. *u-romin*, D. (*u*)*o-ramun* “to calm, keep back” < **awa-rām-* (cp. OInd. *rāmate* “calms, rests, is pleased”, Sogd. *’wr’m-* “to calm, appease”, etc.; f. Benveniste 1959: 95 and KEWA III 43 f.).

Note the geminate (*i*)*ss-* / *iss-* in (*i*)*ssarin* / *isserun* resulting from *s-* (preverb) plus *arin* / *erun*, but cp. also the following examples without gemination: (*zard*) *s-amonin* “to start singing” (MF II 1036: “allein (ein Lied) anstimmen”; IES I 52), *s-amaiin* “to build” (IES I 49, MF II 1037), *s-amæntin* “to smear with; to stir” (IES I 50, MF II

⁸ The Scythian and Sarmatian evidence is ambiguous. Initial *h-* is retained in the proper name Χανακῆς, if we accept Vasmer's (1923: 56; cf. also Zgusta 1955: 167) derivation from **hana-* “old”, Av. *hana-*, OInd. *sāna-* “id.”. According to Abaev (1979: 291), this name is a participle in **aka-* of a verb **xwan-* “to shout”, corresponding to Oss. *xonin* / *xonun*, OInd. *svan-* “to sound”, etc. On the other hand, *h-* was dropped in Ατεας, Αζιτωος, if from **hathya-* “true, righteous” (Vasmer, o.c.: 12 ff.; Abaev, o.c.: 291; cf. also Justi 1895:50; but cf. Zgusta, o.c.: 62); in Αζαριων, if it is connected with Av. *hazayra-* “1000” (Vasmer, o.c.: 30; Zgusta, o.c.: 62; Abaev, o.c.: 291); in Αφθαιμα(να)κος, Αφθειμα(να)κος, if they represent Oss. (D.) *avdeimag* “the seventh” (Vasmer, o.c.: 34; Zgusta, o.c.: 78; Abaev, o.c.: 290); and in Ουρασμακος, if < **ham(a)-razmaka-* “war-comrade”, cf. Av. *rasman* “line of battle” (Justi, o.c.: 233; Vasmer, o.c.: 46; Zgusta, o.c.: 123 ff.; Abaev, o.c.: 290, where other possible **ham(a)-* compounds are given). Cf. also Harmatta 1970: 93 ff. – Not all of these etymologies are unquestionable.

1035), *s-arazin* “to make, build, put straight” (IES I 57, MF II 1037), *s-arauin* “to singe, pitch” (IES I 56, MF II 1038), *s-aræxsin* “to get ready, to (be able to) manage something” (IES I 58, MF 1038), *s-aryauin* “to celebrate mass” (IES I 65, MF II 1039), *s-ardauin* “to set the dog on” (IES I 62, MF II 1039). The fact that there is no gemination here seems to indicate that an initial consonant was lost after the preverb in (*i*)*ssarin* / *isserun* (regarding the loss of *u-* in front of *a*, cf. IES: I,74.)

2.4.2. I. *axsin* (past stem *axst*) “to catch” is the counterpart of D. *axæssun* (*axæsst*) “id.” (IES I 92 f.). Likewise I. *ræxsin* (*ræxsad*) “to patch, stitch up, mend (shoes etc.)” corresponds to D. *ræxæssun* (*ræxast*) “id.” (ib. II 395 f.), and I. *nixsin* (*nixst*) “to sink (intr.), go down” to D. *nixæssun* (*nixast*) “id.” (ib. II 222). Along with the two lastmentioned verbs Digor has also *ræxsun* (*ræxsad*) and *næxsun* (*næxst*), resp. All three verbs are apparently derived from the root **xarš-* “to pull” plus the preverbs *a-*, *ni-* and *ræ-* (<**fra-*), resp. The verb and the preverbs have fused into one unanalyzable lexical unit; for spatial marking and aspectual functions a second preverb is needed (cf. also Thordarson 1982). Notice also that *ni-* does not cause gemination of the initial *x*- here, as is the rule with *ni-* (*ni-*) as a “living” preverb. The syncope of **(a-* etc.) *xarš* > *-xs-* can hardly be explained by the sound correspondences between the modern dialects and may reflect ancient dialectal differences within the proto-language. I., D. *ræxsæn* “schmaler Riemen, woraus die Sohle der *ærč’i* [Schuhe aus Ochsenleder geschnitten] geflochten wird” (MF II 1008, IES II 994) shows that the syncopated form is common Ossetic, cf. also D. *ræxsun*, *ræxsad* beside *ræxæssun*. An unsyncopated form is I. *axæst* “prisoner” <**ā-xršta-*. A syncopated form is *axsæn* “trap, snare”; it does not appear from the lexica whether this word belongs to both dialects.

In Old (East?) Iranian, **xarš-* “to draw, pull” must have coexisted alongside **karš-*: cp. Av. *karš-* “trahere; einfurchen” (Bartholomae 1904: 456 f.), NPers. *kašīdan* “to draw, lead, extend”, Kurd. *kişandin* “to draw”, Pashto *kšəl* “to draw, pull”, OInd. *kāršati* “draws, ploughs”; but Sogd. *yrš-*, *xš-* (**xarš-*, **xaš-*; Gershevitch 1961: 52; Benveniste 1959: 46); Yaghn. *xaš-*, *xašta-* etc. “to pull” (Andreev / Peščereva 1957: 357), Khwar. *xšy-* “schleppen, nach sich ziehen” (Samadi 1986: 243), *xšs-* “geschleppt werden” (ib. 242) Wakhi *xaš-* “to pull, draw” (Pakhalina 1975: 291) Yidgha *xoš-* “id.” (Morgenstierne 1938: 269) Munji *xaš-* “id.” (Grjunberg 1972: 381) Ishk. *xaš-* “id.” (Pakhalina 1959: 248); cf. Ēdel’man 1986: 137 ff.⁹ In the general sense of “to carry, bring” **xarš-* has ousted ancient **bar-* the latter having been preserved in secondary (compound) verbs, e.g. *æværin* / *ævarun* “to put, place, lay” (**abi-bar-*), cf. also *lævar* (I., D.) “a present” (< **fra-bāra-*) and *læværd* / *lævard* “given” (< **frabrta-*), the past stem corresponding to the present *dædtin* / *dættun* “I give”. We find a similar semantic development in German *tragen* (OHG *tragan* etc.), which has ousted ancient *baran* (OHG etc.) in the meaning “to carry, bring”; cf. Nord. *draga* “to pull”, Engl. *draw*, where the old meaning has been preserved.

For *nixsin* / *æxsun*, *nixæssun* “to sink into” (intr.), Abaev (IES: II, 222) refers hesitantly to OInd. *nīkṣati* “pierces”, NPers. *nēš* “a sharp point”, cf. Av. *naēza-* “point of a needle”, NPers. *nēza* “a spear” (without the *s*-enlargement; cf. Mayrhofer, KEWA: II,158). But the Iranian forms point to a palatal, not a velar stop; from the semantic point of view this comparison is also problematic.

Semantically *axsin*, *nixsin*, *ræxsin* must have parted company with *xæssin* (or its precursor) at an early stage, probably before the development “to draw” > “to carry”

⁹ MF (II, 681) note *kærsin* (I.) “to plough” with a question mark. This word is not found in the IES nor in the other dictionaries, and is no doubt a ghost word. – Regarding Oss. *x* corresponding to ancient *k*, cf. Benveniste 1959: 46; Ēdel’man 1986: 137; Thordarson 1989: 464.

took place. The old meaning may still be reflected in *ræxsin* “to stitch, attach by sewing”: “to pass a thread through leather or cloth”.¹⁰

2.4.3. Along with *arin* / *erun*, *axadin* / *axedun*, Abaev cites I. *ælyivin* “to compress, to tighten wattle-works by squeezing the twigs together” (cf. above and IES: II 43), I. *ærjævin* “to shoulder, load, cock a gun” (cf. MF: I, 198 “den Hahn der Flinte spannen”) (D. *ærjævun*, *ærjvun*; the latter with *u*-umlaut caused by the adjacent *v*; cp. IES: II 43), *ærjævnæ* “tongs, nippers”. I. *æljivin*, D. *æljævun* “to squeeze, compress” must also be seen within this context (IES: II 47). *ælyivin* / *æljævun* derives from OIran. **graib-* (I.E. **ghreib-*, Pokorny 1959: 457), while *ærjævin* / *ærjvun*, *ærjævnæ* (< **āgrabanā*, apparently with the accent on the final syllable and a syncope of the pretonic *-a-*; Sogd. *'grbn* (< **āgrabanā*, cp. Benveniste 1955: 313 and 1979: 244) go back to OIran. **grab-* (I.E. **ghrebh-*, Pokorny 1959: 455; LIV 179: **g^hrebh₂*). Cf. also *ærjæfsin* / *ærjæfsun* “to freeze, stiffen” < **grab-* plus *-s-*, the marker of intransitivity (I.E. **-sk-*). Both variants of this I.E. root, **ghrebh-* and **ghreibh-*, are thus attested for the Scytho-Sarmatian ancestor language, as well as for Baltic and Germanic (cf. IES: II, 43, 408).

Abaev (IES: II, 43) suggests the possibility of deriving Yaghnōbi *γīriv-*, *γīrifla-* “to understand” (Andreev-Peščereva 1957: 258) as well as Sar. *waγreyγ-*, *waγraxī-* “to crowd, sit close, be squeezed” (Paxalina 1971: 191 ff.), from OIran. **graib-*; the latter would be from **awa-* (or *wi-*?) *graib-š-* (or a contamination of **graib-* and **grab-*, cf. the past stem *wagraxī-*?). But cf. Sar. *warofs-* “to get up, rise” < **wi-rap-š-*, *nadefs-* “to stick to” < **ni-dab-š-*, *wažafs-* “to return” < **awa-* (*wi-*?) *gaib-š-*, where the development is parallel to that of the other languages of the Shughni group (Édel’man 1986: 190 ff.). Morgenstierne (1974: 91) traces Sar. *wagreyγ-* back to **awa-* (*wi-*) *grafs-*. As to Yaghn. *gīriv-* cf. Andreev / Peščereva, l.c., Édel’man, 1968: 188, who derive this verb from **grab-* (**grb-*) without further comments.

To sum up: Some of the words treated in the preceding paragraph may indeed (as far as the etymologies are sound) reflect dialectal differences within the ancient Scytho-Sarmatian ancestor language. But they do not permit any conclusions regarding the prehistory of the modern dialects nor the development which has led to their separation.

2.5. Anomalous phonetic developments

A number of anomalous phonetic developments are shared by both dialects:

2.5.1. As a rule OIran. **w* is retained as *u* [w]: *uad* / *uadæ* “wind”, cf. Av. *vāta-* “id.” (IES: IV 33); *uarin* / *uarun* “to rain”, cf. Av. *vār-* “id.” (ib. IV 52); *uæ* (I., D.), the genitive of the enclitic personal pronoun in the second person plural, cf. Av. *vō*, OInd. *vas* (ib. IV 62); *duar* (I., D.) “door”, cf. Av. *duuar-* “id.” (ib. I 377) *næuæg*, *nog* / *næuæg* “new”, cf. Av. *nauua-* “id.” (ib. II 174; Miller 1903: 24).

However, there are some few words where ancient initial **v-* seems to be represented by *b-*:

I. *bar*, D. *baræ* “will, right, permission”: Abaev (IES: I, 235), following Miller (1903: 33 ff.), derives this word from OIran. **vāra-*, cf. Av. *vāra-* “will”, OInd. *vara-* “wish”. This etymology was rejected by Benveniste (1959: 139), who, however, does not mention the other instances where the same development seems possible.

Abaev (IES: I 252) likewise derives *bærgæ* (I., D.) “though, even if, certainly” from a verbal root *bær-* < **var-*: Av. *var-* “to choose, believe” (*værəntē* “he chooses”,

¹⁰ For details I refer to the respective entries of IES.

OInd. *vṛñtē* “he chooses, likes, prefers”. If this etymology holds good, *bærgæ* is a gerund form of the verb (originally an instrumental of a verbal noun in **-aka-*). Abaev finds the same verb in I. *bællin* (*bællid*) / D. *bællun* (*bæld*) “to desire, strive for”, which he derives from **varya-* (IES: I, 252, 248 ff.). He further quotes a fourth example of the given root showing **v-* > *b-* in I., D. *ivár* (the accent according to MF, s.v.) “prohibition, fine, penalty” < **vi-vāra-* (< **vi-bāra-* with a regular spirantisation of the intervocalic *-b-*; IES: I, 553). In *uirnin* / *urnun* “to believe” the initial **w-* of the root **war-* (I.E. **wel-*) has been retained.

It is equally tempting to connect *biin* (*bid*) / *biiun* (*bud*) “to weave, plait” with OInd. *váyati* “weaves” (IES: I, 277; Gershevitch 1961: 89).

I. *bælas*, D. *bælasæ* “tree” is possibly a cognate of OInd. *vṛkṣá-*, Av. *varāša-* “tree” (cf. Bielmeier 1977: 127 f. with bibliography; Mayrhofer, KEWA: III, 242; IES: I, 247; and, particularly, Bailey 1954, 18 [AM 7]).

D. *bedun* (*bidt*) “to have effect upon, be of benefit to” (MF I, 608, s.v. *беду́н*), which has no counterpart in Iron, has been derived from OIran. **vid-* “to know, observe”, i.e. its causative **vaid-aya-* “to make known, visible” (IES: I, 259).

The derivation of I. *biræy*, D. *beræy* “wolf” from OIran. **vrka-* (Av. *vəhrka-*, etc.) seems to be rather far-fetched. As to the possibility of a Turkic etymology cp. IES: I, 262 ff. OIran. **vrka-* “wolf” is probably found in *Uærxæg*, the name of a Nart hero.

As a rule Ossetic initial *b-* corresponds to OIran. **b-*, in some words also to intervocalic **p-* through sonorisation and loss of the preceding vowel (Miller 1903: 33; Thordarson 1989: 464). But in some East Iranian dialects **v-* and **b-* have in part merged. Thus we have Khotanese *bana-* “bond” < **banda-* (Av. *banda-* “bond, fetter”, etc.), *basaka-* “calf” (cf. OInd. *vatsá-* “id.”, Oss. D. *uæss* “id.”), *bāta-* “wind” (Av. *vāta-* “id.”, etc.; cf. Bailey 1979: 268, 274, 276; cp. also Emmerick 1968: 92 ff., with a list of verbs; Bielmeier 1977: 128; Ėdel’man 1986: 79).

If these etymologies are sound (some of them, at least, are questionable), we have to assume interdialectal borrowings at an early stage of development.¹¹

2.5.2. OIran. **sp* (**sph*) (< I.E. **sp(h)*, **kw*), in general becomes (*æ*)*fs* (with a regular metathesis and a prothetic *æ-*: I., D. *æfsad* “army”, cf. Av. *spāda-*, *spāda-* “id.” (IES: I 479); *æfsadin* / *æfsadun* “to satiate” (ib., 479 f.), *æfsædin* / *æfsædun* “to eat one’s fill”, cf. OInd. *sphāyate* “grows fat”; *æfsir* / *æfseræ* “ear of corn” < **spairā-*; *iæfs* / *æfsæ* “a mare” (IES: I 438), cf. Av. *aspa-* “horse” (ib. I 563), etc.

In contrast to this, there are some words where ancient **sp* seems to correspond to Oss. *s-*: It seems natural to connect I. *sist*, D. *sistæ* “louse” with Av. *spiš-* denoting the same (or at least some obnoxious) insect, Phl. *spiš*, NPers. *šipiš*, Pashto *spəžə*, Shgh. *sipay* etc. (cf. Miller 1881-87: III, 157; id. 1903: 31; Hübschmann 1887: 57; Bielmeier 1977: 221, with lexical details; IES: III, 210 ff.). Wakhi *šiš* “louse” points to I.E. **kw-* (Pokorny 1959: 626 **kū* “spitz, Spieß”; Pakhalina 1983: 44 and 1975, 263). In *sist* /

¹¹ β for Ir. **v* in Sarmatian proper names, found in Greek inscriptions from the Pontic area, no doubt reflects the fricative pronunciation of the Greek labial in imperial times. – The river name $\beta\omicron\rho\upsilon\sigma\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta\varsigma$ “Dnepr”, attested in Greek sources as early as the 5th century B. C. (Herodotus, IV, 17 and passim) has been interpreted as **Varu-stāna-* “a spacious place” (cp. Vasmer 1923: 65, “... aus iran. **yourustāna-* breite Stelle”; cf. also Abaev 1979: 308); the name is supposed to refer to the broad estuary. Another, and, as it seems, better explanation was offered by Schmid (1978: 18ff.), who derives the name from a hypothetical **bhāra-* “Fluß, Sumpf” plus the verbal adjective **ustāna-* “extensive” (cf. Av. *ustāna-zasta-* “with outstretched hands”, OInd. *uttāna-* “stretched out”). For **bāra-* cf. NPers. *bār* in *jōy-bār* “a brook”, *rud-bār* “a place abounding in rivers”, *daryā-bār* “a sea coast”, Phl. *bār* “bank, shore”, all belonging to the I.E. root **bher-* “to flow” (OInd. *bhurāti* “moves quickly”; cf. Mayrhofer EWAIA: II, 250 ff.; Pokorny 1959: 132; LIV 61 f.: **b^her*). In this case, the river name is an inverted bahuvrīhi meaning something like “with broad currents”. – Needless to say that the Iranian derivation of this river name is not unquestionable.

sistæ “louse”, *mist* / *mistæ* “mouse” we have a pair of rhyme-words that may have influenced each other (D. *mistæ* instead of the expected **mustæ*; I. *mist* is ambiguous). The ending *-tæ* seems to reflect an old feminine in **-ēt* (Morgenstierne 1962).

I. *siʒ*, D. *siʒæ* “culus, posteriors” has been compared with OInd. *sphik-* (dual forms *sphijau*, *sphicau*; cf. Mayrhofer, KEWA: III, 542) “buttock” (Miller l.c.; Hübschmann l.c.; IES: III, 182 ff.), cp. perhaps Khot. *phajsai* “id.” (Bailey 1979: 259, who, however, does not mention the Ossetic word; also 1967: 213 ff.; 1945: 11; Mayrhofer: KEWA III, 542, s.v. *sphik* f.); I.E. **(s)p(h)ēt-*, **(s)p(h)ī-* “pointed”?; Pokorny 1959: 981).

The third word mentioned by Miller (1903: 31) is I. *soi*, D. *soinæ* “fat, grease”, which he compares with OInd. *sphāyate* “grow fat”. Abaev accepts this etymology (IES: III, 130 ff.) and reconstructs **spāna-* (**sphāna-*); a better reconstruction would be **sp(h)ānyā-*. If this holds true, the root **sp(h)āy-* occurs in two variants in Ossetic. Bielmeier (1977: 214) derives *soi* / *soinæ* from a root **san-* “to rise” (past participle **sata-*), cp. Av. *sanat* “arose”, Sogd. *sn-* (Gershevitch 1961: 85), Khot. *sāñ-* (Emmerick 1968: 132; Bailey 1979: 419, with further details), with the causative **sānaya-* “to raise”.

Furthermore, Abaev compares *Sidæmon*, an epic-mythological proper name (Georgian sources (Vaxušti) give *Sidamon* as the name of a mediaeval Ossetic clan), with Av. *Spitāma-*, Phl. *Spitāmān*, a tribal name, which he derives from I.E. **kwei-* “white, bright” (Pokorny 1959: 628, s.v., ff.), cf. Av. *spaēta-*, OInd. *śvetā-* “id.”, etc. (IES: III 102 ff.). This may be tempting but can hardly be proved.

Only the first of the three etymologies treated above can be said to be comparatively certain. It points to I.E. **kw-*; the word may have been borrowed (as an expressive loanword?) from a cognate dialect where this cluster was represented by a sibilant (cf. the development of I.E. **kw* in Khotanese and Wakhi, beside Old Persian). If we accept the fourth etymology, we also have to do with I.E. **kw-*. The development **sp > s* lacks evidence, however. Important for our argumentation is the fact that both dialects show the same development (the dialectal affiliation of *Sidæmon* is, of course, uncertain).¹²

2.5.3. As a general rule OIran. **ry/i-* has become *l(l)*: I, D. *næl* “male” < **narya-*, *fæl-*, a verbal prefix < **pari-*, *allon*, an ethnic name found in a fixed expression in epic tales and put into the mouth of a man-eating giant (*am allon-billon*¹³ *smag cæui* “here it smells of allon-billon”), probably from **āryāna-* etc. This development is attested in Iranian proper names in Pontic Greek inscriptions besides *ri* (no doubt reflecting ancient dialectal differences): Φλειμναγος, Φλιμανακος, Λεμναος, Λιμανακος < **fīrmana(ka)-*, cf. Av. *fīr-* “befriedigen” (Bartholomae 1904: 1016), Oss. *limæn* / *limæen* (cp. Bielmeier 1977: 37), *nimæl* “friend”, etc.; but also Ηρακας < **āryaka-* (cp. Miller 1903: 36; Zgusta 1955: 232; Harmatta 1970: 77 ff., 205 ff.; Abaev 1965 35 ff.;

¹² In the Greek inscriptions there seem to be no examples with initial *s-* (corresponding to Av. *sp-*) in Sarmatian proper names, whereas there are several instances of *σπ*, *σφ*, *ψ* (Zgusta 1955: 148; 233 ff.). – The Kimmerian king’s name rendered in Assyrian as *Sandakšatru* has been explained as Ir. **s(panta-xšavra-* “reine (heilige) Herrschaft habend” (Marquart 1895-1905:I, 236; II, 105 ff.). A better explanation would be **čandra-xšavra-* “glänzende Herrschaft habend” (Vasmer 1928: 179; Zgusta 1955: 16 ff.). – Abaev (IES: III, 201) derives *sinʒ* / *sinʒæ* “thorn” from **spin-ti-*, which he connects with Lat. *spina* “id.”, etc., I.E. root **spei-* etc. (cp. Pokorny 1959: 981). As this root is represented by *æfsir* / *æfsiræ* “ear of corn” (cf. above), this etymology remains uncertain. A connection with Khot. *šimja-* “the thorny jujuba, zizyphus jujuba” is perhaps possible; as an etymology, Bailey (1979: 399) suggests **sinčatā-*, cf. Pashto *sandzala* “eleagnus”, NPers. *sanjed* “jujube tree”, OInd. *siñcatīca* “name of a plant”. But cf. Mayrhofer, KEWA: III, 465. Non liquet.

¹³ A (phonetically motivated?) connection of Oss. *allon-billon* with the wide-spread phrase Pers./Arab. *hīla-bīla* denoting “all kinds of tricks” cannot be completely excluded [S.F.].

Thordarson 1989: 464 ff.). Since the times of Miller (1881-87: II, 55) and Hübschmann (1887: 41) the tribal name *Ir / Iræ* “the (East) Ossetes” has usually been derived from the ancient name of the Aryans, **āryās*, and this still seems to be the best explanation;¹⁴ the retention of the *r* then reflects ancient dialectal differences. Abaev’s (IES: I, 545 ff) misgivings about this etymology are hardly conclusive. The Nakh and Avar names for the Ossetes, *hira* “an Ossete”, *hiri* “Ossetic”, and the Georgian geographical name *Hereti* (Vaxušti; “one of the remote regions of Georgia”, KEGL VIII, 1630), may have been borrowed from Ossetic (cf. Axvlediani 1960: 217 ff.; Bielmeier 1977: 11 ff., with references to earlier literature).¹⁵

The two developments of ancient **ri/y > l, r* are thus found, as it seems, to be common Ossetic.

2.6. Phonetic innovations

Some phonetic innovations which have occurred in both dialects, are of a comparatively recent date.

2.6.1. OIran. **a* has become *o* in front of nasals in the modern language: I., D. *don* “water, river” < **dānu-*, I., D. *nom* “name” < **nāman-*, etc. Likewise, ancient short **a* has been lengthened and ultimately become *o* when followed by clusters consisting of a nasal plus a consonant in words which in old (predialectal) Ossetic had become monosyllabic (i.e., if no second syllable followed): I., D. *fonʒ* “five” < **panča*, I., D. *cong* “arm” < **čanga-*, but I., D. *fendag* “road” < **pantāka-*, I. *fend*, D. *fændæ* “will, plan” < **pantā-*, etc.¹⁶ The vowel quality has been retained in the plural, cf. I. *dættæ*, D. *dæntæ* “waters, rivers”, and in some derivations: I. *fænzæm*, D. *fænzæimæg* “fifth”.

This development is evidently late. In the mediaeval Alanic documents the open pronunciation of the vowel is amply substantiated. In the Alanic verses found in some manuscripts of the *Thegony* of the Byzantine author Ioannes Tzetzes (late 12th century) the words *ταπαιχῆς = καλὴ ἡμέρα σου* correspond to the modern greeting (D.) *dæ bon xuarz* (I. *dæ bon xorz*) “good morning” (lit. “good day”) (Abaev 1949: 254 ff.; Hunger 1955; Bielmeier 1993).

The Yass word-list, written in Hungary in the 15th century (the Yass (Alanic) settlements in Hungary date from the 13th century), gives *daban xorz* (l. 1) with the same meaning. This text has also *dan* = Lat. *aqua* (l. 5) and probably *kuraynu* “mill” (l. 12) = D. *kuroinæ* (I. *kuiroi*) < **kurānya-*. *chugan* (l. 9) = Lat. *olla* is less certain (name of some kitchen utensil with a suffix *-æn* (< **-āna-?* *ch* is probably written for an

¹⁴ But cp. also R. Bielmeier’s more recent explanation of *ir* < **iŕra-* (Bielmeier 1988: 103); cp. OInd. *vīrā-* “man, hero”, etc. Cf. furthermore J. Cheung (id. 2002: 193) who clearly favours Bielmeier’s derivation [S.F.].

¹⁵ The comparison of the Ossetic tribal name *Ir / Iræ* with the Georgian geographical name *Hereti* and the Nakh and the Avar name of the Ossetes seems to derive from N. Marr (cf. Abaev 1949: 246).

¹⁶ The vowel *o* in the Russian river name *Don*, attested in the Old Russian poem “Slovo o polku Igorevè” (Vasmer 1953: I 362 f.) is probably an internal Russian matter; a comparatively close pronunciation of the Alanic vowel in front of a nasal having been identified with Slav. *o*; cf. the Slavonic merger of *a* and *o*. Vasmer (1924: 173) regards the Russian river name as the earliest evidence for the Ossetic sound change of *ān > on*. The Greek and Latin rendering *Tānais* has hardly found a satisfactory explanation. – The *a* in Russ. *собака* “dog” probably reflects a more open pronunciation of the vowel in the Iranian source dialect (**spāka-*); in addition, the borrowing of the latter word may be previous to the adoption of the river name. A close pronunciation of *on*, approximately [un], is heard in the North Iron idiom of Vladikavkaz today.

affricate). Still more problematic is *manauona* (l. 5) = Lat. *furmentum* (i.e. *frumentum*) (Németh 1959).

In the Zelenčuk inscription, dating from the 11th–12th century and written in Greek letters, *-an* = modern *-on* seems to occur in the proper name *Anapalan* (*Ambalan*): *Ανπαλ Αναπαλανη φουρτ* “*Embal*, son of *Æmbalan*”, cf. modern Ossetic (I., D.) *æmbal* “comrade”, *Æmbaltæ*, name of a clan; possibly also in *Λακανη τζηρθε* “the grave or sepulchral monument of *Lakan* (*Lagan*?)” (cp. D. *cirt*, I. *cirt* “grave, sepulchral monument”; cf. Abaev 1949: 260 ff.; Zgusta 1987; Thordarson 1988). This sound change can thus not be earlier than the 13th–14th century.¹⁷

A number of old place names in the Balkar and Kabardian speaking areas, where Ossetic prevailed until late mediaeval or early modern times, testify the same state: *Sau-dan* “Black River”, *Sau-kam* “Black Gorge” (*kom* “mouth, opening, gorge”, *Danikam* “River Gorge”, etc. (Abaev 1949: 284; Miller 1903: 4 ff.); see 2.8.6. below.

2.6.2. The prosodic features are in principle the same in both dialects. The flow of speech is divided into prosodic units of words which are syntactically connected; within the unit, one syllable bears the main accent; a secondary accent may fall on other syllables of the unit. The accent is weakly expiratory. As a rule the accent falls on the first or second syllable of the prosodic unit. The first syllable is stressed if the vowel is long (strong); if the the vowel of the first syllable is short (weak), the accent falls on the second syllable. In Digor the accent may be retracted further back if the vowels of the preceding syllables are short. In Iron the first syllable is stressed even if the vowel is short in cases where an initial short *i* (e.g. the “definite article”, cf. 4.8.1. below) has been lost.¹⁸

This prosodic system is clearly an innovation which we are no doubt justified to ascribe to the influence of North Caucasian neighbour languages. The chronology of this innovation cannot be established with certainty but there may be some indications that it is comparatively recent.

Vestiges of Old Iranian prosody, with a free stress accent at the word level, are found in cases where certain suffixes regularly engender vowel shortening (weakening), in connection with consonant gemination, or syncope in the preceding syllable. The most important of these cases I have treated in a previous study (Thordarson 1990). To these the following can be added:

The suffix of the ordinal numbers causes vowel shortening: I. *-æm* (also *-æmag*) / D. *-æimag* (< **-mayāka-*, cf. Sogd. *-myk* and the Sarmatian proper names *Αφθαυμακος*, *Αφθειμακος* “the seventh”, v. Zgusta 1955: 78 ff.): *æstæm* / *æstæimag* from *ast* “eight”.

Vowel shortening occasionally takes place in oblique cases: *fars* “side”: *færsmae* (allative; but cp. also *farsmae*, IES: I, 423), *færsæi* (ablative). In nominal compounds the vowel of the first member is frequently shortened: I. *ærxud*, D. *æ(r)m)xodæ* “glove, mitten” < *arm* “hand” and *xud* / *xodæ* “cap”; *ævdsæron* “seven-headed” < *avd* “seven” and *sær* “head” plus the adjectival suffix *-on*.

The law of vowel shortening must have been operative at a time when ancient **ān*, **ām* had not yet become *on*, *om*, as appears from such plural forms as I. *dættæ* (with assimilation), D. *dænttæ* from *don* (< **dānu-*) “water, river”, I. *næmttæ*, D. *nænttæ* from *nom* / *non* (< **nāman-*) “name”, etc. As stated above, the narrowing of *ā* in front

¹⁷ We cannot, of course, be certain that the closing of *ān*, *ām* > *on*, *om* took place in all Alanic dialects simultaneously. There may have been local variants (now extinct) where this sound change never occurred. This limits the value of loanwords in other languages when they are used to establish chronology.

¹⁸ Cf. Abaev 1949: 529 ff.; 1964: 10 ff.; Axvlediani 1963–69: I, 49 ff.; Isaev 1966: 26 ff.; Thordarson 1990.

of nasals is later than the 13th century, which thus seems to be, as far as this evidence goes, the terminus post quem for the development of the modern prosodical system.

The gerund suffix *-gæ* probably derives from the oxytone instrumental of a verbal noun in **-aka-* (cf. 3.4.4.1. below). In the Yass word-list (l. 17) *docega* is given as the equivalent of Latin *vacca*¹⁹. The comparison with modern Ossetic *ducgæ* / *docgæ* (*qug* / *γog*) “milk cow” immediately suggests itself. If this holds true, the *-e* renders the unsyncopated short vowel of the suffix, i.e. **docagā* < **docakā* (in modern Ossetic *æ* is a low mid central vowel which might easily be identified with a more closed mid front vowel in the language of the listener). The unstressed vowel of the pænultima of the gerund suffix was thus still retained in the 13th century when the Yass tribes fled to the west from the Mongol hordes. We can admit, however, that the evidence of a single word in a document of this kind is not fully convincing.

In the modern language *rong* (I., D.) is an archaic term found in traditional epic texts where it denotes “an intoxicating liquor prepared from honey”. If the etymology suggested by Abaev (1949: 348 ff.; IES: II, 421; cf. also Andronik’ašvili 1966: 105 ff.) is sound, the word derives from OIran. **frān(a)ka-* (or, preferably, **frānakā-*?, lit. “spiritus”. The same word is found in Kartvelian languages: Svan *rang*, Mingrelian *rang-i*, Georgian (in the dialect of Rač’a) *rang-i* “honey wine”, which is no doubt an older meaning. If the Kartvelian words are loanwords from Ossetic, they must have been borrowed at a time earlier than the narrowing of *ā* in front of nasals took place, after the syncopation of the short *-a-* (but cf. 2.6.1. with fn. 16 above). Note that no final *-æ* seems to be attested in Digor, which we would expect if the reconstruction **frānakā-* is right; but as the word may have changed its declension class, this is not conclusive (cf. 4.12.2 below). Neither the etymology nor the direction of the borrowing is, however, unquestionable.²⁰

Hungarian *üveg* (older *eueg*, *eveg*) “glass, bottle” and *zöld* (older also *zeld*) “green, unripe” (also found in plant names) belong to the handful of Alanic loanwords borrowed at a time when linguistic contacts existed between the Magyars and the Alans in the Ponto-Caspian steppes, i.e. the 8th-9th centuries A. D. (Sköld 1925: 38, 40 and passim; Joki 1973: 335, 350; with bibliography). The corresponding Ossetic words are I. *avg*, D. *avgæ* “glass, bottle” (< **āpakā-*, from **āp-* “water”), D. *zældæ* “a green, turf” (< **zaritā-*, cf. Av. *zari-*, *zairita-*, “yellow”, OInd. *harih* “yellowish, green, pale”, I.E. **ǵhel-*; in Iron the word has been replaced by *næu*, cf. D. *næuæ*, <**nawā-*). Whether the Hungarian words owe their phonetic form to internal developments or to the source language, *-eg* in *üveg* representing the Alanic pænultima *-ak*, and whether *zöld* is testifying to an early loss of the pretonic *-i-* in **zaritā-*, is beyond my competence to decide.²¹

2.7. Homogeneous proto-language

There is every reason to believe that both of the modern dialects (with their local variants) are derived from a fairly homogeneous proto-language. The linguistic material – as far as it can be traced back – does not lend support to any “wave theory”, according to which the dialectal differences would be the result of two or more chronologically distinct Alanic immigration waves from the north and the west to the

¹⁹ The word can only be read with the help of ultra-violet rays; as to the spelling *c* for an affricate cf. Németh 1959: 22.

²⁰ Cf. Gippert (2007) for a different proposal [S.F.].

²¹ As regards the relations between the prosodic patterns of Old Ossetic and Old Iranian I refer to my paper on this subject (Thordarson 1990).

Central Caucasus. This is in principle the view maintained by Vs. F. Miller in his pioneer work *Osetinskie étjudy* (Miller 1881-87: II, 44 ff.) A kind of wave theory is also supported by Harmatta (1970: 62 ff.), and, more cautiously, by Abaev (1949: 363), who assumes two different immigration waves, an earlier one, today represented by Digor, and a later one that is identified as the forerunner of Iron. If this is correct, Iron would have developed at least some of its characteristic innovations in an area far away from its present sides.²² It is difficult, however, to reconcile these views with the linguistic evidence. Besides the fact that the dialects are very close to one another (and to a large extent even identical) in their grammatical structure, they have also used for the most part the same material for expressing the common categories. This is not contradicted by our knowledge of the manifold and complex migratory patterns which have formed an integral part of the human geography of the Caucasus throughout the ages (and which have by no means come to an end).

Modern Ossetic is but a small segment of a language which in former times extended over the whole of the country northwest of the Caucasus. We can assume that there was a considerable regional variation in this vast area, and this is probably responsible for the many anomalies in the relations between the present-day dialects. Attempts have been made to establish boundaries for the ancient local variants (Zgusta 1955: 245 ff.; Harmatta 1970: 76 ff.; Abaev 1979: 273 ff.), but they are limited to individual sound changes, and cannot be correlated with the dialectal differentiation of the modern language anyhow. If our few mediaeval documents seem to show a stronger resemblance with Digor than Iron, this is certainly due to the archaic character of the former dialect. There is convincing evidence that Ossetic, in the shape by which we know it today, has developed most of its peculiar traits approximately within the area where it is spoken today, and that the split-up into two dialects is mainly of a comparatively recent date.²³ Concerning earlier dialectal differences, we are left in almost total darkness.

2.8. Relations between Iron and Digor

In all essentials the relations between Iron and Digor can be described in terms of a focal vs. a marginal dialect. As a rule Digor represents a more archaic stage of development than Iron; in a few cases local variants of South Ossetic may have retained some ancient features which have been lost or modified in the idioms of the north. Innovations have originated in some centre in North Ossetia, from which they have spread to the west and the south. This appears above all from the phonology. A concise survey of some basic differences will illustrate this.

2.8.1. At a prehistoric stage ancient **i* and **ī*, **ū* and **ū̄* merged in short (weak) *i* and *u*, resp. In Iron they have been further levelled under *i*, except in initial position where *u*- has become *ui*-; in Digor they have kept distinct: I. *fīd* = D. *fīdæ* “father”, I. *fīrt* = D. *fūrt* “son”, I. *uīrdæg* / D. *urdug* “upright”. Initial short *i*- was lost in Iron, but reappears in internal sandhi (after preverbs): I. *qusin*, D. *iγosun* “to hear”, but I. *ba-iqusin* / D. *ba-*

²² As to the question of various immigration waves and their relevance to the modern dialects, I refer to the works of Kaloev (1967: 12 ff.), Bielmeier (1977: 10 ff.), Sköld (1925: 66 ff.), and Abaev (1949: passim).

²³ In this connection it may be worthy to note that a wave theory was formerly used to explain the dialectal differences of ancient Greek, too (cf., e.g., Kretschmer 1896). This theory seems now to have been abandoned by most modern scholars. All the known dialects of ancient Greece descended from a comparatively uniform proto-dialect; cf., e.g., Meillet 1935 (1965).

iγosun with the perfectivizing preverb *ba-*. A secondary long \bar{i} , which in most instances has arisen through the influence of a neighbouring $*\gamma$, has been retained in both dialects; in Iron it has merged with $\bar{i} < e$: I., D. *igær* “liver” < $*yakar-$; also *æxsin / æxsinæ* “lady” < $*xšaiθn̄-$.

The ancient diphthongs $*ai$ and $*au$ were prehistorically monophthongised to *e* and *o*, resp. This stage of development is still retained in Digor, whereas in Iron the resulting vowels were further narrowed to *i* and *u*, resp.

Contrary to the development of OIran. $*\bar{i}$, \bar{i} and \bar{u} , \bar{u} , the distinction between \bar{a} and \bar{a} has in principle been retained in both dialects: *æ*, short (weak) vs. *a*, long (strong) vowel.

2.8.2. The voiceless uvular stop *q*, originally alien to Ossetic, was introduced into the phonemic system through lexical borrowing, probably in comparatively recent times; in early Turkic loanwords *q* seems as a rule to be rendered as *k* (cf. IES: I, 614, s.v. *kizg* (i.e. *čizg*) “girl”): In Digor *q* (a glottalised uvular stop according to Isaev 1966: 11) is mostly confined to loanwords. In East Iranian Aryan $*g$ appears in most positions as a spirant γ . In Iron, but not in Digor, initial $\gamma-$ has lost its voicing and become an uvular stop. This development is quite recent (18th-19th century): according to Abaev (1949: 511, in a paper originally published in 1935) ancient initial $\gamma-$ was still rendered as such in Iron texts from South Ossetia at the beginning of the last century, and in the local idioms of Tualeti (North Ossetia) and Žava (South Ossetia) initial $\gamma-$ has been retained as a sandhi variant until modern times: *sau γuin* = *sau quin* (D. *sau γun*) “black hair”.

2.8.3. In Digor and most variants of Iron the OIran. affricates $*č, *j$ (Av. *c, j* in Hoffmann’s notation) have (received?) a dentalised pronunciation; In Digor they are represented by palatalised allophones in front of front vowels. However, in a part of South Ossetia (the idiom of the Žava district) a palatalised pronunciation was the general rule in all positions until the latter half of the 19th century. Today the affricates are pronounced as palatalised sibilants, except when they are geminated or a nasal follows: *žurinč* > *žurinč* “they speak” = standard Iron *zurinc*; *čæuin* > *šæuin* “I go” = standard Iron *cæuin*, *ni ččæuin* “I go down” = standard Iron *niccæuin*. There are some indications that the Žava idiom has retained an earlier palatal pronunciation, whereas the dental pronunciation is an innovation. – The glottalised affricate $/cʰ/$, a somewhat parasitic phoneme, which is rendered as a palatal affricate $<čʰ>$ in the earlier documents, has now a dental pronunciation $[cʰ]$ (cf. Thordarson 1988, with bibliography.)

In Iron the old postpalatals *k, kʰ, g* have become palatal affricates *č, čʰ, ž* when they are followed by front vowels. With the exception of some marginal cases the opposition of the postpalatal stops and the palatal affricates is phonologically or morphologically predictable and thus not phonemic (Job 1977: 74 ff.; Thordarson 1989a). The emergence of the secondary affricates, which is common to both main branches of Iron, is recent. In his (early 19th century) Gospel translations, which are written in the South Ossetic idiom in Georgian script, Ialγuziže used the Georgian letters for *k, kʰ, g*, furnished with diacritic signs, not the letters for *č, čʰ, ž*, to indicate the palatalised pronunciation of the old postpalatals; in other documents *k, kʰ, g* are written in the same way in all positions; so, e.g., as a rule, in Klaproth 1814. This affricatisation has not taken place in Digor.

2.8.4. In Iron a labial glide [w] has developed between the postpalatals and uvulars and a following *u*. When *i* and *u* merged, the labial glide was transferred to the postpalatal or uvular: (D.) *kust* > *kuist* “work”, (D.) *kʰupp* > *kʰuipp* “hump, hill”, (D.) *gubun* >

guibin “stomach”, (D.) *qumbul* > *quimbil* “a kind of ball”, (D.) *γudi* > *quidi* “thought”, (D.) *xumæ* > *xuim* “field” etc. The postpalatals and uvulars are protected by labialisation against affricatisation. This has given rise to a new series of labiovelar sounds in Iron; as to their phonemic status I refer to Job 1977: 77 ff., and Sokolova 1953: 48 ff. – In passing, it can be pointed out that in Iron the labiovelars are rarely found in other positions than in front of *i* < *u*.

2.8.5. In Digor, OIran. **hw-* has been preserved as a labiovelar spirant in front of *a*, *æ* (written *xua/xæ*). In Iron the labial element has been lost in both cases, *a* resulting in an umlaut vowel *o*: D. *xuarz*, I. *xorz* “good”, D. *xuærun*, I. *xærin* “to eat”. Likewise we find D. *k'uard*, I. *k'ord* “a group, great number”, D. *k'uædentæ*, I. *k'ædentæ* “testicula”, D. *æfcægguatæ* (*æfcæk uatæ*), I. *æfcæggot* “collar”. Examples of Digor labiovelar stops plus *a/æ* corresponding to Iron postpalatal stops plus *a/æ* are rare.

2.8.6. As to the relative chronology of these sound changes, the following seems clear:

The development of *ān*, *ām* > *on*, *om* must be later than the development of *o* > *u* (*kosun* > *kusin* “to work”, but not *don* > **dun* “water”).

The labialisation of *ku* > *k^ou* > *k^oi* (orthographically *kui*) must be earlier than the narrowing of *ko* > *ku* (*kud* > *kuid* “as”; but cp. *kusin* “to work” (< *kosun*), *not* > **kuisin*). According to Abaev (IES: I, 367; 1949: 256) the change *ān*, *ām* > *on*, *om* cannot be earlier than the 13th–14th century. As was stated above (see 2.6.1.), Old Alanic place names in *-dan* “river” and *-kam* “gorge” (in modern Ossetic *don*, *kom*) in Kabarda indicate that the vowel in these words still had an open pronunciation at the time of the Circassian expansion (cf. Abaev 1949: 284; IES: I, cp. s. vv. *don*, *kom*). The Kabardian branch of the Cherkes peoples settled in their present territory only in the 16th century. It is therefore tempting to date the narrowing of *ā* to *o* in front of nasals to a time even later than that suggested by Abaev, and, accordingly, the beginnings of the split-up which ultimately resulted in the modern dialects, to the post-Mongolian age. Our lack of detailed knowledge about the language shift from Ossetic to Kabardian and its social circumstances prevents us from making definite statements about the chronology of this crucial sound change.²⁴

2.8.7. In the fields of morphology and syntax the archaic character of Digor is evident too, and the influence of neighbour languages less pronounced.

As will appear from the exposition in chapter IV, the development of case inflection has been somewhat slower in Digor than in Iron, but the trends have been the same.

Traces of the decimal counting system are still (or were until recently) in use in certain varieties of Digor. In Iron it has been completely replaced by the Caucasian vigesimal counting system (but is now being reintroduced in the standard literary language; cf. also 3.2.2.10. below)

The orientational function of the local preverbs will be treated in some detail in a later paragraph (3.4.3.). It is noteworthy that neither dialect has carried through the bidimensional system (actor’s vs. observer’s field) completely. The vertical dimension “up” is expressed by (*i*)*s-* / *is-* in both dialects: (*i*)*s-cidi* / *is-cudæi* “he went, came up”. In Digor, but not in Iron, the horizontal dimension “out, away” shows the same kind of

²⁴ Count J. Potocki (1802; 1829) seems to mention the presence of Ossetes in the present Kabarda in the 18th century. The list of words compiled in the North Caucasus in the later half of the 17th cent. and published by N. Witsen is a mixture of Ossetic and Kabardian words, a fact which indicates that the two peoples lived in close symbiotic relations in the area where the words were recorded. Cf. Bielmeier 1979; Thordarson: Wörterverzeichnis in Witsen (appendix to the present book); also Gaglojty Ju. 1966.

symmetry: D. *ra-cudæi* “he went, came out” = I. *a-cidi / ra-cidi* (in Digor *a-* has been lost as a productive, “living” preverb). In this case Digor obviously represents a more advanced stage of development than Iron.

Traces of tmesis of the verb and its preverb are still found in Digor, but not in Iron.

In Digor the present optative is used to express a repeated action in the past. In Iron this function has been taken over by the past optative.

In all the instances treated above it is evident that Iron is the innovating dialect, so to say proceeding ahead, while Digor lingers behind. This is not surprising when we consider the outlying position and the backward conditions of the Digors (at least in former times). In the development of the dialects we have to do with a spread of innovations from a focal area to the remoter parts of the country. It seems natural to locate this area in the east, on the Vladikavkaz plateau, near or around the banks of the Terek River.²⁵

²⁵ The dialectal differences are treated in detail by Abaev 1949 (p. 357 ff.). A short survey is given in Abaev 1964. Short surveys are also found in Miller 1903 and Axvlediani 1963–69 (I, 13 ff.). Bekoev 1985 treats local variants of Iron. Isaev, in his monograph of 1966, gives a detailed grammatical description of Digor, accompanied by a collection of texts. The South Ossetic idiom is treated in various papers by Axvlediani 1960. Sjøgren 1844 and Rosén 1846 give valuable information about the earlier stages of the language, the latter in particular about South Ossetic.