

The evolution and distribution of the New Persian adjectival suffixes -īn and -ī

In the Middle Persian of the Sasanian era (3rd -7th century A.D.), the suffix -ēn was very productive in forming material adjectives (e.g., abrešomēn „of silk“, ābēn „(consisting) of water“, pašmēn „of wool“), and also of certain other adjectives (e.g., xešmēn „angry, wrathful“). The modern New Persian suffix -īn, being the continuation of MP -ēn, is far less productive than its etymological predecessor and has mostly been replaced by the adjective suffix -ī (< MP -īg), e.g. pašmī „of wool“, čarmī „of leather“.

This replacement took place gradually, and in early and classical New Persian (e.g., the language of the Šāhnāme) forms in -ēn, later -īn, continued to be used widely. The „old“ forms, therefore, partly persist in modern New Persian, but where they do, they belong to higher, literary registers of the language. In some cases, the old forms have taken on special or metaphorical meanings, e.g. āhanīn „of iron“ in expressions such as del-e āhanīn „brave heart“ or dīvār-e āhanīn „iron curtain“; in a few other cases, they have deviated semantically from the word from which they are derived, e.g. šīrīn „sweet“ (from šīr „milk“) or sangīn „heavy“ (from sang „stone“).

The aim of the present paper is to explain this replacement process and these semantic shifts, from Middle Persian to modern New Persian, on the basis of textual evidence; and to discuss this process in a general historical-linguistic context.