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## DOMARI

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### Abstract

Domari is an endangered, archaic Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Middle East by populations who refer to themselves as *Dom* or *Qurbati*, and are usually called by the Arabs *Nawar*. It is part of the phenomenon of Indo-Aryan diaspora languages spoken by peripatetic groups (so-called ‘Gypsies’).

### Definitions

Domari is the language of populations that were traditionally commercial nomads (metalworkers and entertainers) throughout the Middle East and neighbouring regions. Fragmented documentation exists from Azerbaijan in the north, through to Sudan in the south. There are still Domari-speaking communities in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan; the number of speakers is unknown. The only well-documented variety is that of Jerusalem, now spoken by only up to some 200 elderly persons. They refer to their language as *Dōmari* or *Dōmi*. Names in other regions include *Domani* and *Qurbati*.

### History

Like Romani, Domari shares a number of ancient isoglosses with the Central branch of Indo-Aryan, most notably the realization of Old Indo-Aryan *r̥* as *u* or *i* (Sanskrit *śṛṇ-* Domari *sun-/sin-* ‘to hear’) and of *kṣ-* as *k(h)* (Sanskrit *akṣi* Domari *aki* ‘eye’). It also preserves a number of clusters that have been lost in the other Central languages (Sanskrit *drākṣa* Domari *drak* ‘grape’, Sanskrit *oṣṭha* Domari *ošt* ‘lip’, Sanskrit *hasta* Domari *xast* ‘hand’). It appears therefore that Domari, like Romani, emerged as one of the Central Indic languages, but migrated prior to the loss of these clusters to the Northwest, where the clusters were generally retained. Both Romani and Domari also share the pattern of renewal of the past-tense conjugation (through affixation of oblique enclitic pronouns to the past participle) with northwestern Indian frontier languages such as Kashmiri and Shina. The morphology of the two languages is similar in other respects: Both retain the old present conjugation in the verb (Domari *kar-ami* ‘I do’), and consonantal endings of the oblique nominal case (Domari *mans-as* ‘man.OBL’, *mans-an* ‘men.OBL’), and both show agglutination of secondary (Layer II) case endings (Domari *mans-as-ka* ‘for the man’).

It had therefore been assumed that Romani and Domari derived from the same ancestor idiom, and split only after leaving the Indian subcontinent. However, some isoglosses separating the two languages in phonology, morphology, and lexicon appear to be rather old, and point instead to a similar phenomenon of gradual northern and westward migrations, perhaps even to convergent development, rather than to a shared origin. Typical phonological developments that characterize Domari are loss of aspiration in *bh*, *dh*, *gh* to *b*, *d*, *g*, shift of medial *d*, *t* to *r*, of initial *v* to *w*, and of the retroflexes *ḍ*, *ṭ*, *ḍḍ*, *ṭṭ*, *ḍh* etc. to *r*, *t* and *d*.

### The sound system

There is much volatility and variation in the Domari sound system. Consonants include the stops *b*, *d*, *g* and *p*, *t*, *k*, *q*, and *ʔ*, the fricatives *f*, *x*, *χ*, *ɣ* and *h*, liquids *r* and *l* (and, marginally, a velarized *ʎ*), the glides *y* and *w* (alternating with *v*), and the sibilants *s*, *z*, and *š*. The affricates *dʒ* and *č* alternate with their sibilant counterparts *ž* and *š*. Pharyngealization of the dentals *d*, *t*, *s*, *z* enters the language in Arabic loans, but is often imported into the pre-Arabic (Indic) lexicon as well (e.g. [wa:tʰ] ‘stone’). The pharyngeals *ħ* and *ʕ* appear only in Arabic loans. Consonant gemination is distinctive.

Domari vowel phonemes are *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *ɔ*, *u*, each showing a number of allophonic variants. Vowel length is generally distinctive, though the duration of a vowel in a given word may vary considerably. Stress normally falls on the final inflectional segment of the word. Unstressed affixes are agglutinative (Layer II) case endings, external tense markers, and enclitic object pronouns.

### Morphology

#### *Nominal forms*

The principal inflectional alternation in the noun is between two ‘basic’ or Layer I cases, nominative and oblique. Vocalic stems in the inherited (Indic) lexical component have the nominative endings *-a* (masculine) and *-i* (feminine). The most common oblique endings in the singular are *-as-* (*-s-* with vocalic stems) for masculines and *-ya-* (*-ē-* with vocalic stems) for feminines. Some consonantal stems, especially Arabic loans, take *-ī-* or *-ē-*. The oblique plural ending is generally *-(y)an-*. The oblique stem serves as the case of the direct object, and as the base for further (Layer II) agglutinative case formation, with the endings *-ta* (dative), *-ma* (locative), *-ka* (directive and benefactive), *-ki* (ablative and prepositional), and *-san(ni)* (instrumental and comitative).

Demonstratives and adjectives in attributive position agree with the head noun in gender, number, and case. Enclitic pronouns are used with nouns as possessive endings. They encode case and number (*putr-o-m* ‘my son’, *putr-i-m-ka* ‘for my son’, *putr-e-m* ‘my

sons'), as well as person (*putr-o-man* 'our son'). These enclitic pronouns also serve as object-concord markers with verbs, and as subject-concord markers with past-tense (perfective) verbs (*laked-om-ir* 'I saw you', *laked-or-im* 'you saw me'). The genitive-possessive construction marks the head with a possessive affix and the dependent in the ablative/prepositional case (*kury-os mans-as-ki* house-3SG man-OBL-ABL 'the man's house').

### Verbs

Domari retains the Old Indo-Aryan intransitive (passive) derivation marker *-y-* (*ban-ari* 'shuts', *ban-y-ari* 'is being shut'). The transitive/causative marker *-naw-* is also productive (*q-ari* 'eats', *q-naw-ari* 'feeds'). The verb root with derivational augmentation constitutes the present or non-perfective stem. The perfective stem is formed by means of a perfective extension marker (*ban-ami* 'I close', *ban-d-om* 'I closed'). Arabic verb roots are integrated by means of the 'carrier' verbs *-k(ar)-* (transitive, from 'to do'), and *-h(r)-* (intransitive, from 'to become').

There are two sets of person markers. The present stem conjugation is (mostly) a direct continuation of the Old Indo-Aryan set of person markers (1SG *-m-*, 2SG *-k-*, 3SG *-r-*, 1PL *-n-*, 2PL *-s-*, 3PL *-n(d)-*). The perfective set derives partly from possessive markers in the singular, and from a combination of sources in the plural (1SG *-m-*, 2SG *-r-*, 3SG *-s-* or M *-a* F *-i*, 1PL *-n-*, 2PL *-s-*, 3PL *-e-*). The 3SG distinguishes between plain subjects, which show gender agreement (*kard-a* 'he did', *kard-i* 'she did'), and agentive subjects (*kard-os-is* 'he/she did it').

Tenses draw on the two stems, present and perfective, and the affixes *-i-* (progressive) and *-a-* (remote), which are external to the person affixes. The present stem followed by *-i-* constitutes the present/future tense (*laha-m-r-i* 'I see you'), followed by *-a-* it indicates the imperfect/habitual (*laha-m-r-a* 'I used to see you/was seeing you'). The perfective stem forms the basis for the simple past (*lake-d-om-ir* 'I saw you'), the perfect (*lake-d-om-r-i* 'I have seen you'), and the pluperfect/counterfactual (*lake-d-om-r-a* 'I had seen you/would have seen you').

The copula is enclitic. In the third person, predicate nouns and adjectives take a predicative suffix (M. *-ēk*, F. *-ik*, PL *-ēni*). Most of the modal verbs are borrowed from Arabic, and carry Arabic person and tense inflection.

### Syntax

Domari shows syntactic convergence with Arabic. Word order is VO-based and flexible, and clauses are finite. All conjunctions and particles and most adverbs and numerals are borrowed from Arabic, as are most of the prepositions. While demonstratives precede the

noun, there is a tendency to use adjectives mainly in predicative constructions, which agrees with the Arabic word order Noun-Adjective.

### **Bibliography**

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