What’s the time? Natural measurement of time in Modern South Arabian

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Outline

• Brief introduction to the Modern South Arabian languages
• The research teams
• Traditional lifestyles
• Quantification
• Adverbials of time
• Verbs of movement and staying
DEAMSA: Jan 2013-Dec 2016

- 5 languages, 3 UK investigators, 15 local researchers, 100+ speakers
- Archive at ELAR, SOAS:
  - 200+ hours of audio documentation
  - 10+ hours audio-visual documentation
- Comparative cultural glossary
- Ethnolinguistic & phonetic analysis
- Training of local community members

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Semantic fields

• Personal – birth, weddings, divorce, death, kinship terms, illness
• Environmental – water, land, toponyms, flora, fauna, directions, orientation, stars, seasons
• Occupational – livestock husbandry, frankincense, fishing, construction, agriculture, fishing, lime production
• Trade – weights, measures, bartering, products, debt
• Material culture – milk, food, leather work, fibre work, woodwork, clay work, fire
• Stories – poems, folklore, fictional and factual tales
In 2010, Vitaly Naumkin assembled a Russian-Yemeni fieldwork team: Semitist Leonid Kogan and Arabist Dmitry Cherkashin, and two extraordinarily gifted and enthusiastic native speakers of Soqotri: ‘Isa Gum’an al-Da’rhi and Ahmed ‘Isa al-Da’rhi. Six fieldwork seasons on the island, three brief sessions in Sana’a, and above all the informants’ four lengthy stays in Moscow enabled the team to bring to fruition several projects, such as an integral morphological description of the Soqotri verb, a comprehensive lexical archive of previously unknown Soqotri words, and the revitalization of the Vienna Soqotri corpus. The primary goal and focus of the team, however, has been the creation of the Corpus of Soqotri Oral Literature (CSOL). In 2013, Ahmed’s wife Maysoon Mohammed al-Da'arhi joined the team from the Soqotri side, and Maria Bulakh, a specialist in synchronic and historical Semitic linguistics and etymology, from the Russian side.
Adverbials of time, Mehri

- **fahag ~ ka-ffahag ḥāwalay** ‘first light’
- **ka-ffēgar** ‘dawn’
- **śūrēkawtan** ‘first part of sunrise’
- **ka-śśark** ‘sunrise’
- **ṣūbīḥan** ‘early morning after sunrise’
- **k-ašōbah** ‘in the morning’
- **dwēlēban** ‘early mid-morning’
- **ḏʔawban** ‘late morning’
- **nhūran** ‘hot part of day’
- **k-ɑṭahar** ‘midday’
- **k-azwūl** ‘just past midday’
- **ka-lʔasr ~ alʔasr** ‘mid-afternoon’
- **ɡasrawwan** ‘late mid-afternoon’
- **ɡasērēyan** ‘late afternoon’
- **kalʔaynī** ‘before sunset’
- **kalāʔāni** ‘early evening’
- **k-amgawza? ~ agzē?** ‘once the sun begins to redden’
- **ū-mağrāb** ‘sunset’
- **k-aʃīsē** ‘when sky first fully dark’
- **bi-ḥallīyēn ~ ḥāwēl ḏ-aʔāṣar** ‘first part of the night’
- **bi-ḥallay** ‘at night’
- **nahdēt ḏ-aʔāṣar** ‘just before midnight’
- **fakh ḏ-aʔāṣar** ‘midnight’
- **tōlī ḏ-aʔāṣar** ‘end of the night’
Time without sun

- In Dhofar and eastern Yemen during the monsoon period when the sun cannot be seen, noon was traditionally measured by looking into small pool of water, and sunset by the sound of a beetle.
Verbs of movement, Mehri

- **agōmaś, yigamśan, yigōmaś** ‘to go before dawn’
- **ġsūm, yiġawsam, yiġsēm** ‘to go at first light’
- **ghēm, yighōm, yighōm** ‘to go in the morning’
- **hhawgar, yihhūgūr, yihhawgar** ‘to go in the heat of the day’
- **[hakrawr, yhakrawr, yhakkār]**
- **šūgūś, yišgōś, yišawgaś** ‘to go late afternoon’
- **aṣsōfak, yiśṣafkan, yiśṣōfak** ‘to go just before the sun sets’
- **abōṣar, yābaṣran, yābōṣar** ‘to go around twilight’
- **bār, yibawar, yibār** ‘to go at night’
- **[gihma ‘tomorrow’]**

- **šaghūm, yišaghūm, yišagham** ‘to come in the morning’
- **khēb, yikhōb, yikhōb** ‘to come in the heat of the day’
- **watxaf, yitxōf, ytaxf** ‘to come in the evening’
- **kluh, yikayl, yiklah** ‘to come in early evening [livestock]’
- **ṭwuh, yiṭayw, yiṭwah** ‘to come at night’

- **nakak nhūran** ‘I came around mid-day’
- **nakam tīn ḍʔawban** ‘they m. came to use mid-morning’
Verbs of movement, Soqotri

- šḥaʃef ‘to leave in the morning (4.30 – 10.00)’
- gɛhɛm ‘to come around noon (11.00 – 13.00)’
- nofoʃ ‘to leave in the afternoon (13.00 – 17.00)’
- öḳar ‘to come in the evening (17.00 – 20.00)’
- bóʕor ‘to leave at night (from 20.00)’
- šəmɛri ‘to come during the night (from 20.00)’
Verbs of spending particular period

- Mehri
  - \(\text{hak}\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered w}\text{\textperiodcentered m}, \text{yha}\text{\textperiodcentered k}\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered w}\text{\textperiodcentered m}, \text{yha}\text{\textperiodcentered k}\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered am}\) ‘to spend the hot part of the day’
  - \(\text{wat}\text{\textperiodcentered x}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered f}, \text{yit}\text{\textperiodcentered x}\text{\textperiodcentered o}\text{\textperiodcentered f}, \text{yta}\text{\textperiodcentered x}\text{\textperiodcentered f}\) ‘to spend the evening’
  - \(\text{h}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered t}\text{\textperiodcentered u}\text{\textperiodcentered m}, \text{yh}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered t}\text{\textperiodcentered u}\text{\textperiodcentered m}, \text{yh}\text{\textperiodcentered e}\text{\textperiodcentered t}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered m}\) ‘to spend the night’
  - \(\text{ha}\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered b}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered h}, \text{yih}\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered wb}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered h}, \text{yha}\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered b}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered h}\) ‘to wake in the morning’
  - \(\text{ha}\text{\textperiodcentered st}\text{\textperiodcentered u}, \text{yih}\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered ayt}, \text{yha}\text{\textperiodcentered st}\) ‘to spend the winter’

- Soqotri
  - \(\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered k}\text{\textperiodcentered e}\text{\textperiodcentered r}\) ‘to spend c. from 05.00 – 10.00’
  - \(\text{\textperiodcentered k}\text{\textperiodcentered o}\text{\textperiodcentered h}\text{\textperiodcentered o}\text{\textperiodcentered b}\) ‘to spend c. from 12.00 – 15.00’
  - \(\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered f}\text{\textperiodcentered a}\text{\textperiodcentered s}\text{\textperiodcentered i}\text{\textperiodcentered r}\) ‘to spend c. from 16.00 – 20.00’
  - \(\text{fe}\text{\textperiodcentered r}\) ‘to spend c. from 20.00 on’
Discussion

- Shade and shadow in narratives
- Age judged by environmental event – the year of drowning, the year of drought, the year of the al-Haymar rains
- Periods of time measured by the amount of time it takes one to do a certain task – move between two bends in the wadi, milk 10 camels, etc.
- Watches lead to lexical loss ...
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