Sibawaih’s description of the 2FSG object variants -kiš and -kis has generated a good deal of discussion among Arabicists. Whereas some, such as Barth (1911) have taken the forms at Sibawaih’s face value, others, such as Johnstone (1963) have identified them with the contemporary affricated variants -tš and -ts. This paper argues that Johnstone’s position is basically correct. It does this by bringing together evidence from two diverse sources. On the one hand it is shown that the contemporary distribution of the variants forces a reconstruction of -tš, and perhaps -ts, which actually predates Sibawaih’s Kitaab. On the other, a careful reading of Sibawaih himself shows that he described the form -tš among what he classifies as non-sanctioned sounds. After arguing this second point, the question is addressed, if Sibawaih did in fact have at least a -tš in his phonetic inventory, and perhaps a -ts as well, why he spoke of -kiš (and -kis), rather than -tš (and -ts).

INTRODUCTION

With Sibawaih, small chapters often hide issues of larger importance, and their interpretation requires bringing to bear evidence from a variety of sources. These are, in the first instance, an understanding of Sibawaih’s goals, methodology and linguistic theory. What further sources may be relevant depends on the issue involved. A source that has traditionally been less appreciated among Arabicists in the historical interpretation of the language is the contemporary Arabic dialects, which play a crucial role here. In this small contribution I would like to relate a basic observation on object pronouns in Sibawaih to larger issues of Arabic historical linguistics.

The discussion begins in sections 1 and 2 with Sibawaih’s observations on the four variants of the 2FSG oblique (object, possessive) pronoun suffix. Following a suggestion by Johnstone (1963), it is argued that of the two variants, nominally -kiš and -kis, the first definitely and the second possibly, is identical with the modern variants, -č ([tš]) and -ts respectively (section 3).
Thereafter, the rest of the paper addresses the issue of why, if indeed Sibawaih would have heard -č and -ts, he nonetheless interpreted them as -kiš and -kis. To answer this question, three differentiated linguistic issues are examined in detail. The first is phonetic. It will be shown in section 4.2 that Sibawaih did in fact, among a set of eight proscribed sounds, observe the variant [č]. A key aspect of the argumentation in this section leads to an interpretation of Sibawaih’s system for identifying non-basic Arabic phonemes. Secondly, from a sociolinguistic perspective it will be shown that as it is among the proscribed variants, Sibawaih could not have recognized a variant -č of the 2FSG (section 5.1), since proscribed variants are not a functional part of Arabic grammar. Further issues militating against his recognizing a -č in the 2FSG are discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3. Section 6 briefly reflects on the problems of interpreting Sibawaih.

Thirdly, and much more briefly in section 7, it will be argued from evidence of the modern dialects *č reflexes of *k, including the 2FSG -ič, have such a wide distribution, including North Africa, the eastern Nile Delta region (Sharqiyya) and Khorasan—besides its core area of the eastern Arabian peninsula, the Gulf area and parts of the Levant, that linguistic reconstruction leads to the same conclusion as does a close reading of Sibawaih’s linguistics, namely that already by his era the change *k > *č was a part of Arabic.

1. Chapter 504

Chapter 504 (Kitaab II: 322–3) contains three substantive observations about affixal pronominal behavior on the verb. First, Sibawaih notes that the 2FSG suffix can be realized as -ši, -kiš or -kis, as well as -ki.

(1) 2FSG variants in Sibawaih¹
   a. -ši
   b. -kiš
   c. -kis
   d. -ki

¹ Later sources add other variants, which I will not deal with here. Ibn Manḍur reports on the basis of ḥadith (Lisan VI: 197), for instance, that a -si variant exists as well which, apparently, applies to both 2M and 2F., ’abuu-sa “your father”. Along the same lines, a reviewer draws attention to Suyūṭi’s treatment of the phenomenon in his Muzhir (chapter 11, p. 102), in which a -š variant is associated with 2FSG, a -s variant with 2MSG. While constraints of space prevent following up on these interesting strands here, it is my suspicion, subject of course to an examination of Suyūṭi, Ibn Manḍur and others, that it is Sibawaih’s eyewitness account which should be given primary credibility and attention.