When medievalists do think of the Banū Sāsān, they tend to imagine a "shadowy brotherhood of the medieval underworld" or a fringe criminal gang. Prof. Richardson invites a reimagining of this group as a tribal confederation. Members of the Banū Sāsān, as well as outsiders, gave the group four distinct tribal attributes: a tribal name (Banū Sāsān, which means 'Tribe of Sāsān'), an eponymous ancestral founder (Shaykh Sāsān), a tribal dialect (lughat Banī Sāsān), and sub-tribes (ṭāʾīfāt). She will trace samples of this tribal dialect that thrived in medieval Islamdom and has survived into the modern period. It is a mixed language or para-language that takes the form of embedding a substitutive vocabulary into the grammatical structure of other languages, and it has historically been spoken within communities of peripatetics and commercial nomads.

In 10th-century Arabic sources produced in Buyid Iraq and Iran, non-speakers named this language lughat al-mukaddīn (the language of the beggars), lughat Banī Sāsān (the language of the Sāsān clan) or lughat Shaykh Sāsān (the language of Master Sāsān). The language, in name and application, was not identified with a territory or an ethnicity, but rather with a peripatetic tribal group, the Banū Sāsān, whose members worked as beggars, tricksters, and entertainers. As early as the 13th century, speakers of this language referred to it as al-sīn and non-speakers named it lughat/lisān al-ghurabāʾ (the language of the Gypsies). Between the 13th to the 15th centuries, Arabic and Persian writers composed texts explaining various Sāsānī words to their Arabic- and Persian-speaking audiences. Texts also survive from this period with snippets of sīn prose and poetry.

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