



# The Ancient Writing Culture Of The Turanian Peoples

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## ABSTRACT

The article discusses the ancient writing culture of the peoples of Turan. It is analyzed that the quasi-alphabetic writing system of the Aramaic direction entered this region during the Achaemenid period and developed in the form of various scripts until the early Middle Ages. Information is provided about the sources from which these inscriptions have survived. The civilizational significance of writing culture is revealed.

## Keywords:

Turan, antiquity, Achaemenids, Zoroastrianism, Avestan script, Khorezmian script, Sogdian script, Bactrian script, Parthian script, Kharoshthi, Brahmi, Turkic runic, Uyghur, Mongolian scripts, Buddhism, Christianity, sources, civilization.

Writing is considered one of humanity's greatest discoveries. It is through writing that the sound signs of a particular language (word, syllable, sound) are expressed. Throughout its development, humanity initially expressed information delivered to distant destinations through oral speech. However, he felt the need for expressive signs to convey information perfectly and to describe the realities he experienced. As a result, they began to use rock paintings, and then various symbols (pictography, ideography) that gave meaning [14: 485].

From the 4th-3rd millennia BC, a new type of meaningful writing appeared - hieroglyphs (scripts of ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, Elamite peoples, Latin American Indians, Aztecs and Mayans, and modern Chinese and Japanese peoples). In the Near East - Mesopotamia, starting from the 3rd millennium BC, cuneiform (writings of the ancient peoples of Sumer, Assyria, Babylon, Elam) began to form, expressing meaning and syllables. From the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, the need arose to

represent sounds with symbols. On this path, it was the Sami peoples who laid the foundation for an alphabetic writing system representing sound. They formed the Sino-Palestinian, Phoenician, Canaanite, Ugaritic, and Aramaic scripts. As a result, the eastern (such as Arabic, Middle Persian, Khorezmian, Sogdian, Bactrian) and western branches of the Aramaic script (such as Greek, Latin, Cyrillic) were founded on the alphabetic writing system used in ancient times and currently used by humanity [4: 6-23]. The Aramaic script formed the basis of the first alphabetic writing system, representing sound. The Aramaic language, which used this script, was the language of the peoples of the Mediterranean coast and the Near East, and it was divided into two dialects: western - Syrian and eastern - Mesopotamian. As a result of the spread of Aramaic tribes to the territory of Western Asia, the Ugarites, Mitannids, Phoenicians, Hittites, Babylonians, and Assyrians began to adopt their languages. At the same time, the writing system used by the Aramaic began to be adopted. This script, by its

nature, was quasi-alphabetic, representing approximately 22-24 letters (consonant and long vowels). The alphabetic system is subordinated to a strict canonical order, i.e., **’ b, g, d, h, w, z, h, t, y, k, l, m, n, s, ’ p, s, q, r, š, t**. In some cases, additional symbols were added to this order, adapted to the rules of the specific language used (for example, the Avestan script, Khorezmian scripts).

From the 8th-7th centuries BC, the Aramaic language and writing attained international status. The Aramaic script and language were used for official documentation in the Median kingdom from the 7th-6th centuries BC, and subsequently in the Achaemenid Empire (558-330 BC) from the 6th century BC. As a result, all satrapies in the territories from Egypt to Turan (including Khwarazm, Bactria, and Sogdiana) that were conquered by the Achaemenids began conducting their affairs in this language and script. This, in turn, laid the foundation for the formation of local writing systems based on the Aramaic script in our region by the 3rd-2nd centuries BC [6: 11-14; 8: 96-99; 4: 23-36].

The script of the Avesta texts used by the peoples of Turan and its bright example, the book **“Avesta”**, are significant because they provide incomparable information about our history, culture, and spirituality. It is also possible to draw certain historical conclusions from the parts that have come down to us.

In fact, the sacred Zoroastrian book "Avesta" (apastak (abastay) - foundation) was founded in the 8th-7th centuries BC (2700 years ago). The original version of the book, written on 12,000 cattle hides, was based on the Aramaic alphabet with 22 letter symbols. However, most of this "Avesta" was written during the campaigns of Alexander the Great (BC. In the 4th century BC) was destroyed. Then the texts of the Avesta were memorized orally and passed down from generation to generation. The texts of the Avesta, particularly the "Goh" ("Gathas") attributed to Zoroaster himself (who lived approximately 618-554 BC), along with surviving portions of the 21 books (nasks) of "religious-mythological-scientific-legal" content such as "Yasna" (Yasna), "Visprat" or "Vispered" (Visptat), "Videvdat" or "Vendidat" (Vīdēvdāt), "Yasht" (Yašt), as well as the collection of texts

used for daily Zoroastrian needs called "Khurtak Apastak" - "Little Avesta" (Xurtak Apastāk), were first restored in Parthian script by order of Vologez I (51-78), a representative of the Arshakid dynasty in Parthia (250 BC - 227 AD). However, this restored text has not survived to the present day. Subsequently, this work was undertaken again during the Sasanian Empire (224-651), which had adopted Zoroastrianism as the state religion. In an effort to preserve the original pronunciation of the texts, attempts were made to reconstruct the ancient written form of the "Avesta" both formally and phonetically, based on the alphabet of the Middle Persian-Pahlavi language, which itself was derived from the Aramaic script. As a result, an alphabet consisting of 48 independent characters (14 for vowels and 34 for consonants) and 3 ligatures was created, and the orally preserved portions were transcribed [6: 59-77; 8: 102-103]. At present, there are translations of the "Avesta" into Uzbek by Doctor of Historical Sciences M.M. Iskhakov and the writer Askar Makhkam [1: 128; 2: 100; 3: 732].

The Khorezm oasis occupies a special place as a region where the ancient writing culture was formed. The Khorezmian script, formed on the basis of the Aramaic script and reformed over time, was adapted to the language of the ancient Khorezmians.

The ancient Khorezmian language, a term recommended for the languages of the Middle Iranian or Middle Iranian languages that originated, developed, and spread throughout the region in the territory of Turan, belongs to the eastern branch of the Turanian languages [11: 3-12], mainly distributed in the Khorezm oasis, i.e., in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya. This language was the official language of Ancient Khorezm and the Afrighid dynasty in Khorezm (305-995), which ruled from the end of the 4th century BC to the 8th century AD. Examples of this language are preserved in Abu Rayhan Beruni's "Al-asar al-baqiya an al-qarun al-holiya" ("Monuments of Ancient Peoples"), completed in 1000; a written monument from the 12th century, Mahmud Zamakhshari's "Muqaddimat ul-adab," and Mukhtar az-Zahidi's

"Quniyat ul-munia" ("Quniyat al-munya"), written around 1260 [12: 38-55].

The Khorezmian script, formed on the basis of the Aramaic script in the 5th-3rd centuries BC, is considered one of the oldest scripts that emerged in our region. The initial version of the Khorezmian script was refined during the Afrighid period, specifically by becoming cursive. At that time, 20 out of the 22 Aramaic alphabet letters were actively used in the Khorezmian script. Samples of this script were discovered in the 1930s-40s and 1950s by the Khorezm archaeological and ethnographic expedition led by S.P. Tolstov and Academician Ya. Gulyamov at archaeological sites such as Koy-Kirilgan-Qala, Toprak-Qala, Tok-Qala, Gavur-Qala (Mizdakhan), and Khumbuz-Qala. The writing materials that have survived to our time are mainly pottery shards, copper and silver coins, ossuaries, pieces of leather, and fragments of sticks. In addition to the 22 characters of the Aramaic alphabet, the Khorezmian script was enriched with additional characters specific to the Khorezmian language. The script, like all Aramaic scripts, was written from right to left [6: 59-77; 4: 38-43].

The Sogdian script, with its widespread distribution in the region and international significance, is considered an example of an important cultural achievement. In this regard, the world's leading orientalists and source scholars acknowledge the special civilizational value of the Sogdian language and writing, which was the most widespread and long-used in our region during antiquity and the early Middle Ages (from the 3rd-2nd centuries BC to the 10th-12th centuries AD) [7: 347-514].

The Sogdian language, related to the Khorezmian language, also belonged to the eastern branch of the Middle Iranian (Turanian) languages. Besides Sogd, located in the Zarafshan and Kashkadarya oases, this language was practiced in Ustrushana, Chach, partly in Fergana, in the settlements of the Sogdians along the Silk Road in the historical Semirechye and East Turkestan, as well as in the territory of modern Mongolia. In terms of its significance, it is widely used among the Turkic peoples as a language of international communication. In the Western Turkic Khaganate (603-742),

formed in the western part of the First Turkic Khaganate (552-603), and in the Turgesh Khaganate (699-766), along with the Turkic language, it rose to the status of the official language of the state. In addition to the above-mentioned territories, Sogdian language monuments have been found in Khorezm, the Merv oasis, the Ural region, Altai, and even Kashmir, the Chatyal valley in the upper reaches of the Indus River, the Ladakh valley of Tibet, Western China, and Manchuria. Samples of writing are preserved on leather, paper, wood and bark, fabric, ceramics, stone tablets and boulders, coins, metal objects and weapons. [10: 58-62].

The Sogdian script, based on the Aramaic script, was used from the 2nd-1st centuries BC to the 12th-13th centuries AD and consisted of 23 characters, 22 of which were derived from the Aramaic base. The writing order strictly followed the Aramaic system (*ʾ, b, g, d, h, w, z, h, t, y, k, l, m, n, s, ʿ, p, s, q, r, š, t*). In practice, only 18 of the alphabet's characters were commonly used. Additionally, the Sogdians utilized a 29-letter script based on the Aramaic script used by followers of Mani's (216-277) teachings, as well as the Syriac script form based on the Aramaic alphabet used by the Nestorian Christian community, whose patriarch Nestor was exiled from Constantinople in 428-431. Although works were written in Manichaean and Syriac scripts, the language of the texts remained Sogdian. Consequently, other peoples who effectively utilized the capabilities of the Sogdian language and writing system made productive use of this script in developing their own writing cultures. This resulted in the emergence of alphabetic writing systems in the East, such as the ancient Turkic runic, Uyghur, Mongolian, and Manchu scripts [6: 59-77; 8: 136].

Samples of Bactrian writing discovered in the territories of Southern Uzbekistan, Southern Tajikistan, and Northern Afghanistan possess unique historical value, and the study of monuments created in this script is among the pressing issues.

Historically, Bactria, one of the eastern satrapies of the Achaemenid Empire, was conquered by the armies of Alexander the Great between 329-

327 BC. Following the decline of the Greco-Macedonian state, around 256 BC, the Bactrian satrap Diodotus I (256-248 BC) established the Greco-Bactrian kingdom (256-55 BC). In 140 BC, the nomadic Yuezhi tribes brought an end to this state. Initially, in the territory of Bactria, a writing system based on the Aramaic script, adapted to the local Bactrian language, was in use, similar to the Khwarezmian and Sogdian scripts. From the 3rd century BC, under the influence of Hellenistic culture, a new Bactrian script based on the Greek alphabet was adopted for state affairs. Certain changes have also been made in the use of this 25-letter alphabet. In particular, the Greek letter "r" represented the Bactrian "š" [17: 314-347]. This writing system was considered one of the official scripts not only in the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom but also during the Kushan Empire (1st-4th centuries), especially during the reign of Kanishka (78-123), as well as during the Hephthalite state (420-579) and the Tokharistan confederation (6th-8th centuries). Samples of the Bactrian script in the Aramaic alphabet have been found at the Ai-Khanum and Jigateppe sites in Northern Afghanistan and Fayaztepa sites in Southern Uzbekistan, while examples based on the Greek script have been discovered at the Surkh Kotal and Dilberjin sites in Northern Afghanistan, Dashti Nawur in Central Afghanistan, and Ayritom sites in Southern Uzbekistan [4: 47-53, 68-72]. Sources in Bactrian script are currently being translated into English and Russian by N. Sims-Williams and presented to the scholarly community [15: 3-10].

Although not large in scale, the study, research, and historical conclusions of samples of the Kharoshthi script are of great importance in revealing not only historical processes, but also cultural integration processes.

The Kharoshthi script, formed on the basis of the Brahmi script of the Aramaic and ancient Indian script, was in use between the 5th-3rd centuries BC and the 3rd-5th centuries AD. This script is also known as Bactrian, Indo-Bactrian, Bactroian, Northwest Indian, and Kabul. The earliest monument, dating back to about 251 BC, is attributed to King Ashoki (Priyadarshi) (B.C. 272-251), which was discovered on the

Shahbozgarh rock in Pakistan. Epigraphic samples from later periods have been found in Afghanistan, Turan, and East Turkestan (present-day Xinjiang Autonomous Region of the PRC). It was used in Kushan Bactria in the first century AD and, along with the Greco-Bactrian script, was considered the official script of the Kushan kingdom [5: 249-250]. Kharoshthi inscriptions have been found in the Karatepa, Fayoztepa, and Dalverzintepa sites of Old Termez in Southern Uzbekistan. In addition, examples of the Kharoshthi script are found on coins of Indo-Bactrian and Indo-Scythian kings of the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD. The inscription is written first from right to left, then from left to right. Although the Aramaic script was the basis for the formation of this script, since it was used in the divan of the Achaemenid satrapy in northwestern India, the Brahmi script, as mentioned above, influenced its formation. Moreover, from the 3rd century AD, it was supplanted by the Brahmi script [8: 103-104; 4: 72-73].

The Parthian state, which occupied an important place in the history of Turan with its potential and power, its population, and examples of Parthian writing, adapted to the language used in this state, occupy a significant place.

The Parthian script, which existed between the 4th century BC and the 5th century AD, was also formed on the basis of the Aramaic script. It was during this period that Pahlavi (Central Iranian), Parthian, and Greek languages were in use in this region. Representatives of this script were the official script of the Achaemenid Empire, the Greco-Macedonian state, and the Parthian kingdom of the Arsacids (250 BC - 224 AD), which lived in the territory of present-day Southern Turkmenistan and the Khorasan region of Iran. The graphics of writing, as in the Aramaic writing system, consist of 22 letter characters. Just as in Khwarezmian and Sogdian scripts, Semitic language terms were used through heterograms in writing practice [9: 368-369].

Samples of the Parthian script are significantly larger, numbering approximately 3,000. These are fragments of ceramics found in Iran's Kumis, monuments of Avroman parchment found in

western Iran, and the largest part (over 2700) of examples found in the center of the Mihrdatkirt fortress - the ruins of Ancient Nisa in present-day Turkmenistan, as well as inscriptions on ceramics found in the ruins of Kushtepa and the city of Merv. Some parts of the Avesta, dating back to the 2nd-1st centuries BC, and the book "Zarirnamak," which formed the basis of the book "Ayadgarii Zariran" in the Middle Iranian-Pahlavi language, were even found in this script [6: 59-77; 4: 44-47].

In addition to the examples of writing formed on the basis of the above-mentioned Aramaic script, there are also examples of ancient Turkic (runic), Uyghur, and the still valuable hot script, formed under the influence of the Sogdian script, and examples of Turkic writing found in Dashti Naur [10: 60-61], on which research can be conducted, and the studied parts can be included in the illumination of historical processes, thereby increasing the source value of written monuments.

The formation of the ancient Turkic runic script is directly related to the Turkic Khaganate (552-745), and it is said that S.G. Klyashtorny emphasized that the Sogdians were involved in the formation of this script. Alphabet compilers, having modified other alphabet systems, managed to somewhat improve their own alphabets. However, the process of creating the alphabet was very controversial. According to A. Rona-Tash, the alphabet was constructed in four stages, and according to A.M. Shcherbak, in three stages in the form of 39 letters and symbols [18: 3-4]. Its examples have been preserved mainly in the form of stone inscriptions (such as Tonyukuk, Kultegin, Bilge Khagan, Onon). Monuments of Turkic runic writing have been found in Mongolia, Southern Siberia, Kazakhstan, East Turkestan, and Turan, particularly in Uzbekistan [13: 68]. This inscription was studied by such scientists as S.E. Malov, K.V. Trever, A.N. Bernshtam, I. Kizlasov, N. Rakhmon, B. Matboboev.

The Uyghur script, formed under the influence of the Sogdian script, occupied an extremely important place in the life of the Turkic peoples after the Turkic runic script. Until the introduction of the Arabic script, the Sogdian script was used in the region. Even after the

introduction of the Arabic script, the Uyghur script was widely used in the preparation of literary works, official documents, and writings. In particular, works such as Yusuf Khas Hajib's "Kutadgu Bilig," Adib Ahmad Yugnaki's "Hibut ul-haqoyiq," Khorezmi's "Muhabbatnoma," Yusuf Amiri's "Dahnoma," and Khojandi's "Latofatnoma" were written in Arabic and Uyghur scripts. Some decrees and schools of Amir Timur and the Timurids, as well as the rulers of the Golden Horde in the 14th-15th centuries, were also written in the Uyghur script [16: 96].

In conclusion, the examples of written culture practiced in the territory of Central Asia are of invaluable importance in the study of written monuments. And for their consistent study, the training of specialists remains relevant. If higher educational institutions that train personnel in Oriental studies, source studies, language, and literature pay serious attention to this field, it will be possible to study sources from antiquity and the early Middle Ages more consistently and objectively.

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