

ALMUT HINTZE

Avestan

Introduction – Part 3: Avestan script and sound



MUYA —
The Multimedia Yasna Project

Roadmap

- Oral composition
- Oral transmission
- Script and sound of the Avesta script

Training of Zoroastrian priests today



Dadar Athornan Institute,
Mumbai

Photograph: Almut Hintze

Memorisation of fixed texts

- Memorisation techniques in Vedic oral tradition
 - Saṃhitā-pāṭha: words in sequence as pronounced
 - Pada-pāṭha : words in sequence in pausa form

- Other pāṭhas, each word in saṃhitā and in pausa form:
 - Krama-pāṭha : 12 – 23 – 34 – 45 – 56, etc.
 - Jaṭa-pāṭha : 1221 12 – 2332 23 – 3443 34 – 4554 45, etc.
 - Ghana-pāṭha : 1221 123 321 123 – 2332 234 432 234 – 3443 345 543 345, etc.

Composition in Performance: a new song

- Y 28.3 *yā vā aṣā ufiiānī manascā vohū apaouruuīm
mazdqm̄cā ahurəm ...*

“I, who want to extol you, Good Thought and the Wise Lord, with rightness in an unprecedented way ...”

- RV 10.23.6 *stómaṃ ta indra vimadā́ ajījanann ápūrvyam
purutámaṃ sudā́nave /*

“The Vimadas have begotten this praise for you, Indra, (praise) unprecedented, best of many, for the one of good gift”

(Translation by Jamison & Brereton 2014, 1408)

Petrification of texts and oral tradition

- Oral compositions crystallise and petrify and are transmitted verbatim
- OAv. texts petrified while composition in performance continued
- OAv. texts integrated into and elaborated on in later oral compositions

Avestan and Middle Persian exegetical traditions

- OAv. Texts petrified
- Reworked in later oral compositions
- Integrated into later compositions
- Yasna 19–21: exegetical texts of the three main prayers

CENTRES OF POWER IN THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

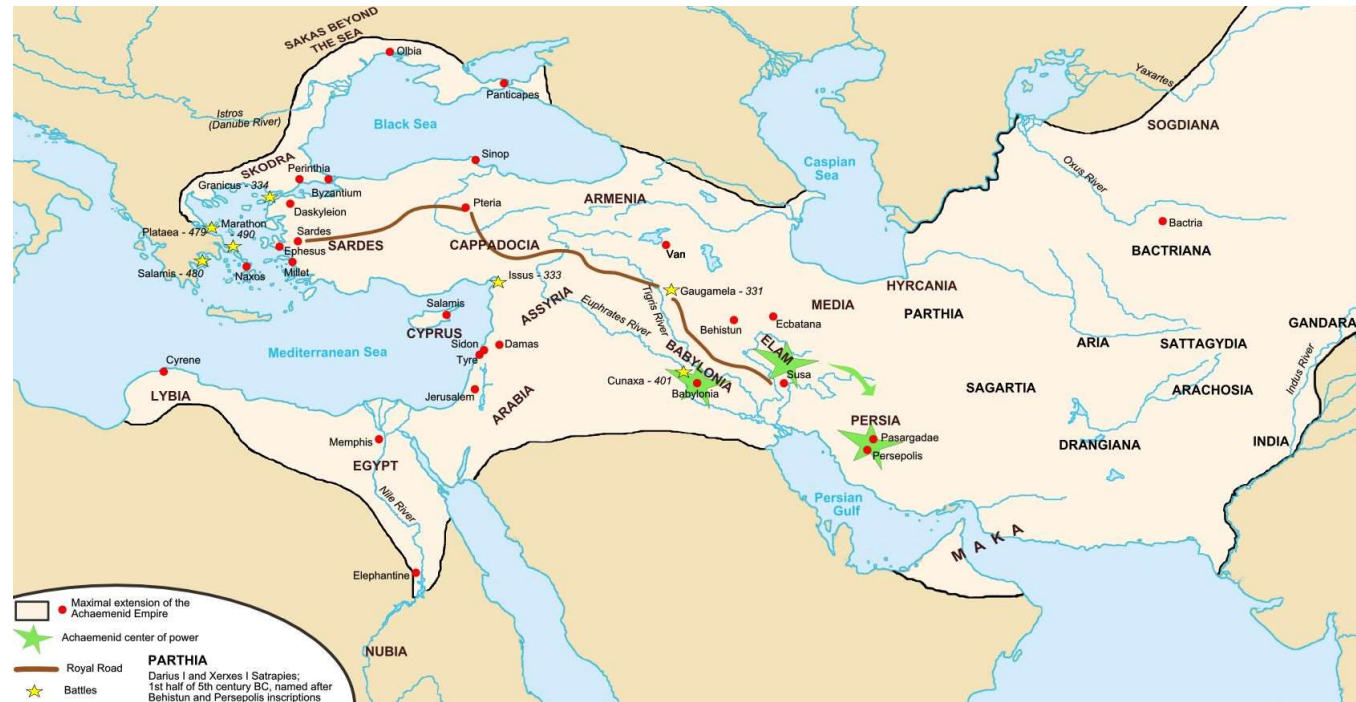


Image credit:

[Fabienkhan, CC BY-SA 2.5-2.0-1.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5-de/)

The Avestan script

- An artificial creation
- Represents sound, not meaning (phonetic script)

𐬀	𐬁	𐬂	𐬃	𐬄	𐬅	𐬆	𐬇	𐬈	𐬉	𐬊	𐬋	𐬌	𐬍
a	ā	ā̇	a _h	ə	ə̇	e	ē	o	ō	i	ī	u	ū
𐬎	𐬏	𐬐	𐬑	𐬒	𐬓	𐬔					𐬕/𐬖	𐬗	
k	x	ẋ	x ^v	g	ġ	γ					c	j	
𐬘	𐬙	𐬚	𐬛	𐬜						𐬝	𐬞	𐬟	𐬠
t	θ	d	δ	ṫ						p	f	b	β
𐬡	𐬢	𐬣	𐬤	𐬥	𐬦		𐬧	𐬨		𐬩	𐬪	𐬫	𐬬
η	ī̇	ī̈	n	ṅ	n̈		m	ṁ		y	v	r	
	𐬮	𐬯	𐬰	𐬱	𐬲	𐬳	𐬴	𐬵		𐬶			
	s	z	š	ṧ	š̈	y=ž̇	ž̈			h			

Inventory of Avestan characters

The three types of Pahlavi script

Three stages of development:

1. Inscriptional
2. Psalter
3. Book Pahlavi

Credit: D. N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* 1971, p.xi

	Imperial Aramaic	Inscriptions		Pahlavi	
		Parthian	Persian	Psalter	Book
' (*ālcḗ)•	𐤀	𐭀	𐭀	𐭀	𐭀
b (bēt)	𐤁	𐭁	𐭁	𐭁	𐭁
g (gimel)	𐤂	𐭂	𐭂	𐭂	𐭂
d (dāleṭ)	𐤃	𐭃	𐭃	𐭃	= g
h (hē)	𐤄	𐭄	𐭄	𐭄	𐭄
w (wāw)	𐤅	𐭅	𐭅	𐭅	𐭅
z (zayin)	𐤆	𐭆	𐭆	𐭆	𐭆
ḥ (hēt)	𐤇	𐭇	𐭇	𐭇	= '•
ṭ (ṭē)	𐤈	𐭈	𐭈	𐭈	
y (yōd)	𐤉	𐭉	𐭉	𐭉	= g
k (kaḗ)	𐤊	𐭊	𐭊	𐭊	𐭊
l (lāmeḍ)	𐤋	𐭋	𐭋	𐭋	𐭋
m (mēm)	𐤌	𐭌	𐭌	𐭌	𐭌
n (nūn)	𐤍	𐭍	𐭍	𐭍	= w
s (sāmeḵ)	𐤎	𐭎	𐭎	𐭎	𐭎
' (*ayin)	𐤏	𐭏	= w	= w	= w
p (pē)	𐤐	𐭐	𐭐	𐭐	𐭐
š (šādē)	𐤑	𐭑	𐭑	𐭑	𐭑
q (qōḗ)	𐤒	𐭒	= m	= m	= m
r (rēš)	𐤓	𐭓	= w	= w	= w
š/š (š/šīn)	𐤔	𐭔	𐭔	𐭔	𐭔
t (tāw)	𐤕	𐭕	𐭕	𐭕	𐭕

The Avestan script

- Methods of creating new letters for the Av. alphabet:
 - by adding diacritic marks to existing letters
 - by borrowing letters from other scripts

The Avestan script

- Adding diacritic marks to Book Pahlavi letters

Pahlavi script

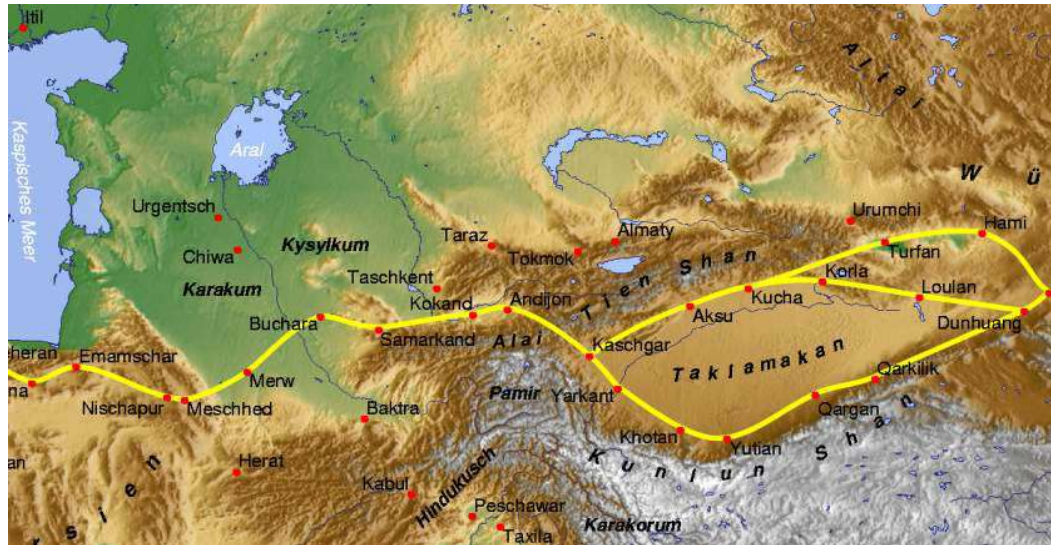
aleph:	a
'yw [ē(w)] 'one'	nYX
'L [ō] 'to':	_On
yod:	i
waw:	n

Avestan script: vowels

Ɑ	Ɱ	Ɐ	Ɒ	ⱱ	Ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱴ
a	ā	ǎ	ǎ̄	ą	ą̄	ə	ē
Ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱷ	ⱸ	ⱹ	ⱺ	ⱻ	ⱼ
e	ē	o	ō	i	ī	u	ū

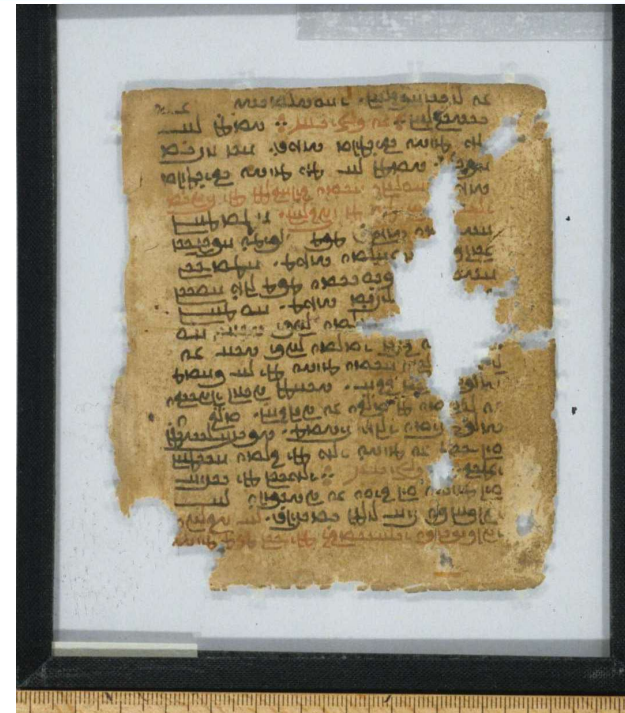
- Borrowing letters from other scripts: Greek epsilon: ε, Av. v [ə]

The script of the Pahlavi Psalter



Location of Turfan on the northern Silk Road

Credit: Wikipedia, GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.2



Fol. 5v of the Pahlavi Psalter

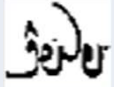
Credit: International Dunhuang Project

Avestan letters from the Pahlavi Psalter

The Avestan script:
 velars and palatal affricates


𐬀	𐬁	𐬂	𐬃	𐬄	𐬅	𐬆
k	x	x̣	x ^v	g	g̣	ɣ
		𐬇	𐬈			
		c	j			


Not used: Book Pahlavi c

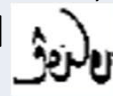
Avestan		Psalter		Book Pahlavi
letter	sound	letter	sound	
K	ɣ	K	k, ɣ	𐬀 Only in heterograms, e.g. KW 'Y𐬀 [kū] 'that', nK 𐬀N [ōh] 'thus'
j	j	j	c, j	∅
d	d	d	d	∅, but occasionally at the end of a word, e.g. plp̂ [frabd]  PRDd 46.6
n	n̄	𐬎	n	∅

Avestan letters from the Pahlavi Psalter

The Avestan script:
dentals and labials


 t θ d δ t̄


 p f b β

Avestan		Psalter		Book Pahlavi
letter	sound	letter	sound	
K	γ	K	k, γ	𐬀 Only in heterograms, e.g. KW 'Y𐬀 [kū] 'that', nK 𐬀N [ōh] 'thus'
j	j	j	c, j	∅
d	d	d	d	∅, but occasionally at the end of a word, e.g. plp̄d [frabd]  PRDd 46.6
n	ń	𐬀	n	∅