



Bednálljan

The Script of the First Imperium

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Bednálljan

THE SCRIPT OF THE FIRST IMPERIUM

By

M. A. R. BARKER

“Bednálljan Salarvyáni” is a Khíshan language, related to Tsolyáni, Mu’ugalavyáni, and others of the family. It is a member in a long tradition, dating all the way back to Llyáni in far-off Livyánu; yet the stages of this process are anything but clear. One important fact is its close relationship to Irzákh, the tongue of the Dragon Warriors of N’lüss.

The language can only tenuously be connected to Bednállja, the small principality that once occupied the shores of Tamkáde Bay in what is now Western Salarvyá. The First Imperium, the empire founded by Queen Nayári of Jakálla, in southern Tsolyánu, was the primary cause for the prominence of both the language and the name: what “Bednálljan Salarvyáni.” Had she and her court not spoken of Bednállja as their original cultural and spiritual “homeland,” the language might well have been called something else entirely.

“Bednálljan Salarvyáni” is not a single unified linguistic corpus. There were many dialectical changes during the First Imperium. Time and events have eroded the visibility of many of these: cognates, morphological and syntactic similarities, and sound shifts. What is left is a basic strong relationship, however, as can be seen from tomb inscriptions and historical texts, plus such non-linguistic cultural sequences as pottery, coins, and later records.

Perhaps a dozen major dialects emerged from the chaos of the crumbling kingdoms of the Fisherman Kings. Some of these had scripts and literatures of their own, now largely lost. The kings of Héru competed with the lords of Koylúga, and the aristocratic masters of Tsatsayágga fought bitter battles—both physically and culturally—with the priesthood of the Goddess Shiringgáyi, whose shrines are centred around Lake Mrissútl. Less is known about developments farther east: the overlords of Retsúllu, the hierophants of Tsa’avtulgu, and the rôles of such eastern cities as Jækánta, Mimoré, and Elelún. It remains for historians and linguists to piece together the complex relationships of cultures that now are evidenced largely by a few stone monuments, artefacts, and occasional historical fragments. Later

authors have written about these matters, of course, but some of their works are clearly fictional, or are based upon mythology and legend.

“Bednálljan Salarvyáni,” as it is presently taught in the schools of the Five Empires, is thus largely a construct based upon the dialect employed by Queen Nayári’s academicians. The ornate Monumental Script used for stone inscriptions, coins, and the like, is only one of the written forms of the language. There were at least three other major literary varieties, plus several cursive forms, and even a type of “shorthand.” It is the Monumental Script that forms the basis for Classical Tsolyáni and certain other traditions that managed to remain separate from the Engsvanyáli language and script that followed the religious renaissance of the Priest Pavár.

Various features of the Bednálljan Monumental Script are related to earlier patterns and structures in the Irzákh writing system of the so-called Dragon Warriors of N’lüss. Not all of these appear in Engavanyáli. It is apparent, thus, that the Bednálljan tradition emerges more directly from Irzákh and related sources, while Engsvanyáli belongs to a somewhat different branch of the family.

CONSONANTS:

The script is written either right to left or left to right, depending upon the scribe’s perceived needs. Thus, a text placed to the left of a figure who is supposed to be speaking it will be written from right to left: i.e. as if it were emerging from the direction of the figure. If the text is to the right of its figure, it will be written from left to right. Text may also be written from top to bottom, but never from bottom to top.

Each Bednálljan consonantal grapheme represents a single phoneme. There are no “silent letters.” In order to fit the script to an English typewriterkeyboard, various compromises have been made. In many cases, there is no relation between the usual value of the English key and the value of the Bednálljan symbol: e.g. “Q” is not used for a “kw” sound at all but rather for the “dz” of “adze” or the “ds” of “rods.” The symbols inside forward-slashes (/.../) are a modified phonemic transcription using English letters and conventions: e. g. /p/ = a phoneme with allophones similar to those of English /p/. In several cases, diacritics or symbols for phonemic symbols are not available on the standard English keyboard, and digraphs must be employed instead: e.g. “ch” = the “ch” of “church.” The correct symbol would be a /c/ with a “hatcheck” (upside-down circumflex, as in Czech and some other languages).

The keys of the standard English keyboard are used for the consonants of Bednálljan as follows:

“Q” = a voiced alveolar affricate: “dz.” The “dz” of “adze” or the “ds” of “rods.”

“W” = a diacritic put over a consonant letter to indicate labialisation: i. e. /t/ + this diacritic = /tw/; /k/ + this diacritic = /kw/.

“R” = a lateral voiced trill: “rr.” The “rr” in Spanish “perro.” Compare “r,” below. This is uncommon in Bednálljan, but the Irzákh tradition utilises it frequently; it is thus included in Bednálljan

“T” = a voiceless interdental fricative: “th.” The “th” in “thigh” or “moth.” Cf. “D,” below. This is relatively common in Bednálljan.

“Y” = a voiced alveolar lateral affricate: “dl.” Similar to the “dl” in “ladle” or “battle.”

“P” = a diacritic placed over a consonant letter to indicate palatalisation: e.g. “t” + this diacritic = “ty,” “k” + this diacritic = “ky,” etc.

“q” = a voiceless back velar stop: /q/. The “q” of Arabic “Qur’an” or “Qadi.”

“w” = a voiced bilabial fricative: /w/. The “w” in “win” or “wise.”

“r” = a voiced single-tap alveolar vibrant: /r/. The “r” in Spanish “pero” or “por.” This is not the “r” in American English “run” or “bare,” nor the British English “r” in “bar.” Cf. “R,” above.

“t” = a voiceless alveolar(or dental) stop: /t/. The Spanish “t” in “tu” or “tan.” This is fortis and slightly aspirated.

“y” = a voiced palatal fricative: /y/. The “y” of “yes” or “yellow.”

“p” = a voiceless bilabial stop: /p/. The “p” of “pay” or “pool.” This is fortis and slightly aspirated.

“S” = a voiceless alveopalatal fricative: “sh.” The “sh” of “ship.”

“D” = a voiced interdental fricative: “dh.” The “th” of “thy” or “bathe.” Cf. “T,” above.

“F” = a diacritic placed over a consonant to indicate glottalisation or pre-glottalisation. This, again, is an historical survival that is uncommon in Bednálljan. A more common usage is to employ this diacritic to show consonantal lengthening or doubling: e.g. the /ll/ in “Bednálljan.” It is thus identical to “V” below. “F” is preferred in some words, while “V” is used in others. There may also be dialectal or historical differences.

“G” = a voiced velar fricative: “gh.” The “ghain” of Arabic, or the medial “g” in German “Wagen.”

“H” = a voiceless alveolar affricate: “ts.” The “ts” of “hats” or “pots.”

“L” = a voiceless alveolar lateral fricative: “hl.” The “ll” of Welsh “Llewellyn.”

“s” = a voiceless alveolar or dental grooved fricative: /s/. The “s” of “so” or “sin.”

“d” = a voiced alveolar (or dental) stop: /d/. The “d” of Spanish “dinero” or “dar.”

“f” = a voiceless labiodental fricative: /f/. The “f” of “fan” or “fool.”

“g” = a voiced velar stop: /g/. The “g” of “go” or “gag.” (Never the “g” of “gym”).

“h” = a voiceless glottal fricative: /h/. The “h” of “hat” or “hook.”

“j” = a voiced alveopalatal affricate: /j/. The “j” of “judge” or “jim.”

“k” = a voiceless velar stop: /k/. The “k” of “kin.” This is fortis and slightly aspirated.

“l” = a voiced lateral post-dental sonorant: /l/. The “l” of “lie” or “long.”

“Z” = a voiced alveopalatal fricative: “zh.” The “Zh” of “Zhukov” or the “s” in “pleasure.”

“X” = a voiceless retroflex alveolar or post-alveolar sibilant: “ss”. This does not occur in European languages but is found in Sanskrit and certain other Indic languages. This is rare in Irzákh but more frequent in Bednálljan.

“C” = a voiceless alveolar lateral affricate: “tl.” The “tl” of Aztec “Atlal” or “Tlaloc.”

“V” = when placed before a consonant, this symbol indicates that the following consonant is doubled: i.e. held or prolonged before release for twice as long as a single consonant: e.g. this diacritic + /k/ = /kk/; this diacritic + /b/ = /bb/. “V” seems to be the common “doubler,” while “F” is restricted to certain specific words.

“B” = a voiceless bilabial fricative: “hw.” Similar to the “wh” in “when” or “which.”

“N” = a voiced velar nasal sonorant: /ng/. The “ng” of “sing” or “long.” This occurs word-initially, medially, and finally. It is also found doubled.

“M” = a diacritic placed over a consonant letter to indicate pre-aspiration: e.g. /n/ + this diacritic = /hn/; /m/ + this diacritic = /hm/. This is fairly frequent in Bednálljan.

“?” = a voiceless glottal stop: /ʔ/. The glottal stop between the two words in a careful pronunciation of “the elephant”; the “catch in the throat” used instead of a “t” in Cockney English pronunciations of “bottle” or “little.”

“z” = a voiced alveolar or dental grooved fricative: /z/. The “z” of “Zulu” or “Zanzibar.”

“x” = a voiceless velar fricative: “kh.” The “ch” of Scots “loch” or the “ch” German “ach.”

“c” = a voiceless alveopalatal affricate: “ch”. The “ch” of “chin” or “church.”

“v” = a voiced labiodental fricative: /v/. The “v” of “vine” or “vase.”

“b” = a voiced bilabial stop: /b/. The “b” of “boy” or “book.”

“n” = a voiced alveolar or dental nasal sonorant: /n/. The “n” of “no” or “pan.”

“m” = a voiced bilabial nasal sonorant: /m/. The “m” of “mother” or “man.”

Two diacritics cannot be placed over one consonantal symbol. One of the diacritics is dropped; which one does not seem to have mattered to the Bednálljan scribes. In this, they were less “neat” than the writers of Irzákh, who had various methods of indicating the value of the diacritic on both letters.

VOWELS:

Word-initial vowels and diphthongs are written with special symbols. This does not follow the practice of Irzákh, which uses a single symbol + a vowel diacritic.

Initial /a/ =  Initial /e/ =  Initial /o/ =  Initial /i/ = 

Word-medial vowels are indicated by diacritics inserted directly beneath the consonant symbol that they follow in pronunciation.

Medial /a/ after /b/ =  (i.e.  + ) Medial /a/ after /t/ =  Medial /a/ after /p/ =  Medial /o/ after /b/ = 

INITIAL VOWELS:

Initial vowels are produced with the following keys:

“@” = the initial form of /ö/: a mid-front rounded vowel. The “ö” in German “böse.”

“E” = the initial form of /e/: a mid-front unrounded vowel. The “ay” of “bay” or the “a” of “fate.”

“U” = the initial form of /u/: a high back rounded vowel. The “u” of “flute” or the “oo” of “poodle.”

“I” = the initial form of /i/: a high front unrounded vowel. The “i” of “machine” or Spanish “sí.”

“O” = the initial form of /o/: a mid back rounded vowel. The “o” of “note” or “no.”

“{” = the initial form of the diphthong /ai/. The “i” of “bite” or “hi!”

“}” = the initial form of the diphthong /au/. The “ow” of “cow” or the “ou” of “shout.”

“|” = the initial form of the diphthong /oi/. The “oy” of “boy” or the “oi” of “noise.”

“A” = the initial form of /a/: a low mid unrounded vowel: /a/. The “a” of “father” or Spanish “padre.”

“K” = the initial form of /i/: a high central unrounded vowel. Found in Turkish as the “unbarred i”: [ɨ]. This is not always distinguished from /ü/. This was a distinct phoneme in Bednálljan. This vowel does not occur in English or the commoner European languages.

“.” = the initial form of /ü/: a high front rounded vowel. The “umlaut ü” of German “für” or “über.”

“<” = the initial form of /æ/: a low front unrounded vowel. The “a” of “cat” or “man.” This vowel is not common in Bednálljan, but it is fairly frequent in the Eastern dialects of modern Salarvyáni. It is not found in Tsolyáni, although it exists in N’lüss.


MEDIAL-FINAL VOWELS:

Word-medial and word-final vowels are produced with the following “dead” keys. The phonetic-phonemic values of these symbols are as for their initial forms, above.


Medial-final diacritics are:


- “!” = the diacritic for medial-final /ö/.
- “e” = the diacritic for medial-final /e/.
- “u” = the diacritic for medial-final /u/.
- “i” = the diacritic for medial-final /i/.
- “o” = the diacritic for medial-final /o/.
- “[“ = the diacritic for medial-final /ai/.
- “]” = the diacritic for medial-final /au/.
- “\” = the diacritic for medial-final /oi/.
- “J” = the diacritic for medial-final /i/.
- “a” = the diacritic for medial-final /a/.
- “,” = the diacritic for medial-final /ü/.
- “>” = the diacritic for medial-final /æ/.


A consonant without a following vowel is symbolised by the consonant letter alone, as might be expected. Examples are shown here from left to right. For example, a “closed” syllable

/rab/ is written /ra/ + /b/: 

Other sequences of vowels occur besides /ai/, /au/, and /oi/. These have no special “letters but are written with a consonant + a word-medial vowel followed by an initial vowel. Vowel clusters consist of no more than two members. Examples will clarify:

/bea/ is written /be/ + initial /a/: 

/miu/ is written /mi/ + initial /u/: 

/aeb/ is written initial /a/ + initial /e/ + /b/: 

OTHER SYMBOLS:

The keyboard contains other symbols besides graphemes representing sounds. The upper case of the top row of keys from “#” through “+” depicts special “ideograms” for whole words. Originally, the script lacked these, but they were gradually introduced under the influence of Irzákh and possibly early Mu’ugalavyáni. At first only the names of certain deities were

written in this fashion, but as time passed, a number of common nouns began to be written with these symbols instead of being “spelled out.” By the end of the period of the Dragon Warriors, some sixty or seventy such “ideograms” were in use, and Bednálljan expanded this number to perhaps a hundred.

There was no compulsion to use an ideogram—one could always spell a word out in “letters”—but it was considered “elegant” to do so, and in some manuscripts ideograms were inscribed in coloured inks and/or were gilded and embellished with miniature pictures. Ideograms carved in stone on monuments or worked in metal on weapons and tools were often surrounded with designs and arabesques to show their importance.

Only a few determinatives are provided here.

“#” = the ideogram for /béssir/ “man.”

“\$” = the ideogram for /xáth/ “woman.”

“%” = the ideogram for /sápal/ “city.” This is not the only word for “city,” and the same diacritic could be used for any one of them.

“^” = the ideogram for /páyeth/ “foe, enemy” and for “(hostile) stranger.” It was considered bad luck to mention enemies by name or give them prominence. The symbol is thus said to be “very small to wish one’s enemies ill.” This carried over directly from N’lússa. This glyph was no longer employed in later Bednálljan.

“&” = the ideogram for /Jighádh/ “war, battle.”

“*” = the ideogram for /mæshá/ “chief” or “king.”

“(“ = the ideogram for /métl/ “god, deity.”

“)” = the ideogram for /dhór/, the “Goddess of the Pale Bone.”

“_” = the ideogram for /jrákh/, the deity Ksáruł.

“+” = the ideogram for /va’ám/, the deity Vimúhla, the Flame Lord.

The lower case characters along the top row of the keyboard are numerals. “1” through “9” are straightforward; “0” = “10”; “-“ (the dash key) = “100”; and “=” = “1,000.” Examples of further combinations are: “5” + “0” = “50,” “9” + “100” (the “-“ key) = “900”; “3” + “1,000” (the “=” key) = “3,000”; “3” + “0” + “6” = “36”; “3” + “0” + “6” + “100” = “360”; “3” + “0” + “6” + “1,000” = “36,000.” “3” + “0” + “6” + “1,000” + “5” = 36,005,” etc. The system is cumbersome and was probably never intended to express much mathematical complexity.

Three more special symbols are:

“”” = the double quotation is used at the beginning of a document to denote the start of the text (and even /ngá/ “greetings!”) It may also denote a break between paragraphs or long utterances. This symbol is repeated on the “/” key.

“,” = the comma marks the end of a clause: i. e. a “comma”). The same symbol with the “V” doubler diacritic stands for a question mark in later Bednálljan documents. In inscriptions it is used to mark the end of a verse in poetry or song.

“.” = the period indicates the end of an utterance. Forms of this symbol vary. In some manuscripts it is embellished with colours and curleques. In inscriptions it is optionally omitted.

A font map of the Bednálljan script is as follows. Note that space requires that the symbols for the | and \ key be added at the lower right.

BEDNÁLLJAN FONT MAP											

