



DECIPHERING THE SCRIPTS AND LANGUAGES OF AFRIGHID KHOREZM: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

Mardonbek Rajapov Qosimboy ugli

PhD student, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Institute of History, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: Khorezmian script, Afrighid era, Aramaic alphabet, historical linguistics, archaeological research, cultural independence, Zoroastrianism, Islam, epigraphy, cursive language.

Received: 11.04.2024

Accepted: 16.04.2024

Published: 21.04.2024

Abstract: This review explores the evolution and scholarly investigation of Khorezmian scripts and languages during the Afrighid era (4th-10th centuries), focusing on their Aramaic origins and transformations post-Arab conquest. Significant findings from the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition have highlighted the minimal alterations in script style from the 3rd to the 8th century, despite cultural and religious shifts from Zoroastrianism to Islam. The research integrates contributions from both Soviet and international scholars, revealing that while the script's study began earnestly in the mid-20th century, many inscriptions from pivotal archaeological sites remain unpublished. Challenges in compiling and analyzing these texts are discussed, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive platform to publish and synthesize all findings. The paper also addresses the broader implications of script changes on the understanding of Khorezm's cultural independence and historical linguistics, suggesting that further research could refine our knowledge of regional interactions and script evolution in ancient Central Asia.

INTRODUCTION

The ancient roots of the script, language, and religion used during the Afrighid era (4th-10th centuries) are well-documented, especially the creation of the Khorezmian script in the 3rd century BCE based on the Aramaic alphabet. The Khorezmian language was closely related to the Eastern Iranian dialects of ancient Persian. Following the Arab conquest, the Khorezmian language and script gradually fell out of use,

becoming an entirely unintelligible dead language by the 10th and 11th centuries. Zoroastrianism was the primary religion worshipped in the region before the Afrighids and remained so until the 8th century when the Arab invasion led to the conversion of the Khorezm people to Islam, as recorded in all literary sources related to the history of Khorezm. It is also noteworthy that during the Afrighid era, aside from Zoroastrianism, people also practiced Buddhism, Shamanism, and Christianity.

METHOD

A comprehensive review of existing literature, including archaeological reports, historical documents, and prior scholarly analyses, forms the foundation of this study. This review aims to collate and synthesize previous findings on the economic, social, and political aspects of Khorezm during the specified period, identifying gaps and areas for further investigation. The analysis of the literature indicates that the majority of research conducted on the aforementioned issues coincides with the Soviet era, during which the role and significance of the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition (KAEE) were paramount. Particularly, the works of S.P. Tolstov, M.M. Dyakanov, M.N. Bogolyubov, A. Freyman, V.A. Livshits, V.G. Lukonin, N. Bichurin, O.I. Smirnova, and A.V. Gudkova have made significant contributions to the restoration and reading of ancient Khorezmian scripts.

The methodology adopted for this study integrates a multidisciplinary approach to explore the socio-economic and culture of Khorezm during the Afrighid dynasty, focusing on the period from the 4th to the 10th centuries. The research design is structured around the following methodological components:

Historiographical Review: In our research, we try to meticulously analyze the history of research related to Khorezmian scripts and languages. This includes:

- Comprehensively examining existing literature (archaeological reports, historical documents, scholarly studies) from both Soviet-era and international sources; Identifying key researchers and their main contributions to understanding scripts from the region;
- Identifying key researchers and their main contributions to understanding scripts from the region;
- Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of current research, pinpointing knowledge gaps or areas where further investigation is needed.

Archaeological Analysis: Archaeological discoveries form the foundation of the study. In our research on the following types of finds:

- Coins with inscriptions: To analyze the development of specific characters;
- Ossuary inscriptions: To understand the everyday use of script;
- Documents (on leather, wood, etc.) from sites like Tupraqal'a: To provide insights into the structure of the Khorezmian language and changes over time;

- Other artifacts (pottery, etc.) with inscriptions: Each adds a layer of information to the understanding of script use.

Comparative Linguistic Analysis: The study highlights the importance of comparing the Khorezmian script and language to other similar scripts and languages in the region. This involves:

- Identifying similarities and differences between Khorezmian and other Aramaic-derived scripts, particularly Sogdian;
- Comparing features of the Khorezmian language to closely related Iranian dialects;
- Using these comparisons to track regional influences and understand potential divergence in Khorezmian language and script development.

Interdisciplinary Synthesis: The study stresses the importance of combining insights from different academic fields:

- Archaeology: To provide physical artifacts with text;
- History: To provide contextualizing information about the Afrighid dynasty and cultural shifts in Khorezm;
- Linguistics: For in-depth analysis of the language and script from a grammatical and structural perspective;
- Economics (potentially): To understand how trade or governance might have influenced use of the script.

DISCUSSION

One of the researchers, E.E. Nerazik focusing on the Khorezmian script and language from the 3rd to the 8th centuries, notes that archaeological research has increasingly clarified these subjects, revealing more than 100 inscriptions in ossuaries, 18 documents on leather and wood from Tuproqqala, and two documents from the 8th-century site of Yakka-Parson. These findings undoubtedly confirm the basis of Khorezmian script on the Aramaic script and its connection to the Eastern Iranian language group[9; P.226.]. The author also notes the presence of dates, greeting forms, names, kinship terms, and names of days and months in the discovered Khorezmian inscriptions[9; P.226.]. V.A. Livshits categorizes the preserved Khorezmian inscriptions into four groups: 1) inscriptions on coins; 2) inscriptions on silver vessels; 3) documents from the Tuproqqala archive; 4) inscriptions in ossuaries from To'qqa'la cemetery. Livshits also mentions that the excavations conducted by KAEE helped identify the developmental stages of Khorezmian script and make certain corrections to Khorezm's "uncertain history" through comparative analysis with information from the works of Al-Biruni[7; P.433-434].

Research indicates that Khorezmian inscriptions were not only found on numismatic coins but also on various materials such as leather, clay surfaces, rims, pottery shards, worked wood, adobe walls, animal bones, and potsherds. These inscriptions come from a total of 12 archaeological sites: Oybo'g'irtepa, Xumbuztepa,

Qal'aliqir, Govur, Aqcha, Burli, Ayoq, Qo'yqirilganqal'a, Tuproqqal'a, Mizdahkon, To'qqal'a, and Yakkaporsan, as well as silver dishes from the regions around the Ural, Volga, and Kama rivers discovered during archaeological excavations[21; P.35-37.]. S.P. Tolstov, in 1962, assessed the discovery of Khorezmian inscriptions during excavations at To'qqal'a as accelerating the reading of the last group of Khorezm documents, noting that most documents were dated to the 7th, 8th, and 9th centuries, and collectively referred to as the "Afrigid era"[12; P.233]. V.A. Livshits compared an inscription from the 8th century found at To'qqal'a and archive documents from Tuproqqal'a, dated to the mid-3rd century with the Dura-Europos script, and also compared Sogdian inscriptions found from Mug mountain. He noted that the cursive use in Khorezmian script found at To'qqal'a was less frequent compared to other scripts, and that the evolution of the Khorezmian script from the 4th to the 8th century, based on the Aramaic alphabet, underwent fewer changes compared to scripts from other regions in Iran and Central Asia[12; P.235.].

Literature analysis reveals that Khorezmian scripts differ from other Aramaic scripts not only in certain character formations but also in their system of ideograms. This distinction is clearly reflected in the documents from Tuproqqal'a and the ossuary inscriptions from To'qqal'a, indicating the region's cultural independence. Researchers S.P. Tolstov and V.A. Livshits studied the inscriptions in To'qqal'a ossuaries, noting their relatively simple structure, typically including the date (year, month, and day of the deceased, though sometimes only the year). They also found that the term "tnbry'k" appears in all ossuaries, meaning "ossuary," and names of the deceased and their fathers are listed, providing personal identification and genealogical information[7; P.435-437].

Researchers including E.E. Nerazik, A.V. Gudkova, and V.A. Livshits have discussed the transformation of the old Khorezmian script after the Arab conquest. They adapted it to the Arab-Persian language, incorporating several letters not present in the Arabic alphabet. This adaptation is demonstrated in the Khorezmian version of al-Zamakhshari's Arabic explanatory dictionary, "Muqaddimat al-adab," which includes translations of Arabic words into the Khorezmian language[9; P.226. 15; P.86.].

From the 3rd to the 8th century AD, the main developments in the Khorezmian script were evidenced by the archives of Tuproqqal'a, inscriptions from To'qqal'a, Yakkaparsan, silver dishes, and texts in the Arab-Persian script, indicating its Aramaic-alphabet origin. Significant attention has been given to the problems of the Khorezmian calendar.

The language and script of Khorezm have also been prominently featured in the works of foreign researchers, whose major contributions, besides Soviet-era studies, include utilizing results from archaeological research in Iran and other regions. Notably, researchers such as V.B. Henning, N. Frey, E. Zaxau, F. Alzeyim, Z.V. To'gon, J. Benzing, D.N. Mackenzie, G. Azarpay, V.A. Livshits, L. Pavel, D.V. Bryukov, A.I. Naymark, V.V. Napol'skikh, and V.V. Ponaryadov have provided crucial information about Khorezm's language, script, and arts from ancient times until the 11th-12th centuries. International research has primarily focused on compiling a Khorezmian lexicon, defining the geographical and chronological boundaries of script and language usage, and grammatical structures through comparisons with other Aramaic-derived scripts. Specifically, V.B. Henning noted the cursive

nature of Khorezmian script comparable to Sogdian script[2; P.123.]. However, V.A. Livshits contested Henning's views, arguing that Khorezmian script was not cursive, based on inscriptions on coins where Khorezmian script appears on one side and Sogdian on the other, and inscriptions on wood and cloth which demonstrate otherwise[10; P.235].

Researchers N. Frey, E. Zaxau, and Z.V. To'gon have observed that the Khorezmian scripts in Tuproqqal'a and To'qqa'la have undergone minimal changes[9; P.13-20]. Additionally, when comparing the Khorezmian inscriptions found in the ossuaries of To'qqal'a from the 8th century with the Khorezmian dictionary written in Arabic in the works of Beruni, they noted no significant changes. Beruni was well-versed in the basic principles of Khorezmian spelling before the Muslim era.

L. Pavel, A.I. Naymark, and V.V. Napolskikh in their research conducted detailed comparisons between the language of the To'qqal'a inscriptions and the Khorezmian language of the 11th-12th centuries. They confirmed that the Khorezmian writing style was written from right to left, similar to Arabic. They also highlighted the scarcity of material on Khorezmian script complicates the reconstruction efforts grammatically and phonetically. Based on the existing evidence, they argued that Khorezmian grammar belongs to the inflective type, and its grammatical features, lexical richness, and syntactic structure are similar to the Sogdian language. The researchers pointed out one of the main syntactic features of the Khorezmian script is the sentence structure "subject+predicate+object," which differs from many other Iranian languages[3; P.95]. French researcher E. Vessyier emphasized Khorezm's unique Iranian language, Aramaic script, and distinct culture, though he noted that the data on these subjects are sparse and scattered[11; P.122].

Uzbek historiography has also studied these issues, predominantly based on Soviet-era literature. National historiography has illuminated the language, script, and religion of the Afrighid era through researchers such as M.Is'hoqov, O.Masharipov, M.Matniyozov, M.Abdullayev, O.Qdirniyozov, I.Jobborov, F.Utayeva, N.Davletova, Q.Masharipov, A.Matniyozov, and T.Matyoqubov[16]. These studies generally classify the language and script of the Afrighid era and emphasize the languages used in the region during that period. For example, M.Matniyozov notes that besides the Khorezmian language, Sogdian, Persian, and Turkic languages were used in inter-state relations during the Afrighid era[18; P.96], while M.Abdullayev mentions that the Khorezmian script was based on 20 letters, but it was complicated to read[12,P.14-20]. Researcher A.Matniyozov stated that the early Khorezmian script was in use from the 3rd-4th century BCE to the 7th-8th century CE, using the term "early Khorezmian" conditionally to distinguish it from the later Khorezmian script based on the Arabic alphabet, which according to Iranology classifications, both early and late Khorezmian language (and script) belong to the eastern group of Middle Iranian languages. He also noted that both types of script are under-researched and not specifically studied[19; P.35-37]. The researcher also referred to the works of B.I. Vaynberg and V.A. Livshits, with B.I. Vaynberg having studied ancient Khorezmian coins and created a chronological catalog of these coins, focusing on the paleographic aspects of the inscriptions during the cataloging process, and emphasizing that these cannot be directly compared to other ancient Khorezmian epigraphic texts. Based on epigraphic texts discovered from Khorezm fortresses, V.A. Livshits provided paleographic data that are mostly scattered and

limited to specific periods. Researcher N. Davletova outlined four periods in the formation and development of the Khorezmian script: 1) 8th-4th centuries BCE; 2) 4th century BCE to the 3rd century CE; 3) 3rd to 8th centuries CE; and 4) 8th to 11th centuries CE, noting that from the 8th century CE, the Khorezmian script gradually lost its ancient form under the influence of the Arabic alphabet, and the ancient Khorezmian language joined the group of dead languages by the 14th century CE. The author also highlighted that medieval scholars such as Abu Rayhan Beruni and the 13th-century jurist Najmiddin al-Hazini provided information about ancient Khorezmian script during their times[14; P.183-184]. Researcher I.Jabbarov noted that the documents from the Tuproqqal'a archive had an administrative-economic nature, and these documents were written in the Aramaic alphabet[15; P.96].

Among the epigraphic texts discovered in recent times, the wall tablets found in Aqchaxonqal'a bearing the dynastic names of over fifty Khorezmian kings are of significant importance. To date, only one of these names has been successfully deciphered. In 2015, researchers from the Khorezm Ma'mun Academy conducting archaeological excavations at Humbuztepa discovered a pottery shard inscribed with a single word, which presents opportunities to resolve some issues related to Khorezmian script[19; P.35-37].

Literature analysis indicates that the issue of Khorezmian script has not been specifically studied. It is necessary to acknowledge the work of Soviet scholars and international researchers that began in the 1950s. However, to this day, not all script samples related to Khorezmian writing from sites in the Khorezm region have been published. Specifically, of the over 100 epitaphs from To'qqal'a, only ten have been published; from the over fifty dynastic names of Khorezmian kings found in Aqchaxonqal'a, only one has been published; and from Humbuztepa, only one inscribed pottery shard has been published.

Considering that the entire body of Khorezmian script has not been specifically studied, it is difficult to draw final conclusions without resolving the following issues. First, gathering all materials obtained through archaeological research onto a single platform and publishing them; second, synthesizing all dispersed sites from the Soviet era and foreign countries to determine the development stages and directions of Khorezmian script; third, applying methods and tools used and being used in global practice in creating Khorezmian paleography; fourth, defining the features of Khorezmian script, and assessing the processes of convergence and divergence with its Aramaic counterpart from a historical perspective; fifth, by evaluating its epitaphic, cursive, and ligature characteristics, resolving issues related to its similarities and differences with Sogdian and other Aramaic scripts.

RESULTS

The most significant "result" in this article is its call to action. It demonstrates the necessity of addressing the identified knowledge gaps through focused research initiatives. The goal is to refine understanding of the fascinating story of Khorezmian script, language, and its wider implications for the history of Central Asia.

In this research, the following results were obtained:

1. Foundational Research: In this article we emphasize the significant contributions made by Soviet-era researchers, particularly the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition (KAEE). Their work helped establish the following:

- a) The Aramaic origins of Khorezmian script;
- b) The relative stability of the script form from the 3rd to 8th centuries, despite cultural and religious shifts in the region;
- c) The increasing use of cursive forms after the Arab conquest.

2. State of Knowledge: The study highlights advancements made by international scholars, which include:

- a) Building a Khorezmian lexicon;
- b) Delineating the geographical and chronological spread of the Khorezmian script;
- c) Analyzing grammatical structures and comparing them to related languages;

3. Unresolved issues: The article identifies critical gaps in current research and pinpoints areas where greater focus is needed. These include:

- a) Lack of Centralization: Numerous important inscriptions from Khorezm remain unpublished and scattered. This hampers comprehensive analysis;
- b) Absence of Khorezmian Paleography: There's no dedicated field of paleography focused on the Khorezmian script, hindering the ability to track its evolution and unique features systematically.
- c) Potential for Further Linguistic Analysis: Comparative research on Khorezmian and other regional languages holds the potential to reveal nuanced linguistic interactions and influences throughout Central Asia.

CONCLUSION

The study of Khorezmian scripts and languages during the Afrighid period offers a unique lens into Central Asian history and linguistic development. Extensive Soviet-era research, primarily through the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition, laid the groundwork for understanding the Aramaic roots of Khorezmian script and its evolution over time. While the script underwent minimal changes from the 3rd to 8th centuries, the Arab conquest introduced significant transformations in both language and script usage. Despite advancements in scholarship, a central challenge remains: the fragmented and unpublished state of numerous pivotal inscriptions from archaeological sites across Khorezm. Centralizing, publishing, and comprehensively analyzing these texts is paramount to gain a deeper understanding of Khorezmian script. Further study, specifically focused on Khorezmian paleography, will be invaluable in discerning distinctive features of the script, and tracing its evolution in comparison to other Aramaic-derived scripts. This research holds the potential to enrich our knowledge of Khorezm's cultural identity, historical linguistics, and regional interactions within ancient Central Asia.

REFERENCES

1. Durkin-Meisterernst D., Khwarezmian' in Windfuhr G. (ed.) // The Iranian languages, Routledge.2009.pp. 336-376.
2. Henning, W. B. The Choresmian Documents // Asia Major, new series, XI, 1965.123-pages.
3. Humbach, H..Choresmian, in Schmitt, R. (ed.) // Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum.Wiesbaden, 1989, P. 193-203.
4. Livshits V.A Some Khwarezmian Names // Studies on Iran and the Caucasus, ed. U. Bläsing et al. Brill. Leiden 2015.pp.317–324.
5. Livshits V.A. The Kwarezmian calendar and the eras of Ancient Chorasmia // Acta Antiquae Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae №16.967.pp-433-437
6. Livshits.V.A. Three Silver Bowls from the Isakovka Burial-Ground No. 1 with Khwarezmian and Parthian Inscriptions // Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia.№ 9.1/2. 2003.pp.147–172.
7. Nerazik E.E. History and culture of Khwarizm. History of Civilizations of Central Asia The crossroads of civilizations A.D. 250 to 750.Vol.3. Ed. Litvinsky B. A. UNESCO Publishing.Paris.1996.p.226.
8. Pavel L. Some New Readings of Chorasmian Inscriptions on Silver Vessels and their Relevance to the Chorasmian Era // Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia № 24/1-2.2018. pp.279–306,
9. Togan Z. V. Documents on Khorezmian Culture, Part 1. Muqaddimat al-Adab, with the translation in Khorezmian. Istanbul, 1951.P 13-20.
10. Tolstov S.P, Livshits V.A.Decipherment and Interpretation of the Chwarezmian Inscriptions from Tok-Kala // Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae №12.1962.p 233-235.
11. Vaissière É . Asie centrale 300-850: Des routes et des royaumes. –Paris: Les Belles Lettres,2024. –122 page.
12. Абдуллаев М.С.Қадимий Хоразм тарихи ва Хоразм давлатчилиги. Тошкент.2019. Б-14-20.
13. Гудкова А.В. Ток-кала. – Т.: Фан, 1964.С.86.
14. Давлетова Н.Н. Қадимги хоразм тили: унинг тарқалиши ва баъзи халқлар тилига таъсири // “Хоразм - Марказий Осиё цивилизацияси тизимида .Урганч.2020. Б.183-184.
15. Джаббаров И. Древний Хорезм – страна высокой культуры и уникальной духовности (Этно-исторические очерки). Москва.2014. С.96.
16. Исҳоқов М.М. Қадимги ёзма ёдгорликлар (мавзули монография). Тошкент: Ёзувчи, 2000., Центральная Азия в системе мировой письменной культуры (древность и раннее средневековье). Ташкент: УМЭД, 2008., Слово о хорезмской письменности // O'zbekiston arxitekturasi va qurilishi. №1.2008., Хоразмда қадимги сиевушийлар сулоласи. Асотирми ёки хакикат? // Шарқшунослик. №1. – 2009.
17. Қдирниёзов О.Ш.Маракзий Осиё цивилизацияси ва илк ўрта асрлар Хоразм маданияти // Ўзбекистон тарихининг долзарб муаммоалари ёш тадқиқотчилар талқинида. Самарқанд,2013. Б.65-69.
18. М.Матниёзов, Я.Олламов. Хоразм давлатчилиги тарихи. ўқув–услубий қўлланма. Урганч – 2009., Хоразм тарихи I жилд. Урганч.1996. Б.96

19. Матниёзов А. Қадимги Хоразмий ёзма ёдгорликларини ўрганишдаги долзарб муаммолар // Ўзбекистон тарихининг долзарб муаммолари ёш тадқиқотчилар талқинида. Самарқанд – 2016. Б.35-37.
20. Машарипов О. Хоразм тарихидан саҳифалар. Тошкент.1994., Хоразмнома: Хоразм, юксалиш ва инқироз. Хоразм. 2007. Б.15