

century B.C. At all events, it is well known that the Persian monarchs of the Akhæmenian period employed Aramæan scribes, and that the Kharoshthī writing, even if originally Indian (according to Sir A. Cunningham and others), has assumed under their hands a manifestly Aramaic character, flowing like all Semitic writing from right to left. Possibly, however, as it seems to me, Grecian influences (which penetrated into India before the time of Alexander) may have partially operated in assimilating this early North-western Indian script to a Phœnician type. It may be excluded from our present inquiry, because it never became generally current in India, and never developed into a form suitable for printing.

The second kind of ancient Indian script is called Brāhma (or Brāhmī lipi). This is without doubt the oldest of the two principal forms¹. Its claim to greater antiquity is proved by its name Brāhma—given to it by the Brāhmins, because, as they assert, it was invented by their god Brahmā²—an assertion which may be taken as indicating that, whatever its origin, it was moulded into its present form by the Brāhmins.

And undeniably it is this Brāhma writing (Brāhmī lipi) which has the best right to be called the true Indian Brahmanical script. It must have been the first kind of writing used when Sanskrit literature began to be written down (perhaps six centuries B.C.), and it is the script of the Aśoka inscriptions of Central and Northern India—and even of North-western India, where it is found concurrently with the Kharoshthī. It was employed to express the Prākṛit dialect³ of the Buddhist kings, and flowed, like its later development called Nāgarī, from left to right. Its first appearance on actually existing inscriptions—so far as at present discovered—cannot be placed earlier than the date of these kings in the third century B.C.

But it is important to note that the existence of the Brāhmī lipi in India must be put back to a period sufficiently early to allow for its having once flowed from right to left like the Kharoshthī, probably as early as the sixth century B.C. This is made clear by the direction of the letters on an ancient coin discovered by Sir A. Cunningham at Eraṇ⁴—a place in the central provinces remarkable for its monumental remains. One can scarcely accept seriously the suggestion that the position of the short *ṛ* in the present Nāgarī is a survival of the original direction of the writing⁵.

If then any unprejudiced Hindū scholar will examine attentively the tables in Professor Bühler's book, he will, I think, be constrained to admit that the Indian Brāhma letters have certain features which connect them with the ancient Phœnician script, and therefore with the Greek and Roman.

It should not, however, be forgotten that an interval of nearly seven centuries separates the Phœnician from the Brāhma inscription-letters, and that to make the affinity between the two alphabets clearer the side-lights afforded by collateral and intermediate Semitic scripts ought to be taken into account⁶. Nor should it be forgotten that when the Hindūs, like the Greeks, changed the direction of their writing, some of the symbols were turned round or their forms inverted, or closed up or opened out in various ways.

The further development of the Brāhma symbols into the modern Deva-nāgarī and its co-ordinate scripts⁷ is easily traceable. It must, however, be borne in mind that the later Pandits tried to improve the ancient graphic signs by setting them up as upright as possible and by drawing a horizontal stroke to serve as a line from which the letters might hang down, and so secure a system of straight writing—often conspicuously absent in Hindūstānī and Persian calligraphy⁸.

I here append a table consisting of seven columns, in which I have so arranged the letters as to illustrate the view that the Phœnician alphabet spread about 800 B.C. first westward towards Greece and Italy, and secondly eastward towards India.

The column marked 1 gives ten Phœnician letters. That marked 2, to the left of 1, gives the ten corresponding Greek letters; that marked 3 the corresponding Roman; and that marked 4 the corresponding English letters. Then the column marked 2, to the right of 1, gives the ten corresponding Brāhma letters; that marked 3 shows the gradual developments of the Brāhma symbols as exhibited on various inscriptions; and that marked 4 gives the corresponding letters in modern Nāgarī⁹.

¹ A variation of it called Bhaṭṭiprolu is described by Bühler.

² In the same way the great Arabian Teacher Muhammad declared in the first Sura of the Kurān (according to Rodwell, p. 2, and Sale, p. 450 with note) that 'God taught the use of the pen.' Even some Christians may not be indisposed to agree with Hindūs and Muhammadans in holding that the faculty of writing, as an instrument for the expression of thought—although dormant through all the early ages of the world's history—is as much a divine gift as language. Muhammad's view, however, of the divine origin of writing consisted in declaring that the Kurān descended ready written from heaven.

³ For the language of the inscriptions, see p. xxv, note 3.

⁴ These letters are shown in Professor Bühler's tables.

⁵ Our invaluable decimal notation certainly came from India, and may be said to conform to Semitic methods in the direction

of the notation, inasmuch as units are placed on the right, while tens and hundreds are on the left.

⁶ Professor Bühler's first table in his work on Indian Palæography would have been more convincing had he given examples of collateral and intermediate Semitic forms.

⁷ Such as the Bengālī, the Marāṭhī, Gujarātī &c., some of which may be usefully studied as presenting forms more closely resembling the ancient Brāhma letters.

⁸ A similar line is often drawn in English copybooks and on writing paper as an aid to straight writing, but always *below*, not above the letters.

⁹ Dr. Lüders, of the Indian Institute, has kindly assisted me in the right formation of some of the inscription letters. The roughness of some is due to their being photographs from original impressions.