

## Mediæval Kabardian Alphabet: Kassogian Inscriptions in Kabarda

[Collected by Amjad Jaimoukha based on Peter Dobrev's  
*Inschriften und Alphabet der Urbulgaren*, 1995.

This theme is in need of further development by specialists to reproduce  
the whole mediæval writing system of the Kabardians]

**T**he early Middle Ages was a very interesting period in the history of the alphabets. Various alphabets developed at different places of Eastern Europe at that time. Some of them later spread thousands of kilometres by the large migrations of peoples. During this period, quite different alphabets were developed almost simultaneously in the Caucasus and in its bordering areas – the Kassogian alphabet, the Armenian alphabet, the Georgian alphabet, and the alphabet of the Caucasian Albanians. G. Turchaninov discovered a multiplicity of inscriptions of this type in the North Caucasus, Southern Ukraine, and in the Imeon (Pamir) mountains. The direction of writing from left to the right, although rare in the East, was characteristic of a number of Caucasian peoples, such as the Kassogs, etc.

The Kassogs, proto-Kabardians or the ancestors of the Kabardians, had developed a runic alphabet of the Murfatlar type in the sixth-seventh centuries AD.<sup>1</sup> Most probably this intellectual development was an adjunct to the spread of Christianity in Kassogia (Kabarda), where there was need to spread the good word, so to speak.



Armenian sources of the seventh century AD mentioned that the people 'Kash' (the Kassogs) lived 'between the Bulgars and the Pontus', i.e. in the area between that of Kubrat Bulgaria (north of the Kuban River and Sea of Azov) and the Black Sea. The Kassog dominion also comprised the lands between the Don and Kuban. The Kassogs were close

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<sup>1</sup> Runic inscriptions similar to the Kassogian inscriptions found in the Caucasus were discovered in Murfatlar (today Bessaraby), a small village in Northern Dobrudja in Romania. See the map reproduced in this account.

(westerly) neighbours of the Alans. That is why there is close similarity between the the Kassogian inscriptions between the Don and Kuban, the Alanian inscriptions, discovered along the lower course of Don, and Proto-Bulgarian runic inscriptions from Murfatlar (in Romania).

### **Kassogian written language**

In one of the Kassogian inscriptions, G. Turchaninov read the title 'KHAN KAISIHI'. Seven out of the ten characters of the Kassogian inscription appear in Murfatlar; two were of a somewhat modified appearance. The Kassogian and Alanian inscriptions helped to interpret 20 Murfatlar characters. In the Kassogian alphabet the first character is a special vowel which sounds as 'ua'. This vowel is reminiscent of the sound 'oa' of the word 'zoapan', found on the Proto-Bulgarian treasure by Nagy Saint Miklos. The next character is, likewise, quite common in the Kassogian and the Alanian languages. It denotes the sound 'r'. The same character, not as 'r' but as 'l', appears in some Caucasian alphabets – for example in the writings of the Caucasian Alans and in one version of the Georgian alphabet. The differences in its sound value are explained by its origin as an Aramean character, which denoted different sonar consonants - r, l and n. In our case it indicates the letter 'r'. That is not only underlined by the Alano-Kassogian appearance of the entire inscription, but also by the fact that in the Glagolic alphabet, once very common in our areas, the sound 'r' was expressed by exactly the same character. In the texts discovered by G. Turchaninov, the fourth character  is met quite often and its sound value is 'an' or 'on'. That is, in this case we also have a character of Alano-Kassogian type. The character  is read exactly as AN=God in some eastern alphabets (Kassogian, Alanian).

  is rendered as 'God's Cloister' in Kassogian.



On the walls of Murfatlar church there is a depiction of a person in church garbs, with a halo around his head. His right raised hand holds a large cross, and above it there are four characters:

Y D 7 X  
IU AN E E

All characters have direct parallels from Kubrat Bulgaria – the first character correspond to the local U, pronounced as ‘iu’ and ‘io’. The second - **D**, is the same as the Kassogian letter **D**, and it sounds as ‘on’. The third, corroded and only partially preserved character is ‘e’, and fourth is the Alano-Kassogian ‘e’ again. The inscription reads ‘IOANE E’, and obviously refers to a saint named ‘IOAN’ (‘John’). It remains to be seen to which saint the inscription referred to, as there are several saints with that name.

All characters have Alanian and Kassogian parallels:

Y D S 7 Y : 6 b 9 . X : A : X . 7 : Y < 9 . 9 1 : Y < : < 0 X < . 1 9  
U A N C H U S A N 7 A N ( I ) S I N U O N N I U O O S S I O I N

Scattered on a church wall, the following short inscriptions were found: ‘JAFJA’, ‘NIEKHES...’. Although the words are in these inscriptions are deeply and clearly carved, their meaning was a mystery.



Location of Murfatlar in southeast Romania,  
where the 'Murfatlar' runic system was discovered.

[Courtesy of [Vassil Karloukovski](http://groznijat.tripod.com/index.htm) <<http://groznijat.tripod.com/index.htm>>]

What does 'JAFJA' or 'EFE(...)' from the church wall mean? And why does one meet the special character 'JA' in this word so frequently in the Caucasus and in Southern Dagestan? Why does it appear so frequently on holy items or in early Christian texts?! All these questions can be answered without difficulties with the help of the eastern languages. In Persian and in Tadjik 'JAFJA' (or 'EHJE') means 'Resurrection'. A number of other eastern languages – Kabardian, Old Syrian and Armenian, have words such as 'UAFE', 'AFE', 'IUV', meaning, amongst other things, 'HEAVEN', 'HOLINESS', 'WORSHIP', all words connected with religion and heaven.

The Kassogian alphabet was similar to the alphabets shown in the following table:

Kubrat Bulgaria	Murfatlar & Pliska	Imeon	Murfatlar & Pliska
Щ	Щ	А	А
Б, б	Б, б	Б	Б
А, а	А, а	Г	Г
Д, д	Д	К	К
З	З	Я	Я
К, к	К	Я	Я
Г	Г	У	У
У	У	У	У
Д	Д	Ф	Ф
И	И	Ф	Ф
Б	Б, б	Х	Х
А	А	Х	Х
Х	Х	К	К
У	У	А	А
У	У	У	У
С, с	С, с	У	У
Д	Д	К	К
Ф	Ф	С	С
Г	Г	С	С
*	*	А	А
Щ	Щ	У	У
Т	Т	У	У
Д	Д	Х	Х
		О	О

The word 'ТИН' above the entry of a cave in Madara, means in Celtic a 'cloister, a place of solitude':

𐌲 𐌲 = 𐌲 𐌹  
ТИН = tigh (Celtic)

Тih (ТЫХЬ) means 'sacrifice', 'sacrificial offering' in Kabardian.

Religious terms, marked with a 'tilde', are also discovered in Western Caucasus. It was probably brought to the region of Caucasus by Byzantine missionaries. The religious traditions probably brought with them certain characters and symbols. Thus the character 'tilde' has travelled a very long journey back – from the Greeks to the Christian Caucasians, to the Proto-Bulgarians, and, finally, to the Slavs.

Some authorities believe that there might be some connection between the Old Kabardian written language and the family heraldic emblems still used by present-day Circassians.

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