

Re: The map of typological features

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- *From:* "Yusuf B Gurseey" <ybg@xxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 17 Jun 2006 07:28:46 -0700
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John Atkinson wrote:

"Yusuf B Gurseey" <ybg@xxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote...

IIRC Jensen or Diringer in their books on alphabets speculated that the inventor just assigned numbers for the previous letters just to make it easier to study.

The first twelve letters of the original Divehi script were already used for numbers — the inventor just transferred ten of them to be the second ten letters of his new system (not corresponding to the same phonemes as in the old script, though, it appears).

Seems to me that, since there were already two scripts available and known to many of the speakers of the language (the Divehi and Arabic scripts), there must have been an incentive for them to invent and then to take up a new one. It makes sense that (as the royal family website implies) the Divehi script was unacceptable to some enthusiastic Muslims because it was closely associated with the old Buddhist religion, but at the same time the nobility and/or the intelligentsia didn't want it to look like they were letting foreigners impose their script on them. So they threw them both out and invented a completely new script with elements of both (and better than either for representing the Maldivian language, as it turned out).

The old script continued to be used in parallel with Thaana for three hundred years, up to early in the 20th century.

Government literature from Maldives says that "Thaana script was invented and introduced to accommodate Arabic sentences and words into the Divehi texts." It's hard to see the logic in this statement. The only advantage of Thaana over the old script for "accommodating Arabic sentences" is that it's written from right to left instead of left to right. Anyway, Arabic isn't written as such in Thaana text. Rather, it's transliterated, and in

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it might have been in older times, as was done in ottoman turkish. and buddhists used the uighur script (to accomodate chinese) vertically while muslims used it horizontally (to accomodate arabic). so there are precedents, and it may have been done earlier.

order to do so, 12 extra letters had to be specially invented. And these, like the 24 standard letters, bear no resemblance to the corresponding Arabic letters. Rather, they consist of the closest-sounding Thaana letters with added dots. This approach could just as easily have been adopted when writing in the old script. (And it probably was).

Juhn.