



## MACEDONIA'S ROLE IN THE CREATION AND DISSEMINATION OF ANCIENT WRITTEN SIGNS AND ALPHABETICAL SYSTEMS THROUGH THE AGES

Krste Iliev, Natalija Pop Zarieva and Marija Krsteva

*University "Goce Delcev", Republic of Macedonia*

The aim of this hypothesis is to compare the interrelatedness between the Phoenician, Greek and Latin alphabet and the Macedonian Cyrillic alphabet, based on new research challenges in exploring recently evidenced peculiarities in age and identity of literacy signs, found at various sites within the Republic of Macedonia. These findings on tomb stones, excavations and rock art engravings point to written signs, some of them as old as 9.000 years, others offering incredible assumptions for consequent alphabets. Some of the ancient signs discovered in the Republic of Macedonia date back some 40.000 B.C. (Vasil Iljov, Marija Gimbutas). This analysis particularly explores the missionary role of the Phoenician ruler Cadmus in his diffusion of Mediterranean written signs, later foundations for alphabetical systems. His trips took place around 2000 B.C. and included the famous ancient cultural and educational town of Ohrid, Kutmichevica (after the name of Cadmus), in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as other regions of the European civilization's linguistic territories. The scientific facts in this paper encounter mythology on its way to the formation of alphabets and their impact upon actual and fundamental intercultural exchange and evolution of the European letters. The ancient assumptions related to the literacy missionary, the ruler Cadmos, led to the quest in this paper for distinctiveness and interaction between the Macedonian, Cyrillic alphabet, and the other Phoenician, Greek and Latin alphabets.

**Keywords:** First written signs, Ancient macedonian language, Phoenician alphabet, Cadmus, Saint kiril and metodij, Saint kliment ohridski, Cyrillic alphabet, Greek and latin alphabets.

### Introduction

Macedonia is a country which offers some of the richest archaeological findings on the Balkan peninsula. The latest explored evidences witness that its cultural layers are rich of remains of a material culture dating back from the end of the Mesolithic and the beginning of the Neolithic period, i.e. from 7.000 - 6.000 B.C. A precise chronology of its development suggests a long continuity of people living in these places, of many changes and events, of the presence of a high culture of the so called pre Slav population, of the prehistoric Macedonian phonetic alphabet and the prehistoric Macedonian language. Furthermore we would like point to the fact that the territory of Macedonia in the past performed the role of "CATENA MUNDI" of the Eastern and Western Civilization through the interaction between the Macedonian , Cyrillic alphabet, and the Phoenician, Greek and Latin alphabets which was enhanced by Cadmos' journey towards the Balkans and included the famous ancient cultural and educational town of Ohrid and Kutmichevica, named after Cadmos, in the Republic of Macedonia. Later on, the pursuits of

Saint Clement and Saint Naum in the second half of IX century lead to Ohrid becoming one of the most developed and most famous medieval centres of Slavic culture.

## Literature Review

The prehistoric Macedonians belong to the Indo-European family of people who are believed to have lived in the Central Balkan Peninsula from 6500 to 5500 B.C and are credited with the creation of the Neolithic culture in this region. Macedonians, as proto-Indo-Europeans, were one of the first people to settle "Old Europe", part of the Central Danube basin. (Gimbutas, 1982). Referring to radio-carbon dating of artefacts which belong to the Anzabegovska and Vrsnik cultures in Macedonia, archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (1982), estimates that the linear symbols originated at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> millenniums B.C. It is estimated that this alphabet is about 2000 years older than the Sumerian alphabet. The writings found in Macedonia represent a testimonial to the presence of a culture and alphabet in existence for more than two millennia before symbols appeared in Mesopotamia.

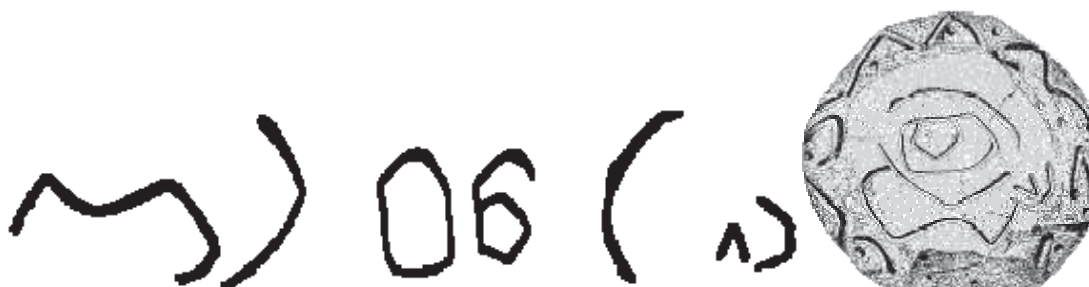
According to our newest palaeographic and paleolinguistic research signs of the sound alphabet have been discovered on the localities: Lepeneski Vir and Vincha in Serbia, Karanovo, Gradeshnitsa and Sitovo in Bulgaria, Tartaria in Romania as well as many localities in Macedonia. They go as follows: Trna Loma or Ilina Gora at Osinchani close to Skopje, Tserye at Govrlevo close to Skopje, Skochivir canyon close to Bitola, the Kratovo region the locality "Grmada" or "Gramada" east of Dolno Dupeni close to Resen, Trebenishte close to Ohrid etc. as well as the island of Lemn in the Aegean sea, the Pizza cave in Corinth and the island Lesb in Greece etc. (Iljov, 1996)

In recent times, among other scientists it is obvious that with over 20 years of work behind him, S.S Bilbiya put a huge effort in 1984 and 1989 when he offered a more acceptable solution to the problem of the so-called etruscan literacy with his endeavours to decipher many writings and texts on the material culture of the etruscans on the Balkan-Anatolian cultural complex, and prominent labours were made by G.S Grinevich who in 1993 tried to prove convincingly that the writings from Crete, Pil and other places with the random dating from 1700-1400 B.C. are not written on the so-called ancient Greek language but instead they are written on an old pre Slavic language.

## Main Part

On the basis of the paleographic and paleolinguist research done up till now, we can affirm that the so-called pre Slav language that is the so-called Aegean language, in other words the Minoan language or the language of the Pelazgian and other Macedonian tribes (Payonian, Piertian, Brygian or Phrygian, Venets or Enets etc) in fact represents a many functional flexible language of the ancient Macedonians which experiences its first innovations far back in prehistoric times while the morphologically relevant diverse peculiarities and the sounds of the phonetic and syntactic peculiarities move on a dialectic border which is a larger speaking area than the current ethnic area of Macedonia. (Iljov, 1998)

One exceptionally meaningful piece of evidence that a prehistoric Macedonian state did exist consists of the seals from the archeological site "Tserye" at the Govrlevo village, close to Skopje. Archaeologist Milosh Bilbiya, while researching the Neolithic suburb at Govrlevo on the 2nd horizon of living in 1982 - 1983, discovered a round ceramic seal with a handle in the shape of a stylized head of a bird, with a deeply engraved inscription on the round periphery of the artifact and on the round surface of the seal. The general composition of the inscriptions of the seal have a solar, cosmographic symbolism made up of written signs with the ancient Macedonian phonetic alphabet and in the ancient Macedonian language. On the surface of the circle a cosmography has been performed in the shape of concentric circles with graphemes and ligatures of the phrase:



which deciphered from the right to the left, properly transcribed with the letters of the modern Macedonian standard language, would say: “**СЛ С БО СМ**” [səl s bo səm] and that in the modern macedonian language means: “**САЛ СО БОГА СУМ**” (“SAL SO BOGA SUM”) or “**САМО СО ГОСПОД СУМ**” (“SAMO SO GOSPOD SUM”) in English it means “Solely with God I am”. On the oval surface along the circle (i.e., the perimeter round lateral side of the seal) the same phrase is engraved, but this time with calligraphic stylized letters of the ancient Macedonian alphabet, which forms the written signs of the so-called secret Macedonian alphabet, which was used for separate mythological, Vedic ligatures for marking secret messages or symbolic writing of different divine expressions. (Iljov, 1998)

Another great historic event and person set off towards the area of Macedonia: Cadmus, the legendary hero who came from Phoenicia and founded Thebes in Boeotia, is credited with the introduction of the Hebrew or “Phoenician” alphabet to the Greek language; in its Hellenized early form the alphabet is called Cadmeian. The classical Greek alphabet, its order of letters, and their form, were borrowed from the Hebrew-Phoenician alphabet; alpha, beta, gamma, delta, are but Grecized aleph, beth, gimel, dalet of the Hebrew language. We do not intend to clarify the differences in opinion between historians and paleographers referring the exact time of Cadmus’ arrival in this area, but to state Cadmus’ journey towards this region has enormous historical and cultural value for the overall Indo-European linguistic tradition and inheritance. The Phoenician alphabet was first taken to Crete, then in Attica, Corinth and Macedonia. It arrived in Rome around 700-500 B.C. and in Athens it arrived around 400 B.C. Thus, the commencement of Cadmus to the Balkans, brought about the adoption of the Phoenician alphabet on this area, and performed a valuable dissemination role in his diffusion of Mediterranean written signs, later foundations for alphabetical systems.

The existence of the ancient town of Lychnidos (today’s Ohrid) is also linked to the legend of the Phoenician Cadmus who fled to the Enhelians and founded the town of Lychnidos on the shores of Lake Ohrid. The Enhelei wanted Cadmus to be part of their tribe in order to defend them from the Illirians, who constantly threatened to attack them. They made Cadmus their king because it was professed that they would win the war against the Illirians if Cadmus and Harmonia were to be chosen as their leaders. The couple then led the Enchelean army and when they achieved victory they settled there. From Ohrid Cadmus proceeded towards the Adriatic coast and founded another town, Thebes, which is supposed to be Tivat in Montenegro today. The village of Kutmichevica near Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia, is named after Cadmus. (Skokljjev, 2010)

Many centuries later, a rich literary activity was developed during the strong Macedonian Empire of Samoil by the end of 10th and the beginning of the 11th century, and happened in the area of Ohrid. During this time Ohrid Archbishopric was founded, which aside its church authority, nourished the cultural development of its ethos. It is known that the initial steps of Slavic literacy had been made in this part of Macedonia. This activity was rooted in the 9th and 10th century, through the mission of Slavic enlighteners Saint Kiril and Saint Metodij. The great education deed, which commenced in this area, was continued by their disciples St. Clement and Naum, who worked in Ohrid and Kutmichevica region. The oldest phase of the Proto-Macedonian sound alphabet, originating from the beginning of the

Neolithic, served Saints Kiril and Metodij as a prototype for composing the glagolitic, and later Saint Kliment Ohridski for composing the cyrillic and probably for Trp Ruen in composing the ruenithic. (Iljov)

Kliment was the first to come (886) and Naum joined him fourteen years later in (893) in the district of Kutmicevica. With their arrival, Ohrid developed into a leading center of Slavic cultural and literary activity.

Kliment spent thirty years among the Macedonian Slavs. The first Ohrid literary school was founded at his monastery church of St. Pantalejmon in Ohrid, (built in 893). The 3500 pupils who came out of this school spread the Slavic script, culture, art and church singing across several Slav landsas far as Kiev in mediaeval Russia. By the end of the 9th century and beginning of 10 th century the Slavic literacy, spirituality and culture were founded. Ohrid was a center of Slavic literacy, spirituality and culture. Ohrid has a disserved place in the spreading of the Slavic literacy and spirituality in Europe and across the world. The process of evangelism of the Slavic East by implementing Slavic words and Slavic church service began in Ohrid. It was spread through the Bulgarian Preslav to Kiev and Moscow, to the Far East in Asia, to the coast of the Indian Ocean, from Vladivostok on the south to the Kamcatka penincula on the north in present Russia. (Skokljev,2010)

Long after the death of Kliment in 916 and Naum in 910, the Ohrid literary school continued to be a source of manuscripts invaluable for Slavic studies and the history of art. This school began work on Macedonian soil in the 9th century and was a loyal adherent of the Glagolitic alphabet. Some of the most valuable Slavic manuscripts dating from the period up to the 12th century, when the Glagolitic alphabet was supplanted by the Cyrillic are attributed to it.

The specific Macedonian sound system of the prehistoric Macedonian alphabets offered 38 letters for the glagolitic and 44 letters for the middle age cyrillic. Generally speaking the sounds from the ancient macedonian sound system were marked with the following signs:

A (A, A, A), B (B, B), B (B, B), Γ (Γ), Δ (Δ, Δ), E (E),  
 F (F, F, F), X (X), Z (Z, Z, Z), S (S), I (I), U (U, U,  
 V), K (K, K, K), M (M), N (N), O (O, O, O, O, O),  
 P (P, P, P, P, P), Z (Z, Z, Z, Z, Z), O (O, O, O),  
 C (C, C, C), D (D, D, D, D), P (P, P), F (F, F, F),  
 G (G, G, G), T (T, T), X (X, X), Φ (Φ), Ψ (Ψ), Ω,  
 Y (Y), Ψ (Ψ), F (F), J (J), Y (Y)

The summation of these letters, according to Vasil Iljov (1996) as modifications shown in table no.1 makes up the general prehistoric Macedonian alphabet, which in the IXth cent. A.D. served as a prototype for the creation of the middle age modified alphabets Ruenithic, glagolitic and cyrillic. The reformer Kliment Ohridski probably knowing the old Macedonian alphabet and the ruenithic in the IXth cent. A.D. he only offered the Ys from the following so called new letters:

Ѓ, Y, H, Œ, ã, ѓ, Y, °, Í

but not as well the specifically macedonian (Slav) letters:

**B, J, C, Q, \, (%T)**

which the ancient Macedonians used from the end of the Mesolithic and the begining of the Neolithic with the exception of the consonantal cluster “ [T ] ” for which in the ancient Macedonian alphabet existed the signof the ligature.



## Conclusion

This approach towards the wealth of the prehistoric Macedonian language understands reviewing from a higher scientific level of the whole prehistoric material culture of Macedonia in the context of the Balkan – Anatolian cultural complex and wider by determining a new cultural centre as a source of dispersion of literacy and culture on the Eurasian continent and the world.

The past suspicious palaeographic presentation on part of the polygenetic development of literacy contributed to the favouring of certain later cultural milieux and nations as alleged primal centres of “civilisation export” and civilisation substratums while the real sources of the continual disciplined alphabet and the authentic culture from the palaeolithic uptill the present day on the Balkan spaces were either unknown for the wider scientific auditorium, or left at the margins of cultural interactions and the cultural continuity of humanity which from its part contributed so that some nations attributed a greater weight to themselves and projected themselves as far as they could into the past.

The fact that a lot of modern scientific pieces of evidence lead to the fact that the European continent developed a written sign system which differed completely from the Mesopotamian written signs, leads to the conclusion that the favouring of the Mideast and Neareast as the alleged discoverors of the original and sole alphabetical system as well as the alleged spread of civilisation waves from the east towards the west is not substantiated. and we might conclude that “Ex Oriente Lux” does not exist.

To conclude, the general point of this research is to present the way this geographical area played the role of “CATENA MUNDI” of the Eastern and Western Civilization though the interaction between the Macedonian, Cyrillic alphabet, and the Phoenician, Greek and Latin alphabets.

## References

1. Bilbiya S. S, *The mummy of Zagreb and other Etruscan, Lydian, Lycian written monuments*, The Institute of Etruscan Studies, Chicago - Michigan, 1989.
2. Bilbija M. *Man, bread and pottery*. Museum of the city of Skopje, R. Macedonia.
3. Gimbutas, Marija. *The civilization of the goddess: the world of Old Europe*. Harper Collins; Neolithic Macedonia, Los Angeles, 1976.
4. Grinevich G. S., *Vnachale bilo slovo: Slavianskaia Semantika Lingvisticheskikh Elementov Geneticheskogo Koda I*. Obshchestvennaia polza. 1993.
5. Iljov, V. *New findings about the literacy, language culture of ancient Macedonians*. Vo: "A -:" a cultural magazine. Skopje, year XIII, No. 5, 6 (1996).
6. Iljov, V. *The oldest written sign scripts witness the continuation and worldspread of Macedonian civilization*. Vo: "A ::" a cultural magazine. - Skopje, year XVI (1998).
7. Skokljeva A., Nikolovski S., Stefov R., *Macedonia in Ancient Times*. Makedonska Iskra. Skopje. 2010.