

02 Armenian Armenia & diaspora, AD 405 03 Bamum Cameroon, around 1884 04 **Bété** Côte d'Ivoire, 1950s

The Afáka writing system was created around 1908–1910 by

the Okanisi or Ndyuka language, a Surinamese Afro-English

cifically designed for a creole.

some 200 characters.

Usa Atumisi Afáka — who named the script after himself — to write

(creole) currently spoken by about 116,000 people in Suriname

in dreams, one by one, which he wrote on paper the next day.

thoughts into written stories. The script was later expanded to

In an unusual, possibly unique twist in the field of revealed

scripts, Afaka kept his writing system a secret until 1910, when he

saw Halley's Comet, which he interpreted it as a sign from a higher

or 'person who knows the script.' At any given time there is an

0

di

ma me/mi mo/mu na

Khom early 1900s

Ong Kommadam, a Lao resistance leader against the French co-

lonial state in the early twentieth century, would go into trances

during which he would repeat a sound and again and again until

with other resistance fighters in places as far away as Vietnam,

Cambodia and Thailand. This breadth of use was a sign of the

its corresponding symbol manifested itself on the bare skin of his

The script became a kind of wartime code, used to communicate

script's re-markable versatility. Even though it was initially created

for the Lao Thenh people, Kommadam established study classes

among his own and allied tribes, and the script enabled him to

the majority of their forces in Indo-China against him, massing

The original physical manifestation of the letters was part of

a broader narrative about Kommadam's body: he was said to be

impervious to bullets. His sons are said to have transcribed the

characters from his tattooed back after he was killed by the French.

9)

On November 23, 2006, the Minim Dag Noore script was created

by Mahamadi Ouédraogo, a Burkinabe man born in 1982 in the

descending from the sky, after extensive scholarly and spiritual

village of Lamba, in the Hauts-Bassins Region, Burkina Faso. The

script came to Ouédraogo as a revelation of 'diamond-like shapes'

travel of West and North Africa. Following years of development, a

subsequent dream directed him to disseminate his script among

Christian residents who have learned, respectively, right-to-left

The Minim script is yet to receive government approval, but it

European countries. Ouédraogo is still actively teaching the script

and his most popular YouTube video—a version of the Burkina Faso

In Mooré, minim means 'knowledge' - the script is also known

Fa Ngas Qua

la ma na sa fa ngas qua ra ta sang ga

a ba dja da ha wou za pahe vate yi ka

la ma na sa fa ngas qua ra ta sang ga

2 2 2 2

Ha Wou Za Pahe Vate Yi

da ha wou za pahe vate yi ka

Ra

G

and left-to-right scripts: it can be written and read either way.

is estimated that more than a thousand people have learned it,

in Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, and even in certain

national anthem in the Minim script — has over 28,000 views.

as minim biisi 'letters of knowledge'.

endangeredalphabets.net/minim

Minim is uniquely suited for a region which has both Muslim and

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khom script (Ong Kommadam)

Minim 2006

**Burkina Faso** 

Mooré speakers.

Right to left

Left to right

This so alarmed the French that at one point they mobilized

everything from elephants to fighters and bomber planes.

Co

og

forge alliances with other groups who spoke different languages.

Liberia, Guinea

chest—at which point a scribe would copy it down.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afaka syllabary

**■** vimeo.com/378805047

Anyone who learned the syllabary would earn the title bukuman,

edebukuman, or 'keeper of the script,' who is responsible for main-

u/ku

gi

ko/ku

ba/pa

6

le/li

do/du dyo/dyu

power that he should spread his knowledge.

taining the script and the wisdom it encodes.

and French Guyana. It is the only known script that has been spe-

According to community narrative, Afáka received the characters

He eventually generated 56 characters, with which he could convert

broadcast, from the first president of newly-independent Senegal Léopold Sédar Senghor, calling on his people to 'gather stones and build this new country,' found Faye out-side a cave called Garay, a word meaning 'the whiteness of the cotton flower,' as the interior of the cave was white. A vision struck him and he began writing on the sand. He called to a friend to bring him something to write on, and thus the Garay script came into existence.

Over the years after creating the script, Faye offered hundreds of face-to-face lessons in how to use it.. He translated the Qur'an into Garay, and his house filled with dozens of unpublished handwritten texts. He died in 2021, but his son is trying to continue his work. Garay has also made a fleeting pop-culture television appearance: in an episode of Star Trek: Discovery, the Universal Translator is in-fected with a virus and the computer begins to speak Wolof. At one point, the monitors on the bridge of the USS Discovery display the Garay script.

662062062 Ta Ra Nya Fa m = 100old Ma old Ka a ca ma ka ba ja NH & L N M C & L L ga da xa ya ta ra nya fa na 9/ 1/L \_W ha old na old ka

An Atlas of Endangered Alphabets, Tim Brookes, 2024

Medefaidrin 1927

Medefaidrin is spoken by a Christian group known as the Oberi Okaime ('freely given') Christian Church in the oil-rich Niger delta region of Nigeria. According to the community, the written language was revealed in 1927 to one of the founders of the community, Bishop Aikeld Ukpong on a 'spiritual board' visible only to the initiated, after Ukpong had been taken into seclusion by the Holy Spirit. But since Ukpong himself was not literate, it fell on the secretary of the group, Prophet Jakeld Udofia, to transcribe the writing—an especially ambitious achievement, given that at the

time their community was pre-literate. The community continued to develop the language and script through the 1930s and then started a school in which children were instructed in Medefaidrin. British authorities closed the school within a year, but the community continued to use Medefaidrin for church activities, including liturgy and hymns, and for letters and written contracts between members.

The religious community reportedly numbers about 4,000 members, but there are fewer than twenty adult speakers of Medefaidrin and only a handful have mastered the script, meaning that Mede faidrin is among the world's most endangered alphabets.

Ρ

eleven twelve thirteen fourteen fifteen en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medefaidrin

fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Medefaidrin

Pau Cin Hau 1900-1931 Myanmar

The Chin people, who occupy northwest Myanmar and Bangladesh, had no alphabet of their own before a prophet arrived named Pau Cin Hau. Apprenticed to a prophetess, Pau Cin Hau suffered a long illness and in 1900 began having a series of visions that foretold new technologies such as railway trains and steamships as well as devastating wars between nations. An Englishman appeared in Pau's visions and held a mirror up to his face in order to

~5000

force Pau Cin Hau to confront the calamities. By 1902, the Englishman returned to Pau Cin Hau to instruct him in the art of writing using stones in the shape of letters. When he had finally mastered the system he woke from the dream and began copying down the letters in a frenzy. The final version was

eventually completed in 1931. A year after his dream of writing, Pau Cin Hau received another vision which he interpreted as a divine order to reject the practice of propitiating nats (animist spirits) and to worship only one all-powerful god. Thus began the monotheistic Laipian movement, a Christian-inspired religious tradition that continues to this day in the Chin Hills and whose primary rituals are con-

cerned with healing.

tone marks en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pau Cin Hau (Unicode block)

Warang Chiti (Warang Citi, Varang

Kshiti) 1950s India tens of thousands

The anthropologist Cécile Guillaume-Pey writes: 'Among the Ho in

the 1950s in Bihar, Lako Bodra, born into a wealthy family, studied in a Catholic school, became a catechist and devised a script called the Varang kshiti.

inscribed on a memorial stone (sasan-diri) dedicated to his

ancestors. The Ho prophet claimed that the alphabet he found had been in fact created in the thirteenth century by a shaman named Dhawan Turi, whose visions he revisited in his own dreams... 'Lako Bodra consequently founded a religion that centers, in

tribal groups in central India...' Warang Citi remains very much a minority script even among the

Ho (who, as a Scheduled Tribe, are some of the poorest people in India), many of whom don't write their language in any form, and if they do write, prefer the standard Devanagari script.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warang Citi (Unicode block)

Armenia and diaspora 1,000,000+ The Armenian alphabet was introduced by Mesrop Mashtots and

Isaac of Armenia (Sahak Partev) in AD 405. Mashtots' biography recounts 'He struggled a long time without success, until one day miraculously he received a vision from God who instructed him and aided in this process.' 'God the All-Bountiful finally granted him that good fortune;

for with his holy hand he became the father of new and wonderful offsprings—letters of the Armenian language, and then and there quickly designed, named, determined their order and devised the

36 letters after extensive travel and research. A third theory holds that the story of the revelation was fabricated to impress the very god-fearing emperor of Byzantium so that he would allow the Armenians to abandon the Greek script that they had been using, thereby to strengthen their cultural identity by using a script of their own. Without a unique alphabet that differentiated them from surrounding peoples, the Armenians, ruled by various powerful empires, might have been subsumed and

assimilated. The alphabet was the key that allowed Armenians to

preserve their culture and identity while other cultures disappeared.

Թթ ժժ Իի Լլ Խխ Ծծ Կկ xe Ղո Ճճ Մմ Յլ Նն hi Չ› ጣպ Ջջ Ռռ Uu Վվ Sm Րր ՈՒու Փփ

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian alphabet fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Armenian

Kpelle 1930s Liberia, Guinea

Gbili, a chief from Sanoyea, in central Liberia, invented the Kpelle script in the 1930s. The script was revealed to him one night (in a different account, during an unusually long sleep of three days) in a dream through an angel messenger. Upon waking, Gbili summoned Lee-polu, to whom he dictated the script in essentially

This origin accorded the script special status among the Kpelle, for whom dreams are highly regarded as sources of wisdom. It was used by the Kpelle as a tool of elite literacy, considered a powerful commodity to be given to others judiciously and restricted to only a few atop the social and political hierarchies. One of Gbili's wives, Neni-tee, is said to have written messages to Gbili when he was traveling away, astonishing the people of Sanoyea by being able to predict the exact day of his return.

The growth of the syllabary was doomed by the local Lutheran mission, which developed a Latin-based script for the language and engaged in a widespread program of its teaching and publication. By the 1970s, the Kpelle script was being used by only a handful of enthusiasts for hut tax records, for the financial records of a store, and for recording court debts.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kpelle syllabary

Mro 1980 Bangladesh, India several hundred

Menley Mro was born in 1965 in rural Bangladesh. His father named him Menley, but in time people came to know him as Kramadi from the word krama, meaning 'possessing infinite knowledge.' In 1980, at the age of 15, he was admitted to a Mro residential school, where he meditated every night under an ashwattha tree, praying for the key to liberation.

In 1981 he started to create a Mro script, and started to write poems and songs—the first in the Mro language to be written in the

Menley returned to the village, where he continued his meditation and alphabet teaching. At first, people thought he was crazy. Only one village elder, Langpung, believed in him—because he had a vision while cutting bamboo that unless he supported Menley, Kramadi's alphabet and religion would be lost.

For a short time, the alphabet and the Krama religion spread in Bangladesh and Myanmar, during which time Kramadi Menley travelled widely to promote the religion and alphabet, but in July 1984, he chose to leave his own society when he was only 19 years old, to practice a more rigorous meditation so as to return with a higher level of writing and religion. He has not been seen since.

phi 9 zero one two three four

 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mro (Unicode block) fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Mro

Sora Sompeng 1936 several hundred

According to tradition, on June 18, 1936, a Sora called Mallia 'had received a dream showing him where to find a special Sora script magically inscribed on a mountaintop.'

In Mallia's dream, each of the 24 sonums, or resident spirits who populated and made up the Sora spirit world, changed into the letter that began the sonum's name, or the name of some other element in the spiritual landscape.

People thought he was crazy, but his commitment was so great that he remained without food on that mountain for twenty-one days. His daughter married a man called Manggai, who propagated the script and turned it into a cult. The alphabet-worshippers call themselves Marirenji, meaning the Pure, Alert, or Clear-Sighted Ones. Reciting each letter of the alphabet was in effect summoning and communicating with its somum, so their observances and ceremonies often center around what we would recognize as an alphabet song.

The letters of the script, then, are hardly ever used for everyday communication; instead, devotees may build small household shrines that include icons, token objects, and letters of the Sora Sompeng alphabet.

five six seven eight nine

fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Sora+Sompeng

Around 1884 King Ibrahim Njoya of the kingdom of Bamum in Cameroon was inspired to create a writing system after a revelatory dream that instructed him to draw an image of a hand on a wooden tablet before washing it off and drinking the water.

Upon awaking, Njoya re-enacted the dreamed ritual before beginning work on a syllabary for his native language of Bamum. With assistance from at least two royal advisors, he drafted over 1000 pictographic characters that were intended, at first, to represent objects and actions. Over the next fourteen years, the script went through six revisions, becoming progressively abridged and more phonetic with each draft. The total inventory of characters was reduced until it stabilised at 80 characters in 1910.

he wrote a history of his people, a pharmacopoeia, a calendar, maps and a guide to good sex. He built schools, a printing press and libraries; he supported artists and intellectuals. But when the French took over Bamum after the German defeat in World War I, they maneuvred Njoya out of power, smashed his printing press, burned his libraries and books, and sent him into exile, where he died.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bamum script fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Bamum

**Leke** 1844 or 1845 Myanmar, Thailand

The Leke script of Myanmar was envisioned by a Karen man named Mahn Thaung Hlya, who in about 1844, scaled the sacred Mount Zwegabin to begin a seven-day fast. On the final day Mahn was rewarded with a vision of a figure dressed in white who asked him what it was that he desired. Responding that he yearned for a native Karen script, the figure touched a flat rock with his staff and immediately there appeared 47 symbols that resembled the scratching marks left in the ground by chickens.

When he came down from the mountain he searched for somebody to decipher the symbols and found Mahn Maw Yaing, a man who was known to have assisted Baptist missionaries in translating the Bible. Mahn Maw Yaing provided values for the 25 consonants, 13 vowels and nine numerals for what would become known as the leit-hsan-wait, or the 'chicken-scratch script.'

The Leke script is still used by members of the Leke sect of Buddhism, as well as by other Buddhists, Christians, and members of the Ariya religion. According to the chief Leke priest, there are over 3,200 trained teachers of the alphabet.

two

omniglot.com/writing/leke.htm

Odùduwà Àibájiogbè 2016/2017 Nigeria several hundred

The Odùduwà Àibájìogbè script of Nigeria was revealed to Chief Tolúlàse R. Ògúntósìn I. Táyé. In 2011, he approached a babaláwo or 'diviner' of Ifa, the Yorùbá god of wisdom. The diviner, Olókun Awópètu, told him to visit his ancestral shrine in the Farasinmi community in Badagry, in Lagos State. There, he found a strange object that he took with him back to Porto-Novo, Benin.

That night, he slept with the object under his pillow. He dreamed he was taken to the sun, where he saw a beam of light reflect in a dark place in the solar system. The beam of light revealed an alphabet, and he kept hearing the phrase 'Teach this to the world'

He went to the king, Oníkòyí Abèsán Alájàé, in Porto Novo in the Republic of Benin, and told him that in his dreams he had been going about teaching people the 'Àibájiogbè.' The king asked him to write what he saw in the dream, and when he did the king said the vision was an alphabet for the Yorùbá language.

Ògúntósìn proceeded to convert the information from his dream into 25 characters, which he collectively called Odùduwà Àibájìogbè, or 'The Talking Alphabet.'

endangeredalphabets.net/ohun-oduduwa

Tibetan AD 233 in diaspora several million

Traditional sources tell us that the written word first came to

Tibet in the year 233. As the twenty-eighth Tibetan king Lhatotori Nyentsen sat on the rooftop of his palace, several objects descended from the sky, carried on a beam of sunlight. The first was a silver *choten*, a symbolic representation of the Buddha's mind. The other was a chest containing three Buddhist scriptures. As the books came to rest on the roof, a voice resounded from above, proclaiming, 'In five generations' time, there will arise a king who will understand the meaning of these objects.'

The king recognized these miraculous manifestations as holy relics but, as no one in the whole of Tibet was literate, their meaning remained opaque. He named them the 'secret antidotes': 'secret' because their ultimate significance was unknown, and 'antidote' because even the illiterate, non-Buddhist king intuited that these blessed artifacts could cure the suffering of sentient beings. For the people of Tibet, this account is so important that until annexation into China in 1950, official Tibetan currency dated from the year 233, marking the arrival of the secret antidotes onto the palace roof.

nya tta ttha dda ddha nna ta न इ स र्र की ba bha ma tsa tsha dza dzha zero halfzero one halfone two /two three /three four /four five /five six /six seven /seven eight /eight nine /nine punctuation left & right bracket separators honorific om

fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Serif+Tibetan

Liberia, Sierra Leone One night in 1832 or 1833, a young man by the name of Momolu

Duwalu Bukele was taught the art of writing by a stranger—a white man—who visited him in a dream. Like the other inhabitants of his village on the Pepper Coast of West Africa, Bukele was a non-literate speaker of Vai, a Mande language spoken in present-day Liberia and Sierra Leone. In the dream, a white man explained writing, and said it came from God.

night by a group of Vai men as a challenge to the supposed cultural superiority of outsiders, or 'Those-from-afar.' Vai turned out to be remarkably successful as a script of the

people. Outside Freetown, the script was used by tailors, foremen, laborers, housewives and market-women for all the transactions of everyday life: fabric measurement, recording lists of workers and their wages, market lists, and for personal correspondence and the keeping of family and private personal records. The Vai syllabary is still widely used in West Africa, and is among

the most successful of the indigenously-created African scripts.

'똑 '빳 '빳 '吽 11 A ||| U || X ⊗ ∆ B J ·Q· F · F · T · H · H · IF ((( # 8 8 8 8 1 1 1 1 4 4 

Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, an artist from Côte d'Ivoire, explained later in life, 'the heavens opened before my eyes and seven colourful suns described a circle of beauty around their Mother-Sun, I became Cheik Nadro: The one who does not forget.'

As a result of this vision, in the 1950s he invented a unique alphabet for his people, the Bété, consisting of 448 monosyllabic pictograms, an inventory of sounds that would allow to transcribe that he claimed were part of an ancient, lost Ivoirean alphabet.

all the languages in the world. The pictograms werebased on geometric designs he found on a series of small red and white stones The Bété script was exhibited in the Tate Modern, London, as part of their 'Poetry and Dream' display in 2011. 'Bouabre is himself a kind of builder of encyclopaedias because his personal work consists in inventing a specific African alphabet,' the Ivorian curator

and art critic Yacouba Konate told the BBC. 'He thinks it's easier for an African to learn, to get new knowledge, when he works inside an African writing system, an African language. Bouabré died in 2014 at the age of 89. The Bété syllabary is still not taught in schools and has no official status.

A A X O \$ \$ 6 X D & A ~~ B B A 四月片格的肝艾品的自物性品作物 能长火体队员 D>>> A 出口 · 一 m mm F® HR = MOBN D D M D K E O 作為是今下甲亚片维州的 B G G F F © \$\f\$ = \$\k\$ \$\p\$ = \$\\\$\$ \$\\\$\$ \$\\\$\$ \$\\\$\$

■ anrt-nancy.fr/en/projets/the-missing-scripts-2022-bete en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bété syllabary

Mandombe 1978 DRC, Angola, Congo, France ~10k

The Mandombe script was created by David Wabeladio Payi (1957-

2013) from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a member of the Kimbanguist Church, who in 1978 dreamed of Simon Kimbangu, the church's prophet, telling him to create a writing system. Mulling over this command, Payi's eye fell on the exposed brick wall of his room, and he noticed that the mortar around the bricks could be seen as a series of patterns that in particular featured two geometrically opposed configurations: 5 and 2, which are seen as sacred shapes. Building on this basic intuition, he incorporated the concept that the direction in which a basic shape pointed would affect its pronunciation. He also extended the basic shapes not only left and right, but upward, like the mortar, so the Mandombe letterforms vary not only in shape but in height.

He called the new script Mandombe, a word that has three possible meanings: 'For the Blacks'; 'That which has been entrusted to the Blacks'; and 'In the manner of the Blacks.'

The script is taught in Kimbanguist church schools in Angola, the Republic of the Congo, the DRC and in France and Brussels, making

 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandombe script ☐ An Atlas of Endangered Alphabets, Tim Brookes, 2024

Pahawh Hmong 1959 in diaspora several thousand

In 1959, an unlettered Hmong farmer and basket maker named Shong Lue Yang had a dream in which two young men asked him if he had already taught his people writing. The farmer insisted that he was illiterate but the young men told him that they already taught him the script. Yang married and had children, and the two young men reappeared and gave him two writing systems: one for the Hmong and the other for Khmu', the language of his mother.

Later, when his infant twins passed away (a tragedy that led Yang to conclude they had been personifications of his ethereal visitors) he received a post-mortem message from them written in the script, reminding him that Hmong writing had been destroyed by other nations in the past, and prophesied that those nations that continue to destroy it would be destroyed themselves. From that time on, he began teaching the two scripts to the Hmong and Khmu' people.

The Hmong version, known as Pahawh Hmong, became such a medium of cultural revival that Yang became increasingly revered and influential. By 1971, his charismatic influence became too strong for the Laotian government's liking, and soldiers were sent to assassinate him.

nkau month

 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pahawh Hmong (Unicode block) fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Pahawh+Hmong

**Vai** 1832/1833

Another, terser version relates that the script was devised one

亚 型 化 互 重 80 品 11 任 下 耳 T 2

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vai syllabary fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Vai

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sora Sompeng (Unicode block)

⊕ tibetanlanguage.org

chanting foreign stop year

fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Pau+Cin+Hau

~1,000,000

'One night during a full moon, he discovered luminous letters

large part, upon tribal deities. Inspired by his books, his disciples elaborated rituals aimed at gathering Ho people around the sarna or 'sacred grove', a religious space shared by Munda-speaking

ten twenty thirty fourty fifty sixty seventy eighty ninety

fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Warang+Citi

Sirijonga (Sirijanga, Limbu) 9th c. Nepal, India, Bhutan several thousand Late in the ninth century, King Sirijonga Hang became supreme ruler of Limbuwan (now eastern Nepal). According to Limbu folklore, he prayed to the goddess Saraswati for the wisdom to devise

<100

a script for his people, and in response she revealed the story of creation to him, written in the Kirat-Sirijonga script. This script united the Limbu kingdoms, but then vanished. Some 800 years later, during a time of tension and upheaval in Sikkim—in other words, just when it was needed—it was reintroduced by the Limbu scholar Te-ongsi Sirijonga, believed to be the reincarnation of King Sirijonga.

He researched, revived and taught the Kirat-Sirijonga script, col-

lecting, copying and composing Limbu literature, teaching Limbu language and the importance of Limbu history and cultural traditions while at the same time preaching openness to other cultures and knowledge. This work made him a cultural hero, but cultural heroes are also often seen as threats. The Sikkimese Bhutia rulers ordered that he

be tied to a tree and shot to death with arrows—possibly a cruel

irony, as limbu means 'archer.'

unicodeplus.com/script/Limb

fonts.google.com/noto/specimen/Noto+Sans+Limbu

zero one two three four five six seven eight nine

A more secular account describes Mashtots settling upon his

Using this script, called *a-ka-u-ku* after its first four characters,

J N  $\bar{0}$   $\bar{y}$   $\bar{b}$   $\vdash$   $\bar{z}$   $\bar{z}$   $\bar{z}$