



The Script of Thu'úsa

A Tékumel Netbook

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The World of Tékumel

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Credits

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The Script of Thu'úsa

By

M. A. R. Barker

Thu'úsa is an anomaly in Tekumeláni linguistics. It is an argot, an artificial language, based upon a no-longer-spoken tongue once employed by the ancient inhabitants of the Kúrt Hills in central Tsolyánu. The basis for this language seems to have been a dialect of Engsvanyáli, but this has been overlaid by material taken from Classical Tsolyáni, Mu'ugalavyáni, and Yán Koryáni. In addition, lexemes and grammatical endings have been added by generations of priests of the temples of the Lords of Stability. Some of these inventions were devised to conceal the original sense of the various texts, while others add nuances to utterances that once were less sophisticated.

Today, Thu'úsa is spoken only by adepts in the more advanced academies of the priesthoods of Lords Hnálla, Thúmis, Belkhanu, and their respective Cohorts. The Temple of Lord Karakán shows little interest in Thu'úsa, and the hierophants of the Temple of Lady Avánthe have similarly ignored the language. The primary use of this tongue is literary and arcane: secret texts that priests of the Temples of the Lords of Change cannot read. Spells written in Thu'úsa are thus supposedly available only to servants of Stability. Texts dealing with the Underworlds, the geography of the Planes Beyond, and the nature of the /sharétyal/ "demons" who inhabit those Planes are available to those permitted to peruse them. In fact, followers of the Lords of Change have often managed to learn Thu'úsa, and efforts are continually made by the priesthoods of Stability to maintain secrecy. New morphemes, grammatical constructions, metaphors, etc. have been devised in order to achieve this.

The ancient Thu'úsan script is still maintained, in spite of occasional efforts to alter or augment it for purposes of secrecy. Originally, the language seems to have been inscribed in the form of short texts upon sticks and tree branches. Such texts were written vertically, with the letters "branching out" from a central "trunk" or bar. The Tsolyáni call this "the ladder script."

The script is rather simple and lacks many of the features of the modern languages. Each phoneme is represented by one letter. The roster includes vowels, which are considered full letters, rather than diacritics, as in Tsolyáni. Each sentence begins with a special symbol that is not pronounced, and each utterance ends in a "tail" which must be present since the vertical central bar that runs through each utterance cannot "trail off into nothing," as the scholars put it. The introductory symbol (of which there are many variations) is called "the Head," and ending symbols are termed "the Tail." There are no capital letters, spaces between words, or punctuation symbols.

As stated above, ancient Thu'úsan was written by carving the letters vertically into sticks. There was no decoration or calligraphy. Later scholars added such enhancements to modern texts, sometimes turning them into veritable "jungles" of intertwined vines and leaves. Scholars have also carved Thu'úsan inscriptions upon wooden posts or stone pillars. The most elaborate of these is the façade of the Temple of Lord Qón in Thráya. Unfortunately, this text is set high above the ground, making it well nigh impossible to read.

The greatest modern Tsolyáni scholar of Thu'úsa is the Lord High Priest Dijái hi Mrélsa, of the Amber Cloak clan. He is middle-aged and not always eager to share his knowledge with students. For this, one might seek out such as Jukélsa hiMaróda, of the Golden Sapphire clan. He is about 50 years of age and usually willing to cooperate with younger priests of the Lords of Stability. Another, still younger practitioner is Lady Dzái hiChrása, of the clan of the Yellow Robe. She is said to be about 30 years old. She does have a habit of concealing her abilities unless there is something to be gained from revealing them. There are also a number of temple academies in which the rudiments of Thu'úsa are regularly taught to qualified students.

The following are the graphemes of Thu'usa. They follow the order of an English typewriter keyboard.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	-	=
										Head	Head
				Th		Ü					
Q	W	E	R	T	Y	U	I	O	P	[]
										Tail	Tail
	SH	DH									
A	S	D	F	G	H	J	K	L			
				MR	NG		AI	AU			
Z	X	C	V	B	N	M	?				

Notes:

The numeral system is deficient. The script is not much used for mathematics or even for noting records of prices.

/TH/ is an interdental voiceless fricative, like the “th” in English “thigh.” /DH/ is its voiced counterpart: the “th” in English “thy.” /Ü/ is a high front rounded vowel: the /ü/ in German “Kühl.” /SH/ is the “sh” in English “ship.” /MR/ is a consonant cluster: /m/ followed by /r/. This is so common in Thu'usan names that it seems best to list it here. /NG/ is a velar voiced nasal: the “ng” of “sing.” /AI/ is a diphthong: the “I” of “fight” or the “uy” of “buy.” /AU/ is also a diphthong: the “ou” of “bout” or the “ow” of “how.” /X/ is a voiceless velar fricative: the “ch” in German “Nach.” /C/ is the “ch” of English “church.” /?/ is the glottal stop: a “catch in the throat” like the “t” in Cockney “bottle.” Other symbols are approximately as in English.

Modern Thu'usa also has symbols for some of the particularly Tsolyáni consonants: e.g. /zh/ (as in “Zhukov”), the retroflex sibilant /ss/, /gh/ (the voiced counterpart of /x/, etc.

For a more complete description of Thu'usan grammar and orthography, one should consult /chányukh hichéshnayal/ “The Ocean of Secrets,” by Pakólu hiVírudai. This grammar is now dated and archaic, but it does have the advantage of being voluminous! Copies may be found in the libraries of several of the temples of Stability, particularly in the city of Thráya.