

# Valyrio Bardion<sup>1</sup>

*Game of Thrones* meta

by **Rodo**

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<sup>1</sup> “Bardion” is not a canonical High Valyrian term. It’s a word I created myself using “bard-”, which is the root of the words “bardugon” (to write) and “bardun” (grammar), and combining it with “-ion”, a derivational affix that is sometimes used to substantivize verbs.

## *Preface:*

First off, I am not a linguist. So take everything I do here with a grain of salt. Moreover, I'm not used to talking about this topic in English either. But still, ever since I read that dedalvs never got around to creating a writing system for High Valyrian, I wished there was one, and finally, I decided to try to create one myself, just for the fun of it. It is obviously flawed and not what dedalvs had in mind, which was a writing system based on hieroglyphs.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the writing system I decided to create has more in common with Japanese. It has logograms, but also phonograms derived from them (as well as some ligatures). Since the grammar is somewhat complex, I also added symbols with varying pronunciations that represent the grammatical context of a word – for example a symbol that indicates that the logogram is supposed to be read in a certain case.

Some other quick notes: the writing system I developed does not have some of the characteristics we are used to from modern writing systems – there are no spaces between words, no punctuation marks and there is no set direction. It can be written left-to-right, right-to-left, top-to-bottom or bottom-to-top, whichever is most useful in a given situation. For simplicity's sake, I will stick to left-to-right with my examples.

Also, don't mind my terrible handwriting. I have yet to find a writing system I don't produce chicken scratch in, and apparently I can't even come up with one on my own.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://dothraki.com/2013/04/tikuni-zobri-udra-zobriar/#comment-1086>

## Phonograms:

High Valyrian, like any language, has several different sounds, including six vowels and several consonants which only occur in loan words.<sup>3</sup> In my writing system, none of the sounds found only in loanwords (/x/, /θ/, /ʃ/ and /f/) have their own letters. They are written as [k], [t], [s] and either [v] or [p]. So while in a transcription we might use “arakhi” or “Thoros”, in my script, they would be written as “araki” and “Toros”. All the other sounds – with the exception of /ɬ/, which is transcribed as “lj” and written with the Valyrian letters L and J – get their own letter. /ɬ/ tends to occur in places where declination or conjugation can change its sound to a different one, for example “vōljes” (raven) becomes “vōlī” when it is an accusative object, and the most famous example of the verb “morghūljagon” is the greeting “Valar morghūlis”. Hence, I decided to keep the letter combination from the transcription and have the sound be the only one that is represented by two letters instead of one.

All the letters are shortened versions of logograms that contain that specific sound, normally (but not always) at the beginning. For example [a] derives from “ābra” (woman) and [u] derives from “hūra” (moon). The six vowels are written as follows:

a	e	i	o	u	y

All these are simple, short vowels. Since all High Valyrian vowels come in both a short and a long version, the basic letters were adapted to reflect that with a simple, short horizontal line added to them. This results in the following letters:

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<sup>3</sup> [https://wiki.dothraki.org/High\\_Valyrian\\_Phonology](https://wiki.dothraki.org/High_Valyrian_Phonology)

ā	ē	ī	ō	ū	ȳ
Ɑ	Ɔ	Ɔ	Ɔ	Ɔ	Ɔ

The same principle is also applied to some of the consonants, some of which can be doubled too. The exception to it is “zz”, since it so far has only occurred in the word “ozzālon” (to burn away), a combination of the prefix “oz-” and the verb “zālon” (to burn). Verbs tend to have their own logograms and affixes are often written as ligatures even if the writer does use the phonetic system, so there was never enough of a need for a letter “zz”. In the event that a sentence is rendered entirely in phonograms, it letter “z” is simply doubled.

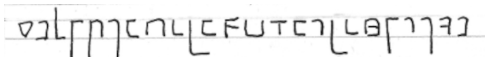
The single and doubled consonants are:

l	m	n	r	s	t
Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ
ll	mm	nn	rr	ss	tt
Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ

And, last but not least, the remaining consonants:

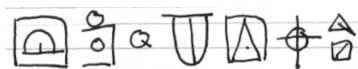
b	d	g	gh	h	j	k
Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ
ñ	p	q	rh	v	z	
Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	Ɑ	

Now, to demonstrate how a sentence would look if only written phonetically, I'll demonstrate it using the example of “*Valyrio muño ēngos ñuhys issa*” – “Valyrian is my mother tongue.”



Handwritten phonetic transcription of the sentence "Valyrio muño ēngos ñuhys issa" on a four-line staff. The characters are: a square with a vertical line, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, a vertical line with a dot above, and a vertical line with a dot above.

If not written using letters, it would look like this, however:

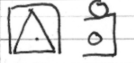





Handwritten non-letter-based transcription of the sentence "Valyrio muño ēngos ñuhys issa" on a four-line staff. The symbols are: a square with a vertical line, a square with a vertical line and a dot above, a square with a vertical line and a dot above, a square with a vertical line and a dot above, a square with a vertical line and a dot above, a square with a vertical line and a dot above, and a square with a vertical line and a dot above.

## *Declination:*

High Valyrian has quite a few cases – eight, to be exact – and besides singular and plural, it also has paucal and collective nouns. “Valar” would be an example of a collective noun, it doesn’t just mean “man” (vala) or “men” (vali), but rather all men. If High Valyrian is written using logograms, the case and number of the word is expressed by adding a marker to the noun or adjective in question. An exception are words in the singular (only plural, paucal and collective are marked), and the nominative case (only accusative, dative, genitive, vocative, locative, instrumental and comitative are marked). If only one marker is needed, the marker will be added in the middle, if two are needed, they are added beside or above each other, depending on the direction of the writing. The declination markers – and the conjugation markers – are added following the logogram they modify depending on the direction of the writing.

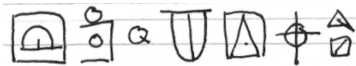
The markers indicate the pronunciation of the adjectives they are added to, but they are added strictly for semantic reasons, not for phonological ones. Whether it is “ñuha”, “ñuhys”, “ñuhon” or “ñuhor”, all four are written the same way, so long as the number and case are the same, as can be seen in the following examples.

ñuha muña	ñuhys zaldřizes	ñuhon blēnon	ñuhor ānogar
			

In this case, the nouns are all nominative singular and no case or number markers are added to either the nouns or the possessives preceding them. All the case and number markers are based on a small circle:

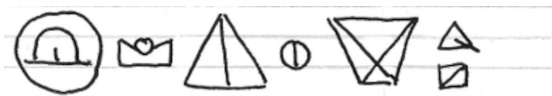
plural		paucal		collective		
accusative	dative	genitive	locative	comitative	instrumental	vocative

Let's look at the example from last chapter again:






The second symbol from the left is “muña” – “mother”. But since the word is genitive – “of the mother” – a small Q-like shape is added after it. The symbol before it (“Valyrio”) and the two after (“ēngos” and “ñuhys”) have no such markers, since the two nouns are singular and nominative, and the adjective takes the case and number markers of the nouns it refers to, even if it is postpositive in this case rather than prepositive (High Valyrian allows both and there's a difference in nuance).

Finally – and this is the part where I can't really work with many examples – adjectives also have degrees of comparison – an equative, comparative and superlative. While I am writing this, Dothraki Wiki is (predictably) down again, so I could only find one single example of a sentence where an equative adjective is used: *Ÿgbāpī ilōn rāelza*. In High Valyrian, it would look like this:



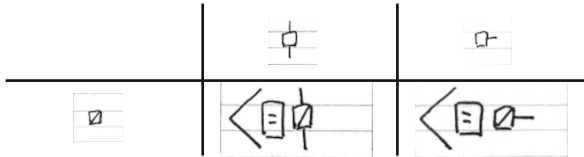
The markers for the degrees of comparison are a little more complex than the ones used for cases, number and conjugations. They are as follows:

equative	comparative	superlative
		



## Conjugation:

A High Valyrian verb is followed by one to three markers that tell the reader 1) who does the action, 2) in which tense the action takes place and 3) which grammatical mood is used. Usually, this means two markers, but in some cases, it can be more, for example in the case of the subjunctive mood, which is characterized by a vertical line following the person and tense markers, or the imperative mood. The simplest marker would be the markers for participles and infinitives, which are combined with their respective tense markers. For example:



The verb in this case is “ipradagon” – “to eat”, by the way. Although to be more precise, the second example would be “ipradagon” – the present infinitive of the verb. The first one is “ipradare”. If participles are used as adjectives, they’ll be followed by the requisite markers as detailed under *Declination*.

If you’re not using a participle, there are always at least two markers present – one for the person and another for the tense. The markers for persons are as follows:

1 <sup>st</sup> sing	2 <sup>nd</sup> sing	3 <sup>rd</sup> sing s/l	3 <sup>rd</sup> sing t/a	1 <sup>st</sup> pl	2 <sup>nd</sup> pl	3 <sup>rd</sup> pl

While spoken High Valyrian does not distinguish between solar/lunar and terrestrial/aquatic when it comes to conjugating verbs (it does so when it comes to pronouns), the distinction can be made in written High Valyrian. This can be assumed to be somewhat antiquated usage, however, and if the grammatical gender of the subject isn't known, it usually defaults to the solar/lunar form. By the way, these triangle-based symbols also function as pronouns, if those are used.

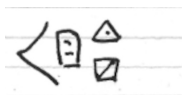
As for the tenses, there are two sets of tense markers, one for active verbs and one for passive verbs. The active markers are:

present	aorist	future	imperfect	perfect	pluperfect	past habitual

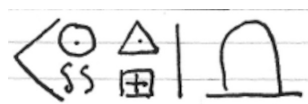
The passive ones are:

present	aorist	future	imperfect	perfect	pluperfect	past habitual

Some examples of how these markers are used would be “ipradan” – “I eat”

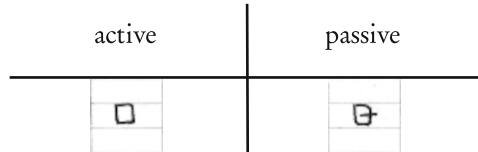


or “merbuton daor” – “I was not hungry.”

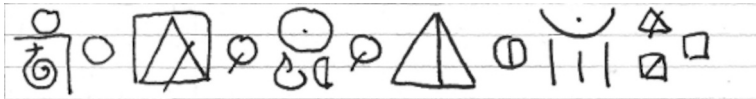


In this example, we can see the difference between indicative and subjunctive, the vertical line following the verb markers. The symbol after that would be “daor” – “no” or “not” – which is also used for the morphemes “dor-” or “do-”, for example in the words “dorzalty” – “the unburnt”.

Which leaves us with just one mood left, the imperative. There are two imperative markers, one for active and one for passive.









These are added to the other markers, as in this example: “Āeksios, aōhos oñoso ilōn jehikās” – “Lord, cast your light upon us.”









## Logograms:

High Valyrian logograms come in several different varieties. The simplest ones are very literal – they are visual representations of the objects (or actions) they represent. Examples for these would be:





bartos	dēmagon	ondos	qilōny	vala	zaldrīzes
					

It does not take a lot of fantasy to see that these mean “head”, “to sit”, “hand”, “whip”, “man” and “dragon”, respectively. Generally speaking, these simple logograms make up a relatively small part of the characters used to write High Valyrian, but they are important because they are building blocks used to create the more complicated logograms. These are about the same size as the simple ones, but consist of one or more of them combined in various forms. Some examples:

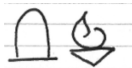
āeksio	gūrogon	kepa	nēdenka	sēnagon	zīragon
					

“Man” and “whip” are combined to create “lord” or “master”. The symbol for “hand” is used in the symbol for “to grasp”, the one for “man” in “father” and “head” and “dragon” combine to form “brave”, while “body” and “knife” become “to kill” and a symbol for change and “snow” combine into “to freeze”. One of the common elements used in the creating of new logograms is a circle or a square being used to enclose another logogram. This usually means the new sign has a related but probably more abstract meaning (especially in the case of the

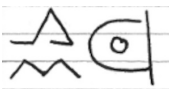
enclosing circle, which is usually more abstract than the enclosing square). This is used – for example – in relexicalized paucal and collective nouns, but also to create adjectives. Very rarely, you’ll find a doubling of the symbol instead, for example in these cases:

blēnon	blēnun	mentys	mentyn
			

There are quite a few of these combined characters, and they make up the bulk of logograms in High Valyrian. There are, however, some cases where two logograms are used to represent one concept. One example – “dorzalty” – I already mentioned above. It consists of the logograms for “no/not” – a raised hand – and the logogram for “to burn”:



Other examples include verbs that contain the compound “emagon”, which is a verb on its own that means “to have”. For example, “sōvemagon” – “to make fly”:



Very, very rarely, there are also combinations of three characters, but so far, the only example for it is “dovaogēdy” – “the Unsullied” – a combination of “no/not”, “dirty” and “man”:



Although even in this case, the latter two logograms might be combined into one, to shorten it.

### *Ligatures:*

The last – and newest – element of High Valyrian writing are ligatures. Ligatures in this case means symbols designed as a short version for frequent combinations of phonograms. The easiest example would probably be “se”, a High Valyrian word for “and”, which looks like this:



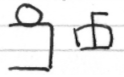
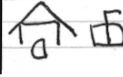

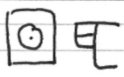
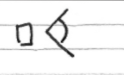
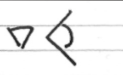
Ligatures are used in two different cases: they’re either replacements for very complicated logograms, or they’re used to clarify logograms (or in other contexts), which wouldn’t have been written out before.

Originally, I imagine that High Valyrian was written with many more logograms that it is now. I used the example of “emagon” above, which is still used in combination with other logograms to create verbs derived from the first one. But most of these logograms are no longer used, presumably because they were complicated or so detailed that, while their use in inscriptions and temples and such was feasible, their use in written language was not. In those cases, they were at first replaced by phonetic writing, which then developed into new signs which were not ultimately based on pictorial representations, but on phonetic letters. Some examples for this would be suffixes like “-anna” or “-āzma”, or the prefix “nā-”. Some examples:

bartanna	iāpanna	embāzma	udrāzma	nābēmagon	nāgeltigon

In the second case, one logogram was used to express several related words and it was not clear from the logogram itself, only the grammatical context, which one it was. Examples for this would be adjectives that were created from nouns,

like “gēlion” and “gēlenka” or “embar” and “embōñe”. Of course, ligatures are only used if the difference between the two words that you want to distinguish from each other differ by more than one phoneme. If it’s only one phoneme, a phonogram is used, such as with “arlie” and “arli” (and even in cases where the adverb ends in -irī, it is simply written as -ī), or “urnegon” and “jurnegon” or “vurnegon”.

ābrenka	gēlenka	embōñe	vējōñe	jurnegon	vurnegon
					

Using the second type of ligatures and phonemes in this context is not mandatory, however, and will not occur in older texts.

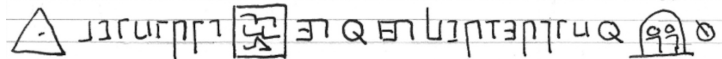
It’s also worth pointing out that even though the ligatures are based on phonemes, they do not change when the pronunciation changes. For example, you can use a ligature for “īha” to make an adjective from the noun “Valyria”. If you then want to talk about a person who is Valyrian (Valyrīhy), you keep the suffix for (-īha) and add an “y” afterwards. A more formal way to depict the word would be combining the character for “woman” with the character for “Valyria” enclosed by a circle.



## *Final Notes:*

So far, so complicated, and I haven't even started to get into the minutiae and all the exceptions to the rules. One thing I had in mind when I worked on this was Tyrion Lannister, who does his very best in the series but who struggles with Valyrian. A lot. I figure a writing system that is not very phonetic and which doesn't rely on you being able to conjugate to understand a written sentence might explain that. He's probably doing alright when all he has to do is read a text.

As I have hopefully made clear, there are several ways to write High Valyrian, and even single High Valyrian words, and a combination of all these systems is often used. In general, it is preferred to write as much in logograms as possible. One context where it's generally accepted to use phonograms are personal and family names. This is partially for emphasis, partially due to many names not being Valyrian in origin.



This sentence is “*Nyke Daenerys Jelmāzmo hen Targārio Lentrot*” - “I [am] Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen”. “Daenerys” and “Targārien” are written in phonemes. “Jelmāzma” is written with a ligature after the word “jelmio”, and “hen” is written with a ligature. In addition to that, we see some case markers, although theoretically it would be possible to leave them off, provided “-āzmo” and “Targārio” were written phonetically to convey their case. Overall, there isn't really a “right” way to write, much like there wasn't before our languages were standardized.

I've actually got most of the words from Dothraki Wiki figured out, and an idea for a more aesthetically pleasing “font”, so to speak, for the phonograms, at least. If there's any interest in it, I could post about the origins of the phonograms as well, or anything else you might want to know. Just let me know! Until then, valar morghūlis!

