Archaic Font Sampler

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1 Introduction

This document provides some samples of archaic fonts. They are available from CTAN in the `fonts/archaic` directory. The fonts form a set that display how the Latin alphabet and script evolved from the initial Proto-Semitic script until Roman times.

The fonts consist of letters only — punctuation had not been invented during this period, neither, effectively, had numerals. The fonts are all single-cased. Upper- and lower-case letters were again only invented after the end of this period.

Other fonts are also available for some scripts that were not on the main alphabetic tree. The period covered by the scripts is from about 3000 BC to the Middle Ages.

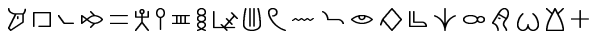
For some of the scripts transliterations into the Latin alphabet can be automatically generated by the accompanying LaTeX packages.

2 Proto-Semitic

Around 1600 BC there were alphabetic scripts in use in the Middle East that are variously called Proto-Siniatic, Proto-Canaanite, etc. I have lumped these together into a Proto-Semitic font. Several of the signs in this alphabet are obviously derived from Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and it may have been a precursor to the Phoenician script.

The alphabet consisted of 23 letters, some of which had alternate forms. Writing was generally from left to right, but could be vertical or in other directions.

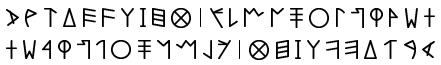
The font and package are in the `protosem` subdirectory.



3 Phoenician

The Phoenician alphabetic script dates from about 1000 BC. The Phoenecians wrote right to left. The script is provided in both a left to right and a right to left form. The alphabet consisted of 22 letters. The font provided actually includes a 23rd letter as the *vau* character had two forms: 𐤅 and 𐤆.

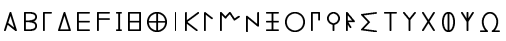
The font and package are in the `phoenician` subdirectory.



4 Greek

The Greeks used the Phoenician script and alphabet as a basis for their own writing. In the earliest times the Greeks used to alternate the writing direction for successive lines, but later settled down to writing left to right. Two forms of the Greek script are provided.

The earlier one is representative of about the sixth century BC, when the Greek alphabet consisted of 26 letters. The font and package are in the `greek6cbc` subdirectory.

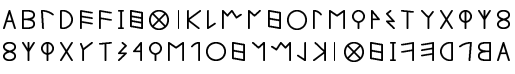


The later script is representative of the fourth century BC, when the alphabet had been reduced to the 24 letters in use today. The font and package are in the `greek4cbc` subdirectory.

5 Etruscan

The Etruscans, who were the precursors of the Romans in Italy, based their alphabet and script on the Phoenician and Greek models. Like the Phoenicians, they wrote right to left. In their turn, the Romans based their alphabet on the Etruscan one, but they wrote left to right and provided the forms of our capital letters.

The script is provided in both a left to right and a right to left form and is representative of about the eighth century BC. The font and package are in the `etruscan` subdirectory.



6 Runic

The *futharc* alphabetic script (named, like ours, after the first few letters) was a script used in Northern Europe until after the Middle Ages, when it died out after printing was invented. It has glyphs that are reminiscent of some of those in the other scripts shown here, but some are wildly different. I have included it because it has the *wen* character, ᚹ, which is the first appearance of a character for the 'W' sound. Also, it has the *ger* character, ᛄ, which corresponds to the modern 'J' sound — 'J' did not appear in the Latin alphabet until about the mid 1500's.

The Anglo-Saxon version of the font and package are in the `runic` subdirectory.

7 Hieroglyphics

Hieroglyphics were used by the Egyptians from about 3000 BC to 400 AD. The script is partly a consonantal alphabet, a syllabary, and logograms. There are approximately 6000 known different hieroglyphs, but less than 1000 were in use at any one time.

The hieroglf package provides about 60 hieroglyphs, enough to write a few names, like Cleopatra or Ptolemy. Serge Rosmorduc's hieroglyphic package is for serious Egyptologists and provides about 600 hieroglyphs.

The hieroglf package, which is in the `hieroglf` subdirectory and which requires the oands package, includes the following hieroglyphs:

The package can also be used for hieroglyphs within either horizontal or vertical cartouches. The three below are the names Cleopatra, Caesar and Alexander.

8 Linear B

The *Linear B* script was a syllabary that was used during the approximate period between 1600 and 1200 BC for writing the Mycenaean Greek dialect. Most examples of the script come from Crete, and in particular from Knossos. The script was deciphered in 1953 by Michael Ventris with assistance from John Chadwick.

The script consists of some 60 basic signs, 16 optional signs, and about 11 signs that have yet to be deciphered. The script also had signs for numbers (1–1000), and signs for various kinds of weights and measures. There were also sets of signs for different kinds of trade goods, such as pots or wool. Although Linear B was used for writing Greek, there is no other relationship between this ancient script and the Greek alphabet.

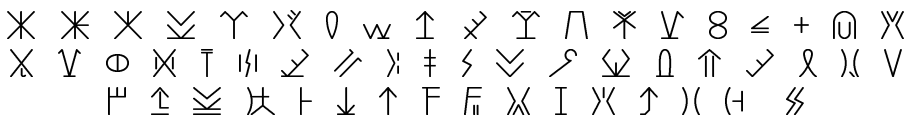
The Metafont script includes only the basic, optional, unidentified, and number signs. The font and package are in the `linearb` subdirectory. The basic signs are illustrated below.

9 Cypriot

The *Cypriot* script was a syllabary used in Cyprus during the approximate period between 1000 and 200 BC for writing Greek. It has a relationship to Linear B as it includes some of the same signs. Towards the end of its life few people could read the script, so inscriptions were written using both the syllabary and the Greek alphabetic characters. These bilinguals made it relatively easy to decipher the script, a task that was essentially completed by the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Like Linear B, the Cypriot script has no relationship with the Greek alphabet apart from the fact that both can be used for writing the same language.

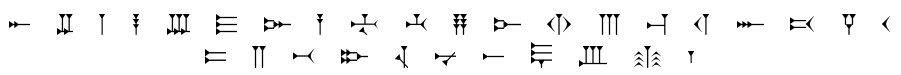
The script consisted of 55 signs. The Metafont source and package is in the `cypriot` subdirectory.



10 Ugaritic Cuneiform

The first cuneiform scripts appeared around 2800 BC and the last recorded use of cuneiform was in 75 AD.

The Ugaritic cuneiform script dates from about 1300 BC and was alphabetical. The script consisted of 30 letters and a ideographic word divider (a short vertical wedge). The Metafont source and package is in the `ugarite` subdirectory.



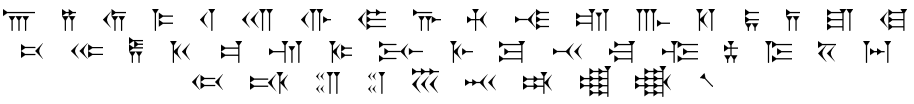
Modern Western transliterations of these glyphs are:

a b g ḫ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k ś l m ḏ n ẓ s ‘ p ṣ q r ṯ ġ t i u ṡ :

11 Old Persian

It is believed that the Old Persian cuneiform script was invented on the order of the Persian king Darius I for use on royal monuments. The script was only in use between about 500 and 350 BC.

Old Persian was a syllabary with 36 glyphs. There were also 5 ideographs, some with multiple forms, for the words *king*, *country*, *earth*, *god* and *Ahuramazda* (the Persian god), together with a word divider. Numerals were also represented. The Metafont source and package is in the `ugarite` subdirectory, but the numerals are not provided.



12 Transliteration

There are generally accepted transliterations of ancient scripts into modern alphabetic characters, often with diacritics. The OandS font, in subdirectory `oands`, provides a few odd characters needed for these.

At present, the font consists of only two characters: ʿ ʒ.

For example, the following hieroglyphs:

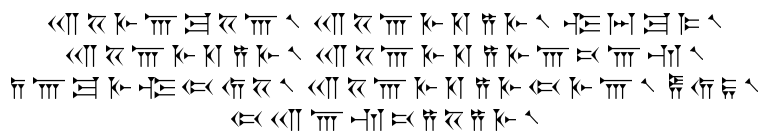
are transliterated as:

wḏ ḥm.f ḥr wrryt.f nt ḏʿm ỉb.f ʒw

and can be translated as:

His Majesty departed upon his chariot of electrum, his heart joyful.

Xerxes had this inscription carved above the doorways of his palace at Persepolis:



which transliterates as:

xa-ša-ya-a-ra-ša-a-: xa-ša-a-ya-tha-i-ya-: va-za-ra-ka-: xa-ša-a-ya-tha-i-ya-: xa-ša-a-ya-tha-i-ya-a-na-a-ma-: da-a-ra-ya-va-ha-u-ša-: xa-ša-a-ya-tha-i-ya-ha-ya-a-: pa-u-ça-: ha-xa-a-ma-na-i-ša-i-ya-:

and which, when translated, means:

Xerxes, the great king, the king of kings, the son of Darius the king, an Achaemenian.