

The Phoenician fonts*

Peter Wilson[†]
Herries Press

2005/04/04

Abstract

The `phoenician` package provides a set of Postscript Type1 fonts for the Phoenician script used about 1100 BC.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	An alphabetic tree	1
2	The <code>phoenician</code> package	2

1 Introduction

The Phoenician alphabet and characters is a direct ancestor of our modern day Latin alphabet and fonts. The font presented here is one of a series of fonts intended to show how the modern Latin alphabet has evolved from its original Phoenician form to its present day appearance.

This manual is typeset according to the conventions of the `LATEX` `DOCSTRIP` utility which enables the automatic extraction of the `LATEX` macro source files [MG04].

Section 2 describes the usage of the package. Commented MetaFont code for the fonts and source code for the package may be in later sections.

1.1 An alphabetic tree

Scholars are reasonably agreed that all the world's alphabets are descended from a Semitic alphabet invented about 1600 BC in the Middle East [Dru95]. The word ‘Semitic’ refers to the family of languages used in the geographical area from Sinai in the south, up the Mediterranean coast to Asia Minor in the north and west to the valley of the Euphrates.

*This file has version number v2.1, last revised 2005/04/04.

[†]`herries dot press at earthlink dot net`

The Phoenician alphabet was stable by about 1100 BC and the script was written right to left. In earlier times the writing direction was variable, and so were the shapes and orientation of the characters. The alphabet consisted of 22 letters and they were named after things. For example, their first two letters were called *aleph* (ox), and *beth* (house). The Phoenician script had only one case — unlike our modern fonts which have both upper- and lower-cases. In modern terms the Phoenician abecedary was:

A B G D E Y Z H Θ I K L M N X O P ts Q R S T

where the ‘Y’ (*vau*) character was sometimes written as ‘F’, and ‘ts’ stands for the *tsade* character.

The Greek alphabet is one of the descendants of the Phoenician alphabet; another was Aramaic which is the ancestor of the Arabic, Persian and Indian scripts. Initially Greek was written right to left but around the 6th C BC became *boustrophedron*, meaning that the lines alternated in direction. At about 500 BC the writing direction stabilised as left to right. The Greeks modified the Phoenician alphabet to match the vocalisation of their language. They kept the Phoenician names of the letters, suitably ‘greekified’, so *aleph* became the familiar *alpha* and *beth* became *beta*. At this point the names of the letters had no meaning. Their were several variants of the Greek character glyphs until they were finally fixed in Athens in 403 BC. The Greeks did not develop a lower-case script until about 600–700 AD.

The Etruscans based their alphabet on the Greek one, and again modified it. However, the Etruscans wrote right to left, so their borrowed characters are mirror images of the original Greek ones. Like the Phoenicians, the Etruscan script consisted of only one case; they died out before ever needing a lower-case script. The Etruscan script was used up until the first century AD, even though the Etruscans themselves had disappeared by that time.

In turn, the Romans based their alphabet on the Etruscan one, but as they wrote left to right, the characters were again mirrored (although the early Roman inscriptions are boustrophedron).

As the English alphabet is descended from the Roman alphabet it has a pedigree of some three and a half thousand years.

2 The *phoenician* package

The Phoenician alphabet consisted of 22 letters. The Phoenician font as provided here consists of 23 letter shapes as there appears to be two forms of the letter *vav*. I have used information from Johanna Drucker [Dru95], John Healey [Hea90] and Richard Firmage [Fir93], as well as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in deciding on the letter shapes.

Table 1 lists, in the Phoenician alphabetical order, the transliterated value of the characters and, where I know it, the modern name of the character.

`\phncfamily`
`\textphnc`

This command selects the Phoenician font family. The family name is **phnc**.

The command `\textphnc{<text>}` typesets *<text>* in the Phoenician font.

I have provided three ways of accessing the Phoenician glyphs: (a) by ASCII

Table 1: The Phoenician script and alphabet

Glyph	Value	Name	ASCII	Commands (L-R)	Commands (R-L)
𐤀	<i>a</i>	aleph	' a	\Arq \Aa \Aaleph	\ARRq \ARa \ARaleph
𐤁	<i>b</i>	beth	b	\Ab \Abeth	\ARb \ARbeth
𐤂	<i>g</i>	gimel	g	\Ag \Agimel	\ARg \ARgimel
𐤃	<i>d</i>	daleth	d	\Ad \Adaleth	\ARd \ARdaleth
𐤄	<i>h</i>	he	h	\Ah \Ahe	\ARh \ARhe
𐤅	<i>w</i>	vav	f	\Af \Avaf	\ARf \ARvaf
𐤆	<i>w</i>	vav	w	\Aw \Avav	\ARw \ARvav
𐤇	<i>z</i>	zayin	z	\Az \Azayin	\ARz \ARzayin
𐤈	<i>h</i>	heth	H	\Ahd \Aheth	\ARhd \ARheth
𐤉	<i>t</i>	teth	T	\Atd \Ateth	\ARtd \ARteth
𐤊	<i>y</i>	yod	y	\Ay \Ayod	\ARy \ARyod
𐤋	<i>k</i>	kaph	k	\Ak \Akaph	\ARk \ARKaph
𐤌	<i>l</i>	lamed	l	\Al \Alamed	\ARl \ARlamed
𐤍	<i>m</i>	mem	m	\Am \Amem	\ARm \ARmem
𐤎	<i>n</i>	nun	n	\An \Anun	\ARn \ARNun
𐤏	<i>s</i>	samekh	s	\As \Asamekh	\ARs \ARsamekh
𐤐	<i>‘</i>	ayin	‘ o	\Alq \Ao \Aayin	\ARlq \ARo \ARayin
𐤑	<i>p</i>	pe	p	\Ap \Ape	\ARp \ARpe
𐤒	<i>s</i>	sade	x	\Asd \Asade	\ARsd \ARSade
𐤓	<i>q</i>	qoph	q	\Aq \Aqoph	\ARq \ARqoph
𐤔	<i>r</i>	resh	r	\Ar \Aresh	\ARr \ARresh
𐤕	<i>š</i>	shin	S	\Asv \Ashin	\ARsv \ARshin
𐤖	<i>t</i>	tav	t	\At \Atav	\ARt \ARTav

characters, (b) by commands whose names are based on the transliterated values, and (c) by commands whose names are based on the (modern) name of the character. These are shown in Table 1 for left-to-right writing. For right-to-left typesetting the glyphs, which are mirror images of those for left-to-right writing, can only be accessed by commands corresponding to those in the table — those that are of the form `\ARxxx` instead of `\Axxx`.

`\translitphnc`

The command `\translitphnc{⟨commands⟩}` will typeset the transliteration of the Phoenician character commands (those in the last two columns of Table 1).

`\translitphncfont`

The font used for the transliteration is defined by this macro, which is initialised to an italic font (i.e., `\itshape`).

References

- [Dru95] Johanna Drucker. *The Alphabetic Labyrinth*. Thames and Hudson, 1995.
- [Fir93] Richard A. Firmage. *The Alphabet Abecedarium*. David R. Goodine, 1993.
- [Hea90] John F. Healey. *The Early Alphabet*. University of California Press/British Museum, 1990.
- [MG04] Frank Mittelbach and Michel Goossens. *The LaTeX Companion*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, second edition, 2004.

Index

Numbers written in italic refer to the page where the corresponding entry is described; numbers underlined refer to the code line of the definition; numbers in roman refer to the code lines where the entry is used.

P <code>\phncfamily</code> 2	T <code>\textphnc</code> 2	<code>\translitphnc</code> 4 <code>\translitphncfont</code> .. 4
--	--	---