The **Aramaic** fonts[*]

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Abstract

The **aramaic** bundle provides a set of fonts for the Aramaic script which was used between about the tenth and second centuries BC in the Middle East.

Contents

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 DOC-STRIP utility which enables the automatic extraction of the LaTeX macro source files [MG04].

Section 2 describes the usage of the package. Commented code for the fonts and source code for the package is 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

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in the south, up the Mediterranean coast to Asia Minor in the north and west to the valley of the Euphrates.

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 familar *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 dissapeared 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 **aramaic** package

The Aramaic script is an early offshoot from the Phoenician script, eventually leading to the Arabic and square Jewish scripts. It was used between about the tenth and second centuries BC in the Middle East. The version presented is typical of about the middle of its life.

The alphabet consisted of 22 characters. Table 1 lists, in the Aramaic alphabetical order, the transliterated value of the characters and, where I know it, the modern name of the character.

\aramfamily   This command selects the Aramaic font family. The family name is `aram`.

Table 1: The Aramaic script and alphabet

Value	Name?	ASCII	Command	Command
a	aleph	' a	\Arq \Aa	\Aaleph
b	beth	b	\Ab	\Abeth
g	gimel	g	\Ag	\Agimel
d	daleth	d	\Ad	\Adaleth
h	he	h	\Ah	\Ahe
w	vav	w	\Aw	\Avav
z	zayin	z	\Az	\Azayin
$\d{h}$	heth	H	\Ahd	\Aheth
$\d{t}$	teth	T	\Atd	\Ateth
y	yod	y	\Ay	\Ayod
k	kaph	k	\Ak	\Akaph
l	lamed	l	\Al	\Alamed
m	mem	m	\Am	\Amem
n	nun	n	\An	\Anun
s	samekh	s	\As	\Asamekh
'	ayin	' o	\Alq \Ao	\Aayin
p	pe	p	\Ap	\Ape
$\d{s}$	sade	x	\Asd	\Asade
q	qoph	q	\Aq	\Aqoph
r	resh	r	\Ar	\Aresh
$\check{s}$	shin	S	\Asv	\Ashin
t	tav	t	\At	\Atav

\textaram   The command \textaram{⟨*text*⟩} typesets ⟨*text*⟩ in the Aramaic font.

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

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

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

References

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[Dru95]   Johanna Drucker. *The Alphabetic Labyrinth.* Thames and Hudson, 1995.

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[MG04]   Frank Mittelbach and Michel Goossens. *The LaTeX Companion.* Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, second edition, 2004.

[Hea90]   John F. Healey. *Reading the Past: The Early Alphabet.* University of California Press/British Museum, 1990. (ISBN 0-520-07309-6)

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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.