

The Etruscan fonts*

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2005/04/11

Abstract

The `etruscan` bundle provides a set of fonts for the Etruscan script as used about the eighth century BC in Italy.

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1 Introduction

The Etruscan alphabet and characters is a direct ancestor of our modern day Latin alphabet and fonts. Scholars can read Etruscan writing, but they have little understanding of the language itself as, apart from proper names, the meanings of less than a score of words are known. The font presented here is one of a series showing the evolution of the modern Latin alphabet from its original Phoenician source to its modern 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 code for the fonts and the package are 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

*This file has version number v2.1, last revised 2005/04/11.

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‘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.

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 day terms the Phoenician abecedary was:

A B G D E Y Z H Θ I K L M N 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. There 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 etruscan package

The Etruscan alphabet originally consisted of 26 letters but by about 450 BC had decreased to only 20. The Etruscan font as provided here consists of 27 letters. The font is mainly based on an 8th C BC Etruscan abecedary in the Museo Archeologico, Florence, together with one character that looks like our digit 8 as shown by Richard Firmage [Fir93]. I also used information from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Table 1: The Etruscan script and alphabet

| Value | Name | ASCII | Command | Command |
|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|------------|
| <i>A</i> | alpha (aleph) | a | \Aalpha | \ARalpha |
| <i>B</i> | beta (beth) | b | \Abeta | \ARbeta |
| <i>G</i> | gamma (gimel) | g | \Agamma | \Agamma |
| <i>D</i> | delta (daleth) | d | \Adelta | \Adelta |
| <i>E</i> | epsilon (he) | e | \Aepsilon | \AREpsilon |
| <i>F</i> | digamma (vav) | F | \Adigamma | \ARDigamma |
| <i>Z</i> | zeta (zayin) | z | \Azeta | \ARzeta |
| <i>H</i> | eta (heth) | h | \Aeta | \AReta |
| Θ | theta (teth) | T | \Atheta | \ARtheta |
| <i>I</i> | iota (yod) | i | \Aiota | \ARiota |
| <i>K</i> | kappa (kaph) | k | \Akappa | \Akappa |
| <i>L</i> | lambda (lamed) | l | \Alambda | \ARlambda |
| <i>M</i> | mu (mem) | m | \Amu | \ARmu |
| <i>N</i> | nu (nun) | n | \Anu | \ARnu |
| Ξ | xi (samekh) | x | \Axi | \ARxi |
| <i>O</i> | omicron (ayin) | o | \Aomicron | \ARomicron |
| <i>P</i> | pi (pe) | p | \Api | \ARpi |
| <i>S</i> | (sade) | S | \Aesade | \AResade |
| <i>Q</i> | (qoph) | q | \Aqoph | \ARqoph |
| <i>R</i> | rho (resh) | r | \Arho | \ARrho |
| <i>S</i> | sigma (shin) | S | \Asigma | \ARsigma |
| <i>T</i> | tau (tav) | t | \Atau | \ARtau |
| <i>Y</i> | upsilon (vav) | y | \Aupsilon | \ARupsilon |
| <i>X</i> | chi | X | \Achi | \ARchi |
| Φ | phi | f | \Aphi | \ARphi |
| Ψ | psi | P | \Apsi | \ARpsi |
| <i>F</i> | (vav?) | v | \Avau | \ARvau |

Table 1 lists, in the Etruscan alphabetical order, the transliterated value of the characters and the Greek and Phoenician (in parenthesis) names of the character.

`\etrfamily` This command selects the Etruscan font family. The family name is `etr`.

`\textetr` The command `\textetr{<text>}` typesets `<text>` in the Etruscan font.

I have provided two ways of accessing the Etruscan glyphs: (a) by ASCII characters, and (b) by commands whose names are based on the (Greek or Phoenician) name of the character. These are shown in Table 1. The commands of the form `\ARxxx` access the glyph forms for writing right-to-left, while the forms for writing left-to-right are accessed by either the ASCII characters or the `\Axxx` commands.

`\translitetr` `\translitetr{<commands>}` will typeset a transliterated version of the character `<commands>` (those in the last two columns of Table 1). A mixture of Latin and Greek uppercase characters are used for the transliteration.

`\translitetrfont` The font used for the transliteration is defined by this macro, which is initialised as an upright form (i.e., `\mathrm`).

References

- [Dru95] Johanna Drucker. *The Alphabetic Labyrinth*. Thames and Hudson, 1995.
- [Fir93] Richard A. Firmage. *The Alphabet Abecedarium*. David R. Goodine, 1993.
- [MG04] Frank Mittelbach and Michel Goossens. *The LaTeX Companion*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, second edition, 2004.

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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.

| E | | T | |
|-------------------------|---------|-------------------------------|---------|
| <code>\etrfamily</code> | 2 | <code>\textetr</code> | 2 |
| | | <code>\translitetr</code> | 4 |
| | | <code>\translitetrfont</code> | ... 4 |