













































# The Origin of the Alphabet

The original alphabet was developed by a Semitic people living in the Sinai Desert. They based it on the idea developed by the Egyptians, but used their own specific symbols. It was quickly adopted by their neighbors and relatives, the Canaanites, the Hebrews, and the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians spread their alphabet to other people of the Near East and Asia Minor, as well as to the Arabs, the Greeks, and the Etruscans, and as far west as present day Spain. The letters and names on the left are the ones used by the Phoenicians. The letters on the right are possible original versions. If you don't recognize the letters, keep in mind that they have since been reversed (since the Phoenicians wrote from right to left) and often turned on their sides!

	<b>'aleph</b> , the ox, began as the image of an ox's head. It represents a glottal stop before a vowel. The Greeks, needing vowel symbols, used it for <b>alpha</b> . The Romans used it as <b>A</b> .	
	<b>Beth</b> , the house, may have derived from a more rectangular Egyptian alphabetic glyph of a reed shelter (but which stood for the sound h). The Greeks called it <b>beta</b> , and it was passed on to the Romans as <b>B</b> .	
	<b>Gimel</b> , the camel, may have originally been the image of a boomerang-like throwing stick. The Greeks called it <b>gamma</b> . The Etruscans -- who had no g sound -- used it for the k sound, and passed it on to the Romans as <b>C</b> . They in turn added a short bar to it to make it do double duty as <b>G</b> .	
	<b>Daleth</b> , the door, may have originally been a fish! The Greeks turned it into <b>delta</b> , and passed it on to the Romans as <b>D</b> .	
	<b>He</b> may have meant window, but originally represented a man, facing us with raised arms, calling out or praying. The Greeks used it for the vowel <b>epsilon</b> ("simple E"). The Romans used it as <b>E</b> .	
	<b>Waw</b> , the hook, may originally have represented a mace. The Greeks used one version of waw which looked like our F, which they called digamma, for the number 6. This was used by the Etruscans for v, and they passed it on to the Romans as <b>F</b> . The Greeks had a second version -- <b>upsilon</b> -- which they moved to the back of their alphabet. The Romans used a version of upsilon for <b>V</b> , which later would be written <b>U</b> as well, then adopted the Greek form as <b>Y</b> . In 7th century England, the <b>W</b> -- "double-u" -- was created.	
	<b>Zayin</b> may have meant sword or some other kind of weapon. The Greeks used it for <b>zeta</b> . The Romans only adopted it later as <b>Z</b> , and put it at the end of their alphabet.	
	<b>Heth</b> , the fence, was a "deep throat" (pharyngeal) consonant. The Greeks used it for the vowel <b>eta</b> , but the Romans used it for <b>H</b> .	
	<b>Teth</b> may have originally represented a spindle. The Greeks used it for <b>theta</b> , but the Romans, who did not have the th sound, dropped it.	
	<b>Yodh</b> , the hand, began as a representation of the entire arm. The Greeks used a highly simplified version of it for <b>iota</b> . The Romans used it as <b>I</b> , and later added a variation for <b>J</b> .	
	<b>Kaph</b> , the hollow or palm of the hand, was adopted by the Greeks for <b>kappa</b> and passed it on to the Romans as <b>K</b> .	
	<b>Lamedh</b> began as a picture of an ox stick or goad. The Greeks used it for <b>lambda</b> . The Romans turned it into <b>L</b> .	
	<b>Mem</b> , the water, became the Greek <b>mu</b> . The Romans turned it into <b>M</b> .	
	<b>Nun</b> , the fish, was originally a snake or eel. The Greeks used it for <b>nu</b> , and the Romans for <b>N</b> .	

		
	<b>Samekh</b> , which also meant fish, is of uncertain origin. It may have originally represented a tent peg or some kind of support. It bears a strong resemblance to the Egyptian djed pillar seen in many sacred carvings. The Greeks used it for <b>xi</b> and a simple variation of it for <b>chi</b> . The Romans kept only the variation as <b>X</b> .	
	<b>'ayin</b> , the eye, was another "deep throat" consonant. The Greeks used it for <b>omicron</b> ("little O"). They developed a variation of it for <b>omega</b> ("big O"), and put it at the end of their alphabet. The Romans kept the original for <b>O</b> .	
	<b>Pe</b> , the mouth, may have originally been a symbol for a corner. The Greeks used it for <b>pi</b> . The Romans turned it into <b>P</b> .	
	<b>Sade</b> , a sound between s and sh, is of uncertain origin. It may have originally been a symbol for a plant, but later looks more like a fish hook. The Greeks did not use it, although an odd variation does show up as sampi, a symbol for 900. The Etruscans used it in the shape of an M for their sh sound, but the Romans had no need for it.	
	<b>Qoph</b> , the monkey, may have originally represented a knot. It was used for a sound similar to k but further back in the mouth. The Greeks only used it for the number 90, but the Etruscans and Romans kept it for <b>Q</b> .	
	<b>Resh</b> , the head, was used by the Greeks for <b>rho</b> . The Romans added a line to differentiate it from their P and made it <b>R</b> .	
	<b>Shin</b> , the tooth, may have originally represented a bow. Although it was first pronounced sh, the Greeks used it sideways for <b>sigma</b> . The Romans used it for <b>S</b> .	
	<b>Taw</b> , the mark, was used by the Greeks for <b>tau</b> . The Romans used it for <b>T</b> .	

The Greek letter phi was already common among the Anatolians in what is now Turkey. Psi appears to have been invented by the Greeks themselves, perhaps based on Poseidon's trident. For comparison, here is the complete Greek alphabet:

Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ϙ Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ Χ Ψ Ω