


The Alphabet

- Borrowed from Phoenician, represented the consonant sounds of Greek, used other Phoenician letters to represent vowels—phonetic instead of syllabic
- 800, writing down epic poetry? Commercial? No evidence for the latter, 8th-7th century still oral
- Second half of eighth century—verses scratched on vases, ‘Homeric’
- 650, inscription from Dreros in Crete
- Regional variations in letter forms
- Easier to learn and read than Linear B


Herodotus on writing


Now the Phoenicians who came with Cadmus... introduced into Greece upon their arrival a great variety of arts, among the rest that of writing, whereof the Greeks till then had, as I think, been ignorant. And originally they shaped their letters exactly like all the other Phoenicians, but afterwards, in course of time, they changed by degrees their language, and together with it the form likewise of their characters.”
Herodotus *Hist.* 5.58.1 (trans. Rawlinson).

Phoenician Alphabet


Z
Zayin
Weapon


W
Waw
Hook


H
He
Window



D
Daleth
Door


G
Gimel
Camel


B
Beth
House



Aleph
Ox


N
Nun
Fish


M
Mem
Water


L
Lamedh
Ox-Goad



K
Kaph
Palm of Hand


Y
Yodh
Hand



T
Teth
Unknown



H
Heth
Fence



T
Taw
Mark


SH
Shin
Tooth



R
Resh
Head


Q
Qoph
Monkey


S
Sadhe
Fishhook


P
Peh
Mouth


Ayin
Eye


S
Samekh
Support



U

R

O

P

E

CENTRAL

N
ULA

Corsica

ITALIAN PENINSULA

Sardinia

Sicily

BALKAN
REGION

ASIA MINOR
(ANATOLIA)

Crimea

Crete

Cyprus

MESOPOTAMIA

THE LEVANT

CYRENAICA

SINAI

NILE

NORTH

AFRICA

ARABIA

E

ANCIENT ITALY



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