



GREEK

EuBoea	Ionia	Athens	Corinth	Modern Capitals	Modern Lower Case	Transliteration	Name
AA	AA	AA	AA	A	α	a	alpha
B	B	B	Π	B	β	b	beta
<<C	Γ	Λ	<<C	Γ	γ	g	gamma
DD	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	δ	d	delta
ÆE	ÆE	ÆE	B	E	ε	e	epsilon
F	-	F	F	F	Ϝ	w	digamma
I	I	I	I	Z	ζ	zd	zeta
-	ΘH	-	-	H	η	ē	eta
ΘH	-	ΘH	ΘH		-	h	
⊗⊕⊗	⊗⊕⊗	⊗⊕⊗	⊗⊕⊗	Θ	θ	th	theta
I	I	I	Ξ	I	ι	i	iota
K	K	K	K	K	κ	k	kappa
Λ	Λ	Λ	Λ	Λ	λ	l	lambda
ΜΜΜ	ΜΜ	ΜΜ	ΜΜ	M	μ	m	mu
N	N	N	N	N	ν	n	nu
X	Ξ	(XΞ)	Ξ	Ξ	ξ	ks	xi
O	O	O	O	O	ο	o	omicron
ΠΠ	Π	Π	Π	Π	π	p	pi
M(?)	-	-	M	M	-	s	san
Ϟ	Ϟ	Ϟ	Ϟ	Q	ϙ	k	qoppa
P	PD	PR	PR	P	ρ	r	rho
Σ	Ξ	Σ	-	Σ	σς	s	sigma
T	T	T	T	T	τ	t	tau
ΥΥV	VY	ΥΥV	ΥΥV	Y	υ	u	upsilon
ϕ⊕	ϕ	ϕ⊕	ϕ⊕	Φ	φ	ph	phi
ΥV	X	X	X	X	χ	kh	chi
(ϕς)	ΥV	(ϕς)	ΥV	Ψ	ψ	ps	psi
-	ΩΩ	-	-	Ω	ω	ō	omega

Above: The first writing system to contain symbols for individual consonant sounds (as in Proto-Canaanite) and for individual vowel sounds (as in the various Near Eastern and Greek syllabaries) was the Greek alphabet. There were many local varieties of the Greek alphabet, such as the four illustrated here.



## Writing Systems

### LOCAL GREEK

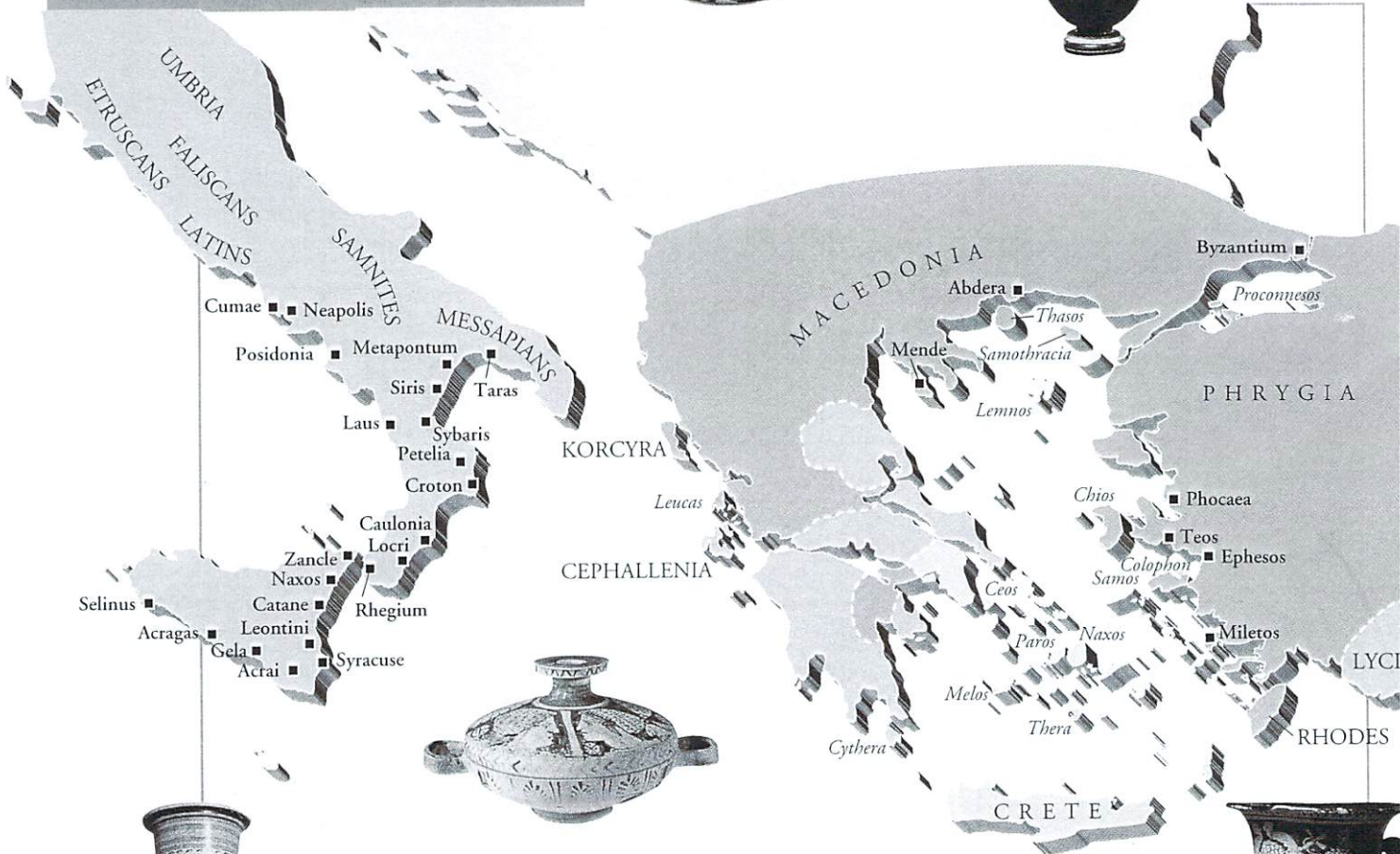
The local, or *epichoric*, alphabets of the ancient Greeks can be divided into four different types according to the manner in which they represent certain consonant sounds. In 1887 the German scholar Kirchhoff published a study of the Greek alphabets in which he included a map showing the distribution of the alphabet types. The four types were color-coded as green, red, blue, and light blue; the practice of identifying the alphabets in this way has persisted.



This Greek canthare, from about 540 BC, has a double head of one white and one black or negro woman.



The head of a satyr is depicted on a fourth century BC painted pottery Rhyton, also from the Trebbia valley.



Crude drawings of female heads decorate this example of fourth century BC Lekane pottery.

An amphora from the Trebbia valley shows the departure of warriors.

This funerary amphora, dating from around 800 BC, depicts the prothesis (laying out) and lamentation over the dead.



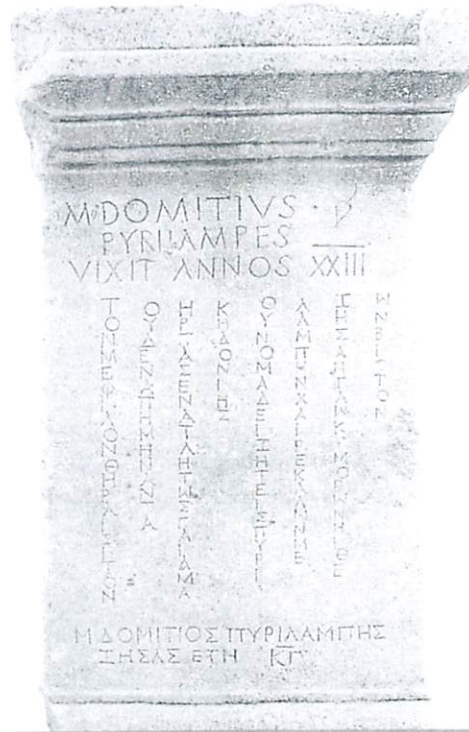


Voiced, voiceless, and voiceless aspirated consonants which are produced at a single point in the vocal tract are not distinguished from one another, including dentals, as can be seen by the example cited above. In contrast to the Linear B practice, [l] and [r] are distinguished in the Cypriot system. Also, special mechanisms are devised for spelling both word-final consonants and the first consonant occurring in word-initial consonant sequences.

GREECE

The Greek alphabet is yet a third Greek writing system. Though much earlier dates have been proposed, the most widely accepted for the first appearance of the Greek alphabet is the eighth century BC.

As with the two earlier Greek scripts, the alphabet was based upon a writing system already used by a people with whom the Greeks came into contact, in this instance the Phoenicians. Various places have been suggested for the Greek adaptation of the Phoenician consonantal script, including Cyprus, Crete, Rhodes, and the Syrian coastal town of Al Mina. Wherever this adaptation occurred, it must have been carried out within a bilingual Phoenician-Greek context. In the view of the author, the evidence points overwhelmingly to Cyprus, on which there had been a significant Phoenician presence since the middle of the ninth century BC. Certain peculiarities of the Greek alphabet suggest that the Greeks who adapted the Phoenician writing system were accustomed to spelling their language with the Cypriot syllabary. For example, the Greek alphabet contains a symbol with the value [k] + [s] (the progenitor of the x symbol used in spelling English); with both a symbol for [k] and one for [s], the alphabet has no need at all for such a double consonant character. Within the Cypriot syllabary, however, *ks* syllabic characters



Left: This funerary inscription on the gravestone of M. Domitius Pyrilampes from Dion, Greece is written in both Latin and Greek. The main text is in Greek, while the name and age of the deceased appears horizontally in Latin at the top.

ETRUSCAN		
Archaic Etruscan	Neo-Etruscan	Transliteration
A	A	a
⌋	⌋	c
⌋	⌋	e
⌋	⌋	v
⌋	⌋	ts
⌋	⌋	h
⊗	⊗	th
⌋	⌋	i
⌋	⌋	k
⌋	⌋	l
⌋	⌋	m
⌋	⌋	n
⌋	⌋	p
⌋	⌋	s
⌋	⌋	k
⌋	⌋	r
⌋	⌋	s
⌋	⌋	t
⌋	⌋	u
⌋	⌋	s
⌋	⌋	ph
⌋	⌋	kh
⌋	⌋	f

Left: The Etruscans, a non-Indo-European people from Italy, acquired a variety of the red alphabet type from the Greeks who settled in the area of Pithekoussae and Cumae in southern Italy (modern Naples). The approximate values of individual symbols are known, but much remains a mystery.



as those of Euboea and Laconia, have the supplemental characters Φ and Ψ, with the respective values [p<sup>h</sup>] and [k<sup>h</sup>]. The blue alphabets are of two subtypes: dark blue, used in Corinth and Rhodes, with supplementals Φ, X, and Ψ, representing [p<sup>h</sup>], [k<sup>h</sup>], and [p<sup>s</sup>] respectively; light blue from Attica, with only Φ and X, taking the same values as in the dark blue subtypes. The form of the Greek alphabet that survives today is Ionic (dark blue).

Much of Sicily and the south of Italy was colonized by the Greeks. One of the oldest known examples of Greek alphabetic writing comes from the ruins of the Greek colony on the island of Pithekoussae in the bay of Naples. These letters comprise a verse inscription on the so-called Cup of Nestor, dated to approximately 725 BC.

ITALY

In the seventh century BC, a non-Indo-European people called the Etruscans lived in western central Italy. The southern reaches of Etruscan settlement neighbored upon the Euboean Greek colonies of Pithekoussae and Cumae. From the Greeks of southern Italy, the Etruscans learned to write. As the sounds of the Etruscan language differed from those of Greek, the Etruscans introduced certain changes into the red Greek alphabet which they acquired. Etruscan lacked voiced stops (sounds such as [b], [d], and [g]), and although the earliest Etruscan alphabets retained the Greek letters for such consonants, eventually the Greek symbols Β and Δ representing [b] and [d], were dropped. The Greek letter Γ, for [g], was, however, retained to represent the voiceless stop [k] when it occurred before the vowels *e* and *i*. The Etruscans used the Greek K to spell [k] before the vowel *a*, and the Greek symbol Ϟ (called *qoppa*) to spell [k] before *u*; the Greeks had used *qoppa* for representing a *k*-sound produced a bit further back in the oral cavity than [k].

The longest single Etruscan document yet discovered was found not in Italy but in Egypt. A Croatian traveling in Egypt in the nineteenth

century acquired for the Zagreb National Museum a mummy which was entombed in linen bandages with an inscription of about 1,200 words detailing a sacred Etruscan calendar. Why and how such a document came to wrap an Egyptian mummy is unknown.

Also coming to light in the nineteenth century was a stele on the island of Lemnos in the Aegean.

*Below: Oscan and Umbrian were two of the several Italic (Indo-European) languages of ancient Italy. Each used an alphabet derived from the Etruscan script. Within the last three centuries BC, these languages and their alphabets fell victim to the spread of Latin and its script throughout Italy.*

OSCAN		UMBRIAN	
Symbol	Translit.	Symbol	Translit.
Α	a	Α	a
Β	b	Β	b
Γ	g	Ϟ	ř
Ϟ	d	Ξ	e
Ξ	e	Ϛ	v
Ϛ	v	Ϝ	ts
Ι	ts	Θ	h
Θ	h	Ι	i
Ι	i	Κ	k
Κ	k	Ϛ	l
Ϛ	l	Ϟ(Λ)	m
Ϟ	m	Η	n
Η	n	Ι	p
Π	p	Ϛ	r
Ϛ	r	Ϛ	s
Ϛ	s	Ϛ(Υ)	t
Τ	t	Ϛ	u
Ϛ	u	Ϟ	f
Ϟ	f	Ϛ	ç
Ϛ(Ϛ)	í		
Ϛ	ú		



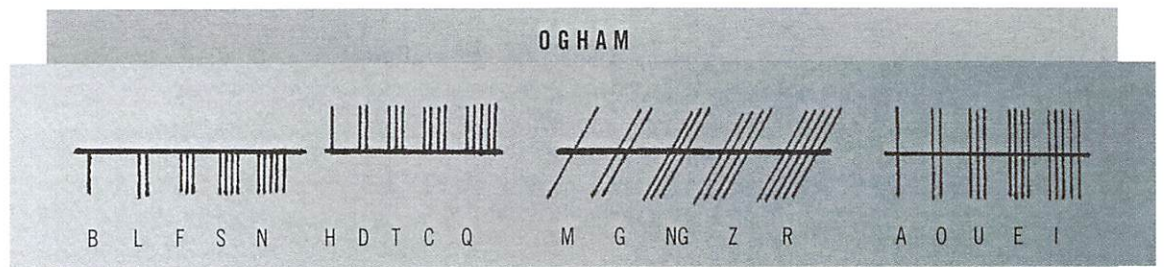
The Lemnian Stone, dated to the sixth century BC, bears an inscription in a script which is quite similar to the Etruscan alphabet. This inscription is not yet understood, though it has been conjectured that it writes a language similar to Etruscan.

The Etruscan alphabet was introduced to the region of Latium and its Latin-speaking inhabitants in the seventh century BC. Again, because of consonant and vowel differences between their own Indo-European language and Etruscan, the Latin-speaking users of the Etruscan script made certain modifications. While early Latin writers continued the Etruscan practice of using three different characters to represent the voiceless stop [k], the third letter of the adapted Etruscan script, C (which was Greek  $\Upsilon$  in origin) was eventually generalized for spelling Latin [k] in all contexts. A modified form of this C, designed G, was used for spelling the Latin voiced stop [g], and placed seventh in the Latin alphabet, replacing an unneeded Etruscan character, the Greek *zeta* in origin. Latin Q, from

Etruscan (and earlier Greek) *qoppa*, came to represent the voiceless labiovelar stop [k<sup>w</sup>]. The early form of the Etruscan alphabet acquired in Latium retained the Greek symbols for [b] and [d], but the Etruscan letters which continued the Greek symbols for the voiceless aspirated stops [p<sup>h</sup>], [t<sup>h</sup>], and [k<sup>h</sup>] ( $\Phi$ ,  $\Theta$ , and  $\Psi$  in the red alphabet of the Euboean colonies) were not required for spelling Latin and so were deleted. The letters Y and Z were appended in the first century BC in order to spell more accurately the many Greek loan words entering the Roman language.

Latin was only one of several Indo-European languages of the Italic subfamily spoken in Italy when the Latin alphabet appeared. Oscan and Umbrian, for example, both developed their own Etruscan-based alphabets. With Rome's highly effective colonization of the Italian peninsula, these languages and their scripts were supplanted by Latin and its alphabet. The pre-eminent status of the Latin alphabet would in time be extended considerably beyond Italy.

Right: One of the more unusual alphabetic scripts of early Europe is Ogham, the writing system of the Celts of Britain and Ireland.



Below: Runes were the alphabetic symbols used by the various Germanic peoples of Europe, known from at least the third century AD. The runic system, or futhork, of the Anglo-Saxons contains 31 characters. Runes were commonly inscribed on wood, metal, and stone.

