

The Runic fonts*

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Abstract

The `runic` package provides a set of fonts for the Runic script, also known as futhorc after the names of the initial letters of the Runic abecedy. The font follows the Anglo-Saxon abecedy.

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1 Introduction

The Runic alphabet and characters was in fairly common use in Europe, particularly in the Germanic, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries until the Middle Ages. The font presented here follows the Anglo-Saxon abecedy.

This is one of a series of fonts intended to show how the Latin alphabet has changed from its original Phoenician form to its present 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 [GMS94].

Section 2 describes the usage of the package. Commented code for the font and package may be 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 day 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 familiar *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 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 runic package

There are three major versions of the Runic script, known as *futharc* after the initial letters of its abecedary, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and Scandinavian. Scholars are unclear about the genealogy of the script, but there are some obvious relationships between some of the futharc glyphs and the Phoenecian glyphs. Some other letters, such as the *thorn* and *wen*, are known Runic inventions. And then there are other glyphs which I can only assume were also Runic inventions.

The font presented here is based on the Anglo-Saxon Runic abecedary which had 24 letters and one (punctuation) mark. The font presented here is based on

information from Drucker [Dru95], Firmage [Fir93], and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

`\Fthorn` Many of the Runic characters have a direct correspondence with the modern
`\Fng` Latin alphabet. For those characters that have a direct correspondance I have mapped the Runic letter to the uppercase Latin letter. However, the *thorn* and *ng* characters have no match. These two characters are accessed via `\Fthorn` and `\Fng` respectively.

The letter sequence for the futharc abecedary mapping is:

F U `\Fthorn` A R K G W H N I J Y P X S T B E M L `\Fng` D O :

where : is the (punctuation) mark.

`\futfamily` This command selects the Runic font family. The family name is `fut`.

`\textfut` The command `\textfut{<text>}` typesets `<text>` in the Runic font.

References

- [Dru95] Johanna Drucker. *The Alphanumeric Labyrinth*. Thames and Hudson, 1995.
- [Fir93] Richard A. Firmage. *The Alphabet Abecedarium*. David R. Goodine, 1993.
- [GMS94] Michel Goossens, Frank Mittelbach, and Alexander Samarin. *The LaTeX Companion*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, second edition, 2004.