

The Alphabets of Hebrew and Arabic:

These are the names and sounds of the letters of the Hebrew and Arabic alphabets:

Hebrew:	sound		Arabic:	sound
<i>aleph</i>	a		<i>alif</i>	a
<i>bet</i>	b/v	<i>b••</i>	b	
<i>gimmel</i>	g		<i>jim</i>	j
<i>daleth</i>	d		<i>d•l</i>	d
<i>he</i>	h	<i>h••</i>	h	
<i>vav</i>	v/o/u		<i>w•w</i>	w/ü
<i>zayin</i>	z		<i>z••</i>	z
<i>•et</i>	[kh]		<i>•••</i>	•
<i>tet</i>	t	<i>t••</i>	t	
<i>yod</i>	y/ı/ı'		<i>y••</i>	y/ı
<i>kaf</i>	k/kh	<i>k•f</i>	k	
<i>lamed</i>	l		<i>l•m</i>	l
<i>mem</i>	m	<i>mim</i>	m	
<i>nun</i>	n	<i>nün</i>	n	
<i>samekh</i>	s		*****	
<i>fiayin</i>	fi (•)		<i>fiayn</i>	fi
<i>pe</i>	p/f	<i>f••</i>	f	
<i>tsadi</i>	ts		<i>ß•d</i>	ß
<i>quf</i>	q [k]		<i>q•f</i>	q
<i>resh</i>	r [gh]		<i>r••</i>	r
<i>sin</i>	s	<i>sin</i>	s	
<i>shin</i>	sh	<i>shin</i>	sh	
<i>tav</i>	t	<i>t••</i>	t	
		<i>th••</i>	th	
		<i>kh••</i>	kh	
		<i>dh•l</i>	dh	
		<i>••d</i>	•	
		<i>÷••</i>	÷	
		<i>ghayn</i>	gh	

Exercise II: Complete the following:

1. Are the Hebrew and Arabic alphabets related? How can you tell?

2. Did the names of the Hebrew letters derive from Arabic, or did the names of the Arabic letters derive from Hebrew? [Hint: Think about *daleth* and *d•l*. Which could have come from the other?]

3. Complete the following table of correspondences of letters:

Hebrew	<i>bet</i>	>>	Arabic	_____
Hebrew	<i>daleth</i>	>>	Arabic	_____
Hebrew	<i>gimmel</i>	>>	Arabic	_____
Hebrew	<i>pe</i>	>>	Arabic	_____
Hebrew	<i>zayin</i>	>>	Arabic	_____
Hebrew	<i>mem</i>	>>	Arabic	_____
Hebrew	<i>nun</i>	>>	Arabic	_____
Arabic	<i>q•f</i>	>>	Hebrew	_____
Arabic	<i>f••</i>	>>	Hebrew	_____
Arabic	<i>’••</i>	>>	Hebrew	_____
Arabic	<i>y••</i>	>>	Hebrew	_____
Arabic	<i>w•w</i>	>>	Hebrew	_____
Arabic	<i>t••</i>	>>	Hebrew	_____
Arabic	<i>h••</i>	>>	Hebrew	_____

4. What are the main points of difference between the Hebrew and the Arabic alphabets?

The Root-and-Pattern System: A Key Characteristic of Semitic Languages

Semitic languages have what is called a root-and-pattern system. Most words have three root consonants. These consonants are the most important consonants in the word; they give the basic meaning. In any given word, these consonants are placed at specific points in a pattern formed by a combination of vowels and other, extra consonants. The pattern modifies the basic meaning of the word in predicatable ways. The number of patterns that occur in the language, though large, is limited. For example, the root-consonants *k/kh-t-b/v* give the basic meaning of "writing" in both Arabic and Hebrew. Putting these consonants into various patterns gives a number of meanings all related to writing:

Arabic: *k-t-b*

fafiala pattern: *kataba* "he wrote"

<i>fufiila</i> pattern:	<i>kutiba</i> "it was written"
<i>f•fiil</i> pattern:	<i>k•tib</i> "writer"
<i>maffiül</i> pattern:	<i>maktüb</i> "written"
<i>maffial</i> pattern:	<i>maktab</i> "desk, office"
<i>maffiiala</i> pattern:	<i>maktaba</i> "library, bookstore"
<i>fifi•l</i> pattern:	<i>kit•b</i> "book"
<i>fufiayyil</i> pattern:	<i>kutayyib</i> "booklet"
<i>fifi•la</i> pattern:	<i>kit•ba</i> "writing"
<i>f•fiiala</i> pattern:	<i>k•taba</i> "he corresponded; he wrote a letter to someone"

Hebrew: k/kh-t-b/v

<i>pafial</i> pattern:	<i>katav</i> "he wrote"
<i>pefiula</i> pattern:	<i>ketuba</i> "written document, especially a marriage contract"
<i>pefiiolet</i> pattern:	<i>ketovet</i> "inscription"
<i>pefiila</i> pattern:	<i>ketiva</i> "writing"
<i>pafiul</i> pattern:	<i>katuv</i> "Verse, passage from the Bible"
<i>pafilan</i> pattern:	<i>katvan</i> "copyist"
<i>niffial</i> pattern:	<i>nikhtav</i> "it was written"
<i>hiffiil</i> pattern:	<i>hikhtiv</i> "to order to be written; to dictate"
<i>miffial</i> pattern:	<i>mikhtav</i> "letter"

In Arabic and Hebrew grammar, the "test verb" Arabic *fafiiala*, Hebrew *pafial* "to do" is used to identify the particular patterns. The three root consonants *f/p*, *fi* (*fiayn*), and *l* are substituted for the root consonants of the word in question. For example, the pattern of the word *k•tib* "writer" is said to be *f•fiil*, the pattern of *maktüb* is *maffiül*, the pattern of *maktaba* is *maffiiala*, etc. In Hebrew, the pattern of *katav* is *pafial*, the pattern of *kativ* is *pafiil*, and the pattern of *nikhtav* is *niffial*, etc. Many of the patterns that occur in Hebrew correspond closely to patterns that occur in Arabic. This suggests that many of them go back to their ancestral languages, proto-West-Semitic, or proto-Semitic.

Exercise III: Complete the following:

1. What are the extra letters that occur in the patterns above? Which letters in the patterns above are not root consonants?

2. What are the root consonants in the following Arabic words?

<i>dir•sa</i> "studying"	_____
<i>majnün</i> "crazy"	_____
<i>bil•d</i> "country"	_____
<i>t•lib</i> "student"	_____
<i>sal•m</i> "peace"	_____

3. What are the root consonants in the following Hebrew words?

migdal "tower" _____
kelev "dog" _____
geshem "rain" _____
regel "foot" _____
shalom "peace" _____

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dir•sa "studying" _____
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5. What are the patterns of the following Hebrew words?

migdal "tower" _____
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Exercise IV:

Words of the form *maktab* (*maffial*) and *maktaba* (*maffiala*)—also *maffiil*, *miffial*--are nouns of place. They usually mean "the place where the verb X (*fafiala*) is done"; sometimes they derive from a noun, and mean "the place where the noun X is found."

Arabic Examples:

kataba he wrote *maktab* office, desk
maktaba library
darasa he studied *madrasa* school
sakana he dwelled *maskan* dwelling
rakiba he rode *markab* boat

Hebrew Examples:

shakhan he dwelled *mishkan* dwelling
rakhav he rode *merkava* chariot

1. Complete the following table:

Verb/Noun	Meaning	Noun of Place	Meaning
	he cooked	<i>matbakh</i>	kitchen
<i>lafiiba</i> (verb)		<i>malfiab</i>	playing field
<i>dakhala</i>	he entered	<i>madkhal</i>	
<i>kharaja</i>	he went out		exit
<i>nazala</i> (verb)	go down, get off	<i>manzil</i>	
<i>t•ra</i> (verb)		<i>mat•r</i>	airport
<i>malik</i> (noun)		<i>mamlaka</i>	kingdom
<i>k•na</i>	he was		place

<i>qabr</i>	tomb	<i>maqbara</i>	
<i>zib•la</i>	garbage	<i>mazbala</i>	

Numbers:

	Arabic:	Hebrew:
One:	<i>w•id</i>	<i>e.ad</i>
Two:	<i>ithnayn</i>	<i>shnayim</i>
Three:	<i>thal•tha</i>	<i>shalosh</i>
Four:	<i>arbatia</i>	<i>arbat</i>
Five:	<i>khamisa</i>	<i>hamish</i>
Six:	<i>sitta</i>	<i>shesh</i>
Seven:	<i>sabfia</i>	<i>shevafi</i>
Eight:	<i>tham•niya</i>	<i>shmone</i>
Nine:	<i>tisfia</i>	<i>teshafi</i>
Ten:	<i>fiashara</i>	<i>fieser</i>
Twenty:	<i>fiishrin</i>	<i>fiesrayim</i>
Thirty:	<i>thal•thin</i>	<i>shaloshim</i>
Forty:	<i>arbafin</i>	<i>arbatim</i>
Fifty:	<i>khamsin</i>	<i>hamishim</i>
Sixty:	<i>sittin</i>	<i>shishim</i>
Seventy:	<i>sabfin</i>	<i>shivfim</i>
Eighty:	<i>tham•nin</i>	<i>shmonim</i>
Ninety:	<i>tisfin</i>	<i>tishfim</i>
Hundred	<i>mi•a</i>	<i>me'a</i>
Thousand	<i>alf</i>	<i>elef</i>

Questions:

1. What Arabic sound corresponds to -o- in Hebrew?
2. What Arabic sound corresponds to -t- in Hebrew?
3. What Hebrew sound corresponds to -dh- in Arabic?
4. What Hebrew sound corresponds to -th- in Arabic?
5. What Hebrew sound corresponds to -kh- in Arabic?
6. What Hebrew sound corresponds to -s- in Arabic?
7. What Hebrew sound corresponds to -m- in Arabic?
8. What Hebrew sound corresponds to -n- in Arabic?

[there are two answers to no. 8]