

## The Coptic Alphabet

Coptic was the final stage of development of the ancient Egyptian language spoken since the time of the pharaohs.

Its earliest written form was Hieroglyphics.

At some stage around the beginning of the first millennium the Coptic script was transcribed into the Greek alphabet, hence the first 24 letters are imported directly from Greek.

After the 5<sup>th</sup> Greek letter, a Coptic letter Ⲯ was added. This does not appear in any words and only ever appears as a number

Another 7 letters were added to the end of the alphabet to make up for sounds that have no equivalent in Greek, leaving a total of 32 letters, the letters are shown in the table below, with more explanation about each in the section that follow .

Letter	Name	Pronunciation	Letter	Name	Pronunciation
Α α	Alpha	a	Π π	Pe	p
Β β	Vita	b, v	Ρ ρ	Ro	r
Γ γ	Gamma	g, gh, n	Ϛ ϛ	Seema	s
Δ δ	Delta	d, th	Ϝ ϝ	Tav	t
Ε ε	Eey	e	Ϟ ϟ	Epsilon	i
Ϛ ϛ	So-ou	-	Ϡ ϡ	Phi	f
Ζ ζ	Zeeta	z	Ϙ ϙ	Key	k, dh, kh
Η η	Eeta	ee	Ϝ ϝ	Epsi	eps
Θ θ	Theta	th, t	Ω ω	Omega	au
Ι ι	Yota	i	Ϻ ϻ	Shai	sh
Κ κ	Kappa	k	ϣ ϛ	Fai	f
Λ λ	Lola	l	ϥ Ϧ	Khai	kh
Μ μ	Mey	m	ϧ Ϩ	Hori	h
Ν ν	Ney	n	Ϙ ϙ	Jenja	j, g
Ξ ξ	Exi	x	Ϛ ϛ	Cheema	ch
Ο ο	O	o	Ϟ ϟ	Ti	ti

## VOWELS

What is a vowel?

The English vowels a, e, i, o, u

Vowels are letter you say without closing any part of your mouth

The other letters are consonants that require you to close part of your mouth while pronouncing them.

You will notice that there are scarcely any words that don't have any vowels; in fact you can scarcely see more than 2 consonants in a row without needing a vowel

Any way Coptic also has 7 vowels whose name and pronunciation are shown in the table.

<b>Α α</b>	Alpha, "a" as in "art"
<b>Ε ε</b>	Ey, "e" as in "let"
<b>Η η</b>	Eeta, "ee" as in "feet"
<b>Ι ι / Ψ ϣ</b>	Iota, Epsilon both "i" as in "sit"
<b>Ο ο</b>	O "o" as in "stop"
<b>Ω ω</b>	Omega, "au" as in "baud"

The different sounds ϣ makes when combined with different letters are summarized in the table below

<b>αϣ</b>	'av' as 'have'
<b>εϣ</b>	'ev' as in 'bev'
<b>οϣ</b>	'ou' as in 'soup'
<b>ϣ</b>	'i' if not preceded by any of the above

## CONSONANTS

As English readers we should be grateful that some of the Coptic consonants look and sound so similar to their English letters some of these are shown with some of the other more common consonants below

Ⲙ ⲙ	Mey, pronounced 'm' as in 'man'
Ⲛ ⲛ	Ney, pronounced 'n' as in 'net'
Ⲙ ⲙ	Kappa, pronounced 'k' as in 'kite'
Ⲥ ⲥ	Tav 't' pronounced as in 'net'
Ⲫ ⲫ	Seema, pronounced 's' as in 'sit'
Ⲡ ⲡ	Pe, pronounced 'p' as in 'put'
Ⲣ ⲣ	Ro, pronounced 'r' as in 'rat'
Ⲥ ⲥ	Sh, pronounced 'sh' as in 'shut'
Ⲅ ⲅ	Chima, pronounced 'ch' as in church'
Ⲙ ⲙ	Zeta, pronounced 'z' as in 'zoo'

ⲘⲎⲚ	Men
ⲤⲎⲚ	Ten
Ⲥⲟⲧⲥ	Totos
Ⲡⲟⲩ	Pou
Ⲙⲁⲧⲁ	kata

Now try to pronounce the following words

Ⲡⲁⲛ	
Ⲡⲁⲓ	
Ⲙⲏⲧ	
Ⲡⲁⲓ	
Ⲙⲁⲩ	
Ⲥⲁⲓ	
Ⲙⲟⲩⲓ	
Ⲙⲟⲩⲛ	
Ⲥⲟⲩⲛ	

Now we will look at some consonants that have only one pronunciation

Ξ ξ	“x”
Χ χ	“kh” (‘ch’ as in German “Buch”)
Ψ ψ	“ebs”
Φ φ	“ph” as in “phone”

Ϝ ϝ	‘f’ as in ‘fan’
Ϟ ϟ	‘h’ as in ‘hat’
Ϡ ϡ	‘ti’ as in ‘tick’
Ϣ ϣ	‘l’ as in ‘lake’

### THE JENKEM

The Jenkem is a little stroke that seems to appear all over the place it looks like this  $\overset{\sim}{\text{y}}$  you will see it appear in front of both consonants and vowels when you see it come over a consonant it is pronounced like an “e” before the consonant.

e. g.  $\overset{\sim}{\text{u}}\text{uon}$  is pronounced “emmon”

if it comes before a vowel it places a stress on the vowel

e.g. when pronouncing  $\overset{\sim}{\text{a}}\text{nok}$  you put a gap between the  $\overset{\sim}{\text{a}}$  and the rest of the word. So it is pronounced “a – nok”

Some example

ϡaron	Sharon
ϡai	Shai
ϣai	Fai
πατηρ	Pateer
βιτϣ	Chitf

Now try the following words:

ζηλος	
ζηρος	
ζηλον	
ζο†	
δεη	
δα	
†γορη	

Consonants with varying pronunciation

**B** vita

This letter has 2 pronunciations ‘b’ and ‘v’

1. In names of places and people “proper names” it is always “b”
2. In words which are not names it is “v” if followed by a vowel and “b” if followed by a consonant.

e.g. **Β**ΟΚ is not a name, the **Β** is followed by a vowel so it is pronounced “vauk”

**Αβρααμ** on the other hand is a name so **Β** is pronounced “b” and the word “abraam”

Try the following words

ζωβ	
βαλ	
νοβι	
ἄννοϋβ	
βωζεμ	
λωβω	
ἔβολ	
νιβεν	

**Δ** Delta

Is pronounced as “th” as in “this” in all common nouns but is pronounced as “d” in proper names

Example

Δε	ze
ΙΔωλον	izaulon
Δοξα	zoksa
Δικεος	Thikeos
Δαυιδ	david

ΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ	
Δελτα	
ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟΣ	
Διδου	
ΔΗΜΟΣ	

θ Theeta is pronounced as a soft “th” as in “thin” but pronounced as “t” if it comes after ω, ς or τ

ῥθεεθ	eshteh
ῥμαϑ	ethmav
θωω	thaush
ῥθορτερ	eshtorter
Ματθεον	matteon

ῥθογιτ	
θεοϷ	
ῥθοι	
ῥθοκ	
Βηθλεεμ	
θαμιο	

### τ Ghamma

Ghamma has 3 separate pronunciations which are as “gh”, “g” and “n”

1. If it is followed by ω, ο, λ it is pronounced as “gh” there is no corresponding letter for his sound in English
2. If it is followed by η, ι, ϑ or ε it is pronounced as “g” as in “get”
3. If it is followed by τ, κ, ζ or χ it is pronounced like “n”
4. If it is followed by any other consonant it is pronounced as “gh”

One of the really common words you will find is “αγιοϷ” using this example you can see that when the τ comes before and ι it is pronounced as “g” that way you know it is pronounced as “g” think of αττελοϷ

Some example

Γαρ	ghar
ΑγιοϷ	agios
ΓεννητιϷ	gennetis
Γη	gee

ταμοϷ	
τοστϑλη	
ατιαζιν	

## Χ

The learning of ω ο α and Η Ι Ϛ ε

Can be applied to the χ

When followed by ω ο α letters it is pronounced as “g” as in “get”

When followed by Η Ι Ϛ ε letters it is pronounced as “j” as in “jet”

Example

χε	je
χαωη	gamee
χαχι	gaji
χιωι	jimi

χαποχι	
χουκ	
πεχαυ	
κοϚχι	
πιχωοϚ	

## Χ

Χ is another one of those letters that has 3 pronunciations, this time the pronunciation depends on whether the word is of Greek or Coptic origin

1. In words of Coptic origin it is always pronounced as “K” as in “kitchen”
2. In words of Greek origin it is pronounced as “sh” if followed by the letters Η Ι Ϛ ε and “kh”
3. If followed by the letters ω ο α or a consonant a good example to remember is

χερε

Example

ΧΗ (Coptic)	kee
Χριστος (Greek)	ekhristos
Βεχε (Coptic)	veke
Χορος (Greek)	khoros
Αρχων (Greek)	Arkhaun

Πιχαηλ (Greek)	
χρωι (Coptic)	

Χαρισμα (Greek)	
Ⲭⲗⲟⲙ (Coptic)	
Χημ (Coptic)	
Ⲭⲣⲓⲥⲧⲓⲁⲛⲟⲥ (Greek)	
Χαριζεσθε (Greek)	

### How do you know if a word is of Greek origin?

1- the word will generally be of Greek origin if it contains one of the following letters

ζ λ ψ ξ ρ τ

2- The word is of Coptic origin if it contains one of the following letters

ϣ ϣ ϥ ϧ Ϩ ϩ

Letters τ , ϣ

The pronunciation of τ and ϣ sometimes varies this occurs in words of Greek origin.

In word of Greek origin τ is pronounced “d” as in “dog” if it comes after an η and ϣ it is pronounced “z” if it comes before η

παντοκρατωρ	pandokrator
ασπασμος	aspazmos
πλασμα	plazma
παντως	pandaus

### N.B.

#### I- Some more vowel rules

In the beginning of a sentence when the letter ι begins a sentence and is followed by another vowel it is pronounced as “y” as ιωτ is “yaut”

#### II- Double vowels

1- ωι is pronounced as “oi” as in “oil” e.g ωικ it is pronounced as “oik”

2- the following 3 double vowel rules apply only to Greek words αι is pronounced as “e” in words of Greek origin

e.g

a- αιμα “ema”

b- θαιμων “themon”

c- ει is pronounced as “i” in words of Greek origin επειδη (epithee) ειρηνη (irinee)

Note that e is very commonly left out all together

3- Oi is pronounced as i in words of Greek origin

a- **ΑΡΙΝΟΙΝ** “arinin”

b- **ΜΕΤΑΝΟΙΑ** “metania”

c- **ΛΟΙΠΟΝ** “lipon”

### III- Repeating vowels

If a vowel is repeated to appear in a row in a word, a stress is made on the second vowel

e.g. **αβρααμ** is pronounced abraam