

סמך

שין

Samchia, Samchiel One of the seventy childbirth angels.

<http://www.angelfire.com/journal/cathboduua/Angels/Sangels.html>

Samekh

Samekh or **Simketh** is the fifteenth letter in many Semitic alphabets, including Phoenician, Hebrew, and Aramaic, representing /s/. The Arabic alphabet, however, uses a letter based on Phoenician šin to represent /s/ (see there); however, that glyph takes Samekh's place in the traditional Abjadi order of the Arabic alphabet.

The Phoenician letter gave rise to the Greek Xi (Ξ, ξ).^[2]

1 Origins

The origin of Samekh is unclear. The Phoenician letter may continue a glyph from the Middle Bronze Age alphabets, either based on a hieroglyph for a tent peg / some kind of prop (*s'mikhah*, Hebrew: סמיכה, or *t'mikhah*, Hebrew: תמיכה, in modern Hebrew means to support), and thus may be derived from the Egyptian hieroglyph *djed*.

2 Hebrew Samekh

Hebrew spelling: סָמֶךְ

2.1 Pronunciation

Samekh represents a voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. Unlike most Semitic consonants, the pronunciation of /s/ remains constant between vowels and before voiced consonants.

2.2 Significance

Samekh in gematria has the value 60.

Samekh and Mem form the abbreviation for the Angel of Death, whose name in Hebrew is *Samael*. It also stands for centimetre.

In some legends, samekh is said to have been a miracle of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 32:15 records that the tablets “were written on both their sides.” The Jerusalem Talmud interprets this as meaning that the inscription went through the full thickness of the tablets. The stone in the center parts of the letters ayin and teth should have fallen out, as it was not connected to the rest of the tablet, but it miraculously remained in place. The Babylonian Talmud (tractate Shabbat 104a), on the other

hand, attributes this instead to samekh, but samekh did not have such a hollow form in the sacred Paleo-Hebrew alphabet that would presumably have been used for the tablets. However, this would be appropriate for the Rabbis which maintained that the Torah or the Ten Commandments were given in the later Hebrew “Assyrian” script (Sanhedrin 21b-22a).

3 Character encodings

4 Notes

- [1] The Arabic alphabet has no glyph of this origin. sīn, derived from Shin, takes its place in abjadi order.
- [2] Muss-Arnolt, W. (1892). *On Semitic Words in Greek and Latin*. Transactions of the American Philological Association v. 23, p. 35-156. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

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Shin (letter)

Shin (also spelled **Šin** (*šīn*) or **Sheen**) literally means “teeth”, “press”, and “sharp”; It is the twenty-first letter in many Semitic abjads, including Phoenician 𐤑, Aramaic/Hebrew שׁ, and Arabic ش (in abjadi order, 13th in modern order). Its sound value is a voiceless sibilant, [ʃ] or [s].

The Phoenician letter gave rise to the Greek Sigma (Σ) (which in turn gave Latin S and Cyrillic С), and the letter *Sha* in the Glagolitic and Cyrillic scripts (Ш, III).

The South Arabian and Ethiopian letter *Šawt* is also cognate.

1 Origins

The Proto-Sinaitic glyph, according to William Albright, was based on a “Tooth” and with the phonemic value š “corresponds etymologically (in part, at least) to original Semitic *t* (th), which was pronounced *s* in South Canaanite”.^[1]

The Phoenician šin letter expressed the continuants of two Proto-Semitic phonemes, and may have been based on a pictogram of a tooth (in modern Hebrew *shen*). The Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1972, records that it originally represented a composite bow.

The history of the letters expressing sibilants in the various Semitic alphabets is a bit complicated, due to different mergers between Proto-Semitic phonemes. As usually reconstructed, there are five Proto-Semitic phonemes that evolved into various voiceless sibilants in daughter languages, as follows:

2 Hebrew Shin / Sin

Hebrew spelling: שׁ

The Hebrew /s/ version according to the reconstruction shown above is descended from Proto-Semitic *š, a phoneme thought to correspond to a voiceless alveolar lateral fricative *ʃ*, similar to Welsh *Ll* in “Llandudno”.

See also Hebrew phonology, *Šawt*.

2.1 Sin and Shin Dot

The Hebrew letter represents two different phonemes: a sibilant /s/, like English *sour*, and a /ʃ/, like English *shoe*. The two are distinguished by a dot above the left-hand side of the letter for /s/ and above the right-hand side for /ʃ/. In the biblical name *Issachar* (Hebrew: יִשָּׁכָר) only, the second sin/shin letter is always written without any dot, even in fully vocalized texts.

2.2 Unicode encoding

2.3 Significance

In gematria, Shin represents the number 300.

Shin, as a prefix, bears the same meaning as the relative pronouns “that”, “which” and “who” in English. In colloquial Hebrew, *Kaph* and Shin together have the meaning of “when”. This is a contraction of כַּאֲשֶׁר, *ka'asher* (as, when).

Shin is also one of the seven letters which receive special crowns (called *tagin*) when written in a *Sefer Torah*. See *Gimmel*, *Ayin*, *Teth*, *Nun*, *Zayin*, and *Tzadi*.

According to *Judges* 12:6, the tribe of Ephraim could not differentiate between Shin and *Samekh*; when the *Gileadites* were at war with the Ephraimites, they would ask suspected Ephraimites to say the word *shibolet*; an Ephraimite would say *sibolet* and thus be exposed. From this episode we get the English word *Shibboleth*.

2.3.1 In Judaism

Shin also stands for the word *Shaddai*, a name for God. Because of this, a *kohen* (priest) forms the letter Shin with his hands as he recites the *Priestly Blessing*. In the mid 1960s, actor *Leonard Nimoy* used a single-handed version of this gesture to create the *Vulcan hand salute* for his character, *Mr. Spock*, on *Star Trek*.^[2]

The letter Shin is often inscribed on the case containing a *mezuzah*, a scroll of parchment with Biblical text written on it. The text contained in the *mezuzah* is the *Shema Yisrael* prayer, which calls the Israelites to love their God with all their heart, soul and strength. The *mezuzah* is situated upon all the doorframes in a home or establishment. Sometimes the whole word *Shaddai* will be written.

The *Shema Yisrael* prayer also commands the Israelites to write God's commandments on their hearts (*Deut.* 6:6);

the shape of the letter Shin mimics the structure of the human heart: the lower, larger left ventricle (which supplies the full body) and the smaller right ventricle (which supplies the lungs) are positioned like the lines of the letter Shin.

A religious significance has been applied to the fact that there are three valleys which comprise the city of Jerusalem's geography: the Valley of Ben Hinnom, Tyropoeon Valley, and Kidron Valley, and that these valleys converge to also form the shape of the letter shin, and that the Temple in Jerusalem is located where the dagesh (horizontal line) is. This is seen as a fulfillment of passages such as Deuteronomy 16:2 that instructs Jews to celebrate the Pasach at "the place the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his Name" (NIV).

In the Sefer Yetzirah the letter Shin is King over Fire, Formed Heaven in the Universe, Hot in the Year, and the Head in the Soul.

2.3.2 Sayings with Shin

The **Shin-Bet** was an old acronym for the Israeli Department of Internal General Security.

A **Shin-Shin Clash** is Israeli military parlance for a battle between two tank divisions ("armour" in Hebrew is שריון - *shiryon*).

Sh'at haShin (The Shin Hour) is the last possible moment for any action, usually military. Corresponds to the English expression *the eleventh hour*.

3 Arabic šīn/sīn

In the Arabic alphabet, *šīn* is at the original (21st) position in Abjadi order. A letter variant *sīn* takes the place of Samekh at 15th position.

In Modern Standard Arabic, initial *sīn-fatha* (though, normally diacritics are omitted) (سَ, pronounced /sa-/) is used as a prefix to imperfective verbs to indicate the future tense. Arab grammarians generally consider this prefix to be an abbreviation of سوف *sawfa*, meaning (in this sense) "will." Thus *sa-* prefixed to يكتب *yaktub* ("he writes") becomes سيكتب *sayaktub* ("he will write").

sīn represents /s/. It is the 12th letter of the modern alphabet order and is written thus:

šīn represents /ʃ/. and is the 13th letter of the modern alphabet order and is written thus:

The Arabic letter shin was an acronym for "something" meaning the unknown in algebraic equations. In the transcription into Spanish, the Greek letter *chi* (χ) was used which was later transcribed into Latin x. According to some sources, this is the origin of <x> used for the unknown in the equations.^{[3][4]}

4 Aramaic Shin/Sin

In Aramaic, where the use of *shin* is well-determined, the orthography of *sin* was never fully resolved.

To express an etymological /s/, a number of dialects chose either *sin* or *samek* exclusively, where other dialects switch freely between them (often 'leaning' more often towards one or the other). For example:^[5]

Regardless of how it is written, /s/ in spoken Aramaic seems to have universally resolved to /s/.

5 Character encodings

6 References

- [1] Albright, 1948: 15
- [2] Star Trek: The Original Series, episode #30 "Amok Time" (production #34), and "I Am Not Spock", Leonard Nimoy, 1977.
- [3] Terry Moore: Why is 'x' the unknown?
- [4] Online Etymological Dictionary
- [5] The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon

Albright, W. F., "The Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from Sinai and their Decipherment," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 110 (1948): 6-22.

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