

Ayin

Ayin (also *ayn* or *ain*; transliterated ⟨ʿ⟩) is the sixteenth letter of the Semitic abjads, including Phoenician ʿayin 𐤀, Hebrew ʿayin ע, Aramaic ʿē ܥ, Syriac ʿē ܥ, and Arabic ʿayn ع (where it is sixteenth inabjadi order only).^[1]

The letter represents or is used to represent a **voiced pharyngeal fricative** (/ʕ/) or a similarly articulated consonant. In some Semitic languages and dialects, the phonetic value of the letter has changed, or the phoneme has been lost altogether (thus, in **Modern Hebrew** it is reduced to a **glottal stop** or is omitted entirely).

The Phoenician letter is the origin of the Greek, Latin and Cyrillic letter Ϝ.

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Origins

The letter name is derived from **Proto-Semitic** *ʿayn- "eye", and the Phoenician letter had the shape of a circle or oval, clearly representing an eye, perhaps ultimately (via **Proto-Sinaitic**) derived from the *h* hieroglyph 𐩣 (Gardiner D4).^[2]

The Phoenician letter gave rise to theGreek Ϝ, Latin O, and Cyrillic О, all representing vowels.

The sound represented by ayin is common to much of theAfroasiatic language family such as in theEgyptian language, theCushitic languagesand the Semitic languages

Transliteration

In **Semitic philology**, there is a long-standing tradition of rendering Semitic ayin with Greek **rough breathing** the mark Ͱ (e.g. ʿarab عَرَب). Depending on typography, this could look similar to either an articulatesingle opening quotation mark ⟨ʿ⟩ (e.g. ʿarab عَرَب), or as a raised semi-circle open to the right ⟨ʿ⟩ (e.g. ʿarab عَرَب).^[3]

This is by analogy to the transliteration of **alef** (**glottal stop**, **hamza**) by the Greek **smooth breathing** mark ͱ, rendered as **single closing quotation mark** or as raised semi-circle open to the left. This convention has been adopted by DIN in 1982 and by ISO in 1984 for Arabic(DIN 31635, ISO 233) and Hebrew (DIN 31636, ISO 259).

The shape of the "raised semi-circle" for ayin (Unicode ⟨ʿ⟩ U+02BF) and alef (Unicode ⟨ʾ⟩ U+02BE) was adopted by the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (edited 1913–1938, 1954–2005, and from 2007), and from there by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.^[4] This convention has since also been followed by ISO (ISO 233-2 and ISO 259-2, 1993/4) and by DIN. A notable exception remains,ALA-LC (1991), the system used by theLibrary of Congress continues to recommendmodifier letter turned comma ⟨ʿ⟩ or left single quotation mark ⟨ʿ⟩.

The symbols for the corresponding phonemes in theInternational Phonetic Alphabet ⟨ʕ⟩ for pharyngeal fricative(ayin) and ⟨ʔ⟩ for glottal stop(alef) were adopted in the1928 revision

In anglicized Arabic or Hebrew names or in loanwords, ayin is often omitted entirely: Iraq ʿirāq عراق, Arab ʿarab عرب, Saudi saʿūdī سعودي, etc.; Afula אפולנה, Arad אראד, etc. In Arabic, the presence of ayin in front of*u* can sometimes be inferred even if it is not rendered separatelyas the vowel quality is shifted toward*o* (e.g. Oman عمان ʿUmān, Omar عمر ʿUmar, etc.)

Maltese, which uses a Latin alphabet, the only Semitic language to do so in its **standard form**, writes the ayin as ⟨gh⟩. It is usually unvocalized in speech. The **Somali Latin alphabet** represents the ʿayin with the letter ⟨c⟩. The informal way to represent it in**Arabic chat alphabet**uses the digit ⟨3⟩ as transliteration.

Unicode

In **Unicode**, the recommended character for the transliteration of ayin is ⟨ʿ⟩ (U+02BF) "modifier letter left half ring" (a character in the **Spacing Modifier Letters**range, even though it is here not used as a modifier letter but as a full grapheme)^[5] This convention has been adopted byISO 233-2 (1993) for Arabic andISO 259-2 (1994) for Hebrew

There are a number of alternative Unicode characters in use, some of which are easily confused or even considered equivalent in practice^[6]:

- ◌̣ (U+0314 **COMBINING REVERSED COMMA ABOVE**), the character recommended to represent Greek**rough breathing**,
- single opening quotation mark⟨ʿ⟩ (U+2018),^[7]
- ◌̣̣ (U+02BB **MODIFIER LETTER TURNED COMMA**),
- the **grave accent** ◌̀ U+0060, from its use as single opening quotation mark in**ASCII** environments, used for ayin in**ArabTeX**.

Other variants chosen to represent ayin as a full grapheme (rather than a sign suggestive of an apostrophe or a diacritic):

- a superscript c ◌̣, or ◌̣̣ U+1D9C **MODIFIER LETTER SMALL C**),
- the IPA symbol for **pharyngealization** ◌̤, ◌̥ (U+02C1 **MODIFIER LETTER REVERSED GLOTTAL STOP**, U+02E4 **MODIFIER LETTER SMALL REVERSED GLOTTAL STOP**),^[8] or a superscript ◌̣ (◌̣̣, U+0295 **LATIN LETTER PHARYNGEAL VOICED FRICATIVE**), the **IPA** symbol for **voiced pharyngeal fricative**.

←	Samekh	Ayin	Pe	→
Phoenician	𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	Hebrew
Aramaic	ܥ	ܦ	ܥ	Syriac
Arabic	ع	ف	ع	Arabic
Phonemic representation	ʕ			
Position in alphabet	16			
Numerical value	70			
	(no numeric value in Maltese)			
Alphabetic derivatives of the Phoenician				
Greek	Latin	Cyrillic		
Ϝ	O	О		

It is worth noting that the phonemes corresponding to alef and ayin Ancient Egyptian are by convention transliterated by more distinctive signs: Egyptian alef is rendered by *two* semi-circles open to the left, stacked vertically, and Egyptian ayin is rendered by a single full-width semi-circle open to the right. These characters were introduced in Unicode in version 5.1 (2008, Latin Extended-D range), ‏U+A723 LATIN SMALL LETTER EGYPTOLOGICAN ALEF and ‏U+A725 LATIN SMALL LETTER EGYPTOLOGICAN AIN.

Arabic ‘ayn

The Arabic letter ع (called عین ‘*ayn*) is the eighteenth letter of the alphabet. It is written in one of several ways depending on its position in the word:

Position in word:	Isolated	Final	Medial	Initial
Glyph form:	ع	ع	ع	ع

Pronunciation

Arabic ‘ayn is one of the most common letters in Arabic. Depending on the region, it ranges from a pharyngeal [ʕ] to an epiglottal [ʕ̥].^[9] It is voiced, its unvoiced counterpart being ح. Due to its position as the innermost letter to emerge from the throat, al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi, who wrote the first Arabic dictionary, actually started writing with ‘ayn as the first letter instead of the eighteenth; he viewed its origins deep down in the throat as a sign that it was the first sound, the essential sound, the voice and a representation of the ‏ʕ̥.

In the Persian language and other languages using the Persian alphabet, it is pronounced *āʔ* (glottal stop), and rarely as *ʔ* in some languages.

As in Hebrew, the letter originally stood for two sounds, /ʕ/ and /ʔ/. When pointing was developed, the sound /ʔ/ was distinguished with a dot on top (عْ), to give the letter *ghayn*. In Maltese, which is written with the Latin alphabet, the digraph *gh*, called ‘*aj*n, is used to write what was originally the same sound.

Hebrew Ayin

Orthographic variants

Various print fonts			Cursive Hebrew	Rashi script
Serif	Sans-serif	Monospaced		
א	א	א	א	א

Hebrew spelling: ‏א

‘ayin, along with Aleph, Resh, and Heth, cannot receive a dagesh.

Phonetic representation

‘ayin has traditionally been described as a voiced pharyngeal fricative ([ʕ]). However, this may be imprecise. Although a pharyngeal fricative has occasionally been observed for ‘ayin in Arabic and so may occur in Hebrew as well, the sound is more commonly epiglottal ([ʕ̥]).^[9] and may also be a pharyngealized glottal stop ([ʔ̥]).

In some historical Sephardi and Ashkenazi pronunciations, ‘ayin represented a velar nasal ([ŋ]). Remnants can be found in the Yiddish pronunciations of some words such as /ˈjaŋkəv/ and /ˈmansə/ from Hebrew ‏יעקב (*ya‘āqōḇ*, "Jacob") and ‏מעשה (*ma‘āse*, "story"), but in other cases, the nasal has disappeared and been replaced by /j/, such as /ˈmaj̥sə/ and /ˈmaj̥rəv/ from Hebrew ‏מערב and ‏מערב (*ma‘ārāḇ*, "west"). In Israeli Hebrew (except for Mizrahi pronunciations), it represents a glottal stop in certain cases but is usually silent (it behaves the same as aleph). However, changes in adjoining vowels often testify to the former presence of a pharyngeal or epiglottal articulation. As well, it may be used as a shibboleth to identify the social background of a speaker as Mizrahim and Arabs almost always use the more traditional pronunciation.

Ayin is also one of the three letters that can take furtive patach (*patach ganuv*).

In Hebrew loanwords in Greek and Latin, ‘ayin is sometimes reflected as /g/, since the biblical phonemes /ʕ/ (or "ʕ") and /ʔ/ (represented by "g") were both represented in Hebrew writing by the letter ‘ayin (see Ġain). Gomorrah is from the original /*ʕamora*/ (modern ‘*Amora*) and Gaza from the original /*ʕazza*/ (‘*aza*) (cf. Arabic غزة *Ġazza*, IPA: [ˈɣazza].)

In Yiddish, the ‘ayin is used to write the vowel *e* when it is not part of the diphthong *ey*.

Significance

In gematria, ‘ayin represents the number 70.

‘ayin is also one of the seven letters which receive special crowns (called taġin) when written in asefer Torah.

Because the sound is difficult for most non-Arabsto pronounce, it is often used as a shibboleth by Arabic speakers; other sounds, such as ā and Dā are also used.

Character encodings

Character	א		א		ܐ		ܐ	
Unicode name	HEBREW LETTER AYIN		HEBREW LETTER ALTERNATIVE AYIN		SYRIAC LETTER E		SAMARITAN LETTER IN	
Encodings	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex
Unicode	1506	U+05E2	64288	U+FB20	1829	U+0725	2063	U+080F
UTF-8	215 162	D7 A2	239 172 160	EF AC A0	220 165	DC A5	224 160 143	E0 A0 8F
Numeric character reference	ע	ע	ﬠ	ﬠ	ܥ	ܥ	ࠏ	ࠏ

Character	ع		ع		ع		ع		ع		ع		ع	
Unicode name	ARABIC LETTER AIN		ARABIC SMALL HIGH AIN		ARABIC LETTER AIN WITH TWO DOTS ABOVE		ARABIC LETTER AIN WITH TWO DOTS VERTICALLY ABOVE		ARABIC LETTER AIN WITH THREE DOTS ABOVE		ARABIC LETTER AIN WITH THREE DOTS POINTING DOWNWARDS ABOVE		ARABIC LETTER AIN WITH THREE DOTS BELOW	
Encodings	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex
Unicode	1593	U+0639	2262	U+08D6	1885	U+075D	1887	U+075F	1696	U+06A0	1886	U+075E	2227	U+08B3
UTF-8	216 185	D8 B9	224 163 150	E0 A3 96	221 157	DD 9D	221 159	DD 9F	218 160	DA A0	221 158	DD 9E	224 162 179	E0 A2 B3
Numeric character reference	ع	ع	ࣖ	ࣖ	ݝ	ݝ	ݟ	ݟ	ڠ	ڠ	ݞ	ݞ	ࢳ	ࢳ

Character	ﺀ		ﺀ		ﺀ		ﺀ	
Unicode name	MODIFIER LETTER AIN		MODIFIER LETTER SMALL AIN		LATIN CAPITAL LETTER EGYPTOLOGICAL AIN		LATIN SMALL LETTER EGYPTOLOGICAL AIN	
Encodings	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex
Unicode	7461	U+1D25	7516	U+1D5C	42788	U+A724	42789	U+A725
UTF-8	225 180 165	E1 B4 A5	225 181 156	E1 B5 9C	234 156 164	EA 9C A4	234 156 165	EA 9C A5
Numeric character reference	ᴥ	ᴥ	ᵜ	ᵜ	Ꜥ	Ꜥ	ꜥ	ꜥ

Character	Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ	
Unicode name	UGARITIC LETTER AIN		IMPERIAL ARAMAIC LETTER AYIN		PHOENICIAN LETTER AIN		COPTIC CAPITAL LETTER OLD COPTIC AIN		COPTIC SMALL LETTER OLD COPTIC AIN	
Encodings	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex
Unicode	66451	U+10393	67663	U+1084F	67855	U+1090F	11444	U+2CB4	11445	U+2CB5
UTF-8	240 144 142 147	F0 90 8E 93	240 144 161 143	F0 90 A1 8F	240 144 164 143	F0 90 A4 8F	226 178 180	E2 B2 B4	226 178 181	E2 B2 B5
UTF-16	55296 57235	D800 DF93	55298 56399	D802 DC4F	55298 56591	D802 DD0F	11444	2CB4	11445	2CB5
Numeric character reference	𐎓	𐎓	𐡏	𐡏	𐤏	𐤏	Ⲵ	Ⲵ	ⲵ	ⲵ

Character	Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ	
Unicode name	INSCRIPTIONAL PARTHIAN LETTER AYIN		INSCRIPTIONAL PAHLAVI LETTER WAW-AYIN-RESH		PSALTER PAHLAVI LETTER WAW-AYIN-RESH		GEORGIAN LETTER AIN		GEORGIAN MTAVRULI CAPITAL LETTER AIN	
Encodings	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex
Unicode	68431	U+10B4F	68453	U+10B65	68485	U+10B85	4346	U+10FA	7354	U+1CBA
UTF-8	240 144 173 143	F0 90 AD 8F	240 144 173 165	F0 90 AD A5	240 144 174 133	F0 90 AE 85	225 131 186	E1 83 BA	225 178 186	E1 B2 BA
UTF-16	55298 57167	D802 DF4F	55298 57189	D802 DF65	55298 57221	D802 DF85	4346	10FA	7354	1CBA
Numeric character reference	𐭏	𐭏	𐭥	𐭥	𐮅	𐮅	ჺ	ჺ	Ჺ	Ჺ

Character	Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ		Ⲁ	
Unicode name	MANICHEAN LETTER AYIN		MANDAIC LETTER AIN		NABATAEAN LETTER AYIN		OLD NORTH ARABIAN LETTER AIN		PALMYRENE LETTER AYIN	
Encodings	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex
Unicode	68313	U+10AD9	2136	U+0858	67735	U+10897	68242	U+10A92	67696	U+10870
UTF-8	240 144 171 153	F0 90 AB 99	224 161 152	E0 A1 98	240 144 162 151	F0 90 A2 97	240 144 170 146	F0 90 AA 92	240 144 161 176	F0 90 A1 B0
UTF-16	55298 57049	D802 DED9	2136	0858	55298 56471	D802 DC97	55298 56978	D802 DE92	55298 56432	D802 DC70
Numeric character reference	𐫙	𐫙	ࡘ	ࡘ	𐢗	𐢗	𐪒	𐪒	𐡰	𐡰

Character	𐬀		𐬁		𐬂		𐬃		𐬄	
Unicode name	OLD SOGDIAN LETTER AYIN		OLD SOGDIAN LETTER ALTERNATE AYIN		OLD SOGDIAN LETTER RESH-AYIN-DALETH		SOGDIAN LETTER AYIN		SOGDIAN LETTER RESH-AYIN	
Encodings	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex	decimal	hex
Unicode	69394	U+10F12	69395	U+10F13	69400	U+10F18	69437	U+10F3D	69440	U+10F40
UTF-8	240 144 188 146	F0 90 BC 92	240 144 188 147	F0 90 BC 93	240 144 188 152	F0 90 BC 98	240 144 188 189	F0 90 BC BD	240 144 189 128	F0 90 BD 80
UTF-16	55299 57106	D803 DF12	55299 57107	D803 DF13	55299 57112	D803 DF18	55299 57149	D803 DF3D	55299 57152	D803 DF40
Numeric character reference	𐼒	𐼒	𐼓	𐼓	𐼘	𐼘	𐼽	𐼽	𐽀	𐽀

References

- ع comes eighteenth in the **hijja'i order** of Arabic and twenty-first in the **Persian alphabet**
- Simons, F, "Proto-Sinaitic – Progenitor of the Alphabet" *Rosetta* 9 (2011), 16–40 (here: 38–40). See also: Goldwasser, Orly (Mar–Apr 2010). "How the Alphabet Was Born from Hieroglyphs". *Biblical Archaeology Review* Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 36 (1), following William F Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and their Decipherment* (1966), "Schematic Table of Proto-Sinaitic Characters" (fig. 1 (http://www.apocalypse2008-2015.com/images/Proto-Sinaitic_Table.gif)).
- sometimes rendered as the Greek diacritic in **serif** font (as Ⲁ), e.g. **Carl Brockelmann's** *Grundriss Der Vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* 1908; Friedrich Delitzsch, Paul Haupt (eds.) *Beiträge zur assyriologie und semitischen sprachwissenschaft* (1890) (1968 reprint (<https://archive.org/details/beitgezurasyr02univgoog>)); sometimes rendered as a semi-circle open to the right with constant line thickness (as ʿ), e.g. **Theodor Nöldeke** *Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (1904).
- "MES Transliteration System" (assets.cambridge.org/MES/MES_ifc.pdf (https://assets.cambridge.org/MES/MES_ifc.pdf))
- Both characters U+02BE "modifier letter right half ring" and U+02BF "modifier letter left half ring" have been present since Unicode version 1.0.0 (1991). The relevant **code chart** (<https://www.unicode.org/charts/PDF/U02B0.pdf>) specifies the purpose of U+02BF as "transliteration of Arabic ain (voiced pharyngeal fricative) transliteration of Hebrew ayin".
- "Various small, raised hook- or comma-shaped characters are often substituted for aglottal stop—for instance, U+02BC modifier letter apostrophe, U+02BB modifier letter turned comma, U+02C0 modifier letter glottal stop, or U+02BE modifier letter right half ring. U+02BB, in particular, is used in Hawaiian orthography as the *okina*." **The Unicode Standard Version 7.0: chapter 7.1 "latin", p. 294** (<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ec3a/f5a195ca71cd24761e9f486f3de0c79c60a8.pdf>)
- recommended by the **Library of Congress** ([loc.gov](https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/arabic.pdf) (<https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/arabic.pdf>)), deprecated by **The European Register of Microform Masters** (<http://www.eromm.org/project/doku.php?id=transliteration:arabisch:listea>)
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External links

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