

---

### The Islamic period: Silence; modern use

The Berber languages in medieval and modern times, down to the present, have been written in the Arabic script; Berber texts written in Arabic script are known from the 12th century C.E. on, and there is a translation of the Qur'an into Berber from the medieval period. During the Middle Ages, various quasi-Islamic, local Berber religions developed, several with their own Berber scriptures, written in Arabic script. Since there are Berber Jews, there are also Berber texts written in Hebrew script, mostly prayerbooks and ritual texts (e.g., Passover haggadoth).

There are no references to Berber script during the medieval and early modern periods, but something of the ancient script has endured in the Tifinigh (TABLE 5.9) used by the Tuareg for playful purposes, for love letters, family notes, and domestic ornamentation (two examples in Cohen 1958, vol. 2, plates 39–40) by both men and women, often in settings where the women are not able to read Arabic. The remarkable continuity of the ancient and modern scripts remains unexplained. This modern Berber script is never (in Chaker's formulation) used to support collective memory, be it historical, literary, or institutional—such is the role of Arabic. Recent attempts to adapt Tifinigh for serious use in the writing of other Berber languages, prompted by pan-Berber political aspirations, have failed.

The most striking feature of this writing system is its name, Tifinigh (sometimes Tifinagh), which is the feminine plural (*ti-* is a Berber feminine marker) of the Latin word *Punicus* 'Phoenician'; thus *Tifinigh* means 'the Phoenician (letters)'. (Another view associates it with Greek πίνοξ *pínaks* 'writing tablet', Rössler 1979A: 93). Tifinigh uses about forty letters. The script is written without word dividers or spacing; but distinctive ligatures, linking the feminine ending *-t* to whatever precedes it (cf. the Arabic *tā' marbūṭa*), and a single sign, apparently read as *-a* unless after *y* or *w* when it is read *-i* or *-u*, serve to mark the ends of some words. The fullest illustration of the Berber scripts is in Friedrich 1966: 94–95 with figures 166–73.

## MODERN BERBER: FROM A TUAREG LETTER

1. *Tifinigh:* : |·: ɿɿ^∧: +|+ ɿ||:| ɿɿ ɿ:ɿ ɿ| ɿ:ɿɿ·  
 2. *Transliteration:* w nk fddw tnt hlǵn šf swy hd lǵšb'  
 3. *Transcription:* awanək fəduɖu tənnaɖ huləɣin ʃif siwi hid elɣəʃaba  
 4. *Gloss:* this I Fedudu saying I.salute chief send.me here garment

'I, Fedudu, greet the chief and request a garment.'

—After Cohen 1958, pl. 39, line 1.

TABLE 5.9: *The Berber Scripts*

	ANCIENT BERBER		TIFINIGH	
	<i>Horizontal</i>	<i>Vertical</i>	<i>Letter</i>	<i>Ligature with -t</i>
>	.	.	.	
b	⊙	⊙ ⊠	⊙ ⊠	⊠
ǧ <sup>a</sup>	Γ	∨ ∧	† ÷	†
d	Π	∩ ⊔	∩ ∧	
h			:	
w	=		:	
z	—	—	#	#
ž	H	H I	I	
z̄	∧	⊥	⋈ ×	
ḥ	†	† †	::	
t, d <sup>b</sup>	⋈	∩	∩ E ⊥	
y	Z	N Z	ξ ζ	
k	←	↑	::	
l		=		⊠
m	∩	∩ ∪	∩ ⊔	⊠
n				+ (+ nk)
s	X	X 8	⊙ ⊠	⊠
s <sup>2</sup>	∩ ∩ ∩	∩		
ǧ	≡ †	†	:	
f <sup>c</sup>	X	X δ	∩ ∩	
q		≡	...	
g			× ×	×
r	○	○ ⊠	○ ⊠	⊠
š	≡	M ≡	3 ⊙	⊠
t <sup>d</sup>	+ ×	+	+	
t <sup>2</sup>	∩	∩		

a. The modern Berber form is *j*, the ancient perhaps *g*.

b. The pronunciation is uncertain; the sounds in question are not native to Berber, occurring in Punic and Arabic loans.

c. Modern Berber has *f* in Arabic loanwords. The ancient Berber realization is uncertain.

d. The second form is used finally.