

Introducing the Sidetic Script

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April 10, 2019

Sidetic is a right-to-left alphabet that was used during the 2nd century BCE in Side, an ancient Greek settlement in Pamphylia, a region on the southern coast of Asia Minor on the Mediterranean. The script is known in the scholarly literature in English as ‘Sidetic’, in German as ‘sidetisch’, and in Spanish as ‘sidetico’. Its origins are unknown. Some scholars hold the view that it may “derive from the Aramaic abjad of the Achaemenids, rather than the Greek alphabet like its neighbors to the west”,¹ such as Carian, Lycian, and Lydian. The script is attested on 10 stone inscriptions and a number of coins.

The Sidetic script was mentioned in Unicode Technical Report #3 by Rick McGowan and Joe Becker (1992) along with the other Anatolian scripts known as Carian, Lycian, and Lydian.² These were not considered for encoding in the standard at that time due to lack of information. Carian, Lycian, and Lydian were eventually encoded. However, an encoding for Sidetic has never been proposed. Also, there is no allocation for Sidetic on the Unicode Roadmap; instead it is on ‘Not The Roadmap’ under the heading “Things rumored to be scripts, but not clearly enough attested for us to even determine whether they are ‘known scripts’.”³

Over the past decade, knowledge about the script, language, and history of Side has expanded significantly. The evidence indicates that Sidetic is a distinctive and proper script. The basic repertoire of the script has been established by experts, although there is discussion regarding the values of some letters. There are a few letters with whose identity remains unknown, but these occur only once or twice and may be alternates or variants.

Given the above, it is clear that Sidetic is suitable for encoding in Unicode. I have confirmed its suitability through my own research on the script and its extant corpus, as well as through discussions with experts, such as Craig Melchert (University of California, Los Angeles), who have provided me with ample material on the script. I have enclosed a basic chart from Klein (2017), which shows Sidetic and other Anatolian alphabets, as evidence of Sidetic’s status as a ‘script’ among current scholars. I hope this will serve as a useful reference for the Unicode Technical Committee until I submit a code chart, which will accompany my forthcoming proposal.

¹ Klein, Jared; Joseph, Brian; and Fritz, Matthias [eds]. 2017. *Handbook of Comparative and Historical Indo-European Linguistics*, vol. 1. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft / Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science (HSK), 41/1. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

² <https://www.unicode.org/reports/tr3/tr3-scan.pdf>

³ <https://www.unicode.org/roadmaps/not-the-roadmap/not-the-roadmap-12-0-0.html>

Tab. 5.12: Anatolian alphabets

(Greek)	Phrygian ^a	Lydian ^a	Lycian ^a	Carian ^b	Sidetic ^c
Α	Α a	Α a	Α a	Α a	Α a
			↑ e	ϸ d	ϸ e
Β	Β b	Ϡ b	Β b	Δ l	Υ i
			Ϟ β	Ε y	ϣ o
Γ	Γ g	Ϟ g	Υ g	Ϝ r	Υ u
Δ	Δ d	λ d	Δ d	Ι λ	ϣ w
Ε	Ε e	ϣ e	Ε i	⊕ q	ϸ j
Ϝ	Ϝ v	ϣ v	Ϝ w	Γ b	Ϡ p
Ζ	Ζ z		Ι z	Ν m	Ψ ς
Η			† h	Ο o	< m
Θ		ι i	ϸ θ	Ϟ t	Γ t
Ι	ι i	ϣ y	ι y	ϣ š	ϣ d
Κ	Κ k	Ϡ k	κ k	Μ s	Ο θ
			* q	Τ ?	ι ś
Λ	Λ l	λ l	Λ l	Υ u	Ν s
Μ	Μ m	ϣ m	Μ m	Φ ñ	ϣ n
Ν	Ν n	ϣ n	ν n	ϸ κ	Ϡ l
			ϸ ñ	Υ n	↑ t
Ξ			Ξ ñ	Δ p	Ϡ g
Ο	Ο o	ο o	Ο o	⊕ ś	ϸ χ
Π	Ρ p		Π p	⊕ i	Λ r
Ϟ		† q	⊕ κ	⊕ e	ϣ a/u
Ρ	Ρ r	ϣ r	Ρ r	Ϟ ý	Π k
Σ	Ξ s	Ϝ s	ς s	∇ k	> b
		ϣ ś		⋆ δ	ϣ n
Τ	Τ t	Τ t	Τ t	Π w	Ϡ z
Υ	Υ u	Υ u	Υ τ	ϸ γ	
Φ	Φ p ^h	Ϡ f	Ϟ ā	ϸ z	
Χ			Υ ē	ϸ η	
Ψ	Υ k ^h		Ϟ χ	Π j	
Ω		Ξ τ		ϣ ?	
		Μ ā		↑ τ	
		Υ ē		Ϟ í	
		Υ λ		ϣ β	
		ϣ v		Ϟ β ₂	
		↑ c			

a. After Swiggers & Jenniges in Daniels & Bright (1996, 283).

b. After Adiego (2007, 508).

c. After Pérez Orosco (2005).

Figure 1: Comparison of Anatolian alphabets (from Klein, Joseph, and Fritz 2017: 44).