Lesson 1: Consonants

The consonants of Aramaic are given here, together with their transliterated form, name, and approximate (and conventional) pronunciation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ס '</td>
<td>'aleph</td>
<td>pronounced like the pause between syllables in the Cockney pronunciation of “sweater” or “better”: /sweˈər/, /beˈər/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>א b</td>
<td>beth</td>
<td>/b/ (or /v/, see Lesson 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ג g</td>
<td>gimmel</td>
<td>/g/ (or /gh/, but the two sounds are not conventionally distinguished)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ד d</td>
<td>daleth</td>
<td>/d/ (or /dh/, the sound of th in the pronunciation of the English word “that”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ה h</td>
<td>he</td>
<td>/h/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ו w</td>
<td>waw</td>
<td>/w/ or /v/ Some people pronounce this letter like /w/, others like /v/. A student should decide which pronunciation she or he is comfortable with and pronounce every waw in the same way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ז z</td>
<td>zayin</td>
<td>/z/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ח h</td>
<td>het</td>
<td>/ch/, as in the German pronunciation of “Bach” or as in the pronunciation of the Yiddish word “Chutzpah” (or, “Hutzpah”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ט t</td>
<td>tet</td>
<td>emphatic t, though conventionally no distinction is made in pronunciation between this t and the taw, listed below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י y</td>
<td>yodh</td>
<td>/y/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ק k</td>
<td>kaph</td>
<td>/k/ (or /ch/, see Lesson 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ל l</td>
<td>lamed</td>
<td>/l/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מ m</td>
<td>mem</td>
<td>/m/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נ n</td>
<td>nun</td>
<td>/n/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ס s</td>
<td>samekh</td>
<td>/s/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>צ c</td>
<td>'ayin</td>
<td>no approximate sound in English, some say like the sound just before vomiting, some say like the sound of a camel getting up, both of which seem to reflect a bias against this phoneme. Conventionally, it is not pronounced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>פ p</td>
<td>peh</td>
<td>/p/ (or /ph/ as in phone, see Lesson 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of these letters, like beth, have two different pronunciations, as will be explained in Lesson 3. Despite this, they are always transliterated with the same Roman letter. Thus, even in cases where ג is pronounced like /v/, ג is still transliterated with the Roman letter b.

In addition to these letter forms, five letters have forms that occur only at the end of a word:

- kaph (Note the two dots that are always written with the final kaph.)
- mem
- nun
- peh
- sadeh

Note the similarities between certain forms. The beth (ג) and kaph (ג) letters look similar. The sin (ס) and shin (ש) letters are distinguished by a single dot above them. And, the final mem (מ) looks like samekh (מ).

Exercise: 1a.
Practice transliterating the following words. For example, גלפ → mlk. (Note that the transliterated word in the Roman alphabet is written and read from left to right [m→l→k], although the Aramaic script is written and read from right to left [ג ←ל ←כ].)
Exercise: 1b.
Now try putting these transliterated words into Aramaic script. Remember that you must reverse the order of the letters. Thus, rb' is rendered in Aramaic script רבע.

ktb
ktbt
("he wrote" and "she wrote")

k'n
("now")

'l
("over," "above")
"then"

"message"

"tribute"

"peace," "well-being"

"land" and "the land"

**Exercise: 1c.**

Try transliterating this full Aramaic sentence from the book of Ezra (4:20):

מלבּין תכופין הוֹד עֶלְיָרְשָלוֹן

ושלִים בֵּכָל עַבְרְ נָהְרָא

ומדה בֶּלֶה וּדְלָךְ מַתַּחְוֵי לְחָמ

"Strong kings were over Jerusalem
and (they had) authority in all Abar-Nahara’s
and tribute, tax, and toll was given to them.”

**Exercise: 1d.**

Now try transliterating this sentence from Ezra 5:4 (slightly altered for the sake of consistency and coherency):

אֵדֹרִים בֵּנְמוּセット עַבְרָא וּרְגֵה בֵּנְיוֹנָא בנז

"Introductory Lessons in Aramaic" by Eric D. Reymond
“Then, accordingly, they said to them, ‘What are the names of the men who are building this structure (literally: who, this structure, are building)?’”

**Exercise: 1e.**
Now, write in Aramaic script the following transliterated passage from Ezra 5:5 (again slightly altered for consistency):

w‘yn ’lhhn hwt ‘l śby yhwdy’

wl’ btlw hmw

“The eye of their God was over the elders of the Judaeans and they (i.e., the elders) did not stop them (i.e., the builders).”

**Exercise: 1f.**
N.B. (*Nota Bene* = Note well): The doubling of a consonant is indicated through a dot placed in the center of the letter. Thus, ב = b, but ב = bb; כח = ktb, but כחב = kttb.

Transliterate below the following passage from Ezra 5:6 and 5:17, noting where the doubled consonants are:

פרשנָא אנורֵהא דְּרְי-שֶׁלָּה הַחָטָא ... נַלְדָּה מָלֵם

“A copy of the letter that Tattenai sent . . . to Darius the king.”

יִבְיסָרָא בְּבִית נָוִיָא דְּי-מְלָאָה שֶׁפָּה דָּי בָּבִיל

“Let a search be made in the house of records of the king there in Babylon.”