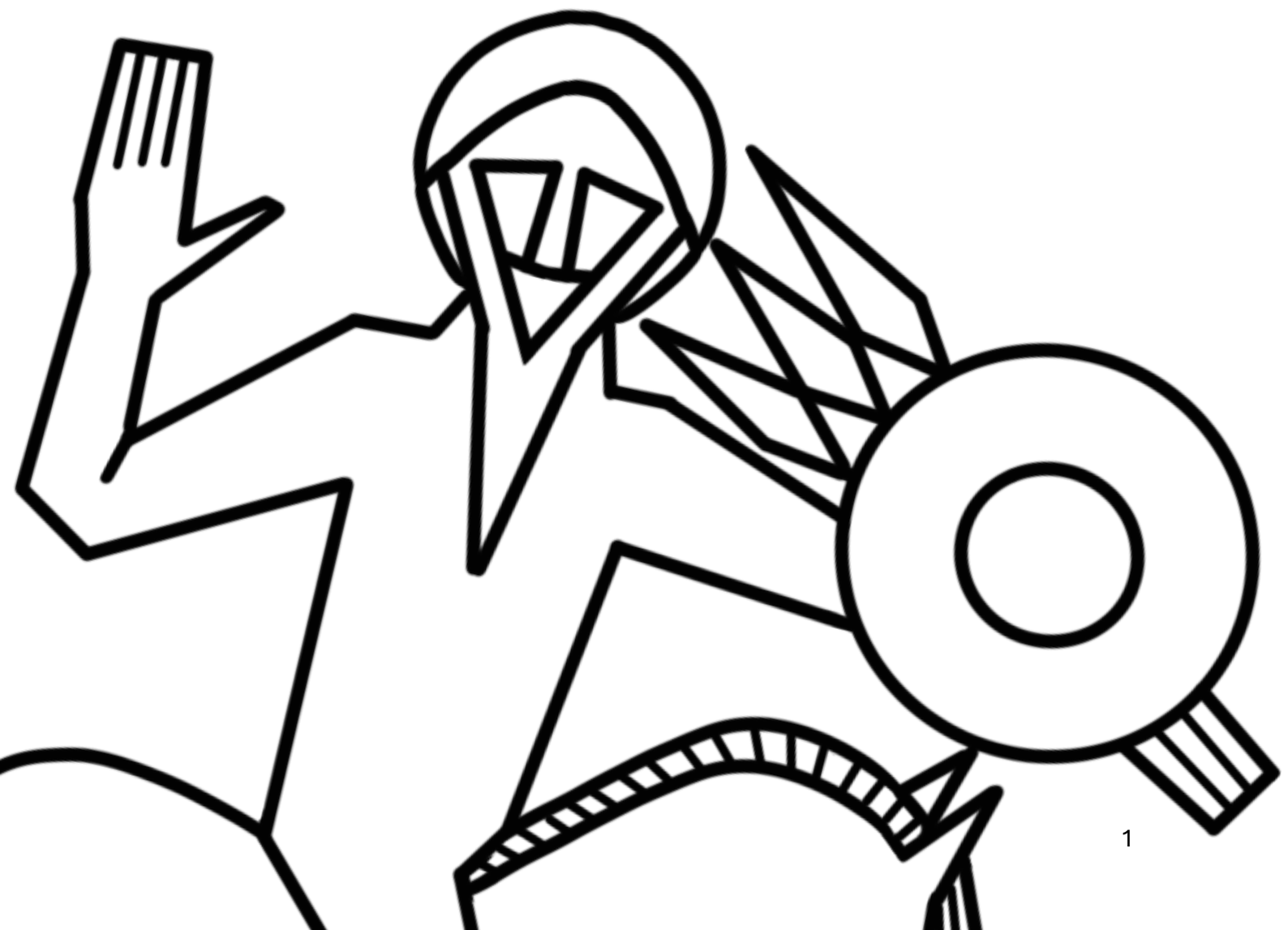Société d'Histoire Nord-Africaine (SHNA)

Association loi de 1901

Submission Dossier for the Libyc Script to Unicode

ISO 15924 Standard

May 23 2024

Société d'Histoire Nord-Africaine (SHNA)

Association loi de 1901

What's the SHNA ?

Preamble

"The millennia-old contribution of North Africa is not adequately acknowledged in African, Mediterranean, and global history. Therefore, this association will work around a set of values centered on sharing and scientific exchanges concerning the overall history of North Africa."

Who are we?

The North African History Society or Société d'Histoire Nord-Africaine (SHNA) is a French association governed by the law of July 1, 1901, and the decree of August 16, 1901, published on Tuesday, December 13, 2022, in the JOAFE. It was announced to the public on January 12, 2023, during Yennayer, the North African agricultural calendar. The society is composed of a circle of enthusiasts interested in the history, archaeology, geography, and anthropology of North Africa.

What is our goal?

The aim of this association is to promote North African history, particularly by working towards the establishment of a museographic space dedicated to the millennia-old history of North Africa, from prehistory to the present day. The association will implement various means of action, including exhibitions, conferences, the publication of scientific works, and books.

Visit our website for more information.

Foreword

« While paleolinguists are rediscovering and reconstructing dead languages that date back to prehistory and comparing the languages that evolved from them, we still do not know how to read Libyco-Berber. There has been great interest in Punic or Greek, but not in Libyco-Berber, and this disinterest is quite old. Neither Herodotus, Pliny, nor Strabo bothered to make any comments on this language, a language whose geographical distribution extends from the Western Nile to Nubia in the East, to the Canary Islands in the West, and from the Mediterranean to the Sahel. As for Sallust, he barely noted that the Numidians spoke a language different from that of the Phoenicians.»

Malika Hachid, *Les premiers Berbères : entre Méditerranée, Tassili et Nil*, 2001

Terminology

It is important to begin by defining the meaning of the expressions "Libyco-Berber scripts" and "Libyc writing systems." According to L. Galand, "Libyco-Berber scripts" refers to both the ancient Libyco-Berber scripts, the traditional Tifinagh, and the contemporary Neo-Tifinagh.
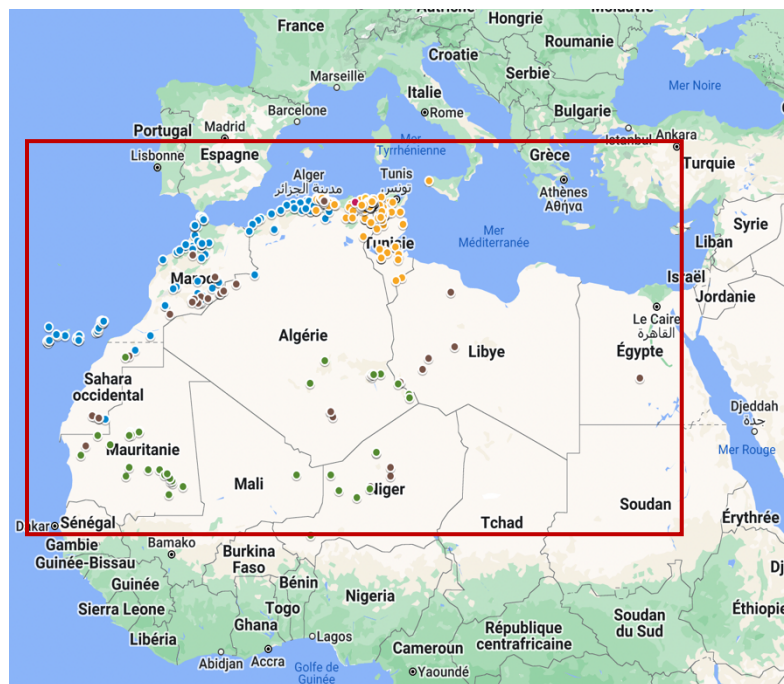
It is thus essential to clearly distinguish between the three graphic systems mentioned above:

1. Libyc : This term refers to the characters of the alphabet discovered from the reading of the bilingual Dougga stele (138 BC). It includes several alphabets, notably the transitional alphabets that would later develop into Tifinagh.

2. Tifinagh : An endogenous term used by the Tuaregs to designate the entire set of symbols in their writing system. This expression is part of the Tuareg language lexicon.

3. Neo-Tifinagh : Refers to the modified Tifinagh script due to the addition of signs with vowel values and new consonants replacing those eliminated for convenience. These are the modernized Tifinagh. The Tuaregs call them *Tifinagh tin n zzaman* (Tifinagh of the era) or *Tifinagh ackalnen* (vocalized Tifinagh), distinguishing them from *Tifinagh tin arsal* (original Tifinagh).

The Neo-Tifinagh symbols, as well as the majority of Tifinagh symbols, already exist in Unicode characters; this document therefore covers the Libyco-Berber script and its introduction into the Unicode standard.

What is Libyco-Berber?

Since antiquity, the ancient Berbers have had their own writing system, called Libyco-Berber, one form of which has been preserved to this day under the name Tifinagh. Tifinagh is still used today by the Tuaregs, as well as Neo-Tifinagh (see 2D30–2D7F), which is now widely used by Berbers across North Africa. The geographical area covered by these inscriptions extends from the Canary Islands to Egypt and from the Mediterranean to the Sahel. To date, 1300 inscriptions have been discovered. Most of these inscriptions are funerary, with the majority originating from the ancient Kingdom of Numidia, hence the old name given to this script by French colonizers, "Numidique."
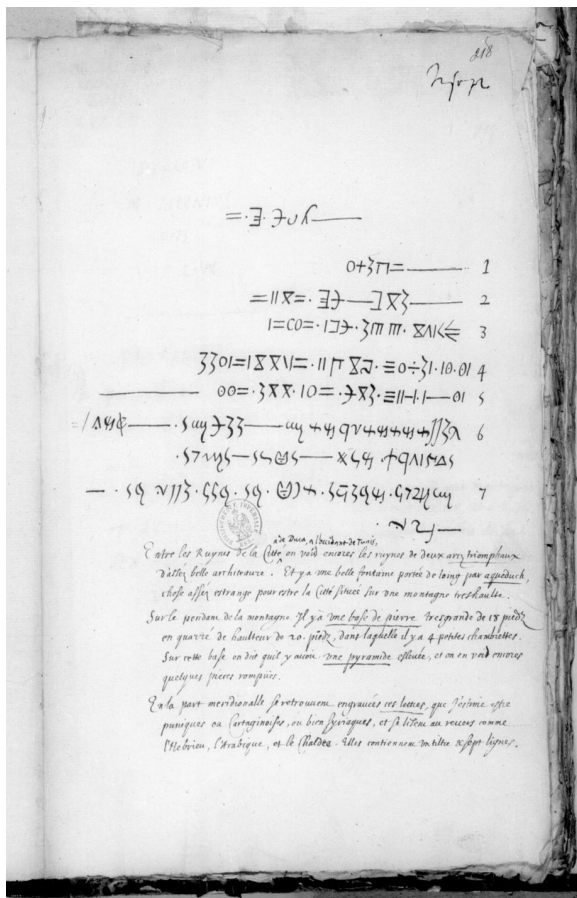

Carte numérique de répartition des inscriptions libyques par Amezruy n Imazighen.

The dating of this script is subject to debate, with researchers providing a wide range from the 2nd/3rd century BC to the end of the 2nd millennium BC. Malika Hachid, a historian and prehistory specialist, advocates for an older origin of the Libyco-Berber script, placing its emergence between 1500 and 1000 BC. However, a Libyco-Berber inscription gives us a clue: the inscription from the temple of the Numidian king Massinissa, built in the 10th year of his son Micipsa's reign, which is 139 BC.

The earliest mention of this script in a foreign language dates back to the 5th century, where Bishop Fulgence of Ruspe provides valuable information: the Libyco-Berber script, according to him, consists of 23 characters.
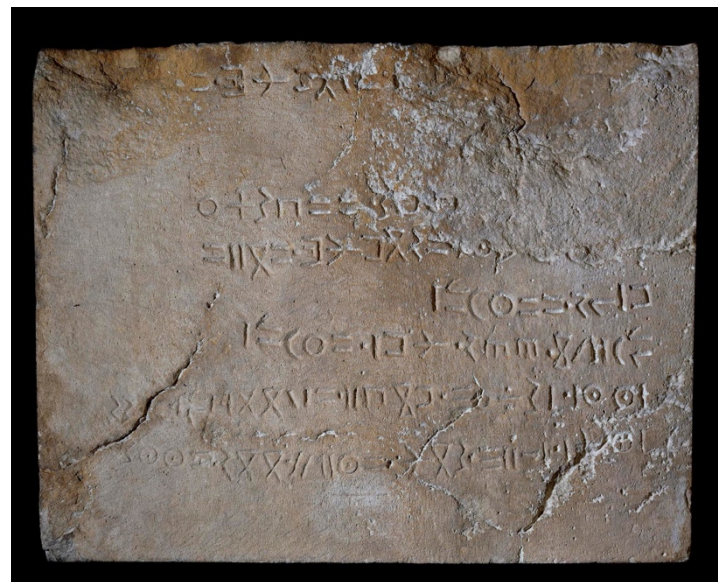
Libyco-Berber re-emerged in the scientific scene in the 17th century, more precisely in 1631, when Thomas d'Arcos discovered the famous bilingual Libyco-Punic inscription on the mausoleum of Dougga in Tunisia. He sent a copy to his compatriot Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, the discoverer of the Orion Nebula, who attempted to decipher it but without success. Then, two centuries later, in 1842, the British consul in Tunis, Thomas Reade, had the inscription removed from the monument, causing significant damage. The inscription is now on display at the British Museum.

Below are the images related to these events :

Transcription of the Inscription from the Mausoleum of Atban in Dougga by Thomas d'Arcos in his Correspondence to Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc in 1631.

Source : https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9066768t

RIL N°1, Libyco-Berber Inscription from the Mausoleum of Atban in Dougga, Removed from the Monument by British Consul Thomas Reade, Currently at the British Museum.

Source : https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1852-0305-1

Origin of Libyco-Berber

Just like its dating, which is difficult to establish, there are also many hypotheses regarding the origin of the Libyco-Berber script. These differing opinions can be classified into four categories: proponents of a Semitic origin (Phoenician, Punic, South Arabian, Proto-Sinaitic, Egyptian hieroglyphs), proponents of a local origin, those advocating a middle position, and those suggesting an unknown origin. As noted by S. Chaker, S. Hachi, and S. Aït Ali Yahia, "one cannot exclude the existence of an embryonic form of pre-alphabetic writing, derived from a limited stock of ideograms later converted into alphabetic signs. This does not exclude a Phoenician influence on Libyco-Berber, as the Berbers might have engaged in the refunctionalization of an old stock of pre-existing signs, transforming them into a national alphabet." However, it is observed that out of the 23 Libyco-Berber letters, only 5 characters originate from the ancient Phoenician alphabet and the Punic alphabet.

From Libyco-Berber to Tifinagh

The Libyco-Berber script did not disappear at the end of antiquity; it has been preserved to this day thanks to the Tuaregs, Berbers of the Sahara and Sahel, who have never lost the use of the Berber script, perpetuating it from generation to generation for nearly two millennia, almost without interruption and without major alteration.

The Tuareg Tifinagh script is related to Libyco-Berber, which, like many other scripts, evolved but did not undergo major transformations. Several characteristics have been maintained over time, the most notable being :
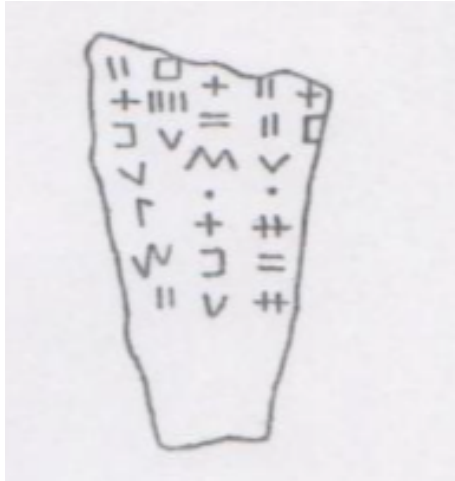
Orientation :

Libyco-Berber is generally written vertically[1] from bottom to top, more rarely from top to bottom. It is also written horizontally, from right[2] to left or left to right, or in boustrophedon[3]. The dimensions of the writing surface can also dictate the direction of the writing. Inscriptions can wrap around a character or an animal. Tifinagh inherited these characteristics from Libyco-Berber ; different writing directions can be observed in both ancient and contemporary Saharan rock inscriptions, as well as in various Tuareg handicrafts (jewelry, tools, weapons, etc.).
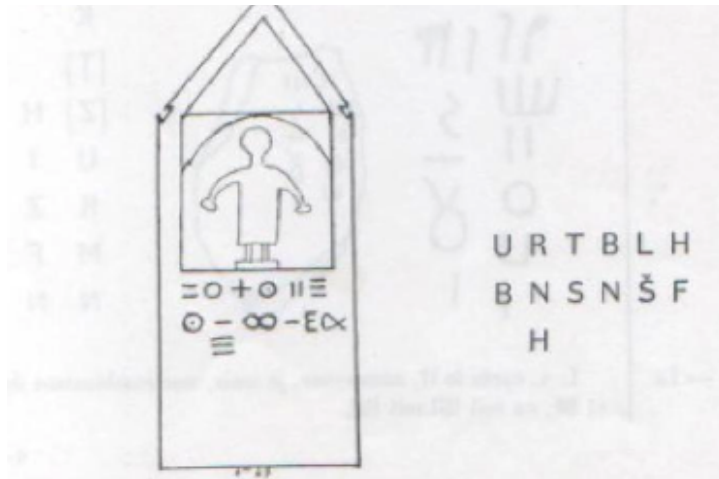
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[1] The vertical direction is considered authentic by the Tuaregs; it is the original direction, akatab n ärsel.

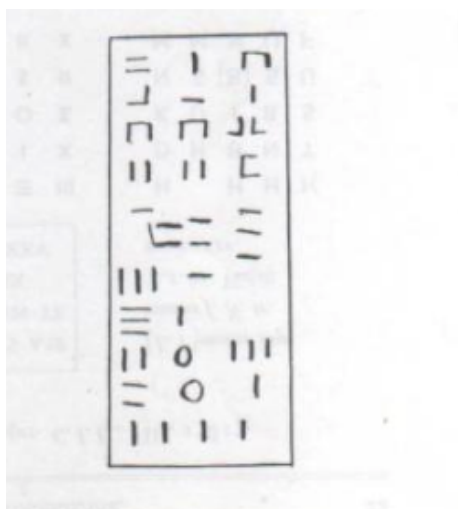[2] The horizontal direction is likely inspired by Punic and Latin scripts, as observed in bilingual inscriptions.

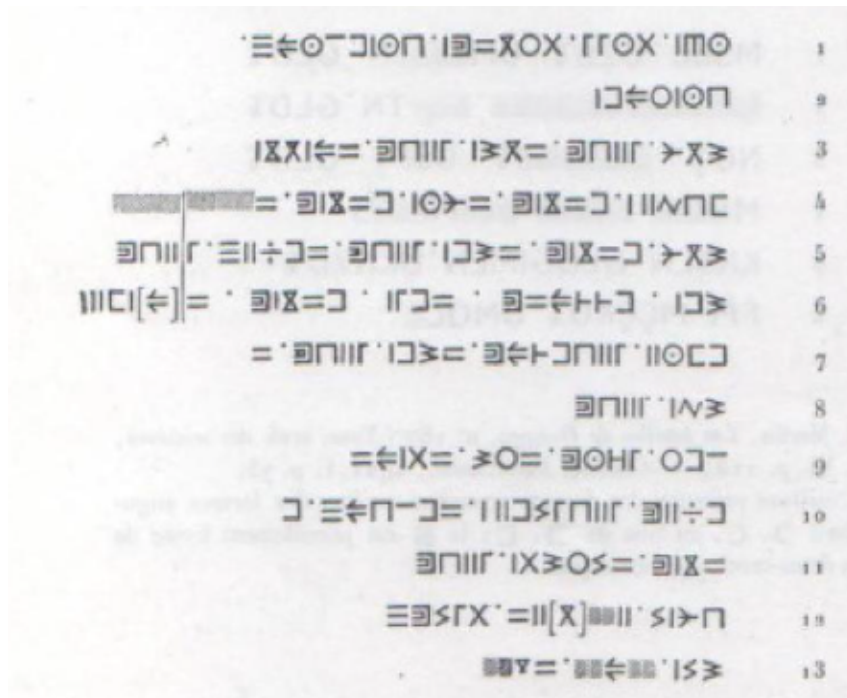[3] The direction of the writing changes when moving to the next line.

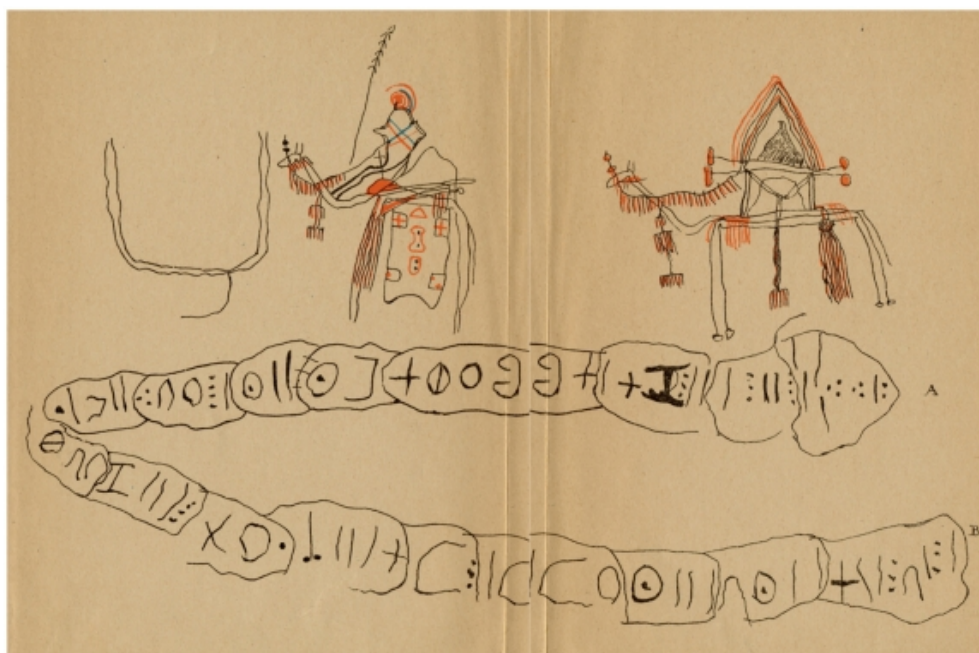*Vertical inscription from bottom to top.* *RIL n°646 ,p142*

Horizontal inscription from left to right. *RIL n°275 ,p66*

Vertical inscription from top to bottom and bottom to top. *RIL n°83 ,p22*

Horizontal inscription from right to left. *RIL n°3 ,p5*

Horizontal boustrophedon inscription, letter from a Taytoq prisoner to a french officer.
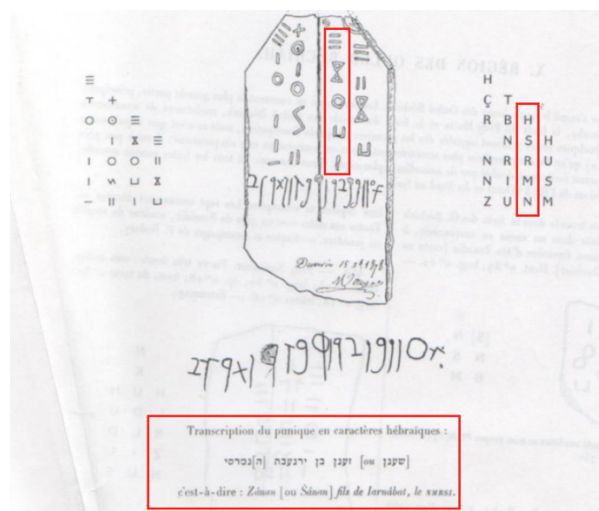*(Bissuel 1891, planche hors-texte)*

Shape of Symbols and Phonetic Values

Tifinagh and Libyco-Berber symbols are signs whose traditional writing is not cursive; the symbols are inscribed in a very geometric manner and on hard surfaces such as rock or stone.

Comparison between Libyco-Berber symbols and Tifinagh shows that at least 8 have the same shape and phonetic value, at least 13 have the same shape but different phonetic values[4], and around ten have no correspondence, neither graphically nor phonetically.

Writing System

Both Tifinagh and their Libyco-Berber ancestors are consonantal alphabets. In Tifinagh or Libyco-Berber writing, the length of a consonantal phoneme is not noted, neither by gemination (doubling of the letter) nor by the addition of a diacritical mark (as in Arabic script).

Tifinagh only has one vocalic sign represented by a point called *taraqmt* or *taghrit*, used only at the end of a word to indicate the presence of a vowel. It may occasionally take the value of /a/, /u/, or /i/ in that same position. In Libyco-Berber, the symbol represented by three parallel bars ≡ and noted as H[5] has this function :
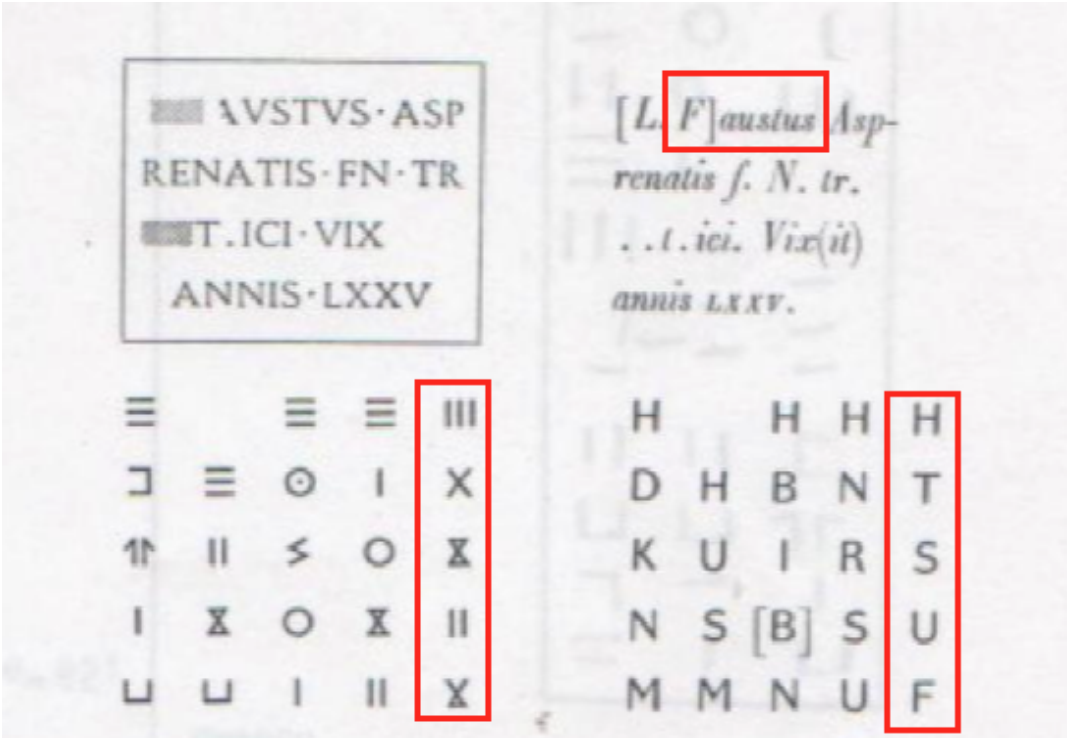

RIL n°451, p101

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[4] In reality, we do not know the phonetic value of certain Libyco-Berber symbols; they could have the same value as their equivalents in Tifinagh.
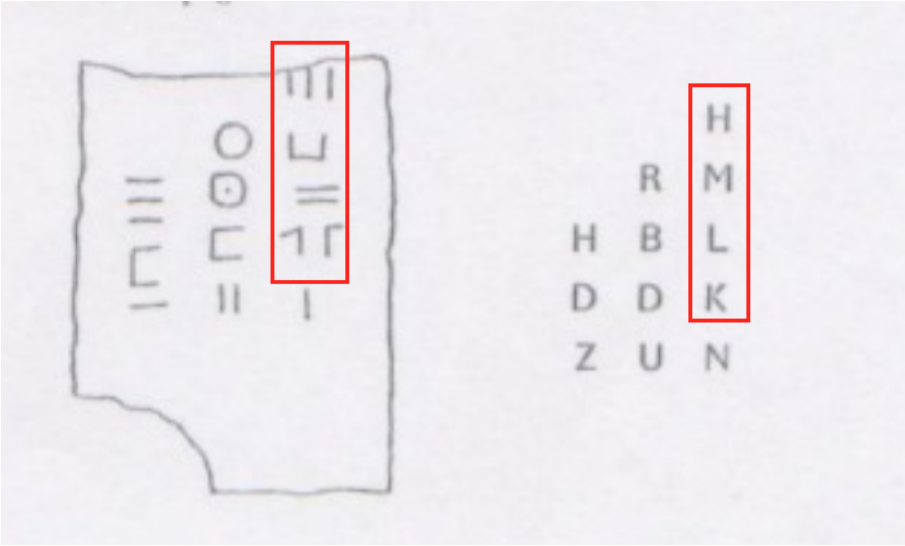
[5] The symbol ≡ is conventionally noted as H but can take several phonetic values in addition to indicating the presence of a vowel. It can represent the consonantal values /h/, /ħ/, or even the velar /ɣ/.

In this inscription, the symbol ≡ (H) in the sequence NMRSH would take the value /i/ to correspond to the Punic sequence that corresponds to the same word (NMRSI), which ends with a yod, thus /y/ or /i/.

[RIL n°85, p23](#)

In this inscription, the symbol ≡ (H) in the sequence FUSTH would take the value /u/ to correspond to the Latin sequence corresponding to the same word (FAUSTUS).

[RIL n°642 ,p141](#)

In this inscription, the symbol ≡ (H) in the sequence KLMH would take the value /a/ to correspond to the name of the ancient city of Kalama (modern-day Guelma in Algeria).

Inscription Format

Tuaregs use Tifinagh only for short texts: letters to relatives, graffiti on trees, rocks, or daily utensils. Libyco-Berber is also used for short inscriptions, mostly funerary.

As S. Chaker mentions, the current Tuareg situation is likely comparable to what must have characterized the entire Berber domain throughout all epochs: the absence of an instituted linguistic norm implies the absence of a graphic norm and variability of the alphabet parallel to dialectological variability (These variations are primarily explained by adaptation to the phonetic and/or phonological peculiarities of different dialects).

Why Encode Libyco-Berber ?

Libyco-Berber has faced millennia of invisibility. It is one of the largest linguistic areas in the world. It is necessary and urgent to encode Libyco-Berber to allow researchers to study this script in the most comfortable manner possible. Until now, researchers have used Neo-Tifinagh characters (see 2D30–2D7F) and the shaping tools of word processing software, which makes writing books particularly burdensome and uncomfortable. By encoding Libyco-Berber, research on this language could progress further through computing, algorithms, artificial intelligence... Deciphering tools could emerge.

To address the lack of a Libyco-Berber script in computing, we have developed a font and a virtual Libyco-Berber keyboard for researchers in Libycology. We have named this initiative the "Libyca Project," which is freely accessible online.

Why Encode 240 Characters Instead of 23 ?

As mentioned earlier, in the 5th century, Fulgence of Ruspe provides valuable information: the Libyco-Berber script, according to him, comprises 23 characters. However, Fulgence unfortunately did not take into account the variations of Libyco-Berber. Only the horizontal order of Dougga comprises 23 characters. Other orders of Libyco-Berber contain more.

It is crucial to consider North Africa in its entirety, on a continental scale. We are in a logic of exhaustive transcription of Libyco-Berber inscriptions. Indeed, the way Libyco-Berber was written varied according to regions, from Tangier to Ghubari, from Algiers to Niamey; Libyco-Berber evolved according to different orientations across the continent.

Libyco-Berber inscriptions present remarkable diversity: they can be horizontal, vertical, boustrophedon, circular, or even spiral. This particularity of Libyco-Berber means that the same characters are written in several directions. Consequently, the number of characters increases depending on the number of orientations. We therefore need all possible orientations to allow for optimal digital transcription.

N°	Symbols	Possible orientations[1]	Phonetic value[2]	Examples
	⊙ ⊡		/b/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°200 ,p 50 RIL n°206 ,p 51
	Γ Γ	⌐ ⌐ ∠ ⌐ ∟ ⌐ ⌐ ⌐ ⌐ ∟ ⌐ ∟ ∟ ∟	/g/	RIL n°1 ,p2 RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°117, p30 RIL n°592 ,p130 RIL n°661 ,p146 RIL n°740 ,p160 RIL n°831 ,p180 RIL n°867 ,p189
	⊏	⊐ ⊓ ⊔	/d/ð/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°122 ,p32 RIL n°123 ,p32
	‖‖	≡	/h/ħ/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°121 ,p31 RIL n°124 ,p32
	‖	=	/w/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°122 ,p32 RIL n°275 ,p66
	—	❘	/z/zˁ/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°825 ,p79 RIL n°836 ,p82
	ⵣ ‡ Ж	⊞ ⊟ ⋈	/z/zˁ/	RIL n°3 ,p5 RIL n°21, p10 RIL n°193, p48 RIL n°646, p142
	#		/zˁ/	RIL n°59 ,p17 RIL n°69 ,p19 RIL n°865 ,p189
	Ψ Ψ	Ψ ⊁ ⊰ ⋔ ⊱ ⊲	/tˁ/dˁ/	RIL n°1 ,p2 RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°3 ,p5
	⊞	⊞ ∃ ⊟	/tˁ/dˁ/	RIL n°291 p67 RIL n°460 ,p103 RIL n°524, p116 RIL n853° ,p186

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[1] Libyc is commonly written laterally, from bottom to top or top to bottom, but also laterally from right to left and from left to right. For each symbol, all the orientations are covered (even if the symbol is not found in the Libyc corpus, written in one of the directions mentioned above).

[2] Phonetic values may occasionally be absent or inaccurate.

☰	‖‖	/tˤ/dˤ/	RIL n°817 ,p171 RIL n°838 ,p182 RIL n°839 ,p182
∿	(variants)	/j/	RIL n°1 ,p2 RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°180 ,p45 RIL n°185 ,p46
⊡	(variants)	/j/	See appendix X
∽	(variants)	/j/	RIL n°27 ,p11 RIL n°39 ,p13 RIL n°44 ,p14 RIL n°390 ,p87
(variants)	(variants)	/k/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°74 ,p21 RIL n°83 ,p22 RIL n°535 ,p118
(variants)	(variants)	/k/	RIL n°43 ,p14 See appendix XI See appendix XIV See appendix XV See appendix XVII
⊓	(variants)	/k/	See appendix VIII See appendix IX See appendix XIII
═	‖	/l/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°6 ,p6 RIL n°14 ,p8
⊔	(variants)	/m/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°402 ,p89 RIL n°449 ,p100
(variants)	(variants)	/m/	RIL n°400 ,p89 RIL n°534 ,p159 RIL n°996 ,p216 RIL n°1090 ,p223

		/m/ (can be /s/ depending on the orientation)	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°17 ,p9 RIL n°999 ,p216 RIL n°1008 ,p218
⊔	⌒ ⊂ ⊃		
│		/n/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°250 ,p61 RIL n°642 ,p141
⋈ (vertical)	⋈	/s/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°20 ,p9 RIL n°290 ,p69
8	∞	/s/	RIL n°86 ,p23 RIL n°275 ,p66 RIL n°338 ,p77
⧫8	◇◇	/s/	See appendix XVI See appendix XVIII
⊕ ⊞ Φ ⊞	⊖ ⊟ θ ⊟	/s/ or /b/	RIL n°115, p30 RIL n°276 ,p66 RIL n°331, p 76 RIL n°740, p160
⋊	⋊ ⋉ ⋈	/f/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°144 ,p37 RIL n°406 ,p92
୪	℧ ∞ ∝	/f/	RIL n°98 ,p26 RIL n°275 ,p66 RIL n°285 ,p68
⊗	⊗ ◇ ◇	/f/	See appendix XVI
∀	A Ⱶ ⊏	/f/	See Appendix V See Appendix VI See Appendix VIII
⊤	⊥ ⊣ ⊢	/sˤ/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°209, p52 RIL n°424 ,p94 RIL n°876 ,p191
·│· ‖│‖	÷ ≑	/q/ɣ/	RIL n°1 ,p2 RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°14 ,p8 RIL n°853, p186
◯ ☐		/r/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°73 ,p22 RIL n°236 ,p58 RIL n°546 ,p120

Symbol	Variants	Sound	References
ᗯ	ᴍ Ɜ Ɛ	/ʃ/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°19 ,p9 RIL n°887, p194 RIL n°1123 ,p240
ᐁ	ʌ ⟩ ⟨	/ʃ/	RIL n°865 ,p189 RIL n°817, p177 RIL n°1122 ,p240
ꖽ	ꖽ ⯾ ⯿	/ʃ/	See Appendix IX See Appendix X
ᴠ	ᴠ ᕃ ᕄ	/ʃ/	See Appendix V See Appendix VII See Appendix VIII
ш	ш ⴹ ⴺ	/ʃ/ or /z/ depending on the orientation	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°79 ,p22 RIL n°275 ,p66 RIL n°285 ,p68
∪	∩ Ɔ Ɛ	/ʃ/	See Appendix I See Appendix X
+ ✕		/t/θ/	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°185 ,p46 RIL n°17 ,p9
⊔	⊓ ⊐ ⊏	/t/θ/ or other	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°4 ,p5 RIL n°6 ,p6
•	The dot can be placed on top, middle or bottom. •⊐| •⊐| .⊐|	Separator	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°4 ,p5 RIL n°132 ,p34 RIL n°369, p83
˙ǀ˙ ᵀǀᵀ	.ǀ. ⁃∸ ⁃∸ ˌǁˌ ⁃∹ ⁃∹	Unknown	RIL n°870 ,p190 See appendix II See appendix XII
˙ǀ	.ǀ. ⁃∸ ⁃∸	Unknown	RIL n°843 ,p184 RIL n°845 ,p184 RIL n°871 ,p190
⊩	÷	Unknown	RIL n°740, p160
⧢	⧣	Unknown	See Appendix I
⋀⋀	⋁⋁	Unknown	See Appendix I

Symbol	Variants	Value	Reference
∿∿		Unknown	See Appendix I
↻	↻ ↺ ↻	Unknown	See Appendix I
⊗ ⊞		Unknown	See Appendix V See Appendix VI See Appendix VII
╪ ╪	⊞⊞ ⊞⊞⊞	Unknown	RIL n°67 ,p18 RIL n°69 ,p19 See appendix XI See appendix XIII
⊞⊞	⊞⊞⊞ ⊞⊞ ⊞⊞⊞	Unknown	RIL n°857 ,p187 RIL n°868 ,p189 RIL n°1123 ,p240
△	▽ ◁ ▷	Unknown	RIL n°45, p15 RIL n°546 ,p118 RIL n°833 ,p181 See Appendix IV
∨	∧ > <	unknown	RIL n°829, p180 RIL n°839 ,p182 RIL n°867 ,p189 RIL n°881 ,p193
Y	Y Y Y Y Y Y Y	Unknown	RIL n°311 ,p73 See appendix III See Appendix IV
⊔	⊢ ⊣ ⊤ ⊥ ⊢ ⊥ ⊤	Unknown	RIL n°2 ,p 3 RIL n°309 ,p72
∵	⁝	/w/	Tifinagh
∴	⁞	/q/ɣ/	Tifinagh
∷	⁞	/h/	Tifinagh
∴	∴ ∴ ∴	/k/	Tifinagh
∷		/x/ħ/	Tifinagh

∴		/ɣ/	Tifinagh
Эᙦ	ᙦ	/f/	Tifinagh

Comparison with Already Coded Tifinagh Letters

Through various previous missions, Unicode has already encoded Tifinagh and Neo-Tifinagh since 1998. As we explained earlier, Tifinagh descends from Libyco-Berber. They are more developed and recent forms of Libyco-Berber. Therefore, several characters proposed by this project have already been encoded by Unicode (See table 2 below). We wish for them to be integrated into this project while remaining distinct from the Tifinagh script (2D30–2D7F).
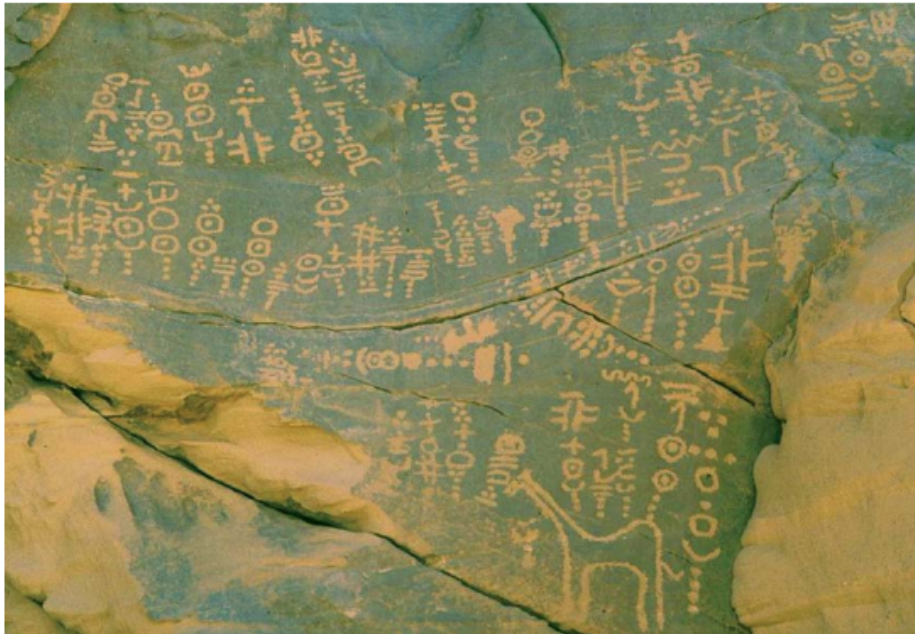
Tableau 2

Find below Libyco-berber symbols that were already created by Unicode for Tifinagh and Neo-Tifinagh scripts, those can be reused for Libyc scripts:
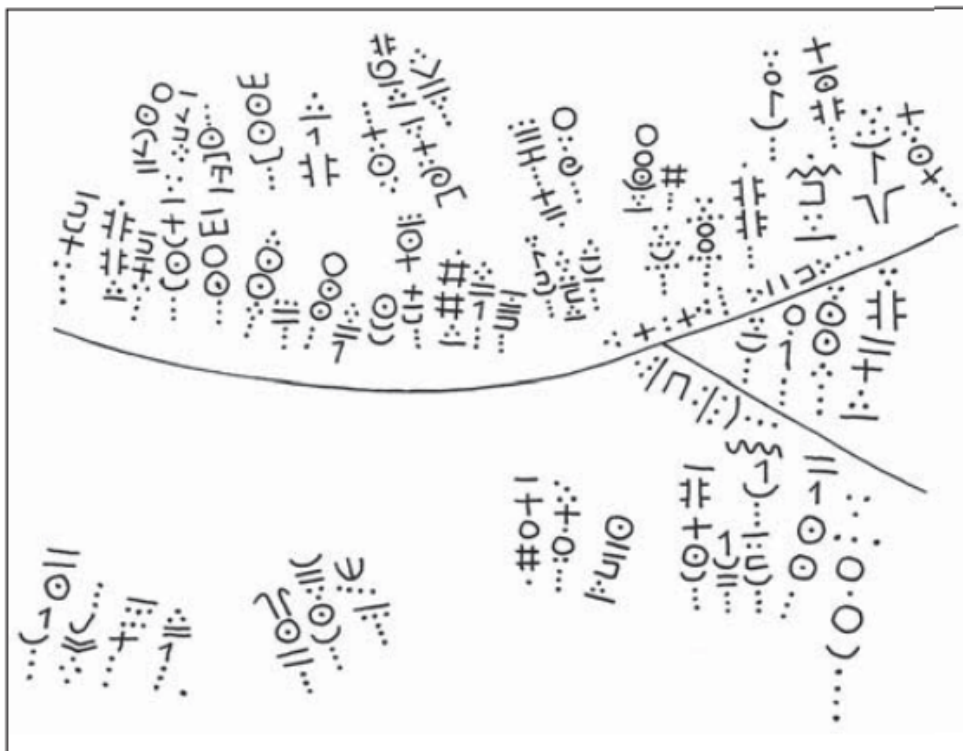
Unicode Tifinagh/Neo-Tifinagh	References n°
••• ⋮	**2D57** **2D48**
⋮	**2D42**
∵	**2D3E**
∷	**2D46**
∴	**2D58**
'l'	**2D36**
♯	**2D4C**
I ╪	**2D4A** **2D50**
⌐	**2D64**
Ⴟ Ⴘ	**2D33** **2D34**
Ⴟ	**2D35**

○	**2D54**
⊙	**2D59**
⊖ ⊕	**2D31** **2D40**
⊕	**2D32**
△	**2D60**
┼ Χ	**2D5C** **2D5D**
Λ V	**2D37** **2D38**
Ε Ǝ	**2D39** **2D3A**
⊔	**2D61**
Ⴥ	**2D43**
Ι	**2D4F**
Ⲥ	**2D4E**
ⵥ	**2D49**

Appendix I

Appendix II

The Libyco-Berber inscriptions of Aourdaoum

[Libyco-punique inscription of Lixus](#)

Appendix III

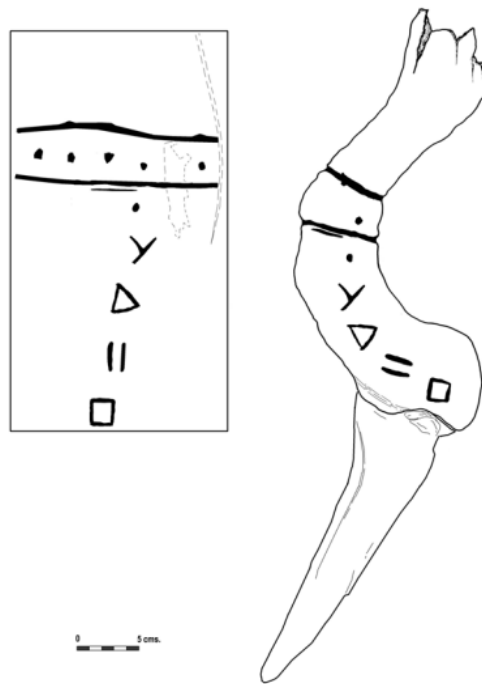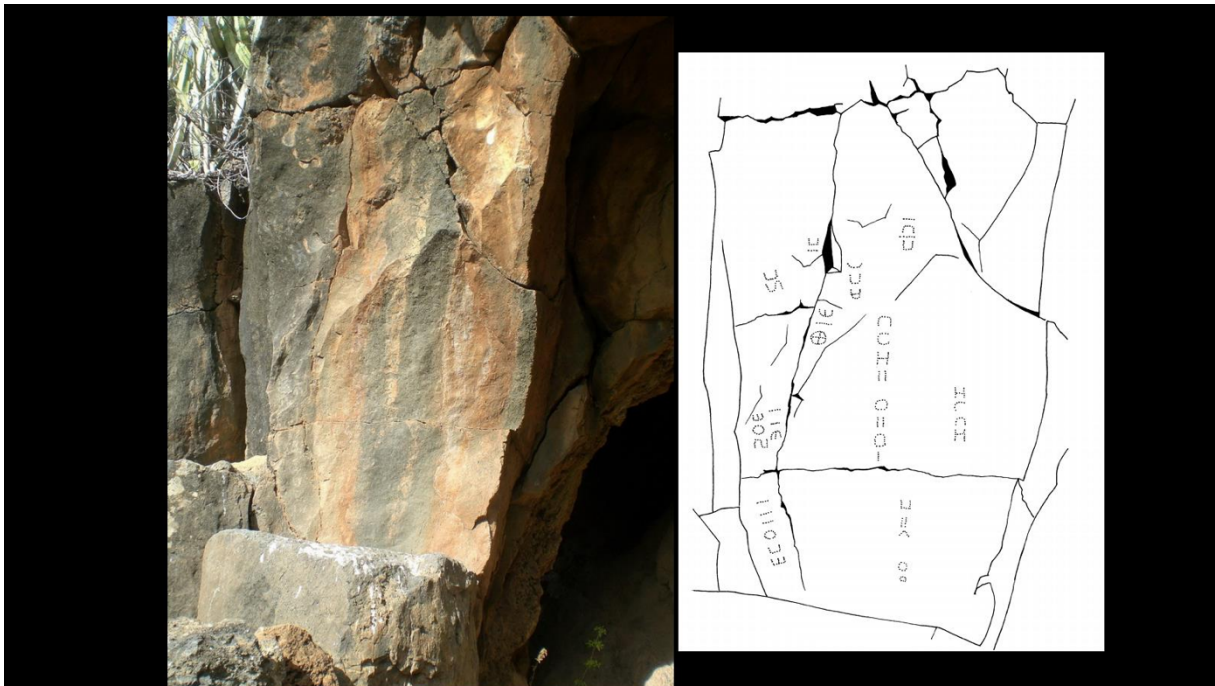[Libyco-Berber inscription from Tetouan region, Morocco](#)

Appendix IV

Figura 4. Pieza de madera con inscripción líbico-beréber, procedente de las Cuevas de Herrera González, muy

Libyco-Berber Inscription on wood of las Cuevas de Herrera Gonzalez - Canaria Islands

Appendix V

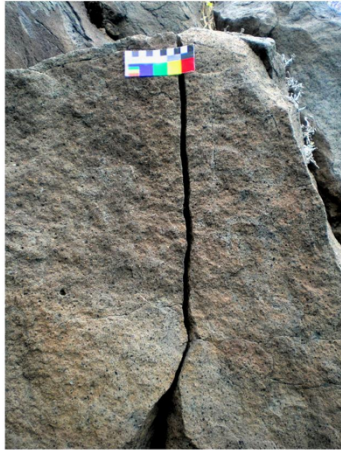Libyco-Berber inscriptions of La Cueva de Don Gabino - Canaria Islands

Appendix VI
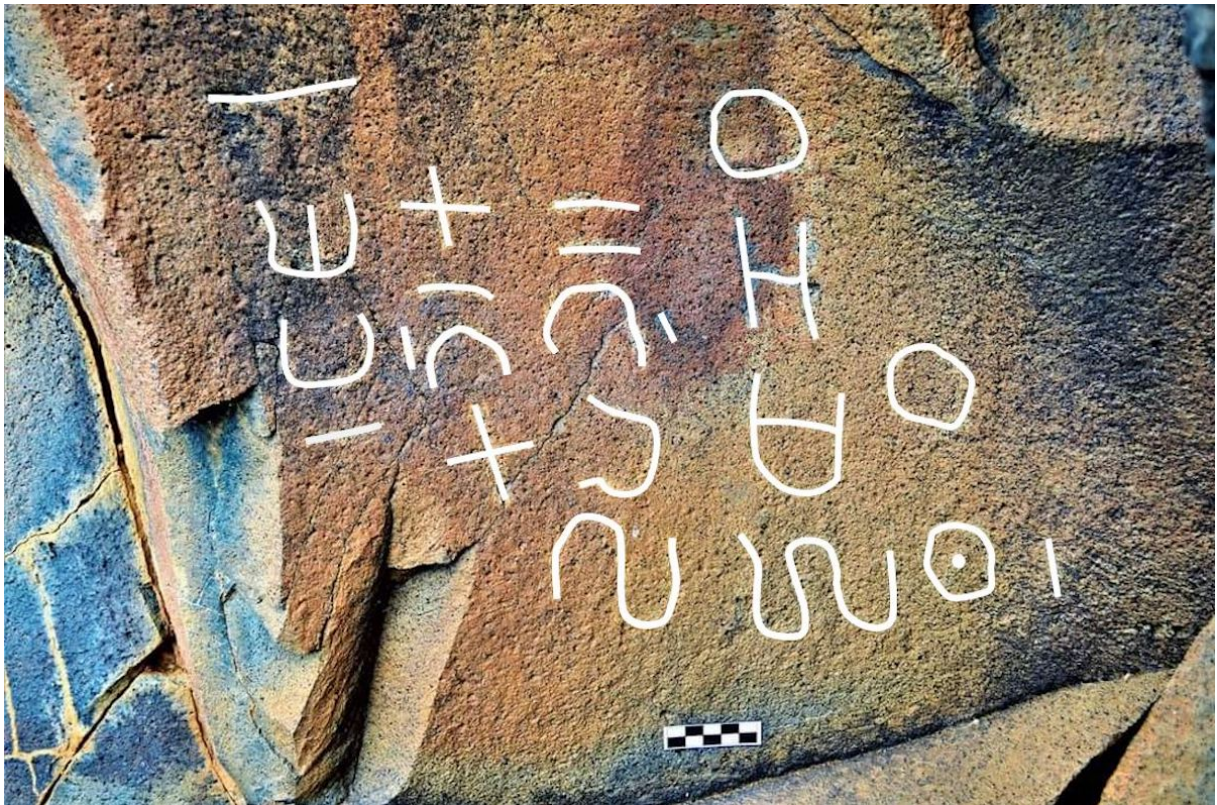

Libyco-Berber Inscriptions of La Caleta N°1

Appendix VII

[Libyco-Berber inscription of La Caleta N°3](#)

Appendix VIII

[Libyco-Berber de Hoyo Blanco](#)

Appendix IX

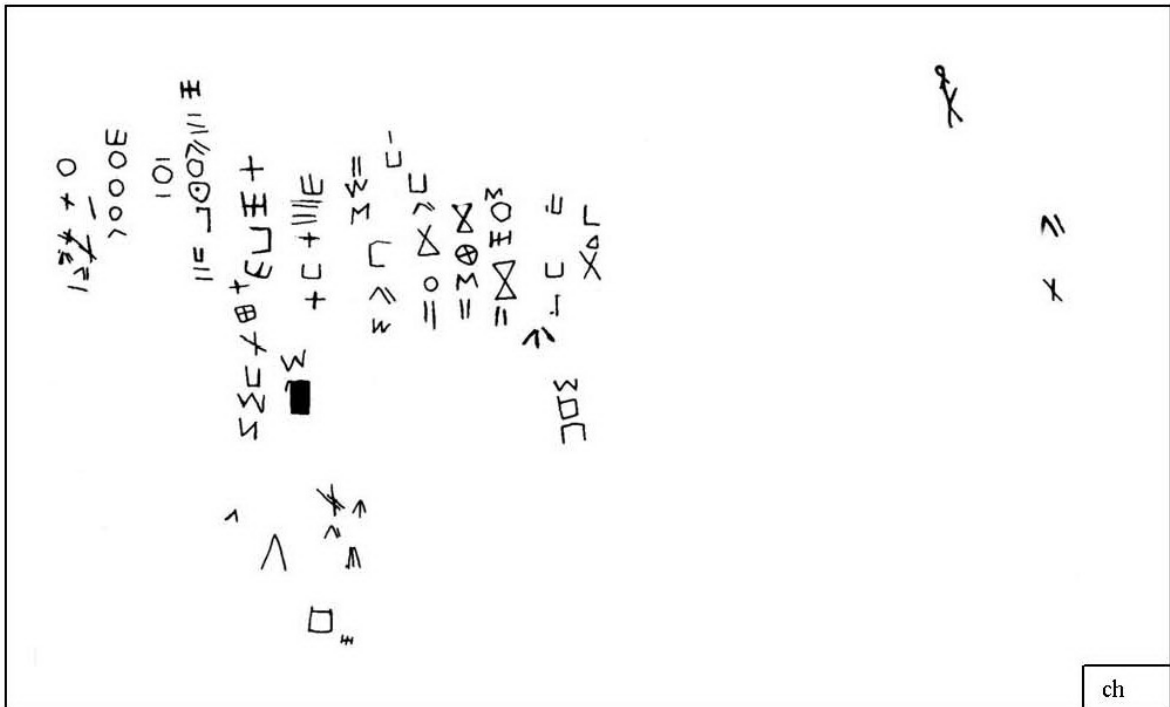

Libyco-Berber Inscriptions of Los Letreros (Julan) N°1

Appendix X

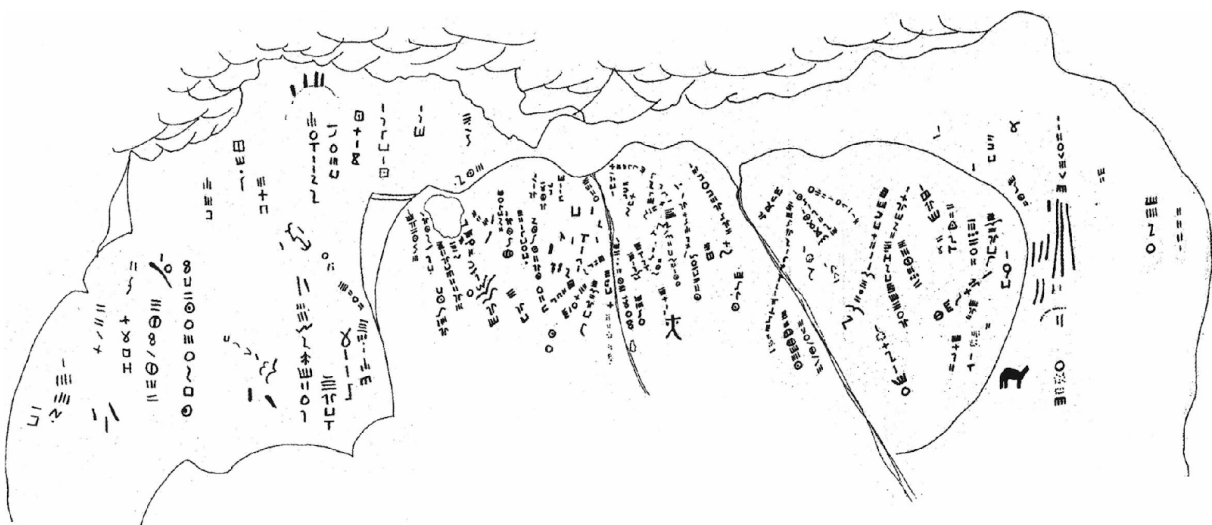

Libyco-Berber inscriptions of Los Signos (La Restinga)

Appendix XI

tole1.1

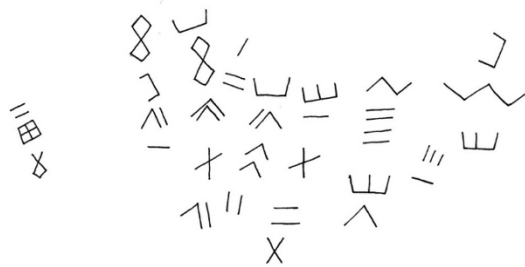Libyco-Berber inscription of Hoya Toledo

Appendix XII

Appendix XIII

[Libyco-Berber Inscriptions of Balos](#)

Appendix XIV

Libyco-Latin inscription of Morretes de Tierra Mala

Appendix XV
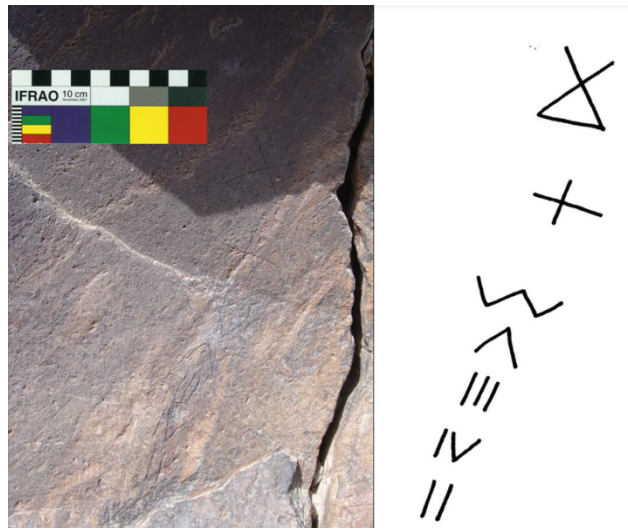

Libyco-Latin Inscriptions del Morro de Montaña Blanca

Appendix XVI

Libyco-Berber inscriptions of Femès

Appendix XVII

[Libyco-Berber inscriptions of Peña de Juan del Hierro](#)

Appendix XVIII

Cueva Paloma (Lanzarote). Texto líbico-beréber

[Libyco-Berber inscriptions of La Cueva Paloma](#)

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