

The Origins of Writing

After the foundation of the very first city states around 3400 B.C.E. the first civilization appeared. Mesopotamia was the first civilization including Sumer and Elamite. The first cities began to grow and consequently their administration became quite complex, which was the proper setting for the emergence of writing. People needed to keep records of things, and this is when writing became important.



Pictographic

Humans began to write using pictography, which is the art of registering something through images. Early pictorial signs were gradually substituted by a complex system of characters representing the sounds of Sumerian (the language of Sumer in Southern Mesopotamia) and other languages. Cuneiform writing was done on clay tablets, particularly to make accounting commercial and properly record that was essential for city administration. If they wanted to keep records for longer periods of time, they baked the clay tablets in ovens.



British Museum: 4,000-year-old tablet recording workers' wages

The evolution of writing led to the creation of phonetic alphabets. Sounds were no longer depicted by illustration, instead they would be represented by signs. This made writing much easier and more accessible; therefore, simplifying communication.

The invention of writing was surely one of humanity's major breakthroughs. From this invention, humans could register their existence, the record of their deeds and discoveries, their culture, and their laws. This allowed historians to learn of ancient cultures and civilizations.



Cuneiform (The Cyrus Cylinder) The Cyrus Cylinder is one of many kingly proclamations on stone or clay known from ancient Mesopotamia. What makes it unique is not its form, but rather the policy it records: Cyrus's decision to allow deported peoples to return to their settlements and to restore their desecrated sanctuaries. In addition, it records that he ordered the restoration of the damaged structures and religious buildings. A replica sits in the United Nations building in New York, USA.



This Old Persian cuneiform sign sequence was discovered because it kept repeating itself in inscriptions. Historians correctly guessed that it was the word for "King". Look below where another scholar has isolated the word "king."







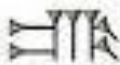



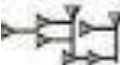















Inscription Persépolitaine de Niebuhr n°1



Niebuhr inscription 1, with the suggested words for "King" highlighted. This inscription is now known to mean *"Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian, who built this Palace."*

Cuneiform Guide:

Sumerian cuneiform

					
A	B	C	D	E	
					
F	G	H	I	J	
					
K	L	M	N	O	
					
P	Q	R	S	T	U
					
V	W	X	Y	Z	



Din Dabireh (Avestan) Guide:

Vowels

𐬀	𐬁	𐬂	𐬃	𐬄	𐬅	𐬆	𐬇
ā	ə	a/ā	a/ā	â	â	ā	a
[ɑ:]	[ə]	[â:]	[â]	[ɑ:]	[ɑ]	[ɑ:]	[ɑ]
𐬈	𐬉	𐬊	𐬋	𐬌	𐬍	𐬎	𐬏
ū	u	ī	i	ō	o	ē	e
[u:]	[u]	[i:]	[i]	[o:]	[o]	[e:]	[e]

Consonants

𐬐	𐬑	𐬒	𐬓	𐬔	𐬕	𐬖	𐬗
he	ghe	ge/gge	ge	xve	xve	xe	ke
h	γ	g/gg	g	x ^w	x	x	k
[h]	[ɣ]	[g]	[g]	[x ^w]	[x]	[x]	[k]
𐬘	𐬙	𐬚	𐬛	𐬜	𐬝	𐬞	𐬟
pe	je/je	ce/ce	tte	dhe	de	the	te
p	j	č	t	ð	d	θ	t
[p]	[dʒ]	[tʃ]	[t]	[ð]	[d]	[θ]	[t]
𐬠	𐬡	𐬢	𐬣	𐬤	𐬥	𐬦	𐬧
nye	ne	ngve	ngye	nge	bhe	be	fe
ny/n	n	ŋ ^v	ŋ	ng/ŋ	bh/β	b	f
[n]	[n]	[ŋ ^w]	[ŋ]	[ŋ]	[β]	[b]	[f/φ]
𐬨	𐬩	𐬪	𐬫	𐬬	𐬭	𐬮	𐬯
se	le	re	ve	yve	hme	me	nne
s	l	r	v	yy/y	m	m	nn/ŋ
[s]	[l]	[r]	[v]	[j]	[m]	[m]	[n]
		𐬰	𐬱	𐬲	𐬳	𐬴	𐬵
		ye	sshe	shye	zhe	she	ze
		y	ssh/š	shy/š	zh/z	sh/š	z
		[j]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[ʒ]	[ʃ]	[z]

Numerals

𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀
ašta	hapta	xšvaš	pañca	caθwar	θri	dva	aēva
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
					𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀	𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀
					dasa	nava	
					10	9	

Punctuation

◦ ◦ \ ◦ ◦	◦ ◦ \ ◦ ◦	◦ ◦	◦ ◦	◦	◦ \ ◦ \ ◦
end of section	end of sentence	semi-colon	colon	abbreviation or repetition	word separator