

# WRITING AND LITERACY



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# WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT WRITING



# DEFINITIONS OF WRITING

Questions on which there are different opinions:

- Is writing a mode of language on a par with speaking? Is it a system in its own right?
- Or does writing depend on speaking? Is only speaking a direct expression of language (as a system), and writing is secondary?

Different opinions lead to wider and narrower definitions of writing:

**Broadly defined:**

- "Writing is a system of human intercommunication by means of visible marks." (Gelb 1963)

**Narrowly defined:**

- "Writing is the graphic counterpart of speech. Each element, symbol, letter, hieroglyph, written word, in the system of writing corresponds to a specific element, sound or group of sounds such as a syllable or spoken word in the primary system." (Diringer 1968)

(the narrow definition is more widely accepted)

## Dictionary (non-specialist) definition (narrow definition)

“The **recording of words or sounds** in significant characters; in the most general sense, any use of or method of using letters or other **conventional symbols of uttered sounds** for the visible preservation or transmission of ideas”

# TYPES OF GRAPHIC SIGNS/SYMBOLS

- Pictogram
- Ideogram
- Logogram
- Syllabogram
- Letter

Beware! Terms may be used in different ways by different authors!

Which are used for recording words (language)?

How are they possibly related (historically)?

# IS SEMASIOGRAPHIC WRITING POSSIBLE?

BLISS Symbols: What does this sentence mean?



# ORIGIN OF WRITING

- Where, when, under which circumstances and for which purpose(s) was writing „invented” / did writing develop?
- Was it invented only once (and then spread), or was it invented several times independently?
- What are the oldest writing systems we know of? Where did they come from? Who used them for which purpose?



# LONG AGO IN MESSOPOTAMIA...



Sumerian inscription on a creamy stone plaque, 120 compartments of archaic monumental cuneiform script by an expert scribe (detail). The text is a list of "gifts from the High and Mighty of Adab to the High Priestess, on the occasion of her election to the temple".







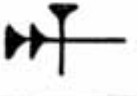









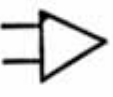







Source:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sumerian\\_26th\\_c\\_Adab.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sumerian_26th_c_Adab.jpg)

# BEFORE WRITING: TOKENS AND ENVELOPS => TABLETS



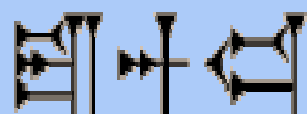
# DEVELOPS INTO LOGOGRAPHIC AND SYLLABIC WRITING

MEANING		OUTLINE CHARACTER, B. C. 3500	ARCHAIC CUNEIFORM, B. C. 2500	ASSYRIAN, B. C. 700	LATE BABYLONIAN, B. C. 500
1.	The sun				
2.	God, heaven				
3.	Mountain				
4.	Man				
5.	Ox				
6.	Fish				



# MULTIPLE USES AND COMBINATIONS OF SIGNS IN ACCADIAN

phonogram  
*an*



*da-an-nim*

*clanim*

'powerful' (gen.)

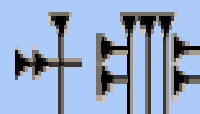
logogram  
*AN*



*AN*

*Anum*

god Anum

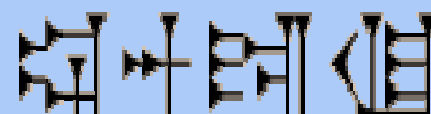


*AN-ĝi*

*šamû*

'heaven'

logogram  
*DINGIR*



*KÁ-DINGIR-RA*<sup>KI</sup>

*Babilum*

Babylon

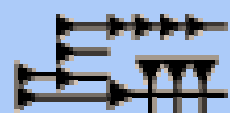
determinative  
name of deity



*EN-LÍL*

*Enlil*

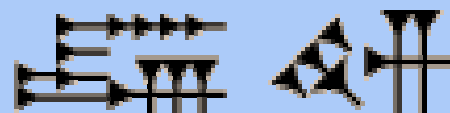
god Enlil



*LUGAL*

*šarrum*

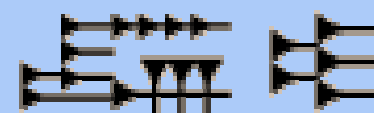
'the king'



*LUGAL-im*

*šarrim*

'of the king'



*LUGAL-i*

*šarrum-i*

'my king'

<http://www.ancientscripts.com/akkadian.html>

# EGYPTIAN: FROM LOGOGRAMS TO LETTERS FOR CONSONANTS

glyph    translit.    phonetic

	<i>ʒ</i>	[ʔ]
	<i>i</i>	[i]
	<i>y</i>	[y]
	<i>ʿ</i>	[ʕ]
	<i>w</i>	[w]
	<i>b</i>	[b]
	<i>p</i>	[p]
	<i>f</i>	[f]
	<i>m</i>	[m]
	<i>n</i>	[n]
	<i>r</i>	[r]
	<i>h</i>	[h]

glyph    translit.    phonetic

	<i>ḥ</i>	[h]
	<i>ḫ</i>	[x]
	<i>ḥ</i>	[ç]
	<i>s</i>	[s]
	<i>š</i>	[š]
	<i>ḳ</i>	[q]
	<i>k</i>	[k]
	<i>g</i>	[g]
	<i>t</i>	[t]
	<i>ṯ</i>	[tʰ], [c]
	<i>d</i>	[d]
	<i>ḏ</i>	[dʰ], [j]

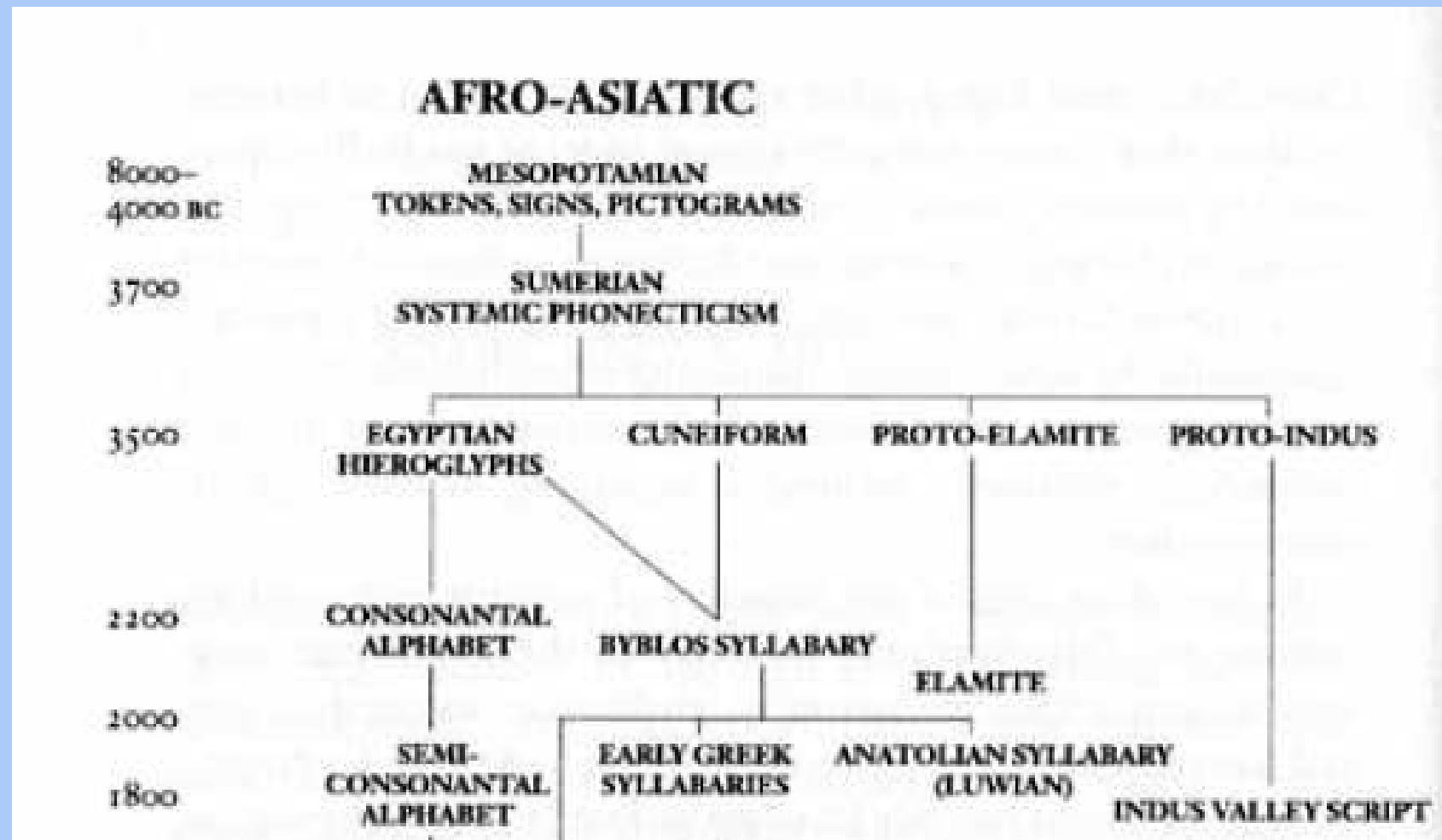
<i>ḥr</i>	<i>pr</i>	<i>rʿ</i>	<i>sʒ</i>	<i>iw</i>
'head'	'house'	'sun', 'day'	'duck'	'to walk'

<http://www.ancientscripts.com/egyptian.html>



# SPREAD AND DEVELOPMENT (1)

## (FISCHER 2001: 296)



# MESOAMERICAN WRITING (FROM 1ST MILLENIUM BC)



La Corona panel

[http://www.authenticmaya.com/maya\\_writing.htm](http://www.authenticmaya.com/maya_writing.htm)



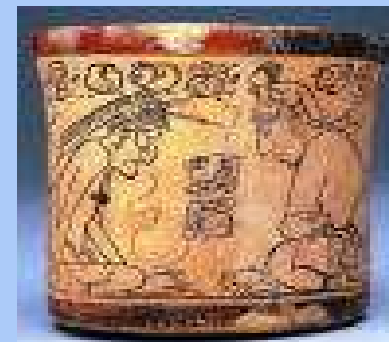
# MAYAN BOOK



"Detail of Codex Dresdensis drawn by Lacambalam" by Lacambalam - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 via Commons -

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detail\\_of\\_Codex\\_Dresdensis\\_drawn\\_by\\_Lacambalam.jpg#/media/File:Detail\\_of\\_Codex\\_Dresdensis\\_drawn\\_by\\_Lacambalam.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detail_of_Codex_Dresdensis_drawn_by_Lacambalam.jpg#/media/File:Detail_of_Codex_Dresdensis_drawn_by_Lacambalam.jpg)





[http://www.authenticmaya.com/maya\\_writing.htm](http://www.authenticmaya.com/maya_writing.htm)

# MESOAMERICAN WRITING AND CHINESE WRITING

„There are so many features of early Chinese writing that find their counterparts in early Mesoamerican writing [...] that it is difficult to believe they can be unrelated to one another”

- Vertical columns, reading from top to bottom;
- Compounded glyphic blocks of two or more signs;
- Logosyllabic values;
- Phonetics used to assist in identification of pronunciation;
- Semantic determinatives of Mayan writing correspond to Chinese writing's semantic classifiers.

Fischer 2001: 217

## EAST ASIAN

CHINESE

(?)

## AMERICAN

PROTO-ZAPOTEC

ZAPOTEC

LATE OLMEC

EPI-OLMEC

MAYAN

(PARACAN  
OF PERU?)

VIETNAMESE

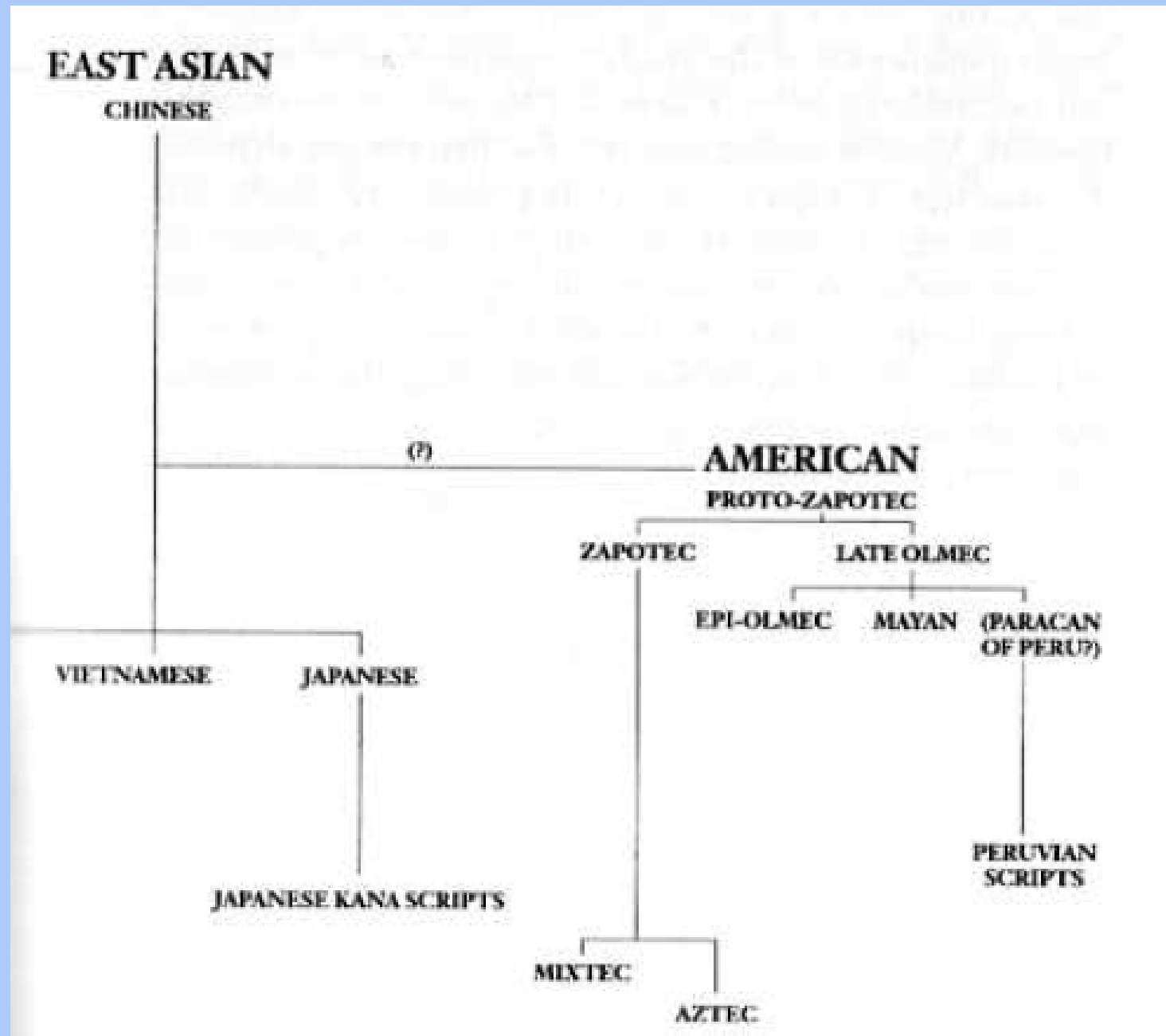
JAPANESE

JAPANESE KANA SCRIPTS

PERUVIAN  
SCRIPTS

MIXTEC

AZTEC



# REFERENCES

- Diringer, D. (1968) The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind (third edn.), New York: Funk & Wagnalls
- Gelb, I. (1963) A Study of Writing (second edn.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fischer, Steven Roger. 2001. A history of writing. London: Reaktion Books.

## Websites:

- <http://ancientscripts.com/>
- <http://historicconnections.webs.com/historyofwriting.htm>
- [http://www.authenticmaya.com/maya\\_writing.htm](http://www.authenticmaya.com/maya_writing.htm)

## Downloadable book on Maya writing:

- Harri Kettunen, Christopher Helmke: Introduction to Maya hieroglyphs, Wayeb 2010.  
<http://www.mesoweb.com/resources/handbook/WH2010.pdf>