

Lecture 1 – Evolution of Written Communication  
A Timeline for Origins of writing:

### **Pre - Writing**

Africa- 200,000 the earliest pictorial markings of man  
made for survival-  
utilitarian and ritualistic in purpose

The Paleolithic artist natural tendency toward simplification and stylization.  
Figures became increasingly abbreviated  
Expressed with a minimum number of lines.

Paleolithic to Neolithic Periods 35,000 BC to 4000 BC-  
Cave paintings appeared in Africa and Europe-  
Early images evolve into symbols for  
sounds in spoken languages.

By the late Paleolithic period, petroglyphs and pictographs are reduced  
to the point of almost resembling letters.

### **First alphabets**

Three great civilizations- Sumerians, Egyptians, Minoans triggered  
development of a true alphabet based on phonics.

5000 BC earliest known Egyptian writing appears

3500 BC Sumerians arrive in Mesopotamia- mysterious origins  
"original keepers of records"

3100 BC fundamentals of writing reaches Egyptians from Sumerians  
Their abstract writing system evolved from pictographic sources.

Unlike Sumerians, Egyptians retained their picture writing system called  
*hieroglyphics*.

3000 BC Minoan culture on Crete had developed pictographic writing  
believed to possibly be precursor of the spoken Greek Language.

While the alphabets inventors are unknown-  
Northwest Semitic peoples of the western Mediterranean region - early *Canaanites*,  
*Hebrews*, and *Phoenicians* - are widely believed to be the source.

*Phoenicians* experimented with simplification of cuneiform ,  
*hieroglyphics* and possibly Cretan pictographs and scripts.

- They arrive at a 22 letter phonetic system in-use by 1500 BC  
Greeks adopt this system as the basis of a written language.

### **Importance of Written Communication**

The quantum leaps in the development village culture to high civilization were possible  
through communication.

1. The capacity to organize a community and gain control over human destiny.
2. Speech - the ability to organize human sounds to communicate.
3. Marks, symbols, pictures, or letters drawn or written upon a surface or substrate became a  
graphic counterpart of the spoken word or unspoken thought. Pictographs/ petroglyphs ultimately  
became symbols for spoken language sounds.

### **The Cradle of Civilization and writing**

#### **The Earliest Writing**

Civilization dawned from obscure sources along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers  
in Mesopotamia- today's Iraq and along the course of the Nile River in Egypt.

The invention of writing brought about an intellectual revolution. Vast impact upon social order, economic progress, and technological and cultural developments.

Writing enabled society to stabilize itself under rule and law. Measurements and weights were standardized and guaranteed. Law codes, such as the Code of Hammurabi.

This rise of culture = ownership of property and the specialization of trades or crafts. Both made visual identification necessary.

### **3500 B.C. -Sumerian people arrive in Mesopotamia-**

Their most significant contributions-

1. They are the "original keepers of records" Sumerians evolved pictographic writing into an abstract form called cuneiform (wedge-shaped") and used it for record keeping.
2. Radically altered the nature of writing: pictographs evolved into an abstract sign
3. Cuneiform became rebus writing- picture symbols began to represent the sounds of the objects depicted instead of the objects themselves.
4. In its advanced form, it represents the first phonetic system of writing, abstract signs represent syllables, which are sounds made by combining more elementary sounds.

Mesopotamian Visual Identification

rise of culture = ownership of property and the specialization of trades or crafts. Both made visual identification necessary.

### **Egyptian Hieroglyphs**

Around 3100 B.C. a number of inventions from the Sumerians had reached Egypt; the cylinder seal, architectural designs of brick, decorative design motifs, and the fundamentals of writing.

The Egyptians evolved a complex writing based on pictographs, called hieroglyphics (Greek for "sacred carving" after the Egyptian for "the god's words").

#### **Reading hieroglyphic inscriptions: the Rosetta Stone**

Found August of 1799 -an inscription in two languages and three scripts; Egyptian hieroglyphics, Egyptian demotic script, and Greek. It was realized that the content was probably the same in the three languages.

### **Invention of Papyrus**

The development of papyrus, a paper-like substrate for manuscripts, was a major forward step in Egyptian visual communications.

As in Sumer, knowledge was power, and the scribes gained significant authority in Egyptian society. The wooden tablet carried by the scribe was a trademark identifying the carrier as being able to read and write.

1500B.C. a cursory "hieratic" script is used by the priests for religious writings.

An even more abstract script called "demotic" (from the Greek word for "popular") came into secular use for commercial and legal writing by the year 400 B.C. see Rosetta Stone.

## **The First Illustrated Manuscripts**

The Egyptians were the first people to produce “illustrated Manuscripts” in which words and pictures combined to communicate Egyptian Mythology.

1580 B.C. papyrus manuscripts come into use for funerary texts. This evolution toward cheaper and more widespread use of funerary texts paralleled the increasingly democratic and religious aspects of Egyptian life.

*A consistent design format evolved:*

1. One or two horizontal bands, usually colored, ran across the top and bottom of the manuscript.
2. Vertical columns of writing separated by ruled lines were written from right to left. Images were inserted adjacent to the text illustrated.
3. Images often stood on the lower horizontal band, the columns of text hanging down from the top horizontal band.
4. A sheet was sometimes divided into rectangular zones to separate text and images. The functional integration of text and image was aesthetically arranged. Open spaces and flat planes of color.

The scribe designed the manuscript. If it was to be illustrated, blank areas were left which the artist would fill in as best he could.

Egyptian culture survived for over three thousand years. Hieroglyphics, papyri, and illustrated manuscripts are its visual communication legacy used by later cultures. Along with the accomplishments of Mesopotamia, these innovations triggered the development of the alphabet and graphic communications in Phoenicia and the Greco- Roman world.

## **The Asian Contribution**

Chinese calligraphy, an ancient writing system, is used today by more people than any other visual language system.

Chinese calligraphic characters are logograms, graphic characters or signs that represent an entire word.

Calligraphy was never broken down syllable signs, like cuneiform, or alphabetic signs for elementary sounds. Learning the total vocabulary of forty-four thousand characters was the sign of wisdom and scholarship

### **4 Phases of evolution-**

The earliest known Chinese calligraphy is writing called chia-ku-wen, or “bone-and-shell” script.

The next phase of Chinese calligraphy, called chin-wen or “bronze” script.

The third phase in the design evolution of calligraphy is called hsiao chuan or “small-seal” style.

The final step in the evolution of Chinese calligraphy is called chen-shu or “regular” style that has been in continuous use for nearly two thousand years.

### **The Chinese contribution to the evolution of visual communication:**

1. Paper, an economical substrate for transmitting information,
2. printing, the duplication of words and images,
3. First Movable type

The Invention of Paper 105 AD

- unchanged until it became mechanized in nineteenth century England.

Invention of printing, a major breakthrough in human history.

Called relief printing; the spaces around an image on a flat surface are cut away, the remaining raised surface is inked, and a sheet of paper is placed over the surface and rubbed to transfer the inked image to paper.

Whether relief printing evolved from chops, rubbings from stone inscriptions, or a synthesis of both is not known.

Earliest datable wood block print 770 AD, 16 feet long 12 inch high

Seven sheets of paper pasted together to form a scroll 4.9 meters (16 feet) long and 30.5 centimeters (12 inches) high. Six sheets of text convey Buddha's revelations to his elderly follower Subhuti.

The scroll was replaced with paged formats in the ninth or Tenth century. First, folded books that opened accordion. These resembled scrolls that were folded, like a railroad timetable. Stitched books by the 11th century

Before the year 1000 paper money was designed, printed and used in lieu of metal coins.

The quiet revolution that printing wrought upon Chinese intellectual life brought about a renaissance of learning and culture over five hundred years before Gutenberg's invention of movable type in the West

Reproducing beautiful calligraphy was established in China by 1000 A.D. and has never been surpassed. The calligrapher was listed with the author and printer in the colophon.

First Movable type

1045 A.D. the Chinese alchemist Pi Sheng developed the concept of movable type, although never widely used in Asia.

The large number of characters in Asian languages made filing and retrieving the characters difficult. Because calligraphy is not alphabetical, types were organized according to rhymes. But movable type never replaced the hand-cut woodblock in the Orient.

*During Europe's thousand-year medieval period, China's invention of paper and printing spreads slowly westward, arriving in Europe just as the Renaissance began.*

### **Alphabets what are they?**

An alphabet is a set of visual symbols or characters used to represent the elementary sounds of a spoken language. Name from (from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, alpha and beta) It was a major step forward in human communications.

The term North Semitic writing is used for early alphabetic writing found through the region of Phoenicia (now Lebanon), and parts of Syria and Israel.

The Phoenicians finally created a totally abstract and alphabetical system of twenty-two simple phonetic signs, replacing the formidable complexity of cuneiform and hieroglyphs. This system was in use by 1500 B.C. The Phoenician alphabet then was adopted and evolved further in Greece and Rome (Latin)

### **Cretan Pictographs-**

The Mediterranean Island of Crete ranks behind only Egypt and Mesopotamia in its early level of advancement in the ancient of Western world.

Early pictographic writing from the earliest stages of the Minoan civilization 3000BC -discovered in 1900 - by Arthur Evans

Minoan or Cretan picture symbols were in use as early as 2800 B.C.

### **Phiastos Disk-**

A syllabary clay disk with 241 total signs made of 45 differing signs. The disk was printed with a stamp or punch.

Thus the principle of movable type could have been in use in a western culture as early as 2000 B.C.

### **The Greek Alphabet**

The Greek alphabet occupies a major position in the evolution of graphic communication. The Greek alphabet fathered the Etruscan, Latin, and Cyrillic alphabets.

It is understood that the Phoenician alphabet was adopted by the ancient Greeks around 750 B.C. then spread through their city-states although the dates are circumstantial and debated.

#### **From a formal design standpoint- major refinements were made:**

1. Geometric structure and order-

The Greeks applied geometric structure and order to the cockeyed Phoenician characters, converting them into art forms of great harmony and beauty.

2. A baseline in an even repetition of form and space-

A visual order and balance as the letters march along a baseline in an even repetition of form and space.

3. The letters and their component strokes are somewhat standardized- a system of horizontal, vertical, curved, and diagonal strokes is used.

4. The letters became symmetrical geometric constructions-

5. Reading directions - the Greeks adopted the left-to-right

The Golden Age of Athens (c. 500 B.C.) was the high point of Greek culture.

Reading and writing had become more important by this time because the expansion of information and knowledge exceeded the ability of an oral culture to contain and document it.

### **Uncials**

As early as the third century A.D. the Greeks developed a more rounded writing style called uncials. This script could be written more quickly because its rounded letters were formed with fewer strokes.

Uncials also demonstrated how writing tools and substrates influence written forms. Pens were made from hard reeds, cut into a nib and split at the tip to aid ink flow.

### **The Latin Alphabet**

The Latin alphabet came to the Romans from Greece by way of the ancient Etruscans.

6th century BC was height of Etruscan civilization which was "romanized" thereafter.

#### **Our 26 letter alphabet.**

Romans added the Y and Z to the end of the 21 letter Latin alphabet After first century BC because they were appropriating Greek words with these sounds. Later- three additional letters were added during the Middle Ages to arrive at our 26 letter alphabet.

#### **Roman forms of the alphabet:**

- 1. Monumental Capitals**
- 2. Square Capitals**
- 3. Rustic Capitals**

Design of Roman inscriptions: "*Monumental Capitals*" -carved in stone-

Unique contributions of the Romans to the forms of letters are found in the Monumental Capitals:

1. Thick and thin strokes were used to unify straight and curved lines.
2. Each letter form was designed to become one form rather than merely the sum of its parts.
3. Careful attention was given to the shapes of spaces inside the letters- and between the letters.
4. A Roman inscription became a sequence of linear geometric forms adapted from the square, triangle and circle.
5. The first serifs appear-  
Two theories on their origin:

Roman written hand took several forms:  
Were Used from 2nd century until the 5th century  
Parchment came into common use around 190 BC.

*Square Capitals* ( capitalis quadrata)  
Written slowly with a flat pen, stately proportions -outstanding legibility  
Space between lines and letters but no space between words.  
Much like today's capitals

*Rustic Capitals*- (capitalis rustica)  
Written quickly, very condensed - saved space on parchment and papyrus.

### **The codex and its importance**

A revolutionary format design called the *codex* began to supplant the scroll (called the rotulus) in Rome and Greece, beginning about the time of Christ.

The modern book takes its form from The codex-

The clumsy process of unrolling and rolling scrolls to look up information yielded to the quick process of opening a codex to the desired page. Both sides of the parchment pages in a codex could be used for writing, books compared and easily hidden.

Christians sought the codex format to alienate themselves from the pagan scroll; pagans clung to their scrolls in resistance to Christianity. *A graphic format thereby became a symbol of religious belief during the late decades of the Roman Empire.*

Christianity, adopted as Rome's state religion in 325 A.D. by the Emperor Constantine (d. 337 A.D.) elevated books and writing to far greater importance than their previous roles in the ancient world.

**Rome's great legacy includes its latin alphabet which became the design standard for visible languages in the Western world.**