

Notecards on Topic: The First Type of WritingWork Cited

Jean, George. Writing: The Story of Alphabets and Scripts. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992.

Clay Tablets

First clay tablets from Sumer were temple records of lists of grain and cattle (Jean 12-13).

First Written Accounts

The first written accounts were agricultural accounts (Jean 13).

One Temple Account

One temple account listed who was employed: "18 bakers, 31 brewers, 7 slaves, and a blacksmith" (Jean 13).

Accounts about Money

One account reveals that the Sumerians used silver as a form of money (Jean 13-14).

School Tablets

Tablets "with the teacher's text on one side and the pupil's copy on the other" showed how people learned how to write cuneiform (Jean 14).

Work Cited

"First Scripts." DK e-encyclopedia. 2004. eLibrary. Web. 28 Aug. 2012.

Writing Invented

As population increased, people needed a way to record details they couldn't simply remember ("First Scripts").

Keeping Track

Kept track of taxes, rations for workers, and inventory for goods ("First Scripts").

Pictograms

=earliest writing
small pictures represented objects, actions, ideas
("First Scripts").

Pictograms

complicated and difficult to learn
("First Scripts").

Cuneiform

was the name of the pictogram writing system used in Sumer around 2900 BCE ("First Scripts").

Cuneiform

was the writing system used before the alphabet was invented ("First Scripts").

Cuneiform

wedge-shaped writing used trimmed reeds developed by scribes ("First Scripts").

Clay Tablets

"scratched onto tablets of wet clay, using stalks from reeds that grew beside... rivers" ("First Scripts").

Clay Tablets

wet clay tablets were then dried in the sun to preserve the cuneiform ("First Scripts").

Reeds

reeds were cut with a triangular tip
("First Scripts").

Reeds

the triangle tip made wedge-shaped marks in the wet clay ("First Scripts").

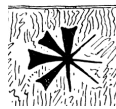
Source Material on Topic: The First Type of Writing

Reliable Records of Accounts Could Not Be Kept Orally. Writing Was Born of Practical Necessity.

Beyond the officials of the royal court, the priests, and the merchants, the population of Mesopotamia consisted largely of shepherds and farmers. This explains the first inscriptions found on clay tablets from Sumer, from the great temple complex at the site of Uruk. These tablets, which constitute a form of written temple records, list sacks of grain and heads of cattle.

The first written signs were therefore used for agricultural accounts. Other later tablets contain information about the social structure of the Sumerians—we learn, for example, that the religious community of the temple at Lagash employed eighteen bakers, thirty-one brewers, seven slaves, and a blacksmith. Other documents show that the Sumerians not only used a silver standard in their transactions but also developed a system for lending money with interest. Finally, thanks to tablets found in the Sumerian schools with the teacher's text on one side and the pupil's copy on the other, it has been possible to trace how people learned to write cuneiform (13-14).

Work Cited: Jean, George. *Writing: The Story of Alphabets and Scripts*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992.



First Scripts

Writing was invented in Mesopotamia, around 3200 BC. Cities had grown so big that people could no longer do business by keeping every detail in their heads. Rulers needed to keep track of who had paid their taxes, which craftworkers had been given rations, and how many goods they had made.

What were early forms of writing like?

The first writing was made up of pictograms—small pictures representing objects or expressing actions or ideas. These writing systems, which included cuneiform, were complicated, and few people managed to learn them.

Where else did people use pictograms?

Different forms of picture-writing developed in Egypt, China, and Meso- (Middle) America. In the Indus Valley, scribes used pictures combined with symbols—a system that today's experts have still not explained.

Cuneiform

Cuneiform is the name given to the wedge-shaped script, written using trimmed reeds, developed by scribes in Sumer around 2900 BC. It was borrowed by other Middle Eastern peoples to write and develop their own languages, before the alphabet was developed.

How was the first script written?

The first pictograms were scratched onto tablets of wet clay, using stalks from reeds that grew beside Mesopotamian rivers. The tablets were then dried in the sun to preserve the written text. Scribes (people trained to copy manuscripts) soon began to trim the reeds to make a triangular tip, which created clear, wedge-shaped marks.

Work Cited: "First Scripts." *DK e-encyclopedia*. 2004. eLibrary. Web. 28 Aug. 2012.

