



## SCIENTIFIC VIEWS ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE EMERGENCE OF WRITING

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p><b>Received:</b> 26<sup>th</sup> January 2025 <b>Accepted:</b> 24<sup>th</sup> February 2025</p>	<p>If we take a look at the history of the emergence of writing, we can see that the discoveries and inventions of each era did not eliminate writing from society. On the contrary, these inventions compelled people to repeatedly refer to recorded information for further progress. Thanks to writing, humanity was able to understand and learn about its ancestors and pave the way for future struggles. Writing enabled people to unite into communities. Many ancient peoples were unaware that their language was recorded not with letters but with images, symbols, syllabic rules, and phonetic signs. It can even be said that the issue of deciphering these signs remains relevant for researchers to this day. The use of material, pictorial, and symbolic writing at the dawn of human society clearly indicates that the peoples who employed it played a significant role in the formation of civilization.</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b> writing, symbols, images, material sources, pictograms, tokens, clay miniatures, letters, logograms, drawings, Oxus, India, China, Sumerian script.</p>	

Human societies can be divided into those that possessed writing and those that did not use writing<sup>1</sup>. The skill of drawing and using pictorial representations eventually became a necessity for human communities, initially serving as a means for calculations and record-keeping. This, in turn, laid the foundation for the creation of pictographic script. Pictographic symbols are considered the earliest form of writing in human history.

One of the key issues faced by researchers studying the origins of writing is understanding how the evolution from images to letters took place.

Throughout the course of human historical development, writing has undergone a unique process of evolution. In the primitive era, people initially used drawings as a means to express their thoughts and ideas. These images provide insight into the worldview of Stone Age humans. For a long period in history, when writing did not yet exist, pictures served as the only means for people to communicate their thoughts and intentions to others.

The next stage that laid the foundation for the emergence of writing was the use of material-based messages. Since ancient times, one of the methods

used by people to convey messages to others was material-based writing. A significant figure in the study of this form of writing is the French-born American scholar Denise Schmandt-Besserat. Her research focused on early writing and what she recognized as its predecessor—the "token system." Notably, her two-volume work *Before Writing*, published in 1992, remains an important contribution to this field<sup>2</sup>.

Archaeological discoveries from ancient Eastern civilizations, particularly in Sumer, Egypt, Elam, the Indus Valley, and the Oxus region, provide sufficient evidence that symbolic pictograms underwent the same developmental process. The use of visual communication through gestures and facial expressions is a well-established phenomenon. However, from an individual perspective, speech is shaped by social class and ethnic origin, whereas from a societal standpoint, it requires clearer and more precise interpretation.

This phenomenon is not universally accepted by all cultures. While gestures may be considered a natural form of expression in some societies, in many others, they are viewed as inappropriate or even as a violation of social etiquette and moral conduct.

<sup>1</sup> Фридрих И. История письма. Перевод с немецкого. Изво "Наука". Москва. 1979. С. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Schmandt-Besserat D. 1992, Before writing, volume one: from counting to cuneiform. University of Texas Press, Austin. 1992.



Research on material-based writing has also been conducted by S. A. Jasim and J.<sup>3</sup> Outis. In their 1986 article published in the journal *World Archaeology*, they criticized certain aspects of D. Schmandt-Besserat's research. While they did not reject her interpretation outright, they questioned her claim that counting tokens and material-based writing were widespread throughout the Near East. Instead, they argued that such small clay objects were characteristic of specific cities, such as Susa.<sup>4</sup>

According to S. A. Jasim and J. Outis, these miniature objects may have served functions beyond accounting and economic purposes<sup>5</sup>. They suggested the possibility that some of these artifacts also indicated social status. Their argument was based on discoveries at Tepe Gawra, where a small alabaster sphere found in a child's grave was interpreted as a toy, while a similar small marble sphere found in another grave was believed to signify the deceased's high social status during their lifetime.

The persistence of material-based writing in modern society is exemplified by observations made by Mary H. Kingsley among indigenous peoples of West Africa. She noted that singers carried various objects—such as pipes, feathers, skins, bird skulls, and other items—inside a net. Each of these objects served as a reminder of a specific song, essentially forming a tangible repertoire of their musical tradition<sup>6</sup>.

The distinctive use of symbolic object-based writing can be regarded as a fundamental aspect of some cultures' way of life. This can be observed in the example of the Yoruba people. During King Dahomey's attack on a Yoruba city, a local resident was captured. To inform his wife of his misfortune, he sent her a set of objects: a stone, charcoal, pepper, grain, and a piece of cloth. Each of these items conveyed a specific message about his situation:

- The stone represented his health—just as a stone is hard, he wanted to indicate that his body remained strong and resilient.

- The charcoal symbolized darkness, meaning that his future, like charcoal, had become bleak and hopeless.
- The pepper represented burning, signifying that, just as pepper burns, his mind was tormented by his bitter fate.
- The grain symbolized withering—just as grain dries out, he expressed that his body had wasted away due to his suffering.
- The piece of cloth indicated that his clothing had turned into rags, representing the severity of his hardship.

This form of writing, in turn, is expressed through objects and items. Written symbols are usually created in the form of drawings or by carving marks through hand movements. In many primitive societies, pictorial representation was replaced by writing over time, but in the modern era, it is no longer recognized in its original role.

Every civilization has strived to develop a writing system with a high degree of accuracy and to make communication convenient for its time. Therefore, when discussing the origin and evolution of writing, it is important to recognize that each society—particularly those that have achieved social development—has continuously worked to establish its own system of writing. Regardless of whether their means of communication took the form of symbols, signs, or objects, the continuous progression and refinement of these methods have been a significant aspect of human civilization.

Notably, civilizations such as the Sumerians and Egyptians succeeded in developing writing systems to a level of systematic organization, ultimately establishing them as traditional forms. In this regard, the Harappan script is also highly commendable, as it played a crucial role in the emergence and dissemination of writing within the Oxus civilization.

The significance of this lies in the fact that extensive cultural exchanges facilitated the similarities between the Oxus and Harappan scripts. These parallels are well-

<sup>3</sup> Jasim S. A., Oates J. (1986), 'Early tokens and tablets in Mesopotamia: new information from Tell Abada and Tell Brak// *World Archaeology*. № 17 (3). 1986. Pp. 348-362.

<sup>4</sup> Jasim S. A., Oates J. (1986), 'Early tokens and tablets in Mesopotamia: new information from Tell Abada and Tell Brak// *World Archaeology*. № 17 (3). 1986. P. 351.

<sup>5</sup> Jasim S. A., Oates J. (1986), 'Early tokens and tablets in Mesopotamia: new information from Tell Abada and Tell Brak// *World Archaeology*. № 17 (3). 1986. P. 352.

<sup>6</sup> И. Гелб. История письменности. От рисуночного письма к полноценному алфавиту. Москва. 2018. С.-9.



supported by scholarly research and academic conclusions.

As a result of years of research by archaeologist Sh. Shaydullayev, this scientific discovery has generated significant interest. In Ancient Asia, the development of the Bactrian and Margiana pictographic writing systems did not progress alongside the emergence of cuneiform writing<sup>7</sup>.

Archaeological excavations conducted in Central Asia have uncovered numerous small clay-based material letters, which have been extensively studied. The contributions of renowned Uzbek scholars such as A. A. Asqarov, N. Avanesova, Sh. B. Shaydullayev, A. Sh. Shaydullayev, and A. Boqiyev have been instrumental in advancing the understanding of these findings.

The next stage in the development of writing was the emergence of pictographic scripts. Among the earliest civilizations that used pictographic writing were the Sumerians, Egyptians, Chinese, Indians, as well as the Iranian and Turanian peoples.

One of the oldest pictographic scripts was invented by the ancient Chinese. The study of Chinese pictographic writing began in the late 19th century. A major breakthrough in this research occurred in 1899, when Chinese scholars Liu Teyun and Wang Yirong discovered mysterious oracle bone inscriptions from the Shang Dynasty near the village of Xiaotun, close to Anyang in Henan Province, China<sup>8</sup>. These inscriptions on animal bones are now considered the earliest known examples of Chinese writing<sup>9</sup>.

In ancient China, the earliest pictographic symbols have been recorded on artifacts from the Yangshao, Longshan, Majiayao, and Liangzhu cultures<sup>10</sup>. These symbols were primarily inscribed on the surfaces of ceramic vessels. However, scholars have not yet reached a consensus on whether these mysterious

pictographic symbols were used as a form of writing or merely as decorative or ritualistic marks.

According to P. Dematté, these symbols from China's Neolithic cultures were part of an emerging symbolic system, which later served as a foundation for the development of ancient Chinese writing<sup>11</sup>.

The Chinese scholar Xu Xigui categorized these pictographic symbols into two groups: These pictographic symbols were classified into two groups by the Chinese scholar Xu Xigui:

1. Symbols resembling specific objects.
2. Geometric symbols<sup>12</sup>.

In China, the earliest symbols were discovered at Neolithic sites such as Jiahu, Dadiwan, and Damaidi. At the Jiahu site, these symbols were inscribed on turtle plastrons<sup>13</sup>.

According to historian and archaeologist Li Xueqin, who conducted research at this site in recent years, these symbols were not yet writing, but rather a developmental stage that later led to the emergence of a writing system.

However, there is a significant time gap of 5,000 years between the Jiahu symbols and the Shang Dynasty inscriptions, leading many researchers to question their direct connection. Despite this, D. Keightley argues that there is a direct link between Jiahu symbols and the oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang Dynasty.

The inscriptions directly related to Chinese characters were discovered at the Banpo and Xianjia sites in Lintong District, Shaanxi Province, dating back to the 5th–4th millennia BCE. Notably, the Banpo symbols, which consist of 22 distinct characters, were extensively studied, especially during the 1954–1957 excavations<sup>14</sup>.

In the study of ancient Egyptian writing, the research of E. Hins holds particular significance. His

<sup>7</sup> Sh. Shaydullayev, A. Shaydullayev. *The Oldest Writing System of Turan*. – Tashkent: Fan, 2024. – p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Крюков М. В., Хуан Шу-ин. *Древнекитайский язык* (тексты, грамматика, лексический комментарий). Из-во. Наука. М. 1978. С. 11. 512 с.

<sup>9</sup> Boltz W. G. *The origin and early development of the Chinese writing system*. American Oriental Series. Vol. 78. New Haven. 2003. P. 31;

<sup>10</sup> Qui Xigui “Hanzi xingcheng wenti de chyubu tansuo” [A Preliminary Investigation of the Problem of Chinese Script Formation]. *Zhongguo Yuwen*. 3. 1978. PP. 168-169.

<sup>11</sup> Dematté, Paola “The Origins of Chinese Writing: the Neolithic Evidence”// *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*. № 20 (2). 2010. PP. 211–228.

<sup>12</sup> Qiu Xigui *Chinese writing*. 2000. P. 30.

<sup>13</sup> Qui Xigui “Hanzi xingcheng wenti de chyubu tansuo” [A Preliminary Investigation of the Problem of Chinese Script Formation]. *Zhongguo Yuwen*. 3. 1978. PP. 162-171.

<sup>14</sup> Woon W. L. *Chinese Writing: Its Origin and Evolution*. Macau: Joint Publishing. Hong Kong. 1987. P. 13.



work contributed to the identification of grammatical elements, such as auxiliary verbs and particles, which are integral to the structure of the Egyptian writing system.

In the mid-19th century, Karl Richard Lepsius played a crucial role in the study of Egyptian hieroglyphs. He successfully corrected fundamental errors observed in Jean-François Champollion's research. Lepsius provided a clear explanation of biliteral and triliteral phonetic values within the Egyptian hieroglyphic system. His contributions marked a turning point in Egyptology, as the challenge of deciphering hieroglyphs was resolved, paving the way for the translation of ancient texts<sup>15</sup>.

One of Lepsius's significant discoveries was the "Canopus Decree," which he recorded in Tanis. Unlike the Rosetta Stone, the Canopus Decree was found in a fully preserved state, allowing scholars to directly compare Egyptian hieroglyphs with Ancient Greek script<sup>16</sup>. This breakthrough led to the systematic development of Egyptian hieroglyphic dictionaries, further advancing the field of Egyptology.

#### Conclusion

It can be said that among all the great achievements of humanity, writing is the discovery that created a revolutionary turning point in its further development. Looking at the history of the emergence of writing, it would not be an exaggeration to say that writing initially emerged as a means of expressing human concepts related to language in written form. Writing is a method of recording human speech.

All attempts at recording information were the simplest steps toward the transition to writing, but we cannot call them true writing. The symbols that seem ordinary to us today played a role in shaping interpersonal communication. However, none of the ancient writing systems were particularly effective in representing speech accurately.

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