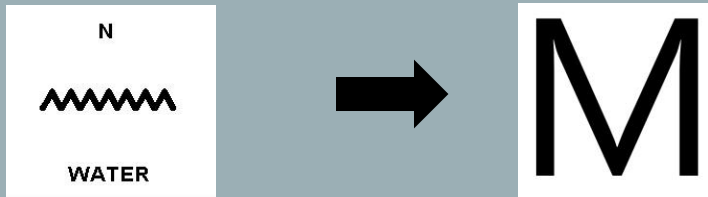


THE ALPHABET AND LITERACY

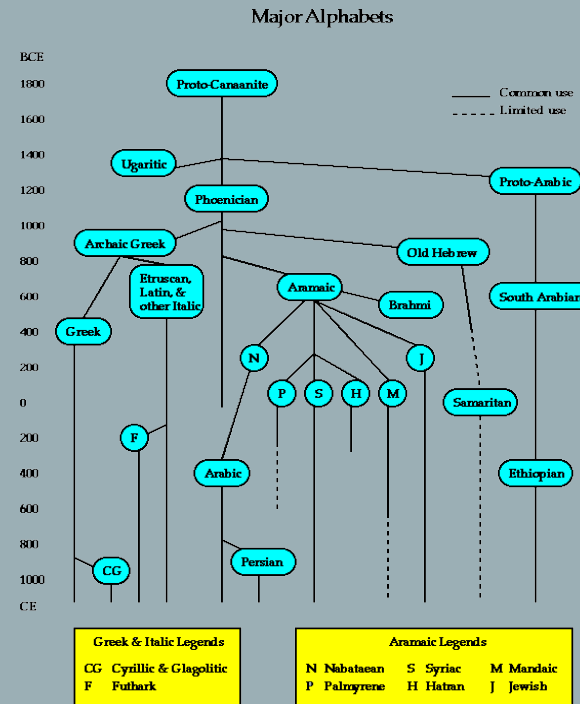
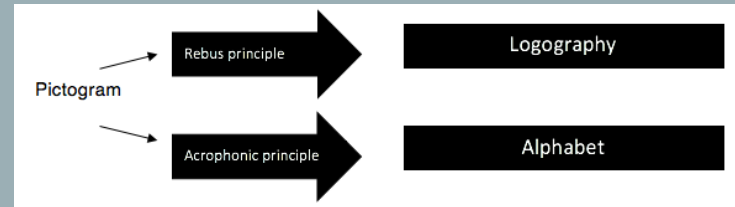
Alphabet: "a set of letters or symbols in a fixed order used to represent the basic speech sounds of a language." (Oxford Dictionary)

- First alphabetic writing system in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt sometime around 1900-1800 BC.
 - Semitic mercenaries or delta dwellers utilized the characters of the Egyptian script to signify the consonants of their Semitic language
 - Hieroglyphs were converted to consonantal signs via the acrophonic principle: the symbols used would represent not the object or idea they depicted but rather the first sound of the word for the thing depicted
- This early alphabetic script evidently then spread outwards from Egypt, parenting the Phoenician script, which itself parented many other scripts including but not limited to the Greek alphabet, the Arabic script, and the Hebrew script.



Our modern "M" came from the acrophonic transformation of the Egyptian symbol for water.

This course has given me important insight into the relationship between language and writing. As I mentioned above, since writing is such a pervasive aspect of not only education but modern life in general, it has been a difficult task personally to separate my conception of writing from my conception of language. I feel I now have a deeper understanding of writing as a sort of technology rather than as more or less a medium for "saying something," and plan to continue research of both language and its relevant cultural inventions in such a way as to keep always in mind the inextricability of culture from language, language from culture, and culture from all aspects of human life.

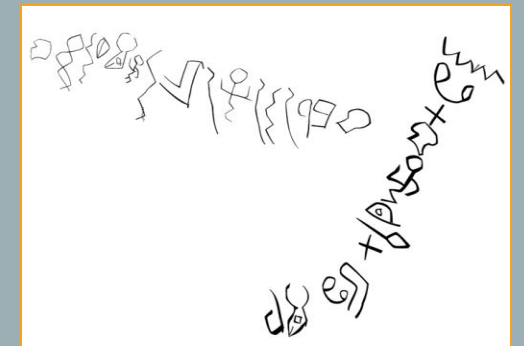


My research showed the following:

(1) Literacy alone (and especially literacy in any specific writing system), despite some theories and even popular belief, does not seem to correlate directly with high-level cognitive reasoning.

(2) Literacy can be linked to greater access to metalinguistic knowledge, and this may differ depending on the writing system and its corresponding language.

(3) Literacy, as conceived of as part of a sociocultural tradition, is closely engrained in the personal identity of the person who engages with it, and it is in this way, above all, that different writing systems may be thought of as having different cognitive relationships effects with their users.



Inscriptions at Wadi el-Hol