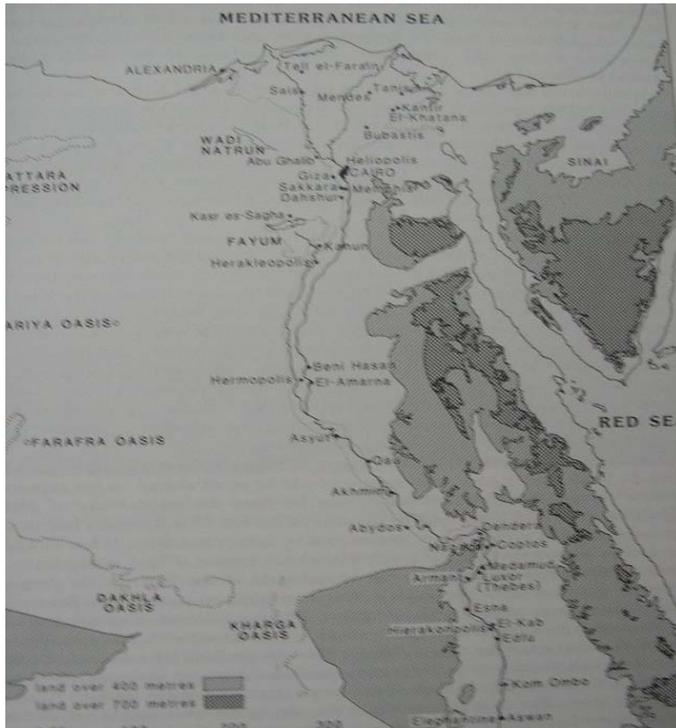


“Was the function of the earliest writing in Egypt utilitarian or ceremonial? Does the surviving evidence reflect the reality?”

Article written by Marsia Sfakianou

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Map of Egypt. Late Predynastic Period-Early Dynastic (Grimal, 1994)

Chronology of Predynastic period, Thinite period and Old Kingdom
 (from the appendix of Grimal's book, 1994, p 389)

4500-3150 BC Predynastic period.
 4500-4000 BC Badarian period

4000-3500 BC Naqada I (Amratian)
 3500-3300 BC Naqada II (Gerzean A)
 3300-3150 BC Naqada III (Gerzean B)

3150-2700 BC Thinite period
 3150-2925 BC Dynasty 1

3150-2925 BC Narmer, Menes
 3125-3100 BC Aha
 3100-3055 BC Djer
 3055-3050 BC Wadjet (Serpent)/Djet
 3050-2995 BC Den/ Udimu
 2995-2950 BC Anedjib, Andjyeb, Enizib, Semerkhet
 2960-2926 BC Ka'a

2925-2700 BC Dynasty 2

Hetepsekhemwy, Reneb, Nyttetjer/ Nytjeren, Weneg, Sened, Peribsen, Sekhemib, Khasekhem/ Khasekhemwy

2700-2190 BC Old Kingdom

2700-2625 BC Dynasty 3

Nebka (Sanakht ?), Djoser, Sekhemkhet, Khaba, Neferka (re), Huni

2625-2510 BC Dynasty 4

Snofru, Cheops, Djedefre, Chephren, Baefre (?), Mycerinus, Shepseskaf

2510-240 BC Dynasty 5

Userkaf, Sahure, Neferirkare-Kakai, Shepseskare, Neferefre, Neuserre, Menkauhor, Djedkare-Isesi, Wenis

2460-2200 BC Dynasty 6

Teti, Userkare, Pepy I, Merenre I, Pepy II, Nitocris

How writing began

It was probably human psychology that gave birth to early languages, during prehistory of many civilizations all around the world. It was loneliness that created the speech. It was the fear of the unknown and the necessity of co-operation against the dangers of nature; the threatening of starvation after an insufficient hunting; the conspiracy against enemies; and, last but not least, the expressing of feelings. All these factors lead people to use their voice in order to communicate with others, inventing a common vocabulary for themselves and other people of their close environment. However, after the invention of speech, what made writing?

The answer is not too complicated: writing would make something or someone unforgettable, would serve the communication of messages and the spreading of ideas theoretically for eternity, sometimes even for propaganda (cult and social structure would not exist without writing).

Cavemen were painting pictures on the walls of their caves. In the beginning cavemen used pictures to tell stories and leave messages. The primitive art of painting and sketching ended with the first kind of writing. Soon, a picture, drawing or sign, would represent a sound or an idea among the members of a community. Nowadays, petroglyphs have been found in many parts of the world (Sandie Oram, 1972, p 2-5).

Writing, however, in the true sense of the word, cannot be said to exist until there is an agreed repertoire of formal signs or symbols that can be used to reproduce clearly the thoughts and feelings the writer wishes to express. Thus, such a system did not appear overnight, and the history of writing is a long, slow moving and complicated process (G. Jean, 1987, p 12)

Egyptian writing and its origins.

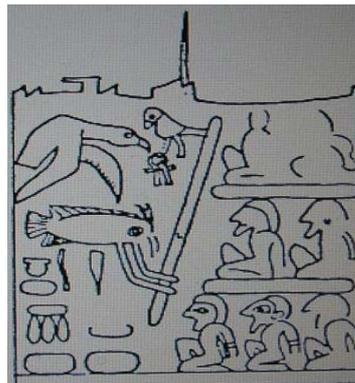
In the beginning of early Egyptian writing the forms of the symbols or ideograms were representing a picture, a sound or an idea but their phonetic functions were unquestionable. As a conclusion, hieroglyphs brought together the pictogram, the ideogram and the phonogram (Grimal, 1994, p 33). Iversen claims that everything that was reproduced by primitive forms of writing (for example an object, or human beings) was thought to have a magical existence of its own (Iversen, 1961, p 12). Thus, primitive ancient Egyptian writing was strongly connected to art, architecture, social structure and politics at that specific time, and those four parts seem to have a parallel development, affecting one another (Baines, 1989, article "Communication and Display: the integration of Early Egyptian Writing"). We also have to bear in mind that political order and stability, ancient Egyptian worship, the unification of the State and the normal working of "Cosmos", would be reflected in the development of Egyptian writing (Kemp, 1989, p 28). That might explain the reason why, according to the ancient Egyptians, it was the god Thoth who created writing and then bestowed it as a gift on mankind.

It is a reality that writing was born in Mesopotamia, during the 3rd millennium BC. The early form of this writing would be more utilitarian than ceremonial, as the archaeological finds indicate. All this enthusiasm about the interpretation of the first

Mesopotamian signs and texts lead probably to a vague conclusion: Mesopotamian writing has affected early Egyptian writing, evolving in the late predynastic period in the Nile Valley.

However, what did actually happen? Would the Mesopotamian writing “loan” characters and signs to predynastic Egyptians? Would it, alternatively, inspire them to create their own writing? Or did it simply give birth to the idea of the necessity of writing in the ancient Egyptian environment? Did Mesopotamians invade ancient Egypt in this part of prehistory? Or was it trade that produced Asiatic ideas and symbols in the area we are examining?

We will probably find it difficult to answer this question. Though, among archaeologists, there are many suggestions about this. At the beginning of the 20th century, M. De Morgan, F. Petrie and W. Budge claimed that ancient Egyptians didn't actually discover writing but the art of writing was borrowed from the Mesopotamians. They support this idea based on imported, Asiatic-origin, finds from predynastic graves of the later period and the fact that, meanwhile, brick buildings, inspired by Mesopotamian techniques, occurred for the first time in Egypt. In addition to that, it is true that the decoration of the earliest cylinder seals coming from Egyptian sites strongly indicates a relationship with Mesopotamian symbols and ideas (W. Budge, 1902, p 39-43).



Ivory cylinder seal of Narmer from the main temple deposit of Hierakonpolis. 1st dynasty. Drawing from the original (Baines, 1989)

K. Bard accepts that, at the end of the late predynastic period, contemporaneous politics existed among Nubia, Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine and Egypt, capable of affecting early Egyptian writing (Shaw, 2002, p 64). Iversen claims that: “*the original sound values of some hieroglyphics relate to parts of the human body corresponding to Semitic names of the same parts of the body*” (Iversen, 1961, p 13). Postgate indicates that Mesopotamians have influenced early Egyptian writing (Postgate et al, 1995, p 463) and Ray agrees with him that: “*the emergence of early writing was extraneous to Egypt*” (Ray, 1986, p 309). Spencer, comparing early ancient Egyptian finds to contemporaneous Mesopotamian, claims: “*if, as is suspected, the idea of writing was borrowed from early Mesopotamia, it is not too surprising that the development stage seems to be missing in Egypt*”. *A misleading impression has been given by the documents which have survived...*” (Spencer, 1993, p 62).



Limestone stela from the official Merka, showing his name and his titles in an inscription. 1st dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 92)

Scopes of early Egyptian writing

Whatever the origins of early Egyptian writing, we have to consider that it was created for a reason, in other words, to serve some purpose during late predynastic and early dynastic Egypt. The goals could be:

a). To serve simple, everyday necessities, requiring the use of writing or symbols, such as:

- ◆ Counting of offers in a tomb
- ◆ Counting time (calendars, etc)
- ◆ Giving an “identity” to products, for example ownership, origin and content of an object.

b). To keep official records, that:

- ◆ Guarantee the Unification of the State and, thus, the “normal working” of “Cosmos”
- ◆ Serve economic purposes
- ◆ Serve administrative purposes
- ◆ Serve royal art or the art of an “elite” (part being “autobiographies” of the deceased in tombs)
- ◆ “Propagandize” for worship.

As a conclusion, some of the purposes early Egyptian writing serve are either utilitarian or ceremonial, always depending on the type of writing and the object or material the text is written on. Though, on some occasions, both utilitarian and ceremonial purposes coexist (Postgate et al, 1995, p 480). However, the majority of archaeological evidence we have about the earliest writing is of the ceremonial-symbolic type.



The name of king Semererkhet on a fragment of pottery wine-jar. From Abydos. 1st dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 90)

Ceremonial or utilitarian?

It was 1995 when N. Postgate, Taw Wang and Toby Wilkinson wrote an article titled “The evidence of Early Writing: Utilitarian or ceremonial?”, in which, attempting to answer this uncertain enquiry, they examined examples of early writing coming from four different environments: Mesopotamia, Egypt, ancient China and Mesoamerica.

In this article Postgate and his colleagues mention that, even though the surviving material for early writing tends to be characterized by a majority opinion more ceremonial and symbolic, rather than utilitarian, “*a comparison of the evidence for the earliest scripts in different parts of the world suggests that an apparent preponderance of ceremonial and symbolic usage should not be interpreted too literally. It seems to have more to do with archaeological preservation (the better survival in archaeological contexts of the durable materials preferred as vehicles for ceremonial text) than with any deep-seated differences in the function of the scripts. It may well be that the earliest Chinese, Egyptian or Mesoamerican texts were largely utilitarian in their application as those of Mesopotamia*”. In other words Postgate mentions that it is hardly surprising that it is the ceremonial texts that have survived, so long as “*for ceremonial texts expensive and durable materials were chosen and for ephemeral and utilitarian texts cheap and perishable materials are used*” (Postgate et al, 1995, p 459-480).



Fragment of ivory from the tomb of Den at Abydos.

The name of the king is written in a serekh. 1st dynasty. From Abydos (Spencer, 1993, p 87)

Some other scholars, on the contrary, agreed with Ray (Ray, 1986, p 311) that “*Egyptian writing was essentially a royal accomplishment used to commemorate the achievements of the palace...and the status of the royal elite, and, as such, it was ceremonial...*”

In my opinion, the truth lies somewhere between the two. Even though, some of the early Egyptian scripts can be simply characterized either “utilitarian” or “symbolic-ceremonial”, there are cases where a script includes characteristics of both identities, in various scales. For example, a script can be characterized:

- ◆ Utilitarian
- ◆ Ceremonial-symbolic
- ◆ Utilitarian and ceremonial-symbolic, where the ceremonial characteristics are dominated, or vice versa.



Ivory label for a pair of sandals in the tomb of king Den of the 1st dynasty. On the front, Den is attacking to an Asiatic captive. On the backside, a picture of the sandals on which the label was attached. In this example, ceremonial and utilitarian purposes clearly co-exist. From Abydos. About 3000 BC (Spencer, 1993, p 87)

The examination of the nature of the scripts must take place after bearing in mind that they relate to a specific era, under special sociopolitical circumstances and needs, always reflecting these factors. Scripts are the “voice” of the society or the voice of a person. They “talk to us” and we have to listen to what they have to say.

The surviving evidence of early Egyptian writing

The earliest example of Egyptian writing comes from tomb U-j at Abydos, excavated by Dreyer and the German Archaeological Institute of Cairo at the end of the 80's. The tomb was probably the tomb of a local leader, possibly the direct ancestor of the kings of the first dynasty. U-j has been dated to 3150 BC.

Written inscriptions (on seals, clay vessels and various types of small labels) found in the tomb, consisting of a few signs each, are in two forms (Postgate, 1995, p 465):

- a. Small bone labels incised with numerals of one to four hieroglyphic signs. The numbers are said to indicate the sizes of webs of cloth, whereas the signs record the provenance of different commodities, denoting royal estates, administrative institutions and places such as Buto and Bubastis in the Nile Delta. Some of the signs depict “elite” objects, such as a throne.
- b. Inscriptions drawn in black ink on the sides of pottery vessels. According to Dreyer, they seem to be denotations of estates, indicating the provenance of the vessels and their contents.



Pictures of tomb U-j and some of the labels found (from the German Archaeological institute website: www.dainst.org/index_51_en.html)

Among the simple inscriptions of local pottery found in the tombs of cemetery U, we can see the first examples of the serekh-panel, “palace-façade design”, device in which royal names were inscribed. Some mud sealings with serekh-panels enclosing royal names have also been found. They seem to identify state goods.



Example of the writing of the royal name Aha in a serekh, 1st dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 59)

Tomb U-j contained local and imported vases and products, possibly from Canaan and Syria-Palestine, and it had a royal character in structure and decoration. One of the inscriptions found in U-j includes ideograms showing a scorpion and a tree (King Scorpion?) (Spencer, 1993, p 75-76). Impressed mud sealings, including names of kings and officials, have also been found.

If we accept that there was already a functioning administrative system by dynasty 0, the scripts found in U-j may predate political unification of the north and south of Egypt (Shaw, 2003, p 74-75). These first scripts reflect the economic function of writing and possibly a flourishing trade and exchange of products, the necessity of keeping official records in the State, possible taxation and, last but not least, a kind of propaganda for the power of the ruling class. However, as these scripts would have a practical, everyday purpose to keep records of the offerings to the deceased or to commemorate him, utilitarian and administrative purposes co-exist.

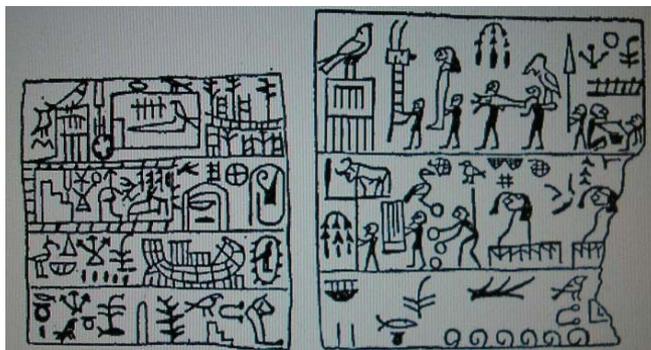
Whether or not the scripts of U-j are, in reality, the earliest sample of writing in ancient Egypt, is rather vague. However, they are related to another kind of enigmatic mark on pottery vessels of the late predynastic period. These “pot-marks” comprise between one and four individual signs, often in well-attested combinations, and they could be, according to some scholars, the origins of Egyptian writing. Though, they seem more likely to be signs providing information about the nature/provenance of the vessel contents, and, in this way, they also serve administrative purposes. These marks are similar to marks of Hierakonpolis, scratched or polished onto ware sherds and being interpreted as symbols of the names of the owner. In that case, they serve both utilitarian and ceremonial-symbolic purposes.

Another kind of script that fulfills an essentially economical-administrative role is the early writing ink inscriptions of royal names, also written on the sides of pottery vessels. Postgate suggests that they also record provenance and they might be records of taxes to a king (Postgate, 1995, p 466).



Cylinder pottery vase inscribed with the name of the predynastic king Ka, one of the Upper Egyptian rulers at the period of unification (Spencer, 1993, p 50).

Small labels of bone, ivory or wood, named “year-labels” have been found exclusively in elite or royal burials dated to the beginning of the first dynasty and thus, they serve administrative purposes. These labels, some of which were made of expensive materials, were attached to highly valued commodities and they were used to identify a particular year of a king’s reign. They sometimes commemorate royal events related to the date mentioned (Postgate, 1995, p 466).

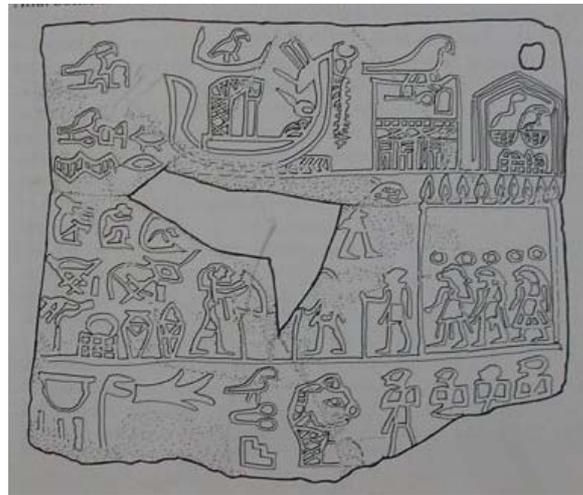


Two year labels from the tomb of King Djer. 1st dynasty (After Emery, 1938:35, figure 8, plates 17a, 18a)

Small ivory labels found in the tomb of Neithhotep date back to the first dynasty, in the reign of Aha. They were attached to items of jewellery in the burial equipment and bear numbers recording the quantity of beads on a necklace. From the same environment comes an inscription on an ivory label for an oil-jar, with the record of events in the reign of king Aha, the son of Neithhotep (Spencer, 1993, p 61, 63)

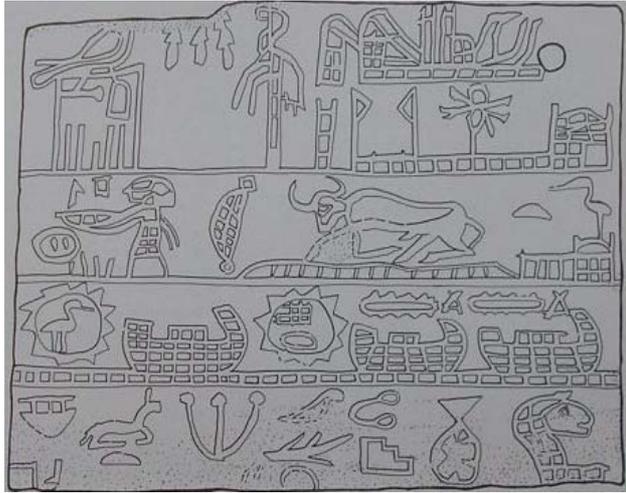


Small ivory label from the tomb of Neithhotep with an inscription recording the beads of a necklace, 1st dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 61)



Inscription on an ivory label for an oil-jar, tomb of Neithhotep, 1st dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 63)

Another ebony label, with a scene showing part of the jubilee festival of king Den, in which the king would run between markers representing the boundaries of Egypt, comes from Abydos. It is dated 1st dynasty and it would probably be used as a tag for a jar of oil (Spencer, 1993, p 66). Another inscription, on a wooden label, once again used as a tag for an oil-jar, found in the tomb of King Aha in Abydos, records a visit to a sanctuary of the goddess Neith (Spencer, 1993, p 65). Moreover, in the pyramid complex of Djoser, of the 1st dynasty, were found inscribed stone vessels showing royal names.



The text of a wooden label from an oil-jar from the tomb equipment of King Aha. 1st dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 65)



Ebony label from Abydos, depicting the jubilee festival and showing the name of king Den. 1st dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 66)

Palettes and maceheads of early dynastic times also include inscriptions combining phonetic and ideographic signs. These objects are used as status symbols in order to serve administrative, ceremonial and political purposes. They usually reflect the power of the king and the state.



Both sides of the famous Narmer palette (from

<http://xoomer.virgilio.it/francescoraf/hesyra/palettes.htm>)

Palettes usually include representations of animals with, or without, human figures. Men and animals are used as symbols. The animals pictured on palettes are always wild, monstrous animals and the people are trying to control them, in an attempt to control the Cosmos. Thus, palettes are serving administrative-symbolic purposes and they are strongly related to the ruling class (Grimal, 1994, p 36).

The most famous palettes of the first dynasty are:

a. The “Narmer” palette.

The Narmer palette is said to be one of the Egyptian finds that best reflects the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. The recto bears the picture of a king identified by two hieroglyphs as “nar” (fish) and “mer” (chisel). Narmer, wearing the crown of the south, holds a pear-shaped macehead in his right hand, in order to smash the head of a northern enemy. We can interpret the enemy as the falcon above Narmer’s head, recognized as the southern Horus and holding a head emerging from a papyrus thicket. The king is followed by a sandal-bearer and before his feet lie two dead enemies.

The verso of the Narmer palette shows a celebration of Narmer’s triumph by two recorders. In the lower part of the palette a bull destroys a city and attacks an enemy. The king is represented wearing the crown of the north, but the name indicates that he is the same person on the reverse. The same sandal-bearer and another man, maybe the first vizier, follow him. On this side, Narmer inspects the decapitated enemies, pictured in front of him (Grimal, 1994, p 37). The palette is dated early first dynasty and it is on display in the Egyptian museum of Cairo.

b. The “towns” palette.

The towns’ palette is part of a ceremonial palette with a relief showing animals destroying walled settlements. It is dated late predynastic to first dynasty and it is now in the Egyptian museum of Cairo (Spencer, 1993, p 53). It definitely has a symbolic *raison d’ être*, maybe picturing the capture of a city.



“Towns’ palette” (Spencer, 1993, p 52)

c. The “battlefield” palette.

Part of the battlefield palette shows a scene of captives and slain victims of battle being preyed upon by wild animals. The other side of the palette is decorated with a relief of two long-necked gazelles. It is dated at the beginning of the first dynasty and it is now on display in Oxford Museum (Spencer, 1993, p 54).



Part of the Battlefield palette (Spencer, 1993, p 54)

d. The “hunters” palette.

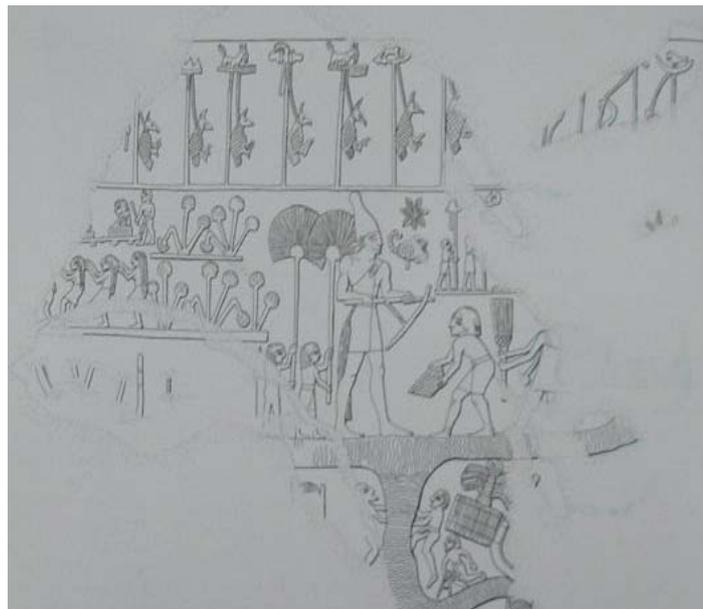
This ceremonial palette contains scenes of groups of warriors hunting wild animals. It is dated at the beginning of the first dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 57).



The “Hunters’ Palette” (Spencer, 1993, p 57)

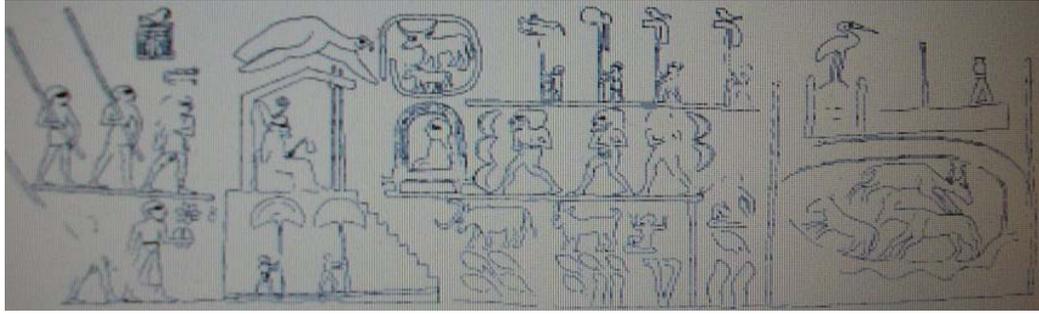
Ceremonial is also the interpretation of the two most famous maceheads of the first dynasty: the Narmer macehead and the Scorpion macehead.

The Scorpion macehead from Hierakonpolis is dated late Predynastic era (Spencer, 1993, p 56). The king is depicted wearing the crown of the south, dressed with a kilt and a belted loincloth to which a bull’s tail is attached. The king uses a hoe to dig out a canal and another person collects the earth for him. Others are next to running water. A pictogram makes clear that the name of the King is Scorpion (Grimal, 1994, p 37).



Relief scene on the macehead of King Scorpion from Hierakonpolis (Spencer, 1993, p 56)

The Narmer macehead shows king Nar-mer (in pictograms) celebrating his victory under a jubilee canopy, accompanied by his officials. He also receives the homage of captives (Grimal, 1994, p 39).



The Narmer macehead from Hierakonpolis main temple deposit. Drawing from the Original (Baines, 1989)

Statues sometimes contain inscriptions on their bases. The statues of Hierakonpolis, such as the statue of Khasekhem, are shown seated in a pose soon to become conventional. They are depicted wearing the robes of the jubilee festival and the crown of Upper Egypt. On the bases of the statues are inscriptions recording numbers of enemies killed (Spencer, 1993, p 68).



Limestone statue of King Khasekhemwy, from Hierakonpolis. 2nd dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 68)



One of the pair of tomb stelae of queen Merneith. 1st dynasty. From Abydos (Spencer, 1993, p 82)

Stelae containing inscriptions of kings' and officials' names and other information were situated in front of the tombs at Abydos. An example comes from the burial of a servant of King Semerkhet. The limestone stela provides information about the name of the owner (Nefer) accompanied by an ideogram of a dwarf (Spencer, 1993, p 81).



Limestone tomb stela from a burial of a servant of king Semerkhet. About 2900 BC. From Abydos (Spencer, 1993, p 81)

Cursive script is also found, for example on the papyrus of the first dynasty burial of Hemaka at Saqqara.

The character of early Egyptian writing

Early Egyptian writing:

- ◆ Is sometimes “stenographic”, mentioning only a few words every time (names, titles, provenance, numbers- full sentences only appear at the end of the second dynasty) but emphasizing the inscriptions with symbols. Symbols and pictures narrate the meaning of the text (e.g. palettes).
- ◆ It is, in some cases, simply symbolic, especially in the earliest samples. Under these circumstances, a symbol is a word.
- ◆ Is connected to magic.
- ◆ Expresses identity (names) and personality.
- ◆ Is a creation/adoption of the king and his environment, to control the masses and reassure the equilibrium of Cosmos.
- ◆ Serves economical, administrative, religious and political purposes. It guarantees the Unification of the State. It also motivates trade and exchange of various ideas with foreign civilizations. It is used for official records.
- ◆ Advertises triumphs (battles, festivals, etc) and thus, finds that include scripts and triumphal symbols could be the first historical documents in Egypt.
- ◆ Is inspired by art.



Ivory label
from an oil-jar recording religious events of the reign of king Semerkhet. 1st dynasty.
From Abydos (Spencer, 1993, p 67)



Fragment of ivory from a box. Two names can be read: Aha (the king) and Ima-Ib or Bener-Ib (possibly a queen). 1st dynasty. From Abydos (Spencer, 1993, p 79)

A brief comparison of early Egyptian writing with Old Kingdom writing

The development of writing in Egypt would always be affected by social, political and religious circumstances.

The Palermo stone would be an inscription on basalt recording, in chronological order, all the names of the kings from mythological rulers up to the fifth dynasty. More ancient Egyptian inscriptions, such as the Karnak, Saqqara and Abydos lists and the very famous fragment of Turin Papyrus, have a similar use and character. The Abusir papyri, dated at the fifth dynasty, were also lists of names of temple staff, objects, letters and inventories (Spencer, 1993, p 14).



The Palermo stone.

Burials of the Old Kingdom would combine pictorial representations and inscriptions situated on the walls of the tombs, on stelae and false doors. The inscriptions would provide information explaining the paintings. They would also mention the name and title of the deceased and his family and a list of offerings, sometimes too long, that later the “pray for offerings and good reception in the afterlife” replaced. The so-called “autobiographies”, written on the walls of the tomb, exactly next to the “prays for offerings”, were inscriptions recording the virtues of the deceased.

We can get information about the prosopography of people from inscriptions written on the bases or back supports of statues and statuettes. All these unrealistic and ideal statues would have had magical significance.

The pyramid texts -inscriptions in pyramids- would contain hundreds of spells, working as amulets for the deceased. Some of the texts were related to the worship of Osiris and sun god, whereas others seem to be texts of funerary rituals.

Royal decrees related to taxation, dated sixth dynasty, were also found. Moreover, the first sample of literature is situated in the Old Kingdom, when, catalogues of maxims, codes of behavior and wise proverbs appear.



Sandstone relief fragment showing the name of king Sanakht with a foreign captive. 3rd dynasty. From Wadi Maghara (Spencer, 1993, p 101)



Limestone slab from the tomb of Rahotep, showing the deceased before a table. 4th dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 112)

Comparing the scripts of the Old Kingdom with those of early writing, we can deduce that, during the Old Kingdom:

- ◆ Writing is now developed and flourishing. The texts are larger and provide more details and information.
- ◆ Texts have replaced pictures. Texts, in a way, are used, not as “shorthand”, not simply to record numbers or names and provenances, but to express feelings and describe pictures. Thus, inscriptions sometimes replace symbols.

- ◆ Writing obviously indicates a flourishing administrative system, a flourishing kingship and elite. Ceremonial texts are used as propaganda to emphasize the necessity of worship and, probably, to control the masses (taxation, religion etc).
- ◆ Scripts are now, more than before, connected to peoples' personalities, as the texts from elite tombs indicate. It seems that the elite social class has more rights and power compared to later predynastic years and the period of the first three dynasties. The first samples of literature and legislation occur.

Conclusion

The early Egyptian scripts usually worked as a tool of the king and the ruling class. Much of early writing is either incorporated into representational works, such as small palettes, or on labels. As Parkinson mentions in his book (Parkinson, 1999, p 73-74): *“Utilitarian and ceremonial purposes are not necessarily opposed. Inscribed pottery and stone vases can both display the state’s ownership of prestigious goods and record deliveries of royal goods of the administration, while labels show royal rituals and record the names of administrative officials in a single scene. All surviving pieces of writing derive from royal and elite contexts, revealing a conscious use of writing as an ideological tool, and for symbolic display, as opposed to recording linguistic narratives”*. However, whether the earliest writing was an Egyptian inspiration or not, it is the most valuable source of research for modern scholars of archaeology and Egyptology. We have to consider that the history of ancient Egypt would be different if it was not for the translation and interpretation of Egyptian inscriptions, first occurred in 1822-24 by Jean F. Champollion.



Wooden panel from the tomb of Hesyra at Saqqara, with a relief showing the owner as a scribe. Hieroglyphs are written in columns without divided lines between them, as a characteristic of the period. 3rd dynasty (Spencer, 1993, p 107)

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www.archaeology.org/9903/newbriefs/egypt.html

www.dainst.org/index_51_en.html

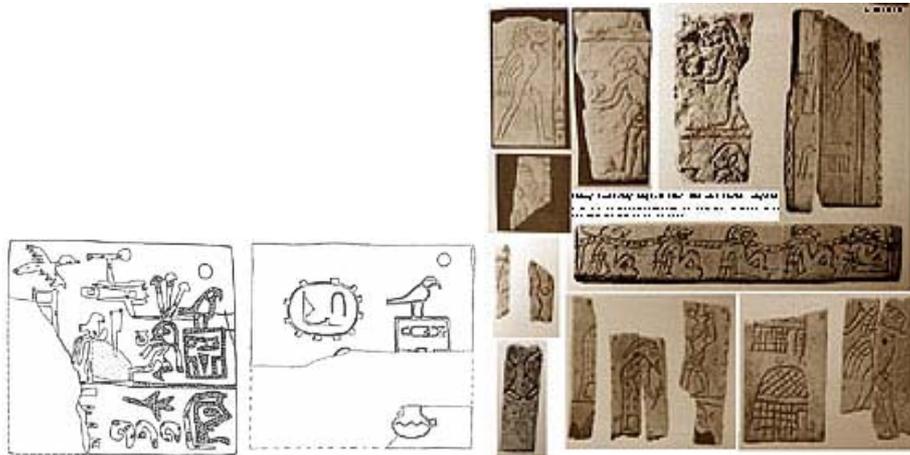
<http://xoomer.virgilio.it/francescoraf/hesyra/tagcorpus.htm>

<http://xoomer.virgilio.it/francescoraf/hesyra/aufgeffase.htm>

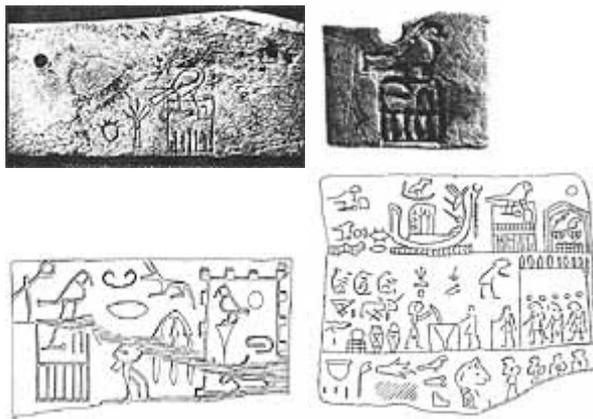
<http://xoomer.virgilio.it/francescoraf/hesyra/palettes.htm>

Album of web illustrations

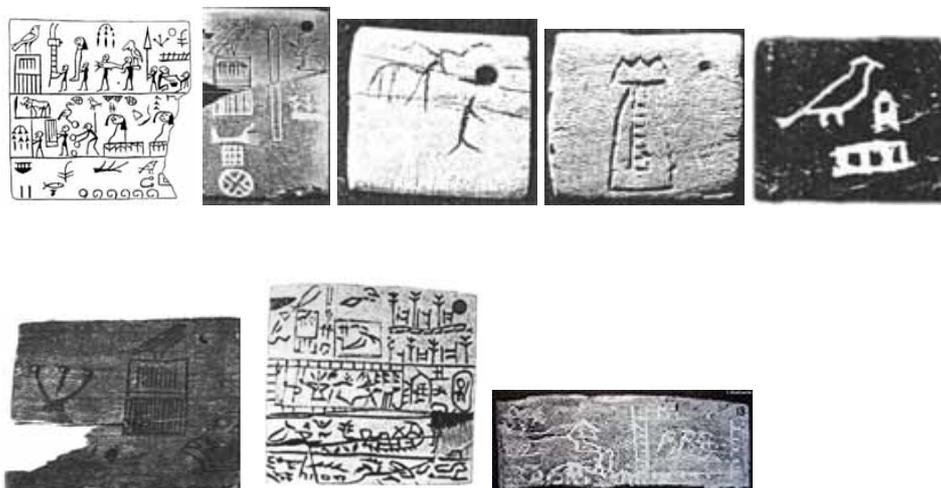
More illustrations are on display here. All the illustrations bellow can be found in the websites mentioned in the links' chapter. For more pictures, comments on these pictures etc, please, visit the websites.



Wooden and ivory labels from the tomb of Narmer.



Wooden and ivory labels from the tomb of Aha (original and some drawings). 1st dynasty



Wooden and ivory labels from related to Djer. 1st dynasty.



Ivory labels related to Djet. 1st dynasty.



Ivory label related to Semerkhet. 1st dynasty.



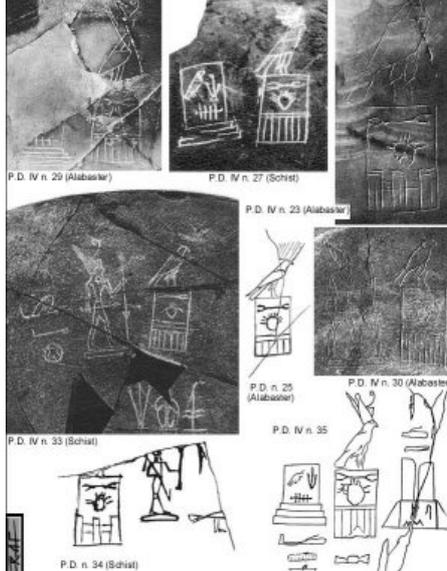
Wooden and ivory labels related to king Ka'a. 1st dynasty.



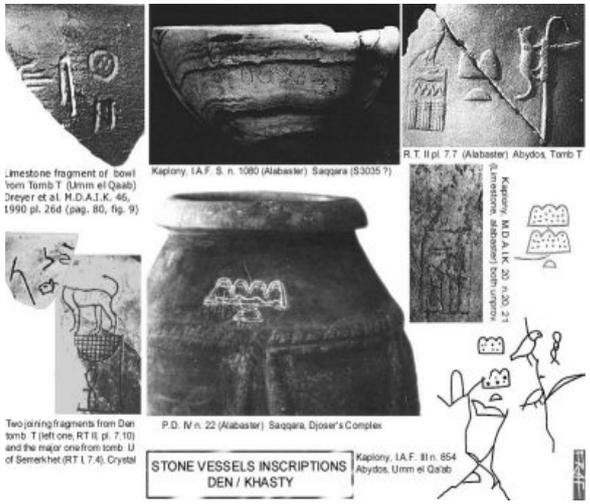
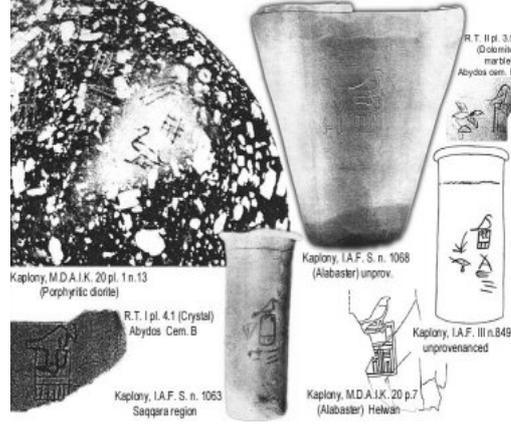


Some palettes dated Naqada III/ early dynasty 1. On some of these examples affection from Mesopotamian art and scripts is obvious.

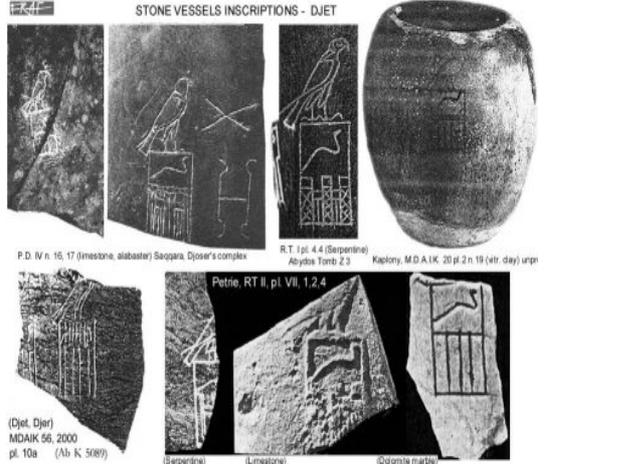
STONE VESSELS INSCRIPTIONS - ADJIB / MERBIAPE (pt. 1)
All from Saqqara, Djoser's complex



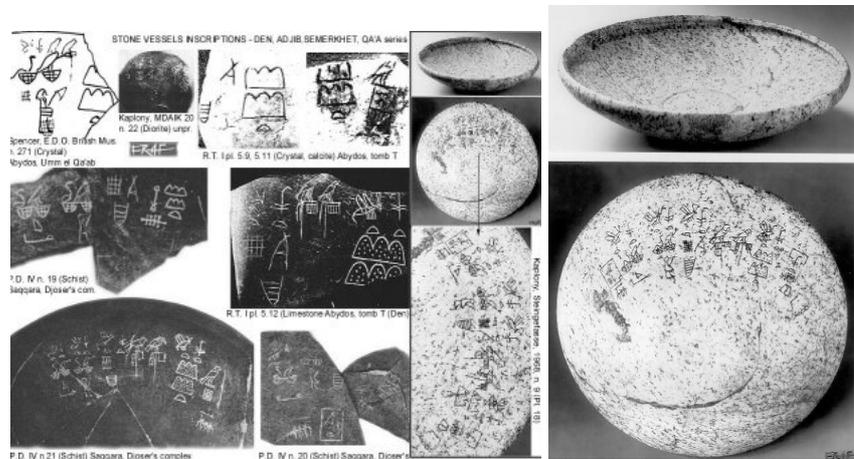
STONE VESSELS INSCRIPTIONS - AHA



STONE VESSELS INSCRIPTIONS - DJER



STONE VESSELS INSCRIPTIONS - HOTEPEKHEMUY / HOTEPE (pt 2)



Stone vessels inscriptions related to various kings of early dynastic period.