

# 1 FROM HANDPRINTS AND HANDWRITING (35,000BCE-0CE)

## *The evolution of communication: from rock art to hieroglyphics and written alphabets.*

### **What were the key geo-political events?**

**The Upper Paleolithic period** (ca. 35,000-10,000 years ago) was an era of massive evolution for mankind. At that time tribes survived by hunting and gathering, moving from place to place with the seasons as food sources changed.

As man's knowledge and understanding of his environment grew, tribes began to raise **crops and domesticate animals** (ca. 10,000-7000 BCE). Mankind went from survival mode to the beginnings of commerce and prosperity. As trade increased, trading centres developed, drawing people together.

Early civilizations appeared around the same time in several parts of the globe: Mesopotamia in **the Fertile Crescent** (modern-day Iraq and Kuwait); **the Indus Valley** (today Pakistan and northeast India); Egypt, Kush (Sudan) and Axum (northern Ethiopia). Ancient civilisations also existed in eastern Asia, however, much is still being uncovered there. Early Chinese civilisation is believed to date back to ca. 2070 BCE with the **Xia Dynasty**. Xia people probably inhabited what we now call the Henan and Shanxi Provinces of China.

**A key change in civilisations was the emergence of monotheistic religions (the worshipping of a single God):**

**Judaism** began around 1812 BCE, during the Bronze Age, in the Middle East.

**Christianity** began as a Jewish sect, gradually emerging as a separate religion in the early centuries of the first millennium.

**Confucianism** was founded by the philosopher Confucius (or Kongzi, c. 551 to c. 479 BCE). It is also referred to as the Ru-jia doctrine, or School of Literati, as it is known by Western scholars. Originally, Confucianism was composed of a set of political and moral doctrines with the teachings of Confucius as its basis.

**Buddhism's** origins point to one man, Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, who was born in Lumbini (in present-day Nepal) in 563 BCE. He was the founder and leader of a sect of wanderer ascetics (Sramanas), one of many sects that existed at that time all over India.

**Hinduism:** the oldest evidence of religious practices in India dates back approximately to 5500 BCE. It is believed that Aryan nomads from the middle east brought Hindu beliefs to India around 1500 BCE. Later, around 700 BCE, Indian scholars reinterpreted these Aryan beliefs to create the Upanishads texts which formed the basis of modern Hinduism.

### **What were the key scientific, technological influences?**

There are countless discoveries for you to research in this period, including the discovery and evolution of early

tools, and the invention of the wheel. (The wheel is believed to have been first used as potter's wheels in Mesopotamia. Later they were turned on their edges and used as a form of transportation.) Later Greek philosophers studied the skies and made important discoveries relating to the universe. **Ancient Greek mathematics** 323-283 BCE, Euclid wrote a series of 13 books on geometry called The Elements.

**Papyrus and paper:** While the Egyptians were writing on papyrus, the Chinese, under the rule of emperor Qin Shi Huang, wrote on bamboo slats, stone, ceramics, and cloth. About 100 years after the emperor's death, circa 100 BCE, the Chinese began making paper from bamboo pulp. As with papyrus, bamboo scrolls were made by gluing sheets together.

### **What were the key design and literary influences?**

**Proto-writing:** Burgeoning civilisations needed to record more complex information to assist with governance, commerce and religion. They developed symbols to communicate with. These early communication systems fall into three categories: **pictographs** that are literal representations; **ideographs** that use an idea to represent an object; and **phonograms (rebus)** to represent sounds like vowels and syllables. All these early forms of writing are known as **proto-writing** (like a prototype).

**Cuneiform:** Various forms of proto-writing emerged around the globe. The evolution of writing in Sumer, the southern tip of the ancient land of Mesopotamia (now Iraq, parts of Syria and Kuwait), is well documented: whereas **Indus (Harappan) script** and early African scripts remain undeciphered. The Sumerian people are thought to have invented **cuneiform** (ca. 3100 BCE), the earliest understood form of proto-writing. It was an advanced system of triangular marks, inscribed on clay using shaped reeds. e.g. **Blau Monuments, Hammurabi's Code, Rosetta Stone**.

**Hieroglyphics:** were created in Egypt around the same period, using a mixture of pictograms, ideograms and phonograms, that continued to be used for over 3000 years. e.g. Book of the Dead, Rosetta Stone.

**The Book of the Dead :** referred to as a "book", these guides to success in the afterlife could take the form of inscriptions inside pyramids, on sarcophagi, or on scrolls that were buried with the dead. The earliest examples are found in Old Kingdom pyramids (about 2686-2181 BC) and were intended for dead kings.

**Chiaku-wen:** In China, evidence of early script inscribed on shells and bones dates back to at least 1800 BCE. So far no evidence of proto-writing has emerged from the rest of Asia. Much myth exists around this bone and

shell script (*chiaku-wen or kangji*). It is said to have been created by Ts'ang Chieh (Cangjie), a servant of the Yellow Emperor. Made up of logograms representing words and phrases, kanji was not universally adopted across China.

**The Phoenician alphabet:** Cuneiform and hieroglyphics gradually reached Phoenicia on the Mediterranean coast (now Syria, Lebanon and northern Israel). There they mingled with scripts from other parts of modern day Israel and Palestine (ca. 1500 BCE) to form the first alphabet. The Phoenicians abandoned symbols entirely and replaced them with a more efficient, sound-based, writing system that used 22 abstract letterforms.

**Greek and Aramaic:** Traders carried their Phoenician script west, where it evolved into the Greek, and east, where it developed into the Aramaic alphabet (ca. 1000-850 BCE). **Aramaic** was first used by tribes from Aram (now part of Syria), N.E. of Phoenicia. It is the foundation for Arabic, Indian Sanskrit, modern Hebrew and Cyrillic (used in Slavic and Russian influenced countries).

**Ancient Greek literature** includes epic poems such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

**Latin:** It is thought that the Romans combined Greek with Etruscan to create Latin (ca. 500 – 200 BCE). Etruscan came from Etruria region in Central Italy. The Romans developed many different styles of script, almost like different typefaces. Latin was initially written in **capitalis quadrata** (squared capitals also known as **capitalis monumentalis**), similar to our capital letters. Its stately proportions were written carefully and slowly with a flat pen nib. They used this writing style (which the typeface Trajan takes inspiration from) when carving stone to commemorate important events and people.

This elegant geometric style was first written on stone with red paint and then chiseled. It used no space between words, or sometimes very small spaces, or dots. There were generous spaces between lines, but no paragraph spaces.

For less formal applications, the Romans used **capitalis rustica** (rustic capitals). It was a less formal writing style – quicker to execute and more space efficient. It was mostly used for writing on papyrus and parchment (more on this next week), although engraved examples also exist.

**Early Roman literature** includes works by: Catullus (lyric and elegiac poet, 1st Century BCE); Vergil (epic and didactic poet, 1st Century BCE); Horace (lyric poet and satirist, 1st Century BCE); Ovid (didactic and elegiac poet, 1st Century BCE - 1st Century CE).

**Chen-shu:** Around the same time that Latin evolved, ca. 200 BCE, China's Emperor Qin Shi Huang (Shih HuangTi) ordered a new single writing style to be created, that became the **chen-shu** "regular" style still used today. Japanese script evolved from Chinese kanji and Korea used Chinese characters until they introduced their own 28 letter alphabet (Hangul) in 1446 CE. In South America, the Mayan civilisation created its own logogram script

system. Like Chinese, Mayan script had thousands of distinct square-shaped symbols.

**Early religious texts** you can find many examples of early religious texts relating to the various religions covered on the previous page.

**Papyrus and paper:** early scribes worked with the materials at hand. The earliest writing was inscribed on walls, pottery, shell, stone, and bone. Gradually other substrates emerged. In the time of Shih HuangTi, while the Egyptians were writing on papyrus, the Chinese wrote on bamboo slats, stone, ceramics, wood, and cloth. Around 100 BCE, the Chinese began making paper from bamboo pulp. As with papyrus, bamboo scrolls were made by gluing sheets together.

### What were the key cultural influences?

#### Fashion

As with science, there are countless cultural evolutions for you to research in this period. Man evolved from wearing fur to weaving fabrics from all manner of materials. With trade and discoveries, more sophisticated forms of dress came, worn by the Greeks and Romans, etc.

#### Architecture

Man evolved from cave-dwelling to building temples. Here are a few examples:

ca. 3100-1600 BCE – **Stonehenge** constructed in phases over 1500 years.

ca. 2575 – 2465 BCE – **Great pyramids** built in Egypt

ca. 1200 BCE – The **Olmecs** built the earliest pyramids and temples in Central America.

ca. 900-250 BCE – Classic **Mayan step pyramids**.

ca. 450 BCE – The Parthenon, Athens.

ca. 250-200 BCE – The Mausoleum of Qin Shi Huang (including the terracotta army).

### What were the key artistic influences?

**Rock art:** About 40,000 years ago, man began making marks on rocks. It is impossible to be sure if they were used as a form of story-telling, or as a way of recording information important to their survival, or both. The marks can be divided into two categories: carving sites (**petroglyphs**) and paintings sites (**pictographs**).

Examples of rock art can be seen around the world:

**Maros**, Indonesia (ca. 40,000 years); **Chauvet**, France, (ca. 35,000 years); **Altamira**, Spain, and **Lascaux**, France, (ca. 20,000 years); **Twyfelfontein**, South Africa, (ca. 4000 years); **Wunnumurra Gorge**, Australia (date unknown); the Great Gallery, **Horseshoe Canyon**, USA, (ca. 2000-4000 years). BC has many undated petroglyph sites, including: **Sproat Lake**, Vancouver Island; **Petroglyph Park**, Nanaimo; and **Fulford Harbour**, Salt Spring Island.

As with science and culture, there are countless artistic evolutions for you to research in this period, including: early religious imagery from various religions; early pottery and ceramics; early Asian art; Greek and Roman sculptures, etc.