

Chapter 3: Letters and Sounds



One of the “Tartaria” tablets, c. 5500 B.C.E.

Key Terms

Ideographic	Logographic	Scripts	Systems
Phonograms	Alphabetic	Insular hands	Cuneiform
Rebus Principle	Alphabet	Strokes or minims	Syllabic
Kanji & Kana	Digraphs	Ligatures	Abbreviated
	Trigraphs	Italic	Orthography
	Ligatures		Spelling
	Runes		Heterographic
	Futhorc		
	ƿ, æ, ð or đ, ƿ		



Natures of Writing Systems

- Pictograms:
Conveys meaning
through pictures: ☺



- * Ideographic or Logographic:
Symbol represents a whole word
- * \$, %, &, @, 1, 7, 9
- * Cuneiform, hieroglyphs
- * Each sign represents a meaningful unit
- * Phonograms:
Each symbol represents a phonologic unit with no reference to meaning
- * a, b, c, q
- * カタカナ

Why did writing evolve in the first place?

- * Basically for record-keeping functions
 - * Taxation
 - * Business transactions
 - * Tithes and temple business
- * Earliest examples

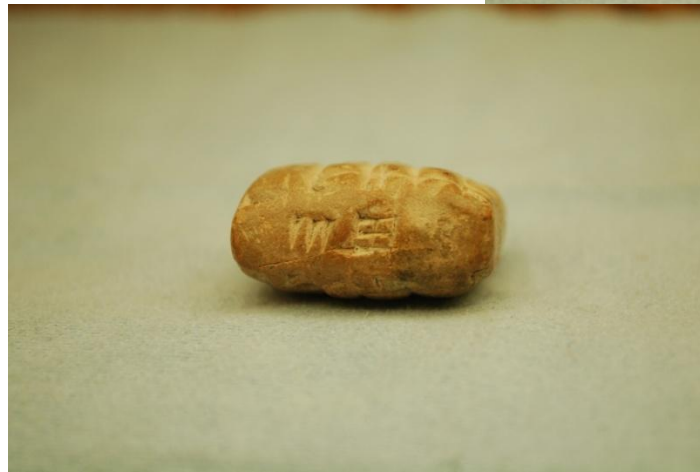


Temple receipt, c. 2300 B.C.E.

A record found at Drehem (Central Mesopotamia) recording the donation to the temple of one sheep and two lambs at the temple. The total of three sheep is written on one edge.

This 1.25" x 1.25" tablet is preserved in the Louise Pettus Archives, Dacus Library, Winthrop University.

Photo taken by Will Folden.



List of Provisions for a Temple Messenger, c. 2300 B.C.E.

Found at Jukha, the ancient city called Umma. This tablet lists the provisions the temple supplied its messenger for the journey. Although the tablet is only approximately 1" square, the writing is the finest on any of the six tablets.

Preserved in the Louise Pettus Archives, Winthrop University.

Photo taken by Will Folden



Temple Offering Cone, c. 2100 B.C.E.

From Warka, the Biblical Erech of Genesis 10:10. This is a prayer for King Sur-ga-shin. It would have been written by the priest and purchased by pilgrims who thrust it into the wall of the temple.





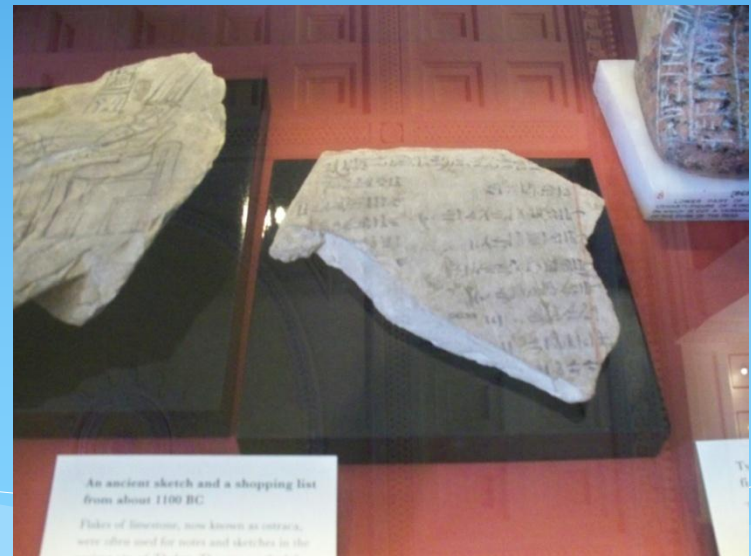
A contract tablet dated 547 B.C.E.

This contract was written in the 8th year of the reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, and father of Belshazzar, the last Semitic king of Babylon. It is kept in the Louise Pettus Archives, Winthrop University. Photo courtesy of Will Folden



Hieroglyphs: Ideographic Writing

Hieroglyphics can be in informal, calligraphic writing, sometimes called “demotic” scripts, as in the example on the right, a list of groceries delivered to an Egyptian woman c. 1100 B.C.E., or formal pictographs, as in the tombstone of a priest of Horus, c. 1600 B.C.E., on the left.



An ancient sketch and a shopping list
from about 1100 BC

Flakes of limestone, now known as ostraca,
were often used for notes and sketches in the

The Rosetta Stone, 196 B.C.E.

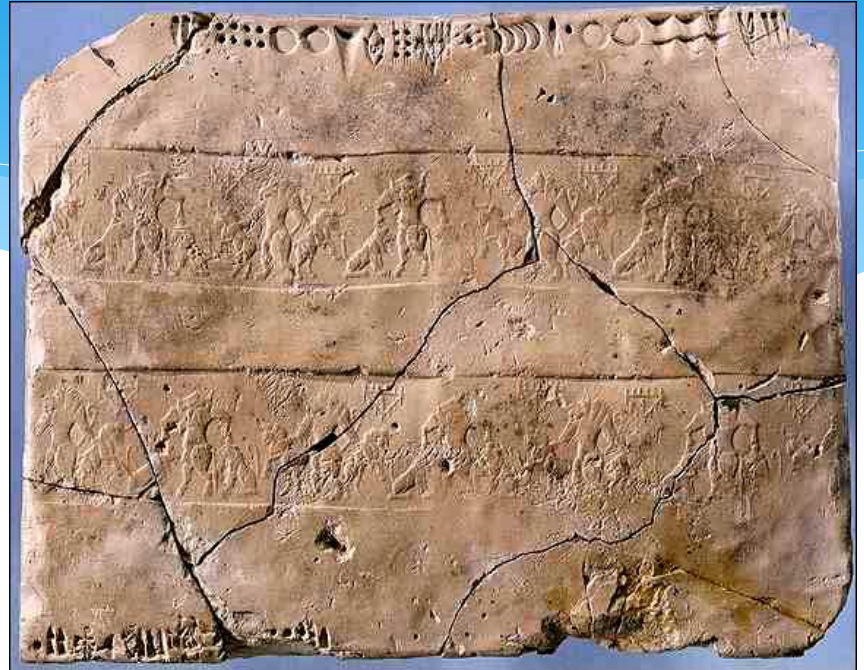


This important landmark in writing history is an 1100-pound granite document discovered in Egypt in 1799. The inscription is a proclamation relaxing taxes on the priesthood. Because it contains the same text in three languages—hieroglyphs, demotic Egyptian, and classical Greek, linguists were able to decipher the earlier languages based on their knowledge of the more modern forms.

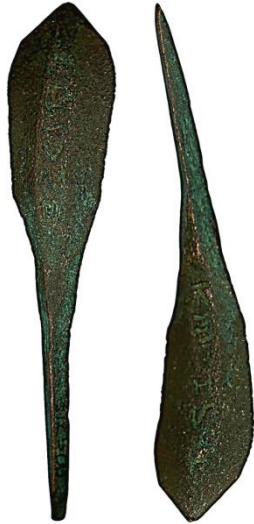
The Fenton Vase, Guatamala,
c. 600-800 C.E.



Alphabetic writing developed independently in four different civilizations



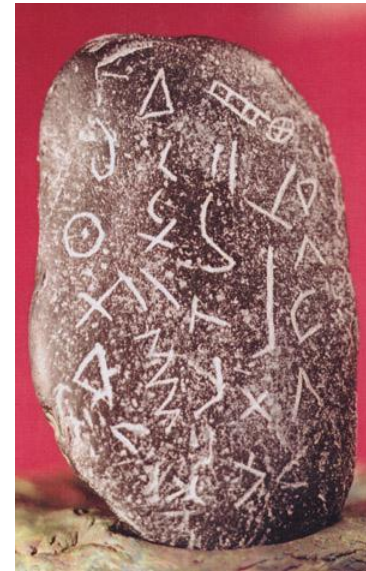
Phonetic: One symbol for each sound



MS 715
Proto-Canaanite script.
Israel/Lebanon, 11th c. BC

Proto-Canaanite, 11th c. B.C.E.

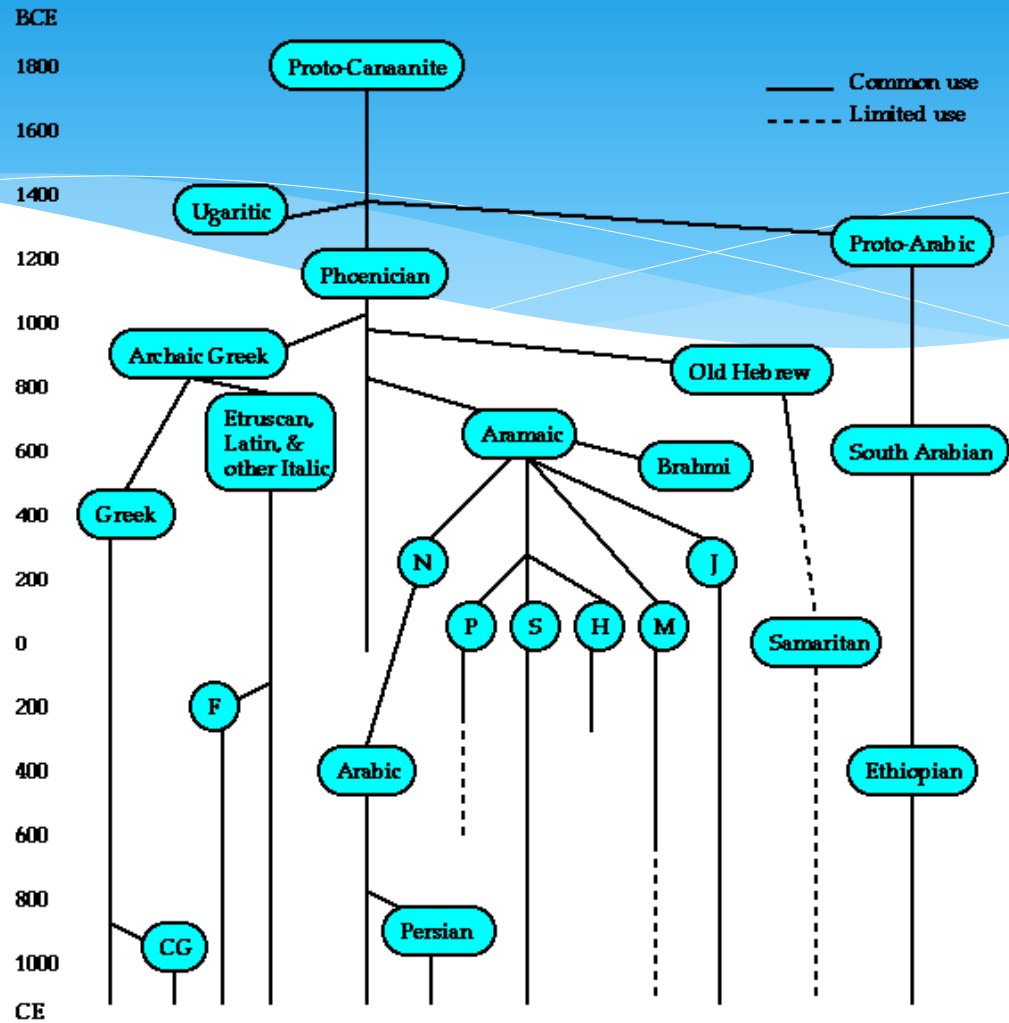
Phoenician, 7th c. B.C.E.



Evolution of major alphabetic systems—

happened early in the Bronze Age, from about 1600 B.C.E. (or maybe earlier): mostly on the northern and eastern sides of the Mediterranean

Major Alphabets



Greek & Italic Legends
 CG Cyrillic & Glagolitic
 F Futhark

Aramaic Legends
 N Nabataean S Syriac M Mandaic
 P Palmyrene H Hatran J Jewish

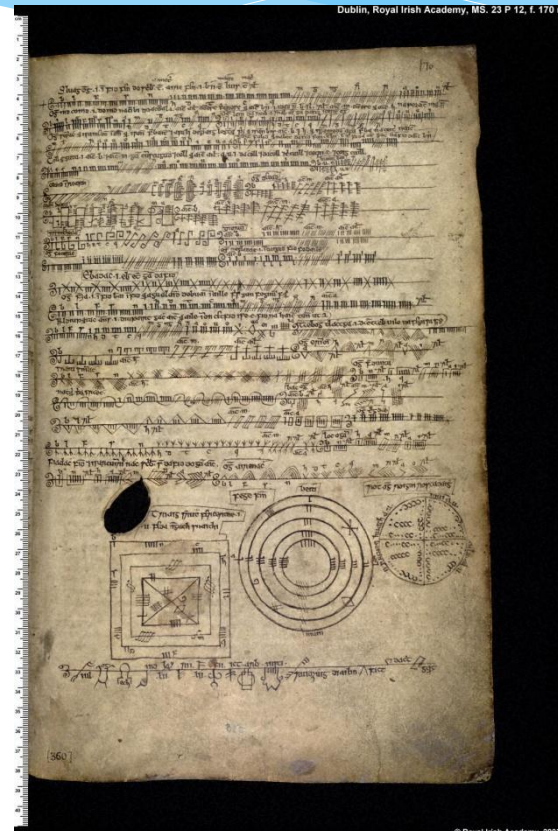
Ogham: S.W. Ireland

Drumconwell Stone, c. 600 C.E.

Decoding Ogham



Courtesy of Diocese of Armagh.



Book of Ballymote, 1390. Courtesy of Royal Irish Academy.

Runes or Futhorc

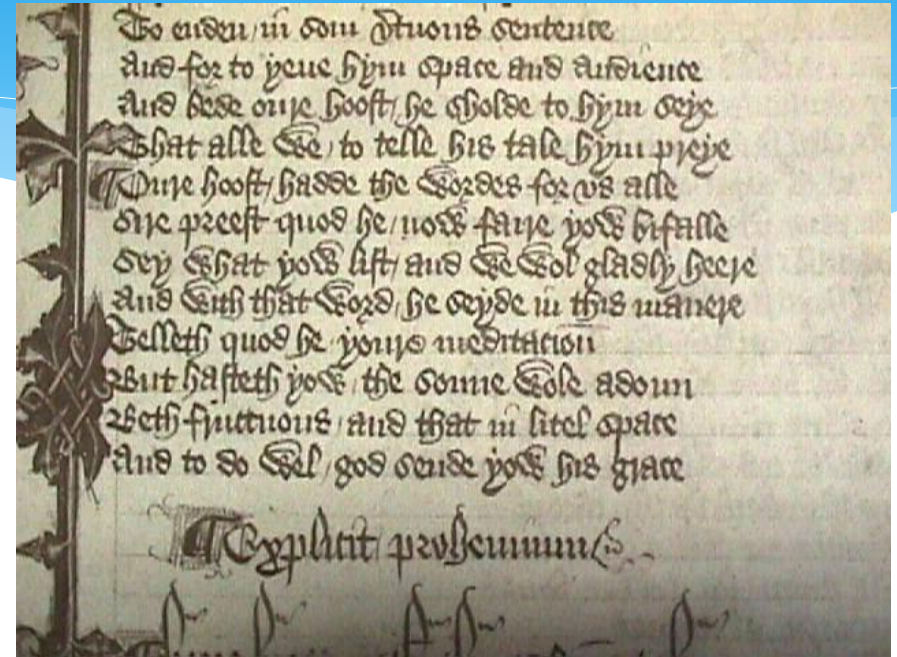
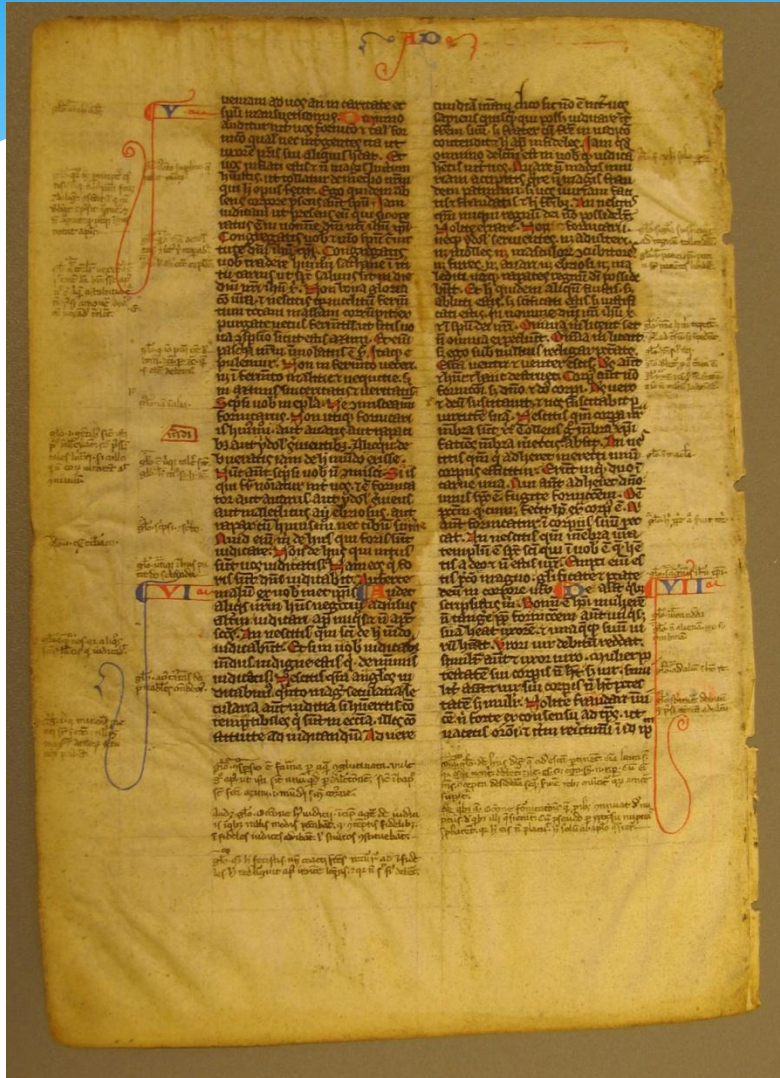


Runes on the Ruthwell Cross



Franks Casket, British Museum

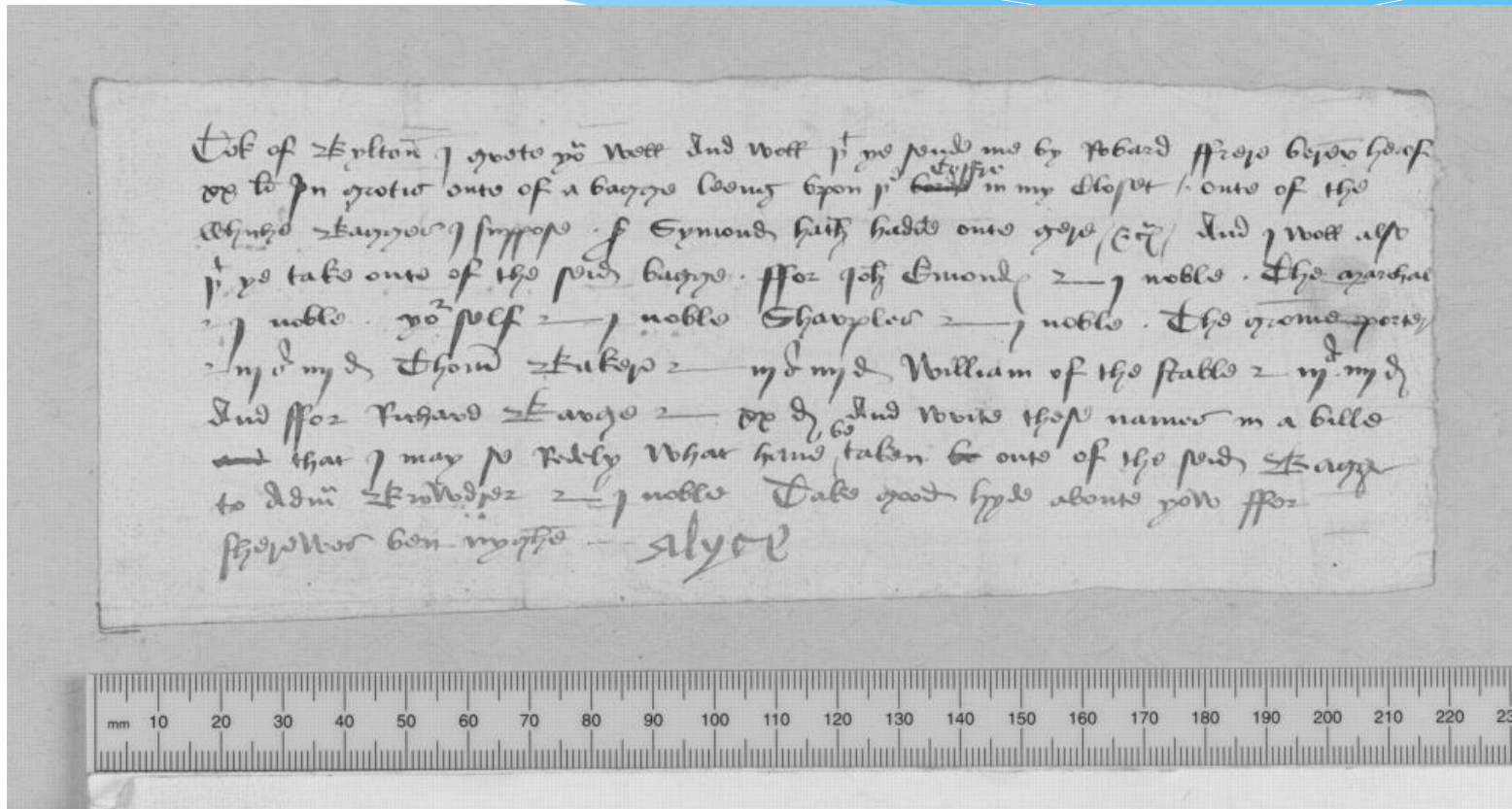
Insular Scripts



Above, handwriting of Adam Pinkhurst, the Hengwrt MS of the *Canterbury Tales*, by 1403. Courtesy of the National Library of Wales. Left: English bible with annotations, c. 1240. Private owner.

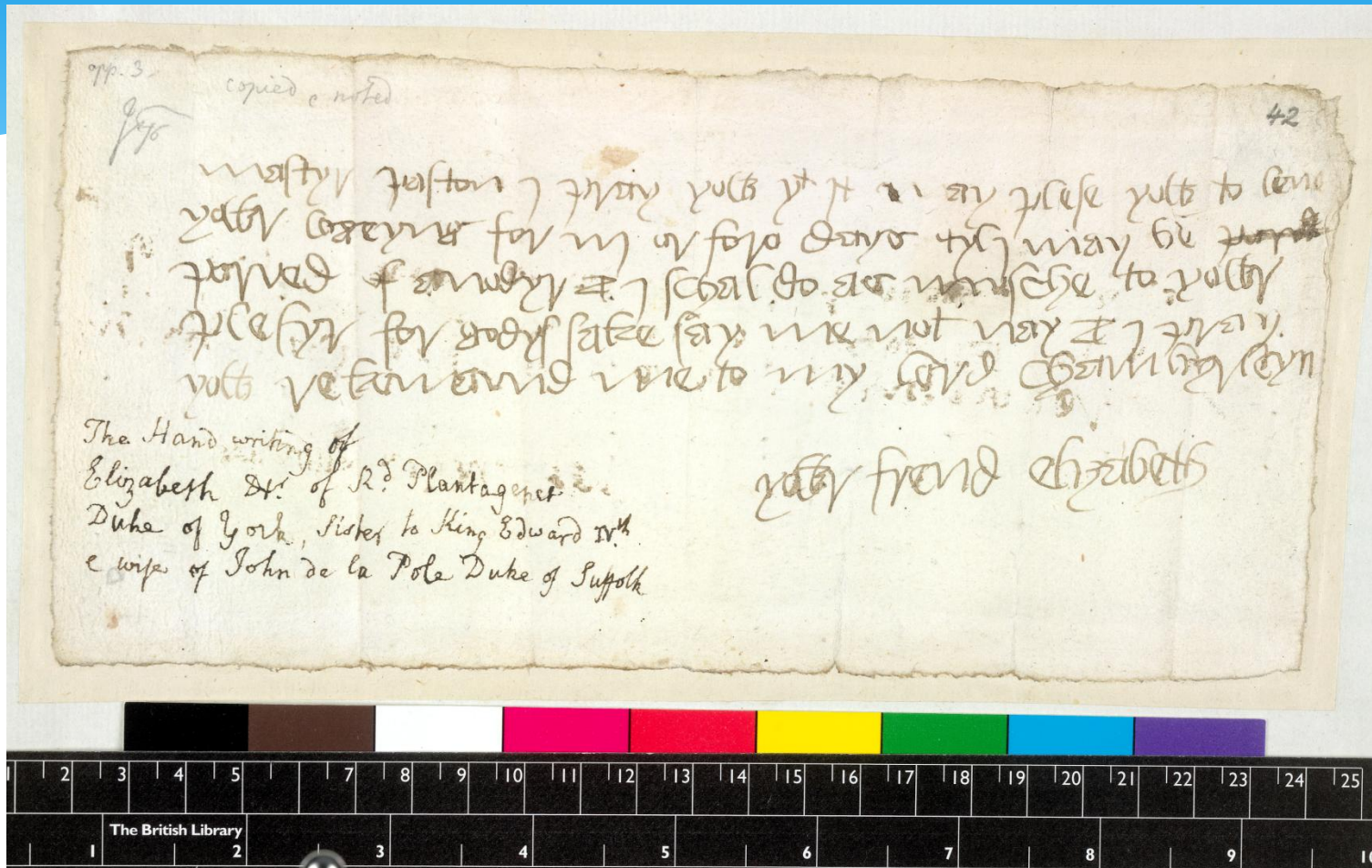
“Secretary”

Letter by Alice Chaucer's secretary with her postscript and signature, mid-fifteenth century.
Courtesy of the Ewelme Almshouse Trust & the Bodleian Library



Elizabeth Plantagenet, Duchess of Suffolk, c. 1470s

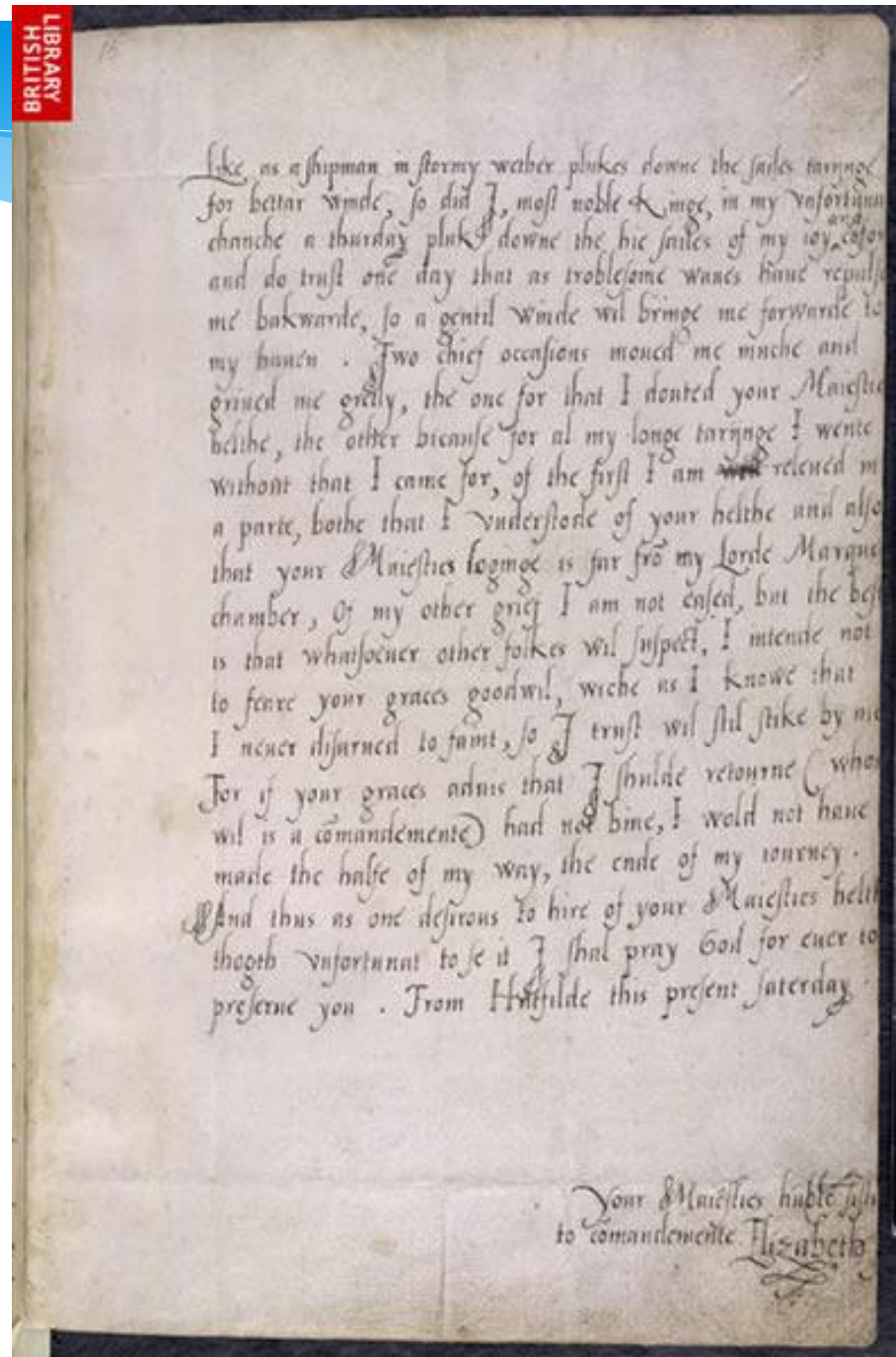
Courtesy of the British Library: The Paston Letters collection



Italic and Humanist Scripts

Letter of Elizabeth Tudor (later Queen Elizabeth I of Britain) to her brother, Edward VI, 1553

Courtesy of the British Library



Martin Billingsley, *The Pens Excellencie*, 1618

courtesy of The Library of Congress

Titles of Bookes, and many other vses, which would bee too tedious for me heere to recite.

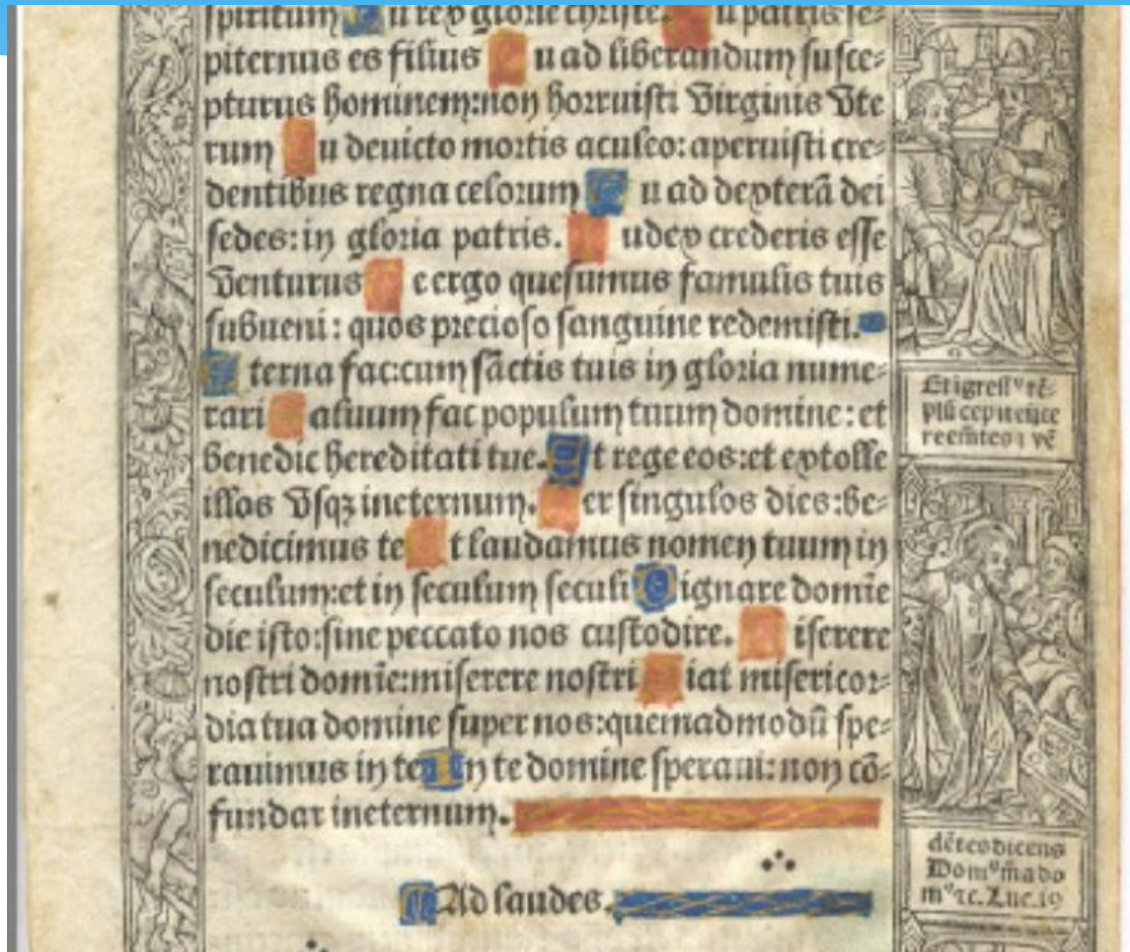
The third is *Roman*, which hath his denomination from the place ³ *Roman*. where (it seemes) it was first written, viz: *Rome*. A hand of great account, and of much vse in this Realme, especially in the Vniuersities: and it is conceived to be the easiest hand that is written with Pen, and to be taught in the shortest time: Therefore it is vsually taught to women, for as much as they (hauing not the patience to take any great paines, besides phantasticall and humorfome) must be taught that which they may instantly learne: otherwise they are vncertaine of their proceedings, because their mindes are (vpon light occasion) easily drawne from the first resolution.

The fourth is *Italian*, a hand in nature not much different from *Roman*, ⁴ *Italian*, but in manner and forme, of much incongruity thereunto. This is a hand which of late is growne very vsuall, and is much affected by diuers: for indeed, it is a most excellent and curious hand, and to bee written with singular command of hand; else it will appear but very ragged and vile; and if the Pen be taken off in conjunction of the letters, it is neither approueable, nor Pen-man-like, but meere botching which is detestable.

The fift is *Court hand*; so called, for that it is of great vse in those two ⁵ *Court*. famous Courts of the *Kings Bench* and *Common Pleas*. It is a hand somewhat difficult to write well, and hee that continually writes it, may haply come to perfection in that; but for other hands (if hee could write ne-

uer

Early Print



Modern Fonts

Modern

FEDERAL

ALIEN ENCOUNTER

ANDES

Asimov

BABYLON IND

Babylon

Bauhaus

Bauhaus 93

BLADE RUNNER

codeca

DIGNITY OF LABOR

ESP

FEDERATION

FEDERAL

Fontovision 1

Fontovision 2

Fontovision 3

Fontovision 4

GRAVIN

Impact

LADY STARLIGHT

layaway

noir

Rave

RED FIVE

Westminster

Scripts as solutions

- * Fonts for syllabic languages such as Native American languages: <http://www.languagegeek.com/font/fontdownload.html>
- * Dyslexie: <http://thenextweb.com/shareables/2011/06/30/dyslexie-a-typeface-for-dyslexics/>

The font for people with dyslexia

This font is especially designed for people with dyslexia. When they use it, they make fewer errors whilst they are reading. It makes reading easier for them and it takes less effort.

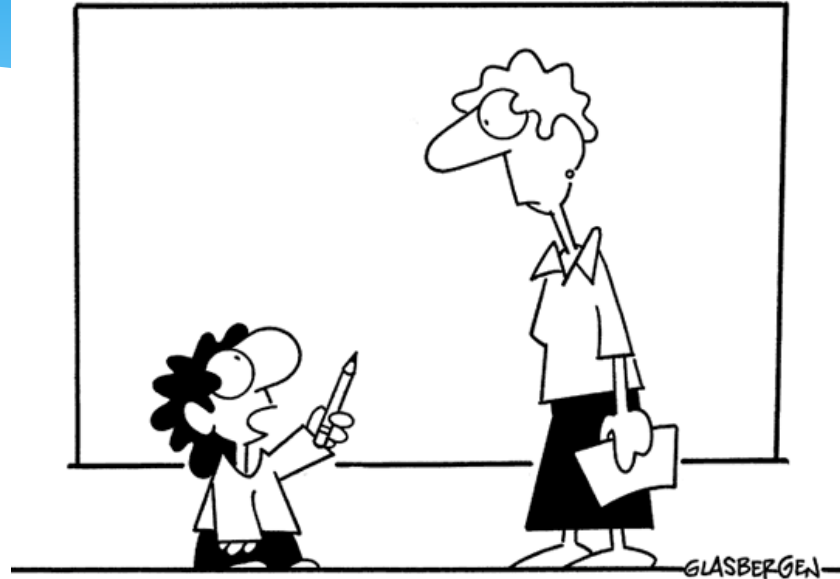
The Dyslexia font is used by several schools, universities, speech therapists and remedial teachers.

The puzzles continue

- * They're getting close to deciphering Proto-Elamite:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19964786> (see the note for location of the Wiki for crowdsourcing)
- * Andrew Robinson has a great article, “Decoding Antiquity,” in *New Scientist*—link on the calendar page
- * The Omniglot website has a list of some of the major undeciphered alphabets with information about ongoing projects to decipher them:
<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/undeciphered.htm>.

These systems are continually evolving.....

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**“How do you expect me to write with this?
It doesn’t even have a USB port for a keyboard!”**