

it would be difficult to make pictures such as the hieroglyphics of Egypt. It would also be very inconvenient to paint to draw flowing lines, such as the hieratic writing of Egypt. A system was developed which was excellently adapted to the use of these tablets. That was what is called the cuneiform writing. We invent the name "cuneiform" from the Latin "cuneus" a stylus. A stylus with a fairly long sharp edge was used in pressing characters on to this moist clay. The stylus was pressed in a little further at one end than at the other, and consequently the character looked a little like a wedge and so we have come to call this writing the wedge shaped writing or cuneiform.

The earliest writing that we have seems to show that the attempt was originally made to make pictures, using this type of material. Naturally the pictures did not look a great deal like the thing that they were intended to represent and they very soon became systematized into definite figures with comparatively little resemblance to the original picture. As time went on and the arrangement of the characters radically changed, they came to be simply a combination of various wedge shaped lines to which it would be impossible to see much resemblance to the original picture. These characters represented ideas like the hieroglyphic signs of Egypt, or words or syllables. Often the same character might represent any one or two or three ideas or of several syllables, depending on the context. Many hundreds of signs were used in this type of writing, about three hundred of them being used much more commonly than the others. This writing was admirably adapted to the material that the Egyptians used. Since these tablets could be fairly easily made almost anywhere, since they were easy to carry, most of them being about the size of a cake of Ivory soap and since they were not easily broken, the great utility and practical nature of this type of writing lead to its spread from Mesopotamia over a large part of the neighboring nations and even being used at times in Egypt itself. Up to the present,