

system used in Babylonian. The earliest writing used in both areas has been studied and compared, and the comparisons are so many though they are developed in different directions, yet the beginning is so similar that it is quite generally thought that the Chinese ~~writing~~ writing came overland from Babylonia, just as the Egyptian writing also did. And these three early systems of writing developed very differently -- in very different directions.

Now we should say a word about the writing of the Babylonians. The Babylonian is written in a different method than any other system of writing in the world. We call it the cuneiform writing. We use the Latin for it -- cuneiform. The Germans simply put it in German. They call it Keilschrift. The word Keil means wedge. Schrift is writing. We use the Latin. Cuni is wedge; form is form. It is the wedge form, wedge shaped writing.

The reason for that is that the Babylonians did not have paper. The Chinese invented paper very early. The Babylonians did not have paper. The Egyptians had papyrus from the banks of the Nile. From these papyrus plants they could make something like paper on which they could write. But in Babylonia they did not have anything of the kind so they had to take clay and make little clay tablets. The clay sticks together very well, and when you make a mark in it the mark stays, so you can just take the clay and press it together and make little things about the size of a cake of ivory soap or larger if you want, and then with the stylus, something like a screw driver -- a little end on it which is like the end on a screw driver, you press into it, and you press one end a little more than the other, so it makes a little wedge shaped mark.

Making these little tiny marks on it they were able to make marks that would last. The writing probably began c. 3000 B.C. in connection with the caravan trade, when they wanted to indicate various things to belong to different people, or to go to different places, and they would make pictures on it to indicate who owned it or where it went.

So the writing began with pictures, but these pictures soon came to represent words and then came to represent the sounds in the words. Originally some of the very earliest writings we have you can recognize well what the pictures are. But on account of this method of writing, of making these little wedge shaped marks, to represent the picture, soon the ~~similarity~~ similarity to the picture was almost entirely lost.

Then the Babylonian writing which they made at first taking their tablet and starting up here and going down, down, down. Then eventually they turned it over, and in turning it over it turns all the pictures on their side. This makes the pictures very hard to recognize as pictures. But you can learn to recognize them as symbols, and there are scholars today in every continent, I believe, who are students of the ancient cuneiform writing. There are thousands and thousands of these tables that have been excavated and taken to museums, and a great many of them have been copied.