

The First Writing

Over 5,000 years ago the first writing began to appear in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Later still, ancient scripts flourished in China and Mesoamerica, with secondary developments in places such as Scandinavia. Drawing on top scholars, *The First Writing* offers the most up-to-date information on these systems of recording language and meaning. Unlike other treatments, this volume focuses on the origins of writing less as a mechanistic process than as a set of communicative practices rooted in history, culture, and semiotic logic. An important conclusion is that episodes of script development are more complex than previously thought, with some changes taking place over generations, and others, such as the creation of syllabaries and alphabets, occurring with great speed. Linguists will find much of interest in matters of phonic and semiotic representation; archaeologists and art historians will discover a rich source on administration, display, and social evolution within early political systems.

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The First Writing

Script Invention as History and Process

STEPHEN D. HOUSTON

Brown University



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*To Anders Bliss Houston and Hannah McCrea Houston
First in all things, and in my heart*

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