Writing Systems Paper – Cuneiform

Scholars hypothesize that writing systems developed independently in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and Mesoamerica. Cuneiform, the script originating from Mesopotamia, is the oldest known writing system. Cuneiform originally represented the Sumerian language, but the script was later adapted to represent Akkadian and many other languages of the near east. The script was used for roughly 3000 years, and known inscriptions date from 3200BCE-75CE (Coulmas, 2003). It is important to differentiate between writing—the actual cuneiform script—and the languages it was used to represent, though the concepts of writing and language are closely linked. With this in mind, it is possible to introduce definitions and a general framework for what is expected in the development of writing systems.

Generally, writing can be defined as the use of visible marks linked at some structural level to language for communication (Olson, 2020). The linkage to language is important in distinguishing proto-writing from writing. Moreover, proto-writing lacks any standardization or conventionalization that would be expected in a formal writing system. Traditionalists view the development of writing as a progression. Writing begins as pictograms, and this develops into word writing. Next, a word-based system develops into syllabic writing. Finally, the syllabic system is replaced with the alphabet. (Olson, 2020). This generalization latches on to the old view that alphabetic systems are somehow more “efficient” than logo-syllabic systems. Modern linguists have abandoned the notion of a “progressive” evolution of writing, and they have come to appreciate that different writing systems offer different solutions for the representation of language (Olson, 2020). At the very least, this proposed pattern highlights some of the characteristics seen in the development of cuneiform.

One popular theory for the emergence of cuneiform is that writing on clay tablets came as a natural consequence of the bullae system. Small clay tokens dated to between 8000BCE-3000BCE (Olson, 2020) are inscribed with markings thought to indicate varying quantities of different goods. The complexity of markings generally increases towards the 4th millennium BCE, and clay envelopes are also found from this time period. Enclosed within these pockets of clay were small tokens, and many envelopes were found sealed with markings similar to those found on tokens (Rogers, 2007). Scholars believe that clay tokens and envelopes were used for accounting and transactional recordkeeping. As agriculture developed, the frequency and volume of economic transactions increased. This necessitated an easier recordkeeping system. Clay tablets filled this need, and this method of accounting eventually developed into a full-fledged writing system.

The study of clay tokens and early tablets as proto-cuneiform is augmented by the use of a historical epistemological perspective. More precisely, a philological approach would simply view this proto-writing as a deficient attempt at representing language. In contrast, the historical epistemological perspective is that proto-cuneiform is a successful representation of the knowledge of a transaction. Moreover, the means of communication is a consequence of the context of the proto-writing (Damerow, 1999). The physical medium of cuneiform texts is clay, and this makes sense given the geographic context that clay was an abundant resource from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Moreover, proto-cuneiform texts do not match syntax corresponding to oral language, and they typically have a lexical or hierarchical structure (Damerow, 1999). This characteristic of proto-cuneiform makes sense because both parties knew of the recorded transaction and associated quantities. Therefore, the author and reader of the proto-writing can infer meaning without the extensive use of linguistic structure. In some sense, the proto-writing is serving as rudimentary mnemonic tool for recordkeeping.

Though there are varying theories detailing where and when Cuneiform was invented, the earliest known inscriptions are from the city of Uruk, and they date to around 3000BCE (Coulmas, 2003). Early inscriptions could be vertical, though the script was later standardized to be written left to right (Rogers, 2007). At this stage, the cuneiform script was logographic, meaning that each sign represented an entire word or idea. Numerous pictograms could be combined to form compound logograms; for example, the pictograms for “dress” + “woman” could be combined to form “mistress” (Coulmas, 2003). For a growing society, this system of writing is problematic because it is difficult to express abstract ideas, and the number of signs required to represent many different objects is cumbersome. In addition, pictographic signs are time consuming to write. These difficulties motivated the physical, semantic, and phonetic abstraction of the original cuneiform symbols.

Physical abstraction of the signs involved pictograms becoming a combination of wedge-shaped marks known as *cuneus* and the *winkelhaken.* The actual shape of the marks is attributed to the ease of impressing clay with a reed stylus—the abundant writing materials of the region (Rogers, 2007). Figure 1 illustrates the physical abstraction of two cuneiform signs.

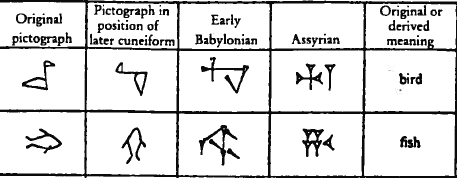


Figure 1 - Rotation and loss of Iconicity in Some cuneiform signs (Coulmas, 2003)

One form of semantic extension was similar to the use of compound logograms. For example, the symbols for “mouth” + “water” could be used to form the verb “drink” (Rogers, 2007). Individual signs also acquired new meanings such as the logogram for “foot”, DU, becoming the verb “go” (Rogers, 2007). In addition, an individual sign could have different meanings depending on its context, and this necessitated the use of determinatives. These symbols clarified meaning, and an example of this would be the cuneiform symbol GIS. As a logogram, it means wood, but as a determinative it serves as a morpheme that specifies that the referenced object is wooden.

Phonetic extension increased the range of what the cuneiform script could represent. The rebus principle—the use of graphic signs for phonetic value—is what closely connects the sounds of language to written marks. With this principle, cuneiform signs could be read as their logographic value, or they could be read as a syllable. In the cuneiform script, phonemic signs represented the following consonant-vowel patterns: V, VC, CV, and CVC (Coulmas, 2003). The introduction of sound often led to ambiguities in the pronunciation of certain groupings of phonemes, and this motivated the use of phonetic complements. When cuneiform was adapted to represent Akkadian, a process known as *gunu* added diacritic marks (Rogers, 2007). These marks clarified the pronunciation of annotated words.

With the general features of cuneiform established, a story on the origins of the script introduces how foreign adaptation of cuneiform catalyzed its phoneticization during the 3rd millennium BCE. “Enmerkar and the Lord of Arata” is a mythological tale detailing numerous ways Enmerkar, king of Uruk, outsmarts a foreign leader. Enmerkar’s final triumph over the lord of Arata is outwitting him by inventing writing (Seri, 2010). Though Enmerkar’s existence as a king of Uruk is corroborated by the archaeological record of Sumerian kings, evidence of epistolary writing as mentioned in the story is only found after 2400 BCE (Seri, 2010). Based on this evidence, it is unlikely that Enmerkar can be credited with the invention of writing. However, the story highlights cultural superiority attributed to cuneiform, and the text implies that writing is a Mesopotamian invention for foreign powers to adopt. Historically, Akkadians adopted cuneiform, and their use of the script furthered its phoneticization.

The traditional timeline for the foreign adaption of cuneiform is that the script was originally used to represent Sumerian until the Sargonic period (2350-2110 BCE). King Sargon (2334-2279 BCE) established an empire with capital city at Akkad where official documents were written in Old Akkadian using the cuneiform script (Seri, 2010). This period was followed by the third dynasty of Ur (2100-2003 BCE) where Sumerian became the primary language of administration. After this “Neo-Sumerian” period, Akkadian once again became the lingua franca of the region, and official documents from this time period were written in Akkadian cuneiform (Seri, 2010). While this historical recount is *mostly* true, evidence of Akkadian and other Semitic languages such as Ebalite written in cuneiform (2500-2400 BCE) antedates the Sargonic period (Seri, 2010). This historical nuance underscores the gradual nature of the adaptation of cuneiform to represent Akkadian, and comparing the Sumerian and Akkadian languages elucidates why cuneiform was phoneticized during this time period.

Sumerian is an isolate language meaning that it is not related to any other known language. Moreover, it is an agglutinative language where words are inflected by stringing identifiable morphemes one after another before or after a given invariable root. The agglutinative nature of the language combined with the monosyllabic, unalterable roots make Sumerian suitable for a primarily logographic writing system (Seri, 2010). In contrast, Akkadian is a Semitic language that was used until 100CE. A strict rule of the language is that clusters of more than two consonants are not allowed, but if they do occur, they must be separated by a syllable boundary. In other words, Akkadian has no syllables that start or end with more than consonant (Seri, 2010). Akkadian scribes needed a phonetic syllabic system in order to convey this structural characteristic of their language, and this necessitated the phoneticization of cuneiform. Evidence of this syllabication ranges from just proper names being sounded out (2600 BCE) to full lexical lists with syllabic Semitic translations next to Sumerian words (2400 BCE) (Seri, 2010). The latest known logo-syllabic cuneiform inscription is a Babylonian astronomical text dated to 75CE (Coulmas, 2003). However, the writing system had been adapted in a much different direction roughly 1500 years earlier.

Ugaritic is a Semitic language closely related to Phoenician, and it was spoken in northern Syria along the Mediterranean coast. Archaeological evidence from the city of Ugarit includes a student tablet with an Ugaritic cuneiform abecedary. This tablet dates to around 1400BCE, but the city of Ugarit was destroyed by invaders from the sea around 1200BCE. (Coulmas, 1999). There were 30 letters written in the wedges of the cuneiform type, though there is no known evidence for the origin of the letter forms (Coulmas, 1999). Though other Ugaritic texts have been deciphered, the destruction of the city meant that the spread of the alphabet would be delayed until the advent of the Phoenician script. Overall, Ugaritic cuneiform represents a short-lived, niche extension of cuneiform beyond its typical logo-syllabic form.

A brief survey of ancient cuneiform texts highlights the purposes of the script in the cultures that it was used. More than 75% of the roughly 150,000 excavated cuneiform documents are administrative (Coulmas, 2003). An example of these seemingly mundane documents is a legal text from the Old Babylonian period. This text is a receipt for barley, and it states that two harvesters are to receive 270 liters of barley. The respective share of barley for each harvester is noted, and the document is concluded with the warning that a penalty according to the royal decree will be enforced should the harvesters not receive their barley (no. P315369). This text underscores the administrative and transactional usage of cuneiform, and this furthers the hypothesis that writing in Mesopotamia emerged from economic demand. In addition, the mention of a royal decree and penalty demonstrates the use of cuneiform for legal and propaganda purposes. The fact that cuneiform is associated with the communication of royal decrees highlights the elevated status of the script. Though not as grandiose as Hammurabi’s code, even a simple receipt offers insight into the use and cultural associations of cuneiform.

While full cuneiform texts are available from the mid-3rd millennium BCE onwards, primitive cuneiform texts from around 3000BCE provide details about the script’s initial use and origins. An example of these early texts is an inscribed jar rim from Uruk dated to between 3200-3000BCE. Inscribed pottery from Mesopotamia is a rare find, and this ostraca’s purpose is known because of a sign on its rim. The sign is conventionally transliterated as DUG, and scholars are confident this represents the word “beer”. This assertion is supported by proto-cuneiform accounts with this sign that describe the production of a drink from malted barley (no. P005309). This artifact highlights the functional use of writing to label objects. Moreover, the pictographic nature of the signs showcases a transition from proto-cuneiform to a basic a logographic script. The artifact contains two other preserved signs—NE and EN—which scholars theorize refer to a job title or profession (no. P005309). It is possible that the pottery’s owner is labeled in addition to its contents.

Beyond administrative and early cuneiform texts, literary works offer a unique view of contemporary societal values. The Enuma Elish is a mythological creation epic that describes a power struggle between the old gods and the young gods. The first tablet of the epic from the Neo-Babylonian period (ca. 600 BCE) details how the old god Apsu plots to kill the young gods who disturb his sleep. However, the young god Ea kills him before he can execute his plan. This enrages the now-widowed Tiamat, thus setting the stage for the upcoming conflict (no. P450752). Among the many gods mentioned in the story, Marduk receives the most praise, and he is crowned king of gods. Historically, Marduk’s popularity as a deity surged during the reign of Hammurabi (1792-1750BCE) (Mark, 2018). In older versions of the tale, the Sumerian god Enki (Ea in Babylonian mythology) plays the central role instead of Marduk (Mark, 2018). This historical nuance demonstrates that cuneiform religious texts reflect the popular deities of their time period. Moreover, the religious and artistic associations of this epic elevate the cultural status of the cuneiform script. Some scholars have even theorized that the theme of patricide in the Babylonian version of the tale is a reflection on the Babylonian conquest of Sumer (Mark, 2018). In this way, the cuneiform script serves as a cross-cultural link between kingdoms of the near-east.

Though the aforementioned document types are essential for the study of cuneiform and the surrounding culture, the most important inscription for the decipherment of the script was the Behistun inscription. This monumental façade is carved into the Zagros mountains of western Iran, and it contains a scene depicting Darius, the Achaemenid king. It contained the same message reproduced 3 times in cuneiform representing the Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian languages (Robinson, 2007). After 10 years of precarious work, the full inscription was copied by Henry Rawlinson in 1847. Building upon the works of scholars such as Edward Hincks, Rawlinson was able to translate the Old Persian inscription (Robinson, 2007). The Babylonian inscription was later deciphered using Rawlinson’s work. Though scholars’ thought process on the decipherment of the Behistun inscription is not well-documented, it can be inferred that the philological approach of working backwards from known languages was instrumental. (Robinson, 2007). The monument is often described as the “Rosetta Stone for cuneiform”, so perhaps the decipherment process bore close resemblance to the work of Jean Champollion and Thomas Young in their decipherment of Egyptian writing.

A comparison of cuneiform to Egyptian scripts highlights the diverse oneness of differing writing systems. The ancient Egyptian writing system consists of three scripts: hieroglyphs, hieratic, and demotic. Hieroglyphs and hieratic appear at roughly the same time at around 3000BCE. Demotic later appears around 650BCE, and it was used until the Roman period circa 500CE (Robinson, 2007). Hieratic was originally used for administrative purposes such as recordkeeping, accounting, and labeling property. Demotic later inherited these uses, and hieratic became a priestly script. Hieroglyphs (sacred carving) remained a primarily monumental script throughout Egyptian history, and scholars believe that this intricate script was commissioned for its aesthetic appeal, religious affiliation, and noble exclusivity (Rogers, 2007). Cuneiform was a single script used across monuments, administrative documents, and literary texts. Moreover, it was used to represent many different languages of the near-east. In contrast, Egyptian texts specifically differentiated the use cases of the three scripts, and the scripts were all used to represent the Egyptian language. The Egyptian writing system as a whole, however, served many of the same purposes as cuneiform.

Whereas cuneiform texts were primarily written on clay tablets, many Egyptian manuscripts were written on papyrus. This is attributed to the geographic availability of differing writing materials. Papyrus does not preserve as well as clay, and this has hindered the discovery of Egyptian texts. However, the monumental nature of hieroglyphs meant that they were often carved in stone, and a vast number of these inscriptions have been found. An example carving is a doorjamb from the palace of Merenptah dated to New Egyptian kingdom period. This limestone relief depicts king Merenptah smiting an Asiatic foe, and its text claims to protect the entrant from supernatural evils entering the doorway (no. E17527). The king’s name is written as two hieroglyph columns enclosed in cartouches—a common method of emphasizing royal names in hieroglyphic texts. The text is symbolic of the pharaoh’s dominance over foreign powers, and its aesthetic qualities underscore the use of hieroglyphs for monumental and propaganda purposes. Moreover, the supernatural protection granted by the inscription highlight the religious affiliation of this script. Many of these characteristics are seen in cuneiform texts, and the cultural esteem of Egyptian scripts and scribes was similar to that of cuneiform.

There is currently a dearth of evidence proving or disproving whether there was Mesopotamian influence on the development of the Egyptian writing system (Robinson, 2007). However, there are structural similarities between the two writing systems. Focusing on Egyptian hieroglyphs, logograms would be indicated by a logographic stroke. Contrary to prevailing scholarly theories between the 15-17th centuries, Egyptian hieroglyphic writing (as well as the other scripts) had a large phonographic component. Phonemes were written as either uniconsonantal, biconsonantal, or triconsonantal graphemes (Rogers, 2007). In some ways, the uniconsonantal symbols could be construed as the beginnings of an abjad, but it is better to characterize Egyptian scripts as logo-syllabic. Therefore, the fundamental structures of Egyptian writing and cuneiform have some similarities.

A notable difference between Egyptian scripts and cuneiform is that vowels are *never* notated in Egyptian scripts. This has challenged scholars attempting to reconstruct oral readings of ancient Egyptian texts, and they have turned to descendant written languages such as Coptic for aid (Rogers, 2007). Other structural components of the Egyptian writing system such as determinatives and phonetic complements are similar to cuneiform. In the hieroglyphic script, phonetic complements were typically notated as additional consonants around a biconsonantal or triconsonantal grapheme to stress certain aspects of the pronunciation. Determinatives were not pronounced, and they were typically added to the ends of words to clarify meanings (Rogers, 2007). Though the graphical forms of cuneiform and Egyptian scripts are different, many structural components of the two writing systems are very similar.

As the oldest known writing system, cuneiform holds a unique place among the scripts of the world. Cuneiform texts trace the script’s 3000-year lifespan across numerous cultures, and they provide insight into the general development of writing systems. Scripts ranging from the mundane to the literary epic parallel the usage of writing thousands of years later. The study of this script influences how scholars think about modern writing, and it illuminates how writing can connect humanity.

Works Cited

Coulmas, Florian. “From Word to Syllable 1: Cuneiform Writing.” *The Writing Systems of the World,* Blackwell, 2003, pp. 72-91.

In this chapter, Florian Coulmas, professor in sociolinguistics at the University of Duisburg-Essen, provides a high-level overview of the cuneiform writing system. Coulmas argues that cuneiform developed as an economic consequence, and this claim is corroborated by the swath of administrative texts found in Mesopotamia. Moreover, the chapter illustrates the development of pictograms into abstract signs, and it enumerates the various languages cuneiform was used to write. This text is helpful because it provides geographic and linguistic information on the development of cuneiform. The chapter is also useful because it explains important linguistic terminology used to study cuneiform such as determinatives, phonetic complements, and logograms.

Coulmas, Florian. “Ugaritic Alphabet.” *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems*, Blackwell, 1996, pp. 522-524.

In this encyclopedia article, Florian Coulmas, professor in sociolinguistics at the University of Duisburg-Essen, summarizes current knowledge about the Ugaritic alphabet. Coulmas explains the geographic and historical context of the alphabetic script, and he establishes the significance of what is thought to be the oldest alphabet. This article is helpful because it enables the discussion of the Ugaritic script. It provides sufficient geographic, historical, and linguistic information to connect this alphabetic script to other forms of cuneiform writing.

Damerow, Peter. “The Origins of Writing as a Problem of Historical Epistemology.” Symposium the Multiple Origins of Writing: Image Symbol and Script, University of Pennsylvania, Center for Ancient Studies, 26 March 1999.

In this lecture, Peter Damerow, the late research scholar at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, presents a historical epistemological perspective on the early development of writing. Damerow argues that this perspective provides new insight to the study of proto-writing as compared to the philological approach which tries to relate ancient scripts to spoken languages. Damerow supports this argument by linking the development of proto-cuneiform to more general questions about the development of early writing systems, and he elaborates how a historical epistemological approach provides different answers to these guiding questions. This lecture print is helpful in that it provides guiding questions for analyzing the development of early writing systems, and it provides details on the development of proto-cuneiform. In addition, this information can be used to explain how social and historical contexts influenced the initial development of cuneiform.

*Doorjamb from the palace of Merenptah.* ca. 1213-1204BCE. Limestone. E17527. *Penn Museum*

https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/304146. Accessed 31 May 2020.

This limestone relief dates to New Kingdom, and it depicts King Merenptah smiting an Asiatic enemy. The king’s name is enclosed in 2 columns of text enclosed in cartouches, and two columns of very large hieroglyphs lie above the scene. The relief symbolizes the dominance of the pharaoh over foreign powers. Moreover, the text on the relief grants magical protection against paranormal evil that may enter through the door this artifact was part of. This artifact highlights many of the structural characteristics seen in hieroglyphic texts, and it is emblematic of the cultural connotations associated with hieroglyphic script.

*Inscribed jar rim dating to the Uruk III period*. ca. 3200-3000 BCE. Clay. P005309. *Manchester Museum* https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/search\_results.php?SearchMode=Text&ObjectID=P005309. Accessed 26 May 2020.

This pottery shard is the rim of what is thought to be a beer jug. Two of the pictographic signs on the shard are conventionally transliterated as DUG. Proto-cuneiform accounts document the use of malted grain to produce the drink found in vessels labeled with DUG, and this leads scholars to believe the vessel was used to store beer. This is one of the earliest cuneiform artifacts, and the pictographic style of the cuneiform highlights the linkage to proto-cuneiform texts. In addition, the use of writing to label a vessel highlights one of the original uses of writing in Mesopotamian society.

Mark, Joshua J. “Enuma Elish - The Babylonian Epic of Creation - Full Text.” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 4 May 2018, www.ancient.eu/article/225/enuma-elish---the-babylonian- epic-of-creation---fu/. Accessed 31 May 2020.

In this encyclopedia article, Joshua J. Mark, professor of philosophy at Marist college, summarizes the Enuma Elish. In addition, a translation of the entire text is provided, and commentary on the historical and social affiliations of the epic is given. This article is helpful because it gives the broader context of the entire literary work. Though inferences about Babylonian culture can be drawn from the primary source, consideration of Babylonian history and worship practices is illuminating when explaining the significance of the Enuma Elish.

*Old Babylonian Legal Text*. ca.1900-1600 BCE. Clay. P315369. *Manchester Museum* https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/search\_results.php?SearchMode=Text&ObjectID=P315369. Accessed 26 May 2020.

This clay tablet is a brief legal document which contains a receipt for a barley transaction. Two harvesters, Hurussu and Belšunu, received 270 liters of barley, and the text details the respective split of barley each should receive. The receipt is stamped with each harvester’s seal, and it ends with the warning that if the barley is not received, a penalty will be enforced according to the royal law. Administrative documents constitute the majority of discovered cuneiform writings, and this artifact highlights numerous writing developments. The cuneiform on this tablet is used for accounting and legal purposes, and it also is used to identify people and property with the usage of proper names and seals. The warning of a penalty according to a royal decree highlights the ruling authority of the time period, and the tablet’s use illustrates a typical economic transaction of this era.

Olson, David R. “Writing.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 31 Mar. 2020, www.britannica.com/topic/writing.

In this encyclopedia article, David Olson, professor emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, enumerates the basic formulation of writing and writing systems. In addition, Olson provides a basic overview of the development of the cuneiform script under the general writing systems framework. Olson also summarizes various scholarly theories such as the general development of writing in 4 stages, and the evolution of clay tokens into clay tablets with cuneiform script. This article is helpful because it provides a general ideological framework for studying writing systems, and it briefly analyzes the development of cuneiform under this viewpoint. Moreover, this article presents a relevant theory for the development of proto-cuneiform.

Robinson, Andrew. “Egyptian Hieroglyphs.” *The Story of Writing*, Thames & Hudson, 2007, pp. 92–107.

Robinson, Andrew. “Cuneiform.” *The Story of Writing*, Thames & Hudson, 2007, pp. 70–79.

Rogers, Henry. “Cuneiform.” *Writing Systems: a Linguistic Approach*, Blackwell Publ., 2007, pp. 79–96.

Rogers, Henry. “Egyptian.” *Writing Systems: a Linguistic Approach*, Blackwell Publ., 2007, pp. 97-114.

Seri, Andrea. “Adaptation of Cuneiform to Write Akkadian.” *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and beyond:* edited by Christopher Woods et al., Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010, pp. 85–98.

In this chapter, Andrea Seri, professor of ancient history at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba in Argentina, explains how cuneiform was adapted to represent Akkadian. Seri argues that the semantic structural characteristics of the Akkadian language necessitated increased phonetic use of the cuneiform script. Seri builds this argument by providing the traditional historical background for the adaptation of cuneiform as well as newer discoveries which date the adaptation to before the start of the Sargonic period (2300BCE). Seri also highlights elements of the Sumerian and Akkadian languages to explain their ease of representation in cuneiform. This article is useful because it highlights how the adaptation of a foreign language can further the phonetic usage of a writing system. Moreover, information in the article can be used to summarize the historical background and supporting artifacts for the adaptation of cuneiform to write Akkadian.

*Upper half of the first tablet of the Babylonian Epic of Creation, Enuma Elish*. ca. 626-539 BCE. Clay. P450752. *Ashmolean Museum* https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/search\_results.php?SearchMode=Text&ObjectID=P450752. Accessed 26 May 2020.

This clay tablet dates to the Neo-Babylonian period, and it serves both literary and religious purposes. It details the mythological power struggle amongst the Babylonian gods, and the end result of this struggle was the creation of the human world. The literary nature of the text highlights the elevated status of the cuneiform script. In addition, this text demonstrates advanced uses of writing beyond administrative tasks. Finally, the text describes Babylonian religious beliefs which provide an insight into their culture.