

Part 1: Study Guide, Chapters 1-4

Chapter 1 – The Invention of Writing

Summary

Chapter one notes three important innovations in the development of Homo sapiens: the thoughtful and deliberate development of tools; speech, the ability to make sounds in order to communicate; and writing, the visual counterpart of speech. The focus of the chapter is on the origins of writing, their influences on the development of civilization, and their impact upon social order, economic progress, and technological and cultural developments. The chapter outlines the development of writing from representational prehistoric images of cave drawings to the pictographic and more abstract ideographic and phonetic visual language systems of the ancient Mesopotamians and Egyptians, including cuneiform and hieroglyphs.

Purposes and cultural perceptions of writing are discussed, as are materials, tools, and methods that influenced visual form. Early design conventions of the Sumerians and Egyptians, including the use of a grid as an organizing element and the combined use of illustrations and text to create visual narrative, are presented, along with early experiments with the direction of writing, which laid the foundation for reading pattern.

The need for visual identification and the concept of visual symbol is introduced, as is the subsequent development of proprietary marks. Artifacts representing forms of communication, such as commemorative markers, funerary texts, and stamps used to make proprietary marks, are identified for each major culture.

Key Terms

1. *Pictograph*
2. *Ideograph*
3. *Cuneiform*
4. *Rebus writing*
5. *Phonogram*
6. *Stele*
7. *Cylinder seal*
8. *Hieroglyphics*
9. *Rosetta Stone*

10. *Determinatives*
11. *Cartouche*
12. *Papyrus*
13. *Hieratic script*
14. *Demotic script*
15. *Papyrus manuscripts*
16. *Pyramid text*
17. *Coffin Texts*
18. *The Book of the Dead*

Chapter 2 – Alphabets

Summary

Early visual language systems were complex and required knowledge of hundreds of signs and symbols, whereas an alphabet, a set of visual symbols or characters that represent the elementary sounds of a spoken language, required only twenty or thirty easily learned signs. Simple to write and learn, alphabets made literacy available to larger numbers of people. This resulted in the expansion and democratization of information and knowledge, which had a leveling effect on social structure.

Chapter 2 focuses on the transition from early pictographic to alphabetic writing, the accompanying spread of ideas, and their influence on fields such as geography, commerce, and conquest. The merchant, seafaring culture of the Phoenicians borrowed from established writing systems such as cuneiform from Mesopotamia and Egyptian hieroglyphics, developed a system for their own language, and facilitated its spread through travel. Early alphabets branched into multiple directions. The Phoenician alphabet evolved further in Greece and Rome, and the Aramaic alphabet gave rise to Hebrew and Arabic writing elsewhere in the region.

In addition to the influence of materials, tools, and methods on the visual appearance of the characters, the sounds of the spoken language became an influential factor on alphabetic forms. Later, the Greeks introduced geometry as a method to construct and refine alphabetic characters into a standardized visual system. The Romans drew their letters in thick and thin strokes and introduced small lines that extended from the major strokes of the letterform, which came to be known as serifs. Experimentation with writing direction continued and eventually settled on left to right primarily in the West and right to left in the East.

While most alphabets evolved over time, the Korean alphabet, Hangul, was developed by a team of gifted scholars and introduced by King Sejong. Its characters are abstract depictions of the positions of the mouth and tongue when they are spoken.

Key Terms

1. *Substrate*
2. *North Semitic writing*
3. *Sui generis*
4. *Sinaitic script*
5. *Achrophonic*
6. *Ras Shamra script*
7. *Phoenician alphabet*

8. *Aramaic alphabet*
9. *Square Hebrew alphabet*
10. *Kufic*
11. *Naskhi*
12. *Calligraphy*
13. *Greek alphabet*
14. *Boustrophedon*
15. *Uncials*
16. *Latin alphabet*
17. *Capitalis monumentalis*
18. *Serifs*
19. *Capitalis quadrata*
20. *Capitalis rustica*
21. *Vellum*
22. *Codex*
23. *Scroll*
24. *Signature*
25. *Hangul*

Chapter 3 – The Asian Contribution

Summary

Innovations in writing similar to those in Mesopotamia and Egypt, which were discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, took place independently in China. Among these innovations were Chinese calligraphy, a nonalphabetic visual language system; the invention of paper; the discovery of printing; and experiments with movable type.

Chapter 3 explores the four phases in the evolution of writing in China from its pictographic origins to Chinese calligraphy's place as the highest art form. In addition to the influence of materials, tools, and methods, nature also inspired the visual form of Chinese calligraphy.

China was the first society in which ordinary people had daily contact with printed images. Before the invention of paper in China by Ts'ai Lun, bamboo slats and woven silk cloth were used as writing surfaces. It is believed that the discovery of printing in China may have evolved from the use of engraved seals, similar in concept to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian seals. Originally, impressions were made in clay and later, inked impressions were stamped onto paper. Inked rubbings from stone inscriptions may also have contributed to the discovery of relief printing.

The structure of the book evolved in China from scroll to accordion-style format to the bound codex-style book. As far as layout was concerned, text was combined with illustrations, and horizontal and vertical lines were used to organize information on the page. The Chinese as well as the Koreans experimented with the concept of movable type, a method in which each character is independent of other characters and can be assembled and reassembled in different combinations. Movable type never became an established method of printing text in the Far East, mainly because the written language systems had thousands of characters, which made organizing and storing the characters difficult.

During Europe's thousand-year medieval period, China's invention of paper and printing spread slowly westward and arrived in Europe just as the Renaissance began. The rediscovery of classical knowledge, a flowering of the arts, and the beginning of modern science were all aided by printing.

Key Terms

1. *Chinese calligraphy*
2. *Logograms*
3. *Chiaku-wen, (bone-and-shell script)*
4. *Chin-wen, (bronze script)*

5. *Hsiao chuan, (small-seal style)*
6. *Chen-shu or kai-shu, (regular style)*
7. *Woodblock printing*
8. *Relief printing*
9. *Accordion-style book*
10. *Codex-style book*
11. *Movable type*

Chapter 4 – Illuminated Manuscripts

Summary

Illuminated manuscripts is the term used for all decorated and illustrated handwritten books produced from the late Roman Empire until printed books replaced manuscripts after typography was developed in Europe around 1450 BCE. During the thousand-year medieval era from the fifth-century fall of Rome until the fifteenth-century Renaissance, the knowledge and learning of the classical world were almost entirely lost, and the general population languished in illiteracy, poverty, and superstition. Regional isolation and difficult travel caused regional design styles to emerge. Eight distinctive schools of manuscript production are presented in Chapter 4, along with insights into the historical and social contexts surrounding their occurrence. Although classical literature was preserved in manuscripts, most illuminated manuscripts were sacred writings that held great meaning for Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Manuscripts were produced with extraordinary care and design sensitivity. The process was costly and time-consuming.

This period brought us a vast vocabulary of graphic forms, page layouts, illustration and lettering styles, and techniques. Caroline minuscules, the forerunner of the lowercase alphabet, were developed during this period, as was *textura*, the condensed, vertical, angular script also called blackletter. The use of embellishment to expand the word became very important. Illustrations had educational value, and ornamentation created mystical and spiritual overtones. Other important contributions of medieval graphic design were the adaptation of Arabic numerals and the invention of musical notation.

Two great traditions of manuscript illumination are presented in this chapter—Eastern from Islamic countries and Western from Europe. With the exception of the Greek and Roman examples from classical antiquity, the manuscripts discussed in this chapter are presented within the context of medieval societies in which few were literate. The unique characteristics of each of the eight styles are outlined below:

- I. Classical style from Greek and Roman classical antiquity
- II. Celtic book design of Ireland
- III. The Caroline graphic renewal
- IV. Spanish pictorial expressionism
- V. Romanesque and Gothic manuscripts

VI. Judaic manuscripts

VII. Islamic manuscripts

VIII. Late medieval illuminated manuscripts

Key Terms

1. *Illuminated manuscript*
2. *Gold leaf*
3. *Scriptorium*
4. *Scrittori*
5. *Copisti*
6. *Illuminator*
7. *Colophon*
8. *Frontispiece*
9. *Classical style*
10. *Uncials*
11. *Uncia*
12. *Semi-uncial or half-uncial*
13. *Majuscule*
14. *Minuscule*
15. *Ascenders*
16. *Descenders*
17. *Celtic style*
18. *Carpet pages*
19. *Interlace*
20. *Lacertines*
21. *Diminuendo*
22. *Scriptura scottia (insular script)*
23. *Caroline or Carolingian miniscules*

24. *Labyrinth page*

25. *Textura*