

The history of the alphabet



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Number] History of Alphabets The history of alphabets is very old. It is believed that the alphabets have their roots inside the ancient Egypt history. In the early stages symbols were used to convey some specific messages and then these symbols and signs were refined to take the shape of alphabets (Stephen, p98). History shows that the first alphabet was introduced in 2000BC developed by the Semitic workers of ancient Egypt however the basic principles for developing alphabets were formulated almost millennium ago in the Middle Bronze Age. This discovery provided the background and base for the development of several Phoenician and Greek alphabets (Ullman, p311). The Latin alphabets are regarded as the most widely used alphabets of the world. These alphabets are derived from the Greek that provided the concept of consonants and vowels (Stephen, p98) The Greek alphabets are rooted from the Phoenician alphabets that basically donate a system that proposed the use of symbols for every consonant. It implies that all the alphabets used in the present world have their roots deeply embedded in to the Phoenician alphabets (Joseph, p65). There are two main scripts that provide the hints for the history of alphabets. These scripts were created somewhere before the end of the fourth millennium BCE known as Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs. These scripts provide the base for the production of Phoenician alphabets and were widely used in the Middle East region. Many of the languages used in the regions are developed from the based provided by the Phoenician alphabets and the two mentioned scripts. The set of 22 hieroglyphs was created by the ancient Egyptians in 2700 BCE. These hieroglyphs basically represent the individual consonants of their language. In addition to the consonant, the 23rd hieroglyph presented the concept of word initial or word final vowel for the

first time (Stephen, p98). This development acted as the pronunciation guide and worked for the development of logograms that introduced the principles for grammatical inflections. Soon after the trend of transcribing loan words and foreign name adaptation was started and many languages borrowed some alphabets from the other languages and added to their own set of alphabets (Ullman, p311). The historians also believe that the first alphabetic script was created in 1850 BCE. It was developed for the Semitic workers in the Sinai and followed mainly the Egyptian glyphs Semitic values and principles. This development was spread in to the north over the time period of five centuries and all the subsequent alphabets created and used all over the globe are descended from this development. It implies that the history of alphabets is as old as the human civilization. Earlier the people use to have system of symbols and sings to represent their messages however, as the civilization grew, people started the creation of certain systems and sets of alphabets that have now resulted in the current existence and use of several sets of alphabets used in different languages across the world (Joseph, p65). Work Cited Stephen R. Fischer, a History of Writing. London: Reaktion Books, 2005 Joseph Naveh, Early History of the Alphabet: an Introduction to West Semitic Epigraphy and Palaeography (Magnes Press – Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1982) Ullman, B. L. " The Origin and Development of the Alphabet," American Journal of Archaeology 31, No. 3 (Jul., 1927): 311-32