



# Unlocking Origins of Writing: Mesopotamian Clay Seal Discoveries

## Description

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A cylinder seal and its design imprinted onto clay

Franck Raux © 2001 GrandPalaisRmn (Musée du Louvre)

Did you know that the world's oldest known writing system could have started with decorated cylinders used for marking ownership and transactions? Some symbols on these cylinder seals are similar to those used in proto-cuneiform, an early form of writing in Mesopotamia.

Researchers from the University of Bologna in Italy suggest that the development of writing in Mesopotamia was not a single event but a collaborative effort involving many people across a large area.

The earliest true writing system, cuneiform, dates back to around 3200 BC in Mesopotamia, evolving from an earlier system called proto-cuneiform used between 3350 and 3000 BC. Proto-writing lacked grammar rules and could only convey simple ideas, unlike true writing.

Exploring the origins of proto-cuneiform, scholars are considering cylinder seals, which had patterns and images imprinted on them and could transfer symbols onto clay. Some symbols on these seals match those in proto-cuneiform.

By studying artifacts from different regions, researchers are uncovering a decentralized process of writing invention, signifying a broader involvement in the development of writing than previously thought.

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## Vocabulary List:

1. **Cuneiform** /'kju:.nɪ.fɔ:m/ (noun): An ancient writing system used in Mesopotamia characterized by wedge-shaped marks.
2. **Proto-cuneiform** /'prəʊ.təʊ,kju:.nɪ.fɔ:m/ (noun): An early form of writing that predates cuneiform lacking grammar rules.
3. **Decentralized** /,di:'sɛn.trə.laɪzd/ (adjective): Distributing functions and powers away from a central authority.
4. **Symbols** /'sɪm.bəlz/ (noun): Marks or characters used to represent something else such as an idea or object.
5. **Artifacts** /'ɑ:r.tɪ.fæks/ (noun): Objects made by humans typically of cultural or historical interest.
6. **Collaborative** /kə'læb.ə.reɪ.tɪv/ (adjective): Involving two or more parties working together towards a common goal.

## Comprehension Questions

### Multiple Choice

1. What is suggested about the development of writing in Mesopotamia by researchers from the University



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of Bologna?

- Option: It was a single event
- Option: It involved a collaborative effort
- Option: It was a recent discovery
- Option: It was mainly a royal initiative

2. When did the earliest true writing system, cuneiform, originate?

- Option: 3350 BC
- Option: 3000 BC
- Option: 3200 BC
- Option: 2800 BC

3. What was a characteristic of proto-writing according to the text?

- Option: It had well-defined grammar rules
- Option: It could convey complex ideas
- Option: It was developed after cuneiform
- Option: It was unable to convey complex ideas

4. What was used to transfer symbols onto clay in the origins of proto-cuneiform, as mentioned in the text?

- Option: Stone tablets
- Option: Papyrus scrolls
- Option: Cylinder seals
- Option: Metal engravings

5. What is the significance of studying artifacts from different regions in relation to the development of writing?

- Option: It confirms a royal invention of writing
- Option: It supports a centralized process of writing invention
- Option: It reveals a decentralized process of writing invention
- Option: It is not relevant to the study of writing origins

6. What is considered to match in terms of symbols between cylinder seals and proto-cuneiform?

- Option: Colors used
- Option: Patterns and images
- Option: Size of symbols
- Option: Letter spacing



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### True-False

7. The world's oldest known writing system started exclusively with complex manuscripts.
8. Proto-cuneiform had developed grammar rules to convey complex ideas.
9. Cylinder seals were incapable of transferring symbols onto clay.
10. Cuneiform writing system emerged after the proto-cuneiform system.
11. True writing systems existed before proto-cuneiform.
12. Researchers believe the writing invention was limited to a specific group of people.

### Gap-Fill

13. The true writing system cuneiform evolved from proto-cuneiform and dates back to around 3200 BC in Mesopotamia, evolving from an earlier system called proto-cuneiform used between 3350 and \_\_\_\_\_ BC.
14. In the origins of proto-cuneiform, scholars are considering \_\_\_\_\_, which had patterns and images imprinted on them and could transfer symbols onto clay.
15. Researchers are uncovering a decentralized process of writing invention, signifying a broader involvement in the development of writing than previously \_\_\_\_\_.
16. Cylinder seals had patterns and images imprinted on them that could transfer symbols onto \_\_\_\_\_.
17. Proto-writing could convey simple ideas but lacked \_\_\_\_\_ rules.
18. Scholars believe the development of writing in Mesopotamia was a \_\_\_\_\_ effort



rather than a single event.

## Answer

**Multiple Choice:** 1. It involved a collaborative effort 2. 3200 BC 3. It was unable to convey complex ideas 4. Cylinder seals 5. It reveals a decentralized process of writing invention 6. Patterns and images

**True-False:** 7. False 8. False 9. False 10. True 11. False 12. False

**Gap-Fill:** 13. 3000 14. cylinder seals 15. thought 16. clay 17. grammar 18. collaborative

## Vocabulary quizzes

### Multiple Choice ( Select the Correct answer for each question. )

1. What refers to the gases released into the atmosphere as a result of human activities?

Option: Fossil Fuels

Option: Emissions

Option: Drought

Option: Chimpanzees

2. What digital currency uses cryptography for security and operates independently of a central bank?

Option: Numerical

Option: Cryptocurrency

Option: Impacting

Option: Cuneiform

3. What are specific rules and guidelines that must be followed for a particular process or technology?

Option: Dynamics

Option: Cryptocurrency

Option: Initiative

Option: Protocols

4. Which species of apes are known for their high level of intelligence and use of tools?

Option: Cryptocurrency

Option: Chimpanzees

Option: Decentralized

Option: Artifacts

5. What policy involves reducing or eliminating government regulations on industries?

Option: Optimism



- Option: Deregulation
- Option: Impacting
- Option: Compliance

6. What process involves putting a decision plan or law into effect?

- Option: Audience
- Option: Surge
- Option: Implementing
- Option: Exposure

7. What term describes the capability or possibility for future growth or success?

- Option: Restricting
- Option: Potential
- Option: Emissions
- Option: Chimanzees

8. What verb describes the effect or influence something has on its surroundings?

- Option: Cryptocurrency
- Option: Impacting
- Option: Transitioning
- Option: Dynamics

9. What term refers to the act of adhering to specific laws regulations or standards?

- Option: Cryptocurrency
- Option: Compliance
- Option: Drought
- Option: Symbols

10. What term refers to the forces or properties that stimulate growth development or change?

- Option: Chimpanzees
- Option: Impacting
- Option: Dynamics
- Option: Decentralized

**Gap-Fill ( Fill in the blanks with the correct word from the vocabulary list. )**

11. Many countries are \_\_\_\_\_ to renewable energy sources to combat climate change.
12. The need to address climate change is extremely \_\_\_\_\_.
13. There has been a \_\_\_\_\_ in interest in sustainable investing.



14. Despite the challenges there is a sense of \_\_\_\_\_ about the future.
15. Increased \_\_\_\_\_ to air pollution can have serious health implications.
16. Some countries are considering \_\_\_\_\_ the use of single-use plastics.
17. Community clean-up drives are a great \_\_\_\_\_ to involve citizens in environmental conservation.
18. Blockchain technology operates on a \_\_\_\_\_ network rather than a central server.
19. Archaeologists uncovered ancient \_\_\_\_\_ that shed light on early human civilizations.
20. The project required a \_\_\_\_\_ effort from multiple departments to succeed.

**Matching Sentences ( Match each definition to the correct word from the vocabulary list. )**

21. These sources of energy such as coal and oil are non-renewable and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions.
22. Mathematical values or quantities that involve numbers or numerical representations.
23. One of the earliest forms of writing consisting of wedge-shaped symbols pressed into clay tablets.
24. The precursor to cuneiform script characterized by simpler pictorial representations.
25. Representations that stand for or suggest something else often with a deeper meaning.
26. The group of people targeted by a message performance or communication.
27. The capacity to have an effect on the character development or behavior of someone or something.
28. The action of putting a decision plan or law into effect or action.
29. Specific rules guidelines or agreements that must be followed for a particular process or technology.
30. The forces or properties that stimulate growth development or change within a system or situation.





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## Answer

**Multiple Choice:** 1. Emissions 2. Cryptocurrency 3. Protocols 4. Chimpanzees 5. Deregulation 6. Implementing 7. Potential 8. Impacting 9. Compliance 10. Dynamics

**Gap-Fill:** 11. transitioning 12. urgent 13. surge 14. optimism 15. exposure 16. restricting 17. initiative 18. decentralized 19. artifacts 20. collaborative

**Matching sentence:** 1. Fossil Fuels 2. Numerical 3. Cuneiform 4. Proto-cuneiform 5. Symbols 6. Audience 7. Influence 8. Implementing 9. Protocols 10. Dynamics

## CATEGORY

1. Sci/Tech - LEVEL3

### Date Created

2024/11/06

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