MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF WRITING

„REPERE ÎN ISTORIA SCRISULUI”

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Una dintre cele mai mari descoperiri ale omenirii a fost scrisul. Prin intermediul scrisului oamenii au reușit ca să își fixeze informațiile, faptele și gândurile, pentru generațiile viitoare. În felul acesta informațiile istorice, faptele întâmplate, dorințele lor se puteau păstra pentru cei care urmau să vină, respectiv pentru generațiile viitoare. Găsim în cartea de căpătâi a creștinismului, respectiv Biblia, că și Dumnezeu s-a folosit de scriere pentru a transmite poruncile Sale divine, precum diverse alte informații necesare oamenilor. Acest fapt a fost cerut și unor profeți, pentru a scrie într-o carte anumite informații primite și destinate oamenilor, cu scopul de a fi cunoscute și ascultate de către ei. Datorită acestei invenții extraordinare, scrisul, de la primele forme de scriere, respectiv pictogramele și până la constituirea unui alfabet, a reprezentat cu adevărat un mare pas înainte al omenirii.

Cuvinte-cheie: *scrisul, pictograme, scrierea cuneiformă, scrierea hieroglifică, scrierea hieratică, scrierea demotică.*

One of mankind's greatest discoveries was writing. Through writing, people were able to fix their information, facts and thoughts for future generations. In this way, historical information, events and wishes could be preserved for future generations. We find in Christianity's most important book, the Bible, that God also used writing to convey His divine commands and other information needed by people. Some prophets were also asked to write down in a book certain information received and intended for the people, in order to be known and heard by them. Thanks to this extraordinary invention, writing, from the first forms of writing, namely pictograms, to the creation of an alphabet, was truly a great step forward for mankind.

Keywords: *writing, pictographs, cuneiform writing, hieroglyphic writing, hieratic writing, demotic writing.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the great discoveries of mankind is writing, because before sound recording technology, writing recorded thoughts, deeds and events, and in this way passed them on to future generations. Even God used writing to pass on eternal truths and commandments to future generations. The earliest evidence of writing are tablets from around Uruk in 3200 BC (Algaze, 2013, 68-94; Woods, 2010, p. 28-98; Damerow, 2012, p.1-20).

These are small, roughly rectangular pieces of clay with pictographs, i.e. simplified images of animals, plants and tools, engraved on them, along with abstract signs that have been interpreted as numerals (André-Leickman, Ziegler, 1982, p.51). Pictograms were the first systematic attempt to fix speech, but they could not convey the articulation of the sentence. Because this code was known only to those who knew the meaning of the drawings, the Uruk tablets could not be completely deciphered.

Writing is one of our daily concerns. Even if handwriting is less used today, and the classic letter, with envelope and stamp, has almost disappeared. Yet we type at least a message or a shopping list on our phone every day, unless we keep a diary on our computer or write an article. No wonder I never heard the song on the radio:

I've thought about it a thousand times,
that I wouldn't write you any more letters.

The younger generation wouldn't understand what it's all about, but writing is one of mankind's most important inventions. It is this invention that has allowed the thoughts of the ancient people to reach us, as the Latins say: *verba volant, scripta manent*, that is, the word flies, but the writing remains.

Writing is the only thing that stands the test of time and carries with it a story that does not want to be forgotten, and for us Christians, writing is all the more important because it has facilitated the preservation of divine revelation through the writing of the 66 books of the Bible, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

The word of the Lord was very clear when He told Moses or other prophets to write down the information they received in a book. Moses was told: „And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." (Exodus 17, 14.); „Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel."(Deuteronomy 31, 19); „Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel." (Deuteronomy 31, 22); „And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." (Deuteronomy 31, 24-26).

The king or psalmist David, to keep the remembrance, was told: „This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD." (Psalms 102, 18).

The prophet Jeremiah was told: „Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day." (Jeremiah 36,2), and to Habakkuk he commands: "And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make *it* plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." (Habakkuk 2, 2.

The invention of writing is the event that marks the dividing line between prehistory and human history. The first forms of writing are thought to be drawings from prehistoric times, but they are obviously not writing as such, but rather representations that are on the borderline between art and writing. The cave drawings of prehistoric people are the first attempt to preserve their life history for future generations. The people of those times were hunters, because at that time their main occupation and livelihood was hunting, so they expressed themselves through depictions of various animals, but in this sense the animal depictions in the Lascaux cave (French Grotte de Lascaux in France (Curtis, 2006) are considered an example of protoscription, but the first actual writing is attributed to the Sumerians. The Shish (Kish) tablet (Ross, 1930, p. 291-300; Yoffee, 1998, p. 312-343; Watelin, S. H. Langdon, 1925, p. 34) (in the Bible it is called Kush), dates from 3500 BC. It is the earliest artifact, which contains a proper script. In the middle of the fourth millennium BC the Sumerians began to use pictographs to write their language. With pictographs they could write down objects, but not abstract concepts. At first the writing consisted of various images on clay tablets, but later it was stylised and in time developed into symbols in the shape of nails (cuneiform), hence the name cuneiform writing (André-Leickman, Ziegler, 1982, p.100-101).

The collections of tablets discovered at the end of the 19th century are the oldest library in the world, which also contains the oldest medical treatise. Sumerian writing included 500 signs, which designated syllables and logograms, or word signs, representing an object or action, a formula or a phrase. Over time they were replaced by abstract cuneiform symbols (Giovannini, 1989, p. 36-37). Writing was vertical, from right to left. Later, on larger tablets, they chose horizontal writing, from right to left. Writing was carried out by professionals called scribes. The scribal profession was hard enough, because it took several years of learning to perfect this cumbersome writing, which included so many signs, but it was precisely this that gave them a privileged social position. In order to maintain this position, to make it harder and harder for them to write and thus to become scribes, they made Sumerian writing very complicated, which made it even more difficult to access culture.

In the Egyptian culture obsessed with the cult of the dead, writing was also influenced by this obsession and as a result was used to write the magical texts of the dead in the idea that it would protect them in the world of the dead, in the world of Osiris. This is how pyramid texts, sarcophagus texts or the book of the dead were written. This cultural peculiarity led to the rapid development of writing, which became a true scribal art. At the same time, writing strengthened the Egyptian monarchy by recording the deeds of the pharaohs, always in praise of them.

Egypt knows, as the first form of writing, hieroglyphs (André-Leickman, Ziegler, 1982, p.150), a sign that combines the ideogram, i.e. sign-word, with the phonetic sign, i.e. sign-sound (Loprieno, 1995, p. 11; (Allen, 2000; Collier & Manley,1998; Faulkner, 1962; Gardiner,1973).

But although there were enough signs, an alphabet was not made. As in ancient Hebrew writing, the Egyptians wrote only consonants, and vowels were under-understood. Egyptian hieroglyphs were written and read from left to right, right to left and top to bottom depending on which direction they were pointing. This writing adorned funerary objects and monumental buildings of rulers, but it was very slow writing because it took a long time to execute. That is why for everyday writing a simplified type of signs was imposed, which the Greeks called hieratic writing, i.e. holy writing, which towards the end of its existence was used only for religious texts. Hieroglyphic and hieratic writing coexisted for a long time. In the last centuries of Egyptian civilization, hieratic writing was replaced by a writing that could be executed much faster, a writing that the Greeks called demotic writing (Kaiser, 1985, p. 236-246; (Depuydt, 1999, p. 686-687; Quirke, 1988; Ray, 2007; Solé, 1999; Parkinson, 2005), which at first was used only for private documents, but over time became established in the official system and became the writing commonly used in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.

The development of writing in the Egyptians is also related to the medium on which texts were written. In the marshes along the Nile, papyrus grew, a plant from the stem of which the Egyptians made so-called papyrus paper (Wethered, 1937). It outlasted clay tablets, and the Egyptians were thus able to develop their writing and perpetuate their intricate hieroglyphic characters throughout their civilisation. As for the scribes (Reynolds, Wilson, 1991), they played an important role in the immortalisation of the royal court and therefore received preferential treatment. One such form of protection for them was that they were not obliged to do military service.

It is interesting to note that archaic writings have also been found on the territory of our country, discovered in Transylvania, in the locality of Tărtăria, in Alba county, a locality situated between Alba Iulia and Orăștie, a discovery made in 1961 by the team of the researcher Nicolae Vlassa from Cluj. Three clay tablets were discovered, which gave historians food for thought, and some even concluded that these writings could be older than the Sumerian writings, generally considered by historiography to be the oldest writings in the world. The three tablets have been studied and analysed by the German scholar Harald Haarmann and dated to around 5,300 BC (Haarmann, 2002, p.20).

The phonetic alphabet appeared relatively late, without knowing exactly where and by whom it was invented. Some scholars believe that the earliest letterforms were derived from hieroglyphic writing. In the Mediterranean area, the evolution of writing reached its peak when a 20-30 letter system was developed to write a language. By the middle of the 2nd millennium BC, two forms of alphabet were present, the cuneiform alphabet of Ugarit (now Ras Shamra) in present-day Syria and the linear Phoenician alphabet. The Phoenician alphabet, which dates from around 1000 BC, was long thought to be the basis for many of today's alphabets, such as Latin, Greek and Hebrew, but this hypothesis was abandoned after the discovery of the Ugaritic alphabet in 1920. Clay tablets dating from around 1300 BC were discovered. Some were inscribed with a known cuneiform script and others with an unknown script. Most scholars believe that the Greek alphabet was

formed after the adoption of the Phoenician alphabet (Stampolidis and V. Karageorghis, 2003, p. 263-276; Johnston, 2003, p. 263-276; Kristophson, 1974, p. 4-128; Macrakis, 1996, p. 265). The earliest Greek inscriptions date from 770-750 BC and correspond to Phoenician characters (Swiggers, 1996, p.261-270).

The novelty of the Greek alphabet, however, lies in the existence of different signs for both consonants and vowels (Verbrugghe, 1999, p. 499-511; Voutiras, 2007, p.266-276) With the expansion of Alexander Macedon's empire (Tudor, 1968; Stearns, 2001), Greek culture spread throughout the Mediterranean basin.

The Library of Alexandria (Olesen-Bagneux, 2014, p. 3–13; Stille, 2002, pp. 246–273; Macleod, 2010; Bagnall, 2002; Tocatlian, 1991, p.255–269), founded in 300 BC, brought together the manuscripts of the great Greek thinkers, but they disappeared in three fires, the one in 48 BC during the Roman Civil War (Batstone, 2006; Morstein-Marx, 2007, p.159–178), when Pompey and Caesar fought in the area. The fire that partially destroyed the library in 391 AD, following the decree of Emperor Theodosius to outlaw pagan religions, and the fire of 650 AD during the Arab conquest. With the destruction of the library, many papyri, which could tell the story of the alphabet as well as Greek wisdom, were lost forever.

In the territory covered by the Roman Empire, signs of the Mycenaean alphabet's penetration have been found, but the appearance of alphabetic writing appeared towards the end of the 8th and 7th centuries BC. From the Chalcedonian alphabet that originated on the island of Euboea in Greece, the Etruscan alphabet emerged. The Romans took over the Chalcedonian alphabet, but it is not known whether they did so through the Etruscans (Lana, 1969, p.18).

The earliest inscriptions in Chinese script are dated to 1500 BC and feature ideograms not found elsewhere in antiquity. The evolution of Chinese script is complicated and is marked by various changes in the form of characters. The spoken language split into many dialects, and writing was the only one that helped communication between linguistically divided areas (Conti, Lamera, 1981, p.66).

Taking into account the area where our ancestors lived, we mention that there are many local and foreign voices that consider that the oldest writing in Europe and maybe even in the world is the one on the tablets of Tartharia, discovered in 1961.There are three clay tablets, two of which have different, incised marks, being pierced. The third tile has a pictographic script in that it has a stylised goat, a plant symbol and another that is unclear. The two disc-shaped tablets contain four groups of signs, separated by lines, and are considered to be closer to true writing. Many of the signs are found in the letters of archaic Greek inscriptions, but also in Phoenician, Etruscan, Old Italic and Iberian scripts. It should be noted that the subject of the Tartarean tablets has a much higher frequency of citation in scientific and archaeological articles than most archaeological artefacts.

The German researcher Harald Haarmann, dated them to 5000 BC, long before the Sumerian writing. But because these tablets were burnt in a kiln and their carbon content

is too low, it is difficult to pinpoint an exact date, which has led to differing opinions. Some believe that the Tarthara discoid tablets are forgeries, while others believe that writing was invented in south-eastern Europe and not in Mesopotamia. But there are also those who believe that the objects were brought from the Near East, through economic or other connections. Other tablets similar to the Romanian ones have been found in Bulgaria, but they have been dated to the third millennium BC. Deciphering the tablets from Tartharia is impossible at this point, because even if the phonetics of the signs were known, the word combinations are innumerable and a much larger number of tablets would be needed to decode the language.

When we talk about the development of writing, we see that it differs according to the place where it was produced and in this way it helped the progress of society. Thus, the face of the world changed and through complex and long-lasting developments, alphabets and writing signs were perfected into the forms we know today. The writing is divided according to language families and speaks of the historical journey of each people.

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