

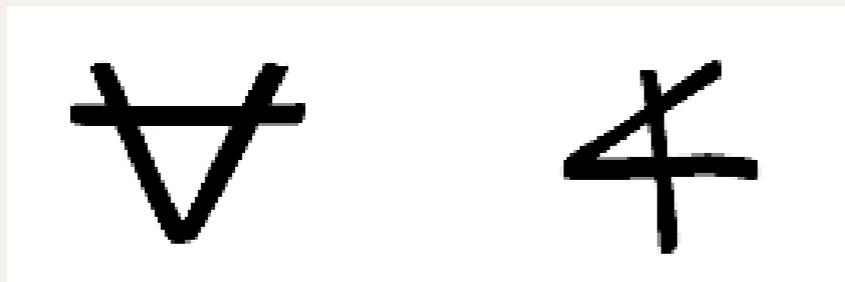
A Brief History of Type

The Origin of the Typographic Form

The written word is the primary method of communication in our culture. Its primary elements, the characters of the modern alphabet, were once literal symbols of everyday objects which were gradually abstracted to the letters of the alphabet.

3500 BC: While cave paintings, dating as far back as 20,000 B.C. are the first evidence of recorded pictures, true written communication is thought to have been developed some 17,000 years later by the Summerians, around 3500 B.C. They are known to have recorded stories and preserved records using simple drawings of everyday objects, called *pictograms*.

Pictograms evolved into the letters of the alphabet



*Early symbol
for "ox"*

*Phoenician
"aleph"*



Greek "A"



Roman "A"

c. **3150 BC:** The earliest known written documents are impressed clay tablets from Sumer. The impressions represent clay tokens, which were used for record keeping before the invention of writing.



3100 BC: Egyptian hieroglyphics incorporated symbols representing thoughts or ideas, called *ideograms*, allowing for the expression of more abstract concepts than the more literal pictograms.

Roman numerals are considered to contain ideograms: I, II, and III representing fingers of the hand, V the open hand, and IV the open hand minus one finger.

c. **3000 BC:** Cuneiform, a very early writing system utilizing wedge-shaped marks on clay tablets, was invented by the Sumerians.

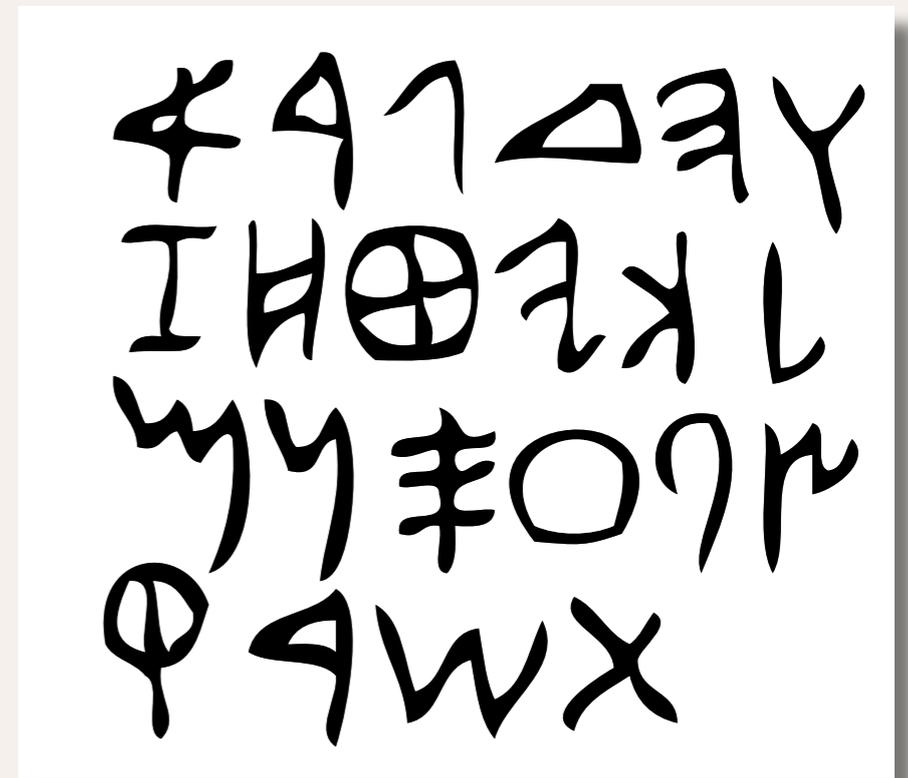
c. **2500 BC:** Egyptians begin to make papyrus, a new writing material derived from the stems of the papyrus plant.

c. **1600 BC:** The Phoenicians had developed symbols for spoken sounds, called *phonograms*. For example, their symbol for ox, which they called aleph, was used to represent the spoken sound “A” and beth, their symbol for house, represented the sound “B”. In addition to sounds, phonograms could also represent words.

The alphabet

It is the Phoenicians who are generally credited with developing the first true alphabet— a set of symbols representing spoken sounds, that could be combined to represent spoken language.

- c. **1000 BC:** Primarily a seafaring merchant society, they traded with many cultures, spreading their alphabet throughout the Western world. Around 1,000 B.C., the Phoenician alphabet was adapted by the Greeks, who developed the art of handwriting in several styles. The word “alphabet” comes from the first two Greek letters alpha and beta.
- c. **160 BC:** Parchment, a new writing material made from animal skins, is developed in the Greek state of Pergamum.
- A.D. 100:** Several hundred years later, the Romans used the Greek alphabet as the basis for the uppercase alphabet that we know today. They refined the art of handwriting, fashioning several distinctive styles of lettering. By A.D. 100, the Romans had developed a flourishing book industry and, as Roman handwriting continued to evolve, lower case letters and rough forms of punctuation were gradually added.



c. 1500 BC: The twenty-two characters of the Phoenician alphabet.

c. 50 BCE – AD 500: Roman square capitals (capitalis quadrata) were written with a flat pen.

MARTIS Q̄ DOLO

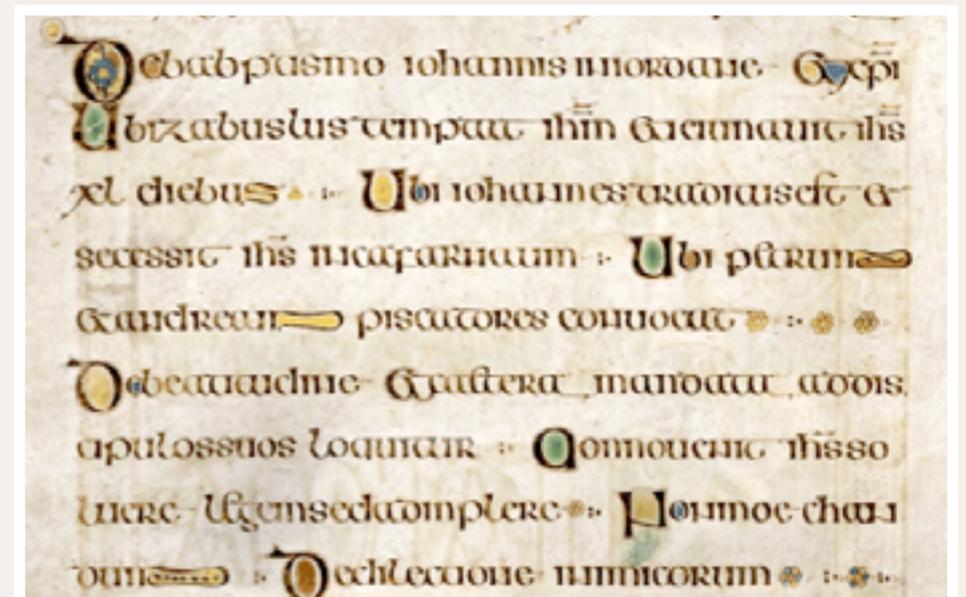
AD 105: Ts'ai Lun invents paper in China.

150: The Roman codex, with folded pages, begins to be used alongside the rolled scroll.

c. 400–1400: During the thousand-year medieval era, knowledge and learning are kept alive in Christian monasteries, where manuscript books are lettered in scriptoria. Manuscript preparation developed into a specialized, highly regarded craft and came to be practiced chiefly in monasteries. Books were objects of immense value, and contained elaborate ornamentation. Illuminated, or illustrated, initials were painstakingly designed and incorporated into exactingly rendered text. It was not uncommon for a monk to devote an entire lifetime to the completion of a single manuscript.



c. 800: *The Book of Kells*



868: The earliest extant printed text, of the Diamond Sutra, is printed in China.

c. 1034: Bi Sheng (Pi Sheng) invents movable type in China. The world's first movable type printing press technology for printing paper books was made of ceramic porcelain china materials and invented in ancient China during the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127).

Moveable type and printing

Fifteenth century: Woodblock printing probably appeared in Europe before 1400. The fifteenth century was a pivotal time for written communication. Manuscripts were treasured possessions which rarely appeared outside monasteries or the courts of royalty. The written word was reserved for the privileged few. In fact, less than one-tenth of the European population could read.



1498 : Albrecht Dürer woodcut

c. 1440 - 1450: In Mainz, Germany, Johann Gutenberg changed the course of the written word. While Gutenberg is often credited with inventing both the printing press and metal type, he, in fact, did neither. Printing had been practiced for several hundred years in China and for at least several decades in Europe. Type had been cast successfully, albeit crudely, several years earlier in the Netherlands. What Johann Gutenberg did do was make these technologies practical.

He perfected a workable system of moveable type, developing an ingenious process employing a separate matrix, or mold, for each alphabet character, from which metal types could be hand-cast in great quantities. These types could then be assembled into a page of text, and imprinted to paper via special inks and a printing press of his own design. For the first time, a technical system of mass production was applied to publishing.

The next 50 years witnessed an explosion of printing throughout Europe and, by the year 1500, more than 10 million copies of nearly 3500 works were printed and distributed. An unprecedented diffusion of technical and social knowledge spread throughout the Western world and the education of the masses had begun.



Metal, movable type

1609: Regular weekly newspapers appear in Strasbourg, Germany.

1709: England adopts the first copyright law.

1775: James Watt constructs the first efficient steam engine.

1791: American Bill of Rights guarantees freedoms of religion, speech, and *the press*.

1796: Aloys Senefelder invents lithography, allowing the printing of more complex imagery, such as continuous tone artwork or photographs. Lithos, meaning 'stone', and graphein, meaning 'to write', is a method of printing based on the immiscibility of oil and water. The printing is from a stone or a metal plate.

1799: Nicolas-Louis Robert invents the papermaking machine.

The nineteenth century and the Industrial Revolution: 1800–1899

1814: Friedrich Koenig invents the steam-powered printing press.

1822: Joseph-Nicéphore Niépce produces the first photographic printing plate.

1826: Joseph-Nicéphore Niépce takes the first photograph from nature.

1827: Darius Wells invents the mechanical router, making the manufacture of large display wood types possible.

1856: Sir Henry Bessemer develops process for converting iron to steel.

1866: The first successful transatlantic cable is laid.

1867: Christopher Sholes constructs the first practical typewriter.

1876: Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone.

1877: Thomas Edison invents the phonograph.

1879: Thomas Edison invents the electric lightbulb.

1886: Ottmar Mergenthaler invents the Linotype, the first keyboard typesetting machine.



1887: Tolbert Lanston invents the Monotype machine.

1895: The Lumière brothers give the first motion-picture presentation.

1980s: Digital typography and computer technology impact typographic design, leading to electronic page design.

1981: Bitstream founded; first independent digital type foundry.

1984: Apple Macintosh computer, first laser printer, and PageMaker page layout software are introduced.

1986: Fontographer software makes possible font design on desktop computers.

1994: Netscape founded, early Web browser.

2007: iPhone is released igniting the proliferation of smart phones

