

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

The History of the Alphabet from its Invention in 2000 BCE through Arabic Writing - 25933

Last update 12-10-2015

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 2nd degree (Master)

Responsible Department: hebrew language & jewish languages

Academic year: 0

Semester: 1st Semester

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Aaron Koller

Coordinator Email: koller@yu.edu

Coordinator Office Hours: Thursday, 12-1

Teaching Staff:

Prof Aaron Koller

Course/Module description:

The course will survey alphabetic writing from the invention of the alphabet in c. 2000 BCE through Arabic writing in the second half of the first millennium CE.

Course/Module aims:

Students will understand why the alphabet was revolutionary, and the cultural connections in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean that allowed it to develop and migrate to all parts of this region.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

Students will be able to identify various scripts, to describe a writing system as a system, and to relate to writing as a cultural artifact.

Attendance requirements(%):

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction:

Course/Module Content:

What is "writing"?
Major non-alphabetic writing systems of the Ancient Near East
Mesopotamian cuneiform
Egyptian hieroglyphs and hieratic
The invention of the alphabet in an Middle Kingdom Egyptian context
Wadi el-Hôl inscriptions
Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions
Proto-Canaanite texts and the second millennium BCE
The Ugaritic adaptation of the alphabet
El-Khadr arrowheads
The Phoenicians and the spread of the alphabet
Advantages to the alphabet?
The alphabet in ancient Israel
Ophel pithos
Qeiyafa inscriptions
Adoption of the Phoenician script

Mismatches between the Phoenician alphabet and the Hebrew phonological system
Literacy and scribal education in ancient Israel:

Early Aramaic scripts

Other Iron Age Levantine scripts

The alphabet as an alphabet, and not a writing system

The South Semitic scripts

The Greek alphabet

Developments within Jewish society in the first millennium BCE

Latin script and writing

Punic: Phoenician in the Roman world

Jewish scripts through the Roman period

Development of Aramaic scripts

Syriac

Nabatean and Arabic

Nabatean

Arabic

Earliest Qur'an

Jewish thought about the alphabet

Required Reading:

Textbook: Joseph H. Naveh, Early History of the Alphabet: An Introduction to West Semitic Epigraphy and Paleography (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997 [first edition 1982]).

1. What is "writing"?

I. J. Gelb, A Study of Writing (rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1-59.

Typology

Frank Moore Cross, "Alphabets and Pots: Reflections on Typological Method in the Dating of Human Artifacts," Maarav 3 (1982), 121-136, reprinted in Cross, From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 233-245.

Naveh, Early History of the Alphabet, 1-12 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית 1-12.

Stephen A. Kaufman, "The Pitfalls of Typology: On the Early History of the Alphabet," Hebrew Union College Annual 57 (1986), 1-14.

2. Major non-alphabetic writing systems of the Ancient Near East

Mesopotamian cuneiform

Egyptian hieroglyphs and hieratic

Naveh, Early History of the Alphabet, 13-22 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית 13-22.

3. The invention of the alphabet in an Middle Kingdom Egyptian context

Alan Gardiner, "The Egyptian Origin of the Alphabet," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 3 (1916), 1-16.

Gordon J. Hamilton, *The Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet in Egyptian Scripts* (CBQMS 40; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 2006), 269-322.
Orly Goldwasser, "Canaanites Reading Hieroglyphs: Horus is Hathor? – The Invention of the Alphabet in Sinai," *Ägypten und Levante* 16 (2006), 121-160.
Benjamin Sass, "השמי האלפבית וראשית התיכונה הממלכה בימי זרים שמות של המצרית הכתיבה", *מעריב*, 20 Israel Eretz (1989), 44-50.
Benjamin Sass, "The Genesis of the Alphabet and its Development in the Second Millennium B.C.: Twenty Years Later," *de Kêmi à Birīt Nāri: Revue internationale de l'Orient Ancien* 2 (2004-2005), 147-166.

4. Wadi el-Ḥôl inscriptions

John Darnell, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, Marilyn J. Lundberg, P. Kyle McCarter, Bruce Zuckerman, and Colleen Manassa, *Two Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from the Wadi el-Hol: New Evidence for the Origin of the Alphabet from the Western Desert of Egypt* (Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 2005), 63-124.
David S. Vanderhooft, "Wadi el-Ḥôl Inscription 2 and The Early Semitic Alphabetic Graph *ḡ, *ḡull-, 'yoke'," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2 (2013), 125-135.

5. Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 23-42 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית 23-41.
William F. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and Their Decipherment* (Harvard Theological Studies 22; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).
Frank M. Cross, "The Invention and Development of the Alphabet," in *The Origins of Writing* (ed. Wayne M. Senner; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 77-90.
Joseph Lam, "The Invention and Development of the Alphabet," in *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and Beyond* (ed. Christopher Woods; Oriental Institute Museum Publications 32; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2010), 189-195.
Aren Wilson-Wright, "Interpreting the Sinaitic Inscriptions in Context: A New Reading of Sinai 345," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2 (2013), 136-148.

6. Proto-Canaanite texts and the second millennium BCE

Frank Moore Cross, Jr. and Thomas O. Lambdin, "A Ugaritic Abecedary and the Origins of the Proto-Canaanite Alphabet," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 160 (1960), 21-26.

Byblos syllabary

Itamar Singer, "Cuneiform, Linear, Alphabetic: The Contest Between Writing Systems in the Eastern Mediterranean," in *Mediterranean Cultural Interaction* (ed. Asher Ovadiah; Howard Gilman International Conferences II; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2000), 23-32.

The Ugaritic adaptation of the alphabet

Dennis Pardee, "The Ugaritic Alphabetic Cuneiform Writing System in the Context of Other Alphabetic Systems," in *Studies in Semitic and Afroasiatic Linguistics Presented to Gene B. Gragg* (ed. Cynthia L. Miller; SAOC 60; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2007), 181-200.

El-Khadr arrowheads

Lachish, Bet Shemesh, and Izbet Şarṭah inscriptions

Ryan Byrne, "The Refuge of Scribalism in Iron I Palestine," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 345 (2007), 1-31.

"The Satire on the Trades: The Instructions of Dua-Khety." In *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*. Edited by William Kelly Simpson.

Seth L. Sanders, "What Was the Alphabet For? The Rise of Written Vernaculars and the Making of Israelite National Literature," *Maarav* 11 (2004), 25-56.

Seth L. Sanders, "Writing and Early Iron Age Israel: Before National Scripts, Beyond Nations and States," in *Literate Culture and Tenth-Century Canaan: The Tel Zayit Abecedary in Context* (ed. Ron Tappy; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 97-112.

7. The Phoenicians and the spread of the alphabet

Advantages to the alphabet?

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 52-63 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 51-60.

Phoenician trade and communication

Phoenician royal inscriptions

Christopher A. Rollston, "The Dating of the Early Royal Byblian Phoenician Inscriptions: A Response to Benjamin Sass," *Maarav* 15 (2008), 57-93, 109-112.

Israel Finkelstein and Benjamin Sass, "The West Semitic Alphabetic Inscriptions, Late Bronze II to Iron IIA: Archeological Context, Distribution and Chronology," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2 (2013), 149-210.

8. The alphabet in ancient Israel

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 64-78 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 61-76.

Haggai Misgav, "3 מקרא עת ח' וישראלים פיניקים, כנענים: בית זה-ת"ב, שור-ף"אל," (2015).

Ophel pithos

Eilat Mazar, David Ben-Shlomo, and Shmuel Ahituv, "An Inscribed Pithos From The Ophel, Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 63 (2013), 39-49.

Qeiyafa inscriptions

For the first inscription, from among the many articles, see Reinhard Achenback, "The Protection of Personae Miserae in Ancient Israelite Law and in the Ostrakon from Khirbet Qeiyafa," *Semitica* 54 (2012), 93-125.

For the second, short, inscription, see Yosef Garfinkel, Mitka Ratzaby Golub, Haggai Misgav, and Saar Ganor, "The 'Išba'al inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 373 (2015), 217-233.

Adoption of the Phoenician script

Kefar Veradim bowl: Yardenna Alexandre, "A Canaanite-Early Phoenician inscribed bronze bowl in an Iron Age IIA-B burial cave at Kefar Veradim, northern Israel," *Maarav* 13 (2006), 7-41.

Gezer Calendar(?)

Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel* (Archaeology and Biblical Studies 11; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 19-82.

Mismatches between the Phoenician alphabet and the Hebrew phonological system: Richard C. Steiner, "On the dating of Hebrew sound changes ($\text{h} > \text{h}$ and $\text{g} > \text{'}$) and Greek translations (2 Esdras and Judith)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005), 229-267.

Literacy and scribal education in ancient Israel:

Richard S. Hess, "Writing About Writing: Abecedaries and Evidence for Literacy in Ancient Israel," *Vetus Testamentum* 56 (2006), 342-346.

Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel*, 91-114, and in greater detail, Rollston, "Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: The Old Hebrew Epigraphic Evidence," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 344 (2006), 47-74.

9. Early Aramaic scripts

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 79-100 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 76-99.

10. Other Iron Age Levantine scripts

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 100-112 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 100-110.

11. The alphabet as an alphabet, and not a writing system

Ugaritic evidence

Reinhard Lehmann, "27 – 30 – 22 – 26: How Many Letters Needs an Alphabet? The Case of Semitic," in *The Idea of Writing: Writing Across Borders* (ed. Alex de Voogt and Joaquim Fredrich Quack; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 11-52.

Abecedaries

Andreas Willi, "Cows, Houses, Hooks: The Graeco-Semitic Letter Names as a Chapter in the History of the Alphabet," *The Classical Quarterly* 58 (2008), 401-423.

Biblical acrostics

Mitchell First, "Using the Pe-Ayin Order of the Abecedaries of Ancient Israel to Date the Book of Psalms," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38 (2014), 471-485.

Robert B. Salters, "Acrostics and Lamentations," *On Stone and Scroll* (2011) 425-440

Babylonian text

12. The South Semitic scripts

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 43-51 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 42-50.

13. The Greek alphabet

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 175-186 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 169-180.

Roger D. Woodard, "Greek-Phoenician Interaction and the Origin of the Alphabet," in

Mediterranean Cultural Interaction (ed. Asher Ovadiah; Howard Gilman International Conferences II; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2000), 33-51.

Barry B. Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Philippa M. Steele, "Greek Writing Systems," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics* (ed. Georgios K. Giannakis; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2.140-146.

14. Developments within Jewish society in the first millennium BCE

Lachish 3

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 112-124 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 111-121.

David S. Vanderhooft, "el-mēdînâ ûmēdînâ kiktābāh: Scribes and Scripts in Yehud and in Achaemenid Transeuphratene," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 529-544.

Rabbinic traditions about Ezra; Shlomo Naeh, "ל"חז בדברי התורה כתב על" (א) המסורת: על החלפת הכתב בידי עזרא, 70 *Leshonenu* (2008), 125-143.

15. Latin script and writing

Rex Wallace, "The Origins and Development of the Latin Alphabet," in *The Origins of Writing* (ed. Wayne M. Senner; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 121-135.

W. Sidney Allen, "Appendix C: The Names of the Letters of the Latin Alphabet," in *Vox Latina — a guide to the pronunciation of classical Latin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Punic: Phoenician in the Roman world

Robert M. Kerr, "Phoenician-Punic: The View Backward—Phonology versus Paleography," in *Linguistic Studies in Phoenician: In Memory of J. Brian Peckham* (ed. Robert D. Holmstedt and Aaron Schade; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 9-29.

16. Jewish scripts through the Roman period

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 162-174 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 157-168.

17. Development of Aramaic scripts

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 125-153 &eq; תולדותיו ראשית, 122-147.

Ryan Byrne, "Asia, Ancient Southwest: Middle Aramaic Scripts," in *Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics* (2nd edition; ed. Keith Brown; Boston: Elsevier, 2006), 1.505-509.

Syriac

Early inscriptions

Dura Europos

18. Nabatean and Arabic

Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*, 153-162 & תולדותיו ראשית, 148-156.

Nabatean
Babatha
Petra

Arabic

Beatrice Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts: From the Nabatean Era to the First Islamic Century* (Harvard Semitic Studies 43; Cambridge: Harvard Semitic Museum, 1993).

Beatrice Gruendler, "Arabic Script: Origin," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* (ed. Kees Versteegh; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1.148-155.

David Testen, "On the Arabic of the 'En 'Avdat Inscription," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 55 (1996), 281-292.

James A. Bellamy, "The Arabic Alphabet," in *The Origins of Writing* (ed. Wayne M. Senner; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 91-102. Early from Israel?

Earliest Qur'an

Dan Bilefsky, "A Find in Britain: Quran Fragments Perhaps as Old as Islam," *New York Times*, July 22, 2015.

19. Jewish thought about the alphabet

Jewish encounter with the Greek alphabet: Number of books in the Bible – Darshan, Tarbiz

Albert van der Heide, "Mem and Samekh Stood by a Miracle: The Sugya on the Hebrew Script (Shabbat 103a-104a)," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 38/39 (2005/2006), 137-143.

Sid Z. Leiman, "אבודה בינימית-ימי אגדה של עקבותיה: הלטיני האלפבית של הרבניים מקורותיו" in שמע-תא מ' ישראל לזכרו היהדות במדעי מחקרים: שמע-תא ח (ed. Avraham [Rami] Reiner, Moshe Idel, Moshe Halbertal, Joseph Hacker, Ephraim Kanarfogel, and Elhanan Reiner; Alon Shvut: Tevunot/Herzog, 2011), 525-531.

Felicia Waldman, "The Mystical and Magical Power of Numbers and Letters in the Jewish Tradition," *Biblische Notizen* 137 (2008) 75-104.

Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah, Hieroglyphicity and Hieroglyphs," *Kabbalah* 11 (2004), 11-47.

Additional Reading Material:

Course/Module evaluation:

End of year written/oral examination 0 %

Presentation 0 %

Participation in Tutorials 20 %

Project work 0 %
Assignments 30 %
Reports 0 %
Research project 50 %
Quizzes 0 %
Other 0 %

Additional information: