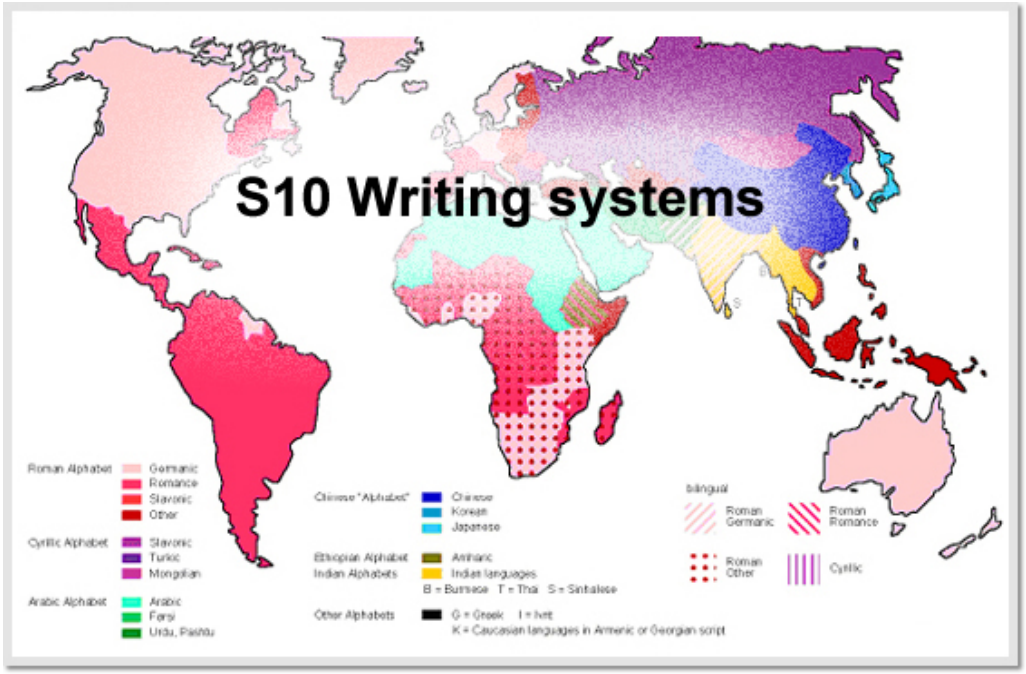

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The content of this module is based on teaching materials by Tjeerd Tichelaar (2003). These teaching materials are made available in the "documents" section.

The module contains the following chapters:

Introduction
Chapter 1: ***Meaning, sound*** and ***looks***
Chapter 2: ***Scripts,*** the ***graphics*** of language
Chapter 3: Script ***development***
Chapter 4: ***Division*** of scripts
Chapter 5: ***Basic unit*** *of writing*
Chapter 6: ***Persistence*** of ***logograms***
Chapter 7: ***Ideographic*** and ***logographic*** sripts
Chapter 8: ***Syllabic*** scripts
Chapter 9: ***Alphabetic*** scripts
Chapter 10: ***Non-Roman*** scripts
Chapter 11: ***Biscriptual*** map
Chapter 12: ***Greek*** and ***Roman*** alphabets

When reading through the following pages, you will come across some uncommon terms. These terms are hyperlinked to the UNGEGN Glossary of Terminology (pdf). Behind each term a number (#) is given that corresponds to the numbering applied in this glossary, e.g. toponymy (#344).

For exercises and documents (and literature) on this topic see respectively the "Excercises" and/or the "Documents section of this module.

The complete module can be downloaded here.

S10: Writing systems

INTRODUCTION

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This chapter shows the semantic, phonetic and graphic aspects of language. It traces the development of the graphic aspects from Sumeria 3500BC, from logographic or ideographic via syllabic into alphabetic scripts resulting in a number of script families. It gives examples of the various scripts in maps (see underlined script names) and finally deals with combination of scripts on maps.

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1. MEANING SOUND AND LOOKS

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What ***is*** the name?

a) Is it what it ***means***?

b) Is it what it ***sounds***?

c) Is it what it ***looks***?

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1. MEANING SOUND AND LOOKS - *A) MEANING: THE SEMANTIC ASPECT*

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- As long as a name is what it means, both its sound and its looks (spelling) are only relevant as far as they support the meaning.
- The name 'Nederland' is wat it means to our neighbours: 'Low country'. So they translate it for instance into 'Pays-Bas' (French) or Netherlands (English) or Niederlande (German), even though that does neither sound nor look like 'Nederland'.
- To Romans and Italians, however, the names Qart Hadasht and Neapolis had never been what they meant ('new towns'). So they became what they sounded: Carthago (to the Roman ear) and Napoli.

For more information click

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INFORMATION

1. MEANING SOUND AND LOOKS - *A) MEANING: THE SEMANTIC ASPECT*

Semantically, names carry a meaning at the time they are coined. Because of its meaning as 'ford on the Roman road', there could, at least to local people, be no misunderstanding about the location of the settlement named Stratford. The meaning may be lost in the course of time, either because the language the name springs from is no longer current, or because the name itself degenerates to such an extent that its meaning can no longer be recognized. More often, the original meaning ceases to be appropriate. The Greek settlement named Neapolis or 'New Town' by its founders, to set it apart from the 'old town' they had fled (neighbouring Kymai, that had been established six or seven generations earlier by colonists from the Ionian city state of Chalcis), retained its Greek name as it was incorporated in the Roman republic in the 4th century BC. As long as Greek remained the (local) official language in Roman Neapolis, which it did for about seven more centuries until the reign of Constantine the Great, the name of the city, its meaning still being understood, was fairly safe. After that, the state language Latin, in a regional variety spoken for long by the majority of the commoners in the city, replaced Greek as the language of administration. To the speakers of the regional variety of Latin, that consequently developed into the Romance Napolitan language (or dialect), the meaning of Neapolis was lost; to its citizens, the city actually appeared ancient instead of new. Kymai had completely been overshadowed even before the Romans came; what remained of it was, ironically, destroyed by the Napolitans in the early 13th century. The name Neapolis ultimately degenerated into Napoli in the Napolitan and Italian languages that succeeded Latin as the language of administration (the latter actually as late as the 19th century).

Unlike the Latin-speaking heirs of Napoli, new foreign-language users of existing names are occasionally known to make efforts to retain the meaning of a name after its language has been discarded. Translation of names was never a Roman policy - another famous 'New Town', the Phoenician colony of Qart Hadash, was also incorporated into the empire under its own native name, be it in this case latinized into 'Carthago' - but was very popular during the manifold changes of sovereignty between the new national states of 19th and 20th century Eastern and South-Eastern Europe: examples are Austrian Karlsbad changing into Czech Karlovy Vary, Hungarian Újvidék becoming Croat Novi Sad. An example outside Europe, but equally associated with the emergence of national sentiments, is the translation of Spanish Casablanca (itself a translation of Portuguese Casa Branca - the Portuguese founded the place in 1515) into Arabic ad-Dar al-Bayda'. In other cases, name changes following transfer of ownership explicitly reflect a change in the meaning the object has to the new owner compared to the one attached to it by his predecessor. The seaport city of Reval was just a 'little sand bank' to its Danish founders in 1219. Although it successively passed into Teutonic (1346), Swedish (1561), and Russian hands (1710), it was allowed to retain its name; but upon the emergence of the independent Estonian nation-state in 1917, the town now chosen to be the nation's capital reverted to a co-existing Estonian appellation reflecting what it had from the beginning on meant to the Estonians: the 'Danish fortress' (Tan-linn, through the centuries contracted to Tallinn).

1. MEANING SOUND AND LOOKS - *B) SOUND: THE PHONETIC ASPECT*

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- As soon as a name is what it sounds, its meaning has become irrelevant. Its looks (spelling) then may or may not be adapted to its sound.
- The dominance of the phonetic aspect to a name (the 'oral tradition') allows the name to degenerate graphically.
- Eventually, the name may be adapted semantically to its perceived sound, through a process called 'popular etymology'.

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INFORMATION

1. MEANING SOUND AND LOOKS - *B) SOUND: THE PHONETIC ASPECT*

Phonetically, names consist of a succession of vocal sounds that as a whole reminds the recipient of the objects they represent. The very fact that names do degenerate - only incidents like Roma, Cremona, Capua (Latin) and Argos (Greek) are known to have subsisted through larger spans of time without phonetic damage, and even these did so only after they became latinized c.q. hellenized - indicates that the sound aspect has for long been dominant above both the semantic and the graphic aspects in determining the evolution of names. This dominance can be explained by the heavy dependence on oral communication in 'passing the word' throughout history, and, in connection with this, maybe by the role played by the well-trained auditive memory in the process of learning/memorizing information conveyed through language.

It has been demonstrated earlier that the phonetic qualities of a name can lead to misinterpretation and thus influence the evolution of the name itself. The generic element '-wic' (settlement) in the Anglo-Saxon name of York, Eoforwic, was misunderstood as '-vík' (bay) by the Danish invaders taking over the settlement in the 9th century, demonstrating that the mere suggestion of phonetic recognition was enough for the Danes to set aside any semantic objections against this interpretation: the town they named after a 'bay' was then, as it is now, situated at a solid inland location. Likewise, the Anglo-Saxons before them had misunderstood the specific element 'ebur-' (yew-tree) of the preceeding Brythonic-Roman name Eburacum as 'eofor' (wild boar), also resulting in semantic mutilation of the original name. The latter is an example of a very commonly occurring process called popular etymology, in which the historic background of a name is reconstructed without taking into account the rules of phonetic change as they are known by historical linguists, resulting in erroneous semantic interpretations and, in the worst case, wrongful (hyper)correction of the name.

As long as names were predominantly transmitted through oral communication, their graphic representation showed little stability. The need of (ortho)graphic standardization was rarely felt, and both between and within documents names referring to the same object could be spelled in different ways. The fact that this was considered acceptable suggests that written documents were essentially meant to support oral transaction: when reading it aloud, the exact orthography of the name, as of any word, was of little relevance.

It is a fairly recent development that writing takes absolute preponderance over the spoken word. More than in the past, public administration pervaded into all segments of social and economic life. A completely new situation was created by the introduction of computers in the administrative processes. Unprecedentedly, the computer made it possible to process graphic data, translated into digital code, without human intervention in the form of (phonetic) reading, As the pronouncing, understanding and correcting human interpreter was by-passed, this short-circuiting of the linguistic data interpretation process necessarily demanded a stricter than ever graphic standardization.

1. MEANING SOUND AND LOOKS - *C) LOOKS: THE GRAPHIC ASPECT*

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- Ultimately, graphic forms have taken preponderance over phonetic forms.
- Graphic forms do thus no longer degenerate. Gloucester remains Gloucester, and Edinburgh will always be Edinburgh, whatever it has got to sound like (Glouster, Edinbro). The names are what they look like!.

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INFORMATION

1. MEANING SOUND AND LOOKS - *C. LOOKS: THE GRAPHIC ASPECT*

The need for graphic representation of the sounds of language became felt when the span of time and distance of man's utterances was requested to exceed the physical limitations of the speaker. An administration of greater volume and complexity than that what an individual was able to remember, required some kind of notation that could be separated from that individual and that specific point in time. The embryonic predecessors of writing were most likely systems of notation of administrative data, consisting of numbers and… names. The data taken down were trade and cadastral data, that, as it was foreseen, needed to be remembered and consulted at a yet unknown point in the future, by a yet unknown individual. Once proven successful, these systems held a promise to allow local rulers to spread their word, and thus their law and authority, beyond the range of their voice and muscles. The first known scripts thus developed in the Sumerian city states of the late 4th millennium BC, and enabled these local centres of power to grow into territorial states exceeding the vision of the central ***zigurrat*** (tower). Shortly after this innovation was introduced in Sumeria, an elaborate script emerged on the banks of the Nile, where a powerful centralized Egyptian empire was about to see the light.

Whether the idea of writing spread throughout the world from one Sumerian origin or it emerged independently in different cultures, the development of writing systems seems to follow a universal sequence from purely pictorial representation (pictograms) to sets of abstracted sound-representing symbols (***phonograms***). Pictograms convey meaning without intervention of sound values; there may be a symbol meaning 'town', 'river' or 'mountain' irrespective of what the word for 'town', 'river' or 'mountain' sounds like, and thus regardless of any specific language. Such a symbol is named a ***logogram***. The advantage of logograms is their universal applicability - because they are language-independent - but they have the obvious disadvantage that there must be a separate symbol for every word. A system consisting of pictograms only cannot be expected to be completely learned and memorized by anyone, as only a limited number of concrete substantives could possibly be represented by naturally drawn pictures.

All complete writing systems the world has ever known, from the highly pictorial Egyptian hieroglyphs to the modern alphabets, do effectively contain both logograms and phonograms. As purely pictorial 'proto-scripts' develop into 'scripts' or writing systems, naturally drawn pictograms are stylised and augmented with drawings for abstract phenomena (hence called ***ideograms***), and will ultimately contain logograms for all basic words of a specific language. Phonograms are developed out of logograms through a process starting with the ***rebus*** principle: the sound values (in a specific language!) of mono-syllabic words are attached to the logograms representing these words, thus creating a phonetic syllabary or syllabic script. A fully syllabic script would contain as many symbols as the language it is used for contains syllables. A syllabary can develop further into an alphabetic system, in which single phonemes (units of sound) instead of syllables are represented by symbols - thus requiring even less symbols. Alphabets may contain both the consonants and the vowels used by a language, or be consonantal (containing consonants only). To the symbols (***letters***) of consonantal alphabets, the vowels following consonant sounds may, either optionally or obligatory, be added to the letters by diacritical marks (***vocalization***), as may certain phonetic modifications of the consonants (nasalization, aspiration etc.).

As said, even in alphabetic scripts some logograms persist: examples are the ciphers (0,1,2,…, in English: 'one', 'two', 'three'…) and signs like + (in English: 'plus'), - (in English: 'minus'), & (in English: 'and'), and, recently added, @ (in English: 'at').

2. SCRIPTS, THE GRAPHICS OF LANGUAGE

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The cradle of most of the modern phonographic scripts is the Middle East. The oldest known Sumerian and Egyptian pictographic inscriptions considered to be scripts date from the 4th millennium BC.

- Scripts were developed to extend man's scope and range.
- Pictograms: purely pictorial symbols.
- Pictograms were used to represent the concepts (ideograms) or words (logograms) they represented.
- Ultimately, logograms develop into phonograms, in which the sound value (phoneme) of mono-syllabic words is attached to the symbols representing these words.
- Finally the syllabic script develops into an alphabetic script in which symbols represent single phonemes instead of syllables.

Universal sequence from purely pictorial representation (***pictograms***) to sets of abstracted sound-representing symbols (***phonograms***).
Pictograms convey meaning without intervention of sound values; there may be a symbol meaning 'town', 'river' or 'mountain' irrespective of what the word for 'town', 'river' or 'mountain' sounds like, and thus regardless of any specific language. Such a symbol is named a ***logogram*** (*pictogram for a specific word*). The advantage of logograms is their universal applicability – because they are language-independent – but they have the obvious disadvantage that there must be a separate symbol for every word.

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3. SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

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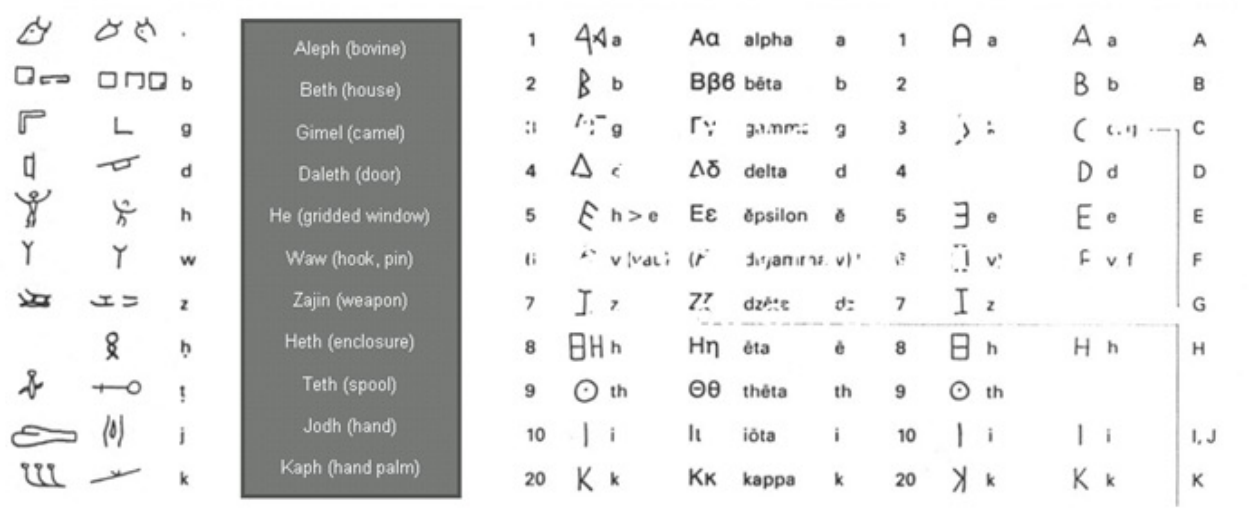

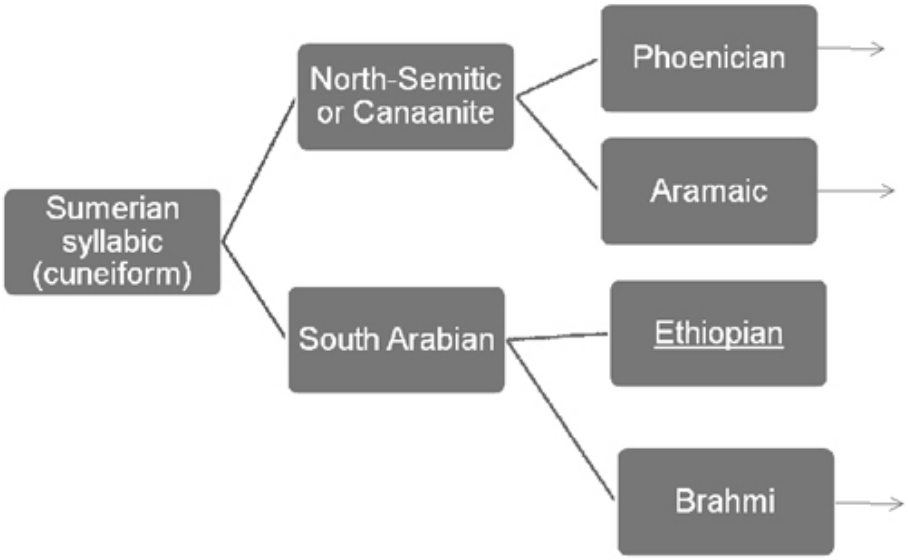

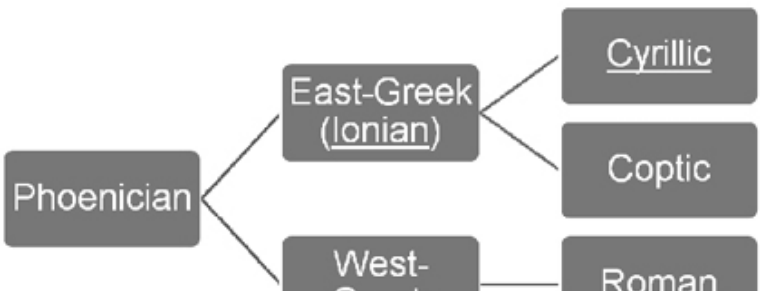

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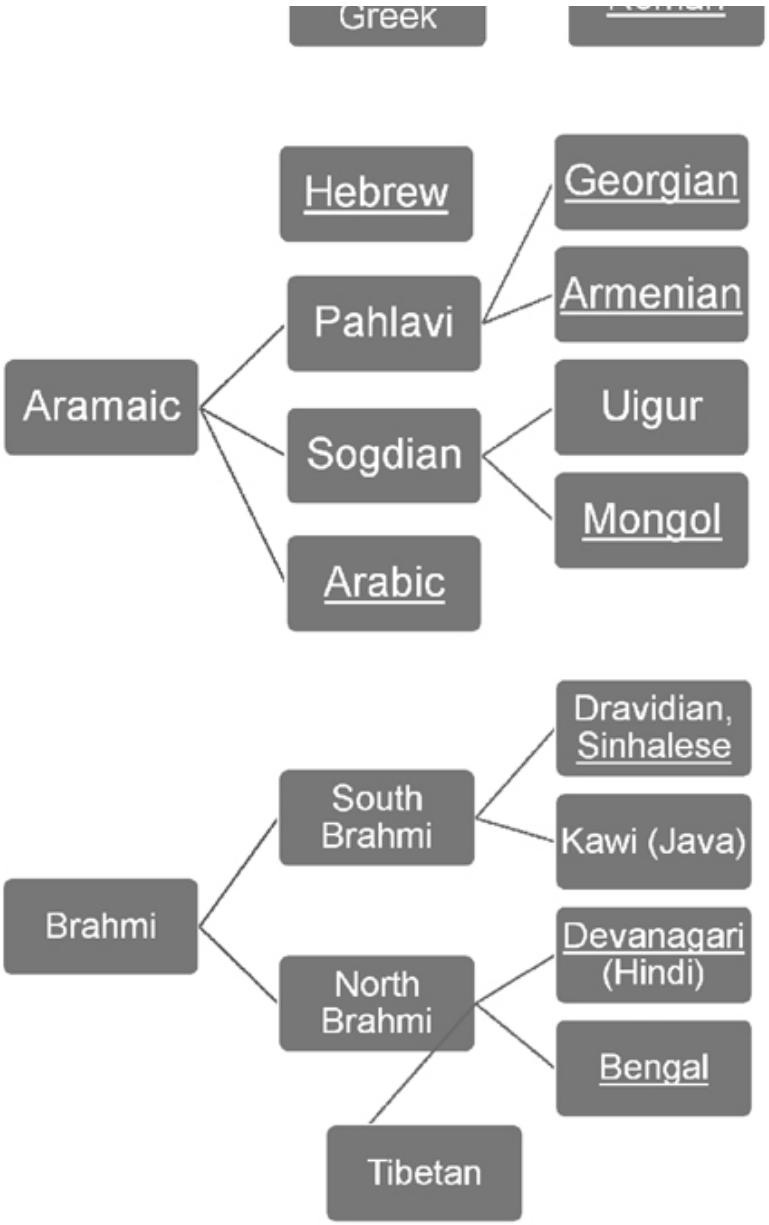

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4. DIVISION OF SCRIPTS

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- Ideographic scripts – Egyptian, Chinese
- Syllabic scripts -Ethiopian, Japanese
- Alphabetic scripts-vocalised Greek, Roman
- Alphabetic non-vocalised scripts - Arabic, Hebrew

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5. BASIC UNIT OF WRITING

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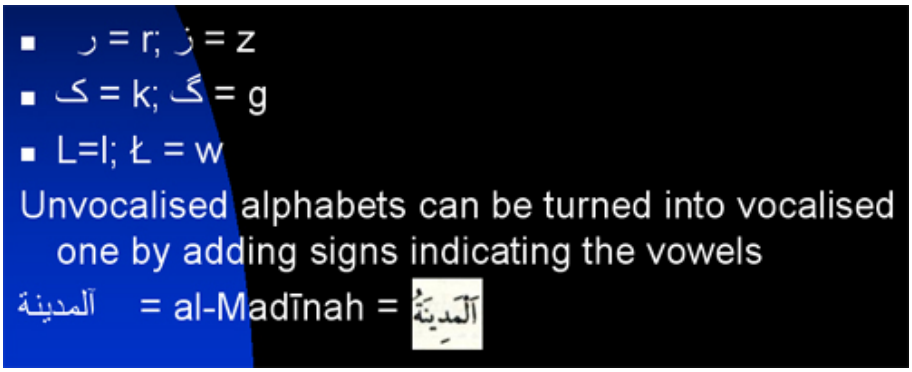
Basic unit of writing = character.

Characters represent either:

- Phonological entities - Vowel / Consonant / Syllable
- Morphological entities - Words

Basic characters can be differentiated by markers, that can change their meaning or their phonetic value (sound). We call these markers diacritical sounds.



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6. PERSISTENCE OF LOGOGRAMS

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Even in alphabetic scripts some logograms persist:

Examples are:

- the ciphers (**0**,**1**,**2**,…, in English: 'one', 'two', 'three'…) and
- signs like **+** (in English: 'plus'), **-** (in English: 'minus'), **&** (in English: 'and'), and, recently added, **@** (in English: 'at').

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7. IDEOGRAPHIC AND LOGOGRAPHIC SCRIPTS

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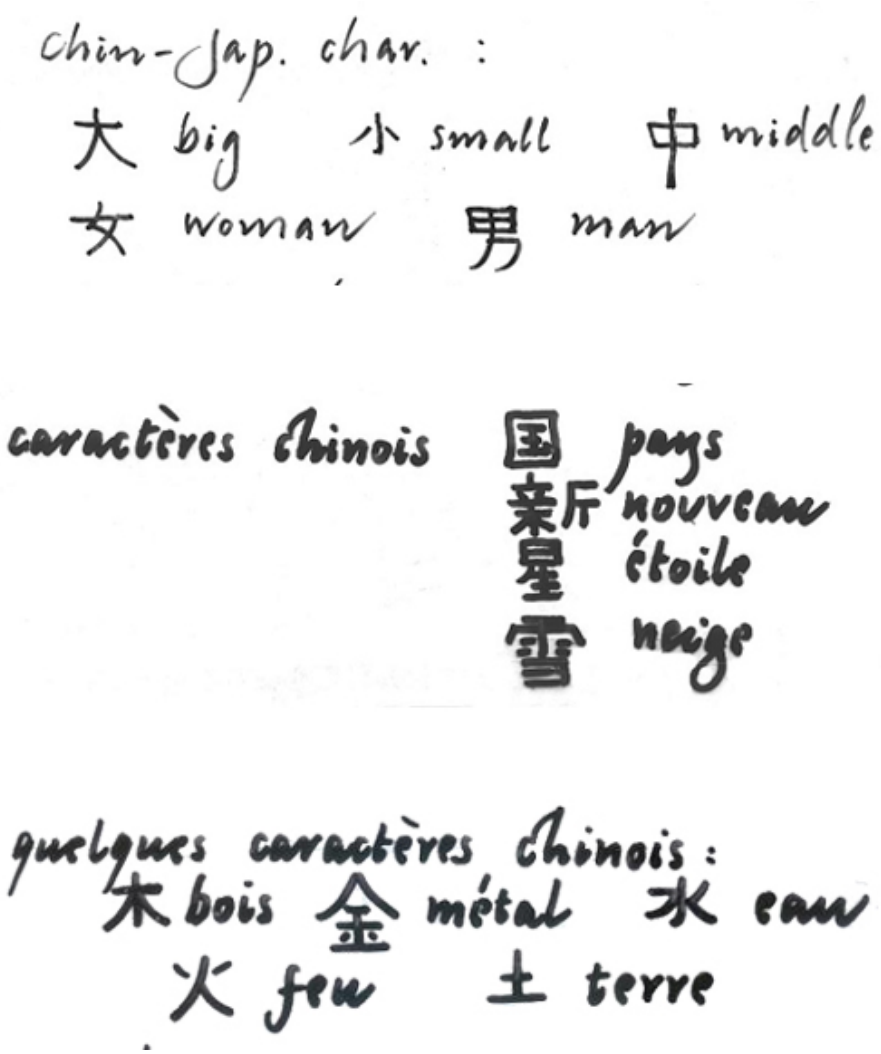
Sumerian scripts 3500 BC
Egyptian hieroglyphs 3000BC
Chinese script: 1500 BC

At first pictograms represented physical objects only, later also ideas, and finally the pictograms lost the meaning of the objects depicted but came to represent the sound of its spoken form, and so turned into phonograms.

Chinese:



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Japanese:

- Kanji script: 3000 chinese characters found their way into Japan, but found a different pronunciation there.

- Kadmon:

Chinese characters but differing in pronunciation. As an example, the character for mountain, 山 , which originally was stylized from the pictogram ⺼ , is 'shan' in Mandarin Chinese and pronounced either 'san' or 'yama' in Japanese, depending on the context. 富士山 is Fuji San, Mt. Fuji – or Fuji Yama, as it is usually called in the West, but not by the Japanese. 中 , middle, is zhong in Chinese but naka in Japanese. 中山 Nakayama (written as one word in romanization, but as two logograms in Japanese Kanji) is the name of both a town and a river in Shikoku Island, Japan. The same characters, but pronounced Zhongshan, represent the name of a town in southern China (and a park in Shanghai). The early pictogram for the sun, ⊙ , was stylized into 日 , as was mentioned above in connection with Chinese. Japan, country of the rising sun, is written 日本 in Kanji logographic characters and pronounced Nippon (or Nihon, depending on context; the second character is pronounced hon e.g. in the name of the island of Honshu). 京 , kyō, is a capital in Japanese; to, 都 designates a city or an urban area. Kyōto, 京都 , was the former capital. 東 tō, is east, as was shown above. Tōkyō is therefore written 東京 and means eastern capital – the name given to the former town of Edo ("estuary") after Emperor Meiji transferred the Japanese capital eastwards in 1868. The same 京 character, pronounced in Chinese jing, has the same meaning, e.g. in 北京 , Beijing, northern capital – as against 南京 Nanjing, southern capital, and 東京 , Dongjing, eastern capital – which is Tōkyō!

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8. SYLLABIC SCRIPTS

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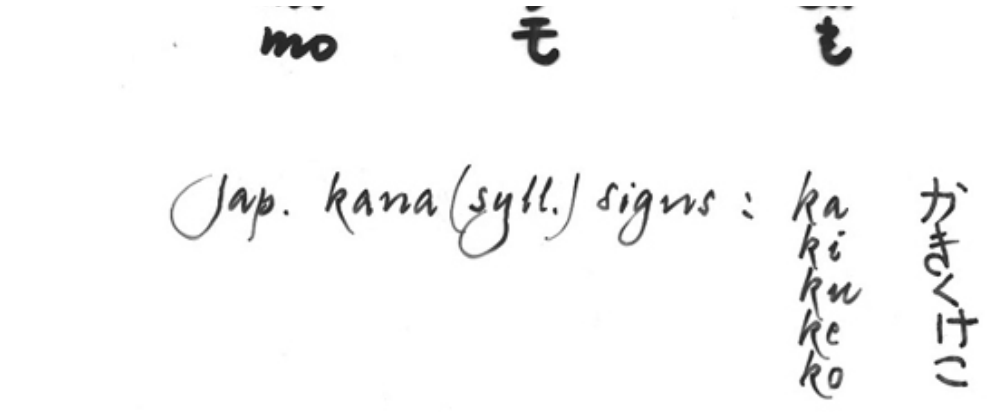
- Syllabogram is a graphic character representing a syllable = unit of pronunciation consisting of one vowel sound and one or more consonants
- In its simplest form, syllabograms are combination of each consonants with each of the vowels discerned: ba, be, bi, bo, bu, by, etc.
- As compared to the enormous number of characters in ideographic scripts this is a huge simplification, but, the advantage of the link to concepts or objects for each character is lost.

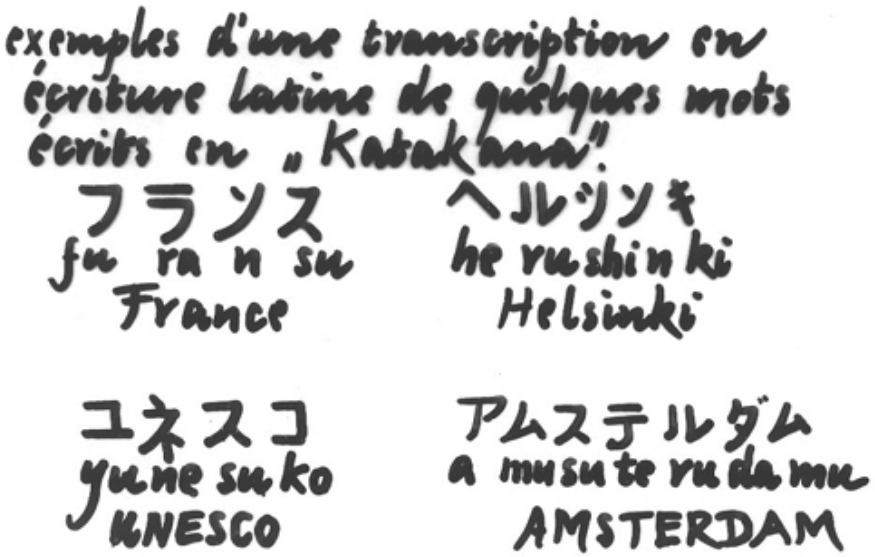
A	ア	カ	サ	タ	ナ	ハ	マ	ヤ	ラ	ワ	ガ	ザ	ダ	バ	パ
B	あ	か	さ	た	な	は	ま	や	ら	わ	が	ざ	だ	ば	ぱ
C	a	ka	sa	ta	na	ha	ma	ya	ra	wa	ga	za	da	ba	pa
D			'												
A	イ	キ	シ	チ	ニ	ヒ	ミ		リ		ギ	ジ	ヂ	ビ	ピ
B	い	き	し	ち	に	ひ	み		り		ぎ	じ	ぢ	び	ぴ
C	i	ki	si	ti	ni	hi	mi		ri		gi	zi	zi	bi	pi
D			shi	chi								ji	ji		
A	ウ	ク	ス	ツ	ヌ	フ	ム	ユ	ル		グ	ズ	ヅ	ブ	プ
B	う	く	す	つ	ぬ	ふ	む	ゆ	る		ぐ	ず	づ	ぶ	ぷ
C	u	ku	su	tu	nu	hu	mu	yu	ru		gu	zu	zu	bu	pu
D				tsu		fu									
A	エ	ケ	セ	テ	ネ	ヘ	メ		レ		ゲ	ゼ	デ	ベ	ペ
B	え	け	せ	て	ね	へ	め		れ		げ	ぜ	で	べ	ぺ
C	e	ke	se	te	ne	he	me		re		ge	ze	de	be	pe
D															
A	オ	コ	ソ	ト	ノ	ホ	モ	ヨ	ロ		ゴ	ゾ	ド	ボ	ポ
B	お	こ	そ	と	の	ほ	も	よ	ろ		ご	ぞ	ど	ぼ	ぽ
C	o	ko	so	to	no	ho	mo	yo	ro		go	zo	do	bo	po
D															
A		ン													
B		ん													
C		n													
D															

Fig. 14. Japanese syllabary (y-forms omitted). A – Katakana, B – Hiragana, C – Kunrei romanization, D – Syusei Hebon (modified Hepburn) romanization.

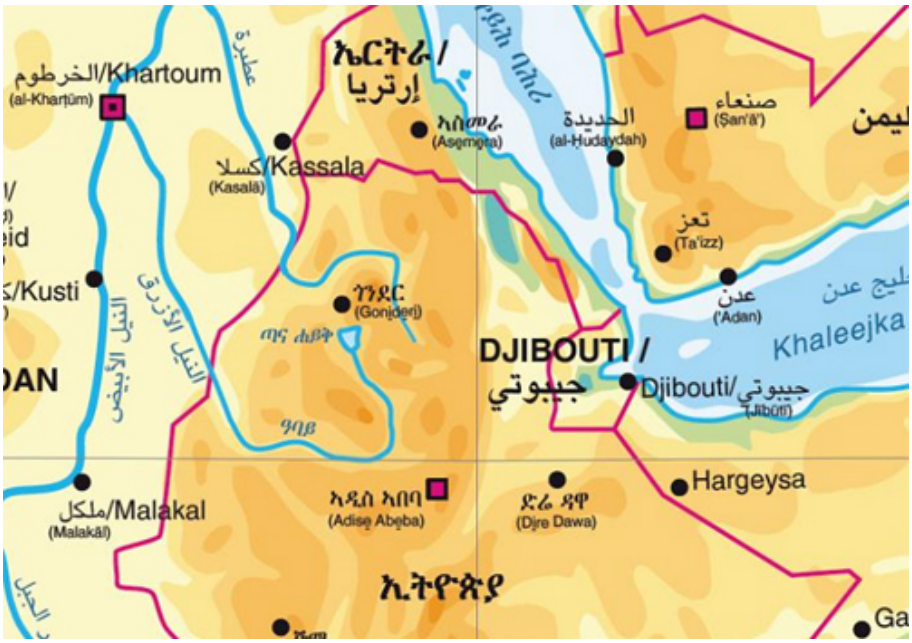
Japan:



Examples of a transcription in Roman script of some words written in “Katakana”.



Amharic is a syllabic script.



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9. ALPHABETIC SCRIPTS

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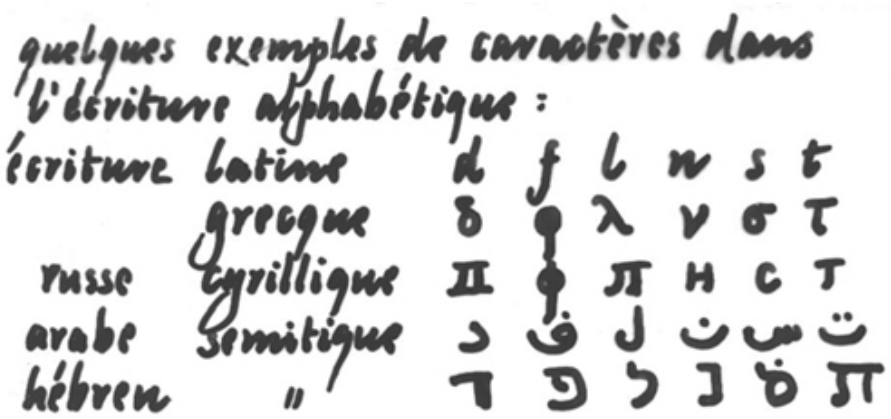
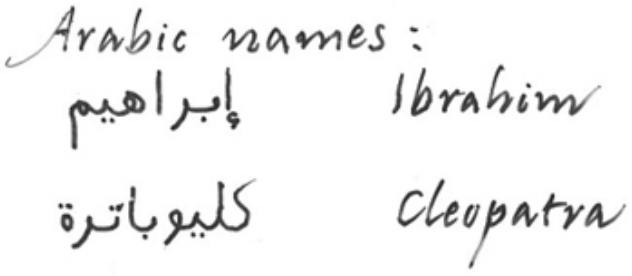
- ***Vocalised:*** Roman, Cyrillic, Greek, Devanagari (Hindi)
- ***Non-vocalised***: Arabic, Hebrew

Different consonants in alphabetic scripts



Arabic script (non-vocalised), Morocco.



10. NON-ROMAN SCRIPTS

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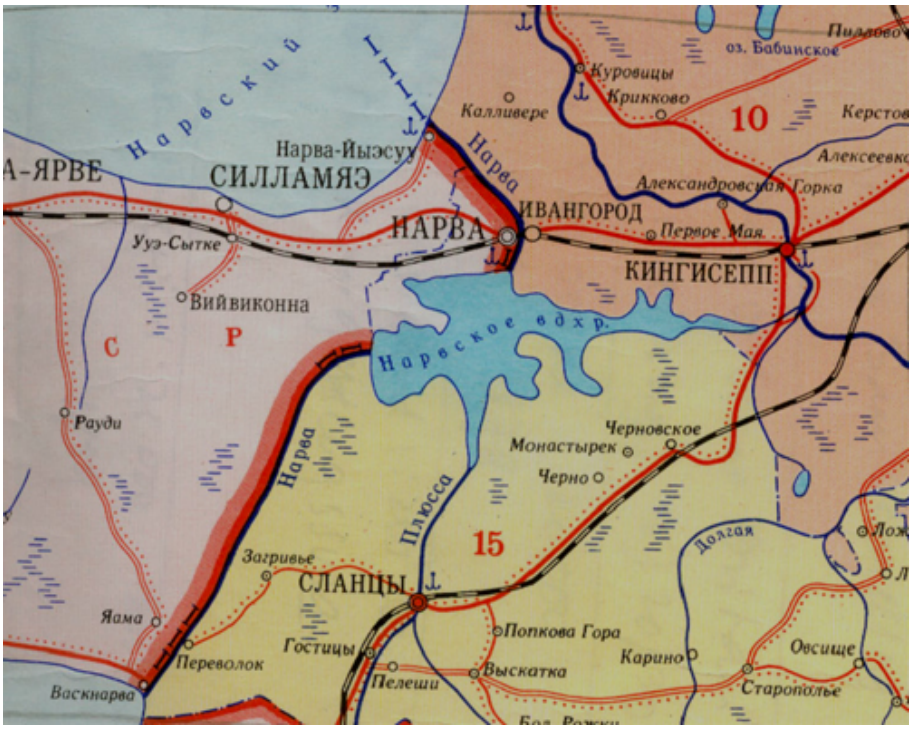
A letter in Devanagari has the default vowel of /**a**/. To indicate the same consonant followed by another vowel, additional strokes are added to the letter:

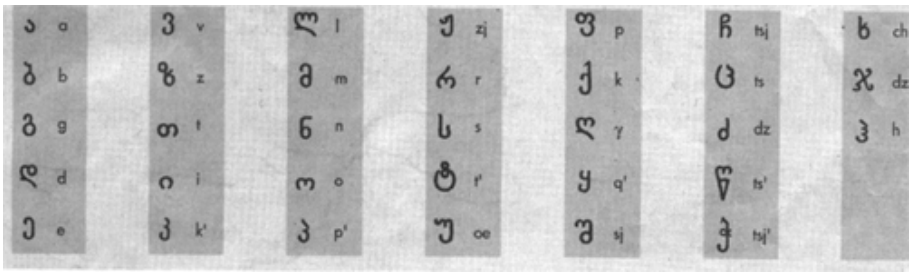
प pa

पि pi

Cyrillic:



Georgian:



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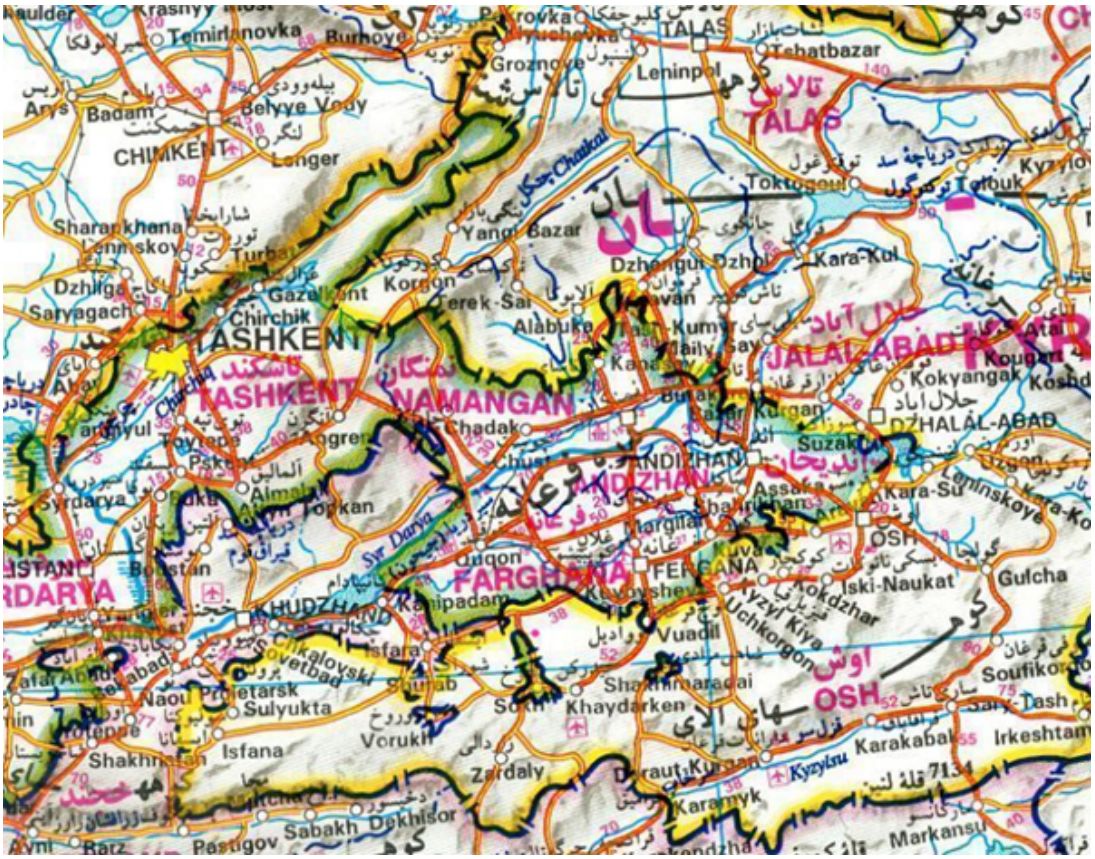

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12. GREEK AND ROMAN ALPHABETS

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Alphabets of unknown origin are, or were in a not too distant past, in use for the ***Berber*** language ***Tuareg*** (Tafinagh, a consonantal script possibly derived from the ancient Numidian alphabet), and some regional languages in Indonesia: ***Batak*** (in North Sumatra) and ***Buginese*** (in Southwest Celebes). The latter is supposed to have had its origins in Java, and thus be related to the scripts of Southern India.

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AVAILABLE EXERCISES

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Exercise 1: Identifying writing systems

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EXERCISE 1: IDENTIGYING WRITING SYSTEMS

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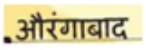
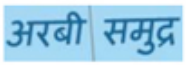
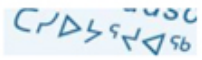
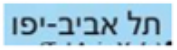
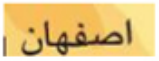
Identify the following writing systems: (toponym), writing system (language):

1.  .....
2.  .....
3.  .....
4.  .....
5.  .....
6.  .....
7.  .....
8.  .....
9.  .....
10.  .....
11.  .....
12.  .....

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EXERCISE 1: FROM GREEK TO THE ROMAN ALPHABET - *ANSWERS*

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Attikí	Lésvos
Achaïa	Lefkás
Boiotía	Magnisía
Grevená	Messinía
Dráma	Xánthi
Dodekánisos	Pélla
Evros	Piería
Eúvoia	Préveza
Eurytanía	Réthymnon
Zákynthos	Rodópi
Ileía	Sámos
Imathía	Sérrai
Irákleio	Tríkala
Thesprotía	Fthiótis
Thessaloníki	Flótina
Ioánnina	Fokís
Kavála	Chalkidikí
Kardítsa	Chaniá
Kastoriá	Chíos
Kérkyra	
Kefallinía	
Kilkís	
Kozáni	

Answers

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DOCUMENTS AND LITERATURE

Available documents:

- D10-01: Tichelaar, T. (2003). *Writing systems*. In: Training Course on Toponymy. Frankfurt am Main: Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie, pp 59-64.

Literature:

- Coulmas, F. (2003). *Writing systems: an introduction to their linguistic analysis*. Cambridge textbooks in linguistics.
- Daniels, P.T. & W. Bright (1996). *The world's writing systems*. Oxford University Press.
- Rogers, H. (2005). *Writing systems: a linguistic approach*. Blackwell textbooks in linguistics.
- Sampson, G. (1990). *Writing Systems: A Linguistic Introduction*. Stanford University Press, 1990.

Online resources:

- Wikipedia: Writing systems

The United Nations sell the following publications which also can be downloaded from the UNGEGN website:

- Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names (New York 2002) / pdf
- Manual for the national standardization of geographical names (UN - Ecosoc, New York, 2006 ST/ESA/STAT/SERM/88 Sales No. E.06.XVII.7 ISBN 92-1-161490-2, available in the 6 UN languages) / pdf
- Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names (New York, 2007) / pdf
- Resolutions adopted at the nine UN Conferences on the standardization of geographical names (English (pdf) / French (pdf)