

**A NOTE ON THE IDEA OF WRITING IN EGYPTIAN
HIEROGLYPHIC AND SUMERIAN CUNEIFORM**

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Scholars in the field of Egyptology and Sumerology have debated on the problem of the idea of writing. Some of them, e.g. Saggs, Frankfort, Gelb and Scharff stated that the idea of writing in Egyptian hieroglyphic is influenced by the Sumerians. Saggs says' "... The principle of writing (though not the technique) was certainly taken over by the Egyptians from Mesopotamia ..."¹ Gelb states Scharff's viewpoint in that problem and says "... Finally, we should refer to the recent investigations of A. Scharff, who proved that the forms of signs representing objects in the earliest Egyptian inscriptions correspond to the forms of objects in use about 3000 B.C. in Egypt. That means according to Scharff, that the Egyptian writing originated about 3000 B.C., i.e. in the period when the Mesopotamian influence was strongest, and thus supports the argument that the writing may have originated under the Mesopotamian influence ..."² Frankfort mentions that "... the Egyptians did not copy the Mesopotamian system slavishly; they were merely stimulated to develop a script of their own, once the notion that language could be rendered graphically had been conveyed ..."³ These points of view depend on the fact that there were Sumerian cultural and commercial influence in Egypt during the protodynastic period and especially the

1. Saggs, H.W.F. : *The Greatness that was Babylon*, London, 1962, p. 27.

2. Gelb, I.J. : *A Study of Writing, the Foundations of Grammatology*, London, 1952, p. 215, and note of., p. 283; Cf. *Die Entzichungszeit der ägyptischen hieroglyphenschrift in archäologischer Beleuchtung*", *Forschungen und Fortschritte*, XVIII, 1942, 172 p., with a fuller discussion in his *Archäologische Beiträge zur Frage der Entstehung der Hieroglyphenschrift*, (*Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philoshist. Abt.*, 1942, Heft 3).

3. Frankfort H. : *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East*, Bloomington, 1951, p. 107.

late Gerzian times. Such influence is demonstrated in the use of panelling in monumental architecture especially in the first Egyptian dynasty, as well as some artistic elements and four Sumerian cylinder seals. It is essential to state that among such Sumerian influence there is no clear evidence that the Sumerians have stimulated the Egyptians in order to invent the hieroglyphic writing.

On the otherhand, it is observed that the Sumerian chronology was reconstructed lately, and the written records are much later than they were originally assumed. ¹

Consequently a certain conclusion can be arrived at, that the Sumerians are not considered earlier than the Egyptians in inventing their pictorial script. That is in addition to the fact that the earliest Egyptian hieroglyphs could be traced in the early predynastic period at Naqqada ² before the arrival of the Sumerian cultural influence.

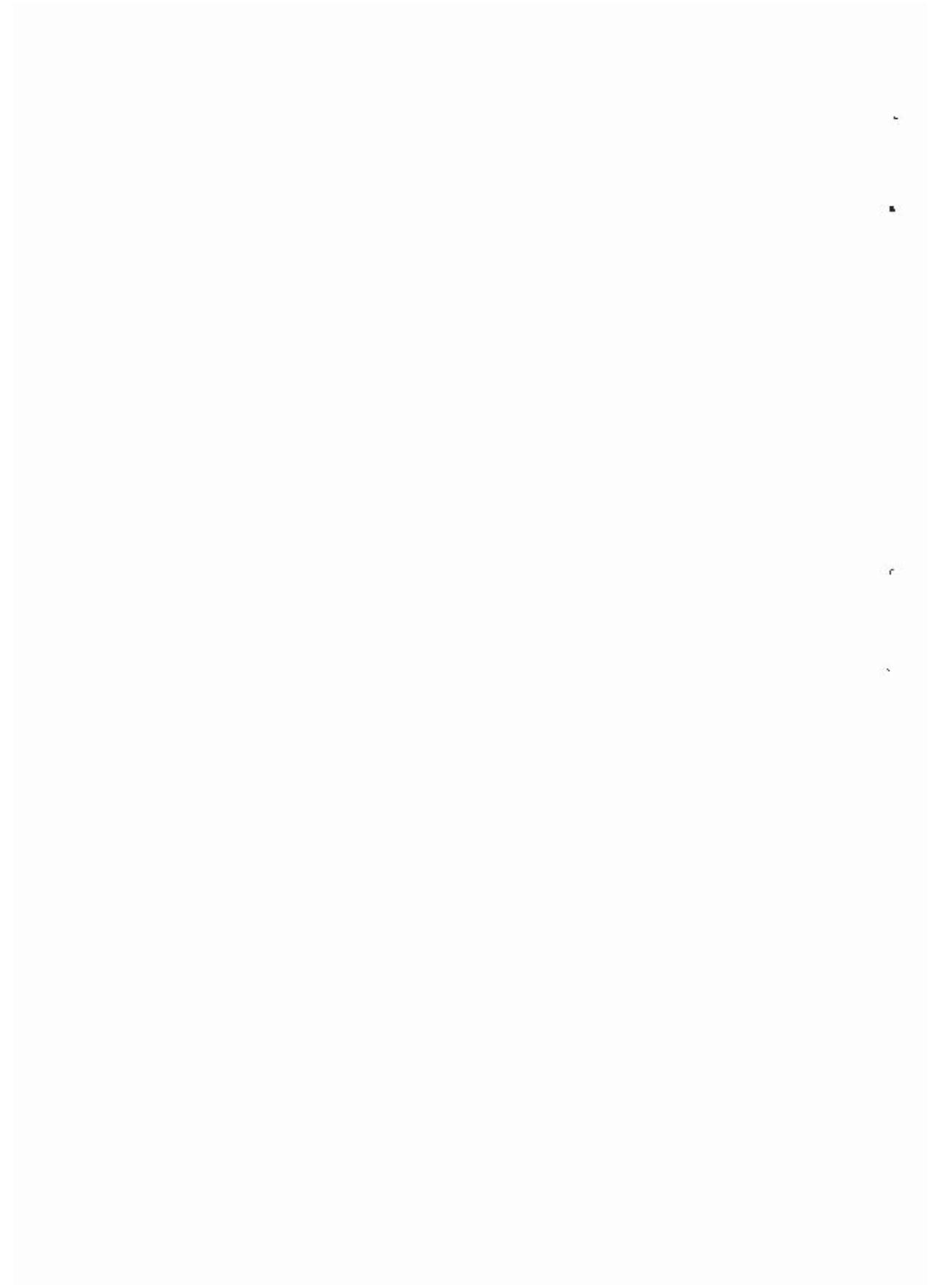
There are also other points which have to be considered in that problem. There is an agreement among scholars that the Egyptian hieroglyphic signs in their pictorial stage have a merely local development, expressing the Egyptian environmental features; on the otherhand the Sumerian early pictorial signs from Uruk demonstrate the Sumerian way of expression. Every culture had its own type of pictorial script ³ in its early stage of writing. The Egyptians normally express the detailed movements of the human being, while the Sumerians, on the contrary of the Egyptians, minimized such trend for the sake of commercial outlooks and especially marketing⁴. In the following I am trying to show the difference between Egyptian and Sumerian in pictorial writing, in some specific words.

That is aside from the differences in writing, etymology, syntax and grammar. So it is quite uneasy to accept the above mentioned statements that the idea of the early Egyptian hieroglyphic writing was influenced by Mesopotamian stimulation.

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1. Woolley, L. : "Ur of the Chaldees", History unearthed, London, 1963, p. 65.
 2. Petrie W.F. : Nagada and Ballas, pls. LVII.
 3. Jensen, H. : Die Schrift, Gluckstadt und Hamburg, 1935
 4. Falkenstein, A. : Das Sumerische, Leiden, 1959, p.7.

Meaning of the sign	Sumerian	Egyptian
Heaven	✱	
Side	┌	
Branches	Y	
Water	≡	
Bread	∩	
To drink		
	an	pt
	bar	wit
	pa	ḥt
	a	mw
	ninda ^{1b}	t
	nag	
		sw(r)i

1. Kramer S.W., "The World's oldest known prescription", CIBA Journal, No. 12



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