History of the Alphabet (01:013:115)

Course Syllabus

Instructor:	Charles G. Häberl, PhD	Office Hours:	Wednesdays at 3:30PM or by arrangement
Date & Time:	MW 04:30-05:50PM		
Location:	Scott Hall 205, CAC	Email:	haberl@rci.rutgers.edu
Office:	Lucy Stone Hall B310, CAC		

Short Description

History of the alphabet, from earliest inscriptions to development of Roman alphabet.

Long Description

The course covers the invention and diffusion of the alphabet from the earliest alphabetic inscriptions in the Near East to the development of the Latin script and beyond. Students will be introduced to the history of alphabetic writing through the most famous ancient inscriptions uncovered during excavations as well as the "typology" or study of the forms of the characters contained within them and their evolution over time.

Course Learning Objectives

During the course of the semester, we will address:

- the early history (and proto-history) of writing;
- the origin of the alphabet and its antecedents;
- the diffusion of alphabetic writing throughout the ancient world;
- typology, the science of distinguishing between different scripts.

By the end of the semester, you will have been introduced to some of the scholarly literature on these topics, and with the aid of your script chart, will have created a typology of ancient Mediterranean alphabets.

Religious Holiday Policy

It is University policy to excuse without penalty students who are absent from class because of religious observance, and to allow the make-up of work missed because of such absence. Examinations and special required out-of-class activities shall ordinarily not be scheduled on those days when religiously observant students refrain from participating in secular activities. Absences for reasons of religious obligation shall not be counted for purposes of reporting.

Students are advised to

- provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances *and*
- they are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule.

Assessment Plan and Grading

Student progress towards these learning goals will be assessed through participation in weekly discussion sections and a final project.

- Weekly Discussions will take place in class.
- The Final Project consists of a script chart comparing the forms of signs from different scripts over time, to illustrate the development of the letters of the alphabet from its earliest forms to their present shapes.

Academic Integrity

As defined by the university's Academic Integrity Policy (http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_2013.pdf), plagiarism is "the use of another person's words, ideas, or results without giving that person appropriate credit." To avoid even the appearance of plagiarism or cheating, kindly identify all direct quotations and even paraphrases from other people and other sources with an appropriate citation. This is especially critical for the assessment exercises. Due to their public nature, the theft of another person's original words or ideas has ramifications beyond the classroom.

Other Useful Information

Prerequisites: None.

Required Texts: None.

Readings: All other readings for the course can be found on the Sakai course website, under "Resources."

Absences: If for any reason you are unable to participate in the weekly discussion sessions or submit an assignment in a timely manner, please make use of the Rutgers Self-Reporting Absence Website, https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/ to keep me updated about your participation in the course.

Office Hours: Every Wednesday at 3pm, I will be to take your questions and elaborate further on the material covered during the lectures on a one-on-one basis. Please let me know in advance whether you'll be dropping in. I am also available at other times, online and in my physical office (Lucy Stone Hall B310 on the Livingston Campus) by arrangement.

Course Schedule

Lesson 1: Wednesday, October 21, 2015

Introduction to the Course

Lesson 2: Monday, October 26, 2015

Pre-Writing/Proto-Writing

Read: Daniels, "Ancient Near Eastern Writing Systems" (1996: 19–32)

Rudgley, "A New Rosetta Stone" (1999: 48–57); "The Signs of Old Europe: Writing or Pre-Writing?" (1999: 58–71); "The Palaeolithic Origins of Writing" (1999: 72–85)

Lesson 3: Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Cuneiform

Read: Michalowski, Cooper, and Gragg "Mesopotamian Cuneiform" (1996: 33–72)

Lesson 4: Monday, November 2, 2015

Hieroglyphs

Read: Ritner, "Egyptian" (1996: 73–86);

Goldwasser, "How the Alphabet Was Born from Hieroglyphs" (2010)

Lesson 5: Wednesday, November 4, 2015

Early Alphabetic Scripts

Read: O'Connor, "Epigraphic Semitic Scripts" (1996: 88–119);

Colless, "Proto-alphabetic inscriptions from the Wadi Arabah" (1996: 75–96)

Lesson 6: Monday, November 9, 2015

The Phoenician Script

Read: Torrey, "The Aḫīrām Inscription of Byblos" (1925: 269–279)

Lesson 7: Wednesday, November 11, 2015

The Aramaic Script

Read: Eco, "Conversation in Babylon" (1994: 92–94)

Häberl, "Arslan Tash Amulet No. 1 (AT1)"

Lesson 8: Monday, November 16, 2015

History of Hebrew and its Scripts

Read: Goerwitz, "The Jewish Scripts" (1996: 487–498);

Albright, "The Gezer Calendar" (1943: 16–26)

Lesson 9: Monday, November 23, 2015

The Phoenicians and the West

Read: Swiggers, "Transmission of the Phoenician Script to the West" (1996: 261–270);

Lesson 10: Wednesday, November 25, 2015

No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

Lesson 11: Monday, November 30, 2015

No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

Lesson 12: Wednesday, December 2, 2015

Vowels and the Greek Script

Read: Threatte, "The Greek Alphabet" (1996: 271–280);

Stager, "Let No One Wonder at These Things" (2005: 427–449)

Lesson 13: Monday, December 7, 2015

The Ancestors of the Latin Script

Read: Bonfante, “The Scripts of Italy” (1996: 297–311)

Daniels, “English” (1996: 651–655)

Schmitz, “The Phoenician Text from the Etruscan Sanctuary at Pyrgi” (1995: 559–575)

Lesson 14: Wednesday, December 9, 2015

The Spread of the Latin Script

Read: Lewis, “Introduction” (1999: 1–4); “Ottoman Turkish” (1999: 5–26); “The New Alphabet” (1999: 27–39).