



# The World's Writing Systems

*From Oxford University Press*

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## **The World's Writing Systems** From Oxford University Press

Ranging from cuneiform to shorthand, from archaic Greek to modern Chinese, from Old Persian to modern Cherokee, this is the only available work in English to cover all of the world's writing systems from ancient times to the present. Describing scores of scripts in use now or in the past around the world, this unusually comprehensive reference offers a detailed exploration of the history and typology of writing systems. More than eighty articles by scholars from over a dozen countries explain and document how a vast array of writing systems work--how alphabets, ideograms, pictographs, and hieroglyphics convey meaning in graphic form.

The work is organized in thirteen parts, each dealing with a particular group of writing systems defined historically, geographically, or conceptually. Arranged according to the chronological development of writing systems and their historical relationships within geographical areas, the scripts are divided into the following sections: the ancient Near East, East Asia, Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Additional parts address the ongoing process of decipherment of ancient writing systems; the adaptation of traditional scripts to new languages; new scripts invented in modern times; and graphic symbols for numerical, music, and movement notation.

Each part begins with an introductory article providing the social and cultural context in which the group of writing systems was developed. Articles on individual scripts detail the historical origin of the writing system, its structure (with tables showing the forms of the written symbols), and its relationship to the phonology of the corresponding spoken language. Each writing system is illustrated by a passage of text, and accompanied by a romanized version, a phonetic transcription, and a modern English translation. A bibliography suggesting further reading concludes each entry.

Matched by no other work in English, *The World's Writing Systems* is the only comprehensive resource covering every major writing system. Unparalleled in its scope and unique in its coverage of the way scripts relate to the languages they represent, this is a resource that anyone with an interest in language will want to own, and one that should be a part of every library's reference collection.

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## Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Nearly 80 international scholars, the editors among them, have contributed entries in *The World's Writing Systems* covering all scripts officially used throughout the world as well as their historical origins, each with an extensive bibliography. Included are tables of alphabets and syllabaries as well as script samples, usually featuring transliteration, transcription, and gloss of the text. The essays are grouped by topics, but a detailed index guides the user to specific terms or languages desired. There is even a section with entries treating notation systems used for music and movement. The *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems* is arranged in dictionary format without an index, but with a substantial bibliography. Coulmas's (*Writing Systems of the World*, Blackwell, 1989) coverage is not nearly as comprehensive as the Oxford publication. In the article on the Cree Syllabary all scripts are mentioned, but tables are not provided for Inuktitut (Inuit language) or Chipewyan. "Gothic" script is discussed with only incidental reference to the term Fraktur, for which an interesting history is provided in the Oxford work. This, however, does not mean that the Coulmas encyclopedia is not a useful reference tool. Both publications are recommended for most reference collections, but *The World's Writing Systems* is clearly the more technically detailed. The determining factors for purchase will be price and needs of library clientele. There is a third choice for public or school libraries with limited resources: Akira Nakanishi's *Writing Systems of the World* (Tuttle, 1980). This inexpensive (pap. \$14.95) ready-reference tool concentrates on modern languages and their scripts, with examples from newspapers, a color map of world writing systems, an index, and a bibliography. Edward K. Werner, St. Lucie Cty. Lib. Sys., Ft. Pierce, Fla.  
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Review

"Without question the most comprehensive work ever published on this subject."--*Times Literary Supplement*

"Recommended for most reference collections."--*Library Journal*

"Divided into thirteen parts from grammatology to printing, it provides succinct and accurate descriptions of all the languages of the biblical world in addition to all others....an unusually informative collection...it will be of great value to those working in Near Eastern and biblical fields and will remain an indispensable tool for scholars and students for many years to come."--*Religious Studies Review*

"A wonderful book....A valuable contribution to the study of writing and one which will be of great practical use."--*Bryn Mawr Classical Review*

"A remarkable reference....This volume is the only comprehensive resource covering every major writing system and the way scripts relate to the languages they represent. It is a resource that belongs in every

library's reference section and in the personal library of anyone with a deep-seated interest in language."--*Cryptologia*

"Ranging from cuneiform to shorthand, from archaic Greek to modern Chinese, from old Persian to Cherokee, this is the only available work in English to cover all of the world's writing systems from ancient times to the present."--*Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society*

"It is difficult to imagine that anything more comprehensive will ever supersede this work."--*Andrews University Seminary Studies*

Language Notes  
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