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Writing: The Story Of Alphabets And Scripts



Synopsis

First English edition. Issued as one in the publisher's Discoveries series. Chapters include Humble Beginnings, Invention of the Gods, The Alphabet Revolution, From Copyists to Printers, The Bookmakers, The Deciphers, and Documents. Profusely illustrated in color and black and white. 207+ 1 pages. stiff paper wrappers. 12mo..

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: French

I wish the author had devoted more of the book to NON-WESTERN scripts, such as Arabian, Hindi, Thai, etc.

And lots of color pictures and illustrations. Not absolutely authoritative, but a good start for the novice--a great learning experience.

This book is a visual delight. Small (7"by 5"), thick (207 pp), and heavy (10 oz), this book is divided into two sections. The first two-thirds, on heavy white clay stock, is lavishly illustrated in full color. Gorgeous! The last third ("Documents"), printed on standard paper, also is heavily illustrated (but only in black and white!) ---- Unfortunately, the text does not fully measure up to the images. For example, explanations the word "pictogram" are given to the point of tedium! The Documents section contains articles than approach gibberish. For example, Hassan Massoudy's contribution

(1986), about calligraphy: "The moment when the calligrapher achieves total concentration represents the beginning of a transport of energy that will help him to overcome all oppressive difficulties. He will seek, in the deepest part of himself, his true path." (Huh?) On the other hand, from this book I learned what calligrams are, that Arabic and Hebrew share an 18-letter alphabet, and that hieroglyphs means "sacred writings". After years of hearing about "demotic script", I discovered that it is the common people's script. I learned how to trim a feather to make a quill pen. I learned that Francois Thureau-Dangin (1872- 1944) produced the first translation of Sumerian, the earliest identified form of writing. In short this book is an excellent introduction to a variety of topics to be followed up later on one's own, but a bit thin if one has an interest in any specific area. As others have noted, it is absolutely superlative in depicting alphabets, scripts, typefaces, calligraphic styles, manuscripts, engravings, paintings, folios, stellae, frescoes, papyruses, tablets, and so on. It is a graphic feast accompanied with a sometimes incomprehensible text - a sad fate for a book entitled "Writing".

A small book, recapping briefly the history of writing from Akkad and Sumer through the development of printing in the West and China. There are, in fact, two sections: First, the overview of languages and writing, without an overly forceful emphasis on the West, which avoids the taint of cultural bias nicely; second, a group of documents ~ quotations ~ from all sorts of sources, about writing, the alphabets, ideograms, and more. The documents are interesting, though a little confused, especially as regarding the plates that illustrate them; it is not always possible to tell what is what. And the first section is a fascinating overview, well written (or well translated [from the French], it's hard to know with a translation), though with little in it I didn't actually know already. The most important thing that a book of this nature can do is to whet the appetite for more. Consider mine whetted.

As a compact introduction to the whole history of writing, this little tome makes for a lovely hour's browsing. There is a lot of information packed into this book, and many color plates to serve as examples of the information contained in the text. However, this book is definitely just an introduction to the subject. There is no way that such a small book, with more page space devoted to pictures than text, can provide anything more than a passing glance at the history it purports to cover. That said, I will again say that it is a very user-friendly, high-quality book about a fascinating subject often overlooked in our daily lives. I, myself, bought it specifically for the pictures; there are many, many books on the subject, but few so profusely illustrated.

A small book that explores the evolution of writing systems in many different cultures. The book's strongest point is its illustrations -- lots and lots. Nothing revolutionary here, but those who like this sort of thing will like it. I certainly did

Packed with wonderful pictures and illustrations, providing a general overview of the origins and developments of alphabetic writing systems. By no means in depth and probably not meant to be, rather an engaging and easily read introduction to the topic. Offers a generous listing for further reading as well as excerpts from other writers on the topic in the "Documents" section of the book.

This is an outstanding source book for anyone curious about not only the development of actual writing (calligraphy) but all the other historic and cultural influences as well. The format makes the material appealing and easy to read, and the illustrations are excellent. I've never before found so much relevant information on this subject in just one book--it's a real treasure.

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