

# EVOLUTION OF WRITING

## Phase I

The first prehistoric rock-paintings discovered were those found at Altamira in Southern Spain in 1879. In these 20 000-year-old paintings, Stone Age hunters left a pictorial commentary of their daily activities. These paintings are examples of man's first attempts at expressing his thoughts and feelings in a timeless form. (stamp 8c,1982)

Among the forerunners of writing, pictographic and ideographic writing are the most widely used forms of writing. Such writing is best represented by the American Indians. A more advanced form of writing is the logography or word signs found on the clay ledger tablets from Uruk in Sumer. These signs were limited to the expression of numerals, objects and personal names. (stamp 20c,1982)

Incised or carved pictures are called petroglyphs and these pictures usually depict men and animals in their varying relationships with each other, as found in Bushman paintings. (stamp 25c,1982)



## Phase II

The oldest system, Sumerian, developed in the basin of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, and is called Cuneiform writing, derived from the Latin word Cuneus, meaning wedge. This wedge-like writing had developed from a pictographic stage. The earliest Uruk writing used signs limited to the expression of numerals, objects and personal names. This stage of writing is known as logography or word signs, viz. a writing form in which "ox" is represented by a picture of an ox.

Like cuneiform, the Chinese too had a "square script" around the first century AD.

The Sumerian, Egyptian, Hittite and Chinese writing systems developed cursive, linear forms that changed through use in daily life until their pictorial origin was completely obliterated. The Sumerian and Chinese cursive systems even changed their monumental forms into non-pictorial writings. The Egyptian and Hittite monumental systems, however, retained their pictorial character to the very end.