

## **Writing, in the deep**

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The invention of writing is arguably one of the greatest achievements in human history, yet how, why, and when it emerged is still an open-ended question. A lot of progress has been made in recent times, moving away from a view that saw writing as a one-off invention in Mesopotamia, ca. 5000 years ago. Now we can claim that humankind invented writing more than once, with at least four separate inventions that took place originally and independently.

This is not the complete picture, however. Many a view still see writing as the result of heavily invested complex societies, that harnessed and used it to specific ends and to precise goals, as if writing and anything tied to it were the result of a controlled, inevitable, deterministic, or teleological process.

In this presentation I argue for a completely different view, one that accounts for the discovery to be part of a gradual, progressive course, one that accounts for a slow evolution made of increasing advancements, one that sees writing as part of a complex, multi-dimensional tooth in the ratchet machine of our cultural evolution. Its deepest roots can be observed in the iconic configurations and in the geometric and schematic shapes of Paleolithic symbols, in a non-linear, non-continuous development through the Neolithic and Bronze age phases of several civilizations. The harnessing of shapes and geometries stirred by our visual perception, the unique sensitivity of human cognition to the affordances and constraints of symmetries and complex configurations all contributed to the anchoring of signs to create a means of representation that is deeply embedded in the way we see the world.