

The arrival of the alphabet in Greece was documented in legend as having been brought by a man named Cadmus who was a member of the leading family in Tyre. He was believed to have come to the land of Boeotia just west of Athens, where he founded a city called Thebes. Herodotus documented the contribution of the Phoenicians this way.

Now the Phoenicians who came with Cadmus, and to whom the Gephyraei belonged, introduced into Greece upon their arrival a great variety of arts, among the rest that of writing, whereof the Greeks till then had, as I think, been ignorant. And originally they shaped their letters exactly like all the other Phoenicians, but afterwards, in the course of time, they changed by degrees their language, and together with it the form likewise of their characters. Now the Greeks who dwelt about those parts at that time were chiefly the Ionians. The Phoenician letters were accordingly adopted by them, but with some variation in the shape of a few, and so they arrived at the present use, still calling the letters Phoenician, as justice required, after the name of those who were the first to introduce them into Greece.

Herodotus 5:58

In reality, of course, throwing out hieroglyphics and cuneiform writing to replace them with the alphabet was such a huge change that it would not have been introduced into Greece by one man, but rather would have been transmitted through many Greek-Phoenician contacts at many places and gradually been adopted by all. But the legend at least acknowledged the direction from which it came.

Actually, the creation of writing was a much more fascinating story than even the stuff of legend. To tell it briefly: Back in the days before writing existed, when shepherds or farmers wanted to record what they owned or what they were trading, they would use small clay tokens that represented the goods involved. For example, if baskets of grain were kept in the village's storage cellar, and a farmer put in three more baskets, he would be given three basket-tokens. He