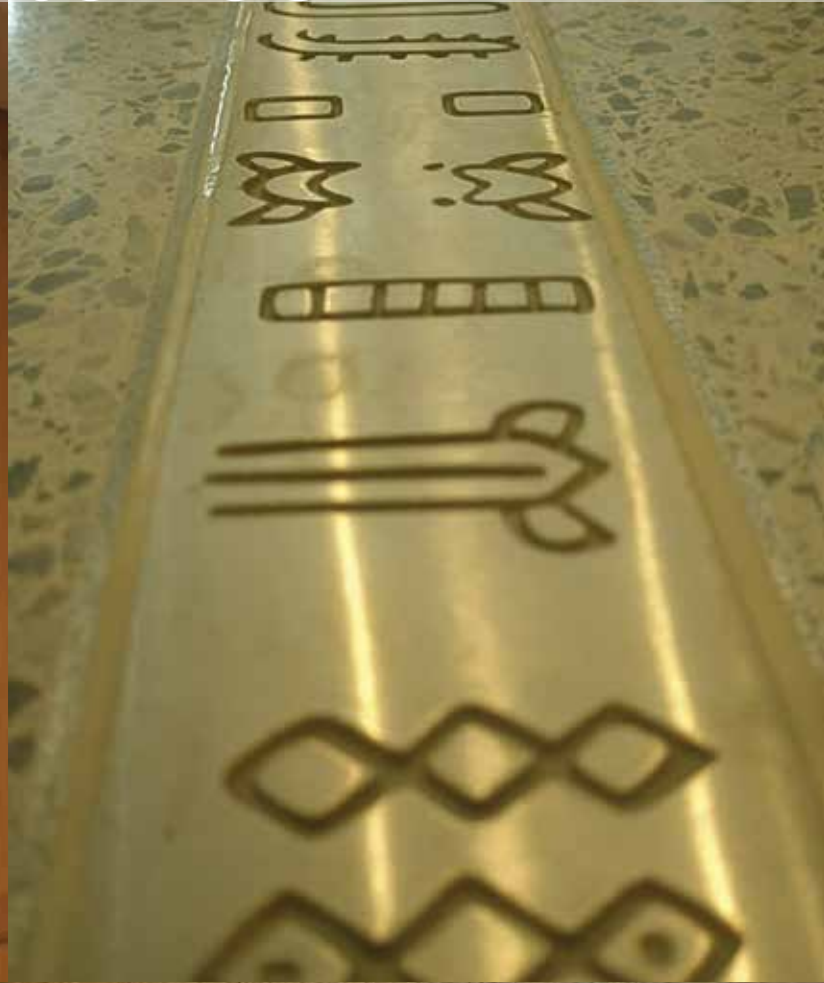


# Thompson Library

Floor Inlays  
& Elevator Etchings

## Foundation Stones



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

# “Foundation Stones” of the Library

Set in the terrazzo of the William Oxley Thompson Memorial Library’s ground and first floors are 49 metal tablets documenting forms of written communication from around the world. Forty-five additional etchings are featured in the decorative framing of the Stack Tower elevators. These examples include full writing systems that have evolved over the past 4,000 to 5,000 years, some of their precursors, and a few other graphic forms that collectively give a sense of the immense visual range of inscriptive techniques. Writing systems establish the foundation upon which all library collections are built, and it is fitting that these “foundation stones” decorate this building. Though not exhaustive, the inlays illustrate the rich diversity and graphic beauty of the human heritage of making marks on two-dimensional surfaces to record and communicate information.

- **Alphabets** have distinct letters for consonants and vowels. The Latin alphabet (38) is used for many languages in works kept in the Library’s print collections. Other well-represented alphabets are Cyrillic (12), Greek (25), and Korean (7). Examples of much less commonly seen alphabets are Avestan (1), Egyptian Coptic (27) and West African N’ko (19). Braille (4) is no doubt the most widely used tactilely mediated alphabet.

- **Abjads** have consonant letters with optional diacritic marks for vowels. Phoenician (46), Hebrew (14, 43) and Arabic (11) are examples of abjads. The Mongolian script (37), and the later Manchu that resembles it, are the farthest-flung offshoots of the Aramaic abjad heritage.

- **Abugidas** have unit letters for simple syllables and diacritic marks to indicate different vowels or the absence of a vowel. Devanagari (3), Tibetan (31), Thai (16), and Burmese (#3, First floor elevator door) show how these systems ramified as they spread from India.

- **Syllabaries** can be large, like Chinese (8), or small, like Japanese *hiragana* (9). The Linear B (32) of pre-Homeric Greek was a syllabary. Mayan (44), the best-known of the Meso-Americans scripts, was a syllabary, as are recently invented scripts for indigenous North American languages such as Cherokee (6) and Cree (15).

- **Graphic systems** for notating dance and music are not transcriptive of speech but make use of the technology of writing. Djembe (13) is an African notation for drumming; a diagram showing the Manual Alphabet (39) for finger-spelling can also be seen.

- The Rongorongo script of Easter Island (48) has not been deciphered. Tengwar, or “Elvish” (23) was invented by J. R. R. Tolkien and featured in his fictional Middle-Earth.

The gallery of inlays also includes images of petroglyphs and cave paintings (40) that were the precursors of full writing. One of these was a decorative element in the original library building, uncovered during its renovation.

A diagram of the floors and the elevator frames provides brief identifiers of each script’s name and origin.

## Guides to the Floor Inlays

### Ground Floor

- 1 **Avestan** - language of the Zoroastrian holy books, NE Iran, ca. 7th c. BCE
- 2 **Glagolitic** - the oldest Slavic alphabet, ca. 9th c. CE
- 3 Letters of **Devanagari** - used for Sanskrit, Hindi and other Indic languages
- 4 **Braille** - devised in 1821 by Louis Braille
- 5 Letters of the precursor of **Ethiopic** syllabary (southern Arabia, early 1st millennium CE).
- 6 **Cherokee** - the syllabary devised and publicly demonstrated by Sequoyah in 1821
- 7 Modern **Korean** - a headline font
- 8 **Chinese** - unambiguous numerical characters
- 9 **Hiragana** - a Japanese syllabary, one component of the current Japanese writing system
- 10 **Labanotation** - a method for notating dance
- 11 Letters of the **Arabic** alphabet
- 12 Combined set of all **Cyrillic** and **Latin** letters used to write Slavic languages
- 13 **Djembe** - a drum notation of Africa
- 14 Letters of the **Hebrew** alphabet
- 15 **Cree** - one of several syllabaries devised for Algonquian languages
- 16 **Thai** - an Indic-derived script of Southeast Asia
- 17 **Olmec** - a precursor of Mayan writing
- 18 **Chamic** - script of an Austronesian language once spoken in what is now Vietnam
- 19 **N’ko** - an alphabetic script of West Africa for the Manding (Mandekan) language
- 20 **Gurmukhi** - from the Punjab region, 16th c. CE
- 21 **Aztec** - post-Mayan writing of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica
- 22 **Brahmi** - ancient Indic script, source of many writing systems of South and Southeast Asia

# Ground Floor



- 23 **Tengwar** - the “Elvish” script invented by J.R.R. Tolkien
- 24 **Old Church Slavonic** - early Cyrillic
- 25 Letters of the **Greek** alphabet
- 26 **Tagalog** - a script from pre-Spanish Philippines in the Indic lineage
- 27 **Coptic** - one of several Egyptian scripts developed since the Hellenistic period
- 28 **Etruscan** - the Greek-derived script of the most important Italian civilization before Rome

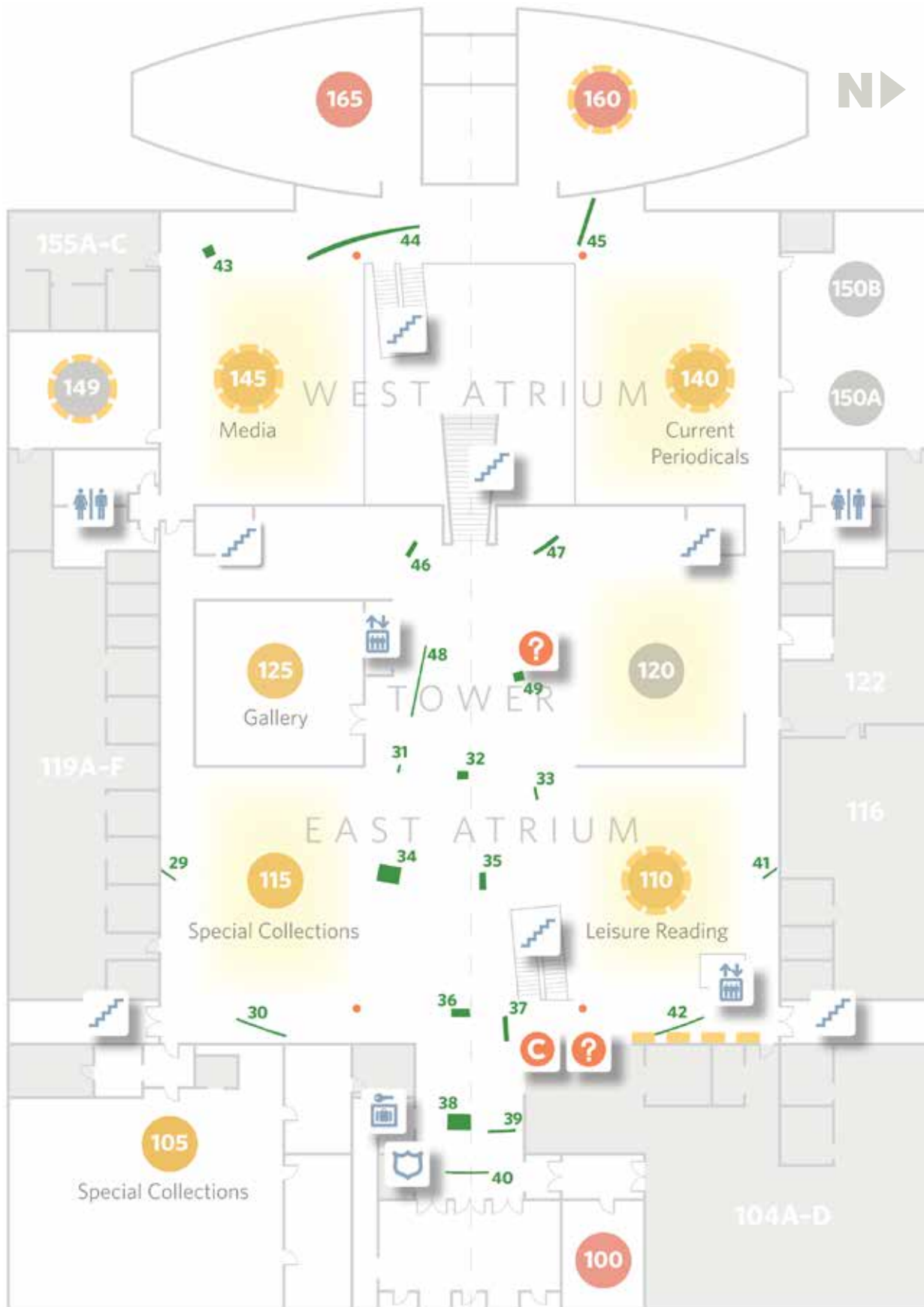
## First Floor

- 29 **Gujarati** - an abugida of northwest India
- 30 Some text in **Gregg Shorthand** - a once widely used sound-based stenography
- 31 Letters of **Tibetan** the most important trans-Himalayan Indic-derived script
- 32 **Linear B** - a syllabary used to write pre-Homeric Greek, possibly 15th - 13th c. BCE

- 33 **Samaritan** - a variant of the Hebrew abjad
- 34 **Egyptian hieroglyphics** - deciphered by Champollion with the aid of the Rosetta Stone
- 35 Modern Western **music notation** - the first eight bars of “Carmen Ohio”
- 36 **Ogham** - an early medieval alphabet used for Old Irish, ca. 800 CE
- 37 **Mongolian** - the modern form of the traditional script
- 38 The **Latin alphabet** in a multitude of typefaces
- 39 **The Manual Alphabet** used in conjunction with American Sign Language
- 40 **Petroglyphs** and **pictograms** from around the world - precursors of full writing
- 41 **Lontara'** - a palm-leaf script of South Sulawesi (Indonesia) in the Indic tradition

- 42 **Cuneiform** - clay-impressed signs used for several different languages of ancient West Asia
- 43 **Early Hebrew** - letter forms from before ca. 600 BCE
- 44 **Mayan** - a now-deciphered pre-Columbian Meso-American syllabic system
- 45 **Ndjuka** - a 20th c. syllabary once used in Suriname (formerly Dutch Guayana)
- 46 **Phoenician** - an ancient Semitic alphabet dating from around 1050 BCE
- 47 Hexagrams from the **Yi Jing (I Ching)** or Book of Changes, an ancient Chinese symbol system
- 48 **Rongorongo** - as yet undeciphered signs of Easter Island
- 49 Letters (runes) of the **Futhark**-used to write Germanic languages prior to the use of the Latin alphabet from ca. 150 CE

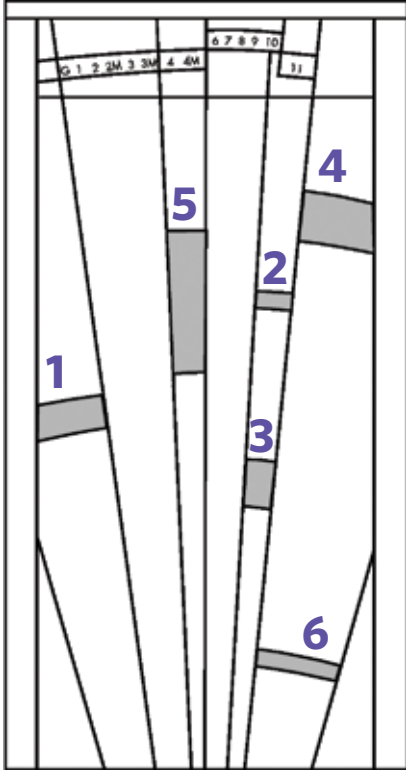
# First Floor



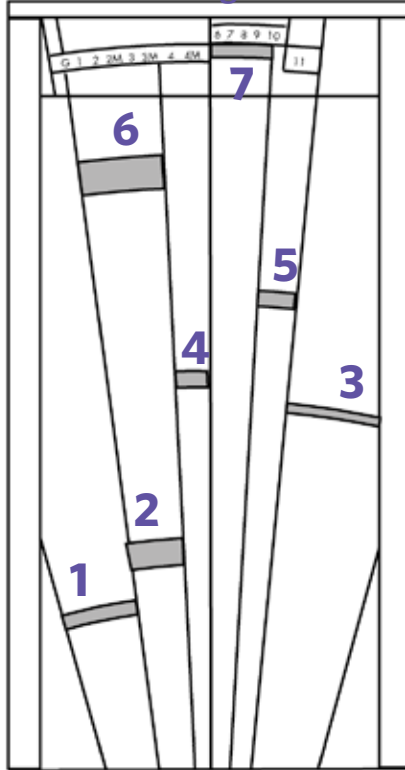


# Guides to the Elevator Doors

**Ground Floor Left**



**Ground Floor Right**



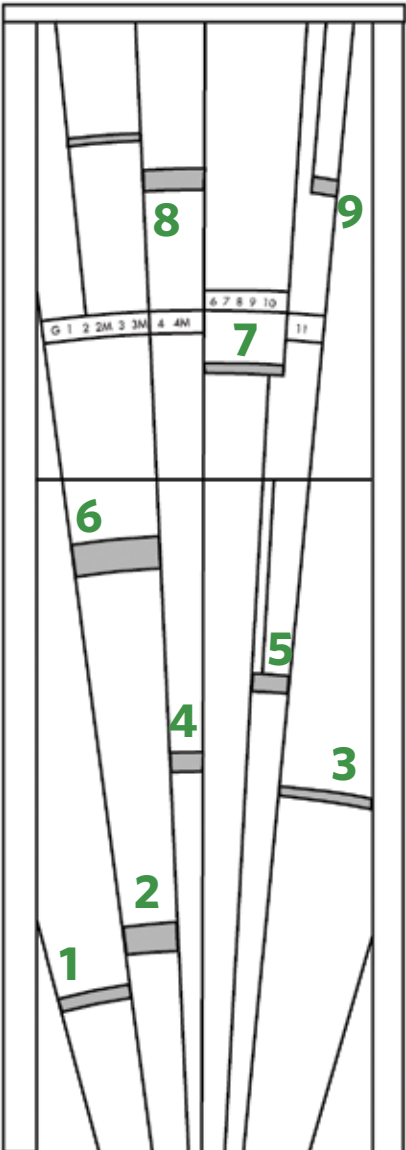
## Ground Floor Left

1. Cuneiform
2. Futhark
3. Latin Black-letter font
4. Greek
5. Mayan
6. Arabic

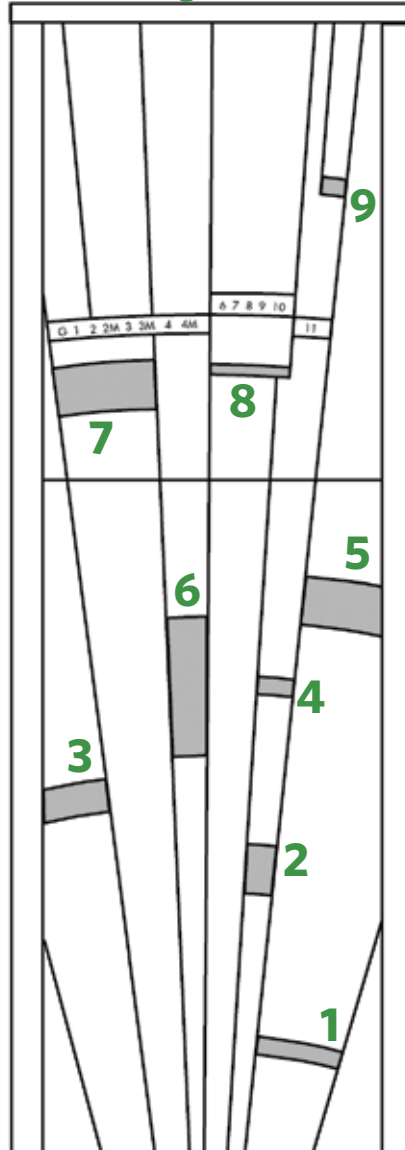
## Ground Floor Right

1. Modern Aramaic
2. Egyptian hieroglyphics
3. Braille
4. Cherokee
5. Djembe
6. Decorative nagari font
7. Manual Alphabet used in conjunction with American Sign Language

**First Floor Left**



**First Floor Right**

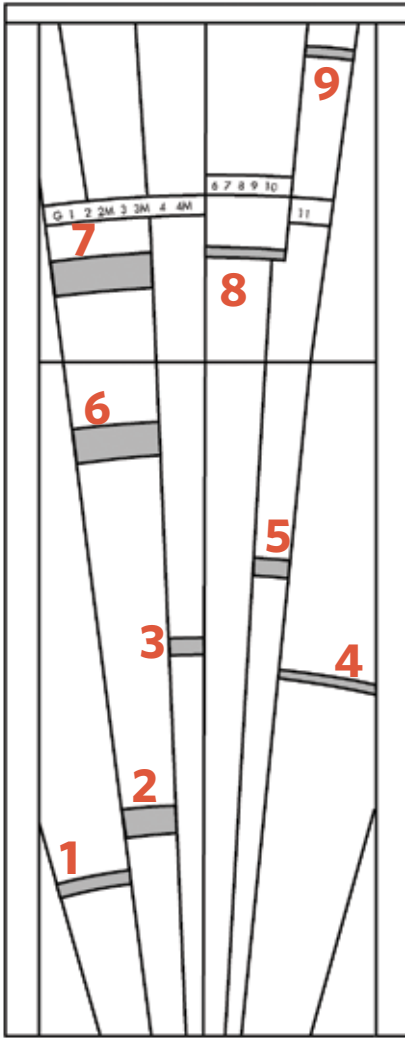


## First Floor Left

1. Avestan
2. Modern Cyrillic
3. Burmese
4. Coptic
5. Nandi (Sinhalese)
6. Chinese
7. Latin
8. Tagalog (Phillipines)
9. Aramaic

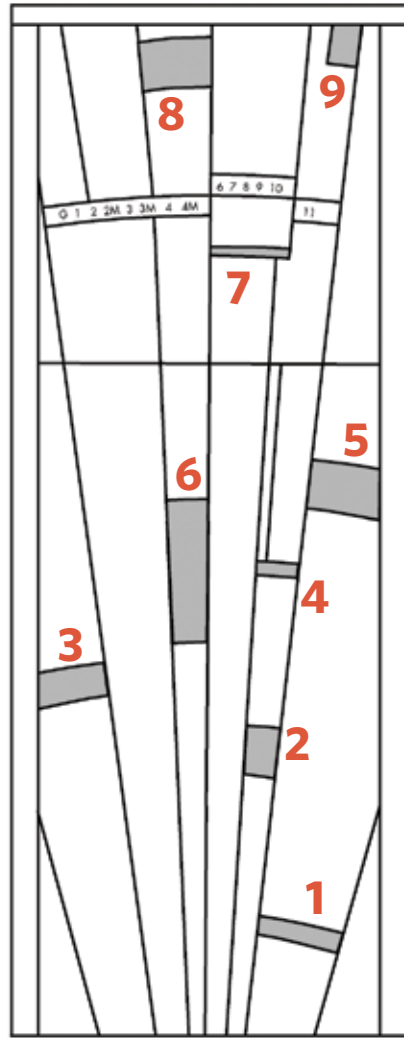
## First Floor Right

1. Brahmi
2. Signs of the Zodiac
3. Thai
4. Rongorongo
5. Hiragana (Japanese)
6. Olmec
7. Old Church Slavonic
8. Glagolitic
9. Blank



### 11th Floor Left

1. Chamic
2. Korean
3. Tengwar (Tolkien Elvish)
4. Tibetan
5. Yi Jing (I Ching) hexagrams
6. Old Javanese
7. Hebrew
8. Blank
9. Blank



### 11th Floor Right

1. Caucasian Albanian (Georgia)
2. Labanotation (for dance)
3. Cree
4. Lontara' (Buginese)
5. Khmer
6. Mongolian
7. Etruscan
8. Tagalog
9. Blank

### Credits:

Floor installations were suggested by **Pete Confar**, Project Architect from Acock Associates Architects, Columbus.

The goal of exemplifying writing systems came from **Dr. Predrag Matejic**, Curator of the Hilandar Research Library.

The selection of images and design of the "Foundation Stones" were done by **Pam McClung**, the Library's Graphic Designer.

Several students from the **Knowlton School of Architecture** assisted in the technical production of the plaques.

The metal floor inlays were cast by **Degginers' Foundry**, Topeka, Kansas, and installed by **Ardit Flooring**, Columbus.

The elevator door panels were fabricated by the **Gunderlin Company** for installation by **Otis Elevator**, Columbus.

Professors **Brian Joseph**, Department of Linguistics, and **J. Marshall Unger**, Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, provided advice on the description of the examples.

Corrections to this pamphlet's text may be sent to [allen.916@osu.edu](mailto:allen.916@osu.edu).

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