Thompson Library
Floor Inlays
& Elevator Etchings
Foundation Stones
“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.

- **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.

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Special thanks to **J. Marshall Unger**, Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures who helped write this brochure.
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
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
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
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” was 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 can be sent to colvin.162@osu.edu.

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