

ETEC 540 – Assignment #2
Documentary Describing a Pre-Digital
Communication Technology
Story Board and
Bibliography

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Jamie Tooze
University of British Columbia

1 **Scene #1**
Opening Scene

2 **Scene #2**
Introductions

Hi my name is Dave and this is my travel companion Sesh. We are going to take you on a journey through time, using our own Way-way-Back machine, to explore the history of the ancient and medieval scribes.

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3 **Scene #3: Time-line**

The history of scribes is much a story about the success of human civilisation as it is a story about these purveyors of progress and and communication. We are going to begin with Sumer in 3500 BCE and conclude with Germany in 1500 CE.

4 **Scene #4**
Mission Slide

As we leap frog through time we will make two key suggestions. 1) That scribes are a technology in the truest sense in that they are an applied innovation used for a practical purpose supporting growth.

5 **Scene #5**
Mission Slide

2) As a technology scribes played a critical role in the advancement and stability of early human civilizations. They did this by legitimizing rulers and ideologies, organizing our societies, providing witness for our greatest achievements.

6 **Scene #6**
Destination Uruk

Our first stop is the city of Uruk in the land of Sumer. (present day Iraq).

- Uruk was the cultural and economic hub of the region at the time and it became the first place, as far as we know, where writing is used. (Avrin 1991)

7 **Scene #7**
White temple

- Here we are inside the great White Temple of Uruk. Uruk was one of the first great cities and it attracted great wealth in the form of agricultural surplus and skilled workers. (Van De Mierop, 1999)

8 **Scene #8**
Outside the temple

With agriculture economic specialization emerged and communities grew rapidly.

Record keeping was developed in order to manage trade, construction, taxes and maintaining order.

This in turn provided legitimacy to leaders and social stability for lower classes.

9 **Scene #9**

Uruk -Tablet House

As cities of Sumer grew a professional class of trained record keeping scribes emerged and around 2500 BCE a new system of writing called cuneiform was developed. It was a quick permeant way to document events on a small cheap media.

At the exact same time in Egypt a separate writing system developed but for a different purpose. (Van De Mieroop 1999)

10 **Scene #9**

Uruk -Tablet House

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At the exact same time in Egypt a separate writing system developed but for a different purpose. (Van De Mieroop 1999)

11 **Scene #10**

Destination – Memphis – Unified Egypt

Our second stop is the city of Memphis in Lower Egypt in the year 3200 BCE.

A civilization perhaps thousands of years old would begin recording the written story of humanity.

12 **Scene #11**

The Written Record

Like their contemporaries in Sumer, Egyptian scribes were the corner stone of Ancient Egyptian society. Thanks to their artistic legacy depicted on artifacts such as this Narmer palette it is clear that by 3200 BCE Egyptian scribes were using a highly developed visual writing and documentation system.

13 **Scene #12**

Scribes as noble class

Script

One of the most valued professionals in ancient Egypt was a person educated in writing. Sesh, as they were called, were brought up in the same scribal schools as their fathers and inherited their fathers' tools, position and secrets upon entering the civil service. (Carr, 2005)

14 **Scene # 13**

Social Hierarchy

Script:

Much of what is known about ancient Egypt is due to the training and devotion of its scribes. Monumental buildings were erected under their supervision, administrative and economic activities were documented by them, and stories from Egypt's lower classes and foreign lands survive today thanks to the scribes that put their stories in writing. (Carr 2005)

Their writing system remained unchanged for 3500 years

15 **Scene #15**

Destination - Ugarit

Now we are off to Ugarit - a flourishing Canaanite trading centre poised at the heart of the

And so when the foundation that facilitated the complexity that made these civilizations so great disappears it takes them centuries to recover and many cities like Ugarit never rebuilt. (Cline 2014)

24 **Scene #21**
Destination China

On that somber note we'll be traveling next to the Shang Dynasty and the year 1200 BCE – where writing developed independently but where scribes also played a critical role in society.

25 **Scene #25 Long hall**

The earliest surviving Chinese writings were the works of priests/diviners who asked questions of the supernatural on behalf of kings and recorded the answers and outcomes. During the Zhou dynasty the diviners became scribes and historians charged with the task of keeping accurate records. (Wang, 2014)

26 **Scene #26 Oracle Bones**

Scribe as sage, bureaucrat and leader

Their influence resulted in paper, the first printing press and ideologies such as Confucianism and later the adoption of Buddhism.

27 **Scene #27 Sages**

1 ■

2 The growing size and complexity of the Chinese state and society resulted in a trend that gradually systematized and simplified Chinese script.

28 **Scene #28 Destination Athens Greece**

Now back to the we left off in the Mediterranean and the birth place of western writing systems.

29 **Scene # ABC**

At the same time China was flourishing Europe and the Near East was pulling itself out of the Dark Ages. From the rubble of the old civilizations scribes from Phoenicia and Greece will build an idea that will change the world. (Murphy, 2001)

30 **Scene #30 - ABC**

During the late Bronze age the nomadic Phoenicians were adopting the sound characters from Egyptian hieroglyphs in order write in their own language. (Murphy, 2001)

31 **Scene #31 The Phoenicians**

After the collapse the Phoenicians found themselves in a good situation. They created a trade hub in Phoenicia and through trade they brought their writing system with them.

The Greeks A new order of Greek scribes adapted the system to their own language. And this resulted in an efficient accurate system that was easier to teach. (ExtraCredit, 2017)

trade routes linking all the bronze age societies.

16 **Scene #16**

In the late bronze age cities around the eastern Mediterranean were swelling with surplus food production, sophisticated trade agreements and advanced technologies like metallurgy. Ugarit was no exception. The region was seeing the most prosperous time in its history – until it all collapsed with one generation. (Cline 2014)

17 **Scene #17**

Jumping forward in time to 3 millennium we can see what's left of Ugarit. At first glance it looks like this city simply succumbed to the ravages of time but upon close examination we see this city was sacked, looted and burned to the ground – just like every other major city from Mycenaean Greece to Ramsee's Egypt. (Cline, 2014)

18 **Scene # 18 & 19**

System Collapse

Essentially cities like Ugarit added complexity to their systems as they grew. With new complexity came greater costs and in turn added complexity. The cycle would have continued until resources started to run out and then it was faced with two fates. Either the civilization would slowly falter or it would be hit with one major or multiple significant crisis that would bring it to its knees. That's is what happened in Ukarit. (Cline, 2014)

19 **Scene # 18 & 19**

Collapse of Ugarit

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20 **Scene #20 – Features of the Bronze Age System Collapse**

When draught and famine cause refugees to flee to the cities resources were stretched and civil unrest grew. Vulnerabilities emerged and foreign invaders from the sea and land seized their chance to blunder and disturb trade. (Cline 2014)

21 **Scene #20 and 21 – Features of the Bronze Age System Collapse**

Trade shut down, economies fell apart, militaries disintegrated and the diplomatic systems collapsed. The common people literally fled to the hills and abandoned the central planning authority ... civilizations fell like dominoes. (Cline 2014)

22 **Scene #21 & 22 – Scribes Disappear**

How is this tied to the scribes you might ask? Well the bronze age civilization came to rely on writing for everything from organizing massive farming projects to codifying laws to negotiating to critical peace treaties. Once they were gone it would have been costly to train in both resources and time. (Cline 2014)

23 **Scene #23 – Scribes Disappear**

32 **Scene #32 Spread of Greek Culture and Empire**

It was such a difficult innovation to develop from scratch that it was rigorously adopted across Mediterranean through trade, literature such as Homer's Illiad and through colonization.

33 **Scene #33 Destination Judaism**

Before we continue west we will follow the story of the scribe to Kingdoms and Israel and Judah.

34 **Scene # 34 People of the Book**

Known as the people of the book, both Judean children and adults of most classes were encouraged to at least read so as to fulfil their religious duties. As a result Judean and Israelite societies enjoyed higher than usual literacy rates at the time.

35 **Scene # 35 Professional Scribes**

Scribes in 8th century BCE Judiac culture were distinguished professionals who served as ancient lawyers, judges, ministers of government, accountants and money lenders – in addition to their central religious roll as codifier of laws and official texts. (Avrin 1991)

36 **Scene #36 Legacy**

The most lasting legacy of the ancient Hebrew scribes is the accuracy of their work. The Torah and the Talmud are widely considered the most "textual stable" holy books of any religion. (Avrin 1991)

37 **Scene #37 Hebrew Scribe Legacy**

Here we see an image of the 2000 year old Dead Sea Scrolls. Found in a cave in 1947 they are the earliest known copies of the Hebrew bible and they have changed very little in two millennium. A testimony to their training. (Avrin 1991)

38 **Scene # 38 – Destination Roman Empire**

Moving North and into the Common Era – our next stop in the Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire.

39 **Scene # 39 Roman Scribes**

As Rome expanded its empire from Britain to the upper reaches of the Nile it found it necessary to recruit more soldiers to protect their outposts - and more scribes to protect their laws and finances. Every roman soldier was taught strategy, Greek philosophy and history. Near the end of the Western Empire many soldiers and scribes were foreigners trained in Latin and Greek by scribes (Arvin, p. 174)

40 **Scene #40 – The Book**

The major leap from codex to a book came around 100 CE. The Roman empire had a well developed communication system to connect the outposts at the frontier. (Avrin. p 175)

41 **Scene #41 – The Book and Christians**

Accounts from the time suggests books were easier to transport and reference than scrolls. Christian scribes liked them because they were easier to conceal. (Avrin. p 175)

42 **Scene #42 Mayan Scribes**

As we near the end of our journey we'd like to take to to another time and place were scribes

developed a unique language independently. We will be visiting the Maya Empire in MesoAmerica.

43 **Scene # 43 Maya Propagandists**

Script

As far as we know the Maya people were the only people in the new world to develop writing. Maya scribes were trained in "rooms of teaching" similar to the Sumerian "Tablet Houses" we saw earlier. And glyphic show they were record keepers, shamans, historians and propagandists.

44 **Scene #44 Maya Politics**

Uniquely Maya scribes played significant political role in Maya society. Maya city-states were small due to the challenges of farming in jungles. Their scribes spent a great deal of effort carving their messages in stone to serve as warnings to all those that might challenge their great king and mighty warriors. (Wang 2014)

45 **Scene # 45 Baghdad**

Our next stop is our last stop in the Near East before we wrap up our Journey. In Europe. Baghdad witnessed a Golden Age of technology and learning and we would be amiss to leap over it.

46 **Scene #46 House of Wisdom**

Between the 8th and 11th centuries CE when Europe was still languishing in the dark ages the international language of science was Arabic.

47 **Scene #47 House of Wisdom**

Baghdad's House of Wisdom, administered by its scribes, was the epicentre of learning. Some of worlds most incredible advances in philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine and physics that brought about the birth of the modern scientific renaissance. (Arvin 1991)

48 **Scene # 48 - House of Wisdom**

The House of Wisdom was a library, a translation house and it was an academy. It's scribes and scientists attracted the greatest minds and served as a safe oasis reservoir for the greatest ideas. (Al-Khalili 2008)

49 **Scene #49 – Destination Florence**

Now we are off to Florence and the dawn of the Italian Renaissance.

50 **Scene #50 – Italian Renaissance**

Near the end of the 1300's a small group of Italian thinkers, referred to as humanists, declared that a new age of learning was dawning. Thanks to the patronage of wealthy elites, these renaissance thinkers hired small armies of secular scribes to transcribe the classic texts in search if great wisdom.

51 **Scene #51 Age of Re-Discovery**

The renaissance scholars built great libraries of their copied literary treasures. From this concentration of knowledge many great developments emerged such as the rediscovery of democracy, new ideas on gravity and technologies like the telescope and the printing press.

52 **Scene #52 – Destination Mainz Germany**

Now for our final destination. Mainz Germany and the birth place of the Guggenheim press.

53 **Scene #53 – The Gutenberg Press**

So much has already been written about the impact of the Gutenberg press - but I dare say it was not as impactful as the first time a scribe recorded a law into a clay tablet.

54 **Scene #54 – No More Manuscripts**

For scribes the advent of the printing press marked the practical end of their profession – for as one historian put it, “until that time everything was a manuscript.” (Curtius 1953. p 268) In as little as 60 years the demand for manuscripts fell to 10% of its peak. The writing was clearly the on wall – so to speak. Graph (Neddermeyer, 1997)

55 **Scene #55**

2 It's true, effectively everything produced up until about 1440 was some form of manuscript printed by skilled human hands. Scribes had recorded our history, documented our achievements and our blunders and served as purveyors of our collective knowledge.

56 **Scene #**

2 Story of the Scribes

By Jamie Tooze

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