An Exploration of Writing

by Peter T. Daniels

DESCRIPTION:
An Exploration of Writing is a book about our alphabets, our syllabaries, and all the other kinds of writing that people use and have used for 5000 years. It introduces the general public to a topic that hardly anyone has heard about, so it clarifies basic linguistic terms as they occur. For linguists exploring the growing field of graphonomy—the study of writing systems—in which the author has long been a pioneer, it weaves together the many threads of theory into a tapestry showing a fuller picture of what all our scripts are seen to share.

An Exploration of Writing begins with more familiar kinds of writing considered in unfamiliar ways—starting with English viewed syllabically—and leads the reader across the Old World and the New to less familiar kinds of writing, showing how all writings share a fundamental essence, however diverse they appear to be, because all writing represents language. The more familiar (Hebrew, Chinese, Korean) leads on to the less familiar (Udi, Pahlavi, Javanese). Featured are some of the world’s most recently elucidated scripts, and some that are long known but long neglected, such as those for Central Asian languages, and some of the most recent interpretations of long-mysterious scripts, such as Sumerian and Mesoamerican.

An Exploration of Writing is in the tradition of and in part a response to A Study of Writing (1952/1963), by I. J. Gelb. It encapsulates more than thirty years of the author’s work and his dozens of articles on writing systems, ranging from investigating the physical process of writing to bringing to light the achievements of those who had deciphered forgotten scripts to developing a theoretical approach to the origins of writing which leads to insights into the nature of writing itself.

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David L. Share, University of Haifa

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CONTRIBUTORS BIOGRAPHIES:
Peter T. Daniels, the world’s leading expert on writing systems, holds degrees in linguistics from Cornell University and the University of Chicago. His first interests were in Comparative Semitic linguistics, which built to the study of writing and decipherment. His challenge to his teacher I. J. Gelb’s influential theories of the evolution of scripts has led to a persistent search for legitimate principles of the nature and development of writing. He is co-editor (with William Bright) of and