

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

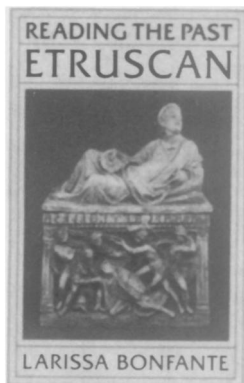
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Silversword Saga



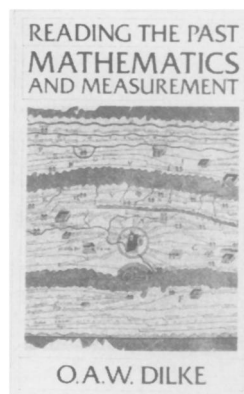
READING THE PAST



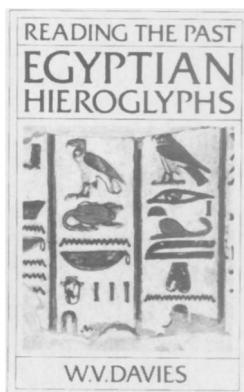
► Before the rise of Rome, the Etruscans were commercially and culturally dominant in central Italy, and it was they who passed the alphabet on to the Romans. But in the 1st century BC, when the Etruscans had become Roman citizens and begun to speak Latin, their own language died out. Being of non-Indo-European origin, Etruscan is difficult to interpret, and the difficulty is increased by the fact that no Etruscan literature survives. However, a certain amount has been reconstructed from inscriptions, and Dr. Bonfante here sets out the rudiments of pronunciation and grammar as they are so far understood. She analyzes inscriptions on a wide variety of objects, including mirrors and gems, vases, sarcophagi and coins, and shows what they contribute to our knowledge of this still largely mysterious people.



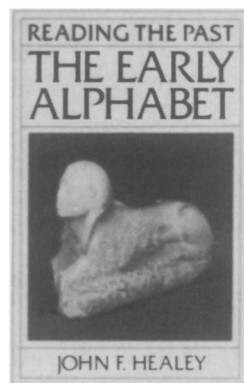
► In Orkney, Shetland and the Scottish Islands, in Ireland, in the Isle of Man and above all in Scandinavia, travelers still come upon great memorial stones inscribed with the curious angular alphabet called runes. Rune-masters also cut their letters on other objects, including swords, brooches, pendants and rings. This book tells the story of runes from the earliest Continental inscriptions of the late second century AD through to the Viking Age and to the related script used for the English language in Anglo-Saxon times. The author shows what a wealth of material about our early civilization has been recorded in runes and suggests to the readers where they themselves may discover them.



► Most of us are familiar with Roman numerals, as they are still in occasional use today, but how did the ancient Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians and Greeks write numbers? How did they measure distance, capacity and weight, and how did the early architects and engineers make the necessary calculations for building their great pyramids, temples, aqueducts and roads? This book outlines the ancient systems of mathematics and measurement and describes how they were used in mapping, surveying, telling the time, trade and commerce, as well as in leisure pursuits such as games and puzzles, and in the occult. A final chapter sketches subsequent developments in the West, including the introduction of Arabic numerals, and shows how the mathematical legacy of the Graeco-Roman world influenced science and technology in the Renaissance and beyond.



► The hieroglyphic script of ancient Egypt is one of the oldest and most beautiful of the world's known writing systems. It was invented at the dawn of Egypt's dynastic history, towards the end of the fourth millennium BC, and was employed for over three thousand years, finally falling into disuse during Egypt's Coptic or Christian Period. This book explains the underlying principles of the script and describes its origin, development and uses, with due attention paid to its cursive derivatives called hieratic and demotic.



► Where did the modern alphabet come from? The invention of a system in which each sound is represented by a letter marked an enormous improvement upon the syllabic systems — cuneiform and hieroglyphic — already developed in the ancient Near East. The first use of alphabetic writing is found in the early 2nd millennium BC, and by 1000 BC an alphabet consisting only of consonants was well established in Phoenicia. Dr. Healey here outlines the basic principles involved and describes the first attempts at alphabetic writing in the Semitic languages. He then traces the spread of the alphabet throughout the later Middle East — including Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic scripts — and its transmission, via the Greeks, to the Latin West.

The University of California Press, 9½" x 6¾", 64 pages, black and white illustrated, paperback, \$9.95

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