



CAVE ART

One of the oldest mediums of recorded thought, cave art predates the advent of writing but continued to flourish for some time after the written word was invented. Scenes represent great hunts, rituals, and events that were important to the society that made them. Some of the most famous cave art has been discovered in France and Spain, but others have been found in Africa, Indonesia, Russia, the Middle East, Mexico, and Australia.

Although not shown in this map, cave paintings and engravings have also been found in:

Mud-glyph caves (USA)

Maya caves (Mexico)

[Koonalda Cave \(Australia\)](#)

[Kalimantan caves \(Borneo\)](#)

Moras caves (Sulawesi)



Courtesy of National Geographic:

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2015/01/first-artists/walter-text>



KHIPUS

Khipus were used by Inca civilizations of South America as early as 4600 years ago and lasted until the 1530s during Spanish conquests. This complex form of communication and record keeping involved a system of dyed and knotted cords, which are now believed to be a type of language which researchers are just starting to translate.

Khipu comes from the Quechua word for "knot."

KHIPU STRUCTURE

Primary cord: element to which all other features are attached; usually thicker than its pendants

Pendant cord: hang from primary cord; may be spaced closely together or far apart & separated by a space or change in color

Subsidiary cord: additional cords hanging from pendants



Explore more about khipus:

<http://khipukamayug.fas.harvard.edu/WhatIsAKhipu.html>

BONES

Some of the earliest evidence of human record keeping is found in the form of bone. The Lebombo bone (Swaziland) was created over 20,000 years ago from baboon fibulas. The markings on them are considered to be evidence of mathematical knowledge.





Tortoise plastron, 1300-1050 BC, China, Smithsonian Museum of Asian Art



ORACLE BONES

Early Chinese used animal shells and bones to predict the future. Questions would be etched into the shell with a knife, then heat was applied to create cracks which could then be interpreted.

Oracle bones are still found at excavation sites all over China. The more that are discovered, the better historians can interpret and understand the ancient Chinese script that is used.

BAMBOO STRIPS (*jiance* or *jiandu*)

The first type of book in China appeared in 6th century BC and were thin strips of bamboo dried over a fire, inscribed with ink, and fastened together with string, thus creating an accordion like book.

Bamboo strip books were discovered in a fourth century BC tomb in Hubei, China in 1993. These strips have been called the “Chinese Dead Sea Scrolls” because of their importance in providing an early view of Confucian and Daoist teachings. It is believed that many bamboo strip books were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution of China in the 1960s.



WAX TABLETS

Wax tablets were used by Romans and into the Middle Ages as portable and reusable writing surfaces, much like we use notebooks and tablet computers today. These tablets were made of wood and covered with a layer of [wax](#), often hinged between two outside covers (*diptychs*). Writing would be performed with a pointed **stylus**, which often had a straight-edged piece at the end for “erasing.” To erase, the tablet would be warmed over a hot surface and then scraped clean.

