

# Who Really Invented the Alphabet—Illiterate Miners or Educated Sophisticates?

## Introduction

 [Biblical Archaeology Society Staff](#)  September 13, 2012  20 Comments  20045 views  Share

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In a [landmark article in the March/April 2010 issue of BAR](#), Orly Goldwasser, professor of Egyptology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, explained how the very first alphabet, from which all other alphabets developed, was invented by illiterate Canaanite miners in the turquoise mines of Serabit el-Khadem in the Sinai peninsula. Inspired by Egyptian pictorial hieroglyphs and a desire to articulate their own thoughts in writing, these Canaanites created 22 alphabetic acrophonetic signs scratched into the rock that could express their entire language.




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Read [“How the Alphabet Was Born from Hieroglyphs”](#) by Orly Goldwasser as it appeared in the March/April 2010 issue of **BAR**.

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But Goldwasser did not convince everyone. Anson Rainey, who had been emeritus professor of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures and Semitic Languages at Tel Aviv University, promptly responded to the article with his doubts that this watershed moment in human culture had been brought about by illiterate miners. In his letter Rainey argues that the alphabet was surely created by “highly sophisticated Northwest Semites”; who inscribed countless papyrus sheets that have not survived.

Join us below to read Rainey's critiques and Goldwasser's thorough rebuttals about who really invented the alphabet.

[Rainey's First Critique](#)

[Goldwasser's First Rebuttal](#)

[Rainey's Response](#)

[Goldwasser's Second Rebuttal](#)

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