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### Reed This

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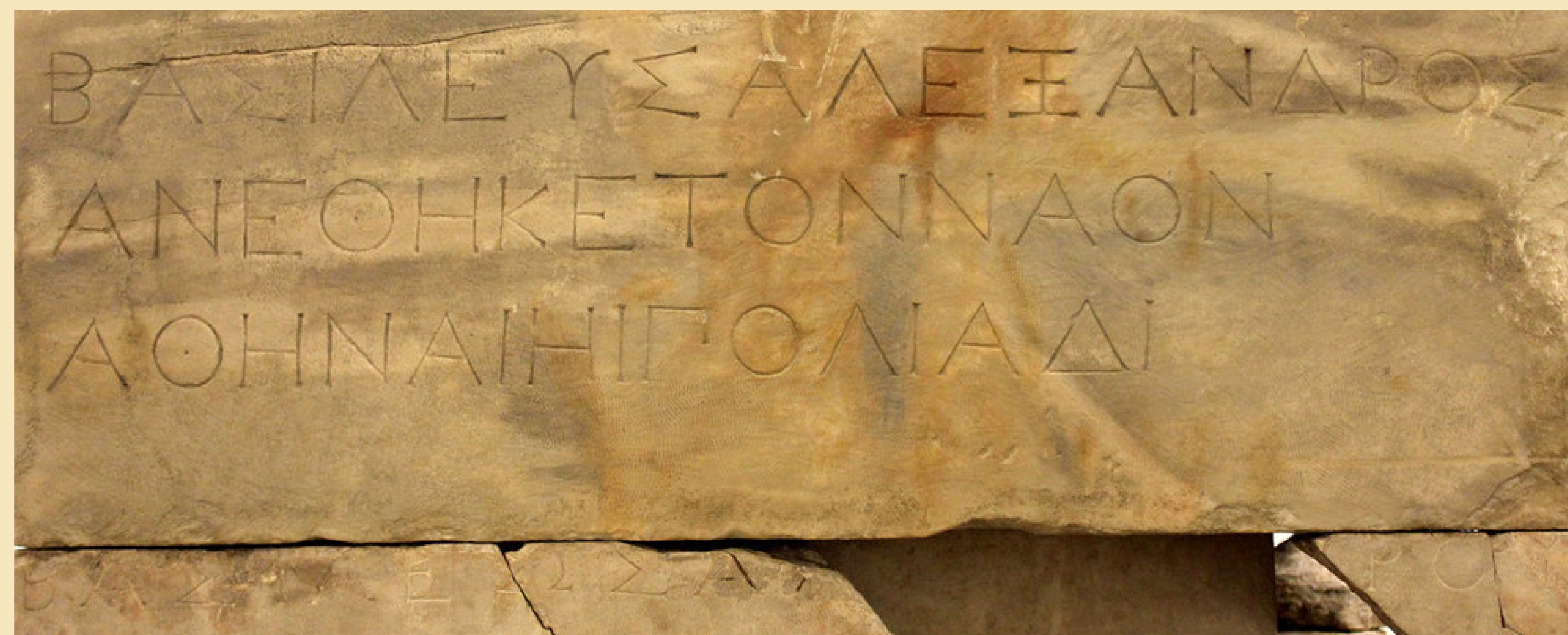
# Reed This: Ancient Culture Through Writing Practice and Material

## Research

### Goals

- Isolate common variables in script forms that point to distinct cultural messages across various cultures.
- Create a material and regional connection between scripts to allow for a better comparison of use, context, and aesthetics.
  - primarily the reed pen used by Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans from 3000BCE – 400CE
- Identify possible connections between the development/spread of culture and script shape.
- Use this understanding to develop a fuller picture of ancient culture.
- Create a book presenting the research in an approachable, visual way.

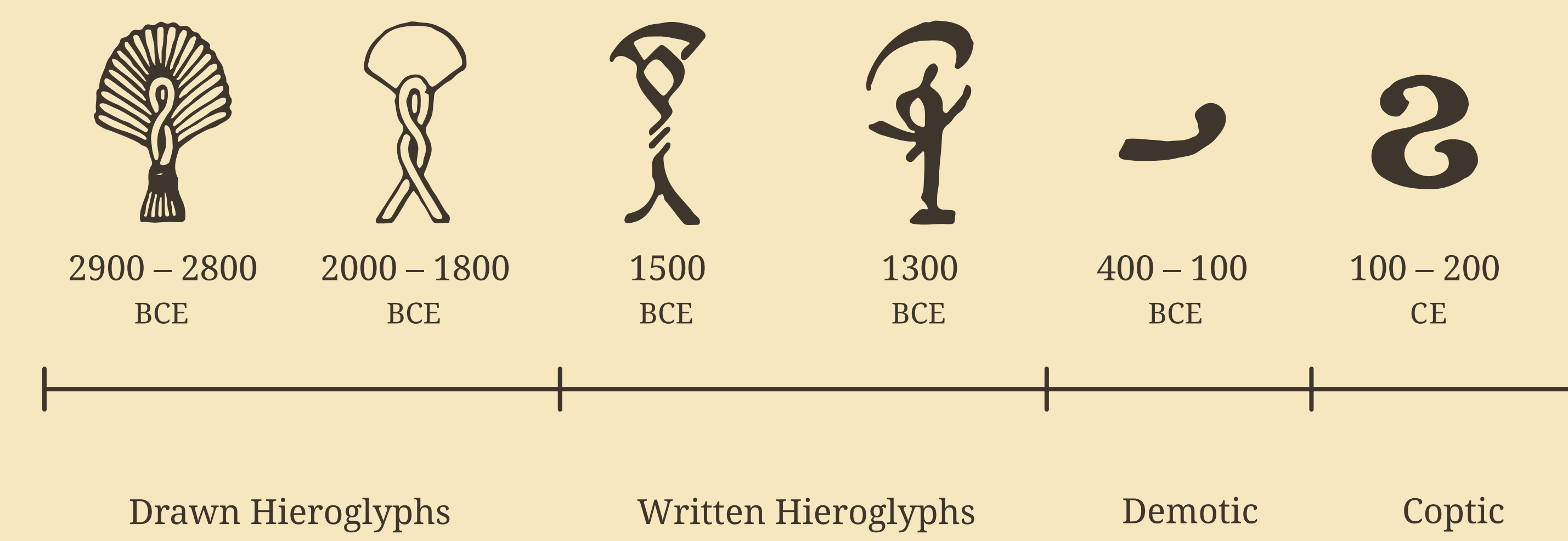
### Materials



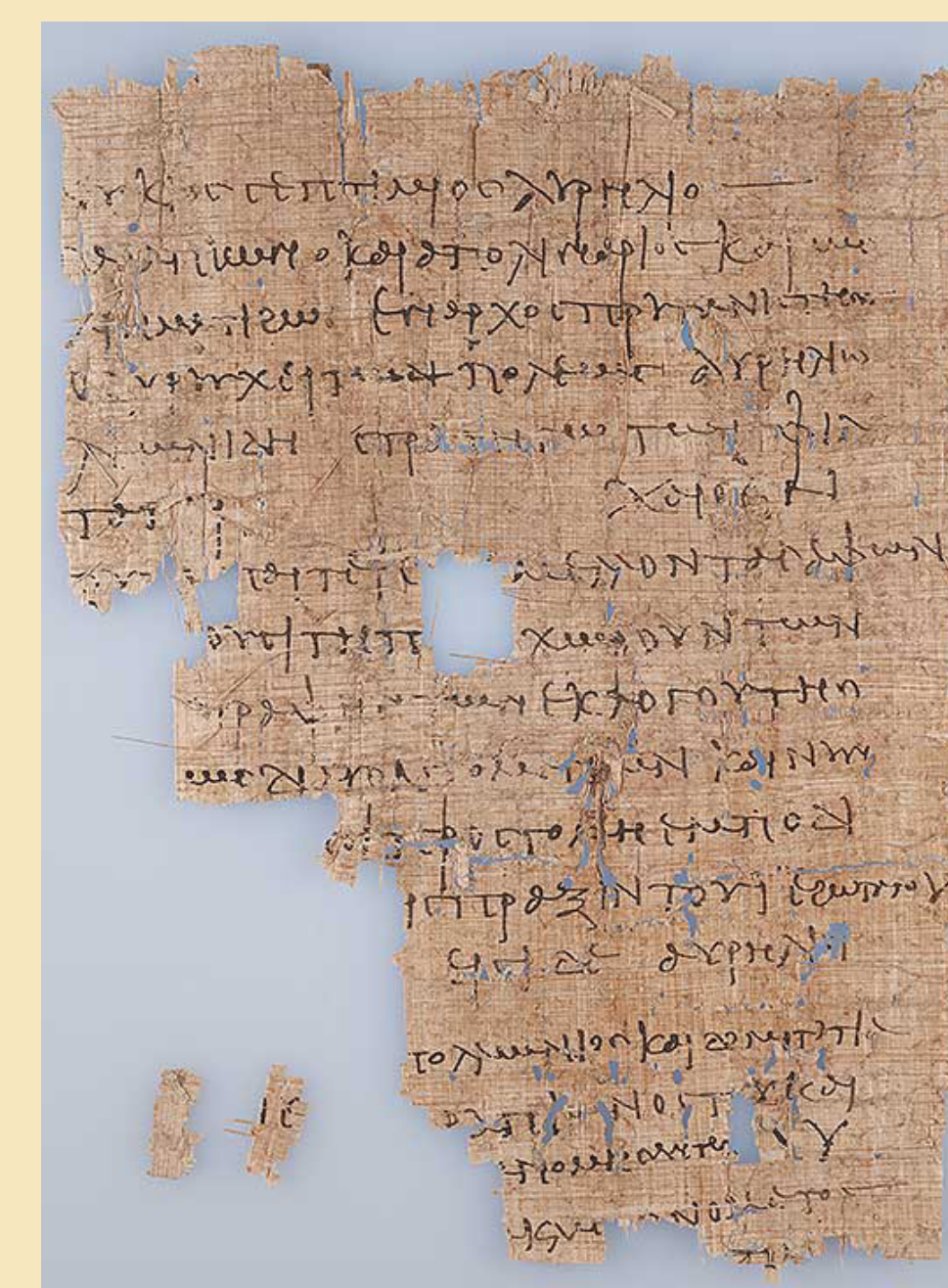
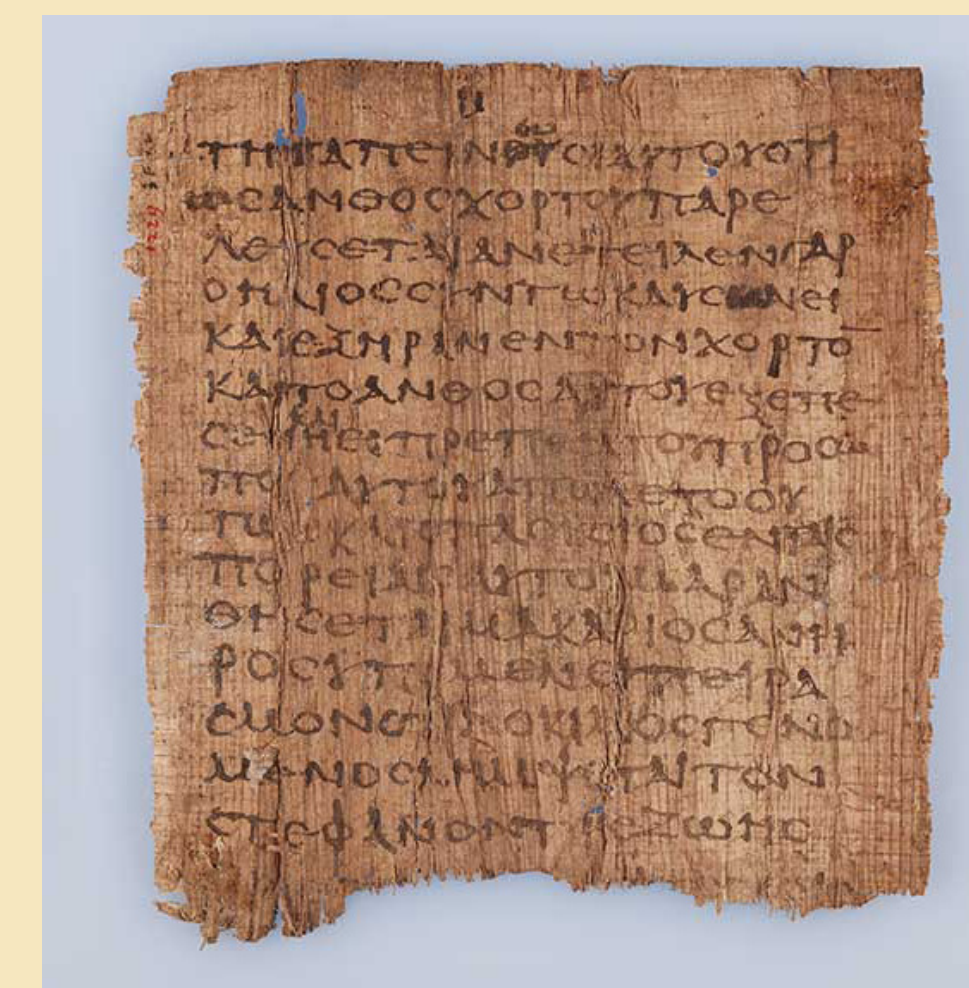
- Reed pen — rigid tip used to dispense ink on paper.
  - Writing
- Brush / Rush pen — a tuft of hair attached to a stick to mark surfaces with pigment.
  - Painting, drawing
- Incision tools — sharp, pointed objects used to cut marks *into* a surface.
  - Inscription

## Conclusions

### Cursiveness, Culture, and Class



The most notable tendency when societies begin using the reed pen is a movement toward more abstract and less complex letterforms. This, put simply, can be called the process of cursivization. By seeing writing as a process of physical movement, dictated by material and cultural influences, we can see cursiveness as a spectrum to which the scribe has full access. We can also then recognize changes in script morphology as announcing an important change in usage. Using this method we can gain more in-depth knowledge of the intended message, audience, and economic/cultural circumstance of the piece, giving us an important and overlooked view into the values of ancient peoples.



## Design

### Full Book Design

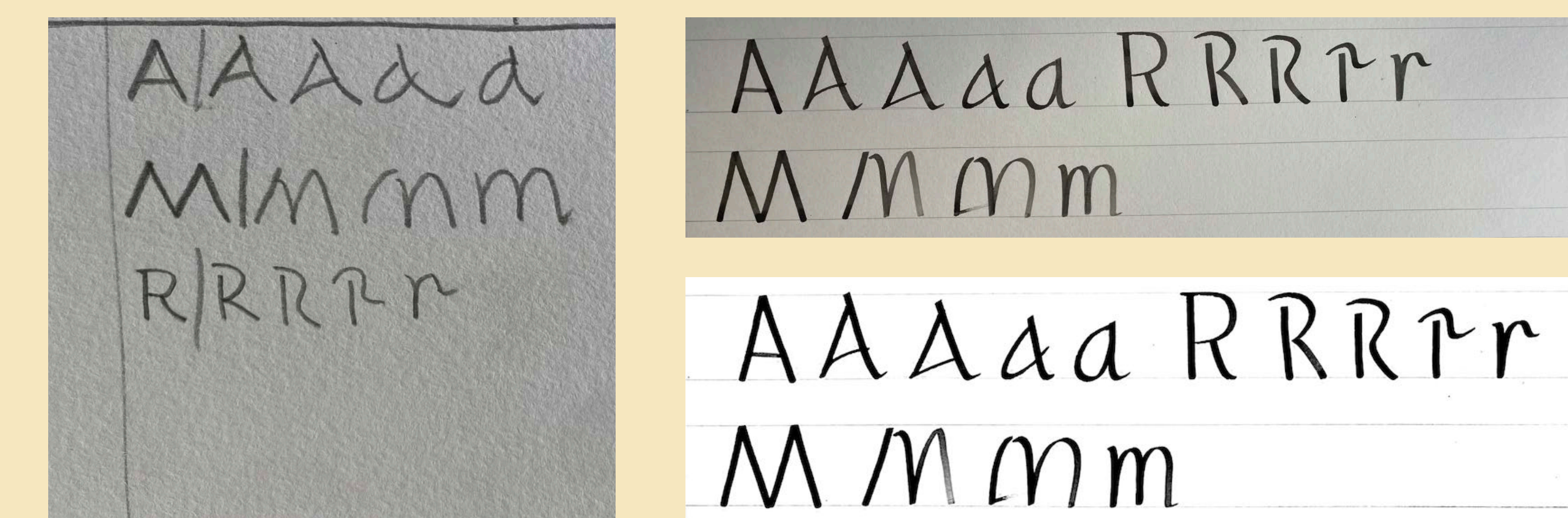
**Figure 23.** (Left) One can often see a close relationship between letter construction and architecture through history. The silhouettes and detailing of popular letterforms seem to mirror those of prominent building styles. See if you can spot the relationship between the structures, their detailing, and their desired function. The buildings and the idea are taken from Aldo Novarese's diagram of the relationship between letters and the architecture of different periods, as seen in *Design With Type* by Carl Dair, University of Toronto Press, Canada, 1967 (first edition Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York, 1952).

**Figure 25.** This diagram shows the proportionality of Greek letters as they connect to architecture, specifically the column, since the radius of the column and the "O" are the basis for most Greek modular systems. Similar to the Champfleury alphabet, it attempts to visually connect the underlying logic of a script to a major cultural value. Where Tory highlighted the connection to morality and chastity, this diagram highlights the importance placed on rationality and visual harmony found in ratios.

**Figure 24.** Champfleury alphabet, designed by Geoffrey Tory (1529 CE). Tory, a pupil of Leonardo da Vinci, said of the letter A that "it has its legs apart in the manner of a man's legs and feet as he strides along. [The crossbar] precisely covers the man's genital organ to denote that modesty and chastity above all else are required by those who seek access and admission to good letterforms, among which A is the entrance gate and first in order in all ABCs." This is certainly a fabrication but it beautifully illustrates how letterforms become entangled in our views on goodness, and how letterforms are then changed and wielded as a result of those views.

**Figure 26.** The alignment zones in the Naskh script are governed by the rhombic dot system that is built around a flexible ribbon-like baseline. This diagram shows the fluid baseline of this Arabic script which adds to its perception as a more "free flowing" script than Latin. When plotted out in this way the letters seem to flow down a river of letter strokes. Understanding the basic principles that a script is built upon allows us to discern its cultural perception and use.

### Process



Throughout my design process, I was able to shape and write with reed pens. This experience allowed me to get hands-on experience with the materials I was researching. I could feel the pliability of the wood as I carved the pen from a bare reed and I could feel the way the ink moved across the page. My process of sketching, writing, computerizing, and laying out also allowed me to create a consistent design language and stay true to the letterforms I was trying to study and emulate. Designing the book highlighted to me that the very act and process of making language visible introduces a visual language and how we present material is a meaningful choice that should be analyzed.