

*Abstract*

The origin of the alphabet has intrigued both scholars and laypeople for ever. Its transmission from the Near East to Europe (i.e. from the Phoenicians to the Greeks) is well understood today, but its creation around the mid-second millennium in Ugarit or nearby still rises constant controversy. Were there any models, e.g. in the so-called Proto-Sinaitic script or the Egyptian hieroglyphs? Or was the Mesopotamian cuneiform the ultimate source of inspiration? Or some other writing system? And how do we explain the two different sequences of letters, one A-B-G-D, called «alphabet», one H-L-Ĥ-M, preserved e.g. in the «South-Arabian» script of the kingdom of Saba and early-modern Ethiopia, and which are both – according to recent research – rooted in 2nd-millennium B.C. Ugarit? For a complete history of the alphabet also these questions require plausible explanations. The author discusses well-known hypotheses and proposes new answers to these highly-debated questions.

*Rudolf Wachter*, Basel/Lausanne