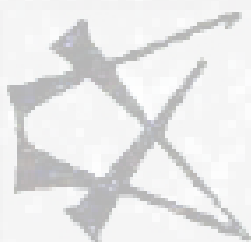


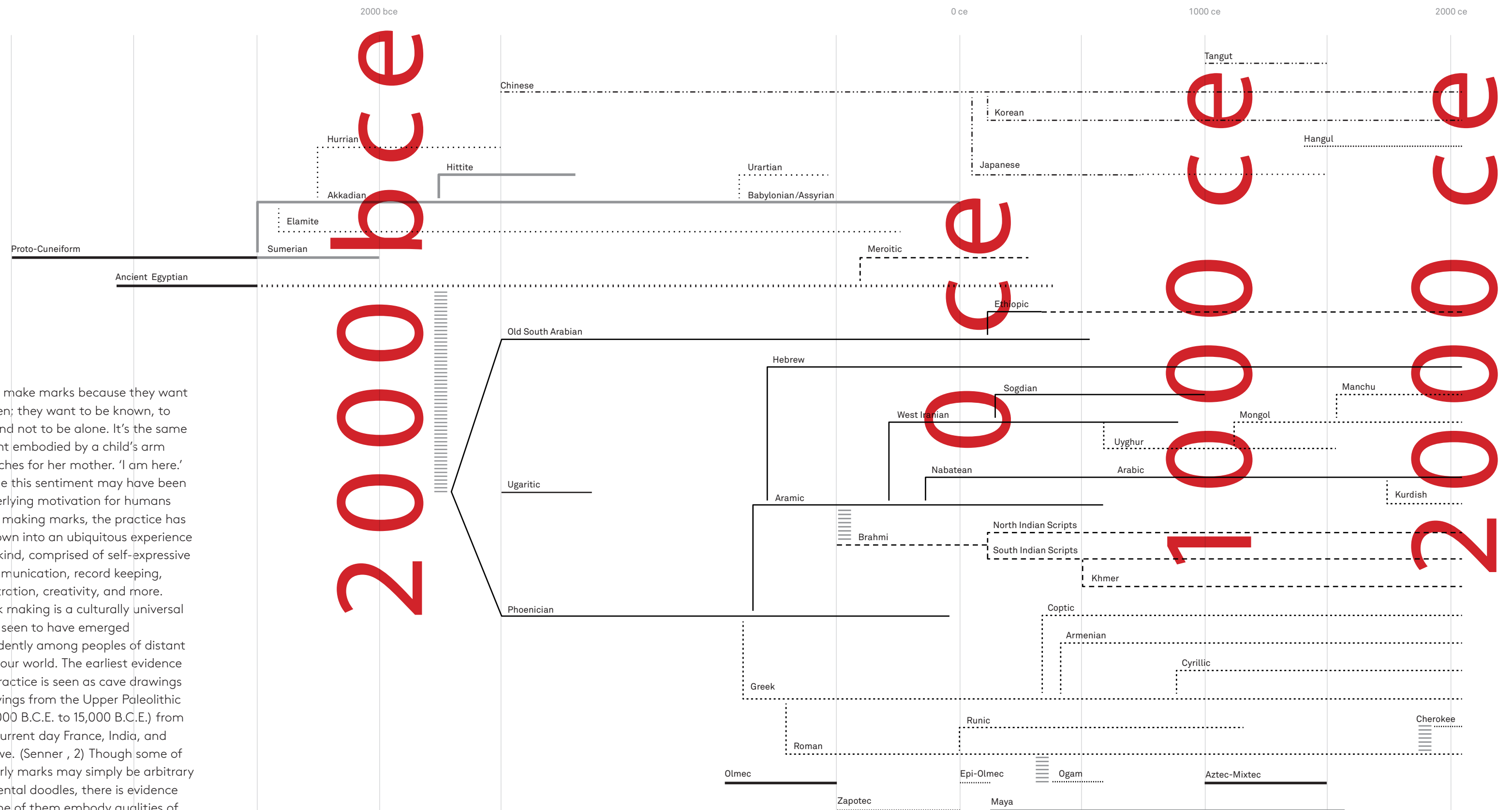


Earliest Written Marks



Humans make marks because they want to be seen; they want to be known, to be felt and not to be alone. It's the same sentiment embodied by a child's arm that reaches for her mother. 'I am here.' And while this sentiment may have been the underlying motivation for humans to begin making marks, the practice has since grown into an ubiquitous experience for mankind, comprised of self-expressive art, communication, record keeping, administration, creativity, and more.

Mark making is a culturally universal practice seen to have emerged independently among peoples of distant parts of our world. The earliest evidence of this practice is seen as cave drawings and carvings from the Upper Paleolithic era (35,000 B.C.E. to 15,000 B.C.E.) from sites in current day France, India, and Zimbabwe. (Senner , 2) Though some of these early marks may simply be arbitrary experimental doodles, there is evidence that some of them embody qualities of intentional communication and even of productive combination. (Senner, 4) The latter of which stands out as evidence toward the employment of syntactical structure that was perhaps influenced by syntactical structures that may have existed within the contemporaneous spoken languages of those times.



In order to understand the mode of function for written marks, it is helpful to have a general classification of signs and of the things to which they may refer. A widely used classification of signs is the Peircean trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol. Under this classification, an iconic sign points to its referent via a direct likeness

Throughout the historic development of written language, it is helpful to make note of the different scopes of communication to which they may refer. For example, there may be a distinction between a sign that refers to an entire concept or phrase, such as the Sun.

Throughout the historic development of written marks, it is also important to make note of the different scopes of concept to which discrete marks may refer. For example, there may be a discrete mark which refers to an entire concept or phrase, such as the Sun. Alternatively, there may be a discrete mark which refers to a certain phoneme or syllable **of spoken language, such as the sound** of the letter 'f.' Logographic or pictographic signs refer to a whole concept or phrase of concepts. Logosyllabic or phonographic signs refer to a phonetic syllable. Logoconsonantal signs refer to clusters of consonantal phonemes. Consonantary signs refer to discrete consonantal phonemes.

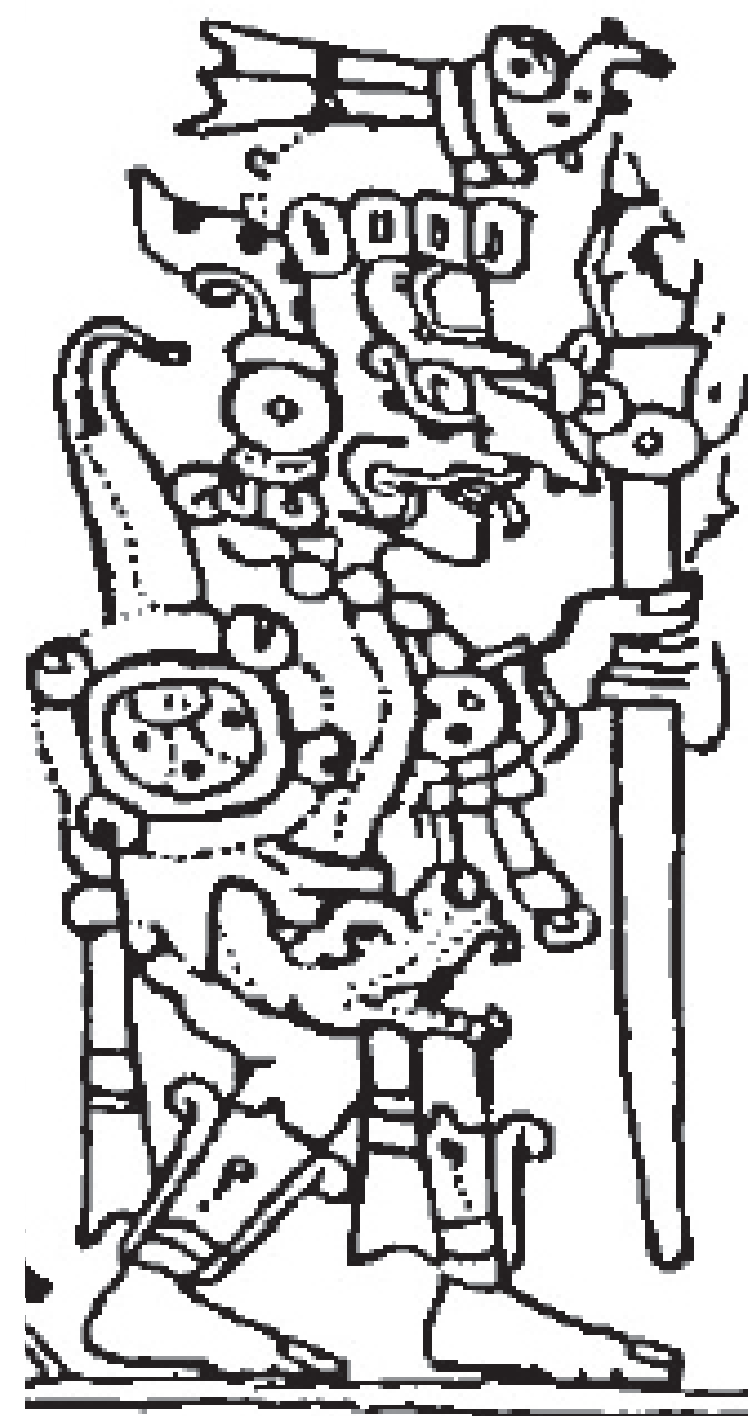
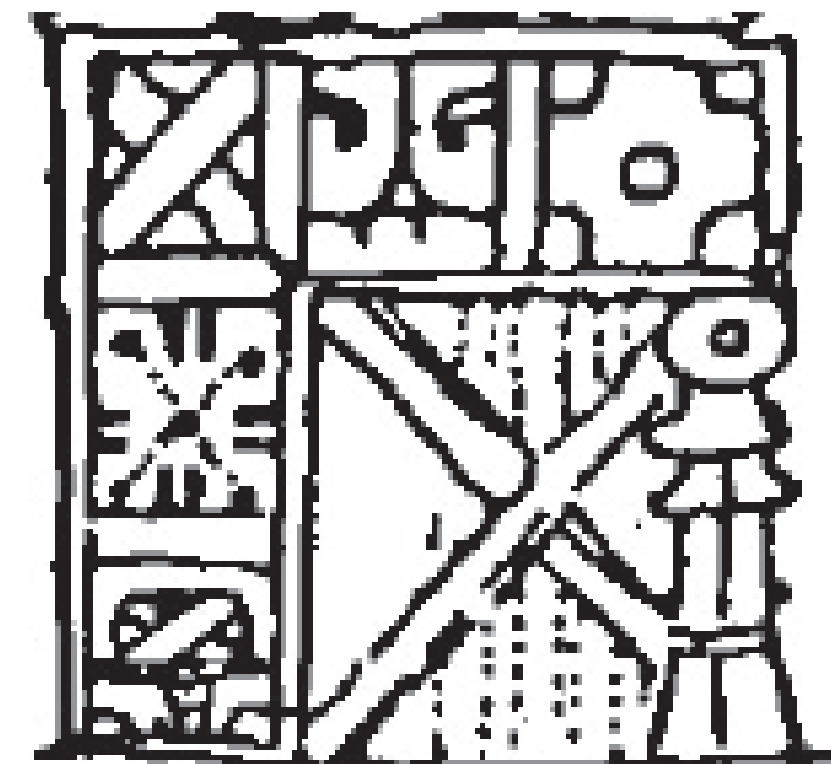
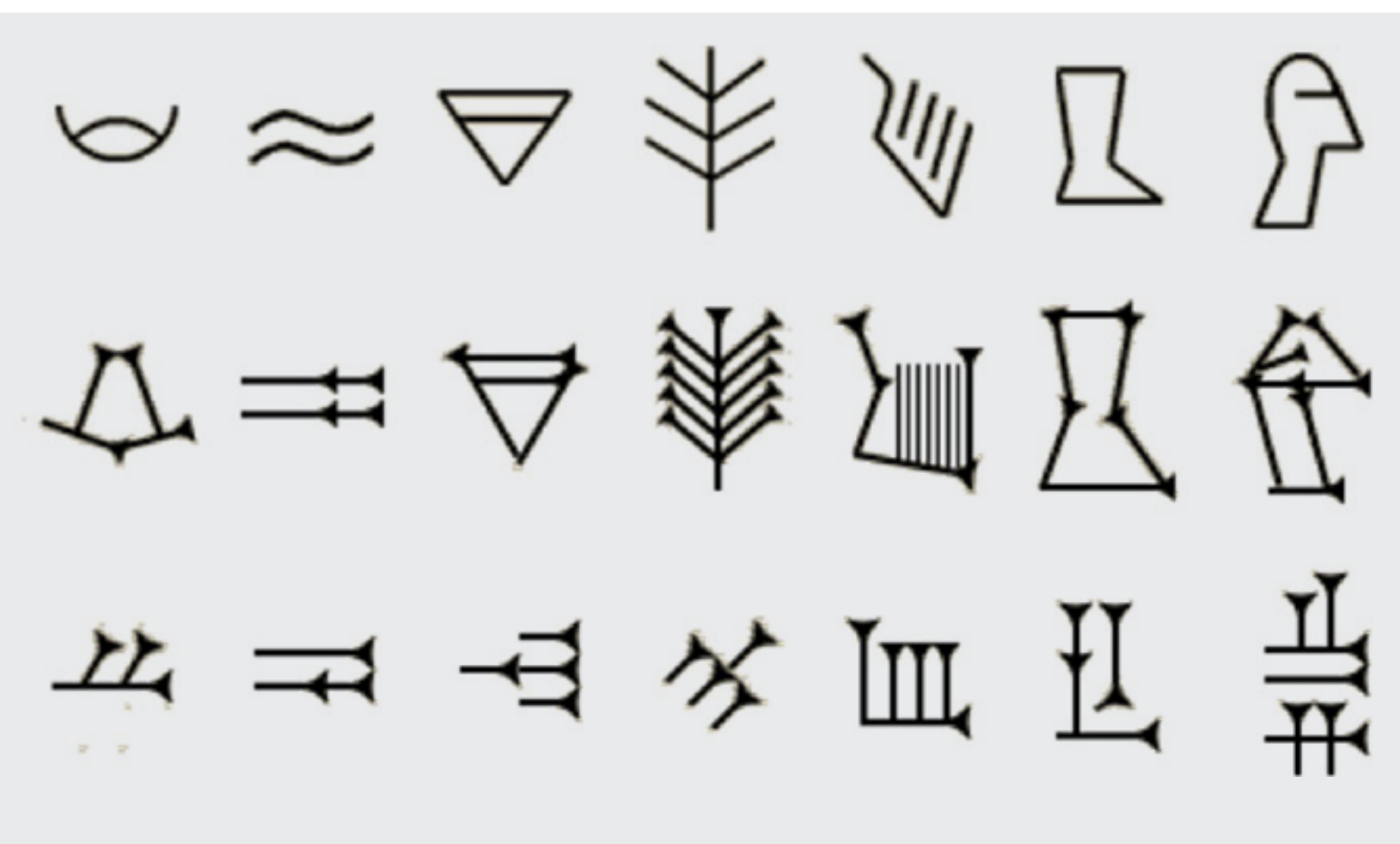
And alphabetic signs refer to discrete consonantal and vowel phonemes.

Given these classifications of written marks, a written mark that refers directly to the signified object by way of a likeness in form is operating as an iconic logograph. If this same written mark bore no formal likeness to the signified object, **and its understanding was by way** of conventionalized use, then it would be operating as a symbolic logograph. Throughout the development of a given lineage of scripts, there is a general progression of written marks from operating as logographs to operating as consonantary and alphabetic marks. There is also a general progression from marks referring to the signified as

icons to that of referring as symbolic signs.

Common to all early writing systems is the use of iconic logograms. This can be seen in Proto-Cuneiform circa 3500 B.C.E., Early Egyptian script circa 3000 B.C.E., Anyang circa 1200 B.C.E., and in Olmec circa 1000 B.C.E. Note that each of these early scripts develop in isolation from each other. Nevertheless, the earliest written forms of these scripts take shape in the form of formal likeness to that which they refer. The sign for 'Sun' is typical circular; the sign for 'water' is typically with ripples; etc. The common mode of function among these early written marks seems suggest a natural progression of the development of writing systems. It is easy to see that

Written marks that refers directly to the signified object by way of a likeness in form is operating as an iconic logograph



recombination in order to achieve myriad meanings from a manageable set of building blocks.

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the development of more intentional and specific communication with written marks.

The relatively organic forms and intricate detail of early iconic written marks makes them ideal for use with artistic imagery. In some early Egyptian and Mayan murals, the separation between linguistic symbols and artwork proper is sometimes indistinct. The composition of written

