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The great nation which dwelt in the seventh century before our era on the banks of Tigris and Euphrates flourished in literature as well as in the plastic arts, and had an alphabet of its own. The Assyrians sometimes wrote with a sharp reed, for a pen, upon skins, wooden tablets, or papyrus brought from Egypt. In this case they used cursive letters of a Phoenician character. But when they wished to preserve their written documents, they employed clay tablets, and a stylus whose bevelled point made an impression like a narrow elongated wedge, or arrow-head. By a combination of these wedges, letters and words were formed by the skilled and practised scribe, who would thus rapidly turn off a vast amount of "copy." All works of history, poetry, and law were thus written in the cuneiform or old Chaldean characters, and on a substance which could withstand the ravages of time, fire, or water. Hence we have authentic monuments of Assyrian literature in their original form, unglossed, unaltered, and ungarbled, and in this respect Chaldean records are actually superior to those of the Greeks, the Hebrews, or the Romans.

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