

Kids' KOrner

Clay tablets found at Tell Brak

WASHINGTON — Two clay tablets more than 5,000 years old, showing examples of a pictographic script that led to cuneiform writing, have been found at Tell Brak, an ancient site in northeastern Syria.

"They are unique and represent the earliest examples of a sort of communication that led to the cuneiform script and hence to writing as it is known today," says David Oates, the University of London archeologist who led the expedition that discovered the tablets.

One tablet holds a drawing of a sheep, the other a goat. Both contain a circular hole-like depression denoting the number 10.

PALACE CROWNS MOUND

Excavating near the top of the 150-foot-high mound at Tell Brak, Oates also found some important things from a later millennium—the remains of a Mitanni palace and throne room. On the ground floor of the building were two cuneiform tablets.

The founders of the Mitanni kingdom were Indo-Iranians from the northeast, one of several groups that overran Mesopotamia between 1700 and 1500 B.C. By 1400 B.C. the Mitanni ruled an empire that controlled Assyria and rivaled the Hittites. It extended across the northern plain that today is Syria and Iraq.

"Up until now neither a Mitanni city nor royal residence has ever been found," says Oates. "To find both, complete with a royal tablet,

is quite extraordinary."

The royal tablet records a legal decision made in the court of Artashshumara, the Mitanni king, and contains his seal.

Commenting on the early pictographs, Oates, notes that similar but more stylized works showing just the heads of animals have previously been found in Uruk, an early Sumerian city in southern Mesopotamia.

"These two new finds are not only the first discovered in northern Mesopotamia," says Oates, "but they seem to be older because they show the whole animal instead of the more sophisticated versions from Uruk that showed only the heads."

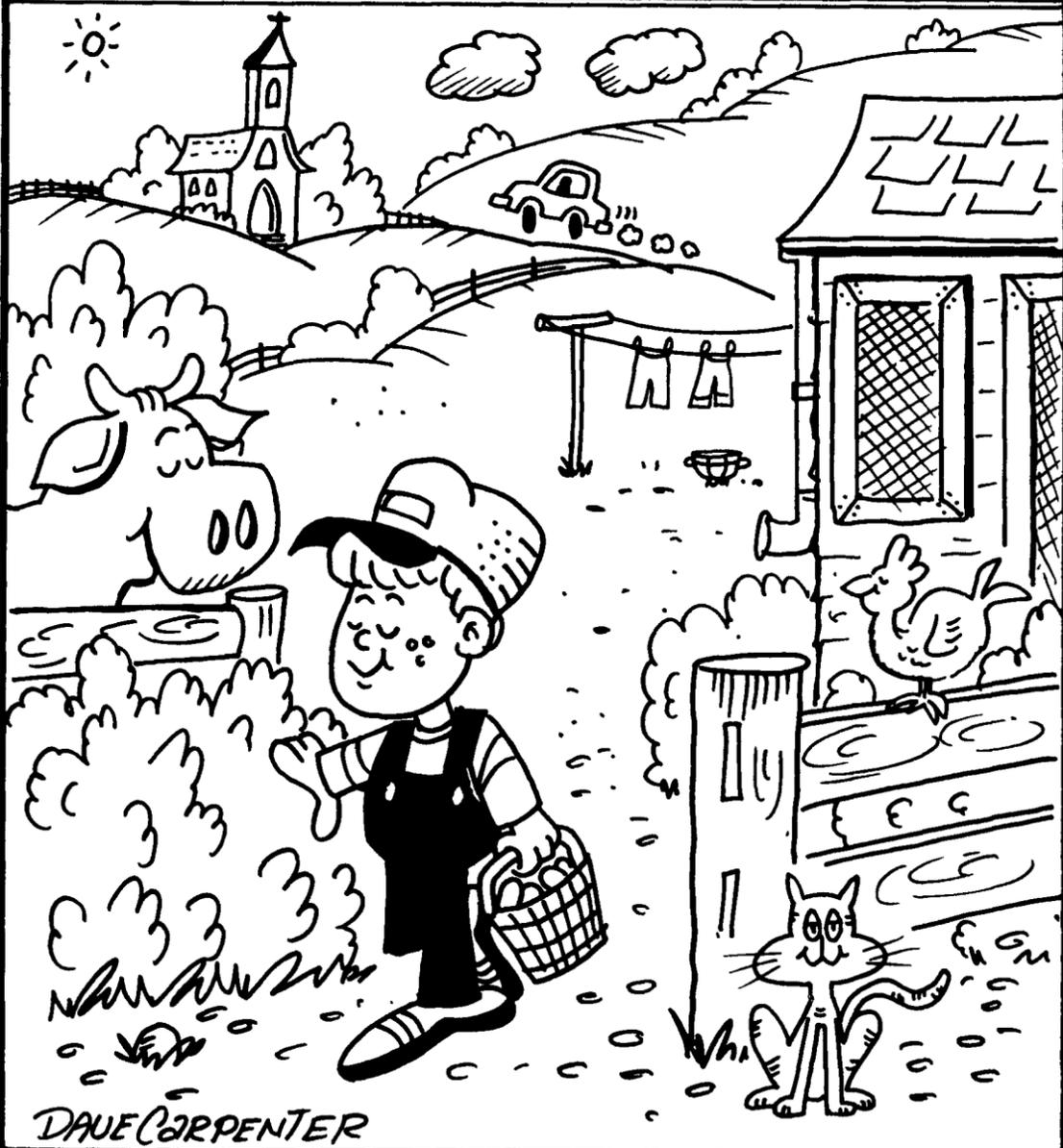
The first pictographic signs, which were developed well before 3000 B.C., were scratched in damp clay. The Sumerian scribes used sharpened reeds. The resulting tablets were used mainly in trading. For instance, when a person shipped 10 head of sheep or cattle, he sent a crude bill of sale in clay with a pictographic symbol for cattle or sheep plus a sign for the number 10. The buyer responded with a similar receipt.

KEEPING TABS ON TAXES

Thus, ancient businessmen and the inevitable tax collectors could maintain their ledgers.

By 2500 B.C., Sumerian scribes had devised a more efficient script. A stylus with a blunt triangular tip could be manipulated to make cuneiform, or wedge-shaped, impressions in rapid succession. Clusters of such

THERE ARE TEN THINGS IN THE PICTURE BELOW, THAT BEGIN WITH THE LETTER "C". CAN YOU FIND THEM?



DAVE CARPENTER

ANSWERS

- 1.) COW 2.) CAT 3.) CAR 4.) CLOTHESLINE
5.) CHURCH 6.) CROSS 7.) CHICKEN
8.) COOP 9.) CLOUDS 10.) CAP

marks formed characters that were based on pictographs. The characters grew increasingly abstract.

When an unknown genius realized that the signs could also represent sounds, the art of writing was born.

The Sumerians were probably the world's first city dwellers. They founded numerous cities and

towns that were nourished by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and their tributaries.

After a city was destroyed by a pillaging army, the population tended to rebuild on the ruins because the water supply was nearby. Excavating a tell—a large mound covering the ruin of a city—is like slicing through layers of history. Each stratum with its

embedded trove of artifacts offers a glimpse of events from one catastrophe to the next.

Brak, whose central mound covers more than 86 acres, is a good example. Oates believes people were attracted to the place as early as 6,000 B.C., but that it experienced its first flowering as a

(Turn to Page B12)

COLOR THIS!

- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. ORANGE |
| 2. RED | 7. PEACH |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

TRACK: ONE PERSON RACING AGAINST ANOTHER IS THE SIMPLEST OF ALL THE SPORTS AND ENJOYED ALL OVER THE WORLD. BESIDES RACING ON A TRACK THIS SPORT INCLUDES CROSS COUNTRY, HURDLING JUMPING, VAULTING WEIGHT THROWING AND WALKING RACES. TRACKS MOTTO IS SWIFTER, HIGHER, STRONGER.

