

still less like the original pictures.

The cuneiform writing was invented by a people called *Sumerians*, who spoke a language quite unrelated to Babylonian. The Babylonians, or rather, Akkadians, took over the signs from the Sumerians and adapted them to their own language. Hence a sign may sometimes be read either as a Sumerian word (e.g. dingir, "god") or as the corresponding Akkadian word (e.g. ilu, "god"). There are about one hundred signs that indicate either a vowel alone, a consonant plus a vowel, or a vowel plus a consonant. Quite a number can represent a combination of consonant plus vowel plus consonant. Most of the signs also have a logographic meaning, that is to say, they can stand for a full word. Sometimes a sign stands for two or three different words that have similar meanings, and one must tell from the context or from the other signs placed next to it, which word it represents. Thus at first sight the cuneiform writing seems to be an extremely complicated system of writing. As over against this, however, it should be noted that it indicates vowels as well as consonants--a real advantage over the Egyptian writing. Indication of vowels is a great help in the understanding of the writing and of the languages that it represents. Cuneiform was used for thousands of years, and the signs underwent many changes, so that in different periods there is considerable difference, though relationships can generally be observed. The earliest cuneiform inscriptions that were worked out came from the Assyrian kings; consequently the Assyrian forms came to be accepted by modern scholars as normative, and the signs are usually arranged in lists according to this order, even though it is quite different from <sup>that of</sup> the forms used in earlier and later periods.

Unlike the hieroglyphics, which were normally used only to represent one language, the cuneiform came to be employed for quite a variety of languages,