The subject of this chapter is the identification of the alphabet of the Hekatompedon Inscription and the examination of its visual properties in detail. "Alphabet", intended here in its larger sense, means that select set of symbols used to convey the particular text in question. Those symbols are the smallest component parts, the "building blocks" out of which the Hekatompedon Inscription, as a major monument, is constructed.

In the case of an Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription, the individual symbols are the specific hieroglyphs, which we recognize as overtly pictorial in their presentation, if not directly representational. In the case of a Greek inscription, the symbols are the alphabetic letterforms and are more abstract in their presentation. A. Carson is one scholar, however, who admits the pictorial force of the Greek alphabet. In Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay, she states, "The Greeks plainly regarded their alphabet as a series of pictorial devices" (1986: 59). Carson follows L. H. Jeffery who, making an important connection between letters and layout, proceeds to introduce the boustrophedon style of writing as evidence for Greek awareness of letters as devices whose direction can be manipulated:

There is no reason to suppose that the Greeks borrowed the idea from any other system of writing.... Its adoption simply implies a pictorial conception of the letters as outlined figures which can be turned in either direction according to need. This notion was evidently in the minds of the first Greek writers, and it was the easier for them to carry it out because twelve of the twenty-six shapes were symmetrical ..., six required very little change in reversal ..., and only eight looked markedly different in reverse. (LSAG: 46)

Carson further remarks (1986: 59), "Such a style suggests a writer who thinks of his letters as a series of novel, reversible shapes: a very Greek way of thinking about letters". The connection between what an alphabet is and the layout in which a text appears will certainly surface again in our examination of the stoikhedon arrangement of the Hekatompedon Inscription.

The important features of any alphabet are a mixture of qualitative and quantitative aspects, but the analysis of a Greek inscription must start with the identification of the alphabet’s regional or epichoric characteristics and the structure of its individual letterforms. Studying an alphabet in depth must also involve measurement, the principle being that letterforms have a natural and very strong affinity with architecture and may be best understood in a unique architectural context (Butz, 2009: 31). The designation, “architectural epigraphy”, invented by the great American epigraphist, B. D. Meritt, is most significant for this argument. Meritt states (1940: 47), "It seems to us now almost self-evident that every inscription should be studied not only as a text but as an architectural monument". Beginning with basic measurement, the two-dimensional and three-dimensional qualities of an inscription benefit from the architectural approach. After measurements have been taken of individual letterforms over the spread of the inscription, groups of letterforms may then be identified and discussed and proportional analyses made. Restoration should always be so physically grounded.

Greek prefers a monoline construct from the outset of its epigraphic tradition (Morison, 1972: 5-7). S. V. Tracy states (1975: 88), "Study of Kirchner-Klaffenbach, Imagines Inscriptionum Atticarum, 1948 reveals that letters conceived as a series of single lines form the mainstay of all lettering on Attic inscriptions in all periods,
even when the letters are large”. Tracy goes on to suggest that the monoline aesthetic in Attic inscriptions “must be a result in large part of the dominance of the stem-cutting method”. Greek monoline, however, was firmly in place long before stem-cut letters by Attic cutters, specifically from the time of the earliest incised or painted inscriptions on vases and the earliest inscriptions on stone in places far afield from Attike. Morison pictures IG XII.3, 1130, the famous gravestone from Melos dated to the second half of the sixth century as evidence, but the Cup of Nestor from Pithekoussai (ML 1) shows the trait cleanly established probably two hundred years before. Coupled with the evidence for prolific inpainting of letterforms in Greek epigraphy (Duncan, 1961: 179-188), the finished inscription as perceived by the viewer would have read as a very graphic and two-dimensional product. This is the paradox of Greek inscriptions: they are achieved as a sculptural activity, with a full range of tools both for preparing the surface, as for a piece of fine sculpture, and for cutting the inscription proper. Yet, because of the inpainting and the monoline aesthetic, they are read two-dimensionally in the visual sense. I have, therefore, excluded depth of stroke from the basic measurement of a Greek inscription, at least in this study. Depth of stroke in Greek epigraphy I find to be more closely linked with the personal τέχνη of the letter cutter. If we were to make an identification of an individual hand at work on a certain inscription, depth of stroke and the exact manner in which the tool achieves the root of the letterform together provide a legitimate point of access. Individual ductus also has this potential for revealing the personal manipulation of an otherwise formal construct.

The practice of analyzing letterforms separately and systematically for a variety of reasons has precedence amongst several outstanding epigraphists. L. H. Jeffery and M. Guarducci both stress the palaeographic side of epigraphy in similar ways. Guarducci (EG I: 88-102) first offers the historiographic analysis of the individual characters of the Greek alphabet, then contextualizes their development in the epichoric alphabet systems of archaic Greece (EG I: 103-367). The whole of Jeffery’s work in LSAG may be said to serve this purpose, but she devotes a special section to the transmission and incorporation of the essential elements of the Greek alphabet (LSAG: 21-42) as well as numerous schemata and commentaries on letterforms at the beginning of each topographic division. Both scholars utilize extensive drawings, exemplars, and charts to support and illustrate their points. Guarducci (EG I: 368-390) further offers a study of the chronological evolution of each letterform from its relative stabilization at the end of the fifth century BCE into the Roman imperial period. H. Immerwahr devotes the entire second part of Attic Script (1990: 2-3 and 131-169) to an alphabetic survey of each letterform’s individual development and occurrence in the media of his research, particularly vase inscriptions; he calls this his “catalogue of letterforms”. S. V. Tracy (1990: 2-4) selects for discussion particular letterforms that, by their formation, help to establish the identification of a specific cutter. Tracy’s analysis of these selected letterforms goes under the heading, “Peculiarities of individual letters”, and follows directly the section, “General characteristics of the lettering” in the entry for each cutter that he identifies. The purpose of the one-by-one letterform analysis for the Hekatompedon Inscription, however, is not so much to identify a hand but to identify a very definite style that has consequences for the definition of the monument.

Jeffery and Immerwahr will be the major authorities cited for their schemata in this chapter on the alphabet of the Hekatompedon Inscription. Certainly other schemata have been produced showing Attic letterforms, for example that of M. Walbank (1974: 161-169), which draws on the Bradeen-McGregor charts in the same publication, namely ΦΟΡΟΣ: Tribute to Benjamin Dean Meritt. Walbank shows, for example, an alpha close to the Hekatompedon version (1974: 165, nos. 2 and 3), but offers no discussion about the form other than in Table 3 (1974: 166-167), where α2 is listed as an “exception” because it may have appeared after Walbank’s terminus ante quem of 450 BCE for the form (449 BCE is actually given