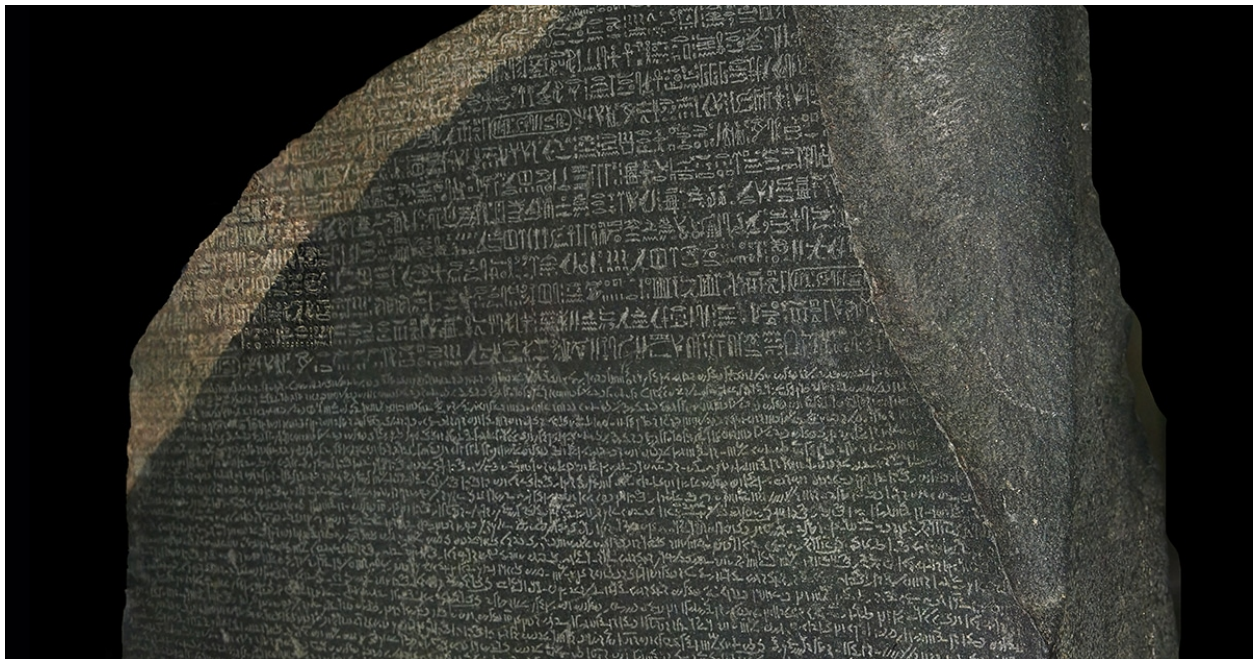


The Mystery of the Rosetta Stone

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. Inscription (Noun) /ɪnˈskɪpʃn/ words written on or cut into something
Example: There is an inscription on the tomb of the pharaoh.
2. Shorthand (Noun) ˈʃɔːrthænd a method of quick writing using abbreviations and symbols
Example: The court reporter knows how to use shorthand method of writing.
3. Slab (Noun) /slæb/ a large, thick, flat piece of stone, concrete, etc.
Example: The house is made of slab.
4. Scholar (Noun) /ˈskɔːlər/ an expert in a particular subject
Example: Who are the most well-known scholars of Athens of all time?
5. Represent (Verb) /ˌrɛprɪˈzɛnt/ to be a symbol or sign of something
Example: The wedding rings round shape represents infinity.
6. Phonetic (Adjective) /fəˈnetɪk/ (of a writing system) having symbols that correspond to one sound
Example: Unlike English, the Korean alphabet is phonetic.



In 1799, French soldiers in the city of Rosetta, Egypt, discovered a stone that would unlock the secrets of ancient Egypt. The stone had inscriptions in three types of writing: Egyptian hieroglyphs, a system of Egyptian writing using pictures; Egyptian demotic, a type of shorthand for hieroglyphs; and ancient Greek. Created in 196 BC, the stone's three sets of inscriptions translate to the same thing, with 14 lines written in hieroglyphs, 32 in demotic and 54 in ancient Greek.

The stone was part of a larger slab that was broken into pieces, but the other parts have never been found. Hieroglyphs stopped being used after the end of the fourth century AD, and eventually no one could read or write them anymore. For hundreds of years, scholars tried to translate them, but without success — until the Rosetta Stone was found. But even then it wasn't easy.

British physicist Thomas Young was among the first to make significant progress. From the Greek, it could be seen that the inscriptions celebrated the anniversary of Ptolemy V becoming king of Egypt. Scholars had thought that each hieroglyph represented an idea. But Young correctly guessed that some of the pictures represented sounds and would be used phonetically to spell "Ptolemy," which is a Greek name.

Young also discovered the direction in which the hieroglyphs had to be read. Then, Jean-François Champollion, a French scholar who studied the history of languages, discovered that the other hieroglyphs represented sounds too. And he used the stone to create an alphabet of phonetic hieroglyphs.

Because of Young and Champollion, scholars were able to completely translate the stone and gain a deeper understanding of ancient Egypt. The Rosetta Stone has been kept in the British Museum since 1802. However, Egyptian archaeologists have been asking for it to be returned to Egypt.

DISCUSSION

1. What did you know about the Rosetta Stone before reading this article?
2. Did you study ancient Egypt in school? Did you enjoy it?
3. What ancient cultures do you find fascinating?
4. Do you know much about the history of your language?
5. Do you know anyone who speaks multiple languages?