The Rosetta Stone Fact Sheet

Before the Rosetta Stone was discovered in 1799, Egyptian hieroglyphs were considered a simple form of picture writing. No one was able to **decipher** them because it was thought that each image had a literal meaning. For example, a bird would mean they were talking about a bird.



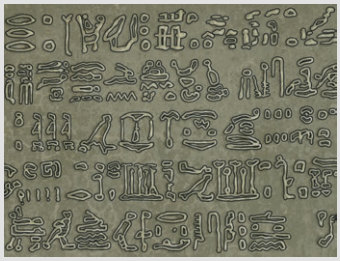
When the stone was discovered, **archaeologists** found it had the same piece of writing in two languages and three scripts. They were famiiar with one of the languages on the stone - this helped them understand and decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs. The Rosetta Stone can almost be considered a 'dictionary'.

Two Languages and Three Scripts

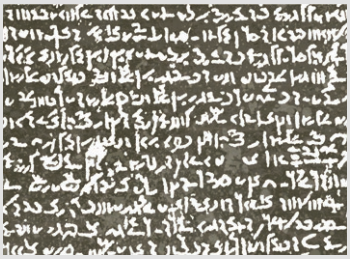
The difference between a language and a script is that a language is a method of communication whereas a script is the symbols that are used to write a language. The two languages on the Rosetta Stone are **Egyptian** and **Greek**.

The Three Scripts

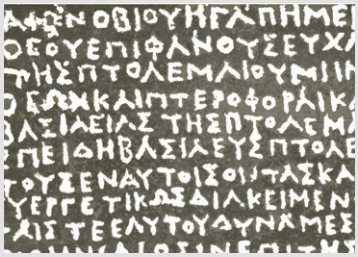
Hieroglyphic



Demotic



Ancient Greek



Because **scholars** still spoke ancient Greek in 1799, they were able to read the 53 lines of ancient Greek and use this to decipher the 32 lines in Demotic and the 14 lines in hieroglyphic script. This was then used to decipher hieroglyphic writings in many other ancient Egyptian **artefacts** and walls.

The Discovery

Soldiers from **Napoleon Bonaparte's** army made the discovery in 1799 in Egypt. While they were digging the foundations for a new building, they found the stone built into a very old wall. An officer, Pierre-François Buchard, realised the importance of the stone.

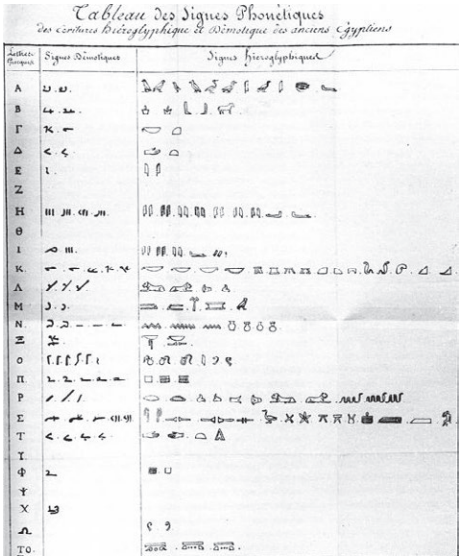
Deciphering the Rosetta Stone

When the British defeated Napoleon, the Rosetta Stone became the property of the British government. The stone was taken to England, where it has been permanently exhibited at the British Museum ever since.

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The two people recognised as having deciphered the Rosetta Stone are Thomas Young and Jean-François Champollion. Young, a British physicist, was the first to match the name 'Ptolemy' in the Greek text to one of the **cartouches.** He also figured out that some hieroglyphic signs had a specific sound.



Champollion, a French **linguist**, used the cartouches within the Rosetta Stone and other artefacts to make a phonetic hieroglyphic **alphabet**.

The stone contained an official message about King Ptolemy V Epiphanes, the pharaoh who ruled in Egypt between 204 and 180 BC. It says that the priests of a temple in Memphis (Egypt) supported him and it lists all the things that the pharaoh did which were good for the priests and the people of Egypt.

Glossary

alphabet –

A set of letters or symbols in a fixed order used to represent the sounds of a language.

archaeologists –

People who study things that have been left behind from the past.

artefacts –

An object made by a human.

cartouche –

A name plate in hieroglyphic script circled by an oval.

Demotic –

The 'language of the people' or native Egyptian script used for daily communication.

decipher –

To find out the meaning of a code so that you can understand a message.

linguist –

An expert in a language or several languages is called a linguist.

Napoleon Bonaparte –

A 19th century French Emperor.

scholars –

People who are well educated and know a lot about a particular subject.

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