

Egyptian Writing

The Egyptians invented one of the earliest forms of writing called hieroglyphics. They used a system of pictures that stood for different alphabetical sounds, syllables or sometimes whole ideas or objects. There are several hundred hieroglyphs.

	A		H		R
	Ä		I		S
	B		J		Sh
	C, K		L		T
	Ch		M		Th
	D		N		U
	E, Y		O		W
	F		P		X
	G		Q		Z

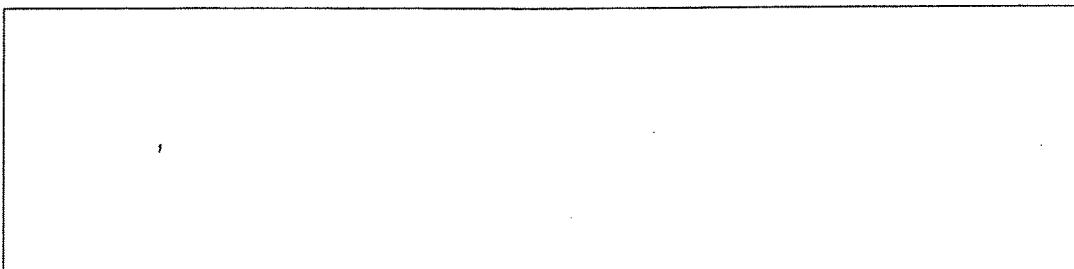
Table showing some examples of the hundreds of hieroglyphs and their English equivalents

Egyptians had no paper. They wrote on papyrus which was made from papyrus reeds which grew along the Nile. They also carved hieroglyphics into the stone and into all of the major monuments, tombs and temples. Not everyone knew this language – only priests, scribes, and stone craftsmen.

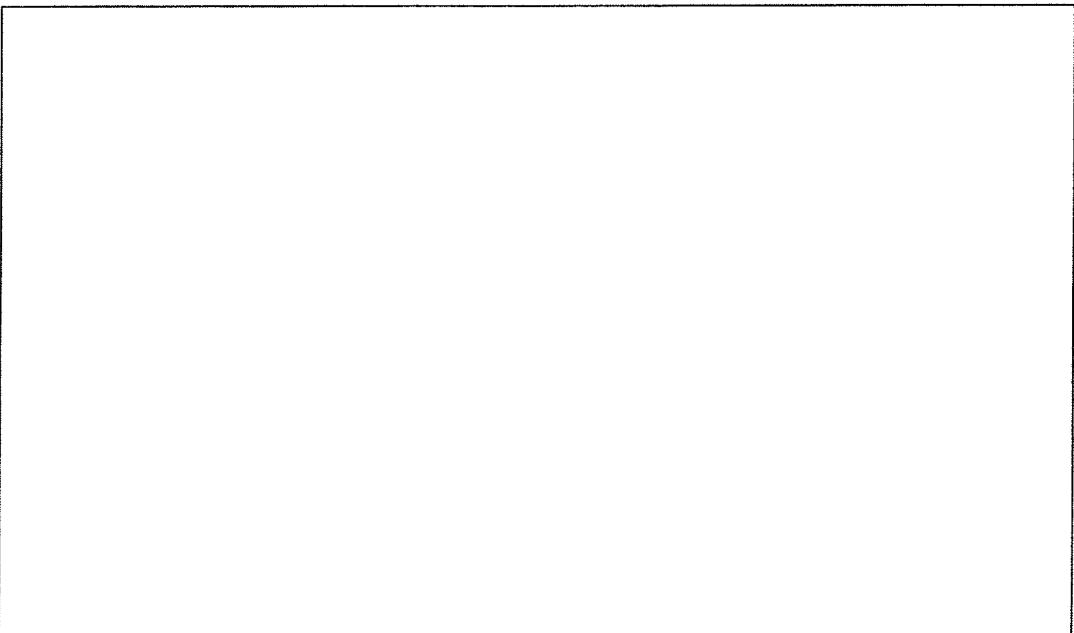
By the fourth century AD, hieroglyphics were no longer used. When the priests, scribes and stone craftsman who knew hieroglyphics died, so did the knowledge of this language.

Activity: Go to the website below or use the table on the previous page to complete the following activities.
<http://www.quizland.com/hiero.mv> (hieroglyphic translator)

- a) Write your name in hieroglyphics



- b) Write a secret message in hieroglyphics



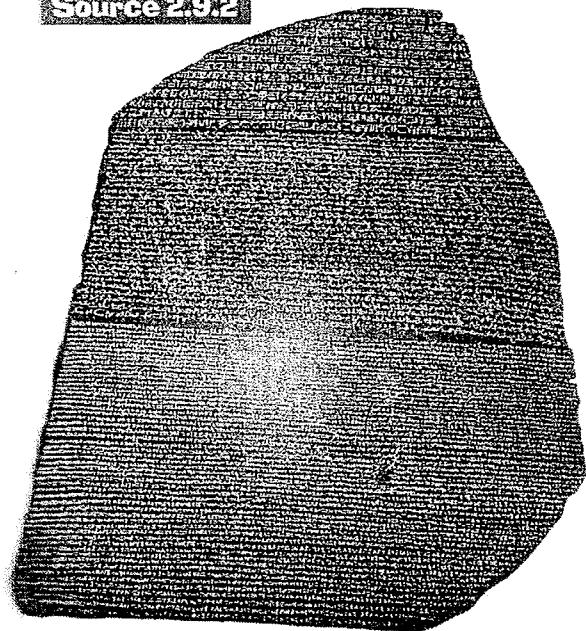
The Mystery of the Rosetta Stone – Unlocking the Mystery of Hieroglyphics

In AD 324 Egypt became a Christian country. In AD 641 Arab invaders introduced the Islam religion. The leaders of these new religions closed the temples of Egypt's old religions. This meant that it took 12 centuries before anyone could work out how to read hieroglyphics.

After Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, French scholars and archaeologists came to Egypt. In 1799 a French soldier discovered a slab of basalt at Rosetta which had engravings of three scripts – ancient Greek, Egyptian demotics and hieroglyphics. This became known as the Rosetta Stone.

A French scholar, Jean-Francois Champollion spent the next 14 years trying to decipher (work out) the hieroglyphics which he did by 1822 by using the ancient Greek writing on the stone as a guide. Now historians could read things such as myths, legends, hymns, medical records and legal documents which had been written many years before by the ancient Egyptians.

Source 2.9.2



A photograph of the Rosetta Stone, which is now located in the British Museum, London

Activity: Imagine you are Jean-Francois Champollion.

Describe how you felt when you deciphered (worked out) hieroglyphics and what they stood for.
