

Hieroglyphics: Writing the Egyptian Way

The Egyptians mainly used writing to keep records of dynasties, and of the deeds/ possessions owned by the Pharaoh.

The Egyptian way of writing was a system of pictograms known as hieroglyphics. In this system of writing, each picture represented a different sound.

Egyptian scribes would write their hieroglyphs using papyrus reed pens, papyrus paper, and ground charcoal for ink.

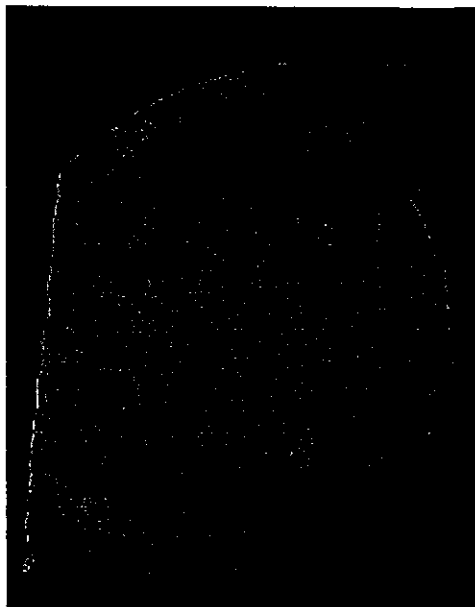
When early Egyptians began writing hieroglyphs, they used a simple drawing to represent the meaning of the word. (ie. A picture of a bee would represent a bee.)

In time, hieroglyphs evolved to not only represent a word, but also a syllable sound. Finally, the fully evolved hieroglyphs were used to represent the different sounds of the Egyptian language, the way our alphabet does.

What made reading hieroglyphs so difficult was the fact that they could be read and written from right to left, or from left to right. In order to determine which way to read their written language, you needed to see what direction the animated pictures were facing. They would face the beginning of the word.

The secret code of the hieroglyphs was not broken until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. The stone was special because it stated a single message in three languages (Greek, Latin/Demotic, and Egyptian hieroglyphs). Researchers used the Rosetta Stone to decode what the symbols meant.

The Rosetta Stone



The Rosetta Stone

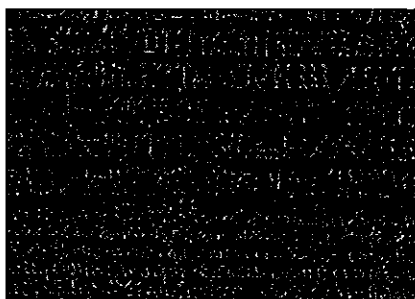
What is the Rosetta Stone?

The Rosetta Stone is a stone with a single passage of writing on it, written in three scripts (Egyptian, Latin/demotic, and Greek).

Why is it in three different scripts?

The Rosetta Stone is written in three scripts because when it was written, there were three scripts being used in Egypt.

The first was hieroglyphic which was the script used for important or religious documents.



Detail of hieroglyphic and demotic script on the Rosetta Stone

The second was demotic which was the common script of Egypt.

The third was Greek which was the language of the rulers of Egypt at that time.

The Rosetta Stone was written in all three scripts so that the priests, government officials and rulers of Egypt could read what it said.