

THE ROSETTA STONE

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Fragment of an ancient Greek inscription, likely a decree or public notice, written in a highly stylized, archaic script. The text is arranged in approximately 25 horizontal lines across the fragment. The script is dense and difficult to decipher due to its archaic nature and the fragmentary state of the original document. The fragment is roughly triangular in shape, with the top edge being the most damaged and the bottom edge being the most complete. The text appears to be a formal document, possibly a law or a public order, given the use of terms like 'ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ' (King) and 'ΠΟΛΙΤΑΙΣ' (Citizens). The fragment is a significant piece of evidence for understanding the development of the Greek alphabet and the structure of ancient Greek prose.

THE ROSETTA STONE.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE STONE.

THE famous slab of black basalt which stands at the southern end of the Egyptian Gallery in the British Museum, and which has for more than a century been universally known as the "Rosetta Stone," was found at a spot near the mouth of the great arm of the Nile that flows through the Western Delta to the sea, not far from the town of "Rashîd," or as Europeans call it, "Rosetta." According to one account it was found lying on the ground, and according to another it was built into a very old wall, which a company of French soldiers had been ordered to remove in order to make way for the foundations of an addition to the fort, afterwards known as "Fort St. Julien."* The actual finder of the Stone was a French Officer of Engineers, whose name is sometimes spelt Boussard, and sometimes Bouchard, who subsequently rose to the rank of General, and was alive in 1814. He made his great discovery in August, 1799. Finding that there were on one side of the Stone lines of strange characters, which it was thought might be writing, as well as long lines of Greek letters, Boussard reported his discovery to General Menou, who ordered him to bring the Stone to his house in Alexandria. This was immediately done, and the Stone was, for about two years, regarded as the General's private property. When Napoleon heard of the Stone, he ordered it to be taken to Cairo and placed in the "Institut National," which he had recently founded in that city. On its arrival in Cairo it became at once an object of the deepest interest to the body of learned men whom Napoleon had taken with him on his expedition to Egypt, and the Emperor himself exhibited the greatest curiosity in respect of the contents of the inscriptions cut upon it. He at once ordered a number of copies of the Stone to be made for distribution among the scholars of Europe, and two skilled lithographers, "citizens Marcel and Galland," were specially brought to Cairo from Paris to make them. The plan which they followed was to cover the surface of the Stone with printer's ink, and then to lay upon it a sheet of paper which they rolled with india-rubber rollers until a good impression had been taken. Several of these ink impressions were sent to scholars of great repute in many parts of Europe, and in the autumn of 1801 General Dagua took two to Paris, where he committed them to the care of "citizen Du Theil" of the Institut National of Paris.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE STONE IN ENGLAND.

After the successful operations of Sir Ralph Abercromby in Egypt in the spring of 1801, a Treaty of Capitulation was drawn up, and by Article XVI the Rosetta Stone and several other large and important Egyptian antiquities were surrendered to General Hutchinson at the end of August in that year. Some of these he despatched at once to England in H.M.S. "Admiral," and others in H.M.S. "Madras," but the Rosetta Stone did not leave Egypt until later in the

* This fort is marked on Napoleon's Map of Egypt, and it stood on the left or west bank of the Rosetta arm of the Nile.

year. After the ink impressions had been taken from it, the Stone was transferred from Cairo to General Menou's house in Alexandria, where it was kept covered with cloth and under a double matting. In September, 1801, Major-General Turner claimed the Stone by virtue of the Treaty mentioned above, but as it was generally regarded as the French General's private property, the surrender of it was accompanied by some difficulty. In the following month Major-General Turner obtained possession of the Stone, and embarked with it on H.M.S. "L'Égyptienne," and arrived at Portsmouth in February, 1802. On March 11 it was deposited at the rooms of the Society of Antiquaries of London, where it remained for a few months, and the writings upon it were submitted to a very careful examination by many Oriental and Greek scholars. In July the President of the Society caused four plaster casts of the Stone to be made for the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Dublin, and had good copies of the Greek text engraved, and despatched to all the great Universities, Libraries, Academies and Societies in Europe. Towards the close of the year the Stone was removed from the Rooms of the Society of Antiquaries to the British Museum, where it was mounted and at once exhibited to the general public.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STONE.

The Rosetta Stone in its present state is an irregularly-shaped slab of compact black basalt, which measures about 3 feet 9 inches in length, 2 feet 4½ inches in width, and 11 inches in thickness. The top right and left hand corners, and the right hand bottom corner, are wanting. It is not possible to say how much of the Stone is missing, but judging by the proportion which exists between the lengths of the inscriptions that are now upon it, we may assume that when it was complete it was at least 12 inches longer than it is now. The upper end of the Stone was probably rounded, and, if we may judge from the reliefs found on stelæ of this class of the Ptolemaic Period, the front of the rounded part was sculptured with a figure of the Winged Disk of Horus of Edfû, having pendent uræi, one wearing the Crown of the South, and the other the Crown of the North. (See the Cast of the Decree of Canopus in Bay 28, No. 957.) Below the Winged Disk there may have been a relief, in which the king was seen standing, with his queen, in the presence of a series of gods, similar to that found on one of the copies mentioned below of the inscriptions on the Rosetta Stone. Whatever the sculptured decoration may have been, it is tolerably certain that, when the Stone was in a complete state, it must have been between five and six feet in height, and that when mounted upon a suitable plinth, and set up near the statue of the king in whose honour it was engraved, it formed a prominent monument in the temple in which it was set up.

The INSCRIPTION on the Rosetta Stone is written in two languages, that is to say, in EGYPTIAN and in GREEK. The EGYPTIAN portion of it is cut upon it in: I. the HIEROGLYPHIC CHARACTER, that is to say, in the old picture writing which was employed from the earliest dynasties in making copies of the Book of the Dead, and in nearly all state and ceremonial documents that were intended to be seen by the public; and II. the DEMOTIC CHARACTER, that is to say, the conventional, abbreviated and modified form

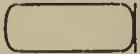
of the HIERATIC character, or cursive form of hieroglyphic writing, which was in use in the Ptolemaic Period. The GREEK portion of the inscription is cut in ordinary uncials. The hieroglyphic text consists of 14 lines only, and these correspond to the last 28 lines of the Greek text. The Demotic text consists of 32 lines, the first 14 being imperfect at the beginnings, and the Greek text consists of 54 lines, the last 26 being imperfect at the ends. A large portion of the missing lines of the hieroglyphic text can be restored from a stele discovered in 1898 at Damanhûr in the Delta (Hermopolis Parva), and now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (No. 5576), and from the copy of a text of the Decree cut on the walls of a temple at Philæ, and the correctness of the restorations of broken passages in the Demotic and Greek texts being evident, we are justified in assuming that we have the inscription of the Rosetta Stone complete both in Egyptian and Greek.

THE EARLIEST DECIPHERERS OF THE ROSETTA STONE.

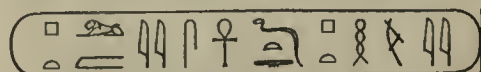
The first translation of the Greek text was made by the Rev. Stephen Weston, and was read by him before the Society of Antiquaries of London in April, 1802. This was quickly followed by a French translation made by "citizen Du Theil," who declared that the Stone was "a monument of the gratitude of some priests of Alexandria, or some neighbouring place, towards Ptolemy Epiphanes"; and a Latin translation by "citizen Ameilhon" appeared in Paris in the spring of 1803. The first studies of the Demotic text were those of Silvestre de Sacy and Åkerblad in 1802, and the latter succeeded in making out the general meaning of portions of the opening lines, and in identifying the equivalents of the names of Alexander, Alexandria, Ptolemy, Isis, etc. Both de Sacy and Åkerblad began their labours by attacking the Demotic equivalents of the cartouches, i.e. the ovals containing royal names in the hieroglyphic text. In 1818 Dr. Thomas Young compiled for the fourth volume of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" (published in 1819) the results of his studies of the texts on the Rosetta Stone, and among them was a list of several alphabetic Egyptian characters to which, in most cases, he had assigned correct values. He was the first to grasp the idea of a phonetic principle in the reading of the Egyptian hieroglyphs, and he was the first to apply it to their decipherment. Warburton, de Guignes, Barthélemy and Zoëga all suspected the existence of alphabetic hieroglyphics, and the three last-named scholars believed that the oval, or cartouche , contained a proper, or royal name. But it was Young who first proved both points, and successfully deciphered the name of Ptolemy on the Rosetta Stone, and that of Berenice on another monument. Another successful decipherer at this time was Mr. J. W. Bankes, who, in 1818, deciphered the name of Cleopatra on the granite obelisk that he had excavated at Philæ in 1815. In 1822 the list of alphabetic Egyptian characters that had been drawn up by Young was corrected and greatly enlarged by J. F. Champollion, who, between that date and the year of his death, correctly deciphered the hieroglyphic forms of the names and titles of most of the Roman Emperors, and drew up a classified list of Egyptian hieroglyphs, and formulated a system of grammar and general

decipherment which is the foundation whereon all later Egyptologists have worked. The discovery of the correct alphabetic values of Egyptian signs was most useful for reading names, but for translating the Egyptian language a competent knowledge of Coptic was required. Now Coptic is only a name meaning "Egyptian." The Egyptians who embraced Christianity after the preaching of Saint Mark at Alexandria are called "Copts," and the translations of the Holy Scriptures, Liturgies, etc., which they made from Greek into their native Egyptian language soon after their conversion to Christianity, are said to be written in "Coptic." The knowledge of Coptic has never been lost, and a comparatively large sacred literature has always been available in manuscripts for study by scholars. Champollion, whilst still a youth in the early years of the nineteenth century, realized the great importance of Coptic for the purpose of Egyptian decipherment, and he studied it to such good purpose that he became an authority on the language and literature of the Copts. In his studies of the inscription on the Rosetta Stone, his knowledge of Coptic enabled him to deduce the phonetic values of many syllabic signs, and to assign correct readings to many pictorial characters, the meanings of which were made known to him by the Greek text on the Stone.

METHOD OF DECIPHERMENT.




The method by which the greater part of the Egyptian alphabet was recovered is this: It was assumed correctly that the oval , or "cartouche" as it is called, always contained a royal name. There is only one cartouche (five times repeated with slight modifications) on the Rosetta Stone, and this was assumed to contain the name of Ptolemy, because it was certain from the Greek text that the inscription concerned a Ptolemy. It was also assumed that if the cartouche did contain the name of Ptolemy, the characters in it would have the sounds of the Greek letters, and that all together they would represent the Greek form of the name of Ptolemy. Now on the obelisk which Mr. Banks had brought from Philæ there is an inscription in two languages, Egyptian and Greek. In the Greek portion of it two royal names are mentioned, that is to say, Ptolemy and Cleopatra, and on the second face of the obelisk there are two cartouches, which occur close together, and are filled with hieroglyphs which, it was assumed, formed the Egyptian equivalents of these names. When these cartouches were compared with the cartouche on the Rosetta Stone it was found that one of them contained hieroglyphic characters that were almost identical with those which filled the cartouche on the Rosetta Stone. Thus there was good reason to believe that the cartouche on the Rosetta Stone contained the name of Ptolemy written in hieroglyphic characters. The forms of the cartouches are as follows:

On the Rosetta Stone



On the Obelisk from Philæ

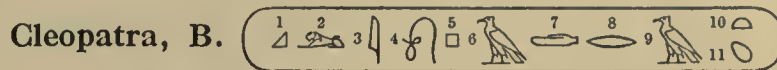
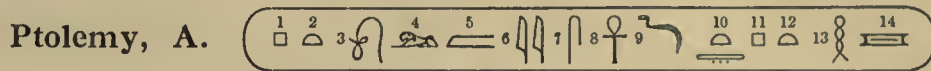


The second of these cartouches contains the sign , which is wanting in the first, and the single sign  takes the place of the three signs  at the end

of the first cartouche. Now it has already been said that the name of Cleopatra was found in Greek on the Philæ Obelisk, and the cartouche which was assumed to contain the Egyptian equivalent of this name appears in this form :



Taking the cartouches which were supposed to contain the names of Ptolemy and Cleopatra from the Philæ Obelisk, and numbering the signs we have :



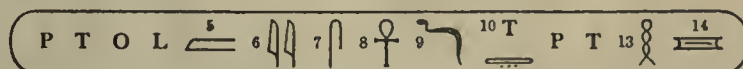
Now we see at a glance that No. 1 in A and No. 5 in B are identical, and judging by their position only in the names they must represent the letter P. No. 4 in A and No. 2 in B are identical, and arguing as before from their position they must represent the letter L. As L is the second letter in the name of Cleopatra, the sign No. 1 \triangle must represent K. Now in the cartouche of Cleopatra we know the values of Signs Nos. 1, 2 and 5, so we may write them down thus :



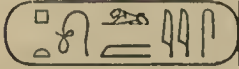
In the Greek form of the name of Cleopatra there are two vowels between the L and the P, and in the hieroglyphic form there are two hieroglyphs, \downarrow and \uparrow , so we may assume that \downarrow = E and \uparrow = O. In some forms of the cartouche of Cleopatra No. 7 \ominus is replaced by \triangle , which is identical with No. 2 in A and No. 10 in B. As T follows P in the name Ptolemy, and as there is a T in the Greek form of the name of Cleopatra, we may assume that \triangle and \ominus have substantially the same sound, and that that sound is T. In the Greek form of the name Cleopatra there are two a's, the positions of which agree with No. 6 and No. 9, and we may assume that \uparrow has the value of A. Substituting these values for the hieroglyphs in B we may write it thus :


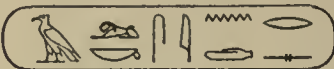


Thomas Young noticed that the two signs \circ always followed the name of a goddess, or queen, or princess, and the other early decipherers regarded the two signs as a mere feminine termination. The only sign for which we have no phonetic equivalent is No. 8 \ominus and it is obvious that this must represent R. Inserting this value in the cartouche we have the name of Cleopatra deciphered. Applying now the values which we have learned from the cartouche of Cleopatra to the cartouche of Ptolemy we may write it thus :

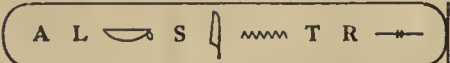


We now see that the cartouche must be that of Ptolemy, but it is also clear that there must be contained in it many other hieroglyphs which do not form

part of his name. Champollion found other forms of the cartouche of Ptolemy, and the simplest of them was written thus: . It was therefore evident that the other signs 𓆎 𓆑 𓆒 𓆓 were royal titles corresponding to those found in the Greek text on the Rosetta Stone meaning "ever-living, beloved of Ptah." Now the Greek form of the name Ptolemy, i.e. Ptolemaios, ends with S. We may assume therefore that the last sign in the simplest form of the cartouche given above has the phonetic value of S. The only hieroglyphs now doubtful are 𓆑 and 𓆒 , and their position in the name of Ptolemy suggests that their phonetic values must be M and some vowel sound in which the I sound predominates. These values, which were arrived at by guessing and deduction, were applied by the early decipherers to other cartouches, e.g.:

1.  2. 

Now, in No. 1, we can at once write down the values of all the signs, viz., P . I . L . A . T . R . A, which is obviously the Greek name Philotera. In No. 2 we only know some of the hieroglyphs, and we write the cartouche thus:

. Now we know that 𓆑 occurs in the name

Berenice, and that it represents N, and that 𓆓 is the last word of the transcript of the Greek title "Kaisaros," and that it therefore represents some S sound. Some of the forms of the cartouche of Cleopatra begin with 𓆑 , and it is clear that its phonetic value must be K. Inserting these values in the above cartouche we have:



which is clearly meant to represent the name "Alexandros," or Alexander. The position of the sign 𓆒 shows that it represented some sound of E or A.

Returning to the signs 𓆎 𓆑 𓆒 𓆓 which we have assumed to represent the royal titles "ever-living, beloved of Ptah," we have to decide whether this assumption be correct or not. It was known by tradition and from Coptic Vocabularies that the old Egyptian word for "life" or "living," was "ānkh," or "ōnkh," and that it was represented by the symbol 𓆎 which occurs several times in the inscriptions. It was therefore guessed that the next signs 𓆑 meant "ever." The Coptic Vocabularies state that one of the old Egyptian words for "ever, age, eternity," was Djet, and as we already know that the phonetic value of the second sign in the word is T, we may assume that the value of 𓆑 is DJ, or TJ. The third sign 𓆒 is a "determinative," and was not pronounced. Thus the first title 𓆎 𓆑 means "living ever," or "ever-living." Of the remaining signs 𓆒 𓆓 we know that the two first are P and T, i.e. the first two letters of the name of Ptah; the third sign 𓆓 must then have the value of H or something like it. If the signs 𓆒 𓆓 form the name of Ptah, then the sign which follows them must mean "loving," or "loved." Here again the Coptic

helped the early decipherers in assigning a phonetic value to \equiv , for the Coptic word for to love is "mere," $\mu\epsilon\pi\epsilon$, and they assumed that the value of the sign was "mer." Now in the cartouche of Ptolemy on the Rosetta Stone after the name Ptah $\square \text{Ⲕ}$, we have the signs $\text{Ⲕ} \text{Ⲕ}$, and these are, clearly, a variant of \equiv . We already know that $\text{Ⲕ} = I$, and therefore Ⲕ must be the equivalent of \equiv and have the value of "mer." By the comparison of texts containing variant forms, and by the skilful use of his knowledge of Coptic, Champollion succeeded in formulating the system of decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs that is, substantially, that in use at the present day.

THE CONTENTS OF THE INSCRIPTION ON THE ROSETTA STONE.

The inscription on the Rosetta Stone is a copy of the Decree passed by the General Council of Egyptian priests assembled at Memphis to celebrate the first commemoration of the coronation of Ptolemy V, Epiphanes, king of all Egypt. The young king had been crowned in the eighth year of his reign, therefore the first commemoration took place in the ninth year, in the spring of the year B.C. 196. The original form of the Decree is given by the Demotic section, and the Hieroglyphic and Greek versions were made from it.

The inscription is dated on the fourth day of the Greek month Xandikos (April), corresponding to the eighteenth day of the Egyptian month Meshir, or Mekhir, of the ninth year of the reign of Ptolemy V, Epiphanes, the year in which Aetus, the son of Aetus, was chief priest and Pyrrha, the daughter of Philinus, and Areia, the daughter of Diogenes, and Irene, the daughter of Ptolemy, were chief priestesses. The opening lines are filled with a list of the titles of Ptolemy V, and a series of epithets which proclaim the king's piety towards the gods, and his love for the Egyptians and his country. In the second section of the inscription the priests enumerate the benefits which he had conferred upon Egypt, and which may be thus summarized :

1. Gifts of money and corn to the temples.
2. Gifts of endowments to temples.
3. Remission of one half of taxes due to the Government.
4. Abolition of one half of the taxes.
5. Forgiveness of debts owed by the people to the Government.
6. Release of the prisoners who had been languishing in gaol for years.
7. Abolition of the press-gang for sailors.
8. Reduction of fees payable by candidates for the priesthood.
9. Reduction of the dues payable by the temples to the Government.
10. Restoration of the services in the temples.
11. Forgiveness of rebels, who were permitted to return to Egypt and live there.
12. Despatch of troops by sea and land against the enemies of Egypt.
13. The siege and conquest of the town of Shekan (Lycopolis).
14. Forgiveness of the debts owed by the priests to him.

15. Reduction of the tax on byssus.
16. Reduction of the tax on corn lands.
17. Restoration of the temples of the Apis and Mnevis Bulls, and of the other sacred animals.
18. Rebuilding of ruined shrines and sacred buildings, and providing them with endowments.

As a mark of the gratitude of the priesthood to the king for all these gracious acts of Ptolemy V, it was decided by the General Council of the priests of Egypt to "increase the ceremonial observances of honour which are paid to Ptolemy, the ever-living, in the temples." With this object in view it was decided :

1. To make statues of Ptolemy in his character of "Saviour of Egypt," and to set up one in every temple of Egypt for the priests and people to worship.
2. To make figures of Ptolemy [in gold], and to place them in gold shrines, which are to be set side by side with the shrines of the gods, and carried about in procession with them.
3. To distinguish the shrine of Ptolemy by means of ten double-crowns of gold which are to be placed upon it.
4. To make the anniversaries of the birthday and coronation days of Ptolemy, viz., the XVIIth and the XXXth days of the month Mesore, festival days for ever.
5. To make the first five days of the month of Thoth days of festival for ever ; offerings shall be made in the temples, and all the people shall wear garlands.
6. To add a new title to the titles of the priests, viz., "Priests of the beneficent god Ptolemy Epiphanes, who appeareth on earth," which is to be cut upon the ring of every priest of Ptolemy, and inserted in every priestly document.
7. That the soldiers may borrow the shrines with figures of Ptolemy inside them from the temples, and may take them to their quarters, and carry them about in procession.
8. That copies of this Decree shall be cut upon slabs of basalt in the "writing of the speech of the god," i.e. hieroglyphs, and in the writing of the books, i.e. demotic, and in the writing of the Ueienin, i.e. Greek. "And a basalt slab on which a copy of this Decree is cut shall be set up in the temples of the first, second and third orders, side by side with the statue of Ptolemy, the ever-living god."

E. A. WALLIS BUDGE.

