

THE ROSETTA STONE.

BY THE EDITOR.

EGYPT, the land of the pyramids and sphinxes, is no longer so mysterious as it was about a century ago. We have learned to decipher the hieroglyphs and have to some extent at least become familiar with the history, habits, and religion of the country. Many details of Egyptian institutions and long periods of the history of the country still remain unknown to us, but we have now a definite knowledge of some phases of the national as well as private life, and are no longer strangers to the peculiar notions of the inhabitants of the valley of the Nile.

The two savants who discovered the key that should unlock the mysteries of Egyptian traditions are Dr. Thomas Young, the discoverer of the undulatory theory of light, and Jean François Champollion, Jr. The former, Thomas Young, succeeded in explaining the Egyptian numbers and in reading several names, while the latter, Champollion, deciphered the hieroglyphs of the Rosetta Stone, for which work the names offered him the key.

The Rosetta Stone is a black basalt, found at Rosetta and preserved in the British Museum. It is inscribed in three languages, Hieratic, Demotic, and Greek. Even a superficial inspection will show that names in the hieroglyphic script are surrounded by a ring, commonly called the "cartouche," which represents the seal of a man, and has thus come to stand for his signature as well as his personality.

Champollion identified the letters of the names Cleopatra and Ptolemy in their respective cartouches,

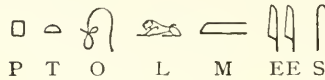


identifying the single letters of the former thus :

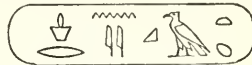


leaving two symbols which always accompany feminine names.

An analysis of the name Ptolemy (Πτολομαῖος) yields this result :



The two feathers, a double *ι*, obviously represents the Greek AI. Other names verify these transcriptions and add a new stock of letters to our knowledge. For instance in the name

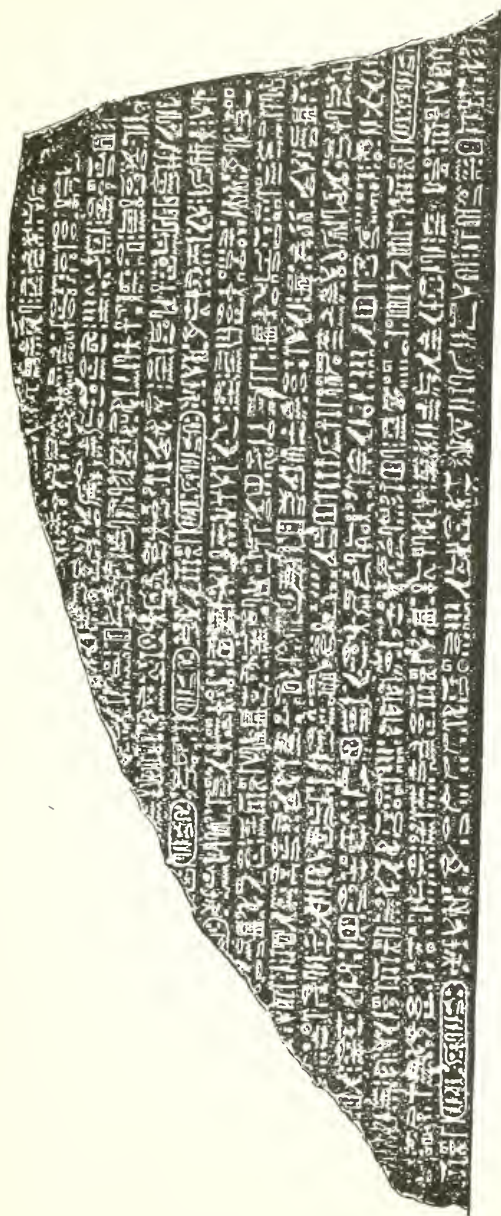


we know the letters R. AIKA and since it must be feminine, we know at once that the cartouche contains the name Berenike and two unknown symbols must be a *B* and an *N*.

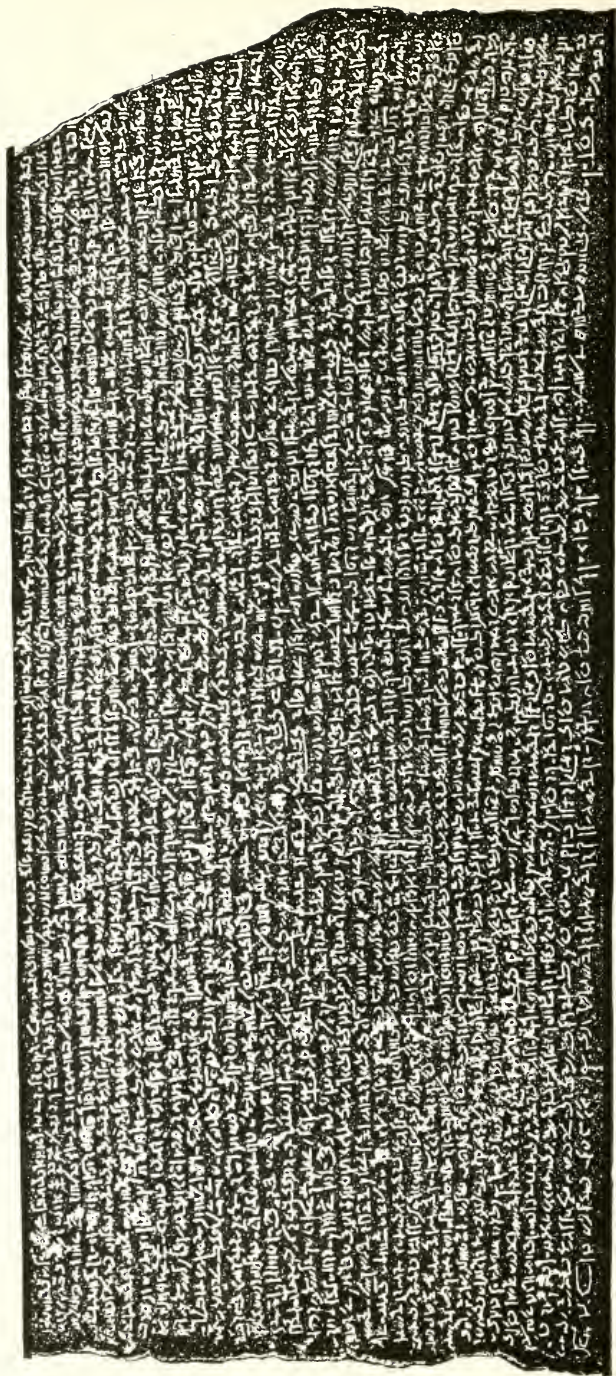
The known letters were inserted in the hieratic inscription which could now be read and translated, the meaning being given in the a ljoined Greek. Here is a list of the most common Egyptian characters reproduced from an Egyptian dictionary¹:

	A		H
	Ā		ꜥ (Kh)
	Ā	} 	S
or	I		
or	U		Š [Sh]
	B		K
	P		Q
	F		ꜥ
or	M		T
or	N		ꜥ
or	R and L	or	Θ (Th)
	H		T' (Tch)

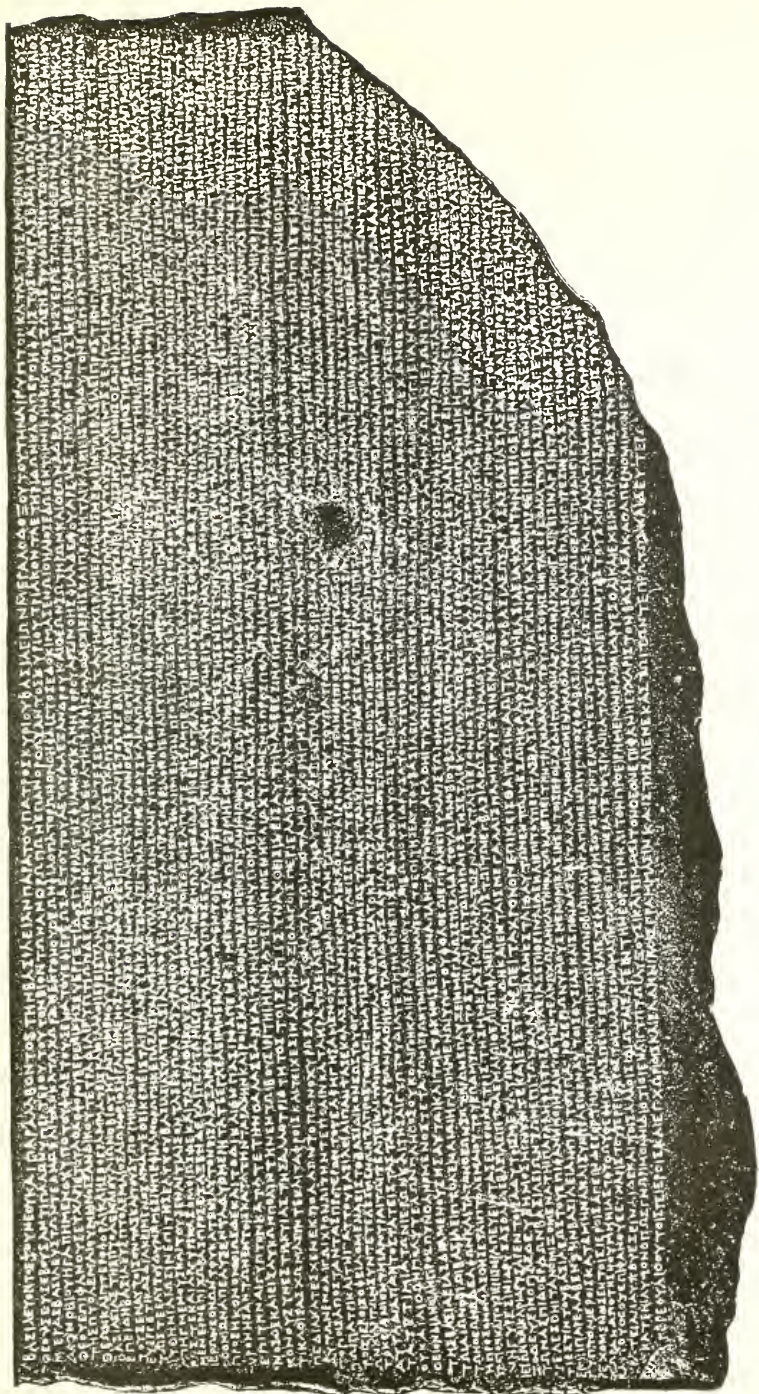
¹E. A. Wallis Budge, *Vocabulary in Hieroglyphic to the Theban Recension of the Book of the Dead*.



HIEROGLYPHIC INSCRIPTION OF THE ROSETTA STONE.
 (By permission of Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.)



DEMOTIC INSCRIPTION OF ROSETTA STONE.
(By permission of Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.)



GREEK INSCRIPTION OF THE ROSETTA STONE. (By permission of Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.)

The success that rewarded Champollion's labors heralded the birth of a new science, Egyptology. His successors have penetrated more and more into the mysteries of the language and history of the country, covering a period of about four millenniums, and showing as marked periods in its development, as we know in the progress of Anglo-Saxon through the Old English to Modern English. Egyptologists of to-day have a fair command of the language, even in its historical growth. Says a late Egyptologist, "The time of apprenticeship is past, we read now," meaning that unless there are exceptional difficulties, the Egyptologists are at present able to decipher any Egyptian inscription. Our scholars have even been able to discover the mistakes which Egyptian scribes made when in their eagerness to forge ancient documents, they wrote in archaic style, the blunders of which now bear witness against them and betray their fraudulent intentions. Such documents that pretend to be ancient, but are later fabrications, are quite frequent, and were made in the interests of the prerogatives of a special priesthood, or the alleged miraculous powers of local deities or their shrines.

* * *

The Egyptian language seems to possess a character, peculiar to itself. While it is unquestionably related to the several Semitic tongues, Abyssinian, Hebrew, Phœnician, and Arabic, we cannot help recognising that the Egyptian grammar and syntax are sufficiently original so as to prohibit its classification with the Semitic language. On the other hand Egyptian is also pretty closely related to Libyan speech, and seems to have adopted some features from the more distant Nubians and also the Ethiopians. The fact is that Egypt lies where Asia and Africa meet, and it is natural that both continents should have contributed their share in building up the civilisation in the valley of the Nile.

[When we wrote to England for a good photograph of the text of the Rosetta stone, we were informed by our London Agents, Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., that Prof. E. A. Wallis Budge was just preparing for them a new book on the subject, for which the stone had been photographed. The print which they kindly sent us is much superior to any other copy that could be procured in the market, and we express herewith our indebtedness to Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. for their courteous permission to reproduce it. We have cut the original into three parts, dividing it into its hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek portions.]