

HIEROGLYPHICS

Ancient Egyptians used a writing system which was made up of pictures or symbols to represent words or sounds. These were called hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphics can be found carved into tombs or monuments, but most writing was done on papyrus by scribes. Only wealthy boys could become scribes. Since writing was considered important, scribes were highly respected in Egyptian society. Scribes kept tax records, trade information and any written records needed for the pharaoh. This helped the government run the country more effectively.

Hieroglyphics is a very Complex and confusing system. It had over 700 different signs and would use determinatives to understand the general meaning. Vowels were rarely used, so the determinative became very important. At first the picture represented the meaning of the word, but then the pictures were used to represent the sounds of the spoken language, much like the cuneiform system. Hieroglyphs could be written left to right, right to left and up and down depending on the wishes of the scribe. In order to determine which direction to read, you had to look to see which way the animals were facing and read into their faces! Sometimes the scribes would stack the hieroglyphs because it made the writing more attractive. Since the Egyptians believed writing was sacred, they feared it could come to life, so often the heads of dangerous animals were shown detached from their bodies! The pharaoh's had their names surrounded by a rope to

protect them from evil spirits. This is called a Cartouche.

For thousands of years, no one could understand hieroglyphics because it was an ancient language that became extinct once Egypt was conquered.

We knew little of Egyptian culture because we could not read their records!

In 1799, French soldiers under Napoleon discovered a huge black

stone in the village of Rosetta. It contained 3 languages,

hieroglyphics, demonic (a later form of hieroglyphs) and

Greek. Since the Greek language could be read, the Rosetta

Stone could be deciphered. It took Jean Champollin 20 years to decode

the hieroglyphic system, but once it was done, scholars were able to unlock all the

mysteries of ancient Egypt by reading the scrolls and tablets.