



The Rosetta Stone

E.A. Wallis Budge

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The Rosetta Stone remains one of the world's most recognizable ancient artifacts, and has come to symbolize not only Egypt, but also the art of translation.

Dating from the Macedonian Ptolemaic era in Egypt (ca 196 BC), the Rosetta Stone contains a royal decree by King Ptolemy V, set out in three languages: in hieroglyphic (suitable for a priestly decree), demotic (the native script used for daily purposes), and Greek (the language of the administration).

By the fourth century AD, all knowledge and understanding of hieroglyphs had been lost by the mixed-race population, and it was only some 1400 years later, after the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, that scholars were able to use the Greek inscription on the stone as the deciphering key.

Thomas Young, an English physicist, was the first to show that some of the hieroglyphs on the Rosetta Stone wrote the sounds of a royal name, that of Ptolemy. The French scholar Jean-Francois Champollion then realized that hieroglyphs recorded the sound of the Egyptian language and laid the foundations of our knowledge of ancient Egyptian language and culture.

In this work, E.A. Wallis Budge, perhaps the British Museum's most famous Egyptian section curator of all time, tells the story of the stone and exactly how it was eventually deciphered.

Starting with the events surrounding the stone's discovery—by French forces under Napoleon Bonaparte—and its capture by the British army and its transportation to London, Budge then discusses the slow process through which the hieroglyphic part of the stone was eventually deciphered.

The majority of the booklet is given over to a graphic explanation of the logical process used to translate the Rosetta Stone, and how, by cross-referencing it with the Coptic language and by using other clues, the mystery of the ancient Egyptian's written language was eventually unlocked.

Finally, Budge provides a fascinating transcript of what the Rosetta Stone actually says.

Highly recommended for serious students and amateur Egyptologists alike.

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