



The Race to Decipher Hieroglyphic

Hieroglyphic is the most ancient form of writing in the Egyptian civilization. It dominated Egyptian culture until its very end, spanning nearly three millennia.



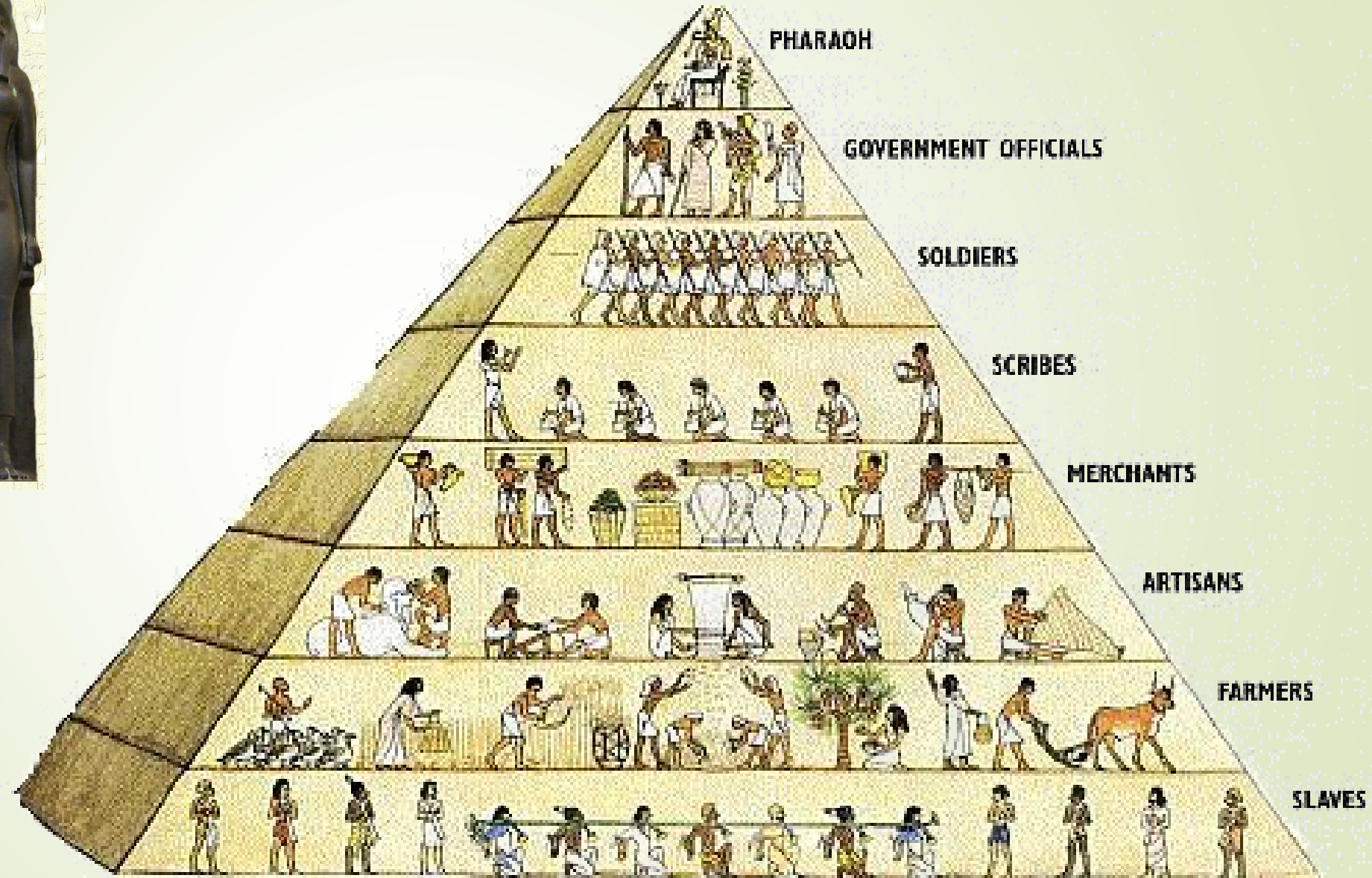


The legacy of Egypt



Elaborate religion, afterlife, being accountable for one's deeds.

Government, administration



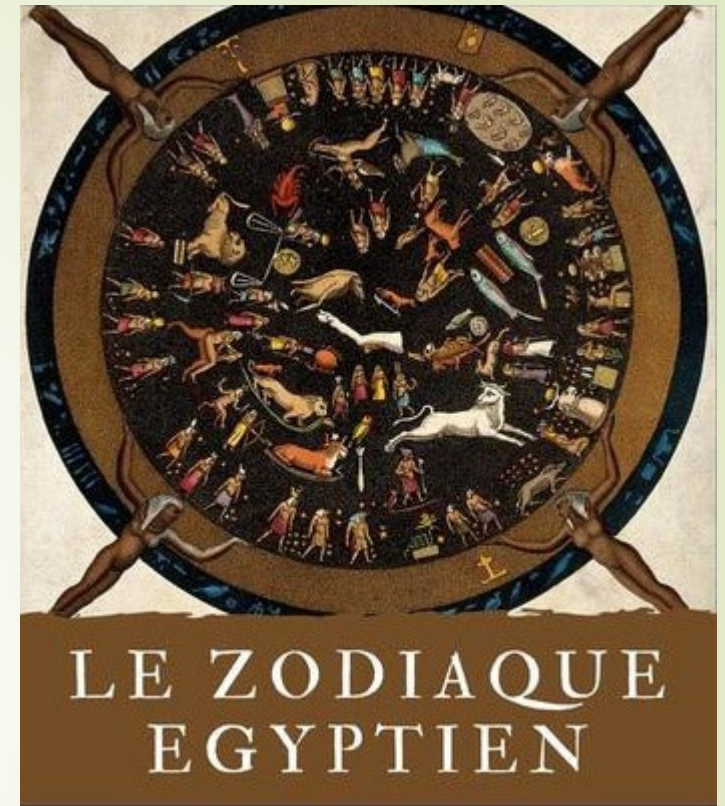
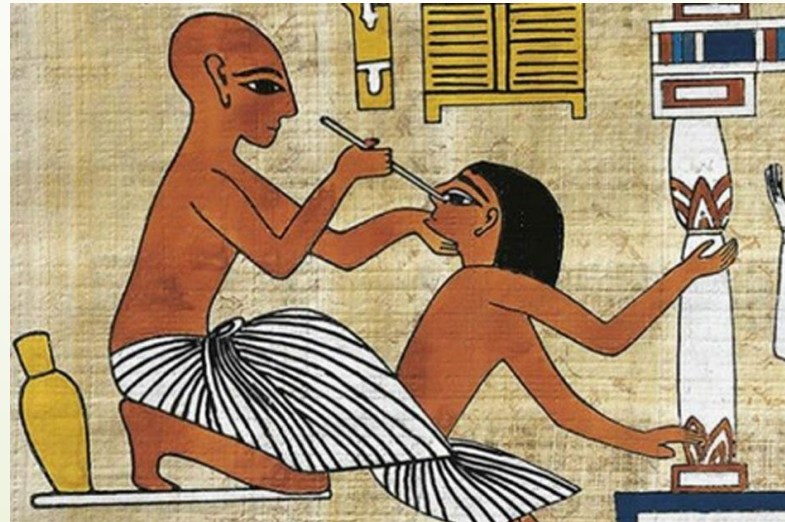


Fine Arts



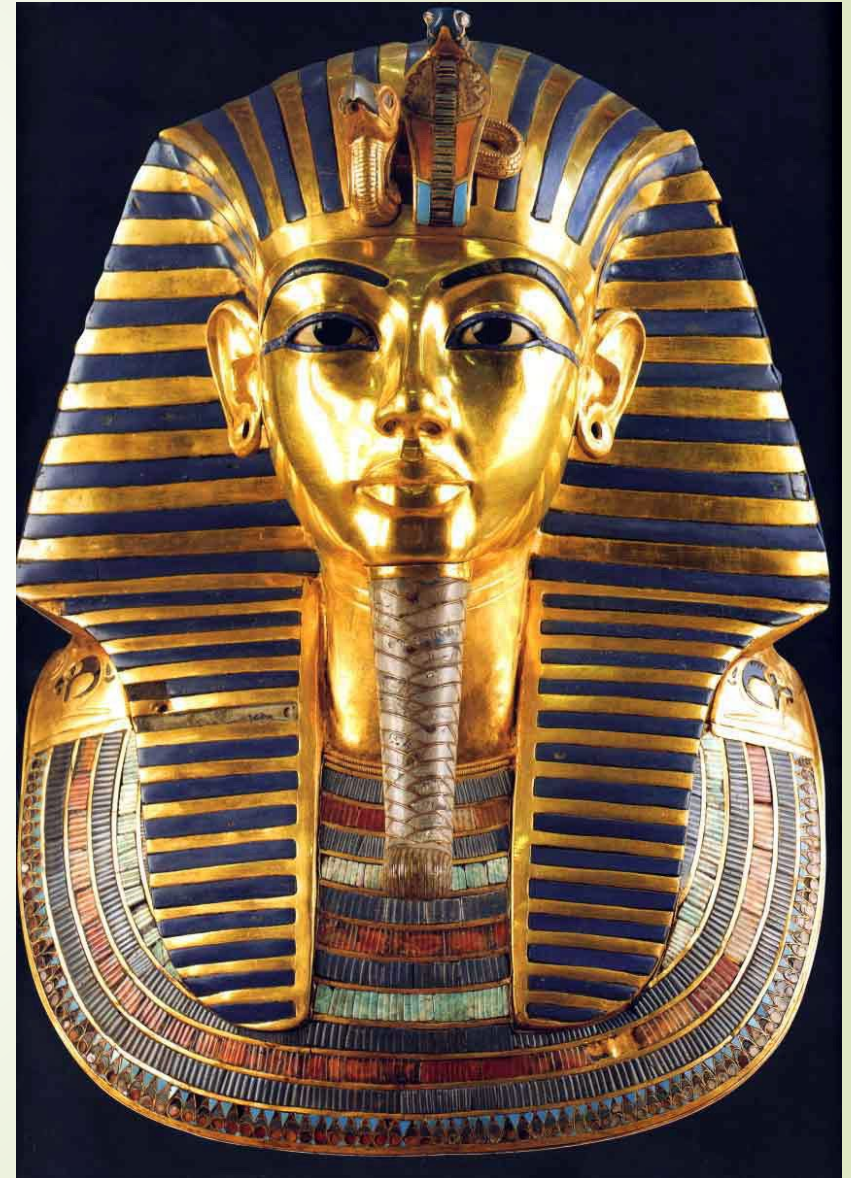


Medicine,
Pharmacy,
Chemistry,
Astronomy.





Glamour! Cosmetics, Ceremonies...









Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a form of Arabic or Persian, arranged in ten horizontal lines. The script is dense and flowing, with many ligatures and diacritics. The text is written on a light-colored, textured background, possibly parchment or paper. The lines are closely spaced and run horizontally across the page.

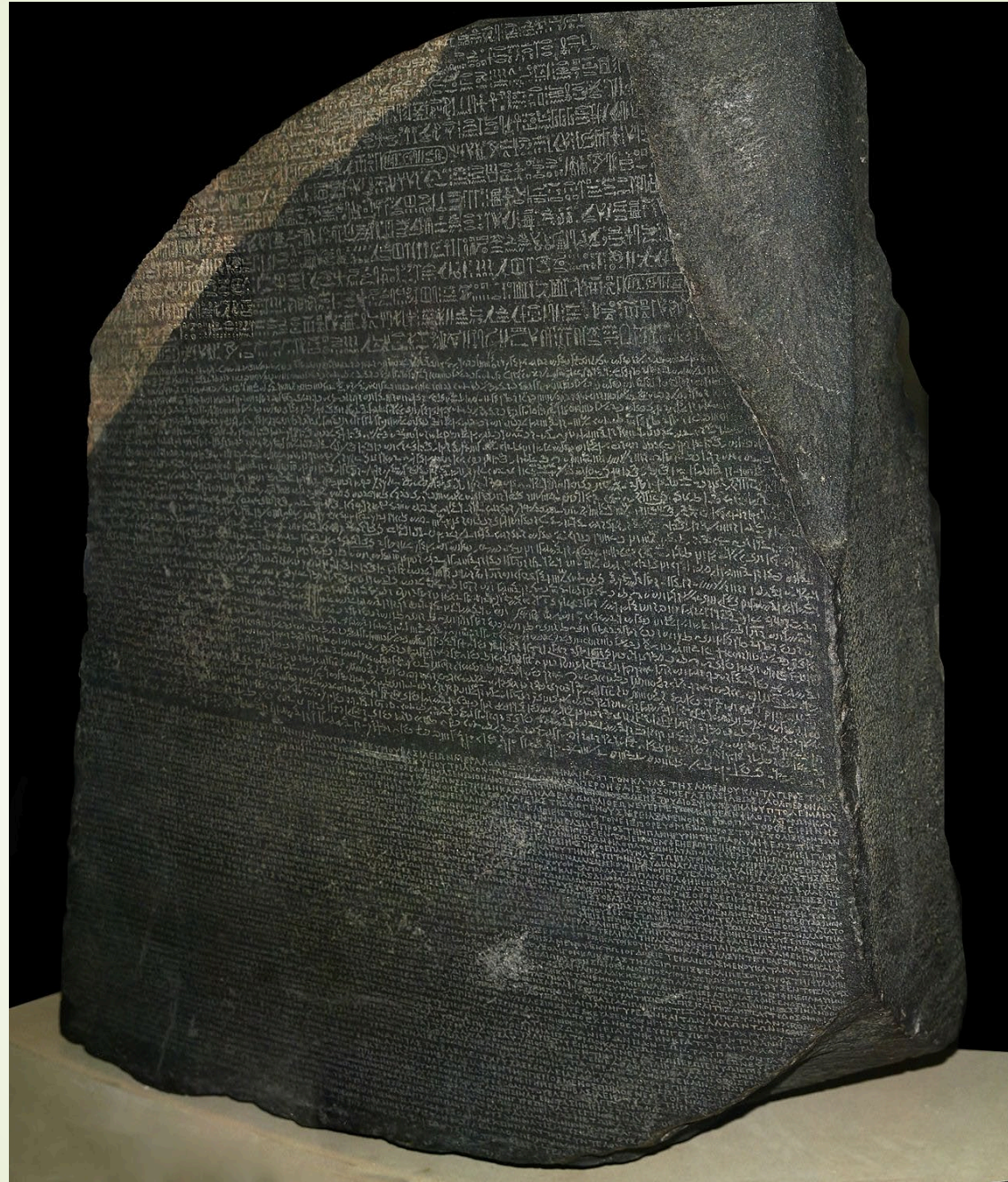


Α	Β	Γ	Δ	Ε	Ζ	Η	
a	b v	g	d	e	s	dz	e i
alpha	bida	gamma	daida	ei	so	zita	ita
Θ	Ι	Κ	Λ	Μ	Ν	Ξ	Ο
th	i	k	l	m	n	ks	o
thita	jauta	kapa	laula	mi	ni	ksi	o
Π	Ρ	Σ	Τ	Υ	Φ	Χ	Ψ
p	r	s	t	u	ph	kh	ps
pí	ro	síma	tau	he	phi	khi	psi
Ω	Ψ	Ϝ	ϝ	Ϟ	ϙ	Ϡ	ϡ
ō ū	š	f	x	h	dž	tš	ti
au	šeí	fei	khei	horí	džaudžia	tšíma	ti

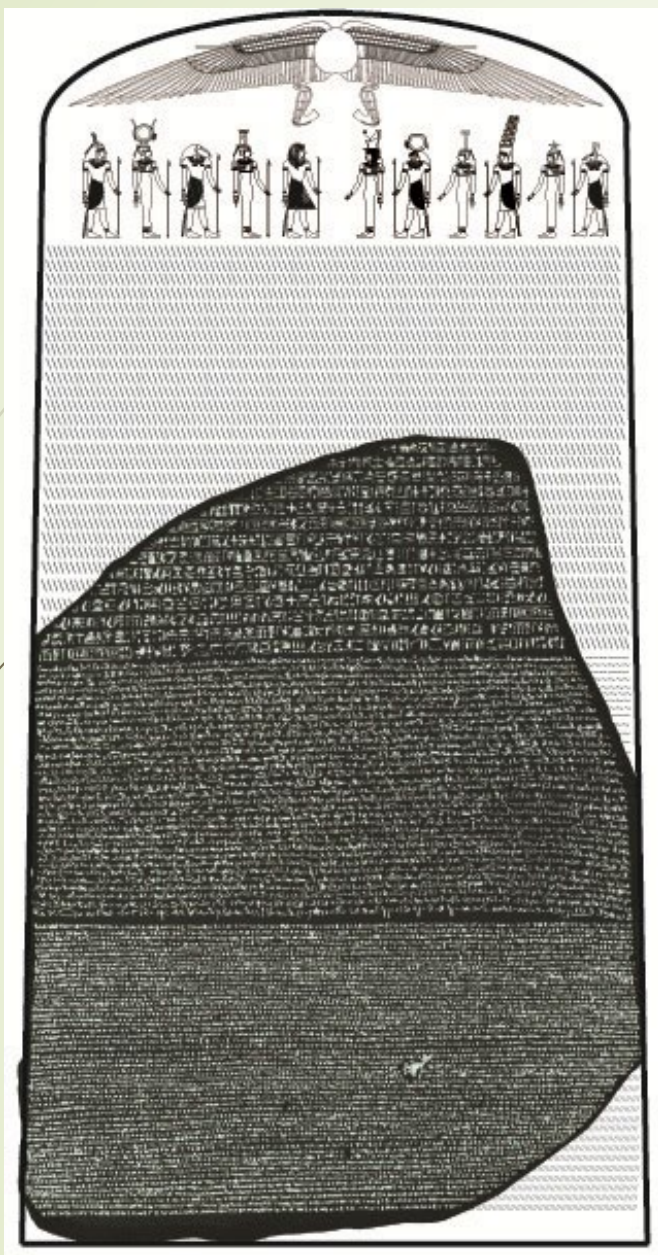
European scholars started to pay attention to Egypt after the Renaissance and especially in the 18th century. They tried to interpret hieroglyphs, to no avail. They assumed that hieroglyphs were nothing more than primitive picture writing, and that their decipherment relied on a literal translation of the images they saw.

The Rosetta Stone



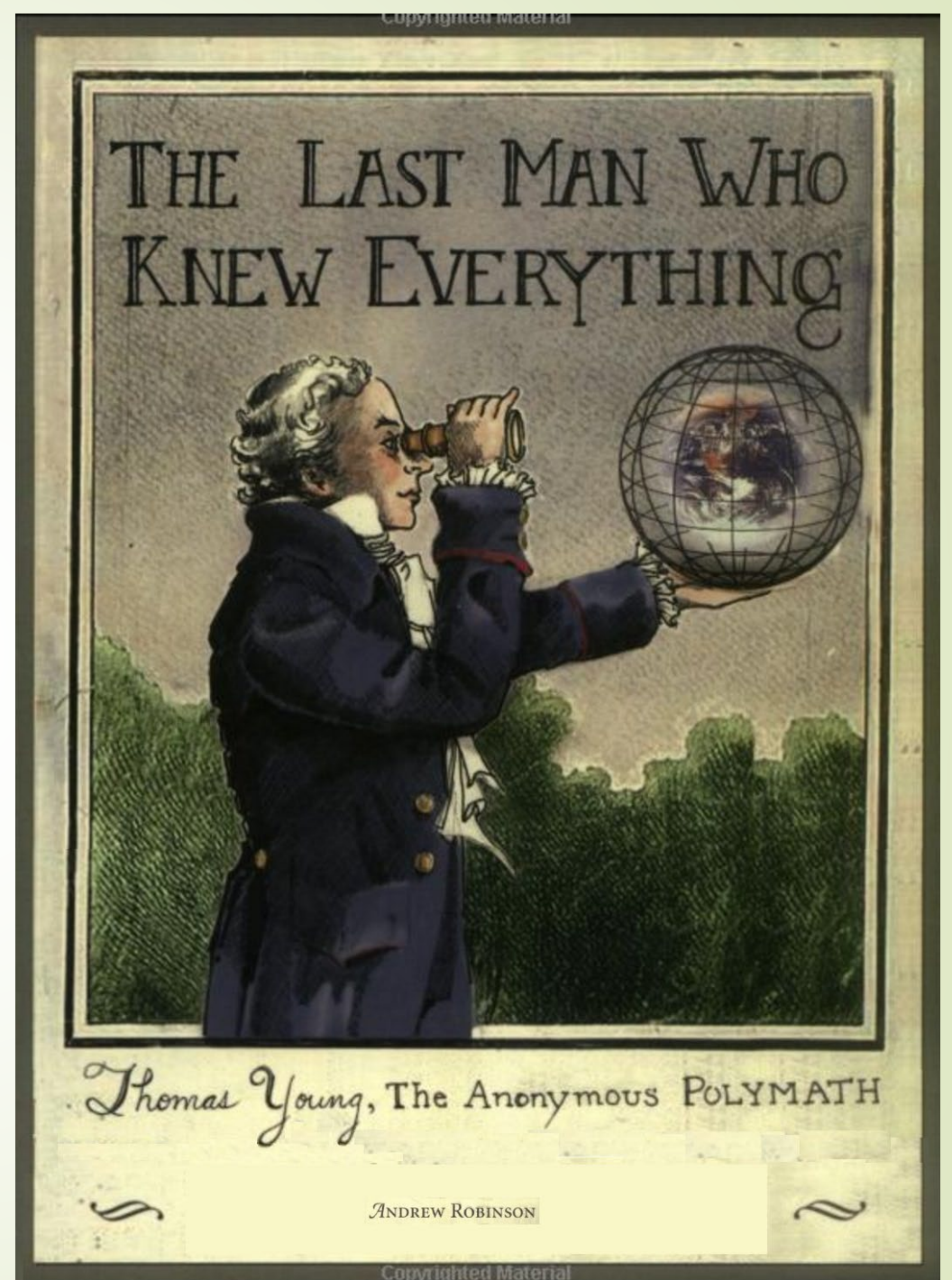




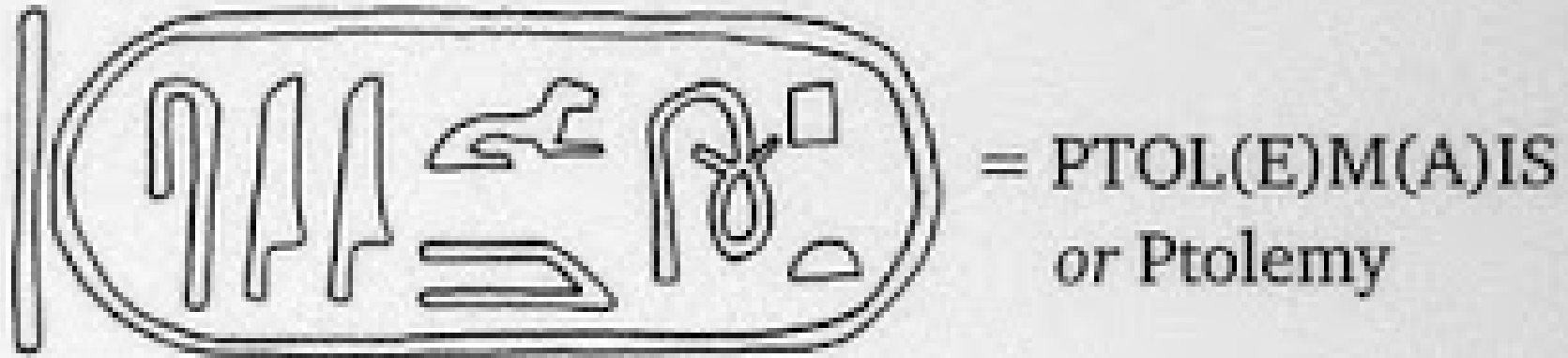


Thomas
Young's
early efforts...

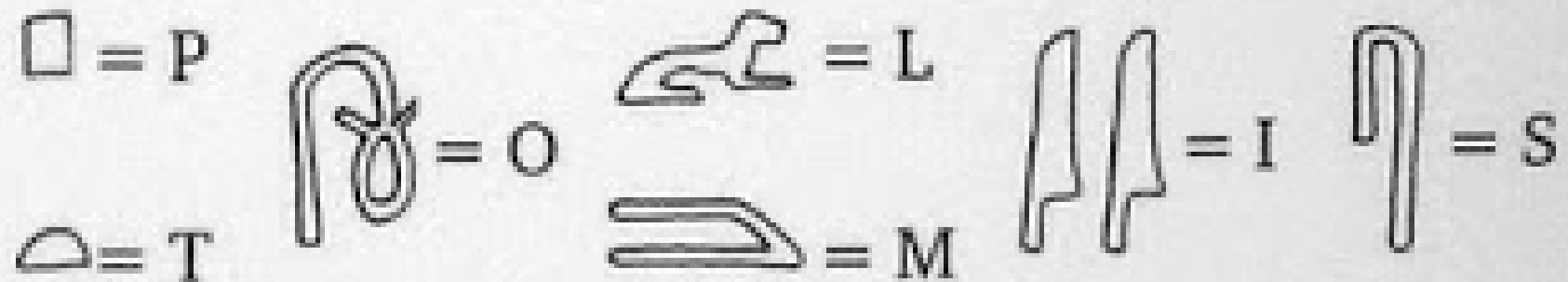
*...quits after a few
months*

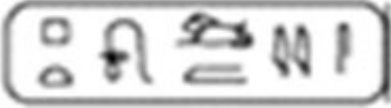









Cartouche (written from right to left)



Cartouche decoded



Thomas Young's decipherment of  the cartouche of **Ptolemaios** (standard version) from the Rosetta Stone.

Hieroglyph	Young's sound value	Actual sound value
	P	P
	t	t
	optional	o
	lo or ole	l
	ma or m	m
	i	i or y
	osh or os	s

Jean-François Champollion

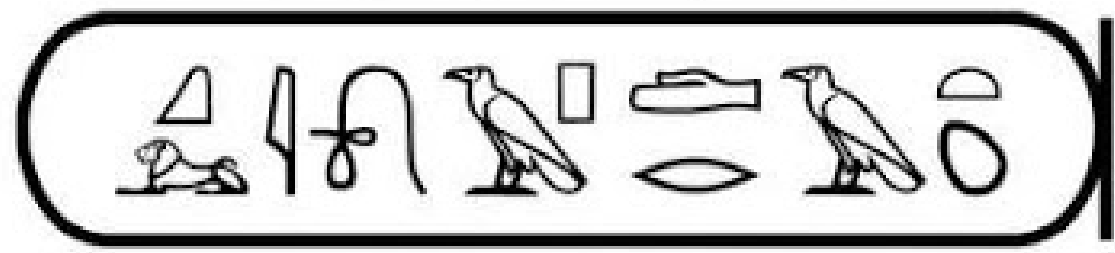


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJwaq7ciTiA>



K E O A P T A

Cleopatra =



L

R

A L S E N R

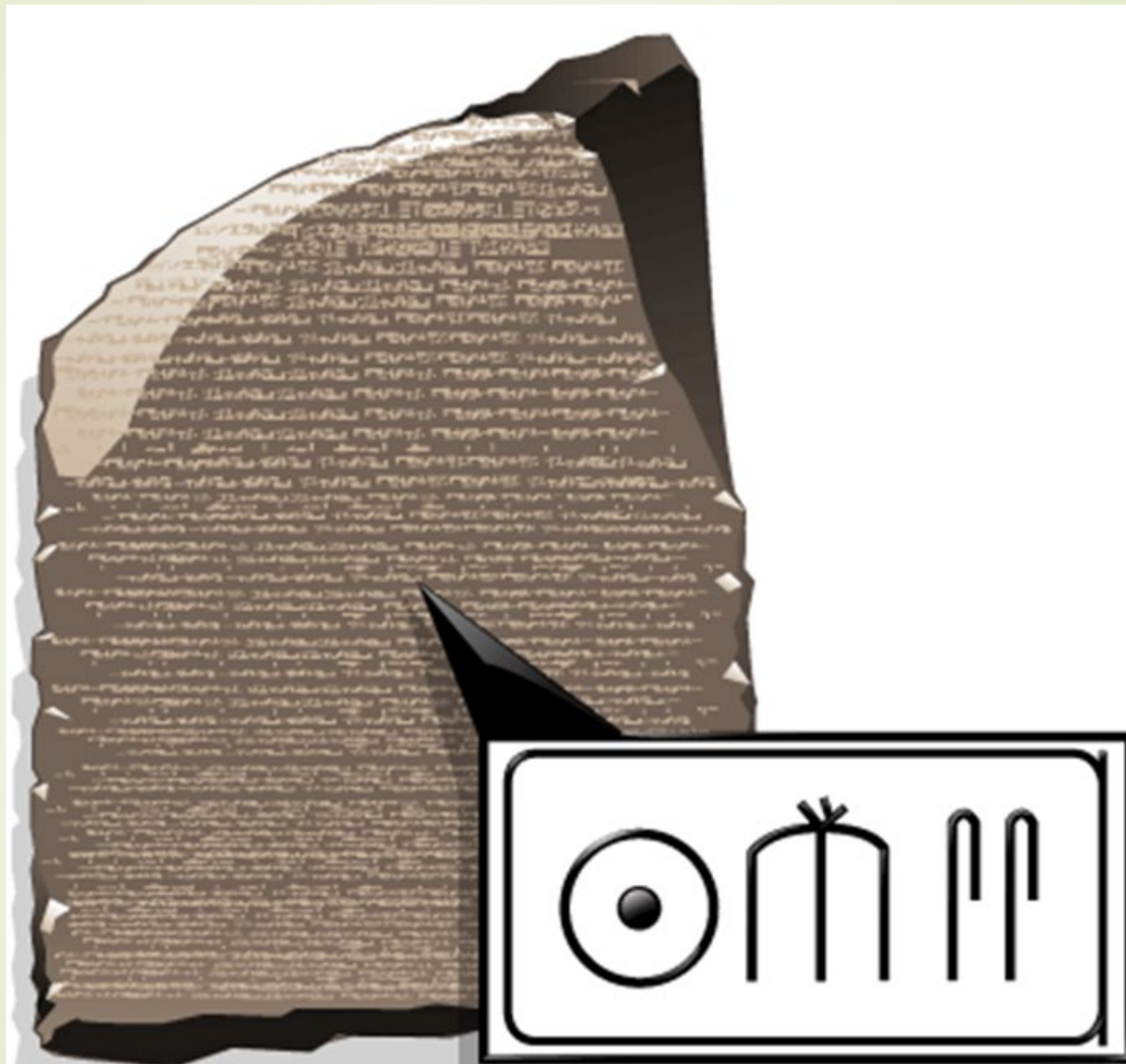
Alexander =



K

T

S

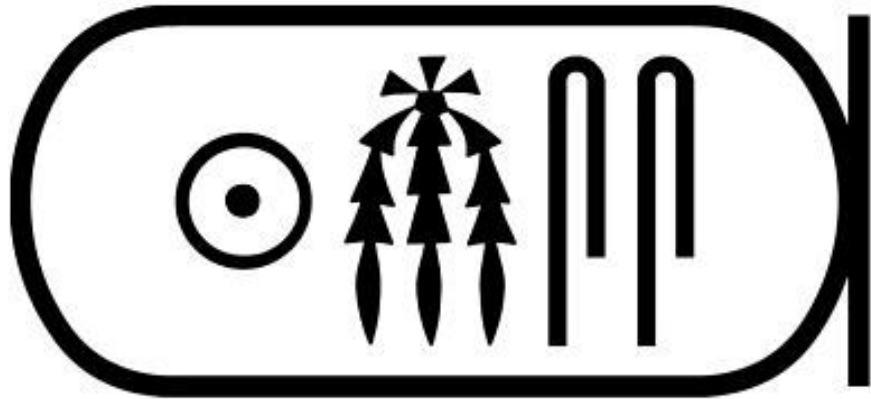


Je tiens l'affaire!

How Coptic language helped Champollion to decipher the hieroglyphic script



RE M S S




THOTH MS S



The cartouche clearly means that its writer spoke Coptic... A decisive clue!

If the writer had spoken a different language, a different language would have been used (if it were French, it would be 'Soleil-m-ss'). The king's written name makes sense if the scribes spoke something related to Coptic.

Champollion demonstrated that the scribes largely relied on a phonetic alphabet. For Champollion, hieroglyphic is phonetic at the root, and only accessorially, ideographic.



Because he knew Coptic, Champollion began deciphering hieroglyphs. He found the phonetic values for many hieroglyphs, and discovered that some of them represented combinations of two or three consonants. This meant that scribes could spell some words with several simple hieroglyphs or with just one multi-consonantal hieroglyph.

Champollion could start interpreting hieroglyphs correctly.

In 1828, Champollion could finally visit Egypt. 30 years earlier, Napoleon's scientists could only ponder the meaning of the hieroglyphs on temple walls. Now at last, Champollion could interpret them correctly. Unfortunately, three years later, exhausted by his intense studies, years of poverty in Paris, and travel in Egypt, he suffered a stroke. He died at 41 on 4th March 1832, having achieved his most cherished dream.







