Egyptian Hieroglyphics

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Egyptian hieroglyphics were used to write the indigenous language of Egypt = Egyptian.

Egyptian: attested in writing from 3000 BCE to 1300 CE
Stage 1 (of 5): Old Egyptian (~3000-2000 BCE)
• Spoken during the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period
• Main texts: Pyramid Texts, tomb autobiographies
• Writing system: hieroglyphics

Cylinder seal of Peribsen

“Aida” is (most likely) set during the Old Kingdom!
Stage 2 (of 5): Middle Egyptian (~2000-1300 BCE)
- Spoken from the Middle Kingdom to the beginning of the New Kingdom
- Golden age of Egyptian written culture (religious texts, literature, letters, etc.)
- Two writing systems:
Stage 3 (of 5): **Late Egyptian** (1300-700 BCE)

- Spoken from the New Kingdom through the 3rd Intermediate Period
- Main texts: narratives, love poetry, written administrative records, etc.
- Writing system: hieroglyphics and hieratic

“Does anybody here speak Egyptian?” (Wenamun 2, 77)
Stage 4 (of 5): **Demotic** (700 BCE to 400 CE)

- Main texts: instructions, narrative cycles
- Writing system: Demotic (based on hieratic; difficult, variable)
Stage 5 (of 5): Coptic
(300 CE to 1300 CE)

- Language of Christian Egypt
  (still used liturgically)
- Main texts: Bible, theological writings, letters
- Writing system: Greek, plus an additional six letters
Decipherment

Jean-François Champollion
Crash Course in Hieroglyphs

A **hieroglyph** is a picture used as the unit of a writing system. (The units of the English writing system are letters.)

Pictures of....
Crash Course in Hieroglyphs

Hieroglyphs were used in **four** different ways.

**Use 1:** logogram

\[ \text{xpr} \]

‘scarab beetle’

**Use 2:** rebus principle

\[ \text{xpr} \]

‘to become’

English rebus:

I \( \text{蜜蜂} \) in you!
Crash Course in Hieroglyphs

Some signs were so commonly used as a rebus that they became permanently associated with certain sounds.

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Hieroglyphic “alphabet”
Crash Course in Hieroglyphs

Hieroglyphs were used in four different ways.

Use 1: logogram

Use 3: phonetic complement = sign that repeats a sound already indicated by another sign

Use 4: determinative = unpronounced sign at the end of a word that indicates the word’s meaning

Use 2: rebus principle

- pr ‘house’
- r ‘to come out’

pr logogram

pr rebus principle
Crash Course in Hieroglyphs: Practice with Aida words!

`pr aA`
- ‘big house’
- ‘pharaoh’

`Dsr`
- ‘holy (adj.)’
- Name of 3rd dyn. pharaoh

`nH`

`nHsyt`
- ‘Nubian woman’

Determinatives
Further Information

“Egyptology Online”

“Wonders of Ancient Egypt”
Dr. David Silverman
Thank you!

Special thanks to Bryce Huebner, Amy Maude Helfer, and Karen Kramer.
Aida = *ii.iti* ‘she is welcome’

Amonasro = 3rd c. BCE Meroitic king

Anachronisms: Qadesh, Nefertiti

Nubian language