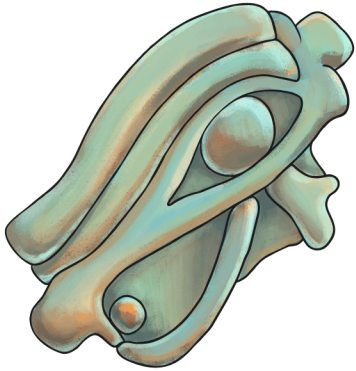


# HIEROGLYPHS



## What are they?

The word hieroglyphics comes from the Greek translation 'holy writing'. You can see examples of this writing on ancient Egyptian artefacts like wall carvings, pottery and the papyrus paper. The hieroglyphs are the ancient written language which uses symbols and pictures. We have found how to read the hieroglyphics to understand how the ancient Egyptians lived.

## Why did they write them?

The ancient Egyptians thought it was important to write down all the information they could about their kings and their religion. So they made the hieroglyphs to tell people in the future what happened. Hieroglyphs were one of the ways the Egyptians would write. They mainly used them in religious texts, on statues and in tombs.



## Who wrote them?

Not everyone could read and write the hieroglyphs; only a group of people called scribes would learn how to do it. The scribes would almost all be men but there is proof of female doctors who could also read them for understanding medical texts.

To become a scribe you would need to go to a special school. At school you would learn to read and write hieroglyphic and other scripts. The children would spend hours writing on sheets of papyrus and practise on pieces of rock and pottery.



## Where would they write them?

**In school** – The scribes would be taught how to write and carve in hieroglyphics. Many students would spend hours copying hundreds of signs and it was hard work – there is even evidence that some of the scribes skipped class so they didn't have to do it.

**In the fields** – After the scribes finished in school, one of the first jobs many of them had was working in fields, counting crops and animals. They would let the government know how many of these would be taken as tax.

**In tombs** – The Egyptians believed that the hieroglyphics in the tomb helped the body get to the afterlife. The scribes would write spells on the walls then the craftsmen would come and carve away what the scribes had written. It was very important that the craftsmen did it perfectly or the spell would not work.

## How can we read them?

The secret to reading the ancient Egyptian text was found in 1799 when the Rosetta stone was uncovered. It is called this because it was found in a town in Egypt with the same name.

The text on the stone is thought to have been written by priests. It lists all the good things that the pharaoh has done for the priests and the people of Egypt.

The reason why this stone is so important to reading the language is that it is written in three languages and this makes it very easy to translate. It is written in hieroglyphs, Demotic (a more common Egyptian way of writing) and an old Greek text. It took scholars twenty years to translate all the text into a modern language.

