



Jean-François Champollion, by Léon Cogniet.



“JE TIENS MON AFFAIRE!”

JEAN-FRANÇOIS CHAMPOLLION,
THE TRANSLATOR AND THE STONE

“I believe that the phonetic writing existed in Egypt at a far distant time; that it was just a necessary part of the ideographic (pictorial) script; and that it was then used . . . to transcribe (crudely, it is true) in ideographic texts the proper names of peoples, countries, cities, rulers, and individual foreigners who had to be commemorated in historic texts or monumental inscriptions.”¹ So wrote Jean-François Champollion on 22 September 1822 in his famous “Lettre à M. Dacier,” secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris. In what stands as one of the greatest academic revelations of all time, the brilliant, headstrong, thirty-two-year-old linguist who had mastered Coptic and some twenty other languages restored to the waiting world the long-lost knowledge of how to read the language of the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. Because of this one single discovery, an entire civilization—its secrets, gods, and pharaohs, dating as far back as 3300 BC—has been brought to light. What follows is the account of several remarkable discoveries made in Egypt by various fascinating explorers and amateur archaeologists in the wake of Napoléon’s 1798 invasion followed by the riveting story of how Champollion earned his lasting reputation as the father of Egyptology.

1. Champollion to M. Dacier in Fagan, *Eyewitness to Discovery*, 85.

THE ROSETTA STONE

In the words of William Stiebing Jr., a leading archaeology historian, it was only fitting that because “the French had initiated the study of European antiquities . . . a Frenchman finally deciphered the ancient Egyptian script.”² In his invasion of Egypt in 1798, Napoléon, who was genuinely interested in science and in the histories of Egypt and the Middle East, took with him a “Commission of Arts and Science,” consisting of la crème de l’Ecole polytechnique—167 “savants” drawn from the nation’s best scientists—“astronomers, geographers, cartographers, architects, engineers, chemists, naturalists, physicians, orientalists, artists and historians.”³ Such a faculty of learning may seem out of place in the midst of an army of conquest—“soldiers of France accompanied by a body of savants, no less ambitious for trophies won in the peaceful triumph of science than were the veteran legions covetous of the bloody trophies of victory”—but so it was.⁴

Many of these men of learning sailed aboard Napoléon’s own ship and made for interesting conversation. One night, under a clear Mediterranean sky, Napoléon was listening intently to an argument about the existence of God. Many on board were of the Voltaire school of thought and were seeking to prove by logic and metaphysics that there could not possibly be a God. Bonaparte, “who hated all ideologists, abstract reasoners, and logical demonstrators, no matter what they were demonstrating, would not fence with these subtle dialecticians, but had them immediately on deck, and pointing to the stars in the clear sky, replied by way of counterargument, ‘Very good, messieurs! But who made all of these?’”⁵

What came of their late-night ruminations, history does not record, but after taking possession of Malta, Napoléon sailed on and invaded Egypt—then part of a tired, decaying Ottoman Turkish empire. Despite the blistering desert heat, Napoléon’s well-disciplined army easily conquered Alexandria. Then, under the very shadow of the Great Pyramids themselves, he virtually annihilated a large Mameluke cavalry army that was totally unprepared to fight against a modern, well-equipped European military force. Further up the Nile, Cairo also fell to the invaders on 24 July 1798. Had not Admiral Horatio Nelson destroyed the French fleet in early August at the Battle of the Nile while it was still in harbor at Aboukir Bay, the Lion of the Desert, as Napoléon was then called, would likely have also conquered Syria and vast regions of the Middle East.

Muslim support contributed much to Napoléon’s successful military campaign, at least initially, because of his opposition to Roman Catholicism, autocratic rule, and pledge to modernize and improve Egyptian society. Furthermore, Napoléon made it his habit to read and study the Koran and instructed his army to respect the Muslim faith. As a conqueror, he was greeted as a benevolent one by many, a force for much needed change and toleration.

2. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past*, 70.

3. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past*, 57.

4. *Ruins of Sacred and Historic Lands*, 145.

5. *Ruins of Sacred and Historic Lands*, 143.

Many Muslim muftis proclaimed him “as God’s messenger and the Friend of the Prophet Mohammed.”⁶

Once in firm control, Napoléon set out to win over the hearts and minds of the people while pursuing his own military agenda. Calling upon the expertise and resources of his cadre of scientists, he set up the multidisciplinary Egyptian Institute of Arts and Sciences at Cairo. And his far-reaching reforms included the constructing of modern hospitals, irrigation schemes, and sewage systems; establishing Egypt’s first newspaper and book-making printing presses; building roads, canals, and an elaborate, new postal network; conducting geographical and geological surveys; and setting up streetlamps in Cairo and Alexandria. Of particular interest to Napoléon was the feasibility of rebuilding and greatly expanding the ancient canal through the strategic isthmus of Suez. Such a waterway between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea would prove a highly attractive alternative to that of circumnavigating half the globe by sailing around Africa’s southerly Cape of Good Hope to India and the Far East. It would also surely pose a “devastating trade problem” for the hated English.⁷

Of chief interest to the many French scientists was their pursuit of a systematic survey of the lower and upper Nile River regions, at least to the second cataract, and where possible, archaeological excavations of Thebes, Luxor, Karnak, and other ancient sites. In January 1799, when Napoléon’s troops first saw the panorama of ancient Thebes, “in sheer amazement [they] halted and burst into spontaneous applause.”⁸ Vivant Denon’s wonderfully illustrated *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte*, published in 1802, sold by the tens of thousands and fired the imagination of the Western world. It was superseded in grandeur and in popularity by the far greater, more majestic work commissioned by the emperor himself—the twenty-volume masterpiece *Description de l’Egypte*, published in installments between 1809 and 1828.

This “gain of a great book,” as the editors of the *Quarterly Review* called it, was a superbly illustrated, heavily researched, and official publication of the French government consisting of some twenty volumes and 794 illustrated plates. It told of the many discoveries in Egypt, from ancient hieroglyphs to modern zoology, “everything worth knowing about Egypt past

6. Cronin, *Napoleon*, 152. However, the longer the occupying French Army remained in Egypt, the more suspicious and disliked it was. Eventually, rebellions erupted in Cairo and elsewhere as European customs and morals interfered with local religious convictions and traditions.

7. Hallberg, *Suez Canal*, 23–33. Long a dream of kings and pharaohs, the approximately hundred-mile-long Suez Canal, or “Gate to the East,” has a long and difficult history. Under Necho II (ca. 600 BC), a partial canal—the so-called “Canal of the Pharaohs”—was built at the cost of some 120,000 lives. The Persian ruler Darius I tried to rebuild it around 500 BC. Ptolemy II and the Roman ruler Trajan tried their hand as well. However, for centuries no serious progress was made because of formidable obstacles as well as the Portuguese discovery of the great Cape route to India late in the fifteenth century. Under Charles Le Pere, Napoléon’s engineers revived the efforts to rebuild it, but miscalculations, cost overrides, and other insurmountable difficulties led to yet again another abandonment. The dream proved impossible until, under the direction of an international commission, the Suez Canal was finally completed in 1869.

8. Adkins and Adkins, *Keys of Egypt*, 31.



Image from *The Memnon Colossi, Thebes. (1884)*, unknown. From *Description de l'Égypte*.

and present.”⁹ Europe was soon caught up with Egyptomania and would remain so for a generation or more, with Napoléon decorating much of Paris with obelisks and monuments. Even the new symbol of the empire became the bee, the hieroglyphic symbol for Lower Egypt.

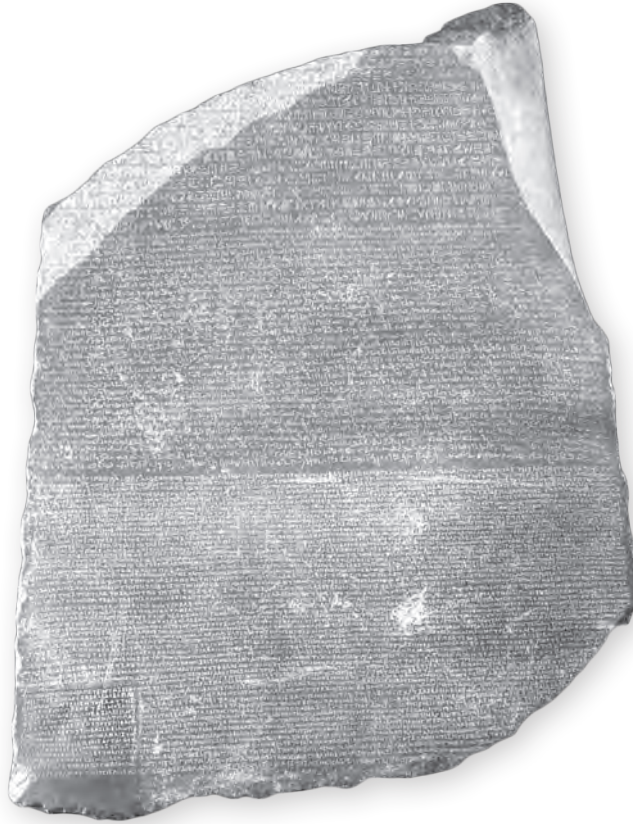
As fate would have it, of all their careful studies and excavations, their most significant discovery came by way of sheer accident. In July 1794, while reinforcing a decaying Arab fortification near the town of Rashid (or

as the French called it, Rosetta), near the mouth of the Nile River and some forty miles east of Alexandria, a French soldier by the name of Colonel d’Hautpoul stumbled across a most extraordinary stone. He immediately notified his superior officer, Pierre-François Xavier Bouchard (Boussard), an officer of the engineers, who ordered an abrupt halt to their efforts. There, carelessly embedded in the wall, was a peculiar, irregular-shaped stone, three feet nine inches long by two feet four inches wide by eleven inches thick (114 by 72 by 28 centimeters) and weighing 1,500 pounds. Obviously once part of an ancient monument (it originally was part of an Egyptian temple erected in 196 BC by the Macedonian Greek king of Egypt, Ptolemy V, to commemorate the first anniversary of his reign), the polished black asphalt slab featured three different writings in parallel columns: one in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, one in Greek, and the third in some unknown language. The inscription found between the hieroglyphics and the Greek was soon identified as some sort of cursive, but no one could begin to decipher either one of the two Egyptian transcriptions. Sensing its potential value as a tool for translation and decipherment, Bouchard carefully secured the stone and delivered it to Cairo, where it was immediately placed in the newly established Institut d’Égypte. Napoléon himself showed great interest in the discovery and promptly ordered a number of impressions be made of it for distribution across Europe.¹⁰

Had the French occupying forces moved with more dispatch, the world famous Rosetta Stone would likely be on display at the Louvre in Paris today. However, Napoléon abruptly quit Egypt for Paris, leaving an infuriated General Jean-Baptiste Kléber to face the invading Ottoman–British coalition army, which overpowered the outnumbered French forces that were decimated by disease. Under terms of the Treaty of Capitulation, France reluctantly

9. Cronin, *Napoleon*, 165.

10. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past*, 57–58.



The Rosetta Stone.

surrendered many of its plunders, including the Rosetta Stone, which, after considerable French protest, eventually made its way to England, arriving in Portsmouth in February 1802. For several months it resided at the Rooms of the Society of Antiquaries in London before its eventual transfer to the British Museum, where for the next twenty years it silently defied decipherment by some of the world’s greatest minds.¹¹

The discovery of the Rosetta Stone and the publication of *La Description* served only to intensify Europe’s increasing fascination with all things Egyptian. Egypt, the so-called granary of the world, with its almost never-ending catalog of kings and pharaohs from 3200 BC to AD 300, had long stood at the very center of ancient civilization in arts, language, commerce, and military might for thousands of years. And no other nation—whether of ancient or modern times—has ever erected such great and durable monuments in the form of the lasting Pyramids and the Great Sphinx of Giza, among others. These stand as testaments

11. Fagan, *Eyewitness to Discovery*, 87–89.

to the glories of an ancient civilization that may have known mathematical, scientific, and engineering secrets modern society can even now only guess at and approximate.

Most enticing of all was its ancient hieroglyphic language chiseled into the stone of temples, monuments, and obelisks all over Egypt. If such writings could at last be deciphered, what treasured knowledge would they reveal about ancient civilizations, the Bible, and perhaps even Creation itself? For the wisdom of the ancient Egyptians was considered proverbial.

Nevertheless, Egypt would surrender its secrets jealously. Some two millennia before Napoléon, the “triumphant Christians closed (and often destroyed) the ancient temples, forbade the old religious rites, and banned the use of the traditional hieroglyphic writing.”¹² Later, after the Muslim conquests of the mid-seventh century, outside access to Egypt beyond Cairo and Alexandria was restricted. With the addition of Egypt to the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire in the early sixteenth century, more of the interior opened to outsiders, but travel was extremely dangerous because of unstable political conditions, poor transportation, and intense poverty.

In the wake of the Renaissance and the rebirth of interest in the ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian civilizations, Europeans set their sights once more on the land of the Nile. The first to come may have been the Frenchman Pierre Belon in 1533, the German Johannes Helferich in 1579, and the Jesuit scientist-priest Athanasius Kircher, who perhaps was the first to hint at the phonetic importance of Egyptian hieroglyphs. Pietro della Valle brought back several mummies in the early 1600s (for centuries many believed such mummies had secret medicinal powers). Others followed, including George Sandys (1610), John Greaves (1638), the Reverend Richard Pococke (1737–38), and Frederick Norden (1738). Despite the many efforts of these intrepid inquirers, by the end of the eighteenth century, what little was known of ancient Egyptian history and civilization was still based primarily on the accounts of Greek and Roman authors.¹³

THE WAR OF THE CONSULS

Napoléon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 inevitably spurred intense European rivalry over the spoils of Egypt. It was, as Donald Malcolm Reid has suggested, “a turning point in confirming Egypt as a cockpit of Anglo-French geographical rivalry” and in heightening public interest in that part of the world.¹⁴ In 1806, Muhammad Ali became pasha, or governor, of Egypt under the nominal authority of the sultan of Turkey, who, after fighting against France, had recognized the superiority of European technology. Ali, an Albanian who had served in the British-Turkish expeditionary force sent by the sultan to fight Napoléon in Egypt, set about “[attempting] to bring Egypt into the modern world by borrowing from the

12. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past*, 55.

13. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past*, 56.

14. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*, 32.

West.”¹⁵ Recognizing that his modernization plans needed the goodwill of the major powers, he adroitly played the interests of one against another in what became known as the War of the Consuls, allowing Europeans a virtually free hand to compete with one another, despoil monuments, and carry away antiquities in return for military and scientific upgrades and advancements.

The truth is, however, that Egypt did not need outsiders to rob it of its treasures; Egyptian natives, hungry for food and money, turned to robbing tombs and destroying temples. These native treasure hunters destroyed much and cared little “about the havoc they wreaked on immovable remains.”¹⁶ Even the Egyptian government demolished ancient temples for sugar refineries. “The widespread, frantic, and unrestrained deportation of artifacts that ensued was closer to wholesale looting than to excavation, . . . a period of excavation by explosion and coat-closet conservation.”¹⁷ It was a time when few people concerned themselves with originality, location, provenance, sequence, and arrangement—in short, the very essence of modern archaeology.

The British Foreign Office appointed Henry Salt as consul general in 1815. With the early support of Joseph Banks, member of the Royal Society and Trustee of the British Museum, Salt set out to represent British interests, if not also to make a tidy fortune of his own to supplement his meager salary. Like his French counterparts, Salt selected his own team of field agents, including Giovanni Caviglia, a Malta-bound sea captain who would dig at Giza; the Swiss adventurer Jean Louis Burckhardt; Giovanni d’Athanasia; and another Italian, Giovanni Battista Belzoni, billed as the “Patagonian Samson.”

One of the era’s more colorful adventurers, “the Great Belzoni,” as his promoters delighted to call him, was born in Padua, Italy, in 1778. This six-foot seven-inch redheaded giant of a man left Italy in 1798 for England to escape Napoléon’s invading armies. There, as a circus strongman, he



Giovanni Battista Belzoni. From *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries Within the Pyramids, Temples, Tombs and Excavations in Egypt and Nubia* by Giovanni Battista Belzoni (London, 1820).

15. Armajani and Riches, *Middle East*, 177.

16. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past*, 60.

17. Muhlestein, “Prelude to the Past,” in Harper et al., *Prelude to the Restoration*, 136–37.

awed his audiences with great feats of physical strength. Expert with levers, hydraulics, and weights, the Patagonian Samson, in one of his more famous stage acts, lifted twelve people who had been put into a specially constructed iron frame.

Convinced that he could make more money elsewhere, Belzoni and his Irish wife, Sarah, left for Egypt in 1812, where he tried to persuade Ali that Egypt simply had to buy his new ox-driven hydraulic pumps. Though Ali declined Belzoni's invention, he did give Belzoni a small government pension and permission to work with Salt in his ongoing efforts to unearth additional Egyptian antiquities for the British Museum. Surprisingly gifted at reading landscapes and working with only a handful of the most rudimentary tools, Belzoni, "with a large staff in his hand, . . . commanded his army of Mussulmans, directed their labors, astonished them with his displays of physical strength, learned to speak their language with marvelous facility, and speedily came to be regarded as a superior being, endowed with magical power."¹⁸ In 1816 he discovered, excavated, and successfully removed the colossal granite head and upper torso of Pharaoh Ramses II from a temple at Thebes. Despite fierce opposition from French agents, Belzoni sailed his seven-and-a-half-ton colossus down the Nile to Alexandria from whence it, too, like the Rosetta Stone, eventually arrived at the British Museum.¹⁹

Soon he was at it again, this time following up on Burckhardt's lead. After sailing up the Nile to the Lower Nubian site of Abu Simbel, Belzoni hired a team of locals to clear away forty feet of sand and then used battering rams to smash in the doors. In doing so, he became the first to discover and crawl inside the temple of Luxor, where he discovered the unfinished sepulcher of Ramses II in his glorious temple carved out of the hillside.²⁰ The temple of Luxor had been so long lost and so completely buried in sand that its very existence was in doubt. Anciently, it had been dedicated to Isis by the queen of Ramses the Great. Four colossal figures, each sixty-one feet high, are seated in front with eight others, each forty-eight feet high, supporting the roof of the inner hall wherein gigantic bas-reliefs depict the history of Ramses. Sixteen other halls, not much smaller than the first, made up the complex. Belzoni's discovery of this ancient temple alone ensures his reputation in Egyptology. On his return trip, Belzoni explored the Valley of the Kings, discovering the majestic tomb and alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I. Then in 1818 at the second pyramid of Giza, the Pyramid of Khafre (or Chephren), Belzoni once again used his engineering genius and discovered its hidden entrance to the inner chambers, becoming the first man since ancient times to enter in. In all, Belzoni located eight previously unknown burial chambers.

Of Belzoni's methods, one can only wish he had been a bit more careful, for if truth be told, he destroyed almost as much as he discovered. The following is his own account of discovering one set of tombs:

18. "The Story of Belzoni," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 751.

19. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past*, 60–61.

20. "Story of Belzoni," 752.



Egypt, Administrative Divisions. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1990. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

In some places there is not more than the vacancy of a foot left, which you must contrive to pass through in a creeping posture, like a snail, on pointed and keen stones, that cut like glass. After getting through these passages, some of them two or three hundred yards long, you generally find a more commodious place, perhaps high enough to sit. But what a place of rest! Surrounded by bodies, by heaps of mummies in all directions; which, previous to my being accustomed to the sight, impressed me with horror. The blackness of the walls, the faint light given by the candles or torches for want of air, the different objects that surrounded me, seeming to converse with each other, and the Arabs, with the candles or torches in their hands, naked and covered with dust, themselves resembling living mummies, absolutely formed a scene that can not be described. In such a situation I found myself several times, and often returned exhausted and fainting, till at last I became inured to it, and indifferent to what I suffered, except from the dust which never failed to choke my throat and nose. . . . After the exertion of entering into such a place, through a passage of fifty, a hundred, three hundred, or perhaps six hundred yards, nearly overcome, I sought a resting-place, found one, and contrived to sit; but when my weight bore on the body of an Egyptian, it crushed it like a band-box. I naturally had recourse to my hands to sustain my weight, but they found no better support; so that I sunk altogether among the broken mummies, with a crash of bones, rags, and wooden cases, which raised such a dust as kept me motionless for a quarter of an hour, till it subsided again. I could not remove from the place, however, without increasing it, and every step I took I crushed a mummy in some part or other. Once I was conducted from such a place to another resembling it, through a passage of about twenty feet in length, and no wider than that a body could be forced through. It was choked with mummies, and I could not pass without putting my face in contact with that of some decayed Egyptian; but as the passage inclined downward, my own weight helped me on; however, I could not avoid being covered with bones, legs, arms, and heads rolling from above. Thus, I proceeded from one cave to another, all full of mummies piled up in various ways—some standing, some lying, and some on their heads.²¹

While modern readers can only grimace at the indelicate stumblings of a man who, like a bull in an ancient china shop, blundered about robbing and destroying much of the area's portable antiquities, Belzoni was no worse than most of his Egyptian or European contemporaries. However, his efforts to take careful notes of wall paintings and hieroglyphs—even though he could not read them—set him apart from tomb robbers. He was, one might argue, Egypt's first amateur archaeologist. The publication of his *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries Within the Pyramids, Temples, and Tombs in Egypt and Nubia*, in two volumes that were published in London in 1820, and his great exhibition at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly went far to pique the interests of a rising generation of much more respectful,

21. "Story of Belzoni," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 752.

professional army of Egyptian archaeologists. An intrepid explorer to the end, Belzoni died of dysentery in 1823 while en route to discover the source of the Niger River.

DISCOVERIES OF THE FRENCH

Meanwhile, the French were making remarkable discoveries of their own. In August 1802, Napoléon's government appointed the twenty-six-year-old Piedmontese, Bernardino Drovetti (1776–1852), to the post of vice-consul in Cairo.²² Drovetti was a lawyer by profession who had been wounded while serving in the French army in northern Italy. He fought in the Battle of Marengo (in his native Piedmont) in June 1800 and soon afterward became a naturalized French citizen. In 1805 the well-regarded Drovetti became consul general of Egypt, a post he held with distinction until he was dismissed by the restored Bourbon monarchy in late 1814. Deciding not to return to Italy, where his Napoleonic sympathies had fallen out of favor among his native countrymen, Drovetti, with the full permission of Ali, remained in Egypt, where he took to the highly expensive mania of collecting Egyptian antiquities in a quest for personal fortune.

Over the next seven years, Drovetti made four excavation trips up the Nile to Sair, Memphis, and Thebes, gaining the trust of many Arabs in the process. "The Arabs besiege without cease the camp where Mr. Drovetti is," observed one of his most fervent admirers. "Each of them brings mummies, bronzes, money, and sometimes cameos. These inhabitants of the desert know that they deal with the most fair and noble man, that they leave always satisfied with the prices that he fixes, and often to his disadvantage. . . . Mr. Drovetti showed me richly ornamented cedar wood boxes, used by women; tables, needles, scissors, textiles of different kinds, pallet charged with vibrant colors, and a precious batch of papyrus."²³ In the course of his work, Drovetti hired a number of field agents to help him excavate and collect antiquities, including Jean-Jacques Rifaud, Antonio Lebolo, and Joseph Rosignana. Drovetti's formidable knowledge of Egypt, his positive relationships with Ali, and his shrewd diplomatic skills eventually led to his reappointment as consul general on 25 June 1821.²⁴

22. Bernardino Drovetti became a corporal in the Twenty-seventh Legion in June 1796. He was promoted captain in February 1799 and then "premiere Officier a Ministere de la Guerre in Piemont" in July 1800. In March 1801, he was again promoted, this time to Major "de la Division des Troupes Piedmontaines." Personal Dossier of Bernardino Michel Marie Drovetti: Centre Historique des Archives (Militaire) à Vincennes, Paris, France. GR 2 YE 1242. See also GR 28 YC 441.

23. M. Le Comte de Forbin, *Voyage dans Le Levant*, 28, author's translation.

24. As to Drovetti's character, Monsieur Louis Nicolas Auguste de Forbin, director of the Louvre, strongly recommended his reappointment in 1821 as consul general: "Mr. Drovetti, ex-lieutenant colonel of cavalry, wounded in the Army of Italy, was sent on a mission in Egypt, where the power and goodness of his character, helped him have many friends who became very useful to French commerce and gave to M. Drovetti the esteem of the actual Pasha. Named Consul General [in 1805] he used his credit with the Vice King only to rectify his ideas, to moderate the excess of his despotism and to satisfy without dangers his taste for antiquity."



Lebolo is pictured standing on the far left; Drovetti is the man with his arm outstretched. *Portrait of Drovetti near Colossal Head*, by Godefroy Engelmann (1788–1839).

LEBOLLO, DROVETTI, CAILLIAUD, AND RIFAUD

Like Drovetti, whom he had likely known from earlier times (they grew up only nine miles apart), Lebolo also hailed from the Piedmont of northern Italy (Castellamonte), where he had served as a gendarme during the French occupation. He likewise had enlisted in the French Army, preferring to support rather than resist the French occupation. Had he returned home immediately after Napoléon's defeat, Lebolo likely would have been considered a traitor, certainly

by the Carbonari, who were secret revolutionary Italian patriots. He thus left his wife and young son and came to Egypt in 1815—perhaps as an invitee of Drovetti—for his personal safety, to make a small fortune, and to begin a new life. At the time he worked with a still shadowy figure named Josef Rosignana, and the two men soon entered into the employ of Drovetti. Rosignana was also a French Army veteran from the Piedmont (Turin) and, along with some four hundred other cavaliers (dragomans), had stayed on in Egypt after the French defeat. Having learned Arabic, Rosignana—or as the Arabs called him, Youssef Kachef—proved a most helpful partner.

For the next several years, Lebolo and Rosignana worked the upper Nile as adventurers, excavators, and amateur archaeologists. Their most important discoveries were in Luxor, near Thebes, where their findings did not go unnoticed. Their British adversary, Henry Salt, tells of buying mummies, papyri, and other “purchases of antiquities . . . of a certain Antonio Lebolo, a countryman of Drovetti, who had just been buying up all the antiquities the Arabs had to sell.”²⁵ Some of the more exquisite mummies then being found in this vicinity were of young virgins, their bodies covered from head to foot “with very beautiful papyrus, in

“Recommendation de M. de Forbin pour la Nomination de M. Drovetti, Consul General de France en Egypte,” 19 May 1819. Archives Nationales de France, FD 20144775/24.

25. D'Athanasī, *Brief Account*, 51. It would seem that Lebolo was less the excavator himself and more the purchaser of scrolls, mummies, and other such materials that others brought and sold to him. He had sold a significant collection of materials to the Imperial Museum of Vienna as early as 1820.



Ebers Papyrus. *Papyrus Ebers* (1875), by Georg Ebers Wellcome.

twelve folds, and containing hieroglyphics and colored figures of extremely good execution. Their colors are so fresh, that one would almost say they had been traced only a few days previously. The length of the papyrus is about 60 feet.”²⁶

26. D’Athanasii, *Brief Account*, 78. The papyri were usually found between the legs of the corpse, often “in such good condition . . . that it may be unrolled without difficulty or danger.” *Brief Account*, 57. Some papyri were letters, others biographies, contracts, even funeral representations. The

Two other, much more careful contemporary French excavators were Frédéric Cailliaud (1787–1869) and Jean-Jacques Rifaud (1786–1852). Both men had extensive scientific training and had been making invaluable finds of their own. Rifaud made some of his finest excavations and discoveries in Thebes in September 1816. In fact, no other contemporary excavated as many sites in Thebes as he did. By the time he returned to France in 1825, Rifaud had sold a good many of his own discoveries and antiquities. It is entirely possible that Rifaud either found the mummies and scrolls that would later be translated into the Book of Abraham and sold them to Lebolo and Rosignana or directed Lebolo and Rosignana to the destination they were discovered. Eventually, Lebolo sold off parts of his collections, which made their way to America, eventually to be translated into the Book of Abraham by Joseph Smith. This work has had an enormous impact on the history, doctrines, and temple practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thus without Lebolo and, by extension, without Napoléon, so much of the core beliefs and practices of the Church would have gone missing.

Cailliaud, who was more a naturalist and anthropologist than he was an archaeologist, made numerous trips of his own to the Theban necropolis to search for antiquities, amassing a rich collection in the process. However, his intent was less financially motivated and more anthropologically oriented. Drawing heavily upon the talents and connections of Lebolo and Rosignana's skills as interpreter, Cailliaud intended to understand the daily life of ancient Egyptians as found in their garments, eating utensils, jewelry, and tools.²⁷

Unfortunately, wherever Lebolo went, troubles followed in his wake. Rifaud and Lebolo, once field work colleagues, soon became jealous antagonists, if not bitter enemies, each man charging the other with stealing goods and other various criminal activities.²⁸ Then later, in yet another confrontation, Belzoni and Lebolo came to blows over the ownership of certain properties and antiquities.²⁹ Both Lebolo and Belzoni returned to their native Italy in about 1823 with the intentions of suing each other in a court of law, a course of action that appar-

wooden masks that often encased the mummies were to protect them from worms and insects whereas the bodies themselves were almost always wrapped in linens.

27. For a fuller understanding of the contributions Cailliaud made in Egypt and which until recently were relatively unknown, see Bednarski, *Lost Manuscript*, 3–25. See also Cailliaud, *Travels*.
28. In an 1827 letter to Drovetti, Rifaud speaks very critically of Lebolo—a disgraceful cheat, thief, and obvious criminal: “He was tearing me apart by his incurable jealousy while deceiving you to obtain some pieces. . . . Mr. Lebolo ha[s] not been for you and for me the man that he should have been as a compatriot.” Jean-Jacques Rifaud to Bernardino Drovetti, 6 December 1827, Papers of Jean-Jacques Rifaud, Book MS supplement 112, Fonds Rifaud, Bibliothèque de Geneve, Switzerland. In defense of Lebolo, it must be admitted that Rifaud, a staunch French patriot, was highly critical of most everyone in Egypt at the time, Drovetti included, especially if they were of Italian extraction.
29. James, *Egypt Revealed*, 92. See also Halls, *Henry Salt*, 2:23. Halls speaks of the “shameful attack made upon Belzoni by Messrs. Lebolo and Rosignana, at Carnak, which led him [Belzoni] to quit the place.” Belzoni threatened Lebolo with a lawsuit for his interference in shipping obelisks down the Nile.

ently never occurred. Meanwhile, Lebolo, whose first wife had died, married—allegedly—a second wife, a native black woman from Egypt.³⁰ Lebolo would die in 1830 but not before selling off a variety of his antiquities, some of which eventually made their way to America and into the hands of Michael Chandler, who in turn sold them to Joseph Smith for the impressive sum of \$2,400 in July 1835 (approximately \$100,000 in 2019 purchasing power).³¹

In 1824, Drovetti made a fortune selling off most of his remarkable collection of Egyptian artifacts—some 5,200 pieces in all, including mummies of all kinds, sarcophagi, statues, stelae, scrolls, jewelry, monuments, weapons, money, tools, pieces of art and furniture, and cases of other items—to Charles Felix, king of Sardinia in Turin, for 400,000 lire—where they became the foundation of the famed Museo Egizio, or Egyptian Museum.³² Jean-François Champollion deciphered the writings on Drovetti’s many papyri, which were most often collections of plans, spells, and sayings designed to protect the survival and glorification of the dead in the afterlife. Drovetti’s remarkable collection—arguably the most impressive assemblage of Egyptian antiquities outside of Egypt—remains on display to the present day. In his correspondence with Drovetti, Champollion himself validated the authentic antiquity of so much of Drovetti’s collections, having determined that many of the discoveries dated back 4,000 years ago to the time of Abraham in Egypt.³³

THE CHALLENGE

Meanwhile, despite the flurry of discoveries along the Nile, the Rosetta Stone, seemingly disdainful of its captors, defied the world’s greatest linguists in their continuing, though unsuccessful, attempts at deciphering its ancient engravings. While its Greek letterings were translated easily enough, the other two writings, both Egyptian, could not be deciphered.

30. Peterson, *Story of the Book of Abraham*. See also notes in the possession of the author of an extended conversation he had with local Castellamonte historian, Emilio Champagne, 16 May 2018. Lebolo and his second wife arrived in Italy with their two small children, who were baptized in Venice before the family finally decided to risk their return to Castellamonte sometime in 1821–22.

31. There is evidence to show that as early as 1824, Lebolo and Drovetti’s nephews were planning on buying some of Drovetti’s antiquities and selling them to America, where they could get “double the price.” Bernardino Drovetti to Pierre Balthalon, 4 February 1824, in Buichard, *Lettere di Bernardino Drovetti*, 483–84.

32. Porter, “Antonio Lebolo: His Life and Contributions to Egyptology” (unpublished paper in possession of the author), 6.

33. From a handwritten statement by Jean-François Champollion, signed 5 July 1827, regarding a second Drovetti collection of antiquities eventually sold to the Louvre. As shown above, Drovetti sold his first and much larger collection to Turin, Italy. As found in the file “Acquisition de la Collection Drovetti Transport Paiement,” Les Archives Nationales de France, Paris, France, file 20144775/8. If Drovetti’s collection found the support of the greatest linguist of his age, Lebolo’s collections, many taken from the same areas at Thebes as Drovetti’s, may well have been from the time of Abraham in Egypt.

The first was in the form of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, a religious or formal text, and the other was in a cursive adaptation of hieroglyphs, a so-called Demotic text. They both proved entirely unreadable. Part of the reason for this lay in the fact that the three different writings of the same event were not identical, word-for-word transliterations but phrases that were only roughly comparable in meaning. A second complication was the scarcity of characters on the stone, particularly in the hieroglyphs, to allow for a larger, more comprehensive study. A third problem was that the Demotic text, a long-lost Egyptian style of writing, was almost as difficult to translate as the hieroglyphs. The Demotic text, looking like nothing more than a scribble to linguists, gave way, historically, to a form of the Coptic language when the Christians overran Egypt around AD 250. A language that included elements of the Greek, Coptic was the first Egyptian language to use vowels. Thus, reading the Rosetta Stone was somewhat akin to a modern student of English or French trying to read Latin without a knowledge of either old English or old French and with no understanding whatsoever of the parent language—Latin.

The earliest serious study of hieroglyphs preceded the discovery of the Rosetta Stone by almost three hundred years. The Italian Pierio Valeriano published his *Hieroglyphica* in 1505. Almost two hundred years later, Athanassius Kircher, in an argument well ahead of his time, postulated that a knowledge of Coptic was a prerequisite to understanding hieroglyphs but continued to foster the long-held misconception that hieroglyphs were symbols and not script. In 1741, William Warburton concluded that the hieratic owed its origins to the ancient hieroglyphs. The hieratic was later superseded in about the seventh century BC by an Egyptian language derivative of hieroglyphs called the Demotic, a more secular language used for business and literary purposes. A generation after Warburton, the French abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy pioneered the argument that those hieroglyphs circled in ovals (the French “cartouches”) usually contained names of royalty. Then in 1783, the great Danish scholar, Georg Zoëga, compiled a massive listing of 958 different hieroglyphs, classifying them by various symbols—plants, mammals, and so forth. Most, even at this late date, believed Egyptian hieroglyphics was, like Chinese, a language of pictographs, with each character representing a certain word, name, or larger meaning.

In the same year that the Rosetta Stone went on display in London, the French Oriental scholar Antoine Isaac, Baron Silvestre de Sacy, and his brilliant Swedish student, Johan David Åkerblad, began in rapid order to read proper nouns—like Ptolemy—in the ancient Demotic. Why Åkerblad and Sacy failed to apply their knowledge of Demotic to hieroglyphs still remains a puzzle.³⁴ By 1802 the world was still totally incapable of deciphering ancient Egyptian.

All this was destined to change. On 23 December 1790, in the small town of Figeac and at the height of the French Revolution, a baby boy was born, the last child of a forty-six-year-old mother and a struggling bookseller father. Raised in a small home just yards away from the town guillotine, Jean-François Champollion grew up in a family that was fearful of

34. Adkins and Adkins, *Keys of Egypt*, 59–65.

most everything and everyone. Refusing to send her children to nearby schools, his illiterate mother tried to teach Jean-François things she knew only from the schools of hard knocks and common sense. Drawn, Napoléon-like, to his father's library, the young Champollion, impatient, quick-tempered, and inclined to unsociable behavior, taught himself to read out of a passion for copying and drawing words over and over again. In his young and highly impressionable mind, he came to associate script to a collection of drawings and was as fascinated at the appearance of letters and words as he was their meanings.

What his parents could not teach him, his older brother, lifelong mentor, and personal hero, Jacques-Joseph Champollion, began to do. Passionate about books and ancient history, Jacques-Joseph was the one who opened his younger brother's mind and insatiable intellectual appetite to the world of higher learning. When he saw his younger brother's unhappiness with the strict disciplines and sterile, rote learning as taught at a local primary school, Jacques-Joseph sent for him to come and study with him and with a tutor, Abbé Oussert, at Grenoble in southeast France. The younger Champollion—"Champollion Le Jeune," as he came to be called—soon showed such promise in studying the classics that he also took to studying Hebrew, Arabic, Syrian, and Chaldean, showing a prodigious and remarkable linguistic capability in one so young.

In another fortunate twist of fate, the school prefect was none other than Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier, one of Napoléon's leading Egyptian scientists, or savants, who was at that precise moment writing the Introduction to the *Description de l'Égypte*. Impressed with Champollion's linguistic aptitude and his consuming interest in all things Egyptian, Fourier invited his young protégé to his home to view his collection of Egyptian antiquities, drawings, and hieroglyphs. At first speechless at seeing such incredible things, Champollion left the house filled with a youthful fire that sparked an undying determination to someday decipher the ancient scripts, which many people then believed would reveal the whys and whens of creation, the true chronologies of the Bible, and secrets of subsequent civilizations. At the end of the school year, the seventeen-year-old Champollion received an invitation to speak before the academy in Grenoble. His essay on the geography of ancient Egypt received a standing ovation and Champollion was invited on the spot to become a member of the Grenoble Academy.

Moving to Paris with his brother later that year, Champollion resumed his linguistic studies at the Institut de France and the Collège de France under the tutelage of some of the country's greatest minds. These included the above-mentioned Professor Silvestre de Sacy, the foremost Oriental scholar in Europe; Professor Louis-Mathieu Langlès, who taught Champollion Persian; Prosper Audran, an expert in Hebrew and Aramaic; and Dom Raphaël de Monachis, who continued teaching Champollion in Coptic and Arabic. By the end of the following year, Champollion had reworked his earlier Grenoble essay into a draft of a book, which he tentatively called *L'Égypte sous les Pharaons*, a geographical study of Upper and Lower Egypt that ultimately was published in two volumes in 1814. Favoring Coptic over any other language, Champollion also embarked on writing a Coptic grammar and dictionary.

During all this time, his foremost worries were first, his deteriorating health; and second, the fear of conscription. Champollion sensed what his brother more fully realized—that such intense study made him both weak and irritable. Paris, with its relatively cold and damp climate, was not agreeable to him. He worked with such abandon that he spent himself. Had he developed more friends and a healthier social life, he may well have learned how best to pace himself and preserve his energies. Instead, tied up within himself as tightly as the bowstrings of a new violin, he continually drove himself to ill health. Yet his course was set—master Coptic before turning to the Demotic found on the Rosetta Stone.

His other fear was that of being conscripted into Napoléon's Grande Armée. At a time when French soldiers were dying at the alarming rate of well over 100,000 men per year, with even worse years soon to come, avoiding military service appeared almost impossible. Had it not been for the continuing intercessions of Fourier and other scholars, Champollion may well have been doing his duty in some garrison outpost on the outskirts of Napoléon's empire—or worse!

In May 1810, both he and Jacques-Joseph once more moved to Grenoble, this time to teach at one of Napoléon's new universities that had recently opened there. The year 1812, as we have seen, meanwhile turned out to be a nightmare for Napoléon and all of France, and Grenoble itself was only spared massive bombardment by advancing Austrian forces because of Napoléon's surrender. Ever more inclined to openly support Napoléon, Champollion and his brother were constantly creating enemies. On hearing of Napoléon's escape from Elba and his approach to Grenoble at the head of an expanding army on its way to Paris, Champollion prepared to meet his hero for the first time. The two men met only briefly between Napoléon's hurried dispatches, with the emperor saying, "It's a good omen—he has half my name."³⁵ Napoléon, on his way northward, showed genuine interest in Champollion and promised to see his manuscript published in Paris. The two men, one bound for Waterloo, the other for a destiny of a different kind—never met again.

With Napoléon's subsequent defeat and banishment to St. Helena, the restored Bourbon monarchy shut down the University of Grenoble and all but exiled the Champollion brothers to Figeac. Fortunately, however, Jacques-Joseph soon afterwards received an appointment as secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres back in Paris, while Champollion returned to Grenoble to accept a history professorship at a new Royal College. Because of continuing intrigues and opposition by his political enemies, Champollion was, however, soon dismissed and almost jailed for alleged treason before his ever more tactful and diplomatic brother rescued him yet again by bringing him back to Paris to work in the Institut. Forever poor, in precarious health, and continually on the run from one place to another, Champollion—who by now had married a young woman named Rosine Blanc in December 1818—was an outcast in his own country. Unable to relate well even to his closest friends, Champollion was never the best of husbands. Though his wife deeply loved him, he seemed incapable of forming a healthy relationship with her. To the end, Champollion's

35. Adkins and Adkins, *Keys of Egypt*, 123.

closest confidante and emotional support was his older brother, although he once fancied himself in love with a much older woman. His life was learning, not loving. Yet despite these obstacles, his prodigious talents as a linguist were real and his personal commitment to decipher the Rosetta Stone was unflagging—a task he renewed with increasing devotion aware now, more than ever, that he was in a race with time.

An Englishman almost solved the Rosetta puzzle before Champollion did. The brilliant English physician, mathematician, and scientist Thomas Young, a man seventeen years Champollion's senior who was financially independent and revered by his government and countrymen, had already earned a reputation for his study of optics. Having convinced himself that the hieratic script was a derivative of the hieroglyphs, Young began to turn his energy and prodigious language talents to deciphering the Rosetta Stone in 1814. Applying his remarkable mathematical skills (precisely what Champollion lacked) to the challenge, Young made impressive progress, soon identifying numbers and plural forms in hieroglyphs. Before long, Young was able to read the word *Ptolemy* in the Rosetta Stone, and he correctly deciphered at least a half a dozen hieroglyphic letters by careful comparison with the Demotic. Most importantly, he concluded—rightly, as time would tell—that hieroglyphs were not primarily pictographs but representations of distinctive sounds, like an ancient alphabet. Had he a better command of Coptic, he would have been able to read more of the Demotic and, by extension and comparison, decoded more of the ancient language of the hieroglyphs.

Back in France, whereas Champollion first naively believed that a thoroughgoing knowledge of Coptic would allow him to directly decipher the hieroglyphs, he gradually came to the realization that, dauntingly, such was not the case. Hieroglyphics were not a single alphabet; rather, they had a wide variety of spellings for the same person or place, and they had no vowels but plenty of shorthand contractions, such as in English one might write "pkg" for "parking," "unvsty" for "university," or "∴" for "therefore." Furthermore, ancient scribes assumed the reader knew the combinations of right vowels and contractions, "but this knowledge had been lost, although Coptic gives clues to it."³⁶







After long and painstaking effort, Champollion concluded that hieroglyphs could not be read alone but in groups or clusters. Intently comparing the Greek to the Coptic, the Coptic to the Demotic and, by extension, the Demotic to the hieroglyphs, Champollion noted that there were three times as many hieroglyphic signs as there were Greek words and, therefore, that there had to be a combination or grouping of signs to convey a single meaning—in other words, consonants and syllables, essential components to phonetic expressions. Hieroglyphs were a combination of phonetics and pictures. Unlike Young, Champollion was now looking not just for more clues between the hieroglyphic and the Demotic but also for the ability to read the hieroglyphs themselves.

An important, contributing discovery, one that confirmed if not enhanced both Young and Champollion's interpretations of the Rosetta Stone, was the arrival in England in the

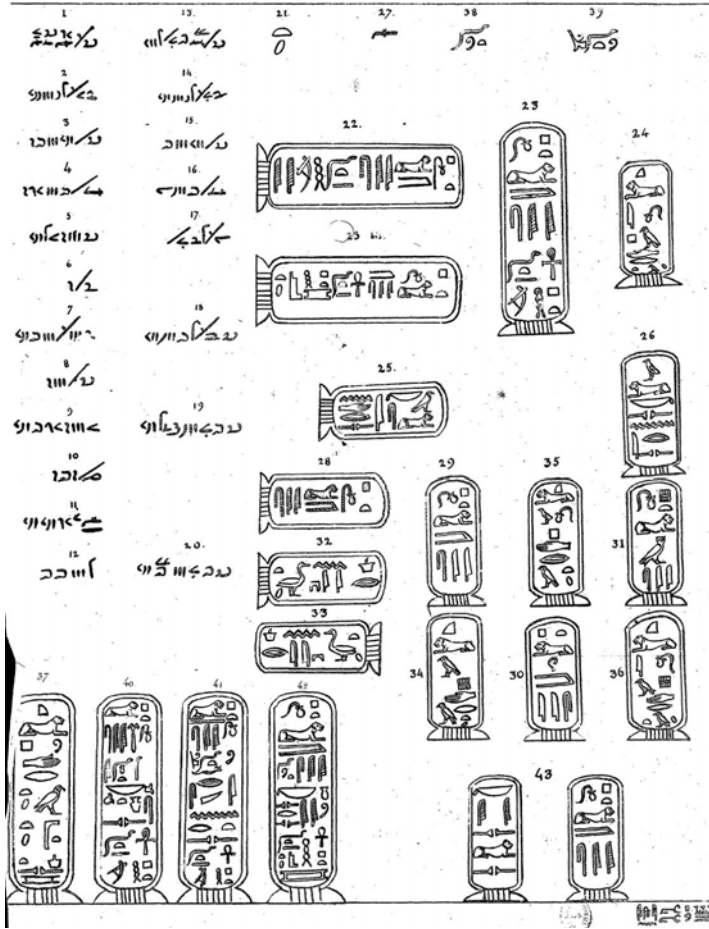
36. Adkins and Adkins, *Keys of Egypt*, 84.

winter of 1820–21 of the so-called Bankes’s obelisk, with its own set of Greek and hieroglyphic inscriptions. The obelisk was discovered in Philae in 1815 by the aforementioned Belzoni and turned over to William John Bankes, the British antiquarian and collector, who believed the obelisk should add much to human understanding. Young mistakenly concluded that the obelisk’s hieroglyphs and Greek writings must represent the same text and meaning. Young jealously refused to publish or disseminate the writings on the obelisk for almost a year. When Champollion finally obtained a copy of its inscriptions, he deciphered the word “Cleopatra,” which Bankes had also deciphered, and painstakingly and methodically expanded his understanding of several other hieroglyphic signs.³⁷

Then, on the morning of 14 September 1822, while living with his brother on 22 Rue Mazarine in Paris, Champollion received yet another indispensable piece to the puzzle. Drawings of hieroglyphs from the temple of Abu Simbel, done by Jean-Nicolas Huyot—architect of the famous Arc de Triomphe—arrived in the post. Thanks to the recent excavation work of Burckhardt and Belzoni, Huyot had gained entrance to the temple and made faithful drawings and replications of the temple’s monumental writings. Historians Roy and Lesley Adkins explain what happened next:

Poring over the drawings in his attic room in the rue Mazarine, Champollion soon noticed names within cartouches—names that he had never seen before. The first sheet contained , and he immediately recognized the first sign  as a picture of the sun. He knew that in Coptic the word for sun was Re or Ra, which also happened to be the name for the ancient Egyptian sun god. From his earlier work he knew the last two signs  would transliterate as ‘s’ in Ptolemaic or Roman names, which if applied to this cartouche would give ‘Ra . . . ss,’ or more likely ‘Ra . . . ses’ because vowels were not normally shown in hieroglyphs. At once he saw that if the other sign  was ‘m,’ it would represent ‘Rameses,’ a name known to have been used by several pharaohs well before the Greek and Roman rule in Egypt—which is nowadays spelled as Ramses, Rameses or Ramesses. With mounting excitement and joy as he began to understand what was happening, yet still fearful that he would find proof that his system was totally wrong, he searched the rest of the Abu Simbel drawings and found the name . Once again he read  as ‘mes,’ and he recognized the sign in front as a picture of an ibis, recorded by ancient writers as the symbol of the god Thoth who was revered by the Egyptians as the inventor of hieroglyphs and god of scribes. The name on the cartouche therefore read ‘Thothmes,’ better known nowadays by the ancient Greek version of the name, Tuthmosis—another name used by several pharaohs well before Greek and Roman times. . . . Champollion

37. Bankes, a friend of Young and a scornful critic of Champollion, believed that Champollion had stolen from Bankes’s scribbled annotation on a lithograph of the inscription from the obelisk, where he had deciphered the name Cleopatra. Champollion always denied the accusation and went on to formulate his system of decipherment quite independent of Bankes. See Usick, *Adventures in Egypt and Nubia*, 76–80.



Lettre à M. Dacier relative à l'alphabet des hiéroglyphes phonétiques, p. 54, by Jean-François Champollion. Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

instantly saw the underlying principle, and it confirmed the system of decipherment that he had been painstakingly putting together, piece by piece, over the last few months.³⁸

What finally enabled Champollion to do what neither Young nor any others were able to accomplish was to apply his mastery of Coptic to the problem. “His knowledge of Coptic enabled him to deduce the phonetic values of many syllabic signs, and to assign correct readings to many pictorial characters, the meanings of which were made known to him by the Greek text on the Stone.”³⁹ The system of decipherment that Champollion had been

38. Adkins and Adkins, *Keys of Egypt*, 180–81.

39. Budge, *Rosetta Stone*, 4.

methodically developing over several years and now verified was that hieroglyphic script was mainly phonetic but not entirely so. It also contained logograms that were used to write native names and common nouns from the pharaonic period. The combination of both constituted an ancient alphabet that he now could prove and sufficiently read or decipher. Champollion thus came to the rightful conclusion that the hieroglyphic writings within cartouches were not only of the later periods of Egyptian history but also of the every earliest pharaonic era, thus proving the ability to read the ancient transcriptions as well as the much later ones. The system was, therefore, decoded and proved that hieroglyphic, hieratic, and Demotic all corresponded to the same language. Whereas Young may well have discovered parts of the alphabet, it was “Champollion [who] unlocked an entire language.”⁴⁰

In a state of exhaustion mingled with euphoria, Champollion gathered up his papers, rushed downstairs into the street, before heading out to find his brother, then working at the nearby Institut de France. As the story goes, by the time he found his brother, Champollion was totally out of breath. Falling to the floor, he cried out, “Je tiens mon affaire!” (I’ve done it) and collapsed in a dead faint.⁴¹

Champollion’s subsequent letter of discovery dated 22 September 1822 and written to M. Dacier was read at the *Academie des Inscriptions at Belles Lettres* just five days later on 27 September, with none other than Champollion’s rival, Thomas Young, in attendance. His British counterpart refused, at first, to accept many of his rival’s decodings, assuming they were false, if not borrowed from him. However, he admitted that Champollion’s findings “appear[ed] to be gigantic.” Running out of research time and money, Young, jealous to the end, more or less abandoned the field to Champollion and died in May 1829.⁴²

What Champollion merely hinted at in his “Lettre à M. Dacier,” he later elaborated upon in his classic work *Précis du Système Hiéroglyphique des Anciens Egyptiens par M. Champollion le jeune*, published in Paris in March 1824. A later edition followed in 1828.

Champollion’s reputation extended far beyond the decoding of the Rosetta Stone. While this remarkable feat earned him an almost instant reputation as the leading expert on Egyptian writings and antiquities, he was soon to make other contributions as well.⁴³ In 1824, Champollion traveled to London, where he gazed upon the Rosetta Stone for the first time, the translator and the stone finally face to face. From there he journeyed to Italy to catalog the various Egyptian monuments at Naples, Florence, and Rome. Authenticating Drovetti’s collection of antiquities as worthy of purchase and preservation, Champollion played a positive role in the sale of Drovetti’s magnificent collection to Turin. In March 1825, Champol-

40. Parkinson, *Cracking Codes*, 40.

41. Parkinson, *Cracking Codes*, 35; and Adkins and Adkins, *Keys of Egypt*, 181. There is some slight disagreement between the above scholars as to precisely what Champollion said: either “je tiens l’affaire” or “je tiens mon affaire.”

42. Adkins and Adkins, *Keys of Egypt*, 204.

43. British consul Henry Salt wrote, “You will be surprised to hear that I have become a complete convert to Monsieur Champollion’s file system of explaining the hieroglyphics.” Henry Salt to William Hamilton, 4 October 1824, in Halls, *Life and Correspondence*, 2:239.

lion moved on to Florence and Rome, deciphering what he could in one great museum after another. Appointed curator of the Egyptian Museum at the Louvre, as well as professor of Egyptian Antiquities at the *Collège de France* in 1827, Champollion soon embarked on an eighteen-month expedition to Egypt—his one and only journey to the land that had dominated his life. He departed in the summer of 1828, thirty years after Napoléon’s invasion, to confirm his system of decipherment and to make more accurate maps and drawings. Greeted as “the man who could read the writings and the old stones,”⁴⁴ Champollion urged Ali to put an end to all looting and desecration of Egyptian tombs, temples, and antiquities, a recommendation that was put into law in 1835. Furthermore, he made extensive and careful field notes and meticulous drawings wherever he went, most of which were later published posthumously. Dying tragically far too young, at the age of forty-one, of a stroke brought on by overexertion on 4 March 1832, Champollion will ever be regarded as the father of modern Egyptology.

SINCE CHAMPOLLION

Thanks in large measure to the prodigious work of the leading German archaeologist Karl Richard Lepsius, with his studies of other trilingual decrees found at Tanis, Champollion’s hypothesis was finally proven a generation after his death.⁴⁵ In America, the first complete translation of the Rosetta Stone, based solely on Champollion’s methods, appeared in 1858 as the *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Philomathean Society of the University of Pennsylvania to Translate the Inscription*, authored by C. R. Hale, S. H. Jones, and H. Morton. However, Professor Samuel Latham Mitchill, the foremost American naturalist of Columbia University, knew of Champollion’s work as early as 1828.⁴⁶

44. Adkins and Adkins, *Keys of Egypt*, 247.

45. David, *Experience of Ancient Egypt*, 81.

46. Of further interest to the Latter-day Saint reader is the fact that Martin Harris, seeking linguistic and scientific corroboration for the characters and engravings Joseph Smith had found on the plates of gold, which Joseph had received from the angel Moroni in September 1827, traveled to Columbia University in February 1828. After Harris visited with Professor Charles Anthon, who was a learned classicist but who knew virtually nothing about Egyptian, Anthon then referred him to his older, more esteemed, and much more approachable colleague, Professor Samuel L. Mitchill, whom even President Thomas Jefferson called “the Congressional Dictionary” because of his vast knowledge of ancient American antiquities and languages. A member of the prestigious American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, Mitchill “perlitely” received Harris and began to examine carefully the engravings Harris had brought with him. Mitchill then “made a learned dissertation on them” and “compared them with the hieroglyphics discovered by Champollion in Egypt and set them down as the language of a people formerly in existence in the East, but now no more.” Bennett, “Mormon Religion—Clerical Ambition,” 362. For a more complete study of this fascinating episode, see Bennett, “Read This I Pray Thee,” 178–216.

The immediate interest among many in Champollion's decipherings and Belzoni's discoveries was an early endeavor to show that all such things proved the historicity and validity of the Holy Bible, especially its Old Testament accounts of ancient peoples. At the time, the Bible was very much in ascendancy because of the incredible dissemination efforts of the British and Foreign Bible Society (see chapter 10) and its later counterpart the American Bible Society. The birth of Egyptology was, as so many then assumed, evidence of God's holy writ. The pope even wanted to make Champollion a cardinal because his discoveries seemed to substantiate the chronology of the Bible. Newspapers and journals throughout the world published scores of articles showing how all such findings—the references to and experiences with Egyptian whirlwinds, mirages, locusts—all proved the accuracy of biblical accounts.⁴⁷

Today, scholars seem less interested in proving the validity and chronology of the Bible and more committed to integrating the study of Egypt with such other disciplines as anthropology, writing, archaeology, art history, and literature. “There is a general movement away from socio-functional approaches towards attempting to reconstruct individual lives and contexts in more plausible shapes and detail.”⁴⁸ Modern scholars still strive to understand what remains, in fact, an entirely different culture from that of modern civilization, with its different mindsets and alphabetic languages.

The systematic study of the language has continued ever since under such scholars as the Irish Reverend Edward Hincks, Heinrich Brugsch, Adolf Erman, Kurt Sethe, Francis Griffith, Battiscombe Gunn, and Sir Alan Gardiner. Yet, for all this, Champollion's achievement remains the key “turning point of a study which is still progressing.” And the Rosetta Stone still maintains its supreme place in the pantheon of Egyptian discoveries, a silent, ever-beckoning, always fascinating “bridge between our world today and the ancient Egyptian [which] seems too vast to contemplate.”⁴⁹

The history of Napoléon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, the resultant discovery and Champollion's incredulous deciphering of the Rosetta Stone, the publication of *La Description de*

47. Note the following argument as quoted in the *British Review* and reprinted in the American publication *Saturday Magazine* in August 1821: “The account of the invasion of Judea, by Pharaoh-Necho, King of Egypt, related in 2 Kings 23:29–34 . . . is confirmed by the sculptures discovered by Mr. Belzoni in the tomb of his son Psammethis. Necho conquered Jerusalem and Babylon, and Psammethis made war against the Ethiopians. In one of the halls of this tomb is a military procession consisting of a great number of figures, all looking towards a man who is greatly superior to them in size, and who faces them. At the end of this procession . . . are three different sorts of people . . . evidently Jews, Ethiopians, and Persians. . . . Behind the Persians are some Egyptians without their ornaments, as if they were rescued captives returning to their country. Among the hieroglyphics, contained in his drawings of this tomb, Dr. Thomas Young (who is preeminently distinguished for his successful researches in archaeology) has discovered the names of Nichas (Necho) and Psammethis.” From “Belzoni's Discoveries in Egypt and Nubia,” 124.

48. Parkinson, *Cracking Codes*, 177.

49. Parkinson, *Cracking Codes*, 42–43.

l’Egypte, and the incredible discoveries by a host of fascinating excavators along the Nile—some of which led to the translation of the Book of Abraham—continue to fascinate readers two hundred years later. It was a time of amazing finds and the unfolding of unknown ancient worlds of knowledge. While remarkable excavations and discoveries were indeed made, and whereas Champollion brilliantly decoded the ancient hieroglyphs of Egypt in our era of 1820, it seems entirely possible that much of the life and culture of the pattern of human thought among Egyptian ancients remains to be discovered.