

The Discovery of the Rosetta Stone

It was 1799 and Napoleons dream of a military and scientific campaign to the Nile had filled the desert with soldiers and the river with boat traffic. The intense heat of the Egyptian sun caused sweat to run down the necks of the French officers overseeing the local workers along the sluggish water's edge. The French engineers were working on the defenses of their growing encampment. The French had already had several battles with the Egyptians and needed to consolidate their power. A French officer named Pierre Bouchard was supervising the workmen. He decided the unneeded dusty wall had been there a long time and was instructing the men to find seams between the heavy stones for moving them. As they groaned and pulled, the wall finally tumbled and the individual stone slabs fell outward. Bouchard saw one large stone, about three feet long and a foot thick, land flat side up in a cloud of dust. It had one squared edge and the rest were broken. But what immediately caught his eye as the dust settled was that the face of this large flat stone was highly planned and totally covered with script, many lines of finely written text. He called for a halt to the workers and bent down to look closely.

What he saw in the bright sun intrigued and then astonished him. He blinked his eyes to make sure. This stone, unlike so many other fragments of Old Egypt, had three distinct ancient scripts, each different. He had been in Egypt long enough to recognise the mysterious pictorial hieroglyphs of forgotten Egypt, but this top section, the most fragmentary, was followed by a section of language unrecognizable to him, Bouchard did not know that day that he had just discovered the world's most important key to decoding ancient Egyptians. This extraordinary discovery would culminate a few decades later in the most exciting decipherment the world has ever known, that of the Rosetta Stone. The discovery of 'the stone' spread like wildfire among the French and, soon after, the British, who together helped decipher the text to give the world knowledge that had been lost for millennia. No credible historian or archaeologist, and certainly no Egyptologist worth reading, would argue with its importance. Decoding it in the early 1820s, opened up ancient Egyptian language and texts, without it, the textual history of ancient Egypt would have remained locked away in forgotten history. Soon after the end of the fourth century AD, when hieroglyphs had gone out of use, the knowledge of how to read and write them disappeared. In the early years of the nineteenth century, some 1400 years later, scholars were able to use the Greek inscription on this stone as the key to decipher them. On Napoleon's defeat, the stone became the property of the British under the terms of the Treaty of Alexandria (1801) along with other antiquities that the French had found. The Rosetta Stone has been exhibited in the British Museum since 1802 and currently remains there.

Reading Test:

Fluency: ____/5 Pronunciation: ____/5 Understanding: ____/5 Meaning: ____/5

Comments: _____

Q. Write and learn the spellings of the underlined words in the text.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Q. Write the meanings of the following words in the spaces provided.

a. consolidate _____

b. intrigue _____

c. culminate _____

d. decipherment _____

e. credible _____

f. pictorial _____

Q. Answer the following questions to the text 'The Discovery of the Rosetta Stone' in full sentences.

a. What were the French preparing for?

b. Why was the wall removed? How did this change Ancient Egyptian history forever?

c. How did Bouchard identify the stone? What fascinated him most?

d. Did Bouchard have any idea about what he had discovered? Why?

e. Who helped to decipher the text?

f. Why is the Rosetta Stone considered an extremely precious relic?

g. Where is the Rosetta Stone kept? Explain why the British have authority over it.
