

**12 exhibition highlights
in plain English**



Hieroglyphs **unlocking** **ancient Egypt**

About this book

This book is written using short, easy to read sentences. It can be used by anyone.

The book takes you on a tour of the exhibition. It looks at 12 different objects.

A map of the exhibition shows you where to find the objects.

The exhibition is divided into sections. Each one has an introduction.

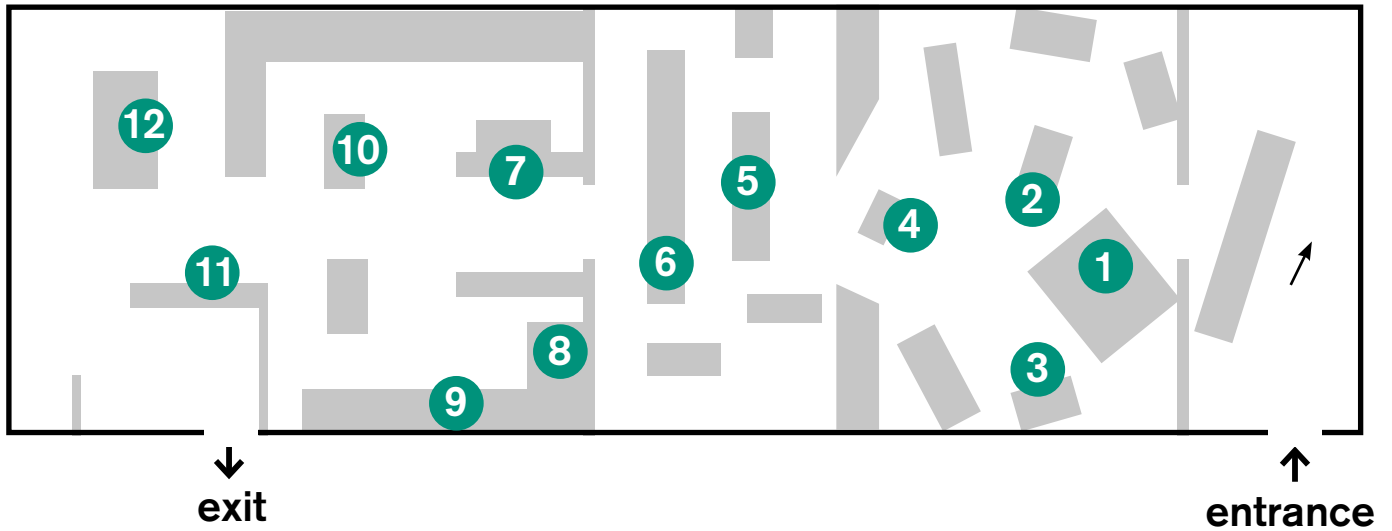
Please let us know what you think about this book. Tell a member of staff or email access@britishmuseum.org

Objects

Each object has a number. These numbers are on the exhibition map on the next page. The map shows you where each object is in the exhibition.

- 1 Sarcophagus**
- 2 Arabic book**
- 3 Magical statue**
- 4 Rosetta Stone**
- 5 Papyrus**
- 6 Part of a temple door**
- 7 List of Egyptian kings**
- 8 Statue of a policeman**
- 9 Battle scene**
- 10 Painted coffin**
- 11 Statue of a scribe**
- 12 List of dreams**

Exhibition map



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12

Introduction to A forgotten language

A long time ago, people in Egypt wrote using hieroglyphs.

Hieroglyphs are a type of writing. They look like pictures of things the ancient Egyptians saw in real life.

Over time, people forgot how to read hieroglyphs.

But 200 years ago, people learned how to read hieroglyphs again.

Now we can understand a lot more about ancient Egypt.

Introduction to Inspired guesswork

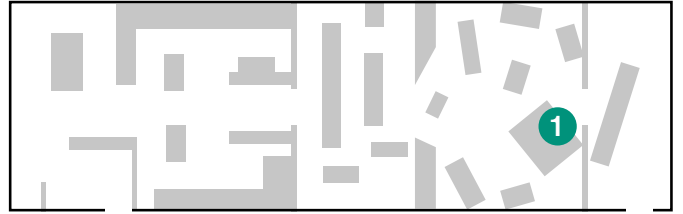
It took a very long time to understand hieroglyphs after they were forgotten.

Some people thought they were just pictures.

Some people thought they were magical.

Some people knew hieroglyphs were writing but did not know what they meant.

People from all over the world tried to find out how to read hieroglyphs. They tried for hundreds of years.



1 Sarcophagus



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

When they died, rich people in ancient Egypt were buried in a stone coffin called a sarcophagus.

Hieroglyphs were carved on the inside and outside of the sarcophagus.

When this sarcophagus was discovered, some people thought it was a magical bathtub.

They believed the hieroglyphs made you feel better if you touched the water inside.

Introduction to Arab endeavours

People from Egypt and other nearby countries were curious about hieroglyphs.

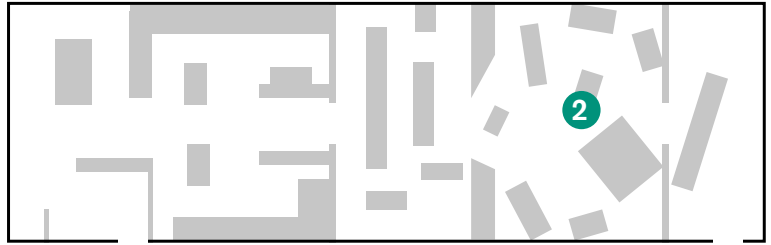
Some people travelled from Iraq and Arabia to see them.

They wrote books about hieroglyphs.

They thought hieroglyphs could teach them about science and magic.

Some people realised hieroglyphs could be read out loud.

They gave sounds to hieroglyphs based on a later Egyptian language called Coptic.



2 Arabic book



Image © British Library Board, Add MS 23420

Many people thought hieroglyphs might be the first type of writing.

People tried to understand hieroglyphs by matching them with letters from their own language.

Some of the first people to try this were Arab Muslims. They wrote in Arabic.

Muslims believed that the prophet Idris was the first person to write with a pen. Therefore, Idris might have invented hieroglyphs.

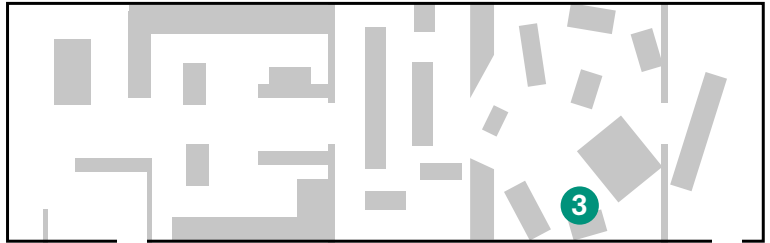
Introduction to Interest from Europe

Later, people from Europe started visiting Egypt.

They brought home things with hieroglyphs on them.

Europeans became very interested in hieroglyphs.

But they still could not read them.



3 Magical statue



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

This is a statue of the ancient Egyptian god Bes.

Bes protected children.

Bes is protecting the god Horus, shown here as a child.

A spell is written in hieroglyphs on the back of the statue.

People copied the hieroglyphs to study them.

Introduction to The French Expedition

In 1798, the French leader Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt. He brought a big army.

He also brought many artists and scientists to study Egypt.

They drew maps of the land and ancient buildings. They collected plants and ancient objects.

In 1801, the British and Ottoman-Egyptian army defeated the French.

The French had to give the ancient Egyptian objects they had collected to the British.



4 Rosetta Stone



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

In 1799, French soldiers found a large stone in the Egyptian city of Rashid.

The stone had three types of writing on it: hieroglyphs, demotic and ancient Greek.

Everyone who saw the stone became very excited.

They thought the ancient Greek writing would help them read the hieroglyphs.

Introduction to

The race to decipherment

It took over 20 years to read the Rosetta Stone.

Many people tried to understand the hieroglyphs.

But two men led the way.

They were Jean-François Champollion and
Thomas Young.

They both wanted to be the first person to read
hieroglyphs.

5 Papyrus



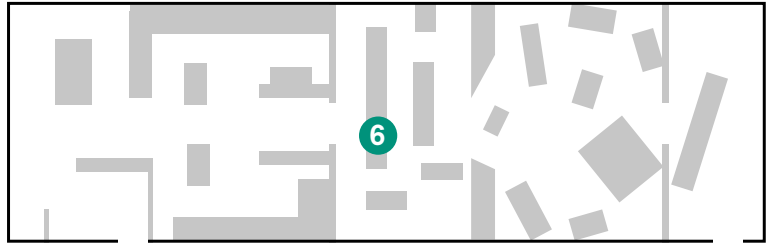
Image © The Hague, Huis van het boek

This papyrus is very long. It has a lot of writing on it. It belonged to an ancient Egyptian man called Spotous.

Spotous is on the right. He has both his hands up. He is standing in front of four gods.

The papyrus is called the 'Book of Breathing'.

Ancient Egyptians believed it protected people on their journey to the afterlife.



6 Part of a temple door



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

In 1822, Champollion won the race. He was the first to read hieroglyphs correctly.

He translated hieroglyphs by studying royal names.

In hieroglyphs, royal names are written inside ovals. These ovals are called cartouches.

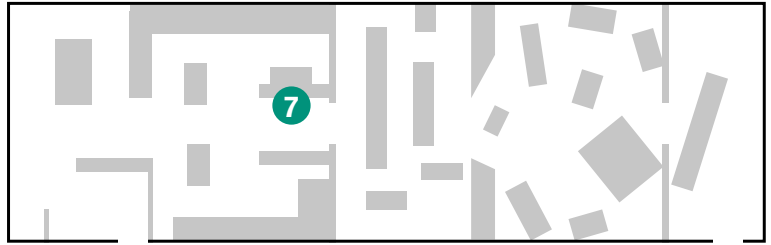
This stone carving has four cartouches.

Introduction to Rediscovering ancient Egypt

After 1822, many people learned to read hieroglyphs.

Dictionaries for hieroglyphs were made in many languages, like French, English and Arabic.

Because we can now read hieroglyphs, we can use all the writing on ancient Egyptian objects and buildings to learn about the past.



7 List of Egyptian kings



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

This is a long list with the names of many ancient kings.

The kings are listed in the order in which they ruled Egypt.

The object shows us that Egyptian history goes back a long way.

Egypt's first king ruled over 5,000 years ago!

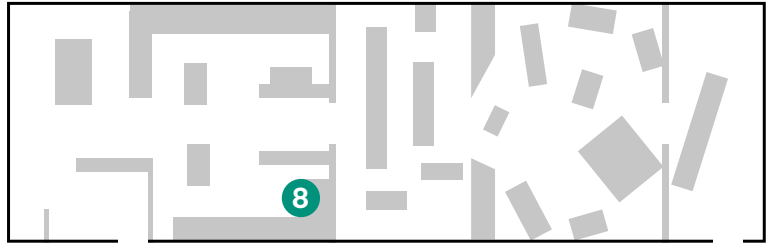
Introduction to Pharaoh and empire

Rulers in ancient Egypt were sometimes called pharaohs.

They looked after the country. They tried to make Egypt a nice place to live in.

They traded and fought with other countries nearby.

People from other countries came to live in Egypt, too.



8 Statue of a policeman



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

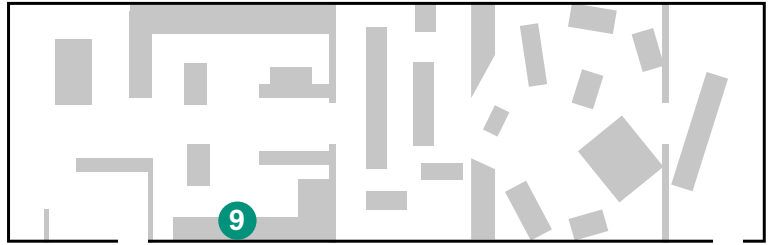
Egypt was a large country surrounded by desert.

It needed protection.

Policemen watched the desert roads.

They protected important places like temples and cemeteries.

This is a policeman called Nebhepetra.



9 Battle scene



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Egypt was a large country surrounded by enemies.

One of these enemies was Libya, a country to the west of Egypt.

The Egyptians won many battles against the Libyans.

They proudly talked about their victories.

This object shows King Sety I killing the Libyan chief and stepping on the Libyan people.

Introduction to

The concept of time

Ancient Egyptians recorded time in different ways.

They used calendars written on papyrus.

They made statues to remember people who had died.

They used the sun, the moon, the stars or water to tell the time.

10 Painted coffin



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

This coffin used to hold a mummy.

It is decorated inside with a 'star clock'.

Star clocks can measure the number of days in a week.

The ancient Egyptians had 10 days in their week!

Introduction to Spirituality and the afterlife

Ancient Egyptians believed that when you died, you went to another world.

This place was called the afterlife or the underworld.

Egyptians spent many years getting ready for the afterlife.

They wrote down spells. They built tombs.
They bought good luck charms.

When rich Egyptians died, they were mummified.
This protected the body after death.

Introduction to Scribal knowledge

Most people in ancient Egypt could not read or write.

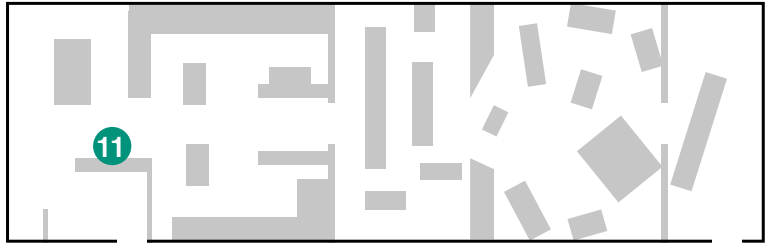
People who could write were called scribes.

Scribes were mostly men.

Some scribes wrote letters and contracts.

Others wrote stories and poetry.

Scribes were very important. They knew everybody's business.



11 Statue of a scribe



Image © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/ Georges Poncet

Scribes went to school to learn how to read and write.

They practiced writing on stone and broken pottery.

When they got better at writing, they were allowed to write on papyrus.

Scribes sat cross-legged and wrote on their laps.

Introduction to Family and society

Ancient Egyptians were a lot like us.

They had families. They built houses. They worked.

They liked to laugh and sing. They wrote letters and love poetry.

They got sick and prayed for help.

We know this because we can read what they left behind.

12 List of dreams



Image © Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Ancient Egyptians believed dreams told you about the future.

Dreams could be good or bad.

They made lists to explain what their dreams meant.

This list says that dreaming about watching monkeys is bad luck. It means change is coming.

Introduction to Writing for eternity

Ancient Egyptians wrote many things on stone.

They hoped their words would last forever.

People forgot how to read hieroglyphs for
1,500 years.

But now we can read hieroglyphs again.

Now we can learn all about the lives of these
ancient people.

