

The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

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The history of modern, scientific archaeology is little more than a century old. Before 1890, western interest in the ancient Near East was basically a hunt for treasures to stock the great national museums of Europe.¹ This interest in antiquities began to develop into a disciplined, enlightened effort thanks to the work of Sir William Flinders Petrie. This was particularly true for Syro-Palestinian archaeology. We mark his brief encounter with Tell el-Hesi, not far from Gaza, in 1890, as the stellar point. It was in the publication of that six week long excavation that he presented the principles that permeated his work: digging according to the stratigraphy and dating according to typology.²

The application and refinement of those principles have continued to define modern archaeology to this very day. During and since Petrie's time (he died in Jerusalem in 1940), a vast number of excavations throughout the Middle East have recovered a tremendous volume of objects, including those bearing writing from the dim past of the biblical world. But some of the most significant finds were accidental rather than methodically recovered in excavations. A primary example that comes to mind was the discovery of the scrolls recovered from the caves near Khirbet Qumran by Bedouin shepherds in 1947. Today we are recalling an equally significant discovery made not a half-century but two centuries ago—the discovery of the Rosetta Stone.

The Rosetta Stone is an 11 inch thick slab of black basalt about 3 ft. 9 in. tall and 2 ft. 4.5 in. wide. In its original form it was apparently rectangular, per-

¹In 1656 John Tradescant published a description of “a collection of rarities, preserved at South Lambeth, near London” under the title: *Museum Tradescantianum*. In the course of time the collection came into the possession of Elias Ashmole, and he presented it to Oxford University in 1683. This was the beginning of the Ashmolean, which has been claimed to be the world's first public museum. The Louvre, a palace constructed from 1546, became the National Art Gallery in 1793, in the midst of the French Revolution. The British Museum was granted a royal foundation charter in 1753.

²Published as *Tell el Hesi (Lachish)* in 1891.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

haps with a rounded top.³ When it was found the top corners and the bottom right corner were missing. A careful search for the missing pieces at the time of discovery proved fruitless, probably because the damage occurred prior to the transfer of the stone into secondary use where it was found.

The Discovery

The Rosetta Stone was discovered by chance in August,⁴ 1799, near the town of Rosetta (Rashid) in the western delta of Egypt. Rosetta is located some thirty miles (48 km.) northeast of Alexandria; Cairo lies slightly more than one hundred miles to the south. The town gives its name to one of the major mouths of the Nile River as it empties into the Mediterranean Sea a few miles from the site of discovery. (The channel is also known as the Bolbinitic branch of the Nile.) The Rosetta mouth lies to the west of the second main mouth, the Damietta.

The discovery was remarkable because the stone was inscribed in two languages—Greek and Egyptian—written in three scripts, hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek. It was to be the key to unlock the reading of the mysterious writing of ancient Egypt, knowledge that had slipped into oblivion over a millennium earlier. But that is enough about the discovery for the moment; we will return to it later. For now, let us hear the rest of the story, in order to appreciate the significance of the discovery.

The Demise of Ancient Egyptian Writing.

We celebrate the discovery of the Rosetta Stone and the subsequent decipherment of hieroglyphics because human ability to read the ancient script had been lost. This was a part of the demise of the glory that once was Egypt, a process that was long and drawn out. During most of the biblical period we call Iron Age II, spanning the period after Solomon's death and through the divided kingdom era, Egypt was experiencing the Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1085–664 B.C.). Dynasties 21 through 25 were ruled by non-Egyptian pharaohs—particularly Libyan (including Sheshonq I) and Sudanese.⁵ It was in this era that the demotic form of Egyptian writing developed from the hieratic. This abbreviated and cursive form of writing was used for the needs of daily life.

Dynasty 26 (664–525 B.C.), the Saite dynasty, saw a restoration of rule to Egyptians, including Pharaoh Necho II. But Assyrian domination was a part of

³Cf. Budge, *The Rosetta Stone*, 35. Rounded tops with sculptured reliefs have been found on the tops of stelae dedicated to Ptolemy II, Ptolemy III, and Ptolemy IV. Budge's translation of the Greek inscription appears at the end of this paper.

⁴Some sources date the discovery in July (e.g., Carol Andrews, *The British Museum Book of The Rosetta Stone*, 12, puts the discovery in "mid-July") while others date it to August (so, no less an authority than E. A. Wallis Budge in *The Rosetta Stone*, 20: "There is no doubt that it was found in August, 1799 . . .").

⁵Cf. Hallo and Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History*, Ch. XII.

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

the times, and Egypt was but “a broken reed,” to echo Isaiah 36:6. Necho was at least partially responsible for the death of King Josiah of Judah, shortly before the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Exile of the Judeans. With the Persian defeat of Babylon, Cambyses conquered Egypt and it became a satrapy of Persia. Persian domination did not signal the termination of Egyptian culture, but the influence of outsiders slowly eroded the dying culture. Greek influence and a Greek presence had existed in the delta region since at least the mid-sixth century B.C.⁶, but the arrival of Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. brought Egypt into the final phase of its ancient existence, and it is in the Graeco-Roman period that the arrival of Christianity ultimately snuffed out the ancient religious practices and the related knowledge of its writing system. Faint vestiges of demotic were to survive in the form of Coptic writing, but not enough to keep alive a memory of the ancient scripts.⁷

In Egypt, following the death of Alexander in Babylon in 323 B.C., the Macedonian general, Ptolemy of Lagos, became the ruler. Realizing the importance of maintaining an expedient relationship between his rule and the power of the Egyptian religious leaders, he and his successors were careful to cultivate the friendship of the all-powerful priesthood. As Cleator has noted, “To this end, rich endowments of grain and money were made to various temples, and others were restored and rebuilt; many new shrines and altars were founded; and enemies of the priests were suppressed. In these most favorable circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the accredited representatives of the high gods enthusiastically endorsed the rule of the intruders, whom they proceeded to deify in accordance with time-honored practice.”⁸ And thereby we find our connection to the Rosetta Stone. Following earlier Ptolemaic exemplars, the Egyptian priests decreed Ptolemy V a god on the occasion of his coronation on March 27, 196 B.C., and the decree was engraved on what we now know as the Rosetta Stone, likely for permanent display in a nearby temple.⁹

As far as we know, the last hieroglyphic inscription was cut into stone on a temple at Philae in A.D. 394. This was just a decade after the Byzantine emperor, Theodosius I (A.D. 379–95), issued an edict establishing Christianity as the religion of the empire and closing the temples dedicated to the old gods, and with them went the associated scribal schools. Ancient Egyptian writing was dead.

⁶Cf. Hallo and Simpson, 292; cf. *Discovering Ancient Egypt*, 171.

⁷Coptic consists of the Greek alphabet plus seven characters derived from the demotic script to represent sounds in the contemporary Egyptian language but not in the Greek, Coptic is a fossil language used for chanting and praying in Coptic services. Everyday use of the language gave way to Arabic in the 16th century. Its linguistic and literary study among scholars can be traced to the pioneering work of Athanasius Kircher in A.D. 1636.

⁸P. E. Cleator, *Lost Languages*, 31.

⁹Champollion thought the temple stood in Bolbitine, a town in the area no longer in existence but referred to in Gk. sources (cf. Budge, 20).

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

The Enigma of Egyptian Hieroglyphs Before the 19th Century

Both the Greeks and the Romans were fascinated by the ancient and esoteric culture of Egypt. Among those who traveled to and left a record of their observations was “the father of history,” Herodotus of Halicarnassus (c. 490–430 B.C.). He visited Egypt c. 450, when the Persians ruled. In the mid-first century B.C., Diodorus Siculus was in Egypt. The first of his twelve volumes of *Universal History* was devoted to Egypt, but he also depended upon the accounts of other visitors from earlier times, particularly Herodotus.

Manetho, an Egyptian priest, wrote his *Aegyptiaca* (History of Egypt) in Greek during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 B.C.), the same ruler who enabled the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek. Only fragments of Manetho’s work survived in the writings of Flavius Josephus, Sextus Africanus, Eusebius (A.D. 320), and George called Syncellus (ca. A.D. 880). Manetho’s chronology of the pharaonic dynasties was destined to assist Champollion in his decipherment of Egyptian royal names.¹⁰

Strabo, the famous Roman geographer, visited Egypt in 25 B.C. Of his seventeen books about the Roman world, the last gives an account of Egypt’s geography, along with information on tombs, pyramids, temples, and religious and historical facts, focused mainly on Alexandria and the Delta. A century later, Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79) wrote his *Historia Naturalis*. He provides an early reference to the Sphinx at Giza as well as to Egyptian obelisks erected in Rome. He, Herodotus, and Diodorus also described the peculiar Egyptian custom of mummification. Another famous classical writer was Flavius Josephus. We cannot be certain that he ever visited Egypt, although it is unlikely; nevertheless, he was an important resource used by European intellectuals inquisitive about matters Egyptian during the Renaissance. These classical authors provide a unique view of Egypt and, despite their shortcomings, they remained the most reliable source for ancient Egypt until the decipherment of hieroglyphs ushered in the modern age of Egyptology.

The Greeks and the Romans were deeply moved by the evident wisdom of ancient Egypt, seen in the grandeur of its monuments. And they were impressed by the mysterious picture-writing of Egypt, which they believed contained within its symbols secret mysteries and profound truths. Despite this interest, we know of no Greek who could read hieroglyphics.

As my colleague Michael V. Fox has noted,

The Greeks . . . were fascinated by hieroglyphics, though they didn’t bother to learn them, or even to learn what they really were. For they were quite sure that they knew what the hieroglyphics were, namely symbolical or allegorical writing. . . . Plotinus (3rd c. A.D.), the founder of Neo-Platonism, gave a tremendous boost to this notion of hieroglyphics, a boost that carried it right through the Middle Ages and Renaissance to the 19th century. The Neoplatonists had no

¹⁰*Discovering Ancient Egypt*, 13f.

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

interest in discursive reasoning. They wanted to get right to the heart of knowledge by direct experience of the truth itself. Plotinus thought that the Egyptians had acquired a way of writing with pictures which were not merely representations [of language] but were endowed with symbolic qualities by means of which they revealed to the initiated—the very essence and substance of things. The Neoplatonists saw the hieroglyphs as sermons in stones, in the most literal sense of the expression.¹¹

And there was some truth to this: “[In its final stages] . . . the language itself had become almost incredibly convoluted, abstruse and deliberately cryptographic.”¹² As Jan Assmann observes,

Until the Late Period, cryptography is a very rare variant of hieroglyphic, used predominantly for aesthetic purposes, to arouse the curiosity of passers-by. But in the Greco-Roman period, an age of foreign domination, the methods of cryptography were integrated into the monumental script of hieroglyphics; this created enormous complexity and turned the whole writing system into a kind of cryptography.¹³

The combination of Egyptian scribal cryptography and Neo-platonist inclinations was destined to be a stumbling block through many generations of those who sought to understand the wisdom of ancient Egypt.

Following Plotinus, near the close of the fourth century A.D., Horapollon wrote in the Egyptian language (probably Coptic) a two-part treatise on the hieroglyphs. This was translated into Greek by someone named Philippus. A traveler, Buondelmonte, discovered the book for Europeans on the Aegean island of Andros in 1419.¹⁴ Budge characterizes Horapollon’s “Hieroglyphika” thus:

The first book contains evidence that the writer had a good knowledge of the meanings and uses of Egyptian hieroglyphs, and that he was familiar with inscriptions of the Ptolemaic and Graeco-Roman periods. In the second book there are many absurd and fanciful statements about the meanings and significations of Egyptian hieroglyphs, and these are probably the work of the unknown PHILIPPUS, who [. . .] was ignorant of the phonetic values of the characters he described.¹⁵

Hieroglyphika was destined to have a long and profound effect on western ideas about Egyptian thought and writing, an effect that continued in some circles even after the decipherment of the ancient system of writing. Rather than relating the signs to phonetics, the book related them to ideas, for example:

To indicate a man who has never travelled they paint a man with a donkey’s head.

¹¹Unpublished lecture, “The Rise and Fall of Egyptian Hieroglyphs”; my thanks to Prof. Fox for these observations.

¹²John Anthony West, *The Traveler’s Key to Ancient Egypt*, 26.

¹³*Moses the Egyptian*, 108.

¹⁴*The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, 11.

¹⁵*The Rosetta Stone*, 181. For the Gk. text with English trans., Budge directs his readers to A. T. Cory, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollon Nilous*, London, 1840.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

For he never knows or listens to accounts of what happens abroad.
They paint a hand to show a man who is fond of building. For the hand is
what carries out work.¹⁶

Likewise, a crocodile represented evil; a hare indicates what is open, because the hare always has its eyes open. The eye signifies a god or divine justice, that is, the ever and all-seeing eye. However, a hawk could also represent a god, because the hawk is fecund or long-lived, or it symbolized the sun, because it excels all other birds in sharpness of sight, because of the rays of its eyes. A fish shows the lawless or the abominable, because its flesh is hated and an object of disgust in the temples. For every fish is a purgative, and they eat each other. On the other hand, the vulture is used to indicate motherhood, because alone of all the animals there is no male vulture, but when the female would generate, she opens her vulva to the wind and is impregnated by the north wind.¹⁷

Such was the legacy of the classical world in this respect, largely lost until its rediscovery in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. However, between the 5th and the 15th centuries, a long hiatus in interest in ancient Egypt ensued, largely due to the pervasive influence of Christianity. Early on the spread of Christian culture in the Byzantine period affected the view of Egypt's past. Egypt represented the pagan past. The ancient monuments were often disdained and sometimes defaced. When noted, they were interpreted in terms of biblical events. Then came the Arab conquest in the 7th century A.D. This aroused no interest in the remnants of ancient Egypt among the conquerors. By this time, too, the native population had very little memory of that long-departed civilization, and none of them could read the hieroglyphs. The Islamic conquerors had their own agenda and were little interested in the ancient monuments which, because of their massive concept and scale, they believed had been constructed by giants or magicians.

Few Europeans traveled to Egypt in the centuries before the Crusades. An occasional non-Muslim traveler did visit Egypt, however, and particularly noteworthy was Benjamin ben Jonah of Tudela in Navarre, who made the journey in A.D. 1165–71. He was the first to note that the annual flood of the Nile was due to the rains that fell on the mountains of Abyssinia. There was also a Muslim doctor from Baghdad—Abd'el-Latif—who taught medicine and philosophy in Cairo and who visited the pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx. His account, however, had no influence on later European investigations because it was not translated from the Arabic until the early 19th century.¹⁸

The Renaissance turned intellectual attention to classical Rome and Greece, and also to the even more ancient wisdom of Egypt, just as classical antiquity had held that wisdom in awe. As Pope has noted,

¹⁶*The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, 18–19.

¹⁷Drawn from illustrations from Fox.

¹⁸*Discovering Ancient Egypt*, 15.

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

This great confidence in the virtues of Egyptian writing existed despite the fact that scarcely anybody had ever seen any. Cyriac of Ancona had brought back from Egypt one or two drawings. There were a few inscribed fragments of obelisks lying partly visible in back quarters of Rome; that was the sum of what was available. Nevertheless, imagination could supply the deficiency, and it did. The first pseudo-hieroglyphs to be printed and published were the modern ones of Francesco Colonna, a learned, allegorical novelist¹⁹

Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) included pseudo-hieroglyphs such as those in a circular medallion, divided vertically by a staff on which two serpents are intertwined. In the upper half on either side, two elephant posteriors are expanding from small objects; on the lower half on either side, two forehalves of elephants are descending into small objects. On the left side is a censor with burning fire; on the right side is a basin of tranquil water. The whole is to be interpreted: "Concord makes little things big; discord makes great things small."²⁰ Such an exercise was possible because hieroglyphs were thought of as symbols of wisdom to be understood allegorically rather than as elements of language.

Pierius Valerians, Apostolic Prothonotary to Pope Clement VII, published in 1556 a comprehensive study entitled *The Hieroglyphs, or a Commentary on the sacred letters of the Egyptians and other peoples*. He wrote the equivalent of fifty-eight chapters on the subject. The first thirty-one dealt with animals; the remainder treated parts of the human body, man-made artifacts, and plants. In the 1561 edition, one of his self-made hieroglyphs is of a stork head attached to a bovine lower-leg and hoof. Its meaning: *Impietati praelata Pietas*, that is, "Devotion over Selfishness."²¹ Others followed this pattern of creating hieroglyphs never seen by an Egyptian eye.. The interest in hieroglyphs had one positive result. A number of obelisks that had been brought to Rome and erected in the days of the empire had fallen and lain in disuse, partially obscured by accumulated dirt and debris. As Pope reports, "Between 1582 and 1589 no less than six obelisks were either re-sited or put up again for the first time since antiquity. One important consequence was that in future engravings of obelisks, hieroglyphic inscriptions had to be very much more accurate."²² And the interest in hieroglyphs continued, but unfortunately dominated by the view that they inherently held "abstract moral and philosophical ideas of pronounced significance"²³ rather than specific language. Nicolao Caussin wrote a work on Egyptian wisdom in the early 17th century in which he defined a hieroglyph as "an image or figure arbitrarily agreed on by men to express a particular meaning,

¹⁹*The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, 23.

²⁰After Fox.

²¹*The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, 27, fig. 13.

²²*Ibid.*

²³C. Aldred, *The Egyptians*, 15.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

which was employed by the philosophers of Egypt instead of letters.”²⁴ A Jesuit priest, Athanasius Kircher, is remembered for his work on the Coptic language, but he published voluminously about hieroglyphs following the presuppositions of his predecessors²⁵

The end of the Crusades had sparked a renewed European interest in the Near East, including Egypt, thanks to the accounts of returning Crusaders. Of even greater importance was the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in A.D. 1453, bringing to the west an influx of Byzantine scholars, along with many manuscripts by classical Greek and Roman authors. The time was at hand for new ways of thinking embodied in the Renaissance.

Other influences were also at work. In 1517 the Turks gained control of Egypt. They signed treaties with France and Catalonia, permitting their traders to operate in Egypt and even providing religious protection. Increasing numbers of diplomats and merchants traveled to the Near East, followed by pilgrims to the holy sites and individuals inquisitive about ancient monuments. Greater freedom to travel was coupled with the intellectual ferment fostered by the Renaissance, and an interest in acquiring antiquities and curiosities developed among wealthy collectors. To this demand the Egyptian entrepreneurs enthusiastically responded.

One peculiar development in Europe was an interest in the presumed medical benefits of powdered mummies! In the 16th and 17th centuries, it was one of the most common ingredients found in the shops of European apothecaries. And in 1658 the philosopher Sir Thomas Browne commented, “Mummy is become Merchandise, Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for Balsams.”²⁶ But the use of mummy as a medicinal ingredient seems to have occurred as early as A.D. 1100.

The international trade in *mumia* flourished, with Alexandria as the main export center. Complete mummies and packages of mummy tissue were shipped, and soon demand exceeded supply. In 1834 the surgeon Thomas Pettigrew wrote, in his *History of Mummies*, “No sooner was it credited that mummy constituted an article of value in the practice of medicine than many speculators embarked in the trade; the tombs were sacked, and as many mummies as could be obtained were broken into pieces for the purpose of sale.”²⁷

The Egyptian authorities had to curb the export of mummies, but this only exacerbated the problem of supply, and that led to fraud. Pettigrew explains how

²⁴See *The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, note 16, 193. Caussin’s *de symbolica Aegyptiorum sapientia* was published in Cologne in 1631.

²⁵*Prodomus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus*, Rome, 1636; *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta*, Rome, 1643; *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, Rome, 1650; *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, Rome, 1652–54; *Polygraphia nova et universalis*, Rome, 1663; *Obelisci Aegyptiaci nuper inter Isaei Romani rudera effossi interpretatio hieroglyphica*, Rome, 1666 (after *The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, 208.

²⁶Rosalie, *Discovering Ancient Egypt*, 16.

²⁷Op. cit.

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

Guy de la Fontaine of Navarre investigated the mummy trade in Alexandria in 1564. When he looked into the stock of mummies held by the chief dealer there, he found that the supply was augmented by preparing the bodies of the recently dead, often executed criminals, by treating them with bitumen and drying them in the sun to produce mummified tissue which was then sold as genuine *mumia*. Later in the 18th century, when the nature of such supplies was eventually revealed to authorities, traders were imprisoned, a tax was levied, and it became illegal to export mummies from Egypt.²⁸

As David notes, “The actual benefits of the ingredient were disputed. On the one hand, it was used to treat amongst other ailments, abscesses, fractures, concussion, paralysis, epilepsy, coughs, nausea and ulcers. It also received royal approval when King Francis I of France reputedly always carried with him some *mumia* mixed with pulverized rhubarb to treat his ailments. However, according to the physician Ambrose Paré, writing in 1634, it had no beneficial effects: ‘This wicked kinde of drugge, doth nothing help the diseased . . . it also inferres many troublesome symptomes, as the paine of the heart or stomake, vomiting, and stinke of the mouth.’ The strict measures introduced to curb the mummy trade did in fact reduce the worst excesses, but the ingredient continued to be in demand, and was still in use in medicines in 19th century Europe.²⁹

The flow of travelers to the Near East and to Egypt engendered another form of trade which we mentioned above. Some travelers began to realize that Egyptian antiquities could be sold to wealthy patrons in Europe at great profit. Among those hungering for acquisitions were nobility and royalty, none more enthusiastically than the Kings of France. Embassies and consulates began to engage in duties other than diplomatic, using local agents to seek out attractive antiquities. Gradually, foreign collectors also sought permission from the Turkish rulers in Egypt to carry out their own excavations, in order to acquire and remove inscriptions, statuary and tomb goods. This in turn led to international jealousy and rivalry between the different factions who were all anxious to supply the most desirable antiquities for their wealthy clients. In time some of the great private collections would become the foundation for national collections to be housed in the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London, etc.

By 1798, when Napoleon Bonaparte went to Egypt in search of an empire, the foundations for the study of Egyptology had already been laid: the extensive journeys throughout the country had enabled travelers to discover all the principal monuments above ground, and in many cases these were already accurately identified with ancient sites. Some excavation had also been carried out, revealing burials at Sakkara and Thebes. The rush to obtain antiquities for great collections abroad had already led to the destruction of monuments and archaeological material, but there were now extensive groups of objects outside Egypt

²⁸Op. cit.

²⁹Op., cit., 16-17.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

which could be studied by scholars. Interesting and increasingly accurate contemporary accounts of journeys also were being written, and these augmented the Classical sources and replaced the older, derivative travel books.

I have attempted to trace briefly the history of interest in and knowledge of ancient Egypt and its hieroglyphs prior to the discovery of the Rosetta Stone and subsequent developments. I want to add the observations of John A. Wilson:

Contrast changes in Europe and the US, where the Industrial Revolution and the American and French revolutions meant irrepressible change, and Egypt, still steeped in the atmosphere of the Middle Ages. A nominal dependency of the Turkish Sultan, but ruled with arrogant brutality by foreign mercenaries, the Mamelukes, Egypt was caught in the torpor of the times and was of little interest to either Europeans or Americans. Any knowledge about Egypt was based on the Bible and the classical authors, supplemented by a few fantastic books of travel. Ideas about Egypt had a large factor of the preposterous. The fertile mud of the Nile after the annual inundation was thought to produce life spontaneously. Said Lepidus in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, "Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun. So is your crocodile." Dried and pulverized mummy was believed to be an effective drug in medicine. . . . And European painters in oils used a pigment called "mummy," made of bitumen and animal remains from Egyptian tombs, because it was reputed not to crack on the canvas.

Equally fantastic were the ideas of the Europeans about the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Generally speaking, ancient Egypt was both remote and incomprehensible; by definition, hieroglyphic was priestly carving, and priests are always suspected of cabalistic mysteries. Therefore, the hieroglyphs must be supercharged with secret symbolism; they could not be read as a Westerner might read Arabic or Chinese. About 1762 a distinguished British physician, William Stukeley, the Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, wrote:

The hieroglyphics of the Egyptians is a sacred character; that of the Chinese is civil or a common way of writing. . . . The characters cut on Egyptian monuments, are purely symbolical. They are nothing than hymns & invocations to the deity. . . . To give a few instances. A feather so often appearing, signify's sublime. An eye is providence. . . . A boat, the orderly conduct of providence in the government of the world. A pomegranate imports fecundity, from the multitude of its seeds. . . . I believe the true knowledg of the hieroglyphics was immersed in extremest antiquity. So that if any skill of interpreting them, remain'd with the priests, to the time of *Cambyses*; after that time, the just understanding of them was lost. . . . The perfect knowledg of 'em is irrecoverable, with the most antient preists [*sic*]

With such an attitude of mind among literate people, it is not surprising that there was no initiative to find the key to hieroglyphic and that the scholarly world was slow to accept Champollion's decipherment in 1822.³⁰

Wilson paints the picture a little too black, however. There were a few rational thinkers who were questioning the received view of the meaning of hiero-

³⁰*Signs and Wonders Upon Pharaoh*, 10–11.

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

glyphs even before the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. As Cyril Aldred has noted, “The history of Egyptology in Europe . . . [was] an attempt to interpret hieroglyphic writing according to the esoteric Neoplatonist ideas, and the gradual emergence of a school of skeptics during the Age of Reason with a more rational attitude to the subject. In this long progression from mysticism to intellectual comprehension many scholars made small but significant contributions, notably Warburton and Young in Britain; Zoëga and Niebuhr in Denmark; Montfaucon, Barthelemy, and Silvestre de Sacy in France; and Akerblad in Sweden. By the end of the 18th century, Egyptian studies were ready to take a new direction.”³¹ We will comment further on the contributions of some of these scholars below.

The French Expedition to Egypt

To return to the discovery, the historical context is of interest. The French were in Egypt in 1799 because of Napoleon Bonaparte. Though a Corsican by birth, he had risen to prominence in the French army as commander in chief of the army of Italy in 1796–97. The historian James Harvey Robinson described Napoleon in these telling phrases: “little” (5' 2"), “thin,” with a “quick, searching eye . . . abrupt, animated gestures . . . and rapid speech” . . . “a dreamer” but one whose “practical skill and mastery of detail amounted to genius.” Further, “He was utterly unscrupulous” . . . and “without any sense of moral responsibility,” personal characteristics to which were added “unrivaled military genius” wedded to “the power of intense and almost continuous work.”³² In 1797 he was appointed by the five-member Directory of the Legislative Body (in whom the executive powers of France were then situated) to command forces for a projected invasion of England, the major enemy of France at the time. However, Napoleon then convinced the Directory that the best way to ultimately devastate the English was to capture Egypt and destroy England’s commercial traffic through the Mediterranean and undermine her dominance in the East.³³

The French fleet and army arrived in Alexandria on July 1, 1798, and along with them were one hundred sixty-seven scholars who were to explore, describe, and even excavate the antiquities of ancient Egypt. Napoleon himself carried with him but one book on Egypt—Constantin François Volney’s *Letters Written from Egypt*, published in 1787.³⁴

The French armed forces easily defeated the Turkish army and occupied Alexandria. This success was soon followed by a victory in the Battle of the Pyramids near Cairo. However, in August 1798, British Admiral Nelson discovered the French fleet in Alexandria’s harbor and destroyed it, leaving Napo-

³¹*The Egyptians*, 16–17.

³²*An Introduction to the History of Western Europe*, New Edition (New York: Ginn and Co., 1934), 273–74.

³³Robinson, op. cit..

³⁴J. Vercoutter, *The Search for Ancient Egypt*, 39.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

leon's troops stranded in Egypt. The Ottoman Turks declared war on France, and Napoleon determined to attack Turkey by moving north from Egypt through Palestine and Syria; but at Acre the Turkish forces and the English fleet repulsed his troops, and he was forced to withdraw. He again reached Cairo in June, 1799. By the time the Rosetta Stone was discovered in August, Napoleon had heard that Great Britain, Russia, Austria, Turkey and Naples had joined forces and were about to invade France. So he secretly left his troops in Egypt and returned overland to Paris. Such was the political context of Europe and the Middle East when the Rosetta Stone was discovered.³⁵

Earlier we mentioned the discovery of the Rosetta Stone; some additional details are of interest. The stone was found by French soldiers at Fort St. Julian as they were tearing down a ruined wall in preparation for extending the foundations to enlarge the fort. The officer in charge of the demolition was Lt. Pierre François Xavier Bouchard. (In my opinion we ought to at the least note him in passing, just as we ought never forget that an inquisitive Arab shepherd boy named Muhammad edh-Dhib discovered the scrolls from Cave One near Qumran.) The soldiers recognized almost immediately the importance of the three texts, and General Menou arranged to have a part of the Greek text translated almost at once in order to determine the nature of the contents. Bouchard and his officer companions noted that parts of the stele were broken off and missing, so they examined the rest of the wall carefully in hopes that they would recover the missing fragments—to no avail. So they packaged the stone and shipped it to Cairo. The French scholars were lodged there in a palace assigned to them by Napoleon. Along with the inscribed stone came an explanatory note of the discovery. The scholars named it the "Rosetta Stone," in honor of the place in which it was found. News of the discovery reached France in September.

Today, if one desires to personally gaze upon the Rosetta Stone, one travels to London—to the British Museum—rather than to Paris and the Louvre, and therein lies another part of our story. The French army continued to hold Egypt after Napoleon's departure for France, that is until coordinated Turkish and British troops forced the French to surrender at Alexandria in September 1801. As a part of the capitulation, the French scholars were required to turn over to the British all their treasures. The French protested vigorously, and the general of the French forces even claimed the Rosetta Stone was his personal property. The British were informed that the material was written in a dead language, that neither British soldiers nor scientists could understand the inscription without the assistance of the French scholars. Ultimately the British relented and left the

³⁵By means of a coup d'état, Napoleon became the head of the French government; on Dec. 2, 1804, he was crowned in the Cathedral of Notre Dame as Napoleon I, Emperor of France. His rule finally ended with his banishment to St. Helena in 1815.

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

bulk of the material with the French; however, they insisted on taking the Rosetta Stone.³⁶

The stone itself arrived in England in 1802. King George III ordered that it be placed in the British Museum and copies of the writing on the stone made available to interested English scholars. The astute French, however, had previously made several paper copies of the inscription by coating it with printer's ink and impressing papers on it. So these ink impressions became the basis of the study of the inscription in France and Europe.

The Decipherment of Hieroglyphics

It is an historical given that Jean François Champollion is credited with deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs, but he did not accomplish this in isolation. We have already noted above that Athanasius Kircher had made initial contributions to the study of Coptic early in the 17th century, no matter his failure with hieroglyphs. The recovery of the Coptic language and the study of Coptic manuscripts led to the realization that several signs in the alphabetic system derived ultimately from the hieratic script. But more important was the realization that Coptic was Egyptian. "Without [the recognition that ancient Egyptian was linguistic] Champollion's decipherment would certainly not have taken place as it did. Indeed it is possible, perhaps probable, that ancient Egyptian would have remained permanently obscure."³⁷ In 1668, John Wilkins published *An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*, attempting to construct a universal writing system. While generally unsuccessful, it became clear from his work that it was extremely difficult if not impossible to write foreign proper names in an ideographic script, knowledge that would in time benefit Champollion's work. The Danish scholar Georg Zoëga perceived and argued that "the order of hieroglyphs in a hieroglyphic text must be linguistically determined, a conclusion which was to have a conscious effect on Champollion."³⁸ Carsten Niebuhr, also a Danish scholar, established new standards of accuracy for copying hieroglyphs and also developed a table of hieroglyphs based on accurate criteria which helped to quantify the total number of signs. His 1744 *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern* was translated into English in 1792.³⁹ William Warburton (1698–1779) insisted that Egyptian hieroglyphic writing developed in the normal course of human progress as "the second mode of invention for recording men's actions and conceptions; not, as has been hitherto thought, a devise of choice for secrecy, but an expedient of

³⁶James Cross Giblin, *The Riddle of the Rosetta Stone* (New York: Crowell, 1990), 29.

³⁷*The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, 39.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 42. Zoëga wrote his *De origine et usu obeliscorum* under the patronage of Pope Pius

VI. The most complete and reasonable survey of Egyptology to his time, it appeared in print in 1797.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 54, 209.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

necessity, for popular use.⁴⁰ Champollion considered him to be the first sensible man to have tackled the subject.⁴¹

Interestingly, Warburton wrote his study to refute the views of free-thinkers and Freemasons, but they turned his convoluted thinking to their advantage.

The idea that pagan religions developed and degenerated around a nucleus of original wisdom which they enshrined and sheltered in a complex and enigmatic architecture of hieroglyphics and ceremonies and which in the course of time became more and more antithetic to their public political institutions had special appeal in the Age of Enlightenment, when the most advanced ideas were communicated within the esoteric circles of secret communities.⁴²

The Abbé Barthélemy built on a theory of Warburton that some of the hieroglyphic signs were borrowed by an alphabetic system. Of course it was not an alphabetic system, but Barthélemy suggested (1762) that cartouches on obelisks might contain the names of kings or gods.⁴³ This was to be a crucial component in the ultimate decipherment of hieroglyphics. Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) was Professor of Arabic at the School of Living Oriental Languages in Paris, and Champollion studied under him. In 1802 he outlined a line of attack for deciphering the Egyptian of the Rosetta Stone, focusing on the demotic rather than the hieroglyphic. He made a number of important observations but was ultimately unsuccessful in his attempts.⁴⁴

Johan David Akerblad was a Swedish diplomat and orientalist. Sacy had sent him a pre-publication copy of the inscription, and he began working on the demotic text. He identified the name Ptolemeios as well as several others and proved that the names were written with signs representing sounds. He identified about 29 letters, about half of which were correct. But he was stymied by two unfounded assumptions. He incorrectly believed that all of the demotic signs represented sounds, and he thought the hieroglyphic text was totally symbolic writing, which it was not.⁴⁵ He published his results in a letter to Sacy in 1802.

Dr. Thomas Young of Great Britain obtained a copy of the inscription in 1814. He was an extraordinary individual, having learned to read before he was two, and by age twenty he had mastered a dozen foreign languages, including Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. An inheritance from an uncle left him free to pursue his scientific interests. Among other pursuits, he had studied the habits of spiders, the surface features of the moon, and respiratory diseases. He is best remembered for developing the wave-theory of light. In 1814–15 the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone became his obsession. He was aware of the work of

⁴⁰Ibid., 49, 210.

⁴¹Ibid., 46.

⁴²*Moses the Egyptian*, 102.

⁴³*The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, 53.

⁴⁴Op. cit., 63, 209.

⁴⁵Op. cit., 64.

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

de Sacy and Akerblad and determined to succeed where they had failed. He first worked with the demotic section, comparing it with the Greek. He noted that the word “king,” or “pharaoh,” occurred thirty-seven times in the Greek, and he worked at matching a group of demotic signs that occurred about thirty times. Also, the name “Ptolemy” appeared eleven times in the Greek version, and he associated the name with a group of demotic characters that appeared fourteen times, and each time they appeared they were set off by lines that looked like parentheses. He guessed, correctly, that these lines were a simple form of the oval cartouches within which the royal names were written in hieroglyphs. But then he stumbled over an assumption, that in the hieroglyphs phonograms were used only for writing foreign names, not for genuine Egyptian words. The latter, he thought, were a form of symbol-writing. In a letter to Sacy he raised doubts against the accepted convention that hieroglyphic forms always were ideographic while demotic forms were always alphabetic. But having worked on the problem for a brief period, Young outlined his results in the 1819 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which provided important observations that Champollion would use.

He not only confirmed that the cartouches contained royal names, and proved that these began at the oval’s rounded end, but he also showed the equivalence of the several forms of Egyptian script, established that the writing was to be read in the direction in which the characters faced, and demonstrated the all-important fact of its quasi-alphabetical nature. He was aware, too, that numerals were expressed by strokes, that plurals were formed either by repeating the appropriate hieroglyph three times, or by writing three strokes after it, and that different characters could on occasion have the same sound (principle of homophony), while others (such as the two symbols used in late texts as an indication of femininity) could be employed as determinatives.⁴⁶ Young then turned away from deciphering ancient Egyptian to other pursuits, even though he later attempted to lay claim to Champollion’s achievement.⁴⁷

Jean François Champollion (1790–1832) was an exceptional youth with an aptitude for languages and a consuming interest in all things Egyptian. By the age of nine he knew Latin and Greek well enough to read Homer and Vergil. By thirteen he had learned Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, and Aramaic. In 1807 he was in Paris, where he spent two years studying Persian and particularly Coptic. And he dedicated himself to what he envisioned as his great work—deciphering hieroglyphs.⁴⁸

Prof. Michael V. Fox has succinctly summarized that accomplishment:

His path to the decipherment was painful and wracked with self-doubts. . . . [There were] . . . three main steps. First . . . he learned to convert demotic to hieratic and hieratic to hieroglyphs, showing that they were equivalent systems. Secondly, working with the name Ptolemy, he identified a number of other

⁴⁶*Lost Languages*, 45.

⁴⁷*The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, 66–68.

⁴⁸*The Search for Ancient Egypt*, 90–94.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

Greek names written alphabetically. He suspected, but was not himself convinced, that other words were also written with phonograms. Third, on September 14, 1822, he received an inscription with the name Ra-messes in a cartouche, which he knew indicated a royal name. He knew that the sun was Ra, and he knew [hieroglyph] to be 's' from "Ptolemeios." So he had Re-?-ss. He thought of Ramesses. On the Rosetta Stone, the [hieroglyph] sign was translated "born." This reminded him of Coptic *misi*, to give birth. That opened the gates, and further progress came in a flood. On September 27, 1822, he presented his discoveries to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in a paper entitled *Lettre à M. Dacier relative à l'alphabet des hiéroglyphes phonétiques*.

Two years later he published his summary of the hieroglyphic system, and by his death in 1832 he could read Egyptian inscriptions amazingly well. He had rediscovered a lost world and opened it to modern science."⁴⁹

Champollion was destined to die but a decade after his great accomplishment. During that time he was able to make an extended expedition to Egypt that resulted in gathering invaluable data published in his *Monuments of Egypt and Nubia* that appeared posthumously in 1845.

The rest, as they say, is history. Others followed and refined the work of Champollion so that today Egyptology is a vigorous academic discipline that continues to throw light not only on the world of the ancient Egyptians but also on its connections with ancient Israel. All this, thanks to the accidental discovery of the Rosetta Stone.

The Rosetta Stone English Translation of the Greek Text⁵⁰

[The Dating of the Decree]

- 1 In the reign of the Young [God], who hath received the sovereignty from his father, the Lord of Crowns, who is exceedingly glorious, who hath stablished Egypt firmly, who holdeth
- 2 in reverence the gods, who hath gained the mastery over his enemies, who hath made the life of man to follow its normal course, lord of the Thirty-year Festivals, like Hephaistos the Great, a King, like Helios,
- 3 great king of the Upper Country and of the Lower Country, offspring of the gods Philopatores, whom Hephaistos hath chosen, to whom Helios hath given the victory, the Living Image of Zeus, the son of Helios (Ra), Ptolemy,
- 4 the everliving, the beloved of Ptah In the IXth year, when Aetos, the son of Aetos, was priest of Alexander, and of the gods Soteris, and of the gods Adelphoi, and of the gods Euergetes, and of the gods Philopatores, and
- 5 the God Epiphanes Eucharistos; Pyrrha, daughter of Philinos, being the Athlophoros of Berenike Euergetes, and Areia, daughter of Diogenes, the Kanephoros of Arsinoe Philadelphos, and Eirene,
- 6 the daughter of Ptolemy, being priestess of Arsinoe Philopator; the IVth day of the month Xandikos, which corresponds to the XVIIIth day of the Egyptian month of Mekheir, the second month of the season Pert.

⁴⁹Fox, unpublished paper, 8.

⁵⁰The translation is by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Rosetta Stone*, 51–66, who also provides translations of the hieratic and hieroglyphic versions.

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

[Introduction to the Decree]

7 The High-priests, and the Prophets, and those who go into the shrine to dress
the gods, and the Bearers of Feathers, and the sacred Scribes, and all the other priests who have
gathered themselves together from the temples throughout the country before the king in
Memphis, for the commemorative festival of the reception of the
8 kingdom, by Ptolemy, the everliving, the beloved of Ptah, the god Epiphanes Eucharistos,
which he received from his father, being assembled in the temple of [Ptah] in Memphis, on this
day, declared [thus]:—

[Ptolemy V as Benefactor of the Temples of Egypt]

9 (1) “Inasmuch as King Ptolemy, the everliving, the beloved of Ptah, the God Epiphanes Eucha-
ristos, the offspring of King Ptolemy (IV) and Queen Arsinoe, the Gods Philpatores, hath given
many benefactions, both to the temples, and
10 to those that dwell therein, and to all those who are subject to his dominion, being a God born
of a god and goddess—even like Horus, the son of Isis and Osiris, who avenged his father
Osiris—;

11 (2) and towards the gods being full of benevolent piety, hath dedicated to the temples revenues
in money and in grain;

(3) and hath incurred great expenses in order that he might bring Egypt into a state of prosper-
ity, and might establish the temples;

12 (4) and hath given away freely of all the moneys which were his own; (5) and of the taxes and
dues which come to him from Egypt, some he hath finally remitted, and others he hath re-
duced, so that the people (i.e., the native Egyptians) and all the others (i.e., foreigners domic-
iled in the country)

13 might be prosperous during his reign; (6) and hath remitted to the natives of Egypt and to all
the other people (domiciled) in his kingdom, the debts which were due to the royal treasury and
which were indeed very many in number; (7) and hath set free from the charges against them
those who were in the prisons,

14 and who had been there for a long time because of the [non-settlement of their cases].

[Ptolemy V Confirms the Revenues of the Temples, and Restores Their Former Revenues]

(8) and hath ordered that the revenues of the temples, and the grants which are made to them
annually, both in respect of grain

15 and money, and also the proper portion [which is assigned to the gods] from the vineyards, and
from the gardens, and the other possessions of the gods, should, as they were in the reign of his
father,

16 remain the same; and in respect of the priests also, he hath also commanded that they should
pay no more as their fee for consecration, than what they had been [formerly] assessed in the
time of his father and up to the first year [of his reign].

[Abolition of the Priest’s Annual Journey to Alexandria and Reduction of the Tariff]

(10) And further he hath released

17 members of the priestly class [from the obligation] to sail down [the Nile] annually to Alexan-
dria. (11) And he hath likewise commanded that men shall no longer be seized by force [for
service] in the Navy; (12) and of the tax upon cloth of byssus which is paid to the royal treas-
ury by the temples

18 he hath remitted two-thirds.

[The Restoration of Peace in the Country and the Granting of an Amnesty]

(13) and whatsoever things had been neglected in times past he hath restored, and set in the
order in which they should be; (14) and he hath taken care that the ceremonial obligations to
the Gods should be

19 rightly performed; (15) and moreover, he hath administered justice unto every man, even like
Hermes, the Great Great (Thoth); (16) and he hath further ordered that those of the soldiers
who returned, and of the others

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

20 who had held rebellious opinions in the troubled times, should, having come back, be allowed to keep possession of their own property.

[Ptolemy V Protects Egypt from Enemies Without]

(17) And he hath made provision that forces of cavalry and infantry, and ships also, should be dispatched against those who were about to invade

21 Egypt, both by sea and by land, [thus] incurring great expenditure in money and grain, so that the temples and all who were in the country might be in a state of security.

[Ptolemy V Punishes the Rebels of Lycopolis]

(18) And having gone

22 to Lycopolis, which is in the Busirite nome, which had been occupied and fortified against a siege with an arsenal well stocked with weapons of war and supplies of every kind—now of long standing

23 was the disaffection of the impious men who were gathered together in it, and who had done much injury to the temples, and to all those who dwelt in Egypt—and having encamped

24 against them, he surrounded it with mounds, and trenches, and marvelous engines; and when the Nile made a great rise (i.e., inundation) in the VIIIth year, and being about, as usual, to flood out

25 the plains, he (i.e., the King) held [the river] in check, having dammed up in many places the mouths of the canals, and in carrying out this work spent no small sum of money; and having stationed cavalry and infantry to guard [the dams]

26 he took by storm the city in a very short time, and destroyed all the impious men who were therein, even as Hermes (Thoth) and Horus, the son of Isis and Osiris, in those very same places, reduced to subjection

27 those who had rebelled.

[Punishment of the Leaders of the Revolt Against Ptolemy IV Philopator]

And the men who had led astray the rebels in the time of his father, and had stirred up revolt in the country, and had committed sacrilege in the temples, having come into Memphis for the purpose of avenging

28 his father and his own sovereignty, he punished according to their deserts at the time when he came there to perform the duly appointed ceremonies for his reception of the crown.

[Remission of Arrears of Taxes and Contributions from the Temples]

(19) And moreover he hath remitted to

29 the temples that which was due to the royal treasury up to the VIIIth year of his reign, which was no small amount of corn [small grain] and money; (20) and moreover, he hath remitted the dues upon byssus cloth which had not been paid into the royal treasury,

30 and also the charges made for the examination (?) of those which had been sent in during the same period; (21) and he hath also freed the temples from [the tax of] one *artaba* for each *arura* of land [held by the temples], and also [the tax of] one jar of wine

31 for each *arura* of vineyards.

[Ptolemy V Provides for the Sacred Animals, and the Worship of the Gods;

His Reward for the Same)

(22) And to [the Bull] Apis, and to [the Bull] Mnevis he hath given many gifts, and to the other sacred animals of Egypt, far more indeed than the kings who were before him, and he was careful in respect of what belonged to them in

32 every matter whatsoever, and for their burials he gave all that was needed with splendid generosity, and that which was necessary for private shrines, and for sacrifices, and for commemorative feasts, and for the ordinances as by law (or, custom) prescribed;

33 (23) and the honourable estate of the temples and of Egypt he hath maintained in a fitting manner, according to traditional custom; (24) and he hath decorated the Temple of Apis; with fine work, expending upon it gold, and silver, and

Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

- 34 precious stones in no small quantities; (25) and he hath founded (refounded?) Temples, and
shrines, and altars, and hath restored those which needed repairs, having the zeal of a benefi-
cent god in matters which relate to
35 divine service, and having discovered which of the temples were most held in honour, he hath
restored the same during his reign, as was meet.
In return for all these things the gods have given him health, and victory, and power, and all
other good things, and his
36 sovereignty shall remain with him, and with his children for all time.
[The Priests Decree Additional Honours for Ptolemy V and his Ancestors]
With the Fortune (or Luck) Which Favoureth. It hath seemed good to the priests of all the tem-
ples in the land, that the honours which have been bestowed upon
37 King Ptolemy, the everliving, the beloved of Ptah, the God Epiphanes Eucharistos, and like-
wise those of his parents, the Gods Phiopatores, and those of his ancestors, the Gods Euergetes,
and
38 the Gods Adelphoi, and the Gods Soteris, should be greatly added to [viz.]:—
[Statues of Ptolemy V and the Local Chief Gods Are to be Set Up in All the Temples]
(1) To set up to the God Ptolemy, the everliving, the God Epiphanes Eucharistos, an image in
the most prominent part of every temple,
39 which shall be called (inscribed?) ‘Ptolemy, the Avenger of Egypt.’ And close by this image
shall stand [an image of] the chief god of the temple presenting to him the weapon of victory,
which shall be constructed after the Egyptian
40 fashion. And the priests shall do homage to the[se] image[s] three times each day. And they
shall array them in sacred apparel, and they shall perform [for them] ceremonies similar to
those which they are wont to perform for the other gods during the festivals which are cele-
brated throughout the country.
[A Wooden Statue of Ptolemy V in a Golden Shrine is to be Set Up in the Temples]
41 (2) And they shall set up for King Ptolemy, the God Epiphanes Eucharistos, the offspring of
King Ptolemy (IV) and Queen Arsinoe, the Gods Philopatores, a statue and a golden shrine in
each of the temples,
42 and they shall place it in the inner chambers [of the sanctuary] with the other shrines. And
during the great commemorative festivals, wherein the shrines go forth [in processions], the
shrine of the God Epiphanes Eucharistos shall
43 go forth with them. And in order that the shrine may be readily distinguished now and in after
time, it shall be surmounted by the ten golden crowns of the King, and an asp (i.e., cobra) shall
be affixed thereto, even as there is on all the other
44 crowns with asps which are on other shrines, but in the centre of them shall be [placed] the
crown which is called Pschent, which he (i.e., the King) put on when he went into the Temple
[of Ptah] in Memphis to perform therein
45 the prescribed ceremonies connected with [his] assumption of sovereignty. And there shall be
placed on the [faces of the] square [cornice?] which is round about the crowns, side by side
with the above-mentioned crown
46 [Pschent] ten golden phylacteries (i.e., scrolls or tablets?) Which shall bear the inscription
‘This is [the shrine] of the King who maketh manifest the Upper Country and the Lower
Country.’
[Special Festivals are to be Established in Honour of Ptolemy V]
And inasmuch as the XXXth day of the month of Mesore, whereon the birthday of the King is
celebrated, and likewise the XVIIth day of the
47 month of Paophi, whereon he received the sovereignty from his father, have been recognized
as name-days in the temples, for they were the sources of many benefits for all people, on these
days a festival and a panegyry shall be celebrated in the temples of
48 Egypt each month, and sacrifices and libations, and all the other rites and ceremonies which are
prescribed shall be duly performed

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society

- 49 as on other festivals. [Here a few words are wanting.] (3) And a festival and a panegyry shall be celebrated yearly for King Ptolemy, the everliving, the beloved of Ptah, the God Epiphanes Eucachristos, in all the temples throughout the
- 50 country, from the first day of the month of Thoth, for five days. And they shall wear crowns (i.e., garlands), and shall offer up sacrifices and make libations, and do everything which it is customary to do.
- [The Priests of Ptolemy V Shall Assume A New Title]
- 51 (4) And the priests of the other gods shall adopt the name of ‘Priests of the God Epiphanes Eucharistos,’ in addition to the names of the other gods to whom they minister. (5) And in all the decrees and [ordinances] promulgated by them shall be mentioned
- 52 his order of priests.
- [Private Individuals May Participate in Paying These Houours to Ptolemy V]
- (6) And members of the laity shall be permitted to celebrate the festival, and to set up and maintain in their houses shrines similar to the aforesaid shrine, and to perform the ceremonies which are prescribed for the festivals, both monthly
- 53 and annually, in order that it may be well known that in Egypt men magnify and honour the God Epiphanes Eucharistos, the King, as they are bound to do by law.
- [The Promulgation of the Decree]
- (7) And this decree shall be inscribed upon stelae
- 54 of hard stone, in holy, and in native, and in Greek letters, and [a stela] shall be set up in each of the temples of the first, second, and third [class] near the image of the everliving King.”

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Schoville: The Rosetta Stone in Historical Perspective

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