

Hieroglyphs and Scribes

Scribes

An important group of people in Egypt were the [scribes](#). However, it was not easy to become a scribe. Education was not free in ancient Egypt and a scribe's training took up to twelve years to complete. People envied the scribes because they did not have to labor in the fields or fight the pharaoh's enemies. They were held in high regard by society.

Scribes worked in temple writing rooms, markets, army barracks, the homes of nobles, government offices or anywhere their skills were needed. These highly trained men could read and write the Egyptian script called hieroglyphics, or holy writing. To us writing looks like tiny pictures or symbols. Each picture represented a different idea or letter or sound, as it was a very complicated system.

Scribes wrote on papyrus, a type of paper made from the papyrus plant growing by the Nile. Fine brushes made of plant fiber were used as we would use a pen. The black ink was made from soot and water. For headings and borders, a red ink was made from a stone called ochre, which was found in the desert. Everyday messages were written on clay tablets; very important information was carved into stone so that it lasted forever. Scribes kept records of supplies and taxes, wrote letters and messages, designed the inscriptions carved into tombs and worked as teachers and librarians. They sat cross-legged and stretched their linen skirts tightly across their knees to form a writing surface to lean on.

Statue of a Scribe Amenemhet

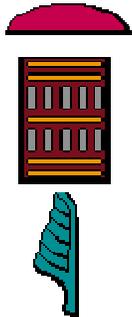
This work of art is a statue of the scribe Amenemhet who was the son of a chief of the land of Tehkhet in Nubia. He was among the earliest of the Nubians who moved to Egypt. The hieroglyphs on his statue tell his name and his profession. On his kilt the hieroglyphs tell us he wishes to be remembered as the "sturdy manager of the king, vigilant manager of the god's wife, and king's acquaintance."



The statue was found in Buhen, which was between the First and Second [Cataracts](#) of the Nile. Statues like this were usually put in a temple near an image of a god, so the owner could share in some of the attention given to the god worshipped there and also to insure his name and reputation would be remembered. Amenemhet was active at a time when scribes were being elevated from managers to intelligensia capable of preparing texts of many dimensions. Ancient Egyptian scribes wrote manuals on medicine, geometry, astronomy, theology, illustrated maps, games, satires, and comics. In addition, scribes could be called upon to be mediators, interpreters, accountants, and organizers of all aspects of life. All of this began with a scribe's ability to write.

Egyptian Hieroglyphs

The Egyptian hieroglyphic writing system consists of several hundred picture signs. The signs can be divided into two classes, [phonograms](#) and [ideograms](#).



Phonograms, or signs used to write the sounds of the Egyptian language. The particular sound value of a sign was usually obtained from the Egyptian name for the object represented. Since the Egyptians did not normally write the vowels, only the consonantal "skeleton" of the word is given. Although each consonant can be written with a single sign (the alphabet signs), most sound-signs express a series of two or more consonants. Some of the Egyptian consonants have no equivalents in most modern scripts, and Egyptologists use conventionalized signs to represent these when transcribing Egyptian.

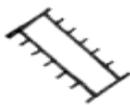
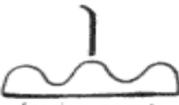
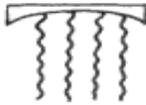
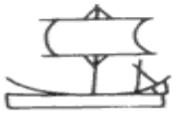


Ideograms, or idea-signs, in which each picture stands for the object represented or for some idea closely connected with the object. A particular word could be written using only sound-signs, or only an idea-sign, but most words were written using a combination of both. It was a particularly common practice to use one or more idea-signs at the end of a word to give the general meaning of the word. A sign used in this way is called a determinative.

A		EAGLE	I/E/Y		REED	S/Z		CLOTH
A		ARM	J		COBRA	SH		POOL
B		FOOT	K/C		BASKET	T		LOAF
C/K		BASKET	L		LION	TH		ROPE
D		HAND	M		OWL	U/W		CHICK
E/Y		2 STROKES	N		WATER	V/F		VIPER
F/V		VIPER	O/U/W		LASSO	W		CHICK
G		JAR	P		DOOR	X		BASKET/ CLOTH
H		HOUSE	Q		SLOPE	Y		2 REEDS
H		FLAX	R		MOUTH	Z/S		DOOR BOLT

Student Activity

Look at the hieroglyphic ideograms and decipher the following message below

 house	 man	 overturn	 wheat
 rejoice	 foreign people	 to weep	 storm
 to make an offering	 woman	 to sow seeds	 to sail up the river
 king	 growth	 dead body	 Hapi (Nile)
 field	 Osiris	 to plough	 grain

A      

B       

C       

DRAW YOUR FAVORITE EGYPTIAN GOD BELOW ©

Cartouches!!!! Hieroglyphs (look up a hieroglyph generator online to write your name)

- When the names of the rulers of Egypt were written in hieroglyphs their names were enclosed within ovals!
- Design a cartouche for your own name using the hieroglyph alphabet (you can google Hieroglyph maker for help)
- Remember that the Ancient Egyptians sometimes wrote in different directions.

