

E. Our Connection to Archaic Egypt

1. For thousands of years, no one knew the history of ancient Egypt, because nobody could read the “hieroglyphics” (picture writing) of the ancient Egyptians.
2. In 1799, French historians found a *stèle*—a flat stone slab—in a place called Rosetta (*see Week 1 Geography*).
3. It was a thrilling discovery because the stèle contained three forms of writing: ancient Greek, Demotic (another kind of Egyptian writing), and hieroglyphics. Since modern historians still knew how to read Greek, they could use the Greek text to help them translate the other two languages.
4. There were two keys to deciphering the Rosetta Stone.
 - a) The basic method was to look for repeating words or letters in the Greek text, and find those same words in the hieroglyphic text.
 - b) Another method was used by a young French historian named Jean-Francois Champollion. He discovered that when written in hieroglyph form *proper names of kings* are placed in an ellipse—a “cartouche.”
5. Champollion made the most important advances in the translation, offering the first key to hieroglyphics in 1822.
6. Once historians could read hieroglyphics, the study of “Egyptology” was born.
7. Thanks to the work of Egyptologists over the past 200 years, we now know more about archaic Egypt than ever before.

F. 3000 BC - As Far Back As We Can See

1. Using knowledge of hieroglyphics, historians deciphered an ancient document that reveals the beginning of Egyptian history. It is called the “Narmer Palette,” and it was found at a tomb in Abydos (again, *see Geography, Week 1*).
 - a) The Narmer Palette is a two-sided stone tablet with images of the deeds of the great conqueror “Narmer.”
 - b) It shows him as the king of Upper Egypt (wearing a helmet shaped like a modern bowling pin) defeating his enemy, and becoming the king of Lower Egypt (wearing a helmet with a decorative curly cue in the front) as well.
 - c) Narmer’s enemies are shown lying dead in great numbers, or marching before him.
 - d) Symbols representing the Nile (a living creature, with papyrus flowers coming out of it) and Egyptian gods (Horus, as a falcon), accompany the main figure. Two giant “serpopards” (serpent leopards) link together on the opposite side of the palette, representing the unification of Egypt.
3. Based on the translation of the palette’s hieroglyphics, historians believe it represents the story of the legendary first pharaoh of Egypt that the Greeks called “Menes.” Later documents refer to him as “Narmer.” To draw the connection between the two, this character is referred to in HistoryAtOurHouse classes as “Menes/Narmer.”