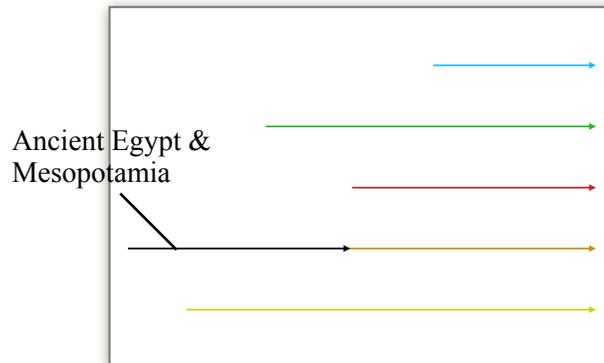


## ANCIENT EGYPT & MESOPOTAMIA

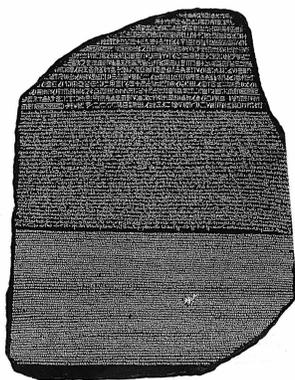
### A. Our Connection to Ancient Egypt & Mesopotamia

1. Although extinct cultures such as those of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia do not have a direct influence on us, our desire to know more about ourselves leads us to want to uncover the mysteries of early human life as well. They are still a part of our recorded history, as captured by our diagram of world history.



2. For thousands of years, the mysteries of archaic Egypt fascinated people. They sailed up the Nile river, past the pyramids and the sphinx, to vast temples and tombs, finding many exotic artifacts (such as pottery, tools, weapons, and sarcophaguses). Anyone with a sense of curiosity and adventure would want to know more.
3. European historians had developed a specialized study called “archeology”—the study of *archaic* human cultures—but archeology could only collect and describe artifacts. It could not tell the story of the people who had made them. There was an insurmountable barrier standing between historians and the *history* of archaic Egypt. The Egyptian form of writing found in all the temples and on many artifacts—a kind of picture-writing called “hieroglyphics”—was unreadable.
4. In 1798, a French general named Napoleon conquered Egypt as part of a war against France’s European neighbors, including Britain. Britain controlled most of India at this time, and Napoleon hoped to march from Egypt over land to India and take it from Britain.
5. Napoleon was not merely a conqueror. He was also interested in subjects like history. Thus, on his expedition to Egypt, he brought hundreds of archeologists and historians. He wanted to give them an opportunity to learn more about the mysteries of archaic Egypt.
6. In 1799, while digging to build a fort at a placed called “Rashid” in Egypt, or what the English later called “Rosetta,” the French found a *stele*—a *flat stone slab*—inscribed with text that would ultimately permit the translation of Egyptian hieroglyphics.
7. French historians were thrilled with the discovery because the stele 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 decipher the other two languages.
8. There were two keys to deciphering the Rosetta Stone.
    - a) The basic method or approach was to look for repeating words or letters in the Greek text, and find those same words in the hieroglyphic text.
    - b) This approach was supplemented by a discovery made by young French historian named Jean-Francois Champollion that when written in hieroglyph form *proper names of kings* are encapsulated by an elliptical outline—a “cartouche.”
  9. Champollion made the most important advances in the translation, offering the first key to hieroglyphics in 1822.
  10. When Napoleon invaded Egypt, his aim was to strike at the British empire in India. The British realized Napoleon's plan, and began to build an empire in the Islamic Middle East, and thus to become interested in its most ancient past as well.
  11. The written records of Mesopotamia (today Iraq) were created using a form of writing called “cuneiform”, which means “wedge-shaped.” (A scribe pressed the wedge-shaped end of a reed into a wet tablet, making an imprint. Then the tablet was baked to harden it.)
  12. Based on earlier studies of Persia, historians had a basic grasp of a language written in cuneiform called Old Persian.
  13. A British army officer named Henry Rawlinson used this knowledge to decipher a great carving on the side of a mountain in Persia called the “Behistun Inscription.”
  14. Since it contained writing in Old Persian and two other archaic languages (Elamite and Akkadian) it became *the Rosetta Stone of Mesopotamian history*. Rawlinson deciphered by about 1851, and the study of the archaic history of the region became possible along side the history of ancient Egypt.



The Rosetta Stone and the Behistun Inscription are the linguistic keys to the study of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia respectively.