

Rosetta Stone Project: Key Terms (Teachers)

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Behistun Inscription: a multilingual cuneiform inscription cut into a cliff in western Iran; created ca. 515 B.C. by order of the Persian emperor Darius to celebrate his many victories; served as the “Rosetta Stone” for the decipherment of cuneiform

cuneiform: wedge-shaped script; one of the earliest known systems of writing; developed in Sumer and spread throughout Mesopotamia; in use for more than 3,000 years

cartouche: cartridge-shaped oval enclosing a group of hieroglyphs representing the name of a pharaoh

Coptic: language of the Copts, or late Egyptian Christians; represents the final stage of ancient Egyptian and survives as the liturgical language of the Coptic Church (Champollion’s knowledge of Coptic helped him decipher the Rosetta Stone)

demotic: a late hieratic form of ancient Egyptian script, dating from ca. 650 B.C.

hieratic: simplified hieroglyphs used for everyday (non-official or religious) written communication

hieroglyphics: stylized, pictographic ancient Egyptian writing system consisting of a combination of semantic and phonetic symbols (hieroglyphs)

ideogram (or ideograph): written character representing an idea or object without indicating pronunciation

inscribe: to write or carve words

logogram: semantic symbol

phonogram: symbol that represents one or more sounds

pictogram (or pictograph): pictorial symbol for a word or phrase (see ideogram)

rebus: a pictographic symbol that represents not the idea but a sound associated with that idea; e.g., a picture of an eye to represent the sound “I”

Rosetta Stone: inscribed stone found near Rosetta (Rashid), Egypt, in 1799 and containing three versions of the same message in hieroglyphs, demotic, and Greek; deciphering the Rosetta Stone unlocked the secret of Egyptian writing

script: system of written symbols to convey the words and ideas of a spoken language (in contrast with *language*, a system of spoken communication)

transliterate: to write the sounds of one script using the closest-sounding corresponding symbols of a different script (in contrast with *translate*, to express the meaning of words in one language in another language)

Jean-François Champollion: French scholar (1790–1832) credited with deciphering the Rosetta Stone

Sir Henry Rawlinson: British soldier, diplomat, and Orientalist (1810–1895) credited with deciphering the Behistun Inscription and definitively deciphering cuneiform

Thomas Young: British scientist and linguist (1773–1829) who contributed to the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone, notably by proposing that hieroglyphs may sometimes be alphabetic as well as ideogrammatic