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Hieroglyphs and the Rosetta Stone

1,419 signs, 486 Greek words, and the last carving at Philae.

The Egyptians called their writing "god's words." They believed Thoth, god of wisdom, created writing. "Hieroglyphs" comes from a Greek phrase meaning "sacred carvings."

The official figure	What the page says
The stone	A decree inscribed three times, in hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek. The school timeline dates it to 196 BC, under Ptolemy V.
1822	Champollion's Lettre à M. Dacier was read on 27 September 1822. He counted 1,419 hieroglyphic signs against 486 Greek words, and concluded the system was a hybrid, not purely ideographic.
Who could read	Only about 2–3% of the population were literate. Signs grew to over 7,000. The script wrote consonants, not vowels, and was not an alphabet.
The last carving	The last known hieroglyphic inscription is dated to AD 394, at the Temple of Philae.

Three questions

1. How many times was the Rosetta decree inscribed, and in which scripts?
2. How many signs did Champollion count, against how many Greek words?
3. When and where is the last known hieroglyphic inscription?

Answers: Three times, in hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek. 1,419 against 486. AD 394, at the Temple of Philae.

Sources: British Museum, Room 4; Timeline of ancient Egypt; Symbols of the pharaoh teacher pack; Ilona Regulski, Eureka! Finding the key to ancient Egypt, 11 October 2022. Checked 17 November 2026. egypt.ages.im is independent of the British Museum. No photographs are included on this sheet.

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