

**RUDIMENTAL OF A
VOCABULARY
OF EGYPTIAN
HIEROGLYPHICS**

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Rudimental of a Vocabulary of Egyptian Hieroglyphics by Samuel Sharpe

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By SAMUEL SHARPE.

"There are, or may be, two ways of seeking and finding truth. The one, from observation and particulars, jumps to universal axioms, and from the truth of those finds out the intermediate axioms; and this is the way in use. The other, from observation and particulars, raises axioms by a continued and gradual ascent, till at last it arrives at universal axioms; and this is the true way, but it has not yet been tried." *Novum Organum, xix.*

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P R E F A C E.

THE study of Hieroglyphics is already sufficiently advanced to moderate our expectations as to the reward which is likely to be the result of future progress. The knowledge hitherto gained belongs to the two sciences of History and Language.

In History—by obtaining a pretty correct series of the kings' names—dates, at least approaching the truth, have been assigned to most of those stupendous works of art which have attracted travellers to Egypt from the time of Strabo to the present day. We have at least learned the order in which those buildings were erected, a knowledge which is of importance in the study of the architecture of any nation, and particularly important in the case of Egypt, where, from the scantiness of other records and the abundance of these, the study of the architecture is the study of the civilization. This knowledge will no doubt be both extended and corrected in the future progress of the study: though perhaps under this head more may be expected to result from the researches of travellers, now that they have been directed to the proper objects, than from the labours of the student at home.

In the department of Language not so much has yet been done, although a wide field seems open to view. We here see words and sentences written by the help of the pictures of real objects. This mode of writing is not, however, like the Mexican picture-writing, which seems to have represented the actions and ideas directly by means of pictures, without the intervention of words; but the Egyptian hieroglyphics, in most and probably in every instance, represent words or parts of a word. The agent, the verb, and the object, require three words in hieroglyphics, whereas in picture-writing the verb is not required, the action is expressed by the relative position of the agent and the object.

Wilkins, in his *Essay towards a Real Character* which might be used without regard to language, expresses an idea, as a naturalist describes a plant, by pointing out first its class, then its genus, then its species; thus, to write the word 'king' by signs, which may be called letters, he expresses first, *a man*; secondly, *related to us in our character of citizens*; thirdly, *the highest in rank* of those so related to us. This order of ideas, which is very suitable for a mode of picture-writing, is directly the reverse of what we find in the construction of all languages; in these the root of a word rarely expresses that most important circumstance, of whether a man, an action, or an object be the thing meant; thus, for instance, in 'sacrificer,' 'sacrificing,' and 'sacrificed,' the root of the word belongs equally to each of those three great classes of ideas, and it is only by a little

syllable added to the root that we are enabled (to use the words of the naturalist) to determine the class to which it belongs, although we were already acquainted with its specific character.

This being premised, it will be seen that the hieroglyphical groups are not formed upon the philosophical plan above described, but upon the plan of language; that they for the most part represent words and parts of words, and that the affixes and prefixes represent, as in language, the genders and numbers, tenses and abstractions.

To this however there is one important exception, which strongly proves the rule,—it is in the case of the names of the months, which were evidently formed philosophically at an early reformation of the Calendar, previous to that in B.C. 1323, and each group expresses, first, that it is a month; secondly, the season of the year; and thirdly, by means of a numeral, its place in that season, on a plan nearly similar to that of *Pluviose*, *Brumaire*, and the other French months under the Convention.

Of all known modes of writing, the Chinese is that which is most analogous to hieroglyphics: according to Sir George Staunton and Dr. Morrison, it can be understood by nations or tribes whose dialects are so dissimilar that they cannot communicate by speech; the characters, like the numerals in all languages, represent ideas and not sounds; and further, like Wilkins's universal characters, when they are modified by prefix or affix, it is in agreement with a modification of the idea, and more frequently not in agreement with the

modification of the sound. Hence, while in some Chinese dictionaries the words are arranged according to the characters, in others they are arranged according to the sound. This distinction between the characters and the sound could not have existed in hieroglyphics; for though of course, in the case of those hieroglyphics which are simply pictures of the objects meant, they may be understood as fully without the knowledge of the Egyptian language as with it, yet this seems to have extended no further, and those adjectives and abstract ideas which are represented by one character seem to be upon the plan of a rebus (*κατα τινας αινιγμας*, to use the words of Clemens), and as much dependent upon language as those which are spelt with letters. Thus the words 'arrow' and 'good' in Coptic nearly resemble one another in sound, consequently an arrow stands for 'good;' again, the words 'rabbit' and 'right' are nearly the same in sound, hence a rabbit is the first syllable of the word 'righteous.'

It was to remedy the obscurity which hence arose that the demonstrative sign was introduced, which is a pictorial representation following the name of an object; thus, after a word for 'carving' or 'representation,' follows the figure of a man, to show that a statue was the thing meant; after the figure of a man pouring liquid out of a vase, which might mean either the action, the liquid, or the priest, there follows the demonstrative sign of water, to prove that the liquid or drink-offering was the thing meant.

Although several inscriptions are published which were

certainly sculptured before the time of Moses, yet all of them contain many words spelt with letters; none of them are sufficiently ancient to show the original introduction of letters among the symbols. But as none of them contain any peculiarities which would lead us to suppose that they were among the first specimens of carved hieroglyphics, it seems probable that future research may throw light upon this interesting subject, by making us acquainted with inscriptions of a more primitive form. It is not impossible that we may find inscriptions in which we may perceive the absence of letters felt as a want, and the mode in which that want was first supplied.

In the later inscriptions, however, the number of words written by means of letters certainly increased, as also the number of letters used to form a word; and, indeed, the number of letters and the complexity of the words may at all times be admitted as strong evidence in proof of the modernness of an inscription.

This is however modified in some degree by the purport of the inscription. In the architectural inscriptions, which contain little more than the names and titles of the kings, the sentences may be made short by the omission of copulatives, without becoming obscure, and in these inscriptions very few words are written by means of letters. So also in the funereal tablets, the sameness of the ideas to be expressed in them all allowed brevity to be used without obscurity. But in other inscriptions, where the subject to be expressed was of a less usual or more complex kind, where a greater