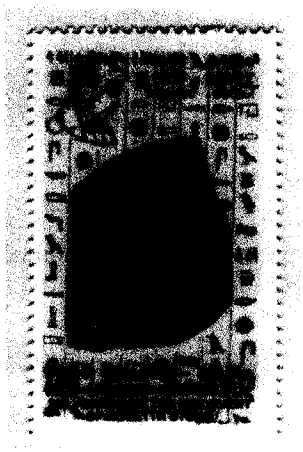
The Names of Royalty Translated

By Hugh W. Johnston

In 1979 I introduced topical stamp collectors to the hieroglyphic writing of the ancient Egyptians.[1] That article was illustrated with Egyptian stamps having hieroglyphs in their designs. Since that time, many more commemorative and definitive Egyptian stamps have been issued which show the intriguing symbols. In this narrative we discuss hieroglyphs in royal names.

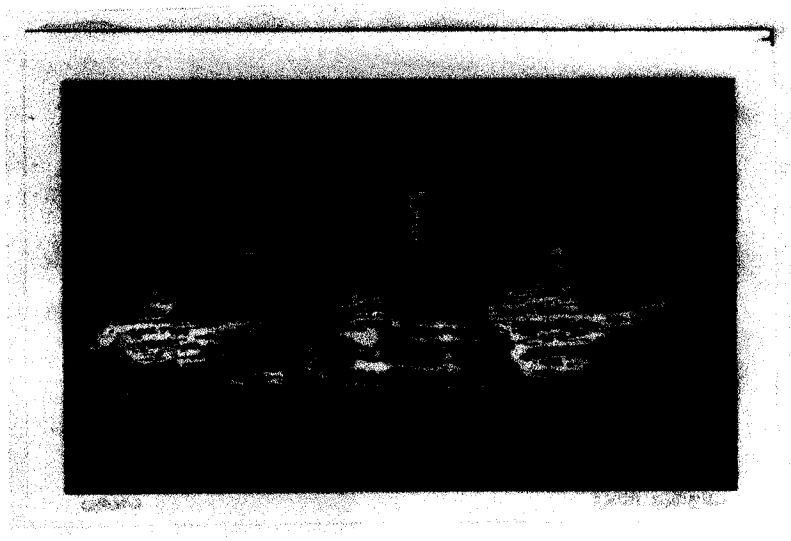
To review a bit, let us recall J. F. Champollion's 1922 translation of the Rosetta Stone's 14 lines of hieroglyphs in which he discovered the name of Ptolemy V.[2] The location of this name on the stone is indicated by a cartouche (a ring of rope) in the upper third of the stone's face as illustrated in Scott Egypt C238. Behind the stone are shown some of the 24 one-consonant signs of the hieroglyphic alphabet.[3]



Scott C238

As we shall see in the following paragraphs, the reading of Egyptian signs gets more complicated. Not only are there one-consonant, but also two- and three-consonant signs. Of approximately 1500 known signs, 750 were commonly used.

In the design of Scott Egypt 1460 we find in the cartouches the birth names of four kings of the Fourth Dynasty (2613-2498 B.C.), each headed by the title, *nesu-bity*, "King of Upper and Lower Egypt" (the sedge plant and bee over cakes). From the left they are *Khufu (Cheops)*, "Protected by Khnum;" *Khafre (Chephren)*, "Appearing like Re; *Menkaure (Mycerenus)*, "Appearing like the Souls of Re" and *Shepskaf*, "His Soul is Noble."



Scott 1460

The first cartouche contains the name of the king expressed in one-consonant signs; the others

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[1] Hugh W. Johnston, "Cartouches of the Pharaohs," *Topical Time*, 1979, pp. 47-51.

[2] Carol Andrews, *The Rosetta Stone* (British Museum Publications, London, 1981).

[3] Mark Collier and Bill Manley, *How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998).