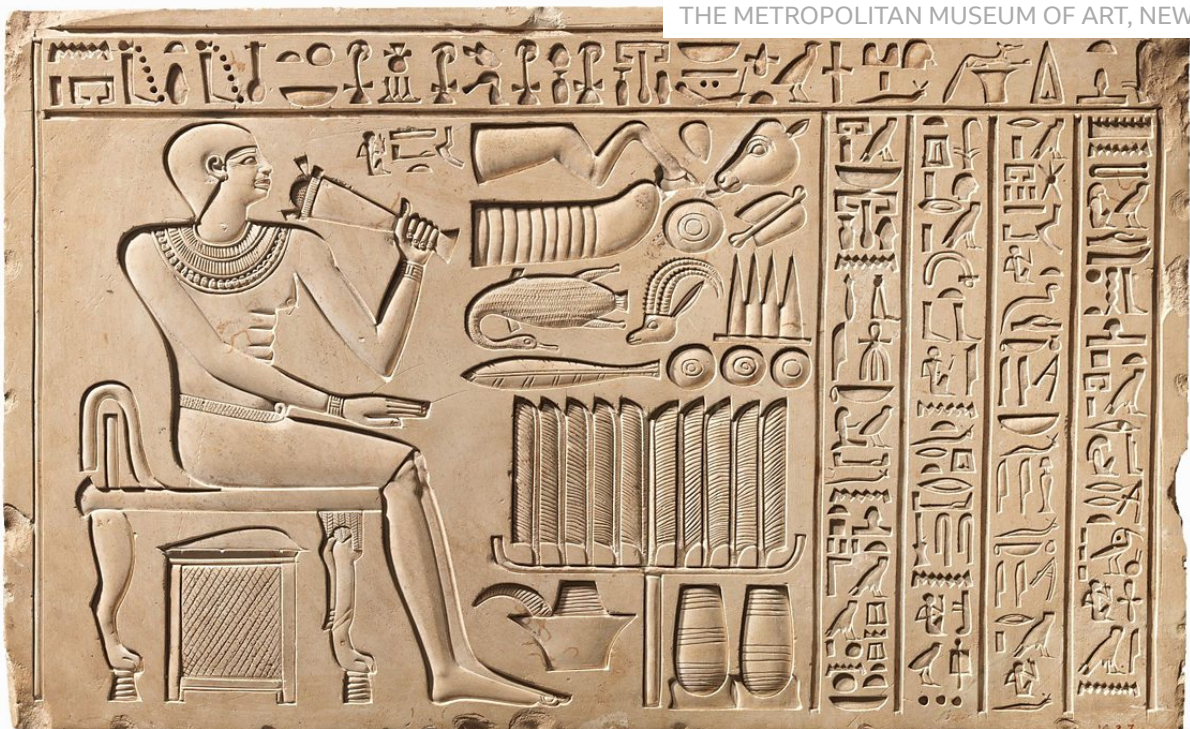


# What were ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs?

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THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

## Stela of the Gatekeeper Maati, ca. 2051–2030BC

In this image an official of Pharaoh Mentuhotep II called Maati sits in front of an offering table. It looks like a carving related to a funeral because the table is a stand with tall leaves. Food offerings float above the table and below it is a basin for Maati to wash himself. The hieroglyph text on the right are traditional passages carved to commemorate the dead.

1 OF 5

The ancient Egyptians invented one of the earliest known writing systems. The symbols they used were called **hieroglyphs**, which comes from a Greek word meaning ‘**sacred carving**’. This is because the ancient Egyptians believed that hieroglyphs had been invented by the gods. This is not surprising because hieroglyphs were very beautiful.



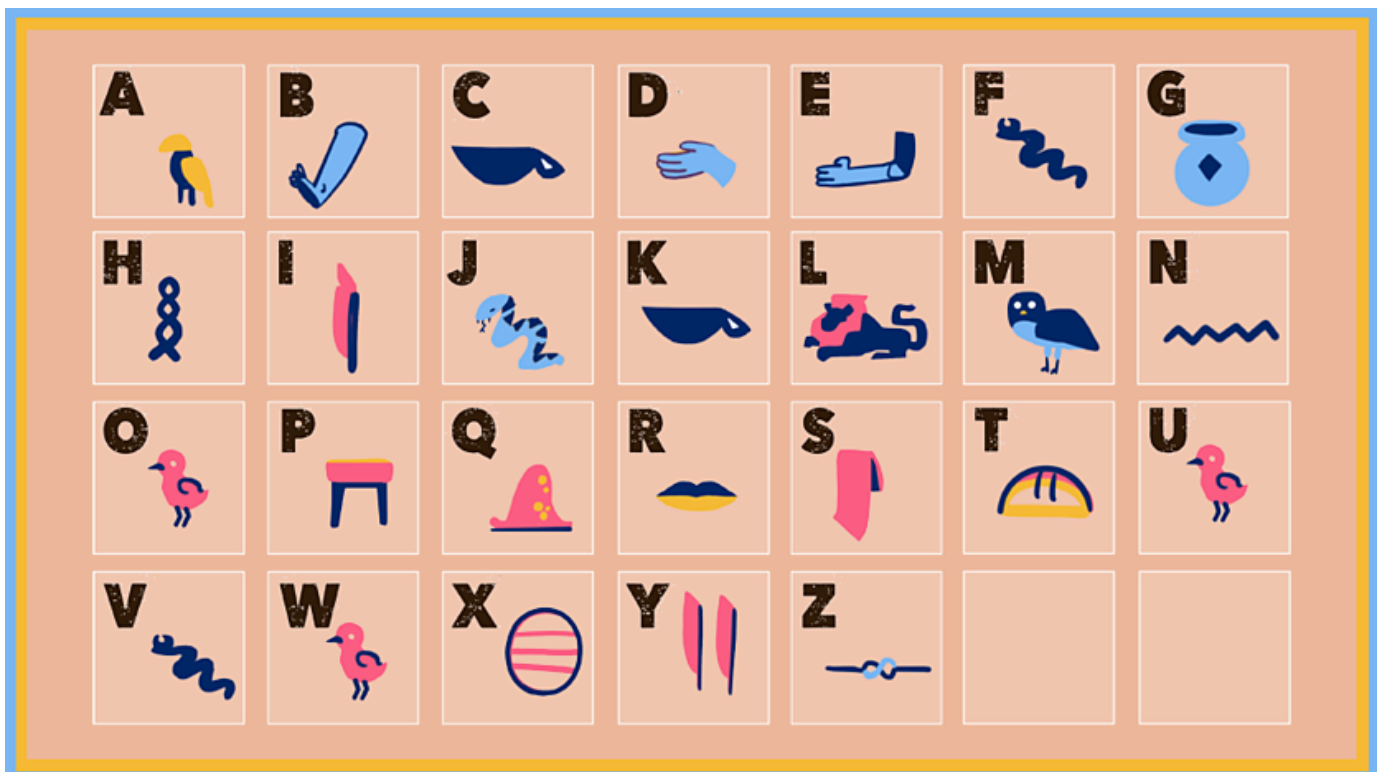
In Ancient Egypt, the people who wrote hieroglyphs were called **scribes**. A scribe had to go to a special school to learn how to do it, because it was very complicated. Hieroglyphs included around **700** different signs of objects and animals. Some signs were **pictorial** or **symbolic** and stood for whole words. Some signs were **phonetic**, which means they stood for sounds.

Hieroglyphs could be written vertically, horizontally, left to right, or right to left! The **phonetic** hieroglyph alphabet is the closest version to our modern English alphabet. It is not

exactly the same because the ancient Egyptians did not have symbols for vowels ('a', 'e', 'i', 'o' or 'u'), but the alphabet below includes the closest sounds.

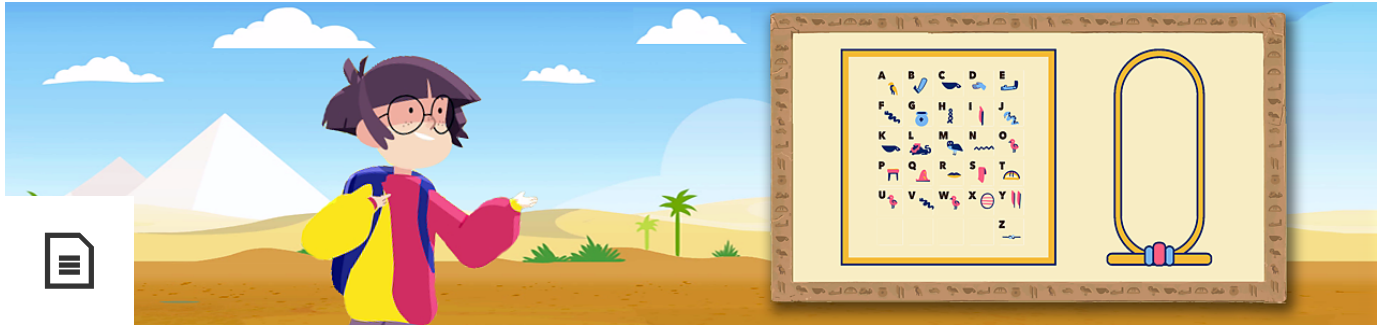


## The hieroglyph alphabet



The ancient Egyptians wrote the names of their gods and royal people in an oval shape called a **cartouche**. The oval shape represents a rope with special powers to ward off evil spirits and keep the name inside it safe.

## Practise your ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs



### Practise your ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs

Download the ancient Egyptian alphabet and try to copy them. Can you write your name in hieroglyphs?

## Write like a scribe

## Crack the hieroglyph code

## Where next?



## What remains of Ancient Egypt?

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## What did the ancient Egyptians believe in?

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