

**The Grand Court Of The Masonic Order of Athelstan
In England, Wales and Provinces Overseas**

Presented By Martin Beard on 26th October 2019

MW Grand Master, RW Deputy Grand Master, Brethren All,

The Rosetta Stone; Part of our ritual and always placed in a prominent position in the South. Indeed we are instructed to 'position the Junior Warden's chair so as to allow a focus on the stone itself'.

Its appearance in a Cort represents the intellectual endeavour we as Freemasons and Burghs should engage in to better ourselves and so be more 'extensively serviceable to our fellow creatures'.

The content of the message on the Rosetta Stone is of little relevance to us and is, of itself, quite boring. I do have a full translation available but this might only be useful to those who have trouble getting off to sleep at night.

It is a little like Homers Illiad. It takes a long time to tell you just a little. I on the other hand hope to quickly tell you lots. To that end I've managed to reduce this talk to about an hour and a half!

Basically the message states what a great chap Ptolemy V is and it thanks him for giving the priests power to raise taxes.

However the importance of the Rosetta Stone cannot be overstated. Not just in Egypt but for the history of Northern Africa, The Middle East and much of the Mediterranean.

The Rosetta Stone is a "STELE" which, in modern day terms would be a notice board. The purpose of a stele was to publicise the law, a decree or a political statement. The Rosetta Stone stele is full of compliments and flattery - a lot of flattery.

I've always had an interest in ancient Egypt. As a schoolboy I saw the Tut Ankh Armoun exhibition at the British Museum. Then as a newlywed I saw the rest of the collection at the Cairo Museum. More recently in 2015 my wife allowed me to realise a long held ambition to visit many sites of antiquities on an escorted Nile Cruise.

Oddly, whilst we were sailing down the Nile we were also buying a house. There is a photo of me on the phone in the courtyard of the Temple at Philae negotiating the purchase of the house we now live in. An odd juxtaposition of a fabulous 2300 year old temple and a 1950's brick and tile built house in Epsom.

Absolutely nothing to do with the Rosetta Stone, but it does introduce the Temple at Philae just South of Aswan. A good starting point for us as Freemasons to compare modern engineers with their fantastically accurate light and laser measuring devices, up against the

ancient artisans who used rope, wood and the odd piece of copper to make their measurements.

Today there is something not quite right about the temple. The builders and architects amongst us might spot the issue but for everyone else I'll explain later.

The clue is 'MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONCE!'

It demonstrates that practise makes perfect, to be as good at your task as you can be, to 'work diligently'. The parallel in Freemasonry is our Lodge or Court of Instruction which helps us deliver as good a ritual as we can.

Arguably the main reason Egypt became and remained for thousands of years such a huge and dominant power was that every year the Nile flooded bringing in vast quantities of soils and nutrients, creating a verdant landscape perfect for growing crops. Whilst much of Africa and the Middle East suffered drought and famine, Egypt enjoyed a, more or less, permanent source of water and food.

But in the 1960s President Nasser built the Aswan Dam. Nasser needed to control the Nile and the Suez Canal so he forged ahead with the construction of the dam causing panic amongst the archaeologists uncovering Egypt's history. They started many hurried attempts to save those temples and palaces which would be submerged behind the dam.

Incidentally, the Suez Canal was first started around 600BC by the Assyrian leader Necho. There is nothing new about large scale projects running well behind schedule and horrendously over budget.

The temple at Philae, about to be flooded, is the burial place of Isis one of the greatest Gods and therefore needed to be saved. It was dismantled block by block to be reassembled on land that would become an island (Algilkia Island), quite a big Island actually, which is why the next bit is a little sad.

The modern engineers moving the Temple miscalculated. The piece of land soon to be an island, wasn't big enough to rebuild the temple exactly as it had been built 2300 years before. By the time this was realised, half the Temple had been reconstructed whilst the other half, all labelled and catalogued, was lying on land about to be flooded. In panic the rebuilders decided to keep quiet, finish the job and hope no one noticed. Those ancient builders buried on the island with Isis must have been spinning in their graves.

The photo on P2 shows the right side of the temple, butting up against the end of the entrance pylon as it should. But across the courtyard the other side is squashed in halfway along the Western face.

Measure Twice, Cut once!

If this were a Craft Lodge we would now hear that quiet murmur "We wouldn't have done it like that".

Incidentally there is a 'Porch Way Entrance' just beyond the opening by the ramp and yes it has pillars on both sides of it, although I do not know their names.

The Rosetta Stone would be positioned in such a courtyard to the side of a Porch Way entrance.

The material the stone is made from, Granodiorite, is not local to the area around Rosetta, or Rashid. It was quarried in March 196BC at Gebel Tingar, South of Memphis, on the West bank of the Nile.

It's an igneous rock, one fifth quartz, and is in effect a volcanic granite, but not as hard as the granite found on Dartmoor or in Scotland.

Which is just as well since it would have been roughly shaped, probably by Entered Apprentices using 'chisels and common gavels' made from Copper and stone. Those Entered Apprentices would be busy shaping the stone and 'knocking off the superfluities' even as a barge carried the stone down the Nile towards Sais.

At Sais Fellow Craftsmen using FC tools would have brought the stone 'into due form'. The 'more experienced hands of a Master Mason' would then be responsible for smoothing the face and chiselling the figures and symbols on the stone.

We now accept that whilst some slave labour was used to build these superb edifices most workmen were paid engineers and stonemasons. Each being paid in wheat, barley or oils, according to his skills. Who got paid what is discussed in the 'tracing board lectures'.

These stone masons would have come from many countries around the Mediterranean although given the number of spelling mistakes in the Greek text there may not have been too many Greek Master Masons at work here.

Originally the Rosetta Stele stood about 149cms tall with a rounded top weighing in at a metric ton. Nowadays it is shorter, about the size of a Tracing board having broken into pieces along weaker lines of pink granite within the stone, something the Glaswegians might understand.

Our facsimile at one tenth scale is an exact copy of the remains of the original Stella, as found by the French, including the roughly chiselled back.

The assistant curator of the Nubian Museum, near Aswan, has theorised that the roughly carved back of many stele stones was a kind of instruction telling the recipient that 'this is the back, put it against a wall'. So perhaps we shouldn't criticise those Entered Apprentices who fashioned the basic shape of the stone. Not entirely unskilled they were probably following a kind of stonemason's shorthand.

From its creation in 196BC its whereabouts is a matter of conjecture and deduction. It is believed it was originally placed in the Temple at Sais in the Nile Delta, where it stayed until about 490AD. However during this period the Romans rededicated some temples to Roman Gods and the rest they systematically dismantled and used the stones for other

constructions. They also set about destroying hieroglyph writings to remove any traces of Egyptian gods.

For the next 1000 years the Rosetta stone survived as part of some-ones house or buried in the sand near the temple, we don't really know.

At the end of the 15th Century Mamluk Sultans ruling small fiefdoms in Northern Egypt were fighting off the Mongols, the Syrians, Turks and Portuguese. This is a well invaded country. Amongst all this fighting **Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri** reinforced Fort Julien which overlooked and guarded the prosperous coastal port of Rosetta or Rashid.

For this work he needed stone and the area around Sais provided a plentiful supply of pre-cut accurately fitted stone, including the Rosetta Stone.

Move forward 300 years to the beginning of the 19th century and history becomes more certain.

Napoleons 1798 attack on the Ottoman Empire in North Africa was really an attempt to undermine the British position around the Mediterranean and give France access to India.

He was, of course, defeated by us the English, but his occupation and reinforcing of Fort Julien did result in the discovery of the Rosetta Stone on the 15th July 1799.

Napoleons defeat was formalised by the terms of the 1801 Treaty of Alexandria. We the altruistic, honest and generous English managed to liberate many antiquities, including the Rosetta, from the clutches of the "greedy Frenchie's" who had been stealing them during their war with the Arabs. We, of course, didn't steal them, but since they were now ours we brought them back to England for King George III, who presented them to the British Museum.

Mind you, we didn't treat the stone too well. At the British Museum the metal frame made to display it didn't quite fit.

Measure Twice Cut Once!

So in true British style, instead of re-jigging the frame we chipped away bits of the stone to make it fit..... Bretheren, I'm not making this up!

Then it took us 200 years to finally protect it in a specially built case in the museums Egyptian Sculpture Gallery.

It has for some time been the most visited item in the British Museum

Other than during wartime, the Rosetta Stone has left the British Museum only once. In the early 70's, amongst all kinds of fears about it being kidnapped, it was lent to the Louvre in Paris for an exhibition around Champollion's work.

Now, The Language Issue **Send Snicker bars round the room.**

What makes the Rosetta stone one of the most important artefacts in history are the three sets of inscriptions on the stone. The top 14 lines are Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs the language used by the Pharaohs, Priests and leaders, the middle section is 32 lines of Egyptian Demotic, the language of the people and scholars, whilst the bottom 54 lines are Ancient Greek the language of the administrators.

If any of you have tried to read a Greek play you will understand why the Greek part is three times longer than the other bits.

The first known Hieroglyphs are dated to 3250BC and were in general use until Alexander's invasion or rather liberation in 332BC.

But from 300BC until 400AD Christianity was spreading across an Egypt ruled in turn by the Macedonians, the Ptolemy's, the Ottomans, the Roman Pharaohs, the Byzantines and the Arabs. Each bringing along a change of beliefs.

Now they were followed by Coptic Christians who took serious steps to Christianise Egypt including the further destruction of Hieroglyphs because of its association with pagan gods.

Over this 700 year period the Demotic Language gradually evolved into Greek Coptic. Finally when Latin and Arabic script – what we use now- replaced Coptic, the last connection to hieroglyphics ended. More than 2500 years of history quite literally got lost in translation.

Until 1802 when back in England the Reverend Stephen Weston translated the Greek inscription on the stone. Weston's contribution is generally not recognised and certainly got lost amongst the excitement that followed the work of Thomas Young and the inspirational insight of Jean-François Champollion.

Two things slowed the translation down;

First, the European scholars working on the translation ignored the more insightful workings of the Arab scholars who had a better understanding of the language.

Secondly, way back in the 5th century a Greek named Horapollo produced a translation of hieroglyphs that seemed to work. So it became the accepted translation text and everyone used it. Unfortunate because he was wrong and caused 1300 years of wasted effort.

However, 10 years after the stone arrived in London, an English scholar, Thomas Young discovered the meaning of a cartouche. An oval shaped box that contains the hieroglyph characters of a proper name.

Cartouche to MW Master

Once he'd identified the name Ptolemy V on the stone and working on the premise that proper names sound the same across most languages, he was able to work out other names and nouns. Unfortunately he was also using Horapollo's translation guide so apart from proper nouns he had no chance of making sense of the phonetics.

Hieroglyphs are a logographic or picture language. It uses images such as a bird or person or building. Images everyone could understand even those who speak different languages.

But whilst a picture of a man means 'man', that image does not tell you what the word man sounds like, its context or whether it's singular or plural and there was no set alphabetic system. To make hieroglyphs work the Egyptians created a code of sounds and ideas, where pictures also spell out words.

Whilst some hieroglyph pictures were sounds, others were sounds and meanings and still others served to clarify meanings.

The written word for man is 'MN'. There were few written vowels so you need to know to fill in the letter 'A' to make 'MAN'.

However, 'MN' or 'MAN' could mean a particular person, a random person or a group of people. The picture following the image of a MAN could clarify this.

The hieroglyph picture of an owl also means the sound 'M'. However, you have to speak the language before you would know there was a sound 'M'.

An excellent example of this in modern terms is the chocolate bar Snicker. It used to be called a Marathon bar but several years ago the name was changed from Marathon to Snicker. It turns out that most European languages do not include the sound TH. So for commercial reasons the manufacturers changed the name so our continental cousins could actually ask for one.

Thomas Young, working against all these variations, understandably gave up the translation but unselfishly published his preliminary results. Jean-François Champollion, taking full advantage of Young's published work around proper nouns, realised the key lay in context and sound. An inspired deduction. He created a means of translation that finally meant we could decipher hieroglyphs and relearn 3250 years of North African history.

The Text

The inscription on the Rosetta Stone is a decree passed by a council of priests.

It starts with the date. No simple matter since the Egyptians used three calendars including one that starts at the beginning of a Kings reign.

There follows a list of all the great things Ptolemy V was supposed to have done. This is where the flattery comes in because having ascended the throne at 5 was then only 13yrs.

Next the priests pledge to support Ptolemy in his reign because he is a great chap. Which might also have something to do with all the gold and silver he gave them.

Then there are instructions dictating that the stone be placed on the outside of a temple near a statue of the senior god Horus.

Finally, the decree states that it should be inscribed in hieroglyphics, the demotic script, and Greek and placed in temples throughout Egypt.

TempleS. Plural. So there is more than one Stela containing this message. More have since been found.

Like the modern day press, the priests held great power in their ability to inform or misinform the general population, so keeping them onside was important.

The joint bribe granting priests the power to raise taxes and handing over lots of gold must have worked because Ptolemy V ruled for 23 years from 204 to 181BC, a long time for a pharaoh.

It is worth a trip to the British Museum to see the Rosetta Stone.

Imagine 2000 years ago a young man at the start of his career as a stonemason carved the stone into a rectangle and straightened the sides. An older more experienced craftsman gave the stone its proper shape and a highly skilled Master Mason using the most basic of tools created an amazing sculpture and then carved into it the means by which we can study his world. I think that is astonishing.

In conclusion there are a couple of things we should consider;

From the first king of a united Egypt, Namar Menes to the last accepted blood line Pharaoh Cleopatra VII- yes she of the poisoned ass- around 30BC the Pharaohs ruled Egypt for over 3000 years. Some ruled for only a few months others for over 25 years but the average rule was just 8 years.

To date in Egypt 167 pyramids and tombs have been discovered and identified.

The maths alone tells us there are hundreds more tombs to be found.

And we must hurry. Because of global warming, rising sea levels and the lack of sediments being deposited since the construction of the Aswan Dam, Egypt's Mediterranean coastline is being swallowed up by the sea, in some places, at the rate of 100 yards a year. How many antiquities have disappeared, how much is going to be flooded before we ever find it.

History is precious. It only happens once. It is from history that we improve ourselves as we learn from our mistakes and successes.

The historian and TV presenter Prof Mary Beard describes the stone as an 'almost mystical key to the hidden world of history..... a fragile process of dialogue..... created by and contested between different cultures, it is a symbol of their ability to communicate with each other across space and time.... it remains a symbol of the enduring power of human understanding.

The connection between Freemasonry as a philosophy and the Rosetta Stone is simple.

The Rosetta Stone represents a communication to everyone regardless of their language, creed or religion or even education.

I believe that Freemasonry and its ritualism, which excludes for the most part politics and religion, is in its simplest form a means of communicating with each other. It 'requires a perfect freedom of inclination by individuals' to start equal and work towards an enduring friendship with all men.

The place, the time and the languages will differ but the idealism and principles are clear for all to see.

Bretheren, thankyou for listening so patiently.

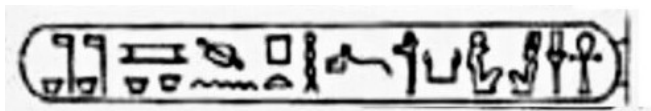
Bro Martin BEARD

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Odds and Ends

Periods	Dates	Dynasties
Archaic	3118-2686 BC	1 & 2
Old Kingdom	2686-2181 BC	3-6
First Intermediate Period	2181-2040 BC	7-10
Middle Kingdom	2040-1786 BC	11 & 12
Second Intermediate Period	1786-1567 BC	13-17
New Kingdom	1567-1080 BC	18-20
Third Intermediate Period	1080-664 BC	21-25
Late Period	664-332 BC	26-30
Ptolemaic Period	332-30 BC	31

Ptolemy V's Cartouche



Ptolemy V Epiphanes