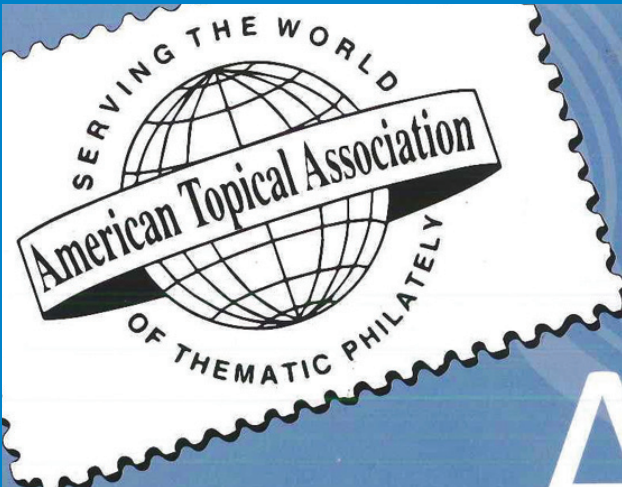


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# *Yesterday in Stamps:* **Hieroglyphs on the Stamps of Egypt**

by Joseph W. Farland

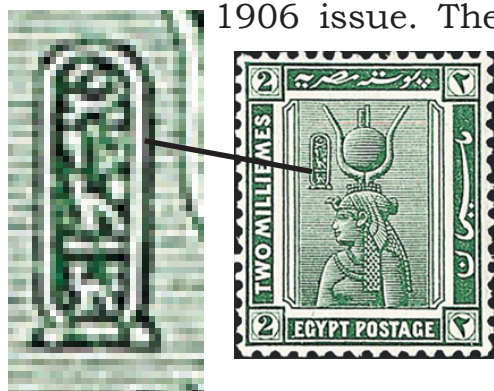
(From *STAMPS Magazine*, Dec. 21, 1940, with new images)

No less interesting than the civilization of the ancient Egyptians themselves is the particular but fascinating form of writing employed by them. Much of what we know about ancient Egypt and its hieroglyphs, we owe to Young and Champollion and the famous Rosetta Stone.

Three distinct types of writing were employed by the Egyptians. For inscriptions on their monuments, tombs, temples and other public buildings, they used the hieroglyphic or monumental writing. On religious papyri the priests used the hieratic—a cursive form of the hieroglyphic. A third form known as the demotic was used for all general purposes, just as we use script in our social correspondence. In this article, however, we shall concern ourselves only with the hieroglyphs.

The hieroglyphic form of writing consists of the IDEOGRAPHIC and the PHONETIC. The ideograph is a symbol or figure and completely conveys a thought, word or subject and is the earliest form of hieroglyphic writing. The phonetic system consists of ideographs which represent alphabetic characters and syllables of sound. The Egyptian postal administration has provided us with several stamps on which appear examples of both systems.

Hieroglyphs first appeared on the 2 mill green of the 1906 issue. The central subject is a bust portrait of Cleopatra with the crown of Isis. To her left is a cartouche (so-named because of its likeness to a cartridge) within which is her name in hieroglyphs. Briefly interpreted, commencing from the top:



- The first sign, a kind of triangle, is K.
- Sign #2, a lion, is L or LE (sometimes R).
- #3, a reed, is a vowel (A-E-I).
- #4, a piece of cord is O.
- #5, a mathematical figure, is P.
- #6, an eagle, is A.
- #7, a hand, is T.
- #8, a mouth, is R.
- #9 is the same as #6, A.
- #10, a half sphere, is T.

The final sign, an egg, is known as a "determinative" and together with the T sign, indicates that the name is feminine. The result of this transliteration is KLEOPATRAT—the Greek form—while CLEOPATRA is the Latinized spelling.

The next issue on which appears the hieroglyphic writing, is the Geographical Congress issue in 1925. All three stamps are identical except for the values. Thoth the god of writing, is depicted as having inscribed the name of King Fuad. An analysis of the hieroglyphs is as follows.

As in the preceding paragraph:

- Commencing from the top the first sign is known as the INSIBY A title, which precedes the throne name and transliterated is SUTEN NET, meaning “King of the North and South.”

- In the cartouche is the name of Fuad. Following is an analysis:

- Sign #1, a slug, is F.
- #2, a chick, is U.
- #3, an eagle, is A.
- The fourth sign, a hand, is D (rather a hard T).

- The sign at the bottom of the cartouche is interpreted as “living forever” or “may he live forever.” This sign, or rather group of signs consisting of a tether, a serpent, a half sphere and the “land” sign is pronounced *ANKH T’ETTA* (eternity).





In 1926 Egypt issued three stamps commemorating the Navigation Congress, on which also appears the name of Fuad.

In December, 1937, three commemoratives were issued for the OPHTHALMOLOGICAL CONGRESS; the central subject being the “eye of Ra,” flanked on either side by a row of hieroglyphs. On these stamps are examples of both the IDEOGRAPHIC and PHONETIC. In the center of the stamp is an ideograph and transliterated is UTCHAT meaning “eye of Ra.” \*

The vertical rows of signs are identical and each is the alphabetic spelling of UTCHAT. Commencing with the first sign which shall be designated #1 is a chick and is the letter U. Sign #2 is a pestle and mortar and is TCH. #3 is an eagle and is A. The fourth sign is a half sphere and is T. The final character is a “detir minative” corresponding with the central subject and is added to indicate the meaning and sound of the alphabetic signs. The UTCHAT is symbolic of “strength” and when inscribed on an amulet, assures the wearer of “good health and happiness” and “strength and protection.” Such amulets were very popular with the ancient Egyptians.



As mentioned at the beginning of this article, this is but a brief interpretation of the hieroglyphic signs. Literally thousands of books have been written on the subject, some dealing alone with a verb or even a single sign. Space here, however, would not permit a more detailed analysis.

• In Egyptian mythology Ra (or Re) is the god of the midday sun. He personifies the Supreme Being and is represented in the morning by Mentu, the rising sun, and in the evening by Amtu, the setting sun. Although represented in various ways, the most common was as a hawk-headed man crowned with the solar disk and uraeus.