



How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs: A Step-by-Step Guide to Teach Yourself

Mark Collier , Bill Manley , R.B. Parkinson (Illustrator)

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Hieroglyphs are pictures used as signs in writing. When standing before an ancient tablet in a museum or visiting an Egyptian monument, we marvel at this unique writing and puzzle over its meaning. Now, with the help of Egyptologists Mark Collier and Bill Manley, museum-goers, tourists, and armchair travelers alike can gain a basic knowledge of the language and culture of ancient Egypt.

Collier and Manley's novel approach is informed by years of experience teaching Egyptian hieroglyphs to non-specialists. Using attractive drawings of actual inscriptions displayed in the British Museum, they concentrate on the kind of hieroglyphs readers might encounter in other collections, especially funerary writings and tomb scenes. Each chapter introduces a new aspect of hieroglyphic script or Middle Egyptian grammar and encourages acquisition of reading skills with practical exercises.

The texts offer insights into the daily experiences of their ancient authors and touch on topics ranging from pharaonic administration to family life to the Egyptian way of death. With this book as a guide, one can enjoy a whole new experience in understanding Egyptian art and artifacts around the world.

How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs: A Step-by-Step Guide to Teach Yourself Details

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Mandy says

The best guide to ancient Egyptian that I have come across. Uses actual Egyptian artifacts as examples!

Peter says

I've had this book since 2005. When I originally purchased the book, it seemed a bit too daunting to me. I started on chapter 1 but got stuck on what I thought was a difficult concept. After completing Manley's Hieroglyphs for Complete Beginners, this book seemed much more approachable. In May of 2017, I started studying with a free online group called GlyphStudy. As of May 2018, I've completed all the exercises in the book. Language study with a group is more motivating than going at it alone. Collier and Manley's book is not a full grammar but it does teach a lot of vocabulary, various verb forms, cartouches, and focuses on the offering formula. This book is well worth your time. Most of the translation material comes from the British Museum, some of it not on public display. You translate several stela and other objects in the book. Specifically translated are: the roasting scene from the rock tombs at Meir, the Abydos king list, BM EA 586, BM EA 567, BM EA 162, BM EA 585, BM EA 101, BM EA 581, the fishing and fowling scene from Senbi at Meir 1 pl 2, the coffin of Nakhtankh BM EA 35285, BM EA 571, BM EA 1671, BM EA 614, BM EM 143 Stela of Nakhti, and others. If you are interested in translating items you will likely see in museums but don't want to do a full college-level grammar than this book is great. It provides an answer key in the back which is a helpful way to check your work. I still think Manley's other title is where I would start from scratch, but this is the best next step.

Manny says

I must confess that I still haven't learned how to do this. But I don't think I can blame the book, which I bought on impulse a few years ago in the British Museum shop.

Ann Schwader says

I've actually worked my way through this useful small volume at least three times, though the last two times were incomplete -- I keep getting bogged down on the exercises in the last chapter.

This is a limited (intentionally) but very useful book for learning enough Middle Egyptian hieroglyphs to read inscriptions in museums & do other things a non-specialist might want to do. Not as intensive or extensive as a real course in hieroglyphs (and, yes, I have had a mail-in one from the Oriental Institute), but well worth doing if you have an interest.

Dictionary, sign list, and all answers to exercises are supplied in the back of the book. Nothing else to buy.

Good end notes for further study, too.

David Waldron says

A compact and highly effective introduction to Middle Egyptian for non-specialists. While the authors might have done well to devote a bit more attention in the later chapters to the language's complex verb forms, I'm quite impressed with the progress I was able to make. As one might expect, the book focuses quite tightly on Middle Kingdom funerary inscriptions. These are among the texts most likely to be encountered in museum collections. I would say that, although the authors have done an excellent job, mastering the material requires a good deal of dedication on the part of the reader.

Sam says

Easy to follow with useful practical exercises, the layout of the book introduces hieroglyphs step by step building the reader's knowledge up progressively. Also a very handy reference guide once you have the basic skills to work through translations outside those provided by the authors.

Jennifer says

I studied from this book in preparation for a trip to Egypt and was amazed at my progress. While in Egypt (and at museums elsewhere since) I was able to read and understand writing on sarcophagi, tomb walls, etc. Learning with this book requires a bit of dedication and a willingness to practice but the effort sure pays off – I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to read ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs for him- or herself.

Itsbecka says

If you want to be able to read the stuff you see in museums, this will give you a basic understanding of how the inscriptions are set up and what are the basic elements to look for.

David says

I actually could not finish this book, but it is not the fault of the authors. What they have attempted here is both remarkable and praiseworthy. The half of the book (little more than half, but it's not important) I did read was well presented and interesting. This is only applicable to me personally, but I think I would have been more successful using this as a textbook for a class about hieroglyphs.

Learning this information on a library loan with a deadline is not conducive to actually getting through it.

Add to this the lack of auditory assistance for pronouncing the ancient language and it becomes exceedingly difficult, at least for me. I don't like giving up on a book, and cannot rate it above a three since I didn't finish, but in better circumstances, I think this would be a very handy teacher and reference tool for learning ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Mateen Ar says

I enjoyed studying this book; not because the book in itself was good, but rather because I really did enjoy the content and what I learned about it. The book is structured in a way in which one cannot help but to enjoy learning, but the parts relating to teaching grammar are incredibly weak and lax of information. There is no proper explanation of unique grammatical information and so without a teacher, one cannot learn as much as he could otherwise. There are also several things missing from this work that would otherwise have made it into a better book, such as digital content available online perhaps, more historical content (as opposed to tomb text after tomb text), and even something more exciting would have made one crave reading this book more (such as Akhenaten's stelae).

Also, it could have done if the exercise answers had notes on them; as opposed to just showing the answers.

Gareth Hughes says

This is a very clever little book. I read it, went to the British Museum's Egyptology Collection and could read the hieroglyphs fairly well. The authors are from the BM, but present the Egyptian in modern way for the beginner. The chapters are well-paced, and you can work your way through them by yourself. Egyptian isn't the easiest language to learn, but this book certainly helps.

Lucy says

A good introduction to the joy of 'glyphs with lots of real examples to translate and a focus on some of the more common formulaic inscriptions (to equip you for the museums of the world to show off your swanky knowledge of dead languages).

Ruth says

Didn't think much of this one. Tried to be too simple and too full of grammar and tenses at the same time. I gave up and went back to Gardiner.

Michael Snuffin says

This book looked promising. I wanted to learn to read hieroglyphs, and the authors, both prominent Egyptologists, have taught this material for many years. Sounds like a good match, right? It didn't play out that way.

I had problems right off the bat with the first section of chapter one. The text presents the Egyptian alphabet, a list of one-consonant signs, but does not identify what any of the signs actually represent. I really felt that I needed to know what the signs meant as ideograms in order to correctly draw and understand them (“square, squiggle, bird, slug” just didn’t cut it), I so put the book down and quickly found a reference chart on the web that provided the necessary information. Strike one.

I told my best friend that I had started studying how to read hieroglyphs, and he asked me some simple questions I could not field using this book, like “how many hieroglyphs are there?” I easily found this information in other books; including a simple two- or three-page introductory essay that provided some basic facts would have added context and depth to this book. Strike two.

Exercises in the first section ask you to write out words in hieroglyphs, but the signs lack definition due to their small size, making it difficult to reproduce them. They made the signs too small; they need to print them in a larger typeface. Strike three, and I’m out looking for better book on how to read Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Postscript: I found Bill Manley’s recent book, Egyptian Hieroglyphs for Complete Beginners, most helpful in learning and understanding the writing of the Ancient Egyptians. Highly recommended!

Sergio ruocchio says

effettivamente le promesse di questo manuale vengono mantenute . il testo garantisce una prima comprensione del geroglifico egizio.
