Language & Writing of Ancient Egypt
Scripts
Hieroglyphs
(from the Greek) *hieroglyphikos* - “sacred writing”

Formal writing system

State script:

- religious works - tomb inscriptions, etc.
- state documents - King lists, etc
- monuments - temple inscriptions, etc.
Religious Works (Biographical)
Monuments
Monuments
Structure

- Egyptian hieroglyphs were made of two (primary) component:
  - **Phonetic/Alphabetic** - symbols that represent sounds (that are read independently of the symbol’s visual characteristic)
  - **Logograms** - a symbol which represents a word or a morpheme (the smallest meaningful unit of language)
\[ r^s \]  
(sun)

\[ pr \]  
(house)

\[ swt \]  
(reed)
DETERMINATIVES

Tired man sinking to ground
(weariness, tiredness, faintness)

Man carrying basket on head
(to carry, to work, load up)
nfr.w
the beautiful young people
(young military recruits)

nfr.w
foundations
(of a house)
Cursive Hieroglyphs
Variation of Hieroglyphs

Used primarily on papyrus and wood for religious documents

Used most frequently in the Ramesside Period (19th/20th Dynasties)
Hieratic
(from the Greek) *hieratika* - “priestly writing”

More informal than Hieroglyphs

developing alongside the more formal hieroglyphic script (Protodynastic)

written in ink with a reed brush on papyrus, wood, stone or pottery ostraca
Demotic
• (from the Greek) *epistolographikē* - “letter writing”

• In use from 650 B.C. (26th Dynasty) to A.D. 452 (December 11th)

• Fell out of use as Greek became the administrative language of the country (Ptolemaic Period)

• Progressively less used in public life during Roman rule
The Roots of Hieroglyphs
Serekh with the name Narmer

Wash (name of the kneeling man)
- **Abydos** is one of the most important (late) Predynastic centers in Upper Egypt.

- The **Umm el-Qa’ab** is where many 1\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty kings constructed their tombs.

- Several have been identified as belonging to monarchs immediately preceding, or belonging to the beginning of, the 1\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty (Iri-Hor, Ka, Narmer, Horus Aha)
Umm el-Qa'ab
Tomb U-j (Abydos)
• **EGYPT**: purposes of trade (both local and extra-local). Tool of the state & pharaoh

• **MESOPOTAMIA**: Purposes of inventory (temple) and taxation
The Cartouche
- *Shenu* (Cartouche) - Denotes a royal name
- Came into use at the beginning of the 4th Dynasty
- Elongated version of the *shen* ring
• Serekh

• Predynastic - Old Kingdom (though used sporadically until Late Period)

• Niched or gated façade of a palace surmounted by the Horus falcon
The End