Structure & Function of Egyptian Hieroglyphics, ....and Survivals in Modern Arabic

Annual Lecture Series featuring

Richard Lobban
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Rhode Island College
Organized and moderated by
Dr. Souad T. Ali, CAIS Founding Chair

Wednesday, February 5th, 2020
4:30 PM
ASU Tempe Campus, Room: Wrigley L1 - 04
Free & open to all ASU students, faculty, staff & the public

This illustrated talk starts with basic linguistic principles and strategies of decipherment of transcription, transliteration and translation. With these topics understood it then turns to the structure and function of ancient hieroglyphs including the complexities of mono-consonantal, bi-consonantal, tri-consonantal and determinative glyphs, noting that hieroglyphs are neither syllabaries, not purely alphabetic as proven by the very large of glyphs. The talk will also illustrate that hieroglyphs existed in three distinct forms from standard (Middle Egyptian) hieroglyphics to the later cursive demotic and hieratic forms and ultimately in Coptic.

While phonetic equivalents are critical for pronunciation as in the famed case of the Rosetta Stone, it is critical to understand that the decipherment by Jean-François Champollion advanced understanding and comprehension because of his understanding of the cognatic Coptic language that descended from hieroglyphics.

Coptic uses alphabetic letters derived from the Greek alphabet with some phonetic adjustments and additions. The talk will illustrate that there are still strong correlations between Coptic and the more ancient forms of the language. Mostly undeciphered Meroitic in ancient Nubia uses some demotic letters but it is likely a Nilo-Saharan language so it is not cognatic with Coptic. Old Nubian in Medieval Christian Sudan uses letters similar to Coptic in its script, but it is also not a cognate language, yet its many religious texts are readable and bilingual dictionaries and lexicons do exist. The talk concludes with a view of the similarities, and important differences between the form and function of ancient hieroglyphs and modern Arabic. Examples of shared lexicons will be offered to stimulate further thinking in this domain of “linguistic archaeology” for an example or proof of glottochronology.

Sponsored by:

Council for Arabic and Islamic Studies
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Dr. Richard Lobban is an Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and former Chair at Rhode Island College. A lecturer at the Archaeological Institute of America and the Naval War College, he is an expert in Ancient Sudan and Ancient Egypt with a particular focus on Nubia. He has written scores of books, articles, reviews, chapters and several editions of the Historical Dictionary of Sudan, and co-edited Sudan’s Wars and Peace Agreements; Sudan Security; and The Historical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval Nubia. He also co-authored several other books including, Libya: History and Revolution. He is an early pioneer in Social Network modeling, Archeologist, Egyptologist, and Sudanist, Foreign Policy Expert, and Human Rights Activist. His publications also included: Historical dictionary of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau; Cape Verde: Crioulo colony to independent nation; Historical dictionary of Cape Verde; and Middle Eastern women and the invisible economy. Richard Lobban is co-Founder and former President of the Sudan Studies Association of North America. He received his PhD from Northwestern University.