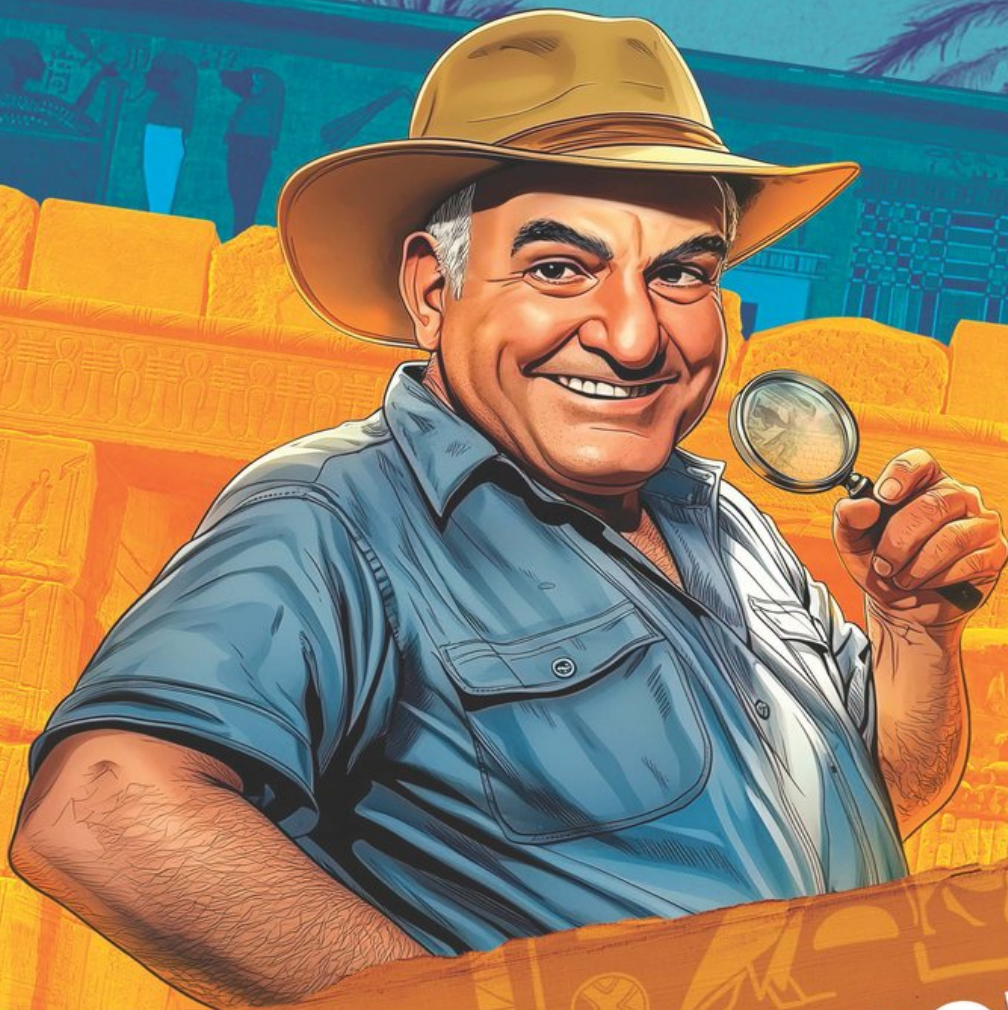




ASK AN ARCHAEOLOGIST

Zahi Hawass

NAHDET MISR



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Title: Ask an Archaeologist
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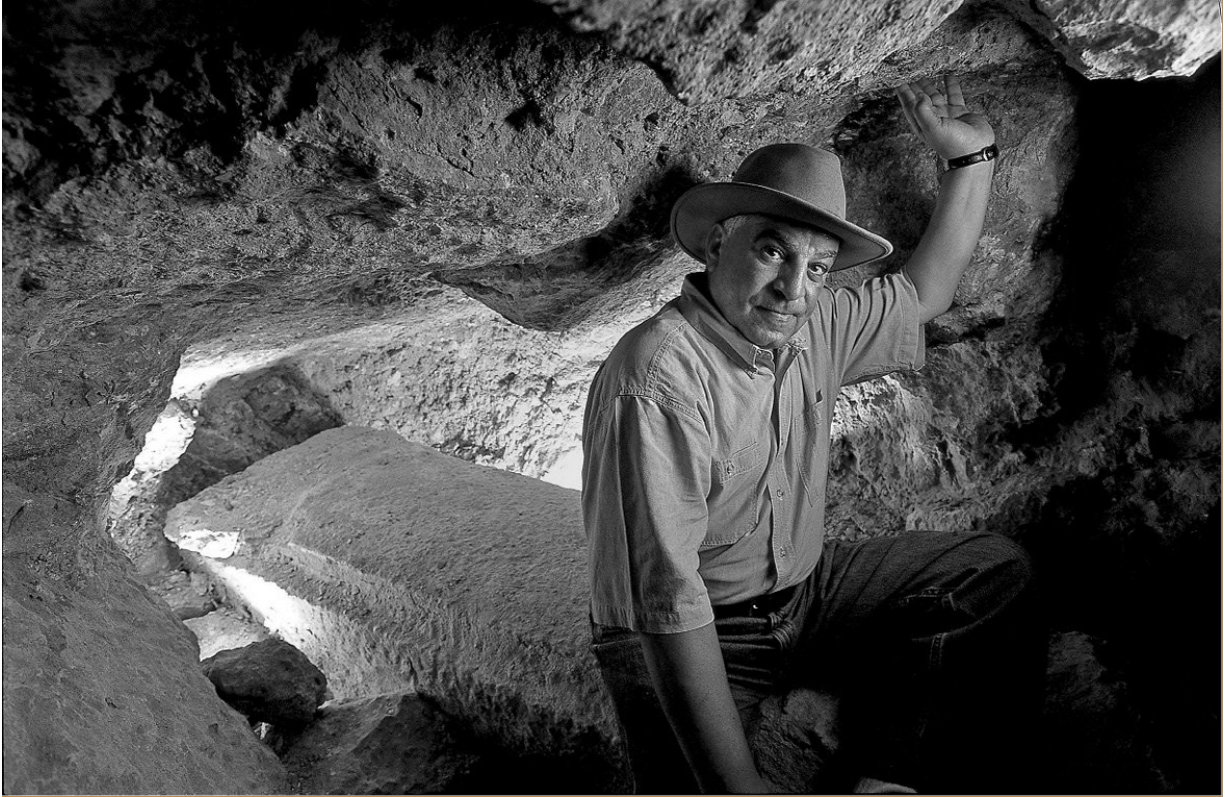
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Introduction



Everywhere I go, I am surrounded by questions from children and young people. They ask me about ancient Egyptian civilization, its secrets, and the mysteries that surround it which archaeologists seek to decipher. I have met thousands of children while giving my lectures both in and outside of Egypt. However, my presence among them in front of the great Egyptian monuments gives their questions a different elegance. I once met five harred youth in front of the pyramid of King Khufu. They asked me questions about King Khufu, the secrets of the Great Pyramid, and the mysteries surrounding it. They also asked me several questions about the Sphinx. They wanted to know whether there are basements and secrets hidden arer this huge statue that has the head of a human and the body of a lion. I also met another group of people with special needs in front of the Pyramid of Khufu. I entered the pyramid with them and went on an adventure that I will remember for the rest of my life.

I remember when a Japanese television program asked me to record a show with them in front of my excavations in Saqqara. They asked me to open a coffin inside a shaft about 20 meters deep. This coffin had been completely closed for more than four thousand years. I took my five-year-old granddaughter Jannah with me to Saqqara. Upon our arrival, we headed to the excavations at Gisir el-Mudir. I entered the tent and sat my granddaughter on my knees. I told her that I had uncovered many tombs and statues in the area and that I would be opening a coffin that had been closed for thousands of years.

She innocently asked me what the word “coffin” meant. I began to explain to her the meaning in a simple way that her mind could understand. I told her that our ancient ancestors believed that they would live again after death in another world. Therefore, they mummified their bodies and placed them in a box called a coffin. My granddaughter then asked me what the word “mummification” means. I explained that our ancient ancestors believed in the existence of another life lived after the one on Earth. They wanted to preserve the body of the deceased in good condition so that his soul would be able to find it when they wake up in this other world. They would wash the body, open the abdominal area, and take out everything in it except for the heart. They did not remove the heart because it is the center of life.

They would place many materials inside it to preserve it. The body would be wrapped in linen cloth, placed inside a wooden box called a coffin, and then the wooden coffin would be placed inside another stone coffin.

I told her, “I will now go down into the shaft, and you will be with me so you can see for yourself.” But she was afraid to go down with me. As we reached the shaft, I found Reis (overseer) Ammar, the chief worker, who was opening the lid of the coffin.

My granddaughter was upset about the depth of the shaft and how I was going to go down without anyone with me. I pointed to the basket and explained to her how I would sit in it so that the workers would help me go down through the rope into the shaft. I tried to

persuade her to go down, but she refused as she was afraid. I went down to the bottom of the shaft with the Japanese television cameramen, Reis Ammar, and two workers who had a machine they called "the devil".

I asked Reis Ammar why it was given that name, but he did not know. He told me, "This is what we inherited from our fathers." Then Reis Ammar and the workers began to lift the lid of the coffin, which weighed ten tons. They were able to lift it about half a meter up.

The moment had come when I would put my head inside the coffin to look inside it and observe the relics it contains. Before I laid down my head, I remembered the curse of the Pharaohs and what had happened to several archaeologists when they had opened tombs. Death was waiting for them! This is because the mummies contained invisible germs from the periods when those tombs and coffins were closed. These germs would infect the archaeologists and they would die of poisoning. Therefore, I asked Reis Ammar to leave the lid open a little so that the bad air could come out and the fresh air would come in.

Then came the moment when I put my head inside the coffin to examine what was inside. I found in front of me a wonderful mummy covered in gold. Next to the mummy was a stick covered in gold and a headrest. This was the oldest and most beautiful mummy I had ever found.

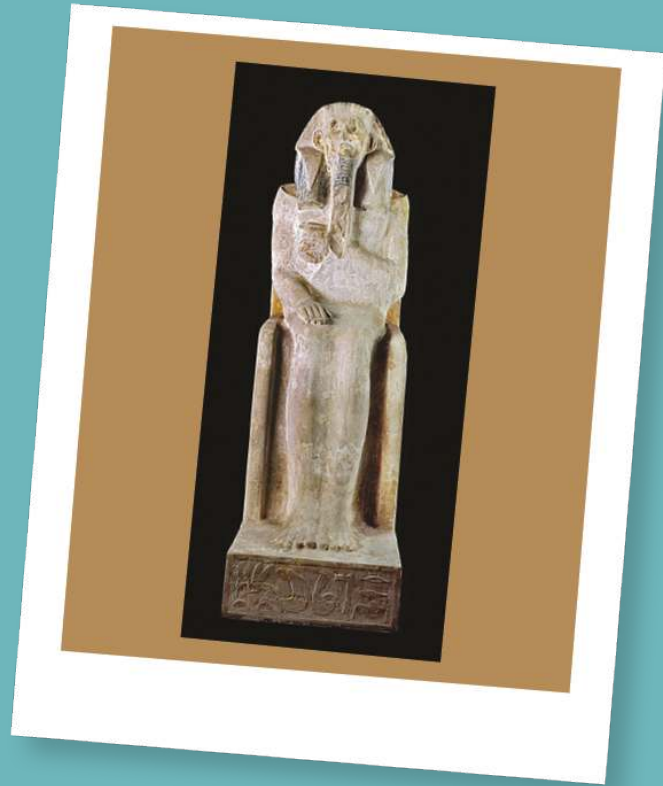


I spoke to the Japanese television program about this amazing discovery, a show that would enter every home in Japan. After that, I sat inside the basket again as the workers pulled the rope to the top of the shaft. I was eager to hug my granddaughter and tell her about this adventure. Because of this, I decided to answer the most famous questions on the minds of children and youth around the world about the great Egyptian civilization.

Zahi Hawass

How many pyramids are there in Egypt?

There are about 120 known pyramids in Egypt. The oldest pyramids date back to the Third Dynasty, which is about 4,900 years ago, and they continued to be built until the Eighteenth Dynasty. King Ahmose I was the last king to build a pyramid. He built it in Abydos in Upper Egypt. The first pyramid to be built was the pyramid of King Djoser. It was designed by the great Egyptian architect Imhotep. It was built in the form of a stepped pyramid consisting of six steps that were built for the first time from limestone. Imhotep built five levels inside this pyramid, measuring 2 km long. The ancient Egyptian vision of the world after death involved the king entering these tunnels to face demons until he met the god Osiris, the god of the arerworld, in the burial chamber.

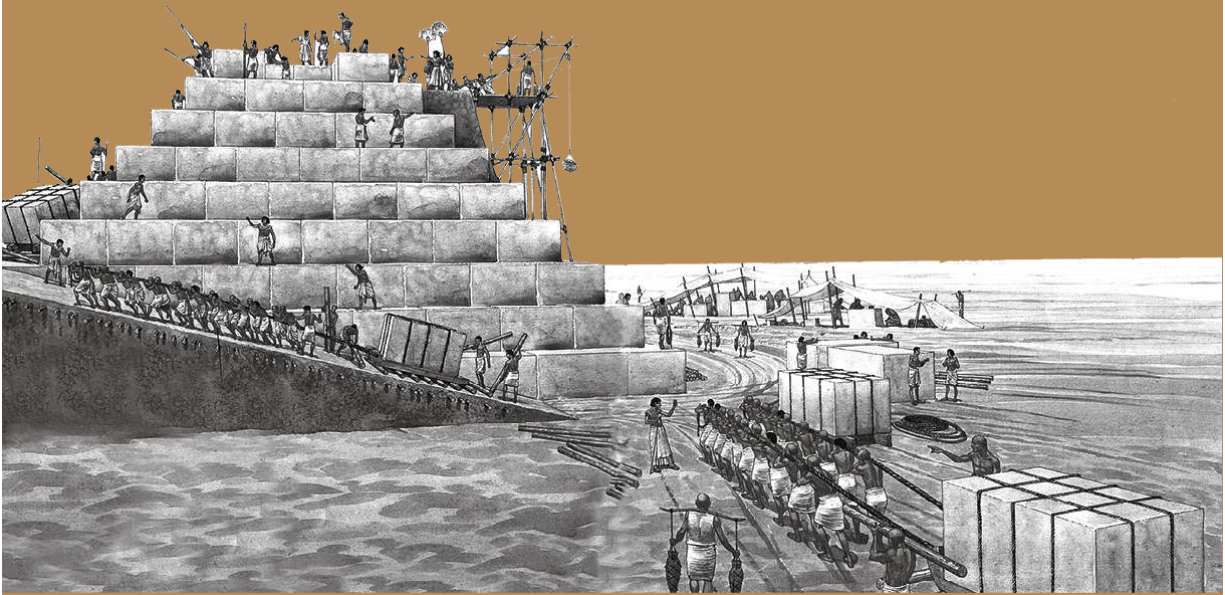


King Djoser



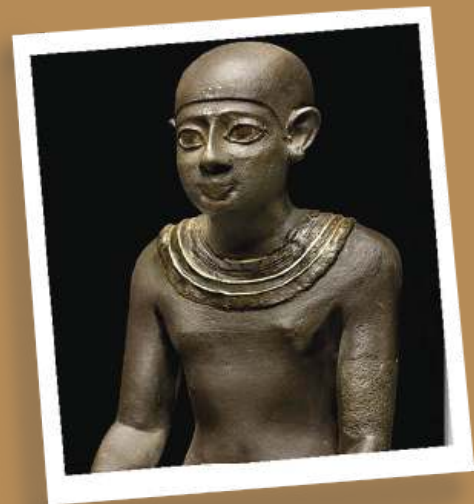
Who is the first architect in history?

A Portrait of the Construction Process of the Pyramids



Imhotep was the first engineer in the world to convert construction from mud brick to stone. He is thought to be the first person to build a ceiling and column of stone. Imhotep held the title of vizier, who was first in line after the king, the overseer of the great palace, and the head of all the king's affairs. He was also a wise man, an educated philosopher, and said to be the first person to practice medicine. Three thousand years

ago, the Egyptians considered him one of the symbols of wisdom and culture. Therefore, they used to recite his name before writing it on papyrus. He was deified in later times, and they considered him to be the son of the god Ptah, the god of artisans and industry. They also compared him to the god Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine.



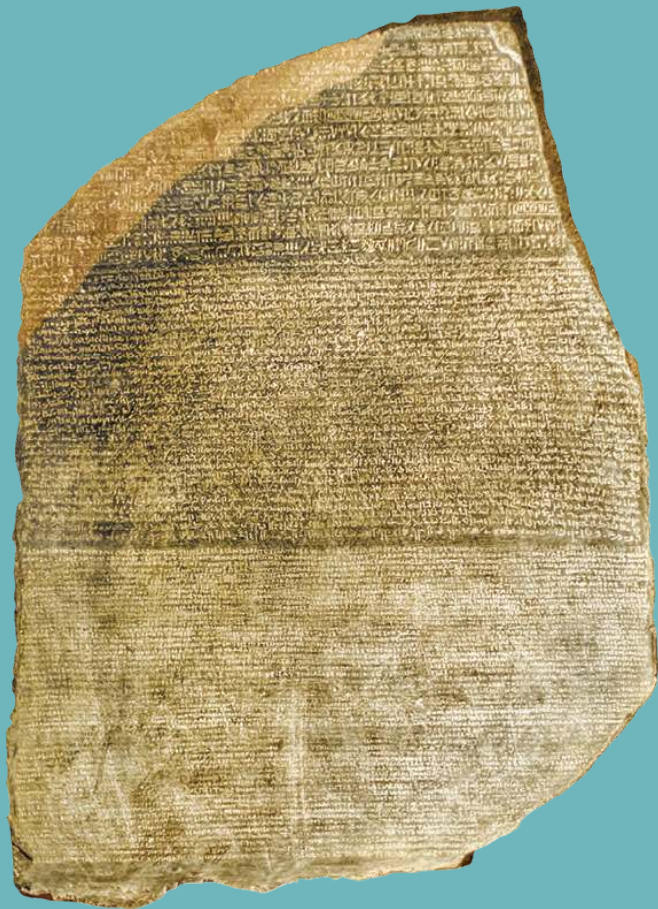
Imhotep

What is the importance of the Rosetta Stone?

In 1799, the Rosetta Stone was found by accident during the French expedition to Egypt. It is made of black basalt. It was discovered by a French soldier named Pierre François Bouchard while digging a trench around a fort in the city of Rosetta. In 1801, the stone was handed over to the British after defeating the French in the naval battle of Abu Qir. Several

lines are engraved on the front of the stone. Fourteen lines remain in hieroglyphic writing and thirty-two lines in demotic writing. There are also fifty-four lines below the stone in Greek writing. Many scholars sought to translate ancient Egyptian texts by comparing them to the Greek language until the French linguist Jean-François

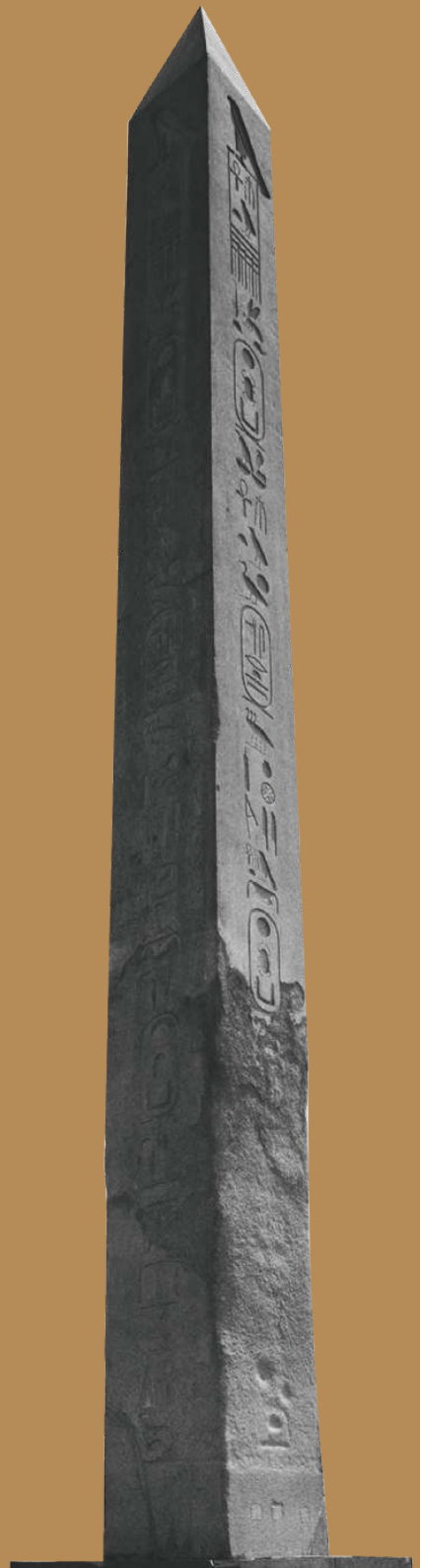
Rosetta Stone



Champollion was able to decipher the stone in 1822. It became clear that these inscriptions included a decision made by the Egyptian priests in 196 BCE for the Ptolemaic king, known as Ptolemy Epiphanes (Ptolemy V). They thanked the king's daughter for exempting their temples from taxes. Due to the ability to understand hieroglyphic writing and decipher its hieroglyphs, the world knew Egyptology. Today, the Rosetta Stone is in the British Museum.

Where was the first university in history established?

The first university in history is said to have been built in Egypt in the city of Iunu or On, which the Greeks called the city of Heliopolis. The city of On is currently located in the Ain Shams region. The Prophet of God, Joseph, is said to have studied at this university. He married the daughter of the priest of the city. She was called "Asenath". Many Greek philosophers also learned at the university in On. Thus, the city became a famous religious and cultural center. The doctrine that emerged from it explained how this universe came into existence as it was. It was a special place for those to worship the sun god Re. This city was considered the religious



capital of Egypt. Kings used to come to the university to receive education and knowledge before assuming power. This city and its university were the city of knowledge and scholars.



*Obelisk of
Senusret I*

knowledge and

Are there Egyptian cities that still bear Pharaonic names?

There are many Egyptian cities and villages that currently exist that have Pharaonic names. For example, the city of Aswan, which was called “Sunu” or “Swen”, meaning “market”, in ancient Egyptian times. Its name comes from the word for “trade” because it was a commercial center for caravans. The city of Dendera gets its modern name from the ancient name “Tantarer” which means “the land of Hathor, goddess of love and beauty”. The city of Akhmim was named Khentmenu, later Khmin, after the god Min, the Egyptian god of procreation and fertility. The city of Assiut was called “Sa-ut,” which means “guardian” in ancient Egyptian. This city was the guard of the borders of Upper Egypt. The city of Minya’s name was derived from an ancient word meaning port or shore. The city of Fayoum comes from “pa iim” meaning “the sea” or “lake”. The Saqqara region is named in reference to the ancient deity Sokar. The city of Damanhur was named “Demi-en-Hor”, meaning the town of the god Horus.

Nile in Aswan



What was the name of Egypt in the Pharaonic era?

Our ancient ancestors called the land of Egypt “Kemet”, which means “black land” because of the black color of the soil. Pharaohs also gave Egypt the name Tawy, meaning “the two lands”. This was referring to the land of Upper Egypt, which the Pharaohs knew as “Ta Shemau”, and the land of Lower Egypt, which they called “Ta mehu”.

There is a record of a letter sent by a king from Canaan to the king of Egypt; it involved the word “Mato Misri”, meaning “the land of Egypt”. The name of Egypt was also found in foreign texts. The Greeks used the word “Egyptus” to refer to the Nile and the land of the Nile. The Greek name “Egyptus” is believed to be a modification of the Egyptian name “Hut-ka-Ptah”, meaning “the land of the god Ptah, god of Memphis”.



The Map of Egypt The word “Kemmet” used to refer to Egypt in Hieroglyphs



Part of the Pyramid Texts at the Egyptian Museum

What do we know about the ancient Egyptian writing?

The ancient Egyptian language consists of three writings. The first is the hieroglyphic writing, meaning the sacred script. This is the writing used on tombs and temples. The second is the hieratic writing, meaning the priestly writing. This is the script for correspondence, letters, and writing on papyrus. The third writing is the demotic writing, meaning the common script. In other words, the writing that is used by the general public. The Egyptian language was originally written in a pictorial form, meaning that it expressed

everything by drawing it. Then, they added signs that served the purpose of phonetic syllables. These signs could indicate a one, two or three letter phonetic syllable, and the number of letters was 24.