

Decipherment

In philology, **decipherment** is the discovery of the meaning of texts written in ancient or obscure languages or scripts.^[1] Decipherment in cryptography refers to decryption.^[2] The term is used sardonically in everyday language to describe attempts to read poor handwriting.^[3] In genetics, decipherment is the successful attempt to understand DNA, which is viewed metaphorically as a text containing word-like units.^[4] Throughout science the term decipherment is synonymous with the understanding of biological and chemical phenomena.

Contents

Ancient languages

Decipherers

See also

Deciphered scripts

Undeciphered scripts

Undeciphered texts

References

Ancient languages

In many cases, a multilingual artifact is necessary to facilitate decipherment, the Rosetta Stone being the classic example. Statistical techniques provide another pathway to decipherment, as does the analysis of modern languages derived from ancient languages in which undeciphered texts are written. Archaeological and historical information is helpful in verifying hypothesized decipherments.

Decipherers

Name of scholar	Script deciphered
<u>Magnus Celsius</u>	<u>Staveless Runes</u>
<u>Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík</u>	<u>Cipher runes</u>
<u>Jean-François Champollion</u>	<u>Egyptian Hieroglyphs</u>
<u>Georg Friedrich Grotefend</u> <u>Eugène Burnouf</u> , and <u>Henry Rawlinson</u>	<u>Old Persian Cuneiform</u>
<u>James Prinsep</u>	<u>Brahmi</u> , <u>Kharosthi</u>
<u>Edward Hincks</u>	<u>Mesopotamian Cuneiform</u>
<u>Bedřich Hrozný</u>	<u>Hittite Cuneiform</u>
<u>Vilhelm Thomsen</u>	<u>Old Turkic</u>
<u>George Smith</u> and <u>Samuel Birch</u> , et al. ^[5]	<u>Cypriot syllabary</u>
<u>Hans Bauer</u> and <u>Édouard Paul Dhorme</u> ^[6]	<u>Ugaritic alphabet</u>
<u>Wang Yirong</u> , <u>Liu E</u> , and <u>Sūn Yíràng</u> , et al.	<u>Oracle Bone script</u>
<u>Michael Ventris</u> , <u>John Chadwick</u> , and <u>Alice Kober</u>	<u>Linear B</u>
<u>Yuri Knorozov</u> and <u>Tatiana Proskouriakof</u> , et al.	<u>Maya</u>
<u>Jan-Olof Tjäder</u>	""Enlarged opening script"" of <u>Ravenna</u> (variant of the <u>Latin alphabet</u>)
<u>Zaza Alexidze</u>	<u>Caucasian Albanian alphabet</u>

See also

Deciphered scripts

- Cuneiform
- Egyptian hieroglyphs
- Kharoshthi
- Linear B
- Mayan
- Staveless Runes
- Cypriot Syllabary

Undeciphered scripts

- Rongorongo
- Indus script
- Cretan hieroglyphs
- Linear A
- Byblos syllabary
- Linear Elamite
- Cypro-Minoan syllabary
- Espanca

Undeciphered texts

- Phaistos Disc
- Rohonc Codex
- Voynich Manuscript

References

1. Trask, R.L (2000). *The Dictionary of Historical and Comparative Linguistics* Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, p. 82 ("The process of determining the relation between an extinct and unknown writing system and the language it represents. Strictly, decipherment is the elucidation of the *script*—that is, determining the values of the written characters")
2. Vaudenay, Serge (2006). *A Classical Introduction to Cryptography* Springer, p.3. ("Action to transform a ciphertext into a plaintext by an *authorized party* [emphasis added]")
3. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/decipherment>
4. Snustad, D. Peter, et al. (2016). *Principles of Genetics* Wiley, p.302
5. <http://lila.sns.it/mnamon/index.php?page=Scrittura&id=4&lang=en>
6. "Anatomy of a Decipherment",
<http://images.librarywisc.edu/WI/EFacs/transactions/WT1966/reference/wi.wt1966.adcorre.pdf>

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