



Kings & Queens of Britain

or

The General History of Love

Chapter One

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Chapter 1 - King He Who Saw The Abyss c. 2750 BCE



The first male monarch known to have affected us here in the British Isles and Ireland lived some 4700 years ago and some 4000 miles away beside the shores of the Persian Gulf (see map in illustrations).

He is 'He Who Saw the Abyss', sometimes shown in ancient carvings squeezing a pair of live lions under his arms, as in the inset picture here. A man of many names, he was also called Gilgamesh, probably meaning Heroic Young Ancestor, and unsurprisingly, given the lions, he was also called Master of Animals.

We knew nothing about him until 1872 when a scholar "jumped up and rushed about the room in a great state of excitement and to the astonishment of those present began to undress himself." The scholar was George Smith, born in 1840 in Chelsea, who left school at fourteen to be apprenticed to a bank-note engraver in Bolt Court off Fleet Street.

The place of his Eureka! moment was the 2nd-floor of the British Museum where lighting was poor. It was a November day, the sun wasn't out for long, if it was out at all, and window-panes were dimmed by London smog. The Director of the British Museum was reluctant to risk setting fire to the nation's treasures by installing that new invention 'electric' lighting.

People everywhere were trying to find sources. In November 1872 the businessman Heinrich Schliemann, born in Mecklenburg-Schwerin in 1822, was in the 3rd year of an effort to find the 'source' of the Troy mentioned in the *Iliad* of Homer.

November 1872 was thirteen years to the month since Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, source-book to end all source-books.

And November 1872 was a year, to the month, since a man trying to find the source of the Nile met Henry Stanley, Welsh-born reporter for the *New York Herald*, at Ijiji near Lake Tanganyika in (today's) Tanzania: the occasion when Stanley said "Dr Livingstone, *I presume*" though they probably had the only two white (or brick-red) faces in 365,000 square miles south of the Equator.

Livingstone, of Blantyre, Scotland, was fifty-nine in November 1871 and in the seventh year of his search for the source of the Nile. He was a Christian missionary and widower with six children he'd left behind him in Scotland and was hoping to make himself famous enough to succeed in organising a European suppression of the then Arab-Swahili African slave trade.

He failed in everything, failed to find the source of the Nile, failed to suppress the slave trade, and the white Victorian public loved him for trying. He was attempting, as they saw it, to bring 'civilisation' to 'Darkest Africa'. The Nile's source is at the base of Mount Kikizi in Burundi, where the White Nile rises, 'white' because of the clay it sweeps along.

This was proved in 1937 by Burkhart Waldecker of North Rhine-Westphalia, though very likely locals knew it all along.

LIONS

The life of David Livingstone remains astonishing. The second son of seven children, he was put to work twelve hours a day six days a week in Lanarkshire at the age of ten in 1823 to help the family budget. He was a 'piecer', a child tying broken cotton threads on the spinning machines in a factory.

It was eleven years before British tax-payers bought out British owners of slaves and forty years before the US Congress stopped slave ownership.

“The noise was what impressed me most” said another boy who became a ‘piecer’ at the age of ten. “Clatter, rattle, bang, the swish of thrusting levers and the crowding of hundreds of men, women and children at their work. Long rows of huge spinning-frames, with thousands of whirling spindles, slid forward several feet, paused and then slid smoothly back again, continuing the process unceasingly hour after hour while cotton became yarn and yarn changed to weaving material.

Often, he said, “the threads on the spindles broke as they were stretched and twisted and spun. These broken ends had to be instantly repaired; the piecer ran forward and joined them swiftly, with a deft touch that is an art of its own.” Livingstone and a few other boys nonetheless got themselves to a local school every day before work from 6am-8am and added Sunday School to that on their day off.

Amazingly Livingstone reached Uni, in Glasgow, at the age of twenty-three, and studying there and in London acquired midwifery and Greek and other subjects. In the early 1840s he went to the “ vast plains to the north of [Bechuanaland](#)” (Botswana now) “where he glimpsed the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary had ever been” and began to preach.

Today Botswana is identified as the oldest continuous African democracy with the lowest perceived corruption, and the current guess (2020 CE) is that it’s where humanity in its modern physical form evolved. The Garden of Eden, as you might say. There are 75,000 year old drawings in caves, so perhaps it’s where art evolved too.

The significance for us, though, just now, of Livingstone going to Botswana in the early 1840s is that he had an experience

that explains why King He Who Saw the Abyss had lions clasped to his sides on carvings him, lions still present on the coat-of-arms of Elizabeth II.

It turns out that the first known useful function of a male monarch in Asia and Africa, was to fend off lion, whether it was up by the Persian Gulf at latitude 26° , where King He Who Saw the Abyss, 'Master of Animals', ruled c.2700 BCE, or below the Equator at latitude -24° , where Livingstone was a missionary c.1840 CE.

Village elders complained to Livingstone that "The lion, the lord of the night, kills our cattle and sheep even in the daytime". Livingstone felt that if with his European gun he could kill one lion other lions would take it as a warning and leave the villagers and their livestock alone, but he was weaker or less lucky than King He Who Saw the Abyss clasping lions at latitude 26°

"Seeing a large lion [Livingstone] fired his gun, but the animal was not sufficiently injured to prevent it from attacking him while [he was] re-loading, seriously wounding his left arm." The broken bone was set with the help of the daughter of another Christian missionary's daughter, but though it "bonded strongly, enabling him to shoot and lift heavy weights" he suffered pain from the lion for the rest of his life and couldn't lift the arm higher than his shoulder.

NINEVEH

While Livingstone looked for the source of the Nile, and taught Christianity as a settled matter, the "Word of God", others looked for sources of the Bible. Some no doubt looked because they suspected that the Hebrew *TaNakh*, the Greek *Old Testament*, and the Arabic *Quran* were by human beings as fallible as ourselves.

Others looked because they hoped to persuade gathering numbers of sceptics that recent propositions by astronomers and geologists didn't invalidate the texts. Particularly, didn't invalidate the earliest parts of the texts, the **בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרֵא** or *Nevi'im*, the "In the beginning" of *Genesis*.

Livingstone himself delighted in the new European and American sciences and expected they could be reconciled with the longer-standing faiths. Travellers from other continents moving through Asia kept a finger on the relevant pages of their *TaNakh*, their *Old* and *New Testaments*, their *Quran*, and watched for real place-names on earth that echoed the written verses they so admired and trusted..

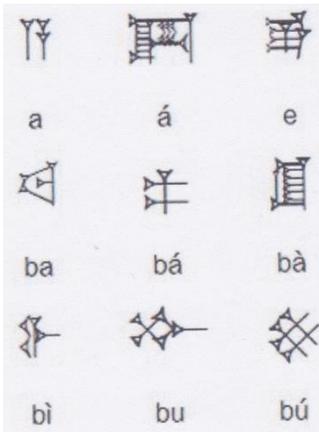
A winding road through Persia and Iraq taken by European wanderers of ethnic Asian background led to the identification of King He Who Saw the Abyss and wardrobe malfunction. In the year 1170 CE, the year Thomas à Becket was murdered in England, Benjamin from Tudela in Spanish Navarre, **בִּנְיָמִין מֵטוּדֵלָה** in his own language, **بنيامين التطيلي** in Arabic, was shown the supposed site of Nineveh, a legendary metropolis of the Bible.

It was a mound beside the Tigris river in the part of Iraq recently reduced to new heaps of rubble by ISIS. At much the same time as Benjamin another Jewish-descended traveller, Petachia ben Yakov of Regensburg in Bavaria, businessman and rabbi, was shown the mound and told the same story, that it was Nineveh.

During the middle season of western Europe, 400s CE-early 1400s CE, a lot of Christian scholars were so gifted that they could read Jewish and Arabic writings and they knew of the mound visits by Benjamin of Tudela and Petachia of Bavaria: they knew there had historically been a Nineveh. But most people didn't know. 'Nineveh' could have been Atlantis.

Then in the 1760s a Christian hailing from the mouth of the Elbe in Germany saw the mound while wandering away from an Arabian exploration financed by a King of Denmark. Solitary European diplomats, spies, businessmen, wanderers out of Europe of all sorts, were by then forever coming across semi-buried statuary and unreadable inscriptions in Egypt and in Asia.

“I met a traveller from an antique land, who said two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert. . . .” wrote Shelley in 1818 about such encounters. The Christian from the Elbe, Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815), visited Persepolis across the water from the Arabian Peninsula when its remains were more perfect than now, and in 1778 published copies of inscriptions he saw there.



People able to read, and able to afford books, stared at his reproductions of the marks on the walls of Persepolis and were baffled.:

GODS

The topography of God’s whole Country was becoming clearer.

Eleven years after the publication of Niebuhr’s Persepolis inscriptions in books paid for by Christian VII of Denmark, brother-in-law of George III of Britain and Ireland, French Revolutionaries sought to abolish Christianity.

Angry that the Christian Church was the largest landowner in their country, and so far from paying taxes towards the expenses of the state collected taxes from everyone except the nobility and royalty, Revolutionaries participating in the National Convention in the theatre of the Tuileries palace in Paris declared Christianity over in France in 1793 after 1,297 years.

One Revolutionary of Spanish descent, Antoine-Francois Momoro (1756-1794), urged that former Catholic congregations be obliged to worship “Reason”, “the perfection of mankind through the attainment of Truth and Liberty”, but without “idols” since “Liberty, reason, truth are only abstract beings. They are not gods, for properly speaking, they are part of ourselves.”

Presumably he suspected that human authorship, and therefore frailty of opinion and fact, underlay the *Old* and *New Testaments*. The Cult or Church of Reason lasted until 1802 when Napoleon re-imposed the Roman communion as the official religion of France. Two years later Beethoven lost all patience with Napoleon, cutting his name out of the *Eroica* symphony for betraying a brave new world.

Niebuhr of Germany, financed by the King of Denmark, visited Mosul, 900 miles up the Tigris from Persepolis. He wrote: "I did not learn that I was at [a] remarkable a spot [until] they showed me a village on a great hill, which they call Nunia, and a mosque, in which the prophet Jonah was buried. Another hill in this district is called Kalla Nunia, or the Castle of Nineveh..."

Nineveh... everyone raised in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula in the heyday of the *TaNakb*, the *Nevi'im* and the *Old* and *New Testaments*, and everyone born of European extraction in the Americas after the 1490s, or receiving a missionary education in the Americas, knew of 'NINIVEH!' when locals showed Kalla Nunia and the castle beside the upper Tigris to Niebuhr in the 1760s.

Nineveh! It had become one of those place-names - like Babel and Babylon and Sheba and Ur - which shone fondly, lifelong, in the heads of adults who when they were children and seated cross-legged on the floor had heard recounted on every continent by the teachers of the *TaNakb* and the *Old* and *New Testaments* and the *Quran* the tale of Jonah and the big fish – Jonah and the whale, as

it became in English. Jonah, who was sent to Nineveh to teach the word of God.

Now dated in its final written form to perhaps the 530s BCE, the Jonah story, a thread which will lead us to King He Who Saw the Abyss, the first king to influence Britain and Ireland, begins along the Dead Sea Transform, modern term for the tectonic fault between Arabia and Africa that includes the valley of the Jordan, ancient Judah and Israel, recent Palestine, and modern Israel.

We learn, in the *TaNaKh* of the Hebrew writers c.530s BCE, that Jonah worships a god of the Dead Sea Transform called Shaddai, possibly meaning “God of the Wilderness”. It’s made explicit in the Hebrew original that Jonah’s Shaddai isn’t a universal or sole god, but a local one along the Transform.

The fact, as we’ll see, is vital to the humour as well as the awe of the Jonah story in its earlier written version, but unluckily Christians pressing for monotheism for the most part failed to make this clear to non-Jewish people lacking experience of the original - with disastrous consequences it may be thought, as when in 1532 the Spanish soldiers of Pizzaro replaced Peruvian polytheism by the monotheism in which they themselves too fervently believed, forcing the population into servitude.

Devout readers of the Christian Bible in English in the 19th century tended to find “Almighty God” (universal deity) put in for ‘Shaddai’ (regional). The error is admitted in the *Holy Bible* of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, published by the Oxford University Press, (1995 edition), though only in a footnote. It hasn’t been corrected in the principal narrative.

NABU

Entranced listeners to the *TaNaKh* and the *Old* and *New Testaments* and the *Quran* have been hearing for 2,500 years that the god Shaddai appeared to Jonah, native of the Dead Sea Transform

kingdom of Samaria, telling him that he must go to Nineveh and upbraid the inhabitants for their loose morals.

Perhaps he was heading south at the time, on his way to the Yemen, a businessman among other travelling businessmen in search of the yellow gum of the Yemen, taken out from between the long thorns of repeatedly wounded myrrh trees for carrying back to Israel and selling to supplicants outside the Temples of Judah and Samaria for conversion into perfume for Shaddai to inhale.

If Jonah was a trader it would explain why the god took it for granted that he could afford to go to Nineveh, and would know how to get there. These details would matter to first audiences wanting to believe in trance-like pleasure and not wanting to be jolted by any obstacles to belief. First audiences will have known, for it was their neck of the world, and we can know by googling, that it would be a journey of 830 miles for Jonah to reach Nineveh.

Indeed, of over 1,000 miles if he happened to be well past the Sinai Peninsula and heading south when the god appeared to him. Jonah (“Why *me?*”) was being asked, therefore, to go an immense journey to the largest city on earth and tell its citizens and its presiding deity where they got off. In fact to tell the presiding deity where *she* got off.

For though the people of Nineveh had other gods, the principle deity on Sheep Hill in the assumed days of Jonah was Inanna (Ishtar), the goddess of desire, proud of her vulva and proud of her prowess in putting down anyone who kicked-off, her powers of attack symbolised by a lion with bared teeth that she used for a footstool.

Incense will have smoked deliciously night and day on the altar of Inanna/Ishtar in Nineveh. Another altar in the town, bless them, was for a god of writing, though the trade is so poor that surely the plumes of smoke of myrrh for the Nabu nostrils to

inhale were infrequent. Nabu was male by the time of the likely writing-down of Jonah's story in the 500s BCE, but those first audiences would have known that he was also female.

He had first been a goddess of grain, down south near the estuaries of the Tigris, and because it was believed along the Tigris and the Euphrates that writing had originated in flatlands near the Persian Gulf, for keeping tally of the grain harvest, s/he wore an ear of grain in the hat and carried a cut-reed pen and a damp clay tablet for writing the sums.

LADY ORNAMENT

Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, PwC, and the other leading UK firms currently enduring Big Flaw criticisms of their accounting practises, are accordingly - as auditors - the world's first writers. Early audiences of the tale of Jonah will have known about the first known *author*, as distinct from accountant, a worshipper of Nabu and, more importantly of Inanna called En-Hedu-An.

It means "Lady Ornament of Heaven", and she was the daughter c.2300 BCE of "True King" Sargon of Ur. Her father was terrifying. He began life as a gardener and possibly a cupbearer to his predecessor, and by violence became ruler of the towns of the Tigris and Euphrates a few centuries after the days of King He Who Saw the Abyss.

Sargon meaning "true king" (clearly propaganda for a usurper) imposed Lady Ornament on the town of Ur in the southern valleys as high priestess of Inanna, the Queen Lady Who Ascends into Heaven. Such was the political uproar in the valleys, thanks to her father, that "Lady Ornament" had to go on the run for a time and described the fact in a surviving song while for a day-job she was composing forty-two hymns praising Inanna.

She lived c.2200 BCE - undoubtedly lived, on 20th century archaeological evidence. We knew nothing about her in Britain and

Ireland until 1958 when a German scholar re-appraised finds made by a British archaeologist in 1927 at “Ur of the Chaldees” in Iraq’s far south. As it happens, in that year, 1958, I was seventeen, and I thought the world’s first-known author was Homer, or “the Homers” if it was a whole family of singers. taking the *Iliad* on tour round Asia and the Greek islands and the Peloponnese c.700s BCE.

I knew there were people, readers of the *TaNakb* and the *Old* and *New Testaments* and the *Quran*, who sincerely believed that the texts they loved preceded Homer by a long way, delivered by gods to prophets. But I didn’t myself suppose that. And now from 1958 there was an author who had lived 1,500 years before the estimated time of Homer! And her work was soon available in translation!

Not that I learned the news about her as early as 1958. It began to emerge for all of us in the general public only after cautions testing and double testing and triple testing by philologists and archaeologists and anthropologists and surfaced as a reliable fact in the 1970s and 1980s and is unchallenged, so far as I know, today.

JONAH

The nerve of Jonah’s god Shaddai! Collective indrawn breath by early audiences! ‘Jonah’ means “dove”, so it can be guessed that first audiences understood at once when they were told this was a story about a man called dove that they were to picture him a peaceable type, unlike the usual wrathful prophet. And they’ll have well understood that in going up against the Lady Ornament’s mistress Inanna he was being given an impossibly tough remit by Shaddai.

We’ll get to Inanna (Ishtar) later, in Chapter Two, where she’s the first reigning Queen to have a powerful impact on Britain and Ireland. But audiences in the 6th century BCE would have known

at once, with the naming of Nineveh, and the knowledge universal in Asia that was the presiding deity there, that this was a David and Goliath story.

A tale of chutzpah by god and human, little chaps against big. Nothing more satisfactory to the Chaplineque little guys of the incense trail along the western Asian Mediterranean shore, with their brief tiny kingdom of Judah and brief tiny kingdom of Israel, forever being sent flying by the boys from Egypt and Assyria, than to imagine dropping a stove on the head of their colossal heroine Inanna.

Hoboken against the whole of New York State. Nineveh – it can be proved today - was the largest city in the world, just when it seems likely the Jonah story was being written down. An imperceptible fishing village on the upper reaches of the Tigris when Lady Ornament was writing hymns c.2200 BCE, by c.700 BCE it had over 100,000 inhabitants covering 2.7 square miles of ground where Carsten Niebuhr would be shown Kalla Nunia and the “Castle of Nineveh”. It took until 1300 CE for London to have a comparable population.

Jerusalem, on the other hand, in the days when we are to suppose Jonah received his instructions, had at most 3,000 inhabitants. There would be a language problem too. He would have spoken Old Hebrew and Aramaic, like the first audiences listening to his story - and like Christ five centuries later - since they were the common tongues of the Dead Sea Transform.

But at Nineveh people spoke Akkadian, so how was he to make himself understood while reproving the monarch and the goddess? The endearing, the wonderful, thing about his story is that Jonah says to Shaddai that he won't do it. He heads, takes ship westward for Sardinia way in the west beyond Sicily, completely the opposite direction.

With nods of recognition, audiences will have seen a variation of the Samarra story, for the dove is flying to out-run destiny and won't succeed. Jonah sits on deck comfortably, putting 100 sea-miles behind him every day, only Shaddai sends a storm after him. The sailors cast lots to decide who aboard has aroused a god's wrath.

They rig the vote so that Jonah gets the blame. But then they can't quite bring themselves to throw him overboard. He says, do it anyway, I *know* I'm to blame. There's an instant calm. Over he goes, deckchair and all, and as he plunges down, down, into the glassy green the crew and remaining passengers see him sink into the mouth of a big fish, the whale in English translation.

ASHES

After days in its stomach it retches him up unharmed back on the Israeli shore.

This time, chastened, he sets off for Nineveh as ordered. He tells the inhabitants of Nineveh to repent, and they do. They fling away their fine clothes and get into the ill-sewn scratchy goat's-hair clothes of penitence, of the sort that he presumably is wearing.

Instead of grinding grey stibnite to make kohl for their eyes, and in place of pounding gold, silver, chromium oxide green, chromium hydroxide, ferric ferrocyanide, stannic oxide, titanium dioxide, iron oxide, carmine, ultramarine, and manganese violet to make nail-polish, they pour ashes from dead fires over their heads, and cease their games of love, and Shaddai, with no power to do it, far, far away in the Sinai, magnanimously decides against destroying Nineveh, its citizens, and its goddess.

Peering at Jonah with dull eyes, they thank him. Wonderful! Like "*Mr Smith Goes to Washington*". The sly wit of it, first audiences laughing aloud at a narrative so very improbable as to be, for a

while, entirely believable, and deeply cheering for listeners more accustomed in their daily life to a kicking than to favours.

What Jonah did afterwards we're not told. He's honoured in the *TaNaKb* and the *Quran* as a prophet: נביא (*nāvi'*) in Hebrew, Προφήτης (*prophētēs*) in Greek, from which English 'prophet', meaning spokesperson or predictor. Familiar people in the ancient Near East, the 'prophets', and surely in all societies.

One day, c.2700 BCE, King He Who Saw the Abyss heard about such a prophet, as George Smith found out at the British Museum in 1872 CE, when he leapt up from an ill-lit desk with excitement. Smith read that day, the first to know it for 2,484 years, how King He Who Saw the Abyss was told by a man in Bahrain about the first known prophet.

The laughter, the little nation self-mockery, of the first version of the Jonah story, seemingly written in the 500s BCE in Babylon and presumably well-appreciated by early followers of Christianity in Asia in the 1st century CE, drifted away out of sight when Christianity became a big-state belief in 380 CE.

1,500 years later, in the 19th century CE when Christianity had reached its maximum global influence and missionary Livingstone was looking for the springs of the Nile in Africa so that he might end a slave trade, Jonah remained a strong early prophet (a 'predicter') among other prophets ('predicters') in the *TaNaKb* and the *Quran*, but had become a greater 'predicter' among the followers of Christianity.

He had become a forerunner or 'type' of Christ, and laughter would be entirely inappropriate.

As Christ had spent three days in the grave, so Jonah had spent three days "in the belly of the whale". Teachers reading aloud from the *Gospel of Matthew* to audiences for the most part unable to read ancient Hebrew or Greek or Arabic or Latin heard that their chance of resurrection into immortality, Jesus of

Nazareth, had said he was on Earth to be “greater than Jonah”, for:

“The citizens of Nineveh actually *listened* to Jonah, and repented in goat-hair and ashes, and were forgiven their indiscipline, but almost no-one will listen to me, almost no-one will repent. The wrath is coming...” . I paraphrase.

THE HANDWRITING OF THE SUN

Nineveh... Jonah... Jesus...transfixing for the British and their fellow islanders in the 19th century CE. There was a lot of work to be done, though, by the linguists of the world before Smith could take his ease in the ancient world and start learning in his spare time in his teens in the 1850s how to translate the strange signs that had come out of Persia and Iraq - climaxing in his translation of one inscription in 1872 and the re-emergence, blinking in the sunlight after 4,500 years in the rubble, of the King He Who Saw the Abyss.

By 1822, and thanks to a short-lived child prodigy, Champollion, the French felt they had become quite the best in the world at solving mysteries about writing. Their confidence began with the Revolution and its resulting military culture. Mounted on knackered horses and resistant donkeys, and no doubt riding badly, staring wildly around, and frequently falling off like a disorderly mockery of jingling cavalry, a ‘wing’ of French interpreters, artists, and linguists accompanied an attempt by Napoleon, against local resistance, to capture Egypt and Syria for the French Revolution between 1798-1801.

The scholars were awed by the ancient African carvers and their strange forms of writing along the buildings beside the Nile. ‘Hieroglyphs’, Greeks told them: ‘sacred carvings’. The heat-struck awe-struck scholars, faces sunburn red, forever thirsty, had seen the pretty shapes indoors in tiny letterpress in Paris in comfort in learned journals, and even seen them copied onto great

two-dimensional canvases on Egyptian themes at art-galleries when doors weren't shut by the guillotine, but no-one knew for sure what the signs meant.

Now they saw the beautiful stylised pictures cut so deeply into the granite of obelisks along the Nile that the sun itself seems to write the words into the stone with the ink of shadows. Out of the mingled conquest and scholarship came the short career of Jean-François Champollion of Figeac in Occitania, on one of the trails to Compostela.

Born in 1790, the seventh of seven children of a poor book-dealer, he started with two birth-languages, possibly three, the Occitan itself, the metropolitan French of Paris and presumably nearby Spanish. To these by the age of fifteen, his studies paid for by a generous and hard-working elder brother, he was able to add Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Ethiopic, Arabic, Syriac, Chaldean, and Coptic.

When he was eleven, word of his skills reached Joseph Fourier (1768-1830), orphaned at nine, French Revolutionary, predictor of the greenhouse effect, cultural adviser to Napoleon on the Egyptian expedition of 1798. They were bright, that generation, brighter than me! Shown the wide road by Fourier, Champollion of the eleven languages (at least!) lent his packed head to a joyous task for the early 19th century CE, the interpretation of the beautiful marks of Egypt.

In 1822 Jean-François Champollion scooped the world of European and American philology with a talk that came nearer yet than any other to deciphering the handwriting of the sun. Speaking at the *Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres* in its offices at the *Institut de France*, founded on the Left Bank of the Seine by French Revolutionaries in 1795, he told of pharaohs and their names and was “congratulated by an amazed audience.”

A crater was named in memory of him on the far side of the Moon. He is buried at Père Lachaise.

WEDGES

In 1823, a year after his famous lecture on ancient African writing, Champollion helped with ancient Asian writing, the jagged signs Carsten Niebuhr had found at Persepolis in the 1760s. 'Wedges', people called them, or when wishing to be more impressive 'cuneiform' in Latin, because they were fat at one end and pointed at the other, like nails or wedges.

The ancient Asian signs were entirely different to ancient African writing. Champollion, aged thirty-four and with only eight years to go before he died of a stroke in Paris aged forty-one, pointed out that a pot kept in Paris in the Rue de Richelieu in the 1st Arrondissement near the Paris Stock Exchange had both Egyptian and Persian writing on it and might help in the battle to read the wedges. Then he went back to the hieroglyphs.

A Dane, three Germans, another Occitanian from near the Pyrenees, a Norwegian, a Frenchman, an Irishman from the County Cork, and three Englishmen, took up the struggle to read - with a little help at exactly the right moment from Champollion in 1824 - the wedges employed for writing on the other side of the Dead Sea Transform from the hieroglyphs.

Close-up, the marks do look like drawings of modern round-head steel nails in a builders' catalogue. But even more closely, archaeologists found, they resembled long objects of hardened clay with their heads coloured to form patterns which used to be driven into the mud-brick walls of temples along the Euphrates and Tigris from c.3,000 BCE, to brighten the temples' appearance.

Wedge-marks intricately angled followed one-another in orderly procession on walls and also, archaeologists found, on small hand-held or hand-sized objects made of the same river clay

as the decorations in temple walls. There was no difficulty guessing what was used to make the marks: chisels for stone surfaces, and reeds from the reed-beds of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. When stripped and shortened they produced a triangular point: the wedge.

The amazing thing if you look closely at the wandering bird's-foot trails of the wedges, as anyone can do today at the showcases of the BM and other leading institutions worldwide, when there's no lockdown, is that *anyone ever* learned to read such uninformative marks. Yet they did. It took the collective efforts of a hundred and eighty years, from 1677 when a Yorkshireman spotted one clue, to 1857.

In 1857 at a 'blind tasting', but of refined language rather than fine wine, a German enthusiast from Hamburg, an Irishman from Cork, a man from Oxfordshire, and a man from Dorset, proved by examining separately in the same place copies of an inscription newly unearthed, and therefore unknown to them all, that there was at last near-perfect agreement between them on how to read wedge.

1857 was the year of the First War of Independence by Indians against exploitation by the City of London. And while we're at it, 1857 was

- The year a French company, the *Compagnie Generale des Omnibus de Londres*, began to organise the previously separate small horse-drawn London bus enterprises.
- The year the Fort Tejon earthquake north of Los Angeles below Monterey, magnitude 7.9, ruptured 225 miles of the San Andreas Fault.
- The year the French and British Empires forced China into opium-dependency in a 'trade deal'.

- The year of the largest-ever slave sale in US history, the “Weeping Time Auction” in the state of Georgia.
- The year the US Supreme Court, sixty-eight year old, ruled that blacks were not citizens and the nation’s slaves could not use the Courts to sue for freedom.
- The year Queen Victoria opened the V & A and chose Ottawa to be the capital of Canada.
- The 4th year during which George Smith, apprentice engraver and teenager, was learning wedge lore at the BM, fifteen years before he performed the translation in the Museum in
- 1872 that cause him to rip off his clothes.

“Kings & Queens” to be continued & concluded during 2020