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The Future of Ancient Texts

Often acclaimed as the most important event in the history of Egyptology, the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs in 1822 accelerated research on one of the longest surviving writing systems in human history. Champollion's early explorations not only provided the intellectual and methodological basis with which we approach Egyptology today; some of the issues he encountered are still topical and largely determine how we value text-based publications today. Two centuries of research have dramatically increased our understanding of Egyptian written culture. Yet, many of Champollion's frustrations and hindrances are still pertinent; the persistent lack of accurate and reliable copies, accessibility to original text material and the need for sign lists.

The presentation will explore how the experiences and values of an early 19th century pioneer scholar can be relevant today. Using examples from the speaker's own research, current methodological issues will be considered with a historical perspective. The topics covered relate to text transmission and copying processes, epigraphy as a means to preserve and disseminate a text, and the corpus of hieroglyphs.