Many very imposing statues and parts of the walls were brought by Layard to the British Museum and by Botta to the Louvre. It was evident that a great civilization had been unearthed. The splendor of the palaces and the excellence of the works of art showed that this had indeed been the center of an empire. The real understanding of what was found required a reading of the inscriptions on the various monuments. Along with the development of excavation, there had been proceeding the deciphering of these inscriptions. As they came to be understood, the discoveries took on more meaning and assumed far greater importance than before.

We must turn our attention to this other movement, the movement of decipherment of the language. This had its start not in connection with the discoveries in Mesopotamia, but in connection with the material that had stood in the open air in Persia, to which we have already referred. It was noticed that the inscriptions there in the wedge shaped characters were often found in three groups. These three groups had very similar characters upon them, but yet it was possible to see that they were distinct types of inscriptions. For instance, when there were three groups like this, one group had only a comparatively few characters which were frequently repeated on it. A second group had about a hundred different characters, while a third group had several hundred characters that occurred. Often three inscriptions of about the same length in the three different types of arrangements of characters were found. It was natural to suppose that the same inscription was being made in three different languages, but there was no way to tell what the languages were or what the subject of the inscriptions might be. The type of inscription that had the fewest characters was naturally the first to be studied.

A young German, Georg Frederich Grotefend, a classical