

# Egypt's place in history: The Royal papyrus

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**Aegyptens  
Stelle in der Weltgeschichte.**

Geschichtliche Untersuchung  
in  
fünf Büchern

von

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## Abstract

*Description and history of the Royal Canon of Turin in Bunsen's examination of all the king lists of Egypt. Essentially the exact same text, albeit further expanded in the English editions.*

Text from the 1867 English edition.

## Source

Bunsen, Christian C. J. 1845. *Aegyptens stelle in der Weltgeschichte: Geschichtliche Untersuchung in fünf Büchern*. Vol. 1. Hamburg: F. Perthes. 82–87

Bunsen, Christian C. J. 1848. *Egypt's place in Universal History: a historical investigation in five books*. Vol. 1. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans. pp. 50–56

Bunsen, Christian C. J. 1867. *Egypt's place in Universal History: a historical investigation in five books*. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. London: Longmans, Green, and Co. pp. 63–68

## III. THE ROYAL PAPYRUS.

(*Lepsius's Records*, Pl. III— VI.)

The French Consul-General Drovetti, celebrated since the days of Napoleon for his love for Egyptian art, brought to Europe a roll of Papyrus, which, with the rest of that splendid collection despised by the Bourbons, fell to the lot of the Turin Museum. It lay there neglected as a mere mass of illegible fragments until discovered by Champollion in 1824, who inserted a notice of it in a scientific Journal.<sup>1</sup> He saw at once that this Papyrus contained a List of royal Egyptian Dynasties, and undertook to arrange the principal fragments, passing over those of smaller dimensions. Seyffarth in 1826 found this MS. to be 6 feet long by 14 inches in height, and arranged in 12 columns, each of which contains from 26 to 30 lines, and almost as many names of Kings. There were vestiges of more than 200 Kings, and from the number of unconnected fragments there must have been at least 250. On the back were calculations in which the name of Ramses occasionally occurs. This circumstance would seem to establish the 19th Dynasty, or the first epoch of the New Empire, as the date of the compilation. Several other considerations tend also to this conclusion. No single name of the 18th or 19th, much less of any later Dynasty, occurs in the List. The Hieratic character however is so precisely the same as that of the other MSS., which, from their superscription or subscription, clearly belong to that epoch, that we cannot do otherwise than adopt it, even upon palaeographical grounds — grounds which are at least as good as those familiarly applied to Greek and Latin MSS.

To Seyffarth belongs the signal merit (and we have a double pleasure in admitting it, considering as we do his other attempts in the department of Egyptian research to be completely abortive) of having spared no pains in restoring the invaluable MS. in a durable manner, and in reconstructing with scrupulous fidelity, or at least in securing, the smaller pieces which Champollion had thrown aside.

This fact was communicated by the curators of that collection to Lepsius when engaged in studying those treasures in 1835. He took an accurate and complete copy of the whole. Unfortunately however, some portions of it, which Champollion had both seen and copied, and which Salvolini published after his death, were no longer to be found. In the year 1838 he obtained an insight into the labours of Champollion at Paris, by the kindness of his brother, and a communication of Seyffarth's arrangement of the fragments, through Mr. Samuel Birch of the British Museum. He found that both those scholars had in reality made the same arrangement, in 12 pieces. When in the year 1840, Lepsius's discovery of the 12th Dynasty of Manetho in that Papyrus rendered it important to have an exact copy of that one line

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<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin Universel*, Nov. 6, 1824.

of the fragment in which there was a different reading in Salvolini and Champollion — he undertook a second journey to Turin expressly for the purpose of dissipating even the shadow of a doubt as to the actual state of the Record. His present publication of the fragments is therefore as scrupulous and correct a copy as has ever yet appeared of any monument of antiquity. We shall not here anticipate either the detailed explanation of its contents, which he himself has promised on his return from Egypt, nor the results of our own investigations; we shall be contented for the present to place before our readers the general bearings of these results on the progress and prospects of Egyptian historical research.

The List began (in the first volume of the fragments) with the Dynasties of the Gods. Six names are preserved — Seb (Chronus), Osiris, Seth (Typhon), Horus, Thoth, and Ma (Truth)— by the side of the 7th, in whose name Salvolini fancied he discovered the Hawk, Lepsius found the number 400 appended. According to him, 3140 years are ascribed to Ma, and to Thoth probably 3226. By the side of one of the Dynasties of Gods, or, as is more probable, at the conclusion of those of the Heroes or Manes (the provincial Dynasties prior to Menes), stands, according to Salvolini, the subjoined notice :

“Sum total: 23 reigns, 5613 years, .... months, 28 days.”

This shows clearly the arrangement of the Egyptian Royal Lists. They were divided into Dynasties — by the side of each King the length of his reign was registered, and each Dynasty closed with the summing up of the Kings, and of their years of reign. The commencement of a new Dynasty, or a division in the same Dynasty, is indicated by red characters.

In the second column the names of Menes and Athotis are preceded by computations, which unfortunately we are unable to interpret. Thus in line 9 behind Horus we read, “13,420 years,” and then follows:

“Kings up to Horus, 23,200 years” (the decimals may have dropped out). Next to this come two mutilated data, where however the name of Menes can yet be recognised (lines 11, 12.) — the 13th row still exhibits that of Athotis, the son and successor of Menes, according to the Lists.

Lepsius has arranged the remaining Rings of mortal Kings in three great masses, in the following manner:

*First* : for the Old Empire :

(a) before the 6th Dynasty (terminating of with 3 Kings of the 5th) - 34 Kings, in 10 frag.

(b) from the 6th up to the 12th, closing with the latter - 20 Kings, in 6 frag.

Making in all for the Old Empire 54 Kings, in 16 frag.

*Secondly* : for the Middle Empire

(Hyksos period) - - - - - 65 Kings, in 6 frag.

Altogether therefore, before the restoration of the Empire 119 Kings, in 22 frag.

The details will be reserved for their proper place, as far as they are as yet capable of historical treatment. It will here be sufficient to premise, that several of the 10 fragments, ascribed by Lepsius to the first five Dynasties, ought, in our opinion, to belong to the series of Provincial Kings before Menes. Of the number of these last we find some details in Manetho, but of their names we know literally nothing, except from some notices of Diodorus, which have hitherto been misunderstood. On the other hand, it can hardly be doubted upon any critical ground that the 6 fragments with the 65 Kings belong to the Middle Empire. Not only can we show from the monuments that none of the names of those Kings belong to the Old or New Empire, but even that a considerable number of them occur on contemporaneous monuments of the Middle Empire. The Egyptians therefore (as our previous investigation showed to be probable) really possessed in the beginning of the New Empire registers of the Royal Families of its Middle period. The mere state of mutilation, deplorable as it is, in which the fragments of these ancient registers have reached us, could never be a sufficient excuse with any sound critic, for evading the attempt to analyse and restore the original succession of the individual names which they contain. The researches of Lepsius have done away with all apology for such precipitation, such want of critical industry or honesty. Whoever has been in the habit of scrutinising Papyri is aware that the fibres of that material supply still nicer criteria for the detection of any false or uncertain arrangement of the fragments, than the characters with which it is inscribed. The Directors of the Museum at Turin afforded Lepsius an opportunity of submitting the labours of Seyffarth to a rigid test of this kind, and the result of this investigation is now before the world. A transcript made by Lepsius of the existing Kings of the Papyrus, from the Hieratic into the Monumental character, will, it is hoped, shortly be published in the complete collection and interpretation, which he has promised us, of all the Royal Rings hitherto discovered,<sup>2</sup> and will enable the historical student more fully to understand and appreciate its value.

One circumstance, however, deserves more particular mention in this place. We may venture to assume from the investigation of the monuments of the Old Empire, that, in it, joint reigns occur, and especially in the 12th Dynasty, one of those preserved in the Papyrus. But neither here, nor elsewhere in this record, are several kings specified as reigning contemporaneously. Such co-regents consequently may be assumed to have been either entirely omitted, perhaps with the exception of the elder one, or the one whose reign was of longest duration; or their names, where at least of the same family, may have been all introduced in the usual dynastic succession, one after the other. If the latter hypothesis were preferred, we should have, in this oldest record of Egyptian Chronology, a method directly opposed to the system of a Chronological Canon. We may call it the Dynastic, its aim being to register every sovereign,

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<sup>2</sup> Announced by the editor of the "Todtenbuch" under the title of "*The Book of the Egyptian Kings, a Chronological Catalogue of all the names of the Egyptian Kings in genealogical connection, from the Dynasty of the Gods and Menes down to Caracalla, &c., quarto.*" [Since published; Lepsius, *Königsbuch der alten Aegypter*, 4to. Berlin, 1858.— S.B.]

whether contemporaneous or successive. In this case, as many years of reign will have been assigned to each of the co-regents, as he really had a share in the government. Admitting this to be correct, the sum total of the reigns recorded in such or such a Dynasty will still be considerably greater than the duration of the Dynasty; that is, than the time intervening between the beginning of the first, and the end of the last reign.

In conclusion, we would remark that the Rings transferred from the Papyrus to our Tables of Kings, have, where necessary, been marked with the letter those which are taken from the Royal Rings of Karnak or Abydos, with k or a. Those without any mark at all are such as are known from other miscellaneous, chiefly contemporaneous, monuments.