

The discovery of the Royal Canon in Turin

1824

Jean-François Champollion

BULLETIN
DES SCIENCES HISTORIQUES,
ANTIQUITÉS, PHILOGIE.

SEPTIÈME SECTION
DU
BULLETIN UNIVERSEL DES SCIENCES
ET DE L'INDUSTRIE,

PUBLIÉ
SOUS LA DIRECTION DE M. LE B^{ON}. DE FÉRUSAC,
OFFICIER SUPÉRIEUR AU CORPS ROYAL D'ÉTAT-MAJOR,
CHEVALIER DE SAINT-LOUIS ET DE LA LÉGIION-D'HONNEUR,
MEMBRE DE PLUSIEURS SOCIÉTÉS SAVANTES NATIONALES ET ÉTRANGÈRES.

TOME DEUXIÈME.

A PARIS,

AU BUREAU DU BULLETIN, rue de l'Abbaye, n^o. 3 ;
Chez MM. DUFOUR et d'OCAGNE, quai Voltaire, n^o. 13; et même
maison de commerce, à Amsterdam;
Chez MM. TRUTTET et WÜRZ, rue de Bourbon, n^o. 17; et
même maison de commerce : à Strasbourg, rue des Serruriers;
à Londres, 30, Soho-Square ;
Et chez M. BOSSANGE père, rue de Richelieu, n^o. 60.
1824.

Champollion 1824

Abstract

Letters from Champollion to his brother about the discovery of the Royal Canon of Turin. The 1824 article was selected 'extracts' from the letters. The full letters were published in 1909, and are the ones included in this document.

English translation by Peter Lundström

Sources

Champollion, Jean-François. 1824. 'Papyrus Égyptiens'. *Bulletin des sciences historiques, antiquités, philologie* 2: pp. 297–303.

The relevant unabridged letters were published in:
Hartleben, Hermine. 1909. *Lettres de Champollion le jeune*. Bibliothèque Égyptologique 30. Paris: Ernest Leroux. pp. 77–92

Turin, October 30, 1824

Patience and resignation are very fine things, my dear friend, that I repeated to myself during the at least twenty days I received absolutely nothing from you. I ought to be accustomed to these delays, but it is a hardship, which one submits to unwillingly, and I cannot do it. I presume that your rustivating with the Prior is the principal cause of it; in that case, I should be glad of it, since you would take a little rest, which you must have furiously needed.

The September issue of *Bulletin* brought me your little note on the Greek mummy of Turin. If you have had your little notice extracted, send me five or six copies. Count Balbe asks for the second supplement to your note *on the cubit*, in which you speak of the scribe Amenof and his stele, which I found in the Nizzoli collection. I am told that this supplement has arrived, so send it as soon as possible.

From now on, *Egyptian Museums* will be found all over Europe, except in Paris. The smallest sovereigns acquire collections every day, and the slimmest of them all, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, has just bought all that Nizzoli has reported. This is what I am told from Florence. The *cubit* will therefore remain next to the Venus of Medici. The Egyptian monuments will abound everywhere, except in France, and this by the obstinate fantasies of three or four scoundrels, whose new study disturbs ideas and interests, which is all for them. Here I am therefore, forced to take a nap in Florence where I did not intend to stop when I passed the Rubicon. The collection formed in Egypt by *Ricci*, of which Belzoni speaks in his travels, is yet to find a buyer in this city. I am told that there are beautiful things, mummies, alabaster vases, papyrus, and a multitude of small objects. But most interesting to me is a great number of drawings, which I am told are very well, among which are many drawings of bas-reliefs and paintings relating either to history or to Civilian uses, potters, glass-makers, musicians, dancers, cooks and cooking, a market, hunters, seine-makers, boat builders, a distillation or chemistry workshop, where two appliances evidently resemble *stills*. Finally, there are drawings of divinities, inscriptions of *temples bearing dates*, a collection of ancient and modern Egyptian animals, the plan of a large garden drawn from a hypogea painting, etc. A copy of a hundred names of kings or queens (cartouches) copied on different buildings was also announced. With the whole are three travel journals:

- One from the *temple of Jupiter Ammon* (Syauah) with drawings and plans.
- Another from *Egypt* and beyond *the Sennaar*.
- Lastly, from a trip to Syria and Mount Lebanon with the inscriptions.

We could have all this for a maximum of fifteen thousand francs, if that were agreeable to our

great men of the Interior.¹ I could go to Florence to see the things on my own, and conclude things if the report is correct, as I have every reason to believe. However, this collection is *for sale* in Trieste, as were the collections Drovetti and Nizzoli, there will be nothing for us. You will see that there is soon an Egyptian Museum in the capital of the Republic of San Marino, while we shall have only isolated and scattered pieces in Paris.

Here is another subject of joy and grief. I continued and finished the Egyptian manuscripts of the Museum. I attached myself to the healthiest and best-preserved *rolls*: I found only more or less complete portions of the funeral ritual, whether for man or woman, all these pious legends were already coming through my eyes. I thought three days ago of visiting carefully what I called my *manure*, that is to say, about twenty packages of *flattened* papyri, folded in two or three, wrapped in pieces of canvas and for the most part in a pitiable condition, which had at first set aside as useless.

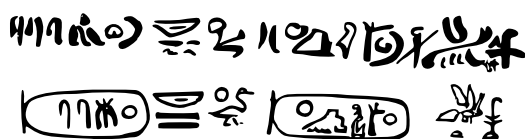
All are in hieratic writing. The first I opened gave me the names of *Sesostris*, repeated eight or ten times in various places. After three and a half hours of work, I succeeded in bringing together the fifty scraps of which this piece consists, and I have convinced myself that it contains either a historical or a public act from the times of *Ramesses the Great*. The other packages gave me a similar result; eager to enjoy, I studied them hastily, only to recognize the royal names they bear. These pieces, all written on *both sides*, were folded and not *rolled*, and some of which are 5 to 6 feet long, are stuffed with *dates* like so:

𐀀𐀁 Year 11, 𐀀𐀂𐀃, Year 32, etc., etc., commonly followed by the name of a king. I found pieces of this kind with the dates or mentions of the reign of the following Pharaohs:

𐀀𐀁𐀂, i.e. (𐀀𐀁𐀂) *Amenophis* (Memnon), where it is spoken of:

𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃, that is (𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃) *Mæris*. One piece with: 𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃, i.e. (𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃) *Armais*, our *Ramesses II*. Four pieces with: 𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃𐀄, i.e. (𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃𐀄) *Ramesses-Miamun*.

Five or six pieces of *Ramesses the Great*, of which the following is the legend:



i.e.: *The King of the obedient people, Re-sate, approved by the Sun, son of the Sun, Lord of the world, Ramesses*. Two pieces from the reign of *Ramesses* of the Nineteenth Dynasty, son of *Ramesses the Great*, whose prenomen is: 𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃𐀄, i.e. (𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃𐀄).

Two or three others, horribly written, whose cartridges I have not yet deciphered. Finally, a beautiful piece, concerning almost all the Kings of the Nineteenth Dynasty:

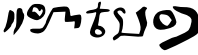

¹ Champollion refers to the minister of Corbiere, whom he did not forgive for refusing to buy the Drovetti collection in Turin.

1. *Ramesses the Great*.

2. *Ramesses*, his son and successor.

3. King *Amenephtep*, , i.e. , who is indeed Αμμενεφθης, the successor of *Ramesses*, son of *Ramesses the Great*.

4. A king, whose prenomen is: , i.e. , the King Resate-Amenemes is certainly that of the King Αμμενεμης, successor to the above-named Amenoftep of the Nineteenth Dynasty.

5. In the same manuscript I found the royal name: , i.e.  which must be either that of Amenoftep of the Nineteenth Dynasty, or that of the last King of that dynasty, named *Thuoris*.

I forgot to speak of a *hieratic* piece, bearing on its reverse several columns of great hieroglyphics, one inch tall at least, and containing all the titles, names, and qualities of *Ramesses*, son of *Sesostris*, plus the fragments of three or four diplomas, admirably written in great hieratic letters, beginning with the royal pharaonic dates of *Ramesses the Great*, etc.

This, I hope, is a fine conquest for history, and a good argument against those who do not want an Egyptian collection, and especially a papyrus. It can no longer argued that the papyrus contain only prayers and Paternoster, that it is useless to pile them in the King's Cabinet. We shall no longer despise manuscripts *without figures: they are the good ones*. Now, by others, for others, or for us, to buy all the *flat manuscripts, not rolled, without figures*, folded in canvas, and without any sort of balm stain. These are the good and true historical manuscripts. I will be spend my winter copying or extracting those that I have just discovered here. I have merely covered them, and the result of this first examination is already too important for me to leave it there. I shall conclude my letter with another remark of a very singular kind. The last package I opened, contained the fragments of a drawing to which I could not at first understand. I patiently collected the pieces, and the result was a large sheet of more than two feet, bearing the *plan of a royal catacomb*.

I say *royal*, and I am not afraid to add, perhaps of the royal catacomb of *Ramesses-Miamun*. For here is the facts; I have compared this plan, of which remains a little more than half with those of the tombs of the Kings Engraved in the Commission of Egypt. The fifth tomb of the West, of *Ramesses-Miamun*, offers the greatest relation to the plan of the papyrus. The outlines of the mountain, also indicated on my map, are similar. There is more; in the middle of the *Great Hall*, is a very finely made *pink granite* sarcophagus, on the lid of which is traced a *group of three figures*, perfectly similar (same position, same characters, same details) as the group carved on the lid of the Cambridge sarcophagus, of which Mr. Brown has sent me drawings, also made of pink granite, which comes from the tomb of *Ramses-Miamun*, the fifth tomb of the West at *Biban-el-Molouk*. I thought I was hallucinating when I recognized this lid. I will hasten to trace this map; I will send it to you, as one of the most curious pieces

you can see.

In each room and corridor of the map are small hieratic inscriptions with strong *figures*. Here is a true *map of the hypogea of the first order*. For this one, I guarantee it. It will be a play to exhibit to the great tragedian, if he is wise, and used to make peace with him. The map is very fine and nicely done. There are magnificent *alterations* of a very pale color, as with a kind of lead pencil. There is writing on the back of the papyrus, which I have not yet examined.

It is scarcely worthwhile to speak to you of a great vessel with canvases, rigging, mosses running about the masts, which I have found painted and whole in the midst of my royal papyri: I will however, copy it as a thing of a certain interest.

That is enough I think. I do not think I can write to you as often, but there are moments like this, but they are getting rarer. Adieu, my dear friend.

Turin, November 6, 1824

The eight days which have elapsed between my last [letter], have been spent, my dear friend, in collecting, with extreme patience and subject to tough tests and disappointments, some old remnants of Egyptian history. I will forever regret the loss, perhaps irreparable, of so many documents of the highest importance, which might have remained intact for a few more centuries if the merchants employed a little care and intelligence.


Let me explain. When I had finished the historical papyrus of which I spoke in my previous letter, I learned by chance that there were some remains of other Egyptian manuscripts in the attic, but that it was a useless visit. However, I insisted to see them, and agreed that they should be placed on a table where I might examine them the next day. On entering this chamber, which I shall now call the *Columbarium of History*, a cold dread gripped me at the sight of a table ten feet in length, completely covered with a layer of papyrus debris, at least half a foot thick. *Quis talia fando temperet a lacrymis?*²

To calm my grief, at first I supposed that I saw only the remains of four or five hundred funerary manuscripts, but I had the courage to cast my eyes upon the fairest and least formless fragments. The wound reopened and bleed cruelly, as I recognized that I had in my hand a fragment dated from the twenty-fourth year of pharaoh *Amenophis-Memnon*.³

From this moment, I made a resolution to examine, one by one, the large and small remains, which covered this table of desolation. I commenced the work by proceeding, but with less

² "Who is speaking such, refrain from weeping" shortened quote from the Aeneid, Book II, 1.

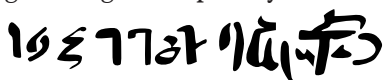

³ Amenhotep III

speed and especially merriment, like the peasants in the country sorting the nuts in the autumn evenings. My tracing became the main instrument of my operation. From the table every piece was examined by my hand, carefully and attentively, on the front and back, then if there was nothing apparently remarkable about it, discarded into the terrible box,  forever.

To describe the sensations I have experienced in studying the shreds of this great corpse of history is impossible; even the coldest imagination would be shaken. How can we defend ourselves from a little emotion by stirring up this ancient dust of centuries? I philosophized excessively; no chapter of Aristotle or of Plato is as eloquent as this heap of papyrus. My table says much more than Cebes⁴: *“I have seen rolling in my hand the names of years whose history had completely lost the memory of the names of gods who have no altars for fifteen centuries.”* I gathered, scarcely breathing, fearing to reduce it to powder, a small piece of papyri, the last and only refuge of the memory of a King who in his lifetime perhaps was close to the immense Palace at Karnak!

In these fragile and mutilated remains of a world that is no more, I have seen, as in today's world, there is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. Time involves without distinction, that which is greater and smaller, more serious and more futile, sadder and more cheerful. Beside a fragment from the reign of Ramesses the Great, or of a ritual containing the praises of Ramses-Miamun,⁵ or of any other great Pastor of the people, I found a fragment of Egyptian caricature. It represent a cat that keeps ducks, a crook in hand; a cynocephalus⁶ playing the double flute; near the names of the bellicose Moeris,⁷ a rat armed for war and striking arrows against a fighter; a cat mounted on a battle chariot. There is a piece with a funerary ritual with a contract of sale written on its back, and the remnants of drawings of a monstrous obscenity, which give me a very singular idea of the severity of Egyptian wisdom.

Here are the results of my examination of all these remains. At first, I found fragments of a great number of acts bearing the usually lost date of the reigns of the Pharaohs. *Amenhotep* of the Nineteenth Dynasty, *Ramses-Pheron* and *Ramesses the Great*, of same dynasty, *Ramses-Miamun*, *Akencheres-Ushorei*, *Mandouei*, *Amenophis II*, and five fragments containing the name of *Mæris*, one of which is large enough to expressly bear the date of this reign:

Transcribed into hieroglyphics:



In fifth year, on the fifth day of this month of the direction of the King of the obedient people, SUN-

4 Cebes of Thebes, an Ancient Greek philosopher and disciple of Socrates
 5 From Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, 1.15, section 97 (Armesses Miamoun)
 6 A man with a dog's head
 7 Amenemhat III of the Twelfth Dynasty

GOD STABILITOR OF THE WORLD, SON OF THE SUN-GOD THUTMES. This piece is certainly the oldest public act in the world, and Egypt alone could furnish us with manuscripts of this astonishing antiquity. You feel that the contracts from the days of the Lagids⁸ and even the Persians are paltry; it is like yesterday in comparison to what I have been stirring for a week. I have collected fragments dated from the fifth and twenty-fourth years of *Amenophis II*, others from the tenth and twenty-fourth, and from the sixth year of *Ramses-Miamun*; the beginning of an act of the fourth year of *Ramesses the Great*, and fifteen other fragments, of which the first names and royal names are either incomplete or unknown. All these pieces are without exception in hieratic writing and for the most part of a magnificent and high proportional writing. Some of them are masterpieces of calligraphy, formed of elongated characters with tails and heads, which are traces of nightingales. Among the million pieces, I have found no fragment in *demotic*, nor any name, which appears to me posterior to the Nineteenth Dynasty. I am convinced that all these papyri were part of the archives of some temple or other public depository.

However, the most important papyrus, of which I shall always regret the complete mutilation, is a real historical treasure, a *chronological table*, a true *Royal Canon* in hieratic writing, containing four times as many dynasties as an intact Abydos Table. I gathered in the midst of the dust about twenty fragments of this precious manuscript, pieces of an inch or two at most, containing, the more or less mutilated names of Pharaohs. What is most remarkable in all this is that none of these 77 names are anything like those of the *Abydos Table*, and I am convinced that they all belonged to the *earlier dynasties*. It seems to me equally certain that this *historical Canon* is from the same time as all the manuscripts in the midst of which I have collected the remains, that is to say, it is not posterior to the Nineteenth Dynasty.

Here is one of those capital discoveries which cause as much regret as pleasure, and which show us (that is the consoling side) that we can expect much from well-directed research, in case our government finally decides to spend some money to acquire Egyptian antiquities. However, I should be astonished if we did the thing that would be honorable and proper to do.

I am surprised that Bluebeard⁹ had the audacity to make a report on the manuscript, he only saw the original for five minutes and in which he was unable to read six words in a row without the help of Peyron or me. However, these are the presumptions to which we should already be accustomed.

M. de Marcieu¹⁰ had already announced to me the next arrival of the Duke. I look forward to it with eagerness, but also with regret, since his plans for tranquility in Paris must be thwarted by this journey. Yesterday I did the honors of the Egyptian Museum to the Duke of Laval-

⁸ i.e. the Ptolemaic dynasty. After Lagus, the father of Ptolemy I.

⁹ French archaeologist Raoul-Rochette.

¹⁰ From the French Embassy in Turin

Montmorency, the ambassador in Rome, and I received from him the most amiable tender.

This morning, at half-past seven, they came to awaken me to perform the same duties with the Prince of Carignan and the Duke Antoine-Clement of Saxony, father of the Princess of Carignan and the Queen of Spain. Their Highnesses were perfect, and I did my best to show off my Egyptian tricks. Biot has been here for two days; he came to my house in the evening with a procession of ten French, Austrian or Piedmontese astronomers. He will measure an arc of the Meridian beyond Milan. I am told that he is perpetually preaching on Egypt's behalf and of my labors. I do not know where this great favor comes from.¹¹ He cries against Breton's lawyer and says that the Administration is not doing all it should do towards me. I am touched by this mathematical tenderness.

Nothing more: the change of season feels a little bit, but a few cups of Kina decoction will remedy that. This week I intend to finish the drawings of my fragments, and begin the study of the twenty almost complete royal papyri, which I found. Adieu, my dear friend, write to me more often, and present my respects and affection to our reverend, by informing him of my new conquests. I am all and always with you in heart and soul.

Turin, November 15, 1824

I have finally finished, my dear friend, the sorting of the nuts. In this work, which has hitherto occupied me, I have been fortunate enough to find a number of other fragments of the *hieratic Royal Canon*. I say *Royal Canon*, since several pieces of this invaluable manuscript prove that it was divided into two columns of *Royal names, followed by the number of years of the reign expressed in hieratic figures* in the following manner.

that is:

¹¹ Champollion mistakenly believed that astronomer Jean-Baptiste Biot had not yet forgiven their disagreement on the Dendera zodiac.

Unfortunately, there is about forty fragments, which I have been unable to connect, in spite of my most careful attention.

This proves the extent of this papyrus, despite that only the smallest part remains, and the abundant historical information that could have been obtained, if the barbarians had not put it to shreds. I found some royal names written in *red ink* amongst the others, *traced in black*. I presume that these were the names of the *chiefs of the dynasty*. All that I observe while contemplating these precious relics can only redouble the pain of such an irreparable loss. Finding such historical treasures will not happen twice, and I confess that the greatest disappointment of my literary life is to have discovered this manuscript in such a despairing state. I will never console myself; the wound will bleed for a long time.

In the end, I gathered from the debris of this *Royal Canon*, which was true *Manetho* in hieratic writing, about 160 to 180 Royal names. Many are complete, but many are also without beginning or end. A number *follow each other*, which will always be a means of chronological classification. The most striking result of this exhumation is undoubtedly evidence that the Egyptians, at a very remote period, counted nearly two hundred reigns before the 17th Dynasty, since this text is in the midst of the remains that do not exceed past the 20th Dynasty. In all these fragments of the Canon, there is not a single cartouche similar to those of the Kings of the 16th, 17th, or subsequent dynasties. The consequences drawn from this important fact is: (1) that Manetho followed the Egyptian ideas by giving thirty Dynasties; and (2) that the opinion of the antiquity of the nation was already in force by the eleventh century BC.

A letter from Florence tells me of the arrival at the lazaretto of Livorno of an *enormous box of Egyptian papyrus* belonging to Mr. Salt. It appears that these manuscripts are for sale. They will send me shortly a bulletin. However, it shall only make me angry, for I am quite sure that no one will do anything in Paris to acquire the most important of these papyri. I would like the leaders of the great and the small to stay for a day or two in the Museum of Turin to hear the honorary epithets decorated by all the French who visit the collection. There is no one that feel sorry that these monuments will not delight France by the microscopic ideas of our political giants. It is a perpetual concert of imprecations, which I have the pious care to direct to their true address.¹² Our ambassador from Tuscany left here, his heart saddened with regrets.

My correspondent in Florence, Migliarini, sent me the inscription of a Greek mummy found in the same cellar as Petemenon. Here are the details of the traveler who gave him a copy. They found seven cases of mummies, all with Greek and hieroglyphic inscriptions, in excavations made at Thebes, in the presence of the Intendant of Mr. Salt and Mr. Gray. All these mummies were of the same family. A small sarcophagus was bought by Mr. Gray (it is that of Tphout, engraved in Hieroglyphics); one was cut to pieces (it is probably the one Cailliaud copied, the inscription reads Soter, son of Philout); two were bought by an

¹² To the Minister of Corbiere.

Englishman; we do not know where the rest has gone. It is sad that all have been copied with care, and the drawings are buried in the portfolios of Mr. Bankes,¹³ who would do better to publish them than to remove the duchesses. It is also alleged that a note in Greek has been found on one of these mummies, probably addressed to the Intendant des Hypogees; "I paid two obols to Charon; I send you my dear daughter; I recommend it to you, and beg you to take care of it, and place it in a suitable place." A few more civilities. Mr. Salt acquired this note and several others. Here is one of the inscriptions. I believe it is unpublished: ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙΔΗΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ ΚΟΡΝΗΑΙΟΥ ΕΒΙΩΣΕΝ ΕΤΗ ΕΞΗΚΟΝΤΑ ΟΚΤΩ ΜΗΝΑΣ ΕΝΔΕΚΑ ΗΜΕΡΑΣ ΕΙΚΟΣΙ ΤΡΕΙΣ.¹⁴ I am not yet authorized to publish it.

I discovered too late, in connection with the errata of my *First Letter*, that I placed *Ephemera* for *Athenagoras*. This will be corrected by hand for the copies sent to the scholars; as for the others, it is very much the same. Plan to take some steps for funds in the Ministry, to send me to Rome, which must be done without the assistance of the excellent Duke, who might still go forward, and I do not consent to battle at his expense. He has already done enough; it would be obtrusive to consent to him doing more.

The group ⲟⲓ, or ⲟⲓ, or Ⲛⲓ, ⲛⲓ, means year, and it is the hieroglyph ⲟⲓ: all that precedes is the *preposition*. I did not send the doctor's inscription to Letronne or to you, since I thought, he had already published it; if a drawing of the group would please him, I will send it.

The *Minutoli* contract between *Horus, son of Horus, Colchyte*, and *Onnophris, son of Horus*, is probably a double from that of Mr. Gray in Greek. The *demotic original* is in the King's Cabinet, which is also of the thirty-sixth year, recorded also as the ninth of Choiac by *Lysimachus* and passed between the same contractors *Horus* and *Onnophris* on the same subject.

¹³ Since 1819, the "Egyptian trophies" owned by William J. Bankes, and who had remained silent about his friend Young, could have accelerated much of Champollion's discoveries. Bankes knew it very well, and that was why he kept them at home.

¹⁴ Transl. *Apollonides of Sotiros, Kornelios, received three score years and eight months, each day a treasure.*(?)