

# Seyffarth's letters from Italy in 1826

Guvstav Seyffarth

THE LITERARY LIFE  
OF  
GUSTAVUS SEYFFARTH

A. M., PHIL. AND THEOL. DR.

LATE PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG, AND THE CONCORDIA SEMINARY, OF ST. LOUIS, MO.; HON. MEMBER OF THE LEEDS PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY SOCIETY, THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, THE NEW YORK PHILOLOGICAL SOCIETY; MEMBER OF THE ROYAL SAXON ACADEMY OF SCIENCE; FOREIGN MEMBER OF THE ROYAL BRITISH ORIENTAL SOCIETY; COR. MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF TRIEN, OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCE OF ST. LOUIS, MO., AND OF DAVENPORT, IOWA; MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ORIENTAL SOCIETY.

*"Multa tulit, felixque parat,  
inducit et alit."*

AN AUTO-BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.



NEW YORK:  
E. STEIGER & CO.  
1886.

# Seyffarth 1826

## Abstract

*Letters from Seyffarth to his parents while visiting Italy and its museums. Of peculiar interest is that Seyffarth reconstructed the Royal Canon during the summer of 1826, yet makes no mention of it in his letters.*

Translated from German by Peter Lundström

## Source

Seyffarth, Gustav., Knortz, Karl. 1886. *The literary life of Gustavus Seyffarth ... An autobiographical sketch*. New York: Steiger.

## Turin, June 3, 1826

I have already been in Turin for eight days, but have not seen much because I spend every day at the library, and at the Academy, where there is not much of note. My reception has been great; they marveled at me like a miracle animal. They cannot understand that someone could be smarter than Champollion. The museum is incredibly rich and important to me. Now I want to look over everything superficial soon go to Rome before the heat begins. Later, I come back and do the rest. Among the peculatities I have found so far are several papyri from the Fifth Dynasty of Manetho, written 2,500 years before Joseph in Egypt, if Manetho and I are not mistaken. Champollion is now in Florence, where I will meet him. He has been waiting here for two months for me after he, God knows how, had heard I wanted to come to Turin, also in Egyptian affairs.

## Turin, June 14, 1826

My expectations regarding the Turin Museum have been exceeded by far. So far, I have been able to look through everything superficially, but many items are still unpacked for lack of space; but I am convinced that no collection of Egyptian antiquities in Europe is as great and important as the one here. Of the several thousand objects, I need only mention the real MSS., of which there are over 200, partly of extraordinary size, about 60 mummies of animals and humans, more than 30 statues, some are true works of wonder, more than 1,500 scarabs and 200 stelae. Many of these treasures are from a time when I myself did not believe that they had been so great at art and science. Who would have believed that there are manuscripts from the time of the Pharaohs, manuscripts that are older than Herodotus, perhaps he even held some of these in his own hands?

I have found two demotic manuscripts from the government of Prammetchussic I. Others belong to earlier times. How surprised I was when I found six papyri from the fifth dynasty of Manetho. Is that list of Manetho is correct and Eusebius' conjecture reliable, we are able to read writings more than 2000 years older than Joseph in Egypt. In addition, many of the oldest manuscripts are truly historical. A single fragment may be of the highest importance to science; how much can we expect from so many ancient and rich MSS.!

They have the peculiarity of not being rolled, but stapled in the manner of our books, with

writing on both sides. Of the hieratic papyri, there is one with a sketch of a royal catacomb, a superbly preserved hymn collection, and an extraordinary history of cleanliness.

In the drawing of the catacomb all ratios are given. The roll with the hieratic hymns is the longest papyrus of the kind I have seen. Its preservation is extraordinary. Unfortunately, that cannot be said of a hieratic papyrus that surpass anything previously known in splendor and beauty. The papyrus, like our paper, is so smooth and fine and originally had a height of 2½ feet, and a length of at least 20 feet. The writing is colossal, so only a few lines to fill the height, but of a certainty, accuracy, elegance, that defies description. This masterpiece of Egyptian calligraphy has been cut into many small pieces by Champollion's ruthlessness. The cuts go right through middle of the lines and letters whose shape are now often unrecognizable. The hieroglyphic papyri are mostly liturgical.

## Rome, July 29, 1826

I am not surprised that there are derogatory judgments about Rudimenta in the Göttinger Anzeiger, as they emanate from Muller, a Champollion, and do me no harm, since I will explain the matter more clearly. I expected all this, and to a certain extent caused it, because I did not want to disclose the foundation of my system. Once I get back, I will print the second issue of my "contributions" including all reviews about me with comments, and give the texts of the Rosetta inscription. Here I found a friendly reception. I have dined with the ministers of Russia, Portugal, France, Holland, Prussia and Hannover. Some were truly princely. I have not yet fed o gold and silver. Italinsky, the Russian ambassador, a man of 85, who every day study his Arab and Persian MSS., is my greatest patron. The Diario di Roma honored my arrival in the first article and in the Gazzetta di Firenze there was an honorable article about my Rudimenta. Last week I wrote to Böttiger asking him to make sure that the government gives orders to buy Egyptian manuscripts, since we have nothing yet and everyone buys antique collections. He will undeniably impart my letter to Minister Einsiedel.

The most interesting acquaintance I have made is undoubtedly that of Champollion. One day I was working in the Vatican. It knocks, beats, and knocks again. When I open, I see a small, dark and stocky man who squints a little, wearing a medal; in his company was a young man. I announce them to Monsignor May, while the stranger, who probably recognized me by my rummaging with the papyri, glaring at me. May denied that it was Champollion, but confessed the next day. This is ominous. It seems as if fortune said, "Through him (my Rudimenta) enter into the secrets of Egypt!"

The next day Italinsky invited me to dinner, but arrived late. Champollion was there, and introductions made. It was not long before we were arguing before ministers and ambassadors. We talked for three hours, but Champollion's ferocity made me fear provoking him. I said little and always invoked the diversity of our systems. This resulted that some people thought I was convinced in Champollion's system. I explained that nothing can be achieved in such a way, and diverted the conversation. In fact, I would have expected more from Champollion than I have found. He claims the silliest stuff, believing in a demotic alphabet of 800 characters; thinks that the old language of Egypt could be the new Coptic, and could not even read the word boro etc. He spoke with presumption and insolence that only a Frenchman or a Champollion is capable. For example, he said that he spoke Coptic as well as his French, etc, and did not even know that aspho means year.

In short, I am very much against Champollion now. Only as far as I've noticed that he was full of anxiety and feared his unmasking, so he had to some extent proceed by such means and perhaps deserves some excuse. He is a man of about 35 years. We left as friends and remained so. The day before yesterday he paid me his respects and did me some favors. Politics and civility cannot be denied the Frenchman. It has went quite well, as everyone feared a duel with two obelisks. For my part, I would have wielded the Lateran obelisk, which is about 200 Elle tall and 6 Elle in diameter. I have found many opponents of Champollion here, and they are looking forward to my Rudimenta which have not yet arrived. The local diplomatic corps allow taking copies of the obelisk. Time after time, they gather and revise, armed with large telescopes, copies of the drawings. I am always there, and they invited me on the very first day after my arrival, and picked me up in a coach.

## Rome, August 21, 1826

Champollion has left for Naples and goes by the same steamboat from there to Livorno. I hope to find him again in Naples or Florence. We are best friends because he is polite out of fear, and I out of courtesy. He has large following here, but also many opponents who see through the nothingness of his system and detest his charlatanism. He has recently made a translation of a large stele in which not one word is correct. He explained, like Kircher, everything symbolically.

The heat is quite annoying here; if you step out of the shade into the sun, it is as if you were doused with hot water. Maybe in winter I can fulfill what I have to do. I can relax during the nights. I work from 9-5, usually in public or private museums.

## Rome, September 27, 1826

Rome, so rich in treasures, has no great particular Egyptian Museum; but so many smaller ones that together make one of the largest and most remarkable in the world. Only Rome enjoys an open-air museum of 13 obelisks, which now, to the merit of the government and the ministers, one might say, the markings drawn for the first time. I personally led the revision. The liberal and honourable enthusiasm, more so than anywhere, in the rebirth of the Egyptian literature and my hieroglyphic studies, I used all these museums to the most, and discovered remarkable objects. The most numerous are the antiquities, which, since they are without inscriptions, initially serve the history of art. To this group belong a multitude of small statues of metal, stone, wood, clay, and other utensils, as spoons, jewels, vessels, scarabs, and the like, most of them of extraordinary beauty and cleanliness.

This include a large number of small statues of metal, stone, wood, clay, and other utensils, such as spoons, jewels, vessels, scarabs, and the like. d. m. partly of extraordinary beauty and cleanliness. Less common are papyrus, especially those that are not copies of the same text. We have printed a catalog about the papyri at the Vatican, which I cannot judge. Among the peculiar curiosities one can still count some larger historical scarabs, several historical steles, and door vestiges from the times of the pharaohs with the most precise indication of the year, month and day, urns with Egyptian gods and hieroglyphic symbols and Latin inscriptions. In addition, a canopic jar, probably from the Eighteenth Dynasty of Manetho, allegedly found in the tombs of the Tarquinians, but against which I have reservations. In general, we will have to be careful of Egyptian antiquity junk, as is necessary with Greek and Latin.

A papyrus, perfectly rolled and hermetically sealed, considered complete and genuine; was found to contain many small pieces of four different papyri, that had been moistened, then rolled, and finally burned at the ends to give the scroll the appearance of antiquity.

I have been so glad to find monuments from almost all the dynasties of the Egyptian kings from Menes down to the times of the Romans. All these monuments were previously unknown or misunderstood, for example, Champollion declared the obelisk of Sesostris a monument of Thutmosis, as if the ibis symbolically represented the syllable Thoth.

I have been here for almost three months and have not seen much pleasing me, and have to leave a lot behind. With horror, I heard that Michaelis is at The Door, before my journey is at its end. I have at least eight months left in Naples, Florence, and Turin; what is left for Paris and Lyon, and how much will the unforeseen stay in Italy cost me? Despite my work, I am

very well. In Leipzig, I had the cold almost every 4 weeks, and as long as I stay in Italy, I am free.

### Livorno, October 30, 1826

Traveling by sea is a bad story. The sea was rough and the ship rocked so horribly that got sick, even the experienced sailors. I was the third to vomit, and how! We have been traveling 44 hours and in all that time, I have not been on my feet for an hour, nor have I eaten a spoonful. The night was the worst. About 30 people slept together in a small room no bigger than half your room, dear mother, and only half as high. I touched the ceiling with my head. If one began to vomit, everyone vomited; and our five women did their best. The smell, the heat and steam from the coal! In the morning, we looked like a ham; even my shirt was smoked brown. The next night things got worse. The waves went sky high because we had to endure a cold storm. Several times passengers jumped because they thought the ship had hit a rock.

Off the port of Livorno, we had to wait another two hours before disembarking. Livorno is not a magnificent city because the palaces of Rome and Naples are missing; but she is very friendly. The streets wide, bright, all paved and the people more beautiful than in Naples.