





# Seyffarth 1828

## Abstract

*Newspaper article ostensibly on the Royal Canon of Turin, but mostly Seyffarth arguing against Champollion's system of reading the hieroglyphs correctly, which he refused to accept.*

English as written in the article.

## Source

*The London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.*, No. 600 – July 19, 1828. 457–459

*Remarks upon an Egyptian History, in Egyptian Characters, in the Royal Museum at Turin, with reference to an Article in the Edinburgh Review. By Dr. G. Seyffarth, Professor of Oriental Literature in the University of Leipzig.*







ALTHOUGH a vast number of papyri and other inscriptions have been found in modern times among the ruins of Egypt, and brought to the museums of Europe, no person has yet succeeded in discovering a *proper Egyptian history*. Of this nature is a large papyrus in the Egyptian Museum at Turin, recomposed by me from a quantity of fragments, during my residence in that town. This remarkable manuscript, in hieratical character, being carefully written on both sides, belongs, according to the manner of writing, to the era of the first Ptolemies. The text consists of twelve columns on the left side, where the fibres go perpendicularly and of six large columns on the other side; and each of these contains from twenty to thirty lines, particularly near the end, where the text is more cramped and comprehensive. Sometimes there are small stripes of papyri fastened with gum upon the sheets, in order, perhaps, to correct errors. The said twelve columns furnish, besides other things, a catalogue of the Egyptian regents, perfectly coinciding with Manetho's history. It begins with the government of the deities, demigods, heroes, and other divine regents. This is the fabulous part of the Egyptian history, like that of the Chinese and other people: therefore it need not be wondered at, that the Egyptian mythologist gives 19,918 years as the government of the first gods, and 23,22(?)<sup>o</sup> years as that of all the divine regents together.

Each of the gods, which follow in this order—Hephaestos (?), Helios (?), Agathodaemon (?), Kronos, Osiris, Typhon, Orus, Thoouth, Anubis, Orus II., have reigned several hundred years, and Thoouth alone governed Egypt 3926 years. After this follow the human dynasties, commencing with Menes, Athothis I., Athothis II., &c. Each dynasty commences with the indication of that town or country where it originated, and finishes with by an article concerning the number of Pharaohs in that dynasty, and the time of their government, &c. The commencement of these notes is distinguished by red letters: immediately following the name of each Pharaoh, the number of years, months, and days, of his reign is remarked, with other notices. It is a great pity that this manuscript, consisting of seven large sheets of papyrus, which in its original condition contained about 300 names of Pharaohs, is in many, and indeed in essential parts very incomplete. It remains, however, an important monument of Egyptian literature and furnishes much remarkably illustrative of the history and the manner of the sacred writing of the ancient Egyptians: therefore, I shall as soon as possible publish it. Besides this, we having a Greek translation of this history and that of Manetho, by Eusebius and others, this manuscript, like the Rosetta stone, affords a *bilinguous inscription*, and serves, by its considerable number of proper names, more than any other, to decide upon Champollion's hieroglyphical system, and that of Spohn and myself. On this subject I shall add a few observations.


There are some articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, as also in the *Caledonian Mercury*, apparently from the same writer, which, while they approve of Champollion's system, condemn ours in extravagant terms.<sup>1</sup> The said papyrus completely contradicts this decision. For instance, like the original text of Manetho, after Julius Africanus, it gives the following regents as the fifth of the Egyptian dynasties:

Egyptian Text of Manetho	Greek Text of Manetho
Otoes	Othoes
Pios	Phios
Metusupis	Methusuphis
Piops	Phiops
...	Mentusuphis
Nitocris	Nitocris

Of these names the shortest is that of Pi, being written thus:

Now, let us try, even by these hieroglyphs, Spohn's system and Champollion's. According to Champollion,  representing a fence, or *Klo* in Coptic, signifies **K**;  signifies **T**, and  signifies **P**; and I think it is impossible for Champollion's system to pronounce this name otherwise than **KeTeP**, or **KaTaP**, &c. But in my system I have said, that  and  together signify only one sound, namely, **I** and  is a form of the letter **P**,<sup>2</sup> which furnishes **PI**, or **PIos**, adding the Greek termination. The aforesaid name must therefore be read, according to

Champollion's System	Greek Text	My System
KeTePos	Phios	PIos

This is a fact which must be admitted, and I could produce a thousand such proofs. One more example may as well be added here. In the name proceeding that of **PIos**, in the aforesaid dynasty, we find the letter **O** expressed by 

That is **FT** according to Champollion, and **O** according to my system.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Champollion's system will pronounce here, perhaps, **FeTeTeFeTEs**, or literally, **FTTFTEs**, instead of **OTOEs**; while my system literally and strictly pronounces **OTOEs**, like the Greek text. These two examples may suffice for the present, and enable everyone to come to a decision between

<sup>1</sup> See *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLV. p. 328 ; *Caledonian Mercury*, No. XVI. p. 612, April 24, 1828; *Asiatic Journal*, October 1827, p. 528. I determined to overlook the said articles, and not to give publicity to my disapprobation of such attacks upon Spohn and myself; and therefore, some time ago, addressed similar remarks to the author himself, in order to convince him privately of his erroneous statements against us, and of his unbecoming style in literary matters. I have, however, since then, been induced to publish some remarks upon the said articles, in order to check the growth and progress of prejudices; and although I am quite averse to every kind of literary cavilling, I cannot but deviate from my former resolution, particularly as it is more in favour of my deceased friend than myself.

<sup>2</sup> See *Rudimenta Hieroglyphices*, tab. xxxvi. letter I, in column x. No. 17; and letter P, columns v. and xii No. 2.

<sup>3</sup> See *Rudimenta Hieroglyphices*, tab. xxxvi. letter O, column vi. No. 7.

Champollion and us, and to contradict every sentence like this in the *Caledonian Mercury*: “Spohn’s system is considered as one of the most perfect specimens of Cimmerian mystifications,” &c. &c.

The particular circumstances under which the hieroglyphical pursuits of Spohn and myself were published, admitted of no doubt that our system would meet with rash censure and unfounded disapprobation; but I must confess I did not expect that our discoveries would be exhibited in such a light as they were made to appear in the articles to which I have alluded. Indeed, it is astonishing that men who pretend to politeness and character, so far as persuing truth, are not ashamed of defending in such a manner, and by such means, a fallacious opinion. I do not complain of the extravagant expressions against Spohn and myself, nor of the condemnation of our Egyptian exertions, by a person wholly ignorant, or most imperfectly acquainted with the Egyptian museums and libraries of Italy, France, Germany, and perhaps with those of England itself; but I deplore the assurance and self-conceit with which a person would forestall the decision of competent judges; and the facility with which he misrepresents the statements of others. But it is not yet known what objects the anonymous author, who appears, however, under his name in a French translation of the essay in the *Edinburgh Review*, had in view, nor what are the secret motives of his frequent articles against us.

It is not at all necessary to refute this reviewer: for matters of fact never can be wholly suppressed; and a hieroglyphical system cannot as yet be really condemned, as everybody will allow, but by such a one as has exclusively applied himself to hieroglyphical studies, and examined a vast number of Egyptian monuments. Any other person, however learned, may certainly pronounce an opinion upon a system; but his judgment, however positive, will never be considered as decisive. Notwithstanding, I will shew in what way Spohn and myself have been proceeded against.

The reviewer asserts, that, according to the principles of our system, *the Egyptians have used 650,000 arbitrary characters of letters*; and he takes this axiom to be the basis of our system. There are whole pages which he wastes for the sake of proving, *that Egyptian brains were not capable of retaining more than half a million of distinct characters; and that it is impossible for human understanding to decipher an inscription written in such characters; and that consequently our system is downright nonsense*. But neither I nor Spohn ever asserted so strange a paradox. There is indeed in one of my annotations to my system a number 675,000, and an analytical calculation, shewing plainly the mutual relation of the demotical, hieratical, and the hieroglyphical letters; but in the same annotation I have *expressly conjectured*, that the forms of the Egyptian letters, in the three manners of writing, altogether do not exceed the number of a few thousands.<sup>4</sup>

It is impossible that our critic has seen or understood our system. I do not know where that

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<sup>4</sup> See *Rudimenta Hieroglyphices*, p. 8, not. 44.

gross mistake originates; but I think a pamphlet, published by Champollion, which attacks it with nearly the same assertions as his, has led him into the same error ; and perhaps he had not then seen my refutation of Champollion's pamphlet.<sup>5</sup> Besides this, a conjecture concerning the number of Egyptian forms of letters is not a principle, or an essential point, of any hieroglyphical system.

After the Rosetta-stone, and all the innumerable inscriptions and papyri brought to European museums, had reanimated the study of Egyptian literature, it remained to determine by what rules these monuments were inscribed. The question was, therefore: "What may we presume, and what course pursue, that we may so far succeed as to understand those inscriptions?" According to this question, it will be easy to determine the material points in every hieroglyphical system. Here are our principles, which I will compare with Champollion's:

#### Our System.

The Egyptian inscriptions are in general alphabetic, particularly the *demotical*.

The basis of the Egyptian writing is *an alphabet of twenty-five letters*, as Plutarch and Eusebius themselves testify of which three were invented by the priest Isiris; the others are the twenty-two Phoenician letters.

Ordinarily, *many signs* express but one word.

Frequently, *two or more signs* denote only one letter.

Frequently, *the same sign* denotes two or more letters.

The language of the ancient Egyptians used on their monuments is the *ancient Coptic*.

#### Champollion's System.

The Egyptian inscriptions are in general symbolic, particularly the *hieroglyphical*.

The basis of the Egyptian writing is *a number of about eight hundred and fifty hieroglyphs*, and each of these, not being symbolical, signifies the sound by which the name of that hieroglyphical figure commences.

Ordinarily, *each sign* expresses a word or an idea.

*Two or more signs* must always express an equal number of letters.

The *same sign* can never denote any other sound than that which the name of that sign commences.

The language of the ancient Egyptians used on their monuments is the *modern Coptic*.

I must suppose the reviewer proceeded against us upon the opinion that I would not admit the merits of Dr. Young and Champollion. He has charged me with so doing. Indeed, I could not approve of Champollion's system; and I am still of the same persuasion, believing that only *that* hieroglyphical system can be true, which (1), corresponds with the express

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<sup>5</sup> *Brevis Defensio Hieroglyphices inventae* à F. A. G. Spohn et G. Seyffarth. Lipsiae, 1827. An Italian and a French translation of it have been published at Turin and at Paris. *Difesa del Sistema Geroglifico dei Signori Spohn e Seyffarth*, da C. Sylva. *Replique contre les Objections de M. Champollion contre le Systeme, &c.* Chez Ponthieu.

assertions of the ancient authors, which (2) is in itself satisfactory, and which (3), when tried by Egyptian texts with a translation, does not exhibit anything different from what the translation furnishes. Notwithstanding, in the same paragraph, I have duly appreciated Young and Champollion's exertions, I am quite averse to denying or diminishing the merits of others; but I confess I claim, and, according to *suum cuique*. I dare claim, that others respect the property of Spohn and myself.

Champollion's hieroglyphical works, it is already known, were published after Spohn's discoveries; but I do not repeat this fact for the purpose of diminishing Champollion's merits, but to mention that what is true in Champollion's system confirms Spohn's.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore rather curious that the reviewer should forget, that in condemning our system he condemns that of Champollion, which he advocates. Besides this, in the continuation of Spohn's work, I will give, with perfect impartiality, and with all necessary exactness, the history of the restoration of Egyptian literature. In this account I will tell (I.) what scholars have contributed to the deciphering of the Egyptian literature since the exposition of the Rosetta stone; (II.) what discoveries each of them has made concerning (1) the tongue of the ancient Egyptians, (2) the rules of their writings, (3) their glossary, (4) their grammar, (5) their alphabets, &c.; (III.) at what time the various discoveries have been effected. I hope by this distinguishing history to satisfy all parties, and to silence all the conflicts which in later times the hieroglyphical exertions in England, Germany, France, and Italy, or the envy and ignorance of reviewers, have occasioned.

But perhaps it is easy to explain why this particular reviewer should so hastily and so positively condemn our hieroglyphical system. Champollion's system, certainly, appears on a superficial examination to be thoroughly exact and perfect; therefore, he did not suppose that any other system different from Champollion's could lie true. However, it would have been as well if he had considered that Champollion's system has not yet been thoroughly investigated by a person versed in such matters, and acquainted with those monuments which have furnished the proofs in support of it. I repeat here, that in the next Number of my Egyptian Review<sup>7</sup> I shall take the opportunity of illustrating and demonstrating our own system, to exhibit that of Champollion in its true light. Supposing for meat that the latter had been exhibited in a most convincing manner, and that the author had not observed in his hieroglyphical pursuits anything but what supported his opinion, passing over everything opposed to it, I think it will be conceded that other resources must be used in such a disquisition.

Egyptian inscriptions, of which we have a Greek or Latin translation, still remain, as we have seen, the best tests for trying any hieroglyphical system. It is certain that the said manuscript, as also many other similar monuments, have been found subsequent to the publication of my system, as well as that of Champollion; and it is incontrovertible, that Champollion's system,

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<sup>6</sup> See my *Vita Spohnii*, Lipsiae, 1825, p. 21; and my edition of Spohn's work, *De Lingua et Literis Vet. Aegypt.* pars i. p. xv,

<sup>7</sup> *Beitrag zur Kenntniss der Altaegyptischen Literatur, &c.*, Leipzig, bei J. A. Barth, I Heft, 1826.

when applied to inscriptions with translations, produces pronunciations and significations very different from what the accompanying text supplies, while ours invariably renders them perfectly similar. While this fact exists, so long will our system remain unshaken; and, sooner or later, it must be universally acknowledged, in defiance of every attack to which it may be exposed.