

The Royal List in hieratic writing of the Turin Museum

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EXAMEN CRITIQUE
DE LA SUCCESSION
DES DYNASTIES
ÉGYPTIENNES,

PAR
W. BRUNET DE PRESLE.

Nous exposons, après un soigneux examen,
ce que les prêtres d'Égypte avaient enseigné dans
leurs annales.

DIMONTE DE SÈCLE.

PREMIÈRE PARTIE.

PARIS,

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RUE JACOB, 56. RUE DE LILLE, 11.

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de Presle 1850

Abstract

General description and history of the Royal Canon of Turin.

English translation of the original French text.

Source

Brunet de Presle, Wladimir. 1850. *Examen critique de la succession des dynasties égyptiennes, première partie*. Paris: Didot. 177-182

§ 11. The Royal List in hieratic writing of the Turin Museum.

A document which would have shed the brightest light on the Egyptian dynasties, if its importance had been understood, and been preserved from the alterations which a fatal negligence has caused it to suffer. It consists of a royal list on papyrus in hieratic writing, going back to the very origin of the monarchy; a list, which may give us an idea of what the priests, had preserved in their archives, and showed to Herodotus, and according to which Manetho had used to compose his History above all.

This document is said to have been discovered in the ruins of Thebes, acquired by M. Drovetti, the Consul General of France at Alexandria, and brought with his collection to Livorno, from where it passed into the Egyptian Museum of Turin. However, not without suffering damage in the various transports which reduced it to numerous fragments that are difficult to bring together.¹

As soon as the existence of a document of this kind became known, some of the doubts that reigned over this part of the chronology were lifted. However, several years passed without the scholars could use this treasure. The rumor spread that it had been lost or destroyed. A few brief notes on this manuscript dispelled this fear, but diminished the hopes the first announcement made.

In the first volume of his *Monumenti storici*, published in 1832, Mr. Rosellini explained the circumstances, which had prevented him from making use of this document.²

Champollion said he had no knowledge of these fragments at the time when he examined the hieratic manuscripts of the Turin Museum, from which he drew so much in his second letter to M. de Blacas. Some time after, a German scholar, Mr. Seyffarth, studying in his turn the fragments contained in this collection, would have recognized that a large number belonged to a list of kings, with the years of their reigns. He collected all these fragments and composed a long list of them, from which he made a copy, which he communicated to various scientists.³ But Mr. Rosellini adds that this papyrus was reduced to such small fragments that most of the fragments contained only one name, and that some names even consisted of several shreds. The state of fragmentation must have made the task of recomposing this list in its original state very difficult and almost arbitrary, which greatly diminished the authority of this canon, at least as to the order of succession of the reigns.

¹ Bunsen, 1.1, p. 82

² *Monumenti storici*, I, p. 146. "Some time later, after the very studious German Seyffarth examined and laboriously preserved those fragments, and separating from the others those who presented the writing itself, discovered that many of these belonged to a list of royal names, with dates written in hieratic characters, etc."

³ Rosellini, *ibid.* "He showed it to me, some five years ago."

The assertions of the professor of Pisa on the state of mutilation of this canon, some exaggerations that perhaps have tricked Mr. Birch and Barucchi from giving him the attention he deserved.⁴ There is also a lack of accuracy regarding the French hieroglyphic. Champollion was the first to mention the nature and content of this papyrus in the *Bulletin universelle des sciences* of 1824, whose fragments he began to classify, recognizing the names of the divine Typhoon, Horus, Thoth and Thmei, whom he cites in his *Egyptian Grammar*, as well as that of Menes.

We owe Mr. Lepsius for the publication of a facsimile of this papyrus,⁵ in his *Selected Monuments* printed in 1842, but first distributed only to a small number of friends. According to this text, Mr. Bunsen gave a record of the number of kings contained in the principal fragments; he restored the hieroglyphic reading of the names that were preserved, and tried to adapt the figures to his chronological system, especially for the Twelfth Dynasty. He was followed in this direction by Mr. de Rougé, who proposed several different applications to some of these passages.⁶

The fragments collected by Mr. Seyffarth numbered one hundred and sixty-four, which he divided into twelve columns. No column is complete from the upper margin to the bottom margin, so as to indicate the exact height of the papyrus. Two fragments that join (numbered 32 and 34) are thirty-five centimeters high, and bear the trace of twenty-two lines of writing. Mr. Seyffarth allowed up to twenty-seven rows per column, which implies at least forty-two centimeters in height, including margins, and exceeds the ordinary size of a papyrus. The letters are one centimeter high, and the interval of the lines is half a centimeter.

The text is divided into columns. Three fragments that join in an obvious way (numbers 72, 81 and 97 of the facsimile) present three fairly intact column heads. The width of the columns varied from ten to fifteen centimeters. The interval between them is quite narrow; sometimes even longer lines encroach on the next column.

It is necessary to evaluate the properties of the material to appreciate the degree of probability of the order adopted in the arrangement of the fragments, and to evaluate the extent of the gaps. Each line contains a royal cartouche, preceded by the signs of royalty (the reed and the bee), followed by the duration of the reign expressed in years, months, and days. Some signs use red ink (for example, Column III, 18, and Col. VI, 61, the reed and the bee are red). According to the Egyptian scribes; practice of writing the beginning of the chapters in red, it seems that this list of kings was divided into sections, like the dynasties of Manetho. We

4 Mr. Birch, *Gallery of antiquities*, p. 66, believe that it can hardly be used to confirm what is already established. On the other hand, Mr. Barucchi, in his *Discorsi critici sulla cronologia egizia*, published in 1844, did not make use of it, although he was able to consult the original, and Mr. Lepsius had given him copies of his facsimile, which was not yet printed, before he left for Egypt. See *Discorsi*, p. 21.

5 Mr. Lesueur, in his *Chronologie des rois d'Égypte*, reproduced a great part of this facsimile, and accompanied it with a hieroglyphic transcription.

6 *Examen de l'ouvrage de M. de Bunsen, etc.*; Paris, 1847. See also *Revue Archéologique* of 1849, an article by Mr. Mariette on a fragment of the Royal papyrus of Turin.

also note some fragments with tall figures, which must be the addition of a number of reigns.

A fragment of a dozen lines, ending with the name of Menes repeated twice, seems to be an assessment of the duration of the reigns prior to Menes. The scribe has formed the first column, Column II, fr. 11, which, according to the breadth of the right margin, would seem to belong to the beginning of the manuscript, contains seven names, preceded by the ordinary signs of royalty, which Champollion recognized as Seth, Horus, Thoth, and Thmé.

The remainder of the manuscript shows traces of about two hundred names, sometimes indicated only by a part of the bee or reed. About fifty of these can be read more or less clearly. Mr. Bunsen count thirty-four kings on ten fragments which he relates to the first six dynasties; twenty others on six fragments for dynasties six to twelve, and sixty-five for what this author calls the Egyptian Middle Ages, that is, the time of the Hyksos.

None of the names that could be read belong to the Eighteenth Dynasty or subsequent dynasties. It was concluded, perhaps a little hastily, is that this papyrus belong to a later period. There no evidence that this manuscript, when it was complete, did not have a larger number of columns, whose fragments may have been lost. The subsequent dynasties could also be contained in one or two other scrolls, just as the dynasties of Manetho were divided into three books.

In truth, the writing is very beautiful, very clear, and the derivation of the hieroglyphs is more recognizable than in many other texts, which is a character of antiquity; however, we do not yet have sufficiently certain elements of hieratic palaeography to be able to affirm that a manuscript belongs to the Eighteenth Dynasty or to a later century. But it does not matter, even if it only originate from the time of Herodotus, it nevertheless present us an authentic extract of the priestly archives. We must be careful, in the course of our examination, to discuss the information this text can still provide, as we find it possible to attach one of its fragments to the lists of Manetho or to the surviving monuments, as Mr Lepsius, Mr Bunsen and Mr Rougé have already attempted to do by ingeniously bringing them together.