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| **Samuel Sharpe 1799-1881**  *by* [*Alexander Gordon*](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Author:Alexander_Gordon)  [**Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900**](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900)**,** [**Volume 51**](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900/Volume_51) |  |
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| **http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Sharpe,\_Samuel\_%28DNB00%29** |

SHARPE, SAMUEL (1799–1881), Egyptologist and translator of the Bible, second son of Sutton Sharpe (1756–1806), brewer, by his second wife, Maria (*d*. 1806), third daughter of Thomas Rogers, banker, was born in King Street, Golden Square, London, on 8 March 1799, and baptised at St. James's, Piccadilly. His mother, a descendant of Philip Henry [q. v.], was sister of Samuel Rogers [q. v.] the poet. On her death, followed by his father's failure, he found a second mother in his half-sister Catherine. Daniel Sharpe [q. v.] was his younger brother. At midsummer 1807 Samuel became a boarder in the school of Eliezer Cogan [q. v.] at Higham Hill, Walthamstow; at Christmas 1814 he was taken into the banking-house of his uncles Samuel and Henry Rogers, at 29 Clement's Lane, Lombard Street; and remained connected with the firm till 1861, having been made partner in 1824. Punctuality and caution made him a successful man of business. Brought up in the creed of the established church, he came gradually to adopt the unitarian views held by his mother's relatives; in 1821 he joined the congregation of William Johnson Fox [q. v.] at South Place, Finsbury. For many years Sharpe and his brothers taught classes, before office hours, in the Lancasterian school, Harp Alley, Farringdon Street. He was elected a fellow of the Geological Society about 1827, but took a greater interest in mathematical science and archæological research, as his contributions (1828–31) to the ‘Philosophical Magazine’ show.

His interest in Egyptology was excited by the labours of Thomas Young, M.D. (1773–1829) [q. v.] He studied the works of Champollion and all that had been then published by Sir John Gardner Wilkinson [q. v.], learned Coptic, and formed a hieroglyphical vocabulary. Before publishing his first book, ‘The Early History of Egypt’ (1836), he consulted his uncle, Samuel Rogers, who said, ‘Why, surely you can do it if Wilkinson can; his only thought is where to buy his kid gloves.’ The first part (spring of 1837) of his ‘Egyptian Inscriptions,’ chiefly from the British Museum, contained ‘the largest body of hieroglyphical writing that had yet been published,’ and was followed by additional series in 1841 and 1855. His ‘Vocabulary of Hieroglyphics’ was published in the autumn of 1837; in the introduction he thus states his general method of investigation: ‘Granted a sentence in which most of the words are already known, required the meaning of others;’ he allows that the results are often tentative, and admits that the problem cannot always be thus set. In addition to his extreme patience, he had for this kind of verbal divination a natural gift; often amusing his friends by the facility with which in a few [ [426](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Dictionary_of_National_Biography_volume_51.djvu/434)  ] minutes he would read off a difficult cryptogram. In the autumn of 1838 appeared his ‘History of Egypt under the Ptolemies;’ in 1842 his ‘History of Egypt under the Romans;’ these were incorporated with the ‘Early History’ in ‘The History of Egypt,’ 1846. Other publications followed in the same line of research, but on these his reputation as an Egyptologist must rest. The pains and skill of his workmanship are unquestioned; but he worked very much on his own lines, and on many points his conclusions have not won acceptance. He said of himself, ‘I am a heretic in everything, even among unitarians.’

Sharpe's labours as a translator of the Bible began with a revision (1840) of the authorised version of the New Testament. His Greek text was that of Griesbach, and to this he always adhered, taking little interest in the progress of purely textual studies. His revision of the authorised version of the Old Testament was first issued in 1865. In eight editions of his New Testament, and four of his Old, he devoted incessant and minute care to the improvement of his work. As a translator he was distinguished less by originality of scholarship than by excellence of judgment; he is successful beyond others in the difficult experiment of removing the archaisms without impairing the venerable dignity of the English Bible. Among the last advocates of unpointed Hebrew, he published manuals for instruction in this system; his plan of printing his Hebrew extracts with capital letters, for the proper names and the beginnings of sentences, seems unique, and convenient for the learner. His ‘History of the Hebrew Nation and its Literature,’ 1869, and his exegetical works have merits akin to those of his Egyptian studies, and bear the same individual stamp. When, in 1870, the project of a revised version was undertaken by the convocation of Canterbury, Sharpe was one of four scholars of his denomination invited to select a member of their body to co-operate with the New Testament company.

In purely theological controversy he took little part, though he was a zealous propagandist in directions tending in his judgment to promote the union of knowledge and piety. His various benefactions to University College and School, London, considerably exceeded 15,000*l*. To his own denomination he was an unobtrusive and munificent benefactor. For its weekly organ, ‘The Inquirer,’ founded in 1842 by Edward Hill, he wrote constantly for some years, though he thought newspaper writing ‘a bad employment.’ He resumed it, however, in 1876 when the ‘Christian Life’ was started by his friend Robert Spears, writing a weekly article till his death. He had contributed papers, chiefly biblical, to the ‘Christian Reformer’ (1834–63) with the signature ‘S. S.,’ and to many minor periodicals. He was a trustee of Dr. Daniel Williams's foundations, 1853–1857; president of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in 1869–70, and president of Manchester College (now at Oxford) in 1876–8.

Simple in his habits, plain in his tastes, methodical in all his ways, quaint and terse in conversation, uniformly gentle in his demeanour, Sharpe spent his later days in tranquil retirement. His house was the resort of his literary friends, and of younger men whom he delighted to imbue with his own enthusiasm for his favourite pursuits. He died at 32 Highbury Place on 28 July 1881, and was buried at Abney Park cemetery on 3 Aug. He married (1827) his first cousin Sarah (*b*. 1796, *d*. 3 June 1851), daughter of Joseph Sharpe, and had six children, of whom two daughters survived him.

He published, besides a few doctrinal tracts: 1. ‘The Early History of Egypt,’ 1836, 4to. 2. ‘Egyptian Inscriptions,’ 1837, fol.; part ii. 1841, fol.; 2nd ser. 1855, fol. 3. ‘Rudiments of a Vocabulary of Egyptian Hieroglyphics,’ 1837, 4to. 4. ‘The History of Egypt under the Ptolemies,’ 1838, 4to. 5. ‘The New Testament, translated,’ 1840, 12mo; 8th edit. 1881, 8vo. 6. ‘The History of Egypt under the Romans,’ 1842, 8vo. 7. ‘Notes on the Hieroglyphics of Horapello Nilous,’ 1845 (Syro-Egyptian Society). 8. ‘The History of Egypt from the earliest Times till A.D. 640,’ 1846, 8vo; 6th edit. 1876, 8vo, 2 vols.; in German from the 3rd edit. (1852) by Jolowicz, revised by Von Gutschmid, Leipzig, 1862, 8vo, 2 vols. 9. ‘The Chronology and Geography of Ancient Egypt,’ 1849, 8vo (in co-operation with Joseph Bonomi, the younger [q. v.]). 10. ‘Fragments of Orations in Accusation and Defence of Demosthenes … translated,’ 1849, 8vo. 11. ‘Sketch of Assyrian History,’ in Bonomi's ‘Nineveh and its Palaces,’ 2nd edit. 1853, 8vo. 12. ‘The Triple Mummy Case of Aro-eri Ao,’ 1858. 13. ‘Historical Notice of the Monuments of Egypt’ in Owen Jones and Bonomi's ‘Description of the Egyptian Court in the Crystal Palace,’ 1854, 8vo. 14. ‘Historic Notes on the … Old and New Testaments,’ 1854, 12mo; 3rd edit. 1858, 8vo. 15. ‘Critical Notes on the … New Testament,’ 1856, 8vo; 1867, 8vo. 16. ‘Alexandrian Chronology,’ 1857, 4to. [ [427](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Dictionary_of_National_Biography_volume_51.djvu/435)  ] 17. ‘Some Particulars of the Life of Samuel Rogers,’ 1859, 4to; 1860, 4to. 18. ‘Egyptian Hieroglyphics,’ 1861, 8vo. 19. ‘Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum, described,’ 1862, 8vo. 20. ‘Notes’ in Bonomi's ‘Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia,’ 1862, 4to. 21. ‘Egyptian Mythology and Egyptian Christianity,’ 1863, 12mo. 22. ‘Sketch of the Arguments for … authorship … of the Pentateuch,’ [1863], 12mo. 23. ‘The Alabaster Sarcophagus of Oimenepthah,’ 1864, 4to. 24. ‘The Hebrew Scriptures, translated,’ 1865, 8vo, 3 vols.; 4th edit. 1881, 8vo in one volume with New Testament. 25. ‘The Chronology of the Bible,’ &c., 1868, 8vo. 26. ‘Texts from the Bible explained by … Ancient Monuments,’ 1866, 8vo; 1869, 1880 (drawings by Bonomi). 27. ‘The History of the Hebrew Nation and its Literature,’ 1869, 8vo; 5th edit. 1892, 8vo. 28. ‘The Decree of Canopus; in Hieroglyphics and Greek, with translations,’ 1870, 8vo. 29. ‘The Rosetta Stone; in Hieroglyphics and Greek, with translations,’ 1871, 8vo. 30. ‘Short Notes to … translation of the Hebrew Scriptures,’ 1874, 8vo. 31. ‘Hebrew Inscriptions from the valleys between Egypt and Mount Sinai,’ 1875, 8vo; part ii. 1876, 8vo. 32. ‘The Journeys and Epistles of St. Paul,’ 1876, 16mo; 3rd edit. [1880], 8vo. 33. ‘The Book of Isaiah arranged chronologically in a revised translation … with … Notes,’ 1877, 8vo. 34. ‘A Short Hebrew Grammar without Points,’ 1877, 8vo. 35. ‘The Book of Genesis … without Points,’ 1879, 8vo (selections). 36. ‘An Inquiry into the Age of the Moabite Stone,’ &c., 1879, 12mo. 37. ‘Bαρνάβα Ἐπιστολή. The Epistle of Barnabas … with a translation,’ 1880, 8vo.

[Clayden's Samuel Sharpe, 1883; Christian Life, 7 Oct. 1876 (portrait), 6 and 13 Aug. 1881; Athenæum, 6 Aug. 1881; Lawrence's Descendants of Philip Henry, 1844, p. 51; Jeremy's Presbyterian Fund, 1885, p. 213.]

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