ENiM
Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne

Équipe Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne
UMR 5140 « Archéologie des Sociétés Méditerranéennes »
Cnrs – Université Paul Valéry (Montpellier III)

The 'Abaton Decree'
Philological Study of Religious Texts from Philae

Charly De Maré

Citer cet article :

Charly De Maré, « The 'Abaton Decree'. Philological Study of Religious Texts from Philae », *ENiM* 14, 2021, p. 21-54.

ENiM – Une revue d'égyptologie sur internet est librement téléchargeable depuis le site internet de l'équipe « Égypte nilotique et méditerranéenne » de l'UMR 5140, « Archéologie des sociétés méditerranéennes » : **http://www.enim-egyptologie.fr**

The 'Abaton Decree'

Philological Study of Religious Texts from Philae

Charly De Maré

(F.R.S-FNRS)*

ULB Université libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium

EPHE École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, France

THE ABATON OF BIGEH was an important place of worship conceived in connection with the Great Temple of Isis on Philae Island[1]. It was named "Pure Mound / Pure Island" in Ancient Egyptian, but "Abaton", *i.e.* the "Forbidden place" in Greek. It was a holy wooded mound which housed the mythical tomb of Osiris containing the left leg of the god. This Osirian burial place probably stood on a limited area on Bigeh Island, whose Egyptian name was *Senmut*. The cult image of Isis travelled there in a small boat every ten days and on festivals to make a libation of milk in favour of her deceased husband. A Graeco-Roman temple has been partially preserved near the jetty situated in the oriental creek of the island[2].

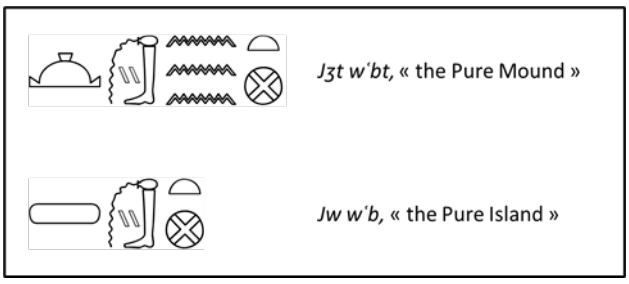


Fig. 1. The names of the Abaton in the hieroglyphic sources.

* I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my two directors, Mr. Laurent Coulon (EPHE – IFAO) and Prof. Michèle Broze (F.R.S.-FNRS - ULB), for their advice and the support they have shown me. I would also like to warmly thank Prof. Holger Kockelmann (Univ. Tübingen) for the information and the photographs he kindly sent me. I want to acknowledge the acceptance and support of Prof. Filip Coppens and his team (Charles University, Prague) during the 7th Ptolemaic Summer School. Also, I would like to thank Prof. Marc Gabolde for the unpublished documents that he gave me and that fed my reflection. Finally, I am indebted to Mr. Colin Quentinet (CFEETK) whose expertise allows me to provide here a high-quality photograph of the Decree I.

[1] It is interesting to note that, as A. Gutbub has shown, the Abaton and Senmut symbolize Lower Egypt, in the local theology of the temple of Philae (Ptolemy Philadelphe), while Philae corresponds to Upper Egypt. See D. INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *Le mythe de la déesse lointaine à Philae*, *BiEtud* 132, Cairo, 2001, p. 268. However, the Osirian sepulcher at Bigeh had an equivalent in the north at Acanthônpolis. On this subject, see J. YOYOTTE, "Études géographiques, I : la 'Cité des Acacias' (Kafr Ammar)", *RdE* 13, 1961, p. 102 sq.

[2] A.M. BLACKMAN, *Les temples immergés de la Nubie : The temple of Bigeh*, Cairo, 1915.

The texts are far more helpful than the sparse archaeological remains to provide a picture of the buildings that were on the island. The mention of the Abaton on a block from the reign of Psammetichus I and the special connections of some deities with Senmut, but rather than with Philae, attest to the antiquity of the occupation of Bigeh in comparison with Philae[3].

Fig. 2. Bigeh Island (left) and flooded Philae Island (right).

Interest for the Abaton of Bigeh and the fascination with Osirian tombs are not new. Among the past studies on the Abaton, are the old publications of Émile Chassinat[4] (1903) and Hermann Junker[5] (1913). The early 20th century publications have focused on some details about the Abaton or the related texts, except for the excellent summary made by Holger Kockelmann[6] in 2011. Indeed, these last few years, the scientific interest in the Abaton has notably increased. Sibylle Emerit[7] approached the subject in 2002 in her paper about music bans. Peter Grossmann talked in 2002 about the church that was established in the temple of Bigeh in the VIIth century AD[8]. In 2009, Gihane Zaki discussed the sacred island and the leg

[3] D. INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *op. cit.*, p. 268; A. KADRY, "Remains of a kiosk of Pasammetikhos II on Philae Island", *MDAIK* 36, 1980, p. 297 et fig. 4 (mention of the Abaton on a block from a kiosk of Psammetichus II). One could add, as Arthur Weigall said, that: "As will be seen from the inscriptions and the remains of the statues of Amenophis II and Thoutmosis II, the island was already sacred in the Eighteenth Dynasty. (…) The sanctity of Philae is of much later date than is that of Bîgeh; and thus the latter island has an interest which one must not overlook". See Arthur E.P.B. WEIGALL, *A Report on the Antiquities of Lower Nubia (the First Cataract to the Sudan Frontier) and their condition in 1906-1907*, Oxford, 1907, p. 37.

[4] É. CHASSINAT, "Étude sur quelques textes funéraires de provenance thébaine", *BIFAO* 3, 1903, p. 129-163.

[5] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, Wien, 1913.

[6] H. KOCKELMANN, "L'Abaton. Tombe et lieu de culte d'Osiris sur la première cataracte", *Égypte, Afrique et Orient* 60, 2011, p. 31-44.

[7] S. EMERIT, "À propos de l'origine des interdits musicaux dans l'Égypte ancienne", *BIFAO* 102, 2002, p. 189-210.

[8] P. GROSSMANN, "Überlegungen zur Gestalt der Kirche im Temple von Bīğa", dans T.A. Bács (ed.), *A Tribute to Excellence: Studies Offered in Honor of Ernő Gaál, Ulrich Luft, László Török*, Budapest, 2002, p. 279-287.

reliquary of Osiris[9]. In 2012, Lise Manniche gave interesting information about the temple, the tomb of Osiris and the inscriptions on the rocks of the island[10]. In 2016, I published a paper on the ritual aspects of the Abaton, its vegetation and the parallels in the Greek and Latin sources[11]. Regarding Bigeh, it is also worth mentioning an architectural study issued in 2017 on the characteristic Nubian villages that remain on the island, with some botanical notes on actual vegetation[12]. It is the result of the field work carried out in 2015-2016 by a team from the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* led by Bernadeta Schäfer. A recent contribution by Konstantin Ivanov[13] has been published in 2020 about the remains of the pronaos of the Temple of Bigeh (probably from the reign of Ptolemy XII). It discusses a hypothetical reconstruction of a scene (identified as a ritual purification of the pharaoh by Horus and Thot) and deals with the decoration program of the pronaos.

1. The 'Abaton Decree', an essential source on the Abaton

The main Egyptian source that describes the Abaton of Bigeh may be found at Philae, in the corridor of the jetty leading to Bigeh Island, which is a structure called "Hadrian's Door", because it's dated from the reign of Roman emperor Hadrian, in the second century A.D. This text, named the 'Abaton Decree' (in German, *das Götterdekret über das Abaton*), has been preserved through two versions (Decree I and II) carved in association with a sequence of figurative reliefs. Of the two versions, the Decree I is the most complete: it consists of ten columns written in Ptolemaic hieroglyphic script. The inscription is located on the north wall in the first register.

The text is important because the provisions concerning the Abaton also apply to the mounds of Busiris, Abydos and Memphis. Frequently discussed during Ptolemaic lessons, the text does not have a recent edition, while gray areas remain. When seemingly easy to read, the Decree contains passages which are difficult and discussed. The text has appeared sporadically in some recent publications. Besides Sybille Emerit's study on musical prohibitions, which quotes the Decree, Prof. Alain Fortier dedicated a class[14] in 2018 on this text and André Block wrote a paper in 2019 on a misinterpretation by the Greeks of a passage of the Decree[15].

Lately, I had the opportunity at the 7th Ptolemaic Summer School (Prague, August 2019) to present a revised edition of the Decree (especially the Decree I)[16], and to collect the

[9] G. ZAKI, *Le premier nome de Haute-Égypte du IIIe siècle avant J.-C. au VIIe siècle après J.-C. d'après les sources hiéroglyphiques des temples ptolémaïques et romains*, *MRE* 13, 2009, notamment p. 267-268, 378-379.
[10] L. MANNICHE, "Osiris' grav og tempel på Biga", *Papyrus : aegyptologisk tidsskrift* 32/2, 2012, p. 4-15.
[11] Ch. DE MARÉ, "Ci-gît Osiris : l'Abaton de Biggeh d'après les sources textuelles et iconographiques", *BABELAO* 5, 2016, p. 1-45.
[12] B. SCHÄFER, "Bigge, Ägypten. Die Arbeiten der Jahre 2015 und 2016", *e-Forschungsberichte des DAI*, *Faszikel* 1, 2017, p. 22-31 ; B. SCHÄFER, "Bigge, Ägypten. Nubische Dörfer auf der Insel Bigge. Feldforschungskampagne im Januar 2017", e-*Forschungsberichte des DAI*, *Faszikel* 2, 2017, p. 11-20.
[13] K. IVANOV, "Rituele reiniging van de farao in Bigeh. Het doen herleven van de tempel van Osiris", in *Mehen, Essays over het oude Egypte* 2020, p. 224-239 (transl. in Dutch by Bep Koek-Overvest).
[14] A. FORTIER, "Initiation et lecture des textes des temples d'époque ptolémaïque et romaine", *Ann. EPHE^V* 125, 2016, p. 109-111.
[15] A. BLOCK, "Plutarchs Hausverbot für Vogel und Fische am Abaton: fatale Folge eines Übersetzungsfehlers aus dem Ägyptischens?", *ENiM* 12, 2019, p. 43-48.
[16] The work on the Decree II could then be carried out, thanks to detailed photographs provided by Prof. Holger Kockelmann, which I lacked. The inscription of Decree II being located quite high, this complicates taking photographs and reading.

comments of the participants. This article is based on this work and these discussions. The purpose of this study is to publish a new edition with philological commentaries in order to provide both researchers and students with a solid basis and in-depth reflection on questions of interpretation in terms of local and religious history posed by the remaining uncertainties.

The Decree I (see Annex 1), written by the god Thoth himself[17] and enacted by the great gods, contains an hymn addressed to Osiris' *Ba* established on the Abaton, the terms of the Decree including daily rituals requirements, several prohibitions (regarding music, human presence, fishing and hunting) concerning the burial sanctuary of Osiris, and also a description of the periodical pilgrimages of Isis on Bigeh Island. Indeed, the access to the Abaton was prohibited for all except the priests. The Decree II adds details about Isis' pilgrimages.

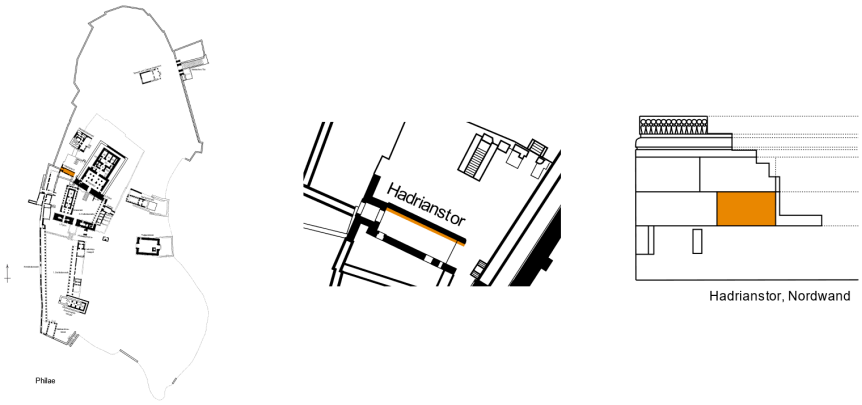


Fig. 3. Location of the Decree I : Philae > Hadrian's Door > North wall (© Projekt "Edition der Tempelinschriften von Philae", ÖAW Wien [Textnummer : PhHadrianstor0034]).

Fig. 4. Hadrian's Door. View of the Decree I (inscription in the centre) in context. (© Ch. De Maré).

[17] S. SCHOTT, "Thoth als Verfasser heiliger Schriften", *ZÄS* 99/1, 1972, p. 20-25.

The text consists of two main parts: a hymn to Osiris and the enumeration of the terms of the Decree. The introduction of hymnic nature (col. 1 to 4) begins with an invocation (*jnḏ-ḥr.k*...) to the Osiris' *Ba* and ends with *m-ḏd* introducing the terms of the Decree that contain duties and bans about the holy place (col. 5 - 9). Finally, a colophon mentions the signatures of the gods who witness the Decree (col. 10). The god Thoth in action at the right of the Decree is described in a lost caption.

The Decree II is engraved in the upper frieze, between the upper register and the cornice. The inscription is engraved horizontally from left to right. It sets itself apart by the presence of two very large signs, probably intentionally oversized: a *ba*-bird with a human head and a leafy tree. The engraving style is not constant and there may have been a change of engraver at the middle of the preserved part. Moreover, the first part of the inscription is badly carved or preserved. The Decree II is only half preserved. The content of the Decree is very similar to the Decree I, with some interesting differences. After an introduction evoking the arrival of the Osiris' *Ba* on the Abaton, the terms of the Decree II refer to the yearly ritual boat journey of Isis, ritual dispositions and bans on music, human presence, hunting and fishing.

This paper contains a literature review about the Decree and the methodology applied, a text schema comparing the content of the two Decrees, an annotated edition and translation of Decree I and Decree II, and finally, a discussion about the results and the scope of perspectives. A continuous translation of the two Decrees, the list of used references, the photographs and diplomatic and linear editions of the inscriptions will be found at the end of the paper (Annex 1 & 2). Reinterpretations and new tracks will be proposed.

2. Literature review and methodology

At the very beginning of the research on the Abaton Decrees, Junker discovered the text of Decree I on behalf of the Photo Berlin n° 400 and that of Decree II by means of the Photo Berlin n° 397. The photographs come from the Archives of the expedition's materials carried out for the *Berliner Wörterbuch der ägyptische Sprache*[18]. In 1913, H. Junker published the only printed edition of the text with translation and commentaries. Junker's edition is a real masterpiece in Egyptian philology, but it does not really capture the epigraphic reality and could benefit from a new examination of the inscription. The debt of Hermann Junker's understanding of the text is immense and worthy of appreciation, as his work has left a lasting mark on this area of research.

Junker provided a continuous translation of the two decrees on pages V and VI of his work. Among the elements published by Junker in his study are the two decrees which are the subject of the present paper. It also contains a study on the Abaton of Bigeh and the parallels in Greek and Latin sources[19] and a chapter on the papyrus Berlin 8351 concerning *W-pqr* and papyrus Dogson evoking gloomy prophecies. Junker's work is excellent but somewhat dated and based on poor quality photographs. The Teinhard font that Junker used has also shown its limits. As Alain Fortier recently said, the typographic composition of the Junker edition is misleading compared to the photograph, because the hieroglyphic font used at that time was not well adapted to the "normalized" restitution of Ptolemaic texts, especially those of the

[18] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. III.
[19] See also Ch. DE MARÉ, "Ci-gît Osiris : l'Abaton de Biggeh d'après les sources textuelles et iconographiques", *BABELAO* 5, 2016, p. 10-20, 26-42.

Roman era, which show a great diversity and inventiveness in the creation of hieroglyphs[20]. So, the use of high-quality photographs of the inscription and the new techniques of informatic edition enable us to give a more accurate philological study of this text.

Other translations are based on Junker's translation like those by Roeder[21] in 1915 and Etienne Drioton[22] in 1960 or are partially so, as those of Jean Yoyotte[23] in 1997 or Sylvie Cauville[24] in 2013. Therefore, revising the annotated translation that I gave in a previous paper[25] in 2016 and reading with attention the valuable philological notes of Christian Leitz[26], I propound a new hieroglyphic edition established from scratch on the basis of recent pictures of the inscription taken by Prof. Holger Kockelmann. I got the opportunity to go *in situ* to examine certain details and take additional photographs, accompanied by Colin Quentinet, photographer at the CFEETK (CNRS/MoTA – Luxor). Regarding the method, the layout of a facsimile helped me to stick closer to the inscription in the establishment of the edition. I also used detailed photos to accurately examine the difficult passages and the Jsesh software[27] to build an informatic edition of the text. In addition, I took up the main remarks from Junker's publication.

3. Text schema

DECREE I

1. The Hymn addressed to the Osiris' *Ba*

1a. Invocation Spell

1b. Litany on the names of the Osiris' Ba

1c. Reception of the Osiris' Ba *on the* Abaton – *Welcome Speech*

1d. Glorification of the Osiris' Ba *on the* Abaton

DECREE II

1. Introduction. The translation of the Osiris' Ba

[20] A. FORTIER, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
[21] G. ROEDER, *Urkunden zur Religion des alten Ägypten: übersetzt und eingeleitet* IV, Jena, 1915, p. 31-33.
[22] É. DRIOTON, "Philae: the sacred isle", *The UNESCO Courier* 13, 1960, p. 36.
[23] J. YOYOTTE, P. CHARVET, St. GOMPERTZ, *Strabon. Le voyage en Égypte: un regard romain*, Paris, 1997, p. 260-261.
[24] S. CAUVILLE, M.I. ALI, *Philæ: itinéraire du visiteur*, Leuven, Paris, Walpole, 2013, p. 268-269.
[25] Ch. DE MARÉ, "Ci-gît Osiris : l'Abaton de Biggeh d'après les sources textuelles et iconographiques", *BABELAO* 5, 2016, p. 13-20.
[26] Chr. LEITZ, *Quellentexte zur ägyptischen Religion* I. *die Tempelinschriften der griechisch-römischen Zeit* II, Münster, 2009, p. 44-48.
[27] Created by S. Rosmorduc.

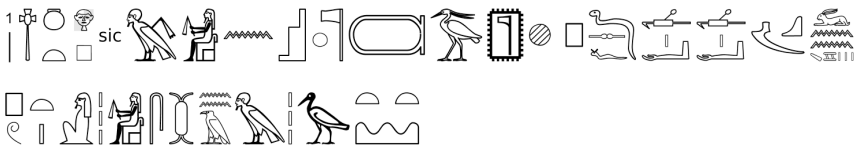
2. The Decree *stricto sensu*	**2. The terms of the Decree**
2a. Introduction	*2a. Introduction*
2b. The terms of the Decree	*2b. Isis' pilgrimage on feast days – The ritual boat journey of Isis*
§1. Introduction	*2c. The funeral offering to Osiris*
§2. Daily rituals	*2d. The libations*
§3. Ban on playing music	*2e. The daily ritual on the Abaton*
§4. Ban on going there	*2f. Ban on playing music*
§5. Prohibition of fishing and hunting	*2g. Ban on going there*
§6. Noise ban during the periodical pilgrimages of Isis	*2h. Prohibition of hunting and fishing*
§7. Isis' pilgrimage on feast days	[Rest in lacuna]
2c. The divine redaction of the Decree	

4. The Decree I : Edition, transliteration and translation[28]

(See Annex 1 for orthophotograph, diplomatic edition and continuous edition).

4. 1. *The Hymn addressed to the Osiris' Ba*

1a. *Invocation Spell*



(1) *Jnḏ ḥr.k, bȝ šps n(y) Wsjr* (*Wnn-nfr*)|,

bnw nṯry ḫp(rw) ḏs.f, wʿ wʿ, qmȝ(w) wnnw, p(ȝ)wty šps n(y) nȝ bȝw Jgrt !

(1) Hail to you, Osiris Wenen-nefer's venerable Ba, divine phoenix who generated himself, the Unique to be unique, who created that is, venerable primaeval god of the *Bau* of the necropolis-*igeret*!

This hymn is related to the depiction of the Osiris' Ba standing on the *menta*-grove at the left of the Decree I, and to the beginning of the Decree II. The Osiris' Ba was worshipped in the Abaton.

[28] See Ch. DE MARÉ, "Ci-gît Osiris : l'Abaton de Biggeh d'après les sources textuelles et iconographiques", *BABELAO* 5, 2016, p. 10-20 (preliminary study and French translation, based on Junker's edition). Previous translations are cited below in abridged form, including only the name of their author. The full references are: H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 1-25 (Decree I), p. 25-31 (Decree II); G. ROEDER, *op. cit.*, p. 31-33. I would like to thank warmly Nadine Guilhou for her remarks on the philological study.

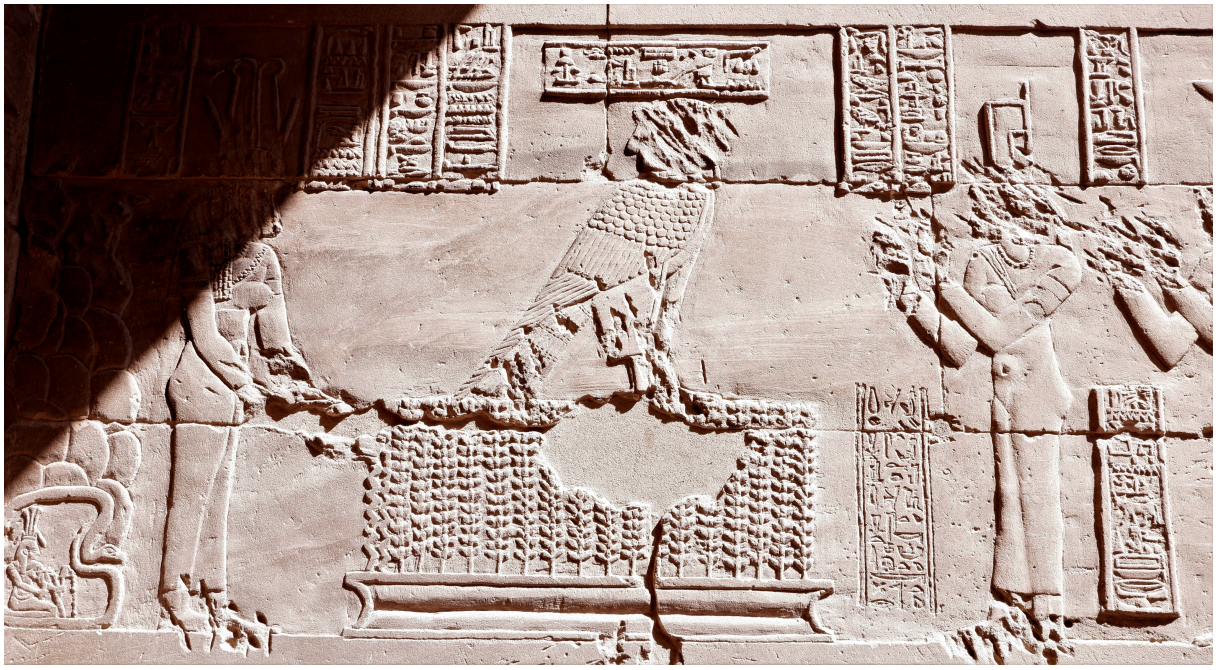


Fig. 5. Hadrian's Door. View of the left part of the north wall. (© Ch. De Maré).

The empty cartouche with omission of *Wnn-nfr* is probably attributable to the lack of place to carve it in the cartouche[29].

The epithet of *bnw nṯry* ("divine phoenix") has connections with Osiris-Moon, to whom a hymn is dedicated in the temple of Bigeh[30], through the image of the phoenix linked with the flood[31].

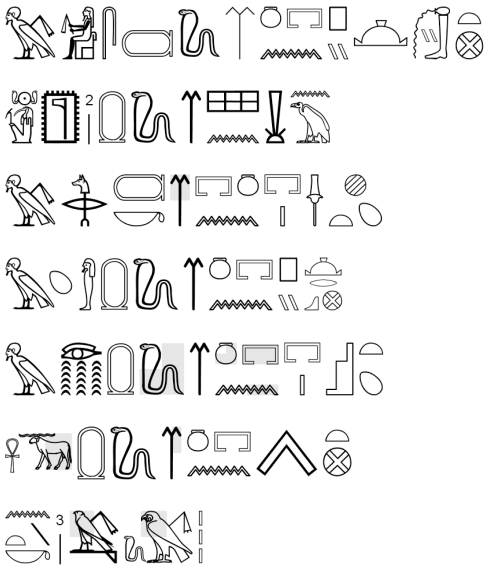
wnn(w) : "that is" (common writing). Because of the determinative, it evokes the physical setting, not the human environment. Other cases of *wnnw* with determinatives adding shades to the term occur[32]. Osiris is here equated with the creator god Atum.

As for *n(y) nꜣ* at the end of the sentence, according to Junker, reduplication of the *n* in <*n*> *n(y) nꜣ* would be a peculiarity of the Hadrian's Door[33].

Regarding the end of the line, another possible translation could be: "who created the beings and the venerable primaeval gods for the bas of the necropolis". However, it seems not very convincing, because the determinatives of the term *wnn(w)* make clearly reference to the creation by the demiurge, but not to live beings.

[29] About the cartouches in general, see C. SPIESER, "Les cartouches divins", *ZÄS* 129/1, 2002, p. 85-96.
[30] See Fr.R. HERBIN, "Un hymne à la lune croissante", *BIFAO* 82, 1982, p. 237-282.
[31] See Ch. DE MARÉ, "Ci-gît Osiris: l'Abaton de Biggeh d'après les sources textuelles et iconographiqus", p. 13, n. 73. *bnw nṯry ḫprw ḏs.f* : see *LGG* II, 687-688 et 797-798.
[32] See examples at Esna in A.I. FERNÁNDEZ PICHEL, *Les hymnes au dieu Khnoum de la façade ptolémaïque du temple d'Esna*, *Studien zur spätägyptischen Religion* 20, Wiesbaden, 2018, p. 40, n. b). about Esna II, 17, 17 : "cadre physique naturel créé par la divinité".
[33] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 2.

1b. *Litany on the names of the Osiris’* Ba



Bȝ šps *rn.k m-ḫnw* *p(ȝ)y Jȝt wʿbt,*

Bȝ nṯry (2) *rn.k m-ḫnw* *Snmwt,*

Bȝ wsr *rn.k m-ḫnw* *Pr-Sḫmt,*

Bȝ jrw *rn.k m-ḫnw* *p(ȝ)y Jw-rq,*

Bȝ rmy *rn.k m-ḫnw* *Pr-Ȝst,*

Bȝ ʿnḫ *rn.k m-ḫnw* *Ȝbw,*

Ntk (3) *bjk nṯrw nṯrwt.*

Venerable *Ba* is your name in the Abaton,

Divine *Ba*[34] (2) is your name in Bigeh Island,

Powerful *Ba* is your name in Sekhmet’s Temple,

Appearing *Ba*[35] is your name in Philae,

Mourned *Ba* is your name in Isis’ Temple,

Living *Ba* is your name in Elephantine[36],

Because you are (3) the Falcon of Gods and Goddesses[37].

The first name of the Osiris’ Ba that is mentioned, *bȝ šps* (“Venerable *Ba*”), is the name of the Osiris’ Ba on the Abaton. This has to be compared to the first lines of the Decree II. The hymn is also linked with the caption of the Ba’s depiction on the same wall.

Bȝ / bnw nṯry (“Divine *Ba* / Phoenix”): because of the intern logic of the litany, the reading *bȝ* is here preferred. However, the reading *bnw* (“phoenix”), propounded by Junker, is still possible,

[34] H. Junker: *Heiliger Phönix* (*op. cit.*, p. 3).
[35] Litterally Ba *of the form.* H. Junker: *Ba śpd ỉrw?* (*op. cit.*, p. 3).
[36] H. Junker: *ḥpt* (*op. cit.*, p. 3); G. Roeder: *Elephantine* (*op. cit.*, p. 31).
[37] H. Junker: *Du bist der Ba über den Seelen der Götter* (*op. cit.*, p. 3); G. Roeder: *Du bist der Falke, der oberste (Herr) der Falkenweibchen (?)* (*op. cit.*, p. 31).

according to M. Gabolde (see *LGG* II, p. 687-688 et 797-798). The sign of the ibis-headed god topped by a solar disk with two *uraei* occurs nowhere else. The role of Thoth in the local theology towards Tefnut[38], and the presence of a depiction of Thoth at the right of the Decree must be considered. It could justify this special writing for the word *bꜣ*. On the other hand, the presence of the expression *bnw nṯry* ("divine phoenix") in the introduction of the text pleads in favour of a reading *bnw* ("phoenix"). So, this point might be debatable. Another possibility is that the two meanings are willingly overlapping, in the frame of a play of double reading. *Bꜣ nṯry* ("divine *Ba*") is attested for Osiris and appears much more frequently than *bnw nṯry* ("divine phoenix"). Furthermore, the term *Snmwt* designates all the island of Bigeh, while the "Pure Mound" refers only to the Abaton[39].

The ideogram here clearly differs in comparison with the writing at the beginning of each phrase of the litany, but nothing prevents a reading *bꜣ*. On the other hand, the reading *bnw* does not occur in any other text, and *bnw* is never written with an ibis. The readings *jꜥḥ* ("moon") or "ibis" might also be possible, in link with Osiris-Moon. An interesting hypothesis would be a triple Osiris – Thoth – Re interconnection through the Thoth figure, possibly with a reference to the heron *bnw*[40].

bꜣ jrw ("*Ba* of the form"): According to Junker, the sign *spd* would have been forgotten in presence of the sign of the egg. However, *spd jrw* ("with an effective form") is a guesswork propounded by Junker, that has now to be dismissed because the present expression is very well attested[41].

"Powerful *Ba*" (*bꜣ-wsr*) refers to Sekhmet, the Powerful Goddess (*Wsrt*). "*Sekhmet's Temple*" would be a sanctuary devoted to the goddess Sekhmet-Tefnut on Bigeh Island. It is difficult to know if the so called "House of the Flame" quoted in the texts from Philae and that was dedicated to Sekhmet, has to be identified with the temple of Bigeh[42]. Tefnut, who was an important deity at Bigeh in relation to the Far Goddess myth, occurs rarely in the Decree, but can be found in many inscriptions, sometimes quoted as Sekhmet, Râit or Upeset, in which occurrences it is said that she resides in the Abaton, has been pacified and has cleansed herself (*wꜥb*) on that place (reference to the etiological etymology of *Jw-wꜥb*)[43].

As the epithet *bꜣ rmy* ("Mourning *Ba*") shows, the Abaton is obviously the place of the plaintive cries of Isis near the corpse of her husband (*Abaton*, p. 4). "*Isis' Temple*" (*Pr-ꜣst*) is nothing else than the Great Temple of Isis in Philae.

In *bꜣ ꜥnḫ* ("Living *Ba*"), the writing with a ram has been deliberately chosen, to associate the ram god Khnum with his place, Elephantine. "Living *Ba*" is a frequent title in the funerary texts. Concerning the reading of the toponym, *Ꜣbw* is now the common reading, and not *Ḫḫt*[44].

The text mentions successively Bigeh and its surroundings (the Abaton, Senmout, the Sekhmet's Temple), Philae (the Island and the Great Temple of Isis) and Elephantine. According to M. Gabolde, the litany could be a catalogue of toponyms from a central point (the Abaton) to the outer places. On the other hand, the litany refers to divinities in relation with places, sometimes with special writings: Osiris (Abaton), Thoth? (Senmut), Sekhmet/Tefnut (Sekhmet's Temple), Isis (Philae, twice), Khnum (Elephantine).

---

[38] Thoth of Nebes is "Who pacifies the Flame in Senmout" or "in the Abaton". The god, in the form of Shu, brings back his Eye to Re in the shape of the Far Goddess; as Thoth, he calms the flaming goddess in Bigeh. See D. INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *Le mythe de la déesse lointaine à Philae*, p. 176.

[39] See Ch. DE MARÉ, "Ci-gît Osiris: l'Abaton de Biggeh d'après les sources textuelles et iconographiqus", p. 2.

[40] According to the chapter 100 of the Book of the Dead, the heron *bnw* can be associated with Re as well as Osiris. Furthermore, Thoth is the heart / mind (*jb*) of Re and, as moon, his substitute.

[41] See *LGG* II, 665: other occurrences of *bꜣ jrw*.

[42] D. INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *Le mythe de la déesse lointaine à Philae*, p. 241.

[43] See *ibid.*, p. 81; 213 ("le thème de la purification apparaît donc comme fondamental dans la théologie du temple de Senmout").

[44] See D. KURTH, *Einführung ins Ptolemäische: eine Grammatik mit Zeichenliste und Übungsstücken* I, p. 413, n. 138.

The final clause is the object of many disputations. Is the first sign of column 3 to be read as *bꜣ* ("*Ba*") or *bjk* ("falcon")? While Junker considered it as *bꜣ* ("*Ba*"), it has been pointed out at the PSS 2019 that the sign under the falcon does not correspond closely to the sign of the sky, but rather to a divine pavois surmounted by a falcon with a flail. Now, the Osiris' Ba is precisely delineated in the Decree II as a falcon with a human face, just as in the depiction on the left side of the north wall of the Hadrian Door[45].

The "Falcon of Gods" cited here already appears in the Pyramid Texts, in particular § 525 [TP 325][46] (among other utterances), where it is the sum of Horus of the Horizon, of Horus of the East and of Horus of Shesmet, that is to say of all the Horus, in other words of all the gods.

"Because you are the Falcon of Gods": proposition with nominal predicate with independent pronoun, ending a series.

1c. *Reception of the Osiris'* Ba *on the* Abaton – *Welcome Speech*

Jj.n.k m ḥtp r spt twy, r jꜣt.k twy šps(t),

ḏsr(w){t} n.k Ḥr, rm(w) n.k Ꜣst [ḥr.s? ...]

sbjw/šnṯyw? [...] ḥr [trwy ?].

You are coming in peace to this territory, to this your venerable mound,

that Horus is consecrating for you and on which Isis is mourning[47].

[…] the enemies [… forever?][48].

It is also possible to analyze the sentence as an argumentative proposition: "If you came in peace to this territory, to this your venerable mound, that Horus consecrated you and [where?] Isis mourned over you, this is [...] your enemies [of the two times?[49]]".

[45] See H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 15, n. 11.

[46] "To say: The double doors of heaven are open; the double doors of *ḳbḥ.w* are open for Horus of the gods, at daybreak, that he may ascend in the Marsh of Reeds and purify himself in the Marsh of Reeds. The double doors of heaven are open; the double doors of *ḳbḥ.w* are open for Harachte at daybreak, that he may ascend in the Marsh of Reeds and purify himself in the Marsh of Reeds. The double doors of heaven are open; the double doors of *ḳbḥ.w* are open for Horus of the East at daybreak, that he may ascend in the Marsh of Reeds and purify himself in the Marsh of Reeds. The double doors of heaven are open; the double doors of *ḳbḥ.w* are open for Horus of the *Šsm.t*-land at daybreak, that he may ascend in the Marsh of Reeds, and purify himself in the Marsh of Reeds. The double doors of heaven are open; the double doors of *ḳbḥ.w* are open for N. himself at daybreak that he may ascend in the Marsh of Reeds and purify himself in the Marsh of Reeds. (…)." (S. MERCER, *The Pyramid texts in translation and commentary* I, New York, 1952, p. 111).

[47] H. Junker: *Horus ist (macht) dir ḏśr (?). Isis beweint dich* (*op. cit.*, p. 6).; G. Roeder: *Horus richtet sie dir schön her* (*op. cit.*, p. 31). This translation with relative clauses is due to a suggestion made by Prof. J.Fr. Quack.

[48] H. Junker: *... die Feinde des ... immerdar (?)* (*op. cit.*, p. 6); G. Roeder: *[Harendotes und Arsnuphis töten deine] Feinde in Ewigkeit* (*op. cit.*, p. 31).

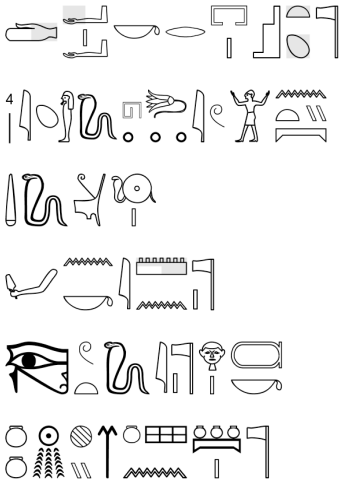
[49] Of the two times? *i.e.* "day and night", usual meaning of *trwy*.

The *m* (sic) has probably been carved in lieu of a falcon. On the palaeographic level, note that the sign *rm* is engraved with four floods of tears.

The last phrase was probably about the enemies that are subdued or killed on Osiris' behalf. Roeder propounded that the gods Arensnuphis and Harendotes, depicted killing enemies on the Hadrian Door, were originally mentioned in the text, but this is just a hypothesis based on the contiguous reliefs.

Fig. 6. Hadrian's Door, south wall, second register. The gods Arensnuphis and Harendotes killing enemies. (© Ch. De Maré) [50].

1d. *Glorification of the Osiris'* Ba *on the* Abaton



[50] For this scene, instead of Harendotes and Arsnuphis, Madeleine Peters-Destéract mentions Horus of Efdu slaughtering an enemy in front of a deity. The photograph seems also to match a reading of the name of Horus as 'Horus of Edfu' rather than 'Harendotes'. A deeper research about this scene would be very useful. See M. PETERS-DESTÉRACT, *Philae, le domaine d'Isis*, Monaco, 1997, p. 222.

Sšp(w) ʿwy.k (?) r Pr-Wsjr.

(4) *Jrw.k (m) hy r qȝ n(y) pt.*

Mdw.k n Rʿ.

Ḏsr n.k Jmn,

Wḏȝ tw.k Ḏḥwty ḥr rn.k.

Wbn sp-2 m-ḫnw Nww!

You are led (?) to the Osiris' Temple.

(4) Your form is rejoicing up to the sky and you are talking to Re.

Amun is sanctifying you and Thoth is making you prosperous in your name.

Rise, rise from the *Noun*![51]

Sšp(w) ʿwy.k (?) r Pr-Wsjr: Junker suggested the conjecture *nḏr(w) ʿ.k* ("your body is conducted (to the Osiris' Temple)"), with the verb *nḏr* as a passive form. According to him, this idea comes from an excerpt of the *Stundenwachen.* Junker says himself that it is very doubtful[52]. Not only does it seem too hypothetical, but the remaining signs on the inscription also do not fit with this reading, contrary to what is here propounded. According to the *Wörterbuch*[53], *sšp(w) ʿwy.f (?) r* means literally "to take somebody's arm to somewhere", so "to lead somebody to somewhere", here as a passive form. The sign hand D46 is a common Ptolemaic writing for the verb *šsp*[54].

Irw.k (m) hy ("your form is rejoicing"): omission of the preposition *m* in a non-verbal sentence.

Note the special form of the sign *ḏsr*, made plausible by the parallel in Decree I, 1c.

This part of the text refers to several divinities that are portrayed at the left of the Decree I.

Note the form of the sign *pr* in the preposition *m-ḫnw* ("in"), that is a peculiarity, occurring twice, in this inscription.

"Osiris' Temple" (*Pr-Wsjr*) designates the sanctuary of the god on the Abaton.

Note the occurrence of the object pronoun at the 2nd person singular (*tw*).

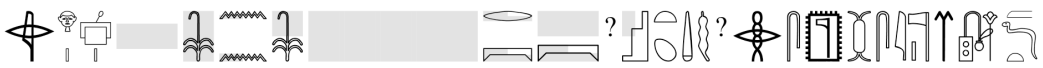
ḥr rn.k ("in your name"): a reference to the litany of names of Osiris' Ba in the preceding paragraph.

wbn ("rise!"): the Osiris' Ba is rising and gleaming like the creator god in the Nun (as a resumption to the beginning, a *regressus ad uterum*).

[51] G. Roeder: *Re erläßt einen Befehl für dich, Amon richtet ihn dir schön her, Thoth ruft dich an (?) auf deinen Namen, der du aufgingst im Nun!* (*op. cit.*, p. 32). H. Junker: *Erglänze aus dem Ozean, du Glänzender* (*op. cit.*, p. 7).
[52] See H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 7.
[53] *Wb* IV, 532 (4) : jemandes Hand ergreifen nach (*r*)…hin = jemanden führen nach…
[54] *Wb* IV, 530.

4.2. *The Decree* stricto sensu

2a. *Introduction*



Jr ḥr-sȝ nn […] Ȝst mdw nḏm (?) ḥnʿ.s nṯrj.n s(y) Ḏḥwty m sš m-ḏd:

After that, [… this Mound (?) …] Isis [said ?] a pleasant word about it (?)[55] and Thoth sanctified[56] it in his writings in these terms:

There are uncertainties about the sign after *mdw*. Junker had thought about *n.s* or *nḏm* . The sign visible on the wall seems to be a or a . The purpose here was to find a satisfying meaning.

Thoth is mentioned as sanctifying the Abaton, as in the Decree II, 2a: "to sanctify this place named the 'Pure Mound'" (*r nṯrj jȝt tn, jȝt wʿbt rn.s*). The same action is also to be found in the caption of Re-Harakhte depicted at the left of the Decree I; in the sequence of divinities praising the Osiris' Ba, he says to Osiris: "I issue a decree for all lands to sanctify your holy place, the Abaton" (*r nṯrj jȝt.k ḏsr, Jw-wʿb*). In addition, this line refers to the god Thoth as the redactor of the Decree, just like at the end of the Decree I and as in the depiction of the god at the right of the Decree I, with a pen and a papyrus in the hands.

m-ḏd ("in these terms") introduces the terms of the Decree.

2b. *The terms of the Decree*

1. Introduction

(5) *Jr pȝ)y jȝt wʿbt, spt šps n(y) nbw n(y) Wsjr ḥnʿ snt.f Ȝst,*

wḏ.tw ḥr.s m ḥȝt, ḥr (?) Wsjr [ms(w)] m Wȝst:

(5) "Concerning the Abaton, the holy golden territory of Osiris and his sister Isis, it was decreed about it, from the beginning, about (?) Osiris, [born] in Thebes, that:

The preposition *Jr*, "concerning", puts the holy mound in a thematization and is used as a structural marker, introducing the terms of the Decree. The thematized noun "Abaton" is repeated by a pronoun in *ḥr.s,* "about it".

"the holy golden territory of Osiris and his sister Isis": the Abaton is also the place of Isis, as she carries out the protection of her husband and goes often on the island to accomplish ceremonies in his honour. About the determinative for *spt* or *spȝt*, "territory", Junker considers it as an unusual determinative, whereas Grapow, quoted by Junker, foresees an explanation based on the possible

[55] H. Junker: *... [Stätte ...] Isis ... spricht mit ihr?* (*op. cit.*, p. 7); ROEDER: *... die Stätte, und Isis ... einen wohltätigen Befehl in bezug auf sie (?)* (*op. cit.*, p. 32).
[56] P. WILSON, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu*, *OLA* 78, Leuven, 1997, p. 560.

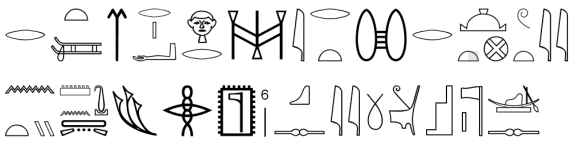
association with the count-*sjpt*[57].

According to Junker, the expression "from the beginning" could refer to the signature of the Decree by the creator god Re at the beginning of times[58].

The signs are highly problematic. Two hypotheses, which each pose specific problems, are conceivable. The first possible reading considers that the group is a spelling of the preposition *ḥr*. So, Junker reads *ḥr*, "for the benefit of"[59], for want of a better proposal. However, this meaning is particularly surprising for this preposition. Consequently, the meaning "concerning", well attested, is here preferred. However, it remains that, if reading *ḥr* is possible, the sign A1 (seated man) makes no sense. The other possible reading is to consider the first sign as being the basket (*k*). The group could so be considered as a variant of , an alternative writing of the verb *kȝj*, "to conceive (in one's mind)". This hypothesis would account for the presence of the seated man, even if we should have A2 instead of A1. If Osiris is not its author, he would be the indirect inspirer of the Decree. It is however surprising to attribute the conception of the Decree to Osiris, since it is made to protect him. There is no convincing parallel to support this hypothesis.

At the end of this paragraph occurs an uncertain sign, which is highly distorted, here just a grey zone in the edition. It is probably or , as propounded by Junker. The quadrate was badly cut, probably due to the complexity of the group for the engraver (as, often at this time, in particular, in Esna). Indeed, if the epithet *ms(w)-m-Wȝst* ("born in Thebes") has few attestations[60], the birth of Osiris in Thebes is very well attested through the texts from the Temple of Hathor in Dendera, the Ipet Temple in Karnak, Philae Temple, and by Plutarch *in fine*[61]. This preponderance of Thebes seems confirmed by the presence in a very good place of the god Amun on the wall.

2. Daily rituals



R tm rdj(w) ḥr jrṯ(t) r Jȝt twy nty mntȝ ḥnʿ ḥwt nṯr (6) *qsy n(y) Wsjr jm.s.*

It will not be allowed that[62] milk is lacking to this mound where are the *mntȝ*-grove[63] and (6) the burial sanctuary of Osiris.

[57] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 8.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[59] *Loc. cit.*
[60] See *LGG* II, 254 ; III, 402.
[61] The back pillar of the Cairo statue CG 38368 says, after Osiris' titulature: "Geb is his father, Nout is his mother, Thebes is his city"; see B. Mathieu in his article "Quand Osiris règnait sur terre", *Égypte, Afrique et Orient* 10, 1998, p. 5-18. See also *Dend.* II, 100-101; other references in S. CAUVILLE, *Dendara. The Osirian chapels*, Cairo, 1997, p. 236-238; C. DE WIT, *Les inscriptions du Temple d'Opet à Karnak* III, *BiAeg* 13, Bruxelles, 1968, p. 146-147. See also the references (with variants*: jrw m Wȝst, prw m Wȝst*) cited by L. Coulon in *CENiM* 3, *D3T* 1, translation number b, p. 4; also n. c. The following references must be added: G. BÉNÉDITE, *Philæ*, p. 89, l. 14-16; J. OSING, *CNI* 17, 1998, p. 264 and n. f.; Fr.-R. HERBIN, *RdE* 54, 2003, p. 70; L. COULON, *SRH* 2004/5, 2005, p. 32.
[62] Litterally: *To not allow that…*
[63] Ch. DE MARÉ, "Ci-gît Osiris : l'Abaton de Biggeh d'après les sources textuelles et iconographiques", *BABELAO* 5, 2016, p. 6 sv.

Jr n.f ḥtpw 365 m pẖr m spt tn, jw qbw n(y)w bn(j)w ḥr.sn. R tm rdj(w) ḥr qbḥw ḥr.sn r ˁ nb, r tm rdj(w) ḥr mw (7) *m-pẖr.f nb.*

Will be prepared for him 365 offering tables around this territory, while palm fronds will be arranged on them. Libations on them will not be allowed to be lacking any day, water will not be allowed to be lacking (7) all around this territory.

"for him": means "for Osiris".

The libations on the Abaton were made up of milk, because of a local custom due to Nubian influences[64]. On the other hand, it could reflect the symbolic value of milk to nourish the royal child and regenerate the dead.

Jr(w) ḫt-nṯr m r ˁ nb jn wˁb ȝ ˁ m ȝbd.f. Qbḥw n(y) Ȝst, nb(t) Jw-rq, ḥr jr(t) qbḥw jm.sn r ˁ nb.

The divine ritual will be accomplished every day by the high priest who performs his monthly office. The choachyte of Isis, mistress of Philae, will accomplish the libation on them every day.

The divine ritual consists mainly in the awakening, the toilet, the feeding and the clothing of the godly statue. The accomplishment of the divine daily ritual is an obligation for the high priest in function.

3. Ban on playing music

R tm rdj(w) sḫy sh(ȝ) ḥsj n bynt wḏnyt jm.

It will not be allowed to beat tambour and to play harp or oboe there.

The sign *ḥs* is badly carved, but the reading is clear thanks to the parallel in the Decree II, 2f.

A correction of Junker's edition has been brought concerning the sign *wḏ* (and not)[65] in *wḏnyt* ("oboe").

[64] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 10.
[65] S. EMERIT, "À propos de l'origine des interdits musicaux dans l'Égypte ancienne", p. 190.

A similar interdiction is attested in the temple of Esna, about the *Abaton de la campagne d’Esna*, with an addition of the trumpet, according to Sauneron[66]. The ban on playing music in Osirian places is also to be found in the *Geography* of Strabo[67]. According to Sauneron[68], additional ritual prohibitions were in use on the Abaton of the *Campagne* at Esna : the light was prohibited on the tomb of the dead gods and in its immediate vicinity, and any removal of wood from the sacred trees was prohibited there (*Esna*, 197, 25-26).

4. Ban on going there

Ḥnʿ tm (8) *rdj(w) sš s nb jm.s rʿ nb, ḥnʿ tm rdj(w) sš [wr] nḏs jm.s.*

And it will not be (8) allowed to anyone to pass by there on any day, and it will not be allowed [to the powerful and] the weak to pass by there[69].

The sign *sꜣ* in *s nb* (“anyone”) gets a very peculiar form just in this line. But the line’s meaning is totally clear thanks to the parallel with the Decree II (2g). Junker says about it: “die Lesung ist ganz sicher, der untere Teil des Zeichens ist mißraten”[70].

[wr] nḏs (“the powerful and the weak”): the restitution is quite sure and is based on a polar expression, referring to opposites to include all the persons, from the powerful to the miserable one. From the attested expressions (notably *wrw nḏsw*), *wr* is the most probable word to fill in the gap. Junker contemplated a solution as *wʿb nḏs*, “an inferior priest”, in contrast with the great priest (*wʿb ʿꜣ*) mentioned in the paragraph about daily rituals[71]. However, this expression occurs nowhere, and the argument seems not convincing at all. See also Decree II, § 2f (*infra*).

5. Prohibition of fishing and hunting

Ḥnʿ tm rdj(w) grg ꜣpdw nb(w) rmw nb(w) [m] mḥty [x +]40 r Rsyt, Mḥtyt, Jmntt, Jꜣbtt.

And it will not be allowed to catch any bird and any fish [on x+] 40 cubits to South, North, West and East.

About the lacuna, the sign of the cubit (*mḥ*) is clearly visible in the photographs, but it is absent from the publications of Junker and Leitz. So, fishing and hunting were forbidden on a minimal distance of 20 meters in all directions from the Abaton. The lacuna, coated with cement, brings unfortunately no more indications.

[66] S. SAUNERON, *L’Abaton de la champagne d’Esna (note préliminaire)*, *MDAIK* 16, 1959, p. 271-279.
[67] STRABO, *Geography*, XVII, 44.
[68] S. SAUNERON, *L’Abaton de la campagne d’Esna (note préliminaire)*, p. 278.
[69] H. Junker: *und es darf kein (Hoher? oder) Niedriger sie betreten* (*op. cit.*, p. 22); G. Roeder: *und daß [Laien und] Bürger es betreten* (*op. cit.*, p. 32).
[70] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 22.
[71] *Ibid.*

6. Noise ban during the periodical pilgrimages of Isis

Ḥnʿ tm rdj(w) qȝ [mdw] (9) *s nb ḫr.f <m> ʿḥʿw wʿb n(y) hrw 5 (sic) jr(w).n.f Ȝst, nbt Jw-rq, m ḥr(yt) st-wrt jm.s r jr(t) qbḥw jm.f tp <hrw> 20 (sic) nb.*

And it will not be allowed to raise the voice below (9) to everybody during the pure period of the (five?) days that Isis, mistress of Philae, is spending there, as She-who-is-on-the-Throne, to accomplish at this moment a libation at each decade.

First off, parallels from Philae enable to correct the end of the paragraph in *hrw 10* (“ten days”) instead of *<hrw> 20* (“twenty”), maybe because of a confusion between the sun sign (N5 = *hrw*, “day”) and the sign of the decade (V20 = “ten”). The following inscriptions from Philae are absolutely clear about the period of ten days between each pilgrimages of Isis for the purpose of accomplishing libations:

> (…) ta sœur Isis, sous l’aspect de « celle qui donne l’eau (la vie) » est près de toi, à prodiguer la libation à ton *Ba* tous les dix jours (*sn.t.k S.t m dỉ ʿnḫ r-ḥnʿ.k ḥr ḳbḥ n Bȝ.k tp hrw 10 nb*) ; tu fais qu’Hapy soit grand pour lui, afin qu’il inonde cette terre en son temps, sans qu’il y ait de limite. (Philae Temple, outdoor west wall of the naos from the reign of Augustus (right range), geographic procession, the nome of Bigeh)[72].
>
> (…), Isis lui (*sc.* Osiris) rend visite tous les dix jours pour verser l’eau à sa momie sur la Colline-élevée, (…). (Philae Temple, west pylon tower, north side, frieze from the reign of Ptolemy XII Auletes, monography)[73].

This paragraph of the Decree I presents a problem in terms of the number of days where Isis sojourns on the Abaton (“during the (five?) days”). Are we dealing here with “the days” or “the five days”?

Junker argues that it is not conceivable that Isis crosses the Nile every ten days to the Abaton and stays there for five days on each trip. Consequently, Junker rejects the reading *hrw 5* (“five days”) on the ground that it does not provide a satisfying meaning[74]. Nevertheless, the clause is obviously already containing a wrong number, but as showed previously, the mistake can be explained. In addition, the engraved signs for *hrw 5* (“five days”) are undeniably clear. It is quite conceivable that Isis spends five days on the Abaton at the start of each ten days.

Another hypothesis would be to consider that *hrw 5* (“five days”) is an incomplete writing of the five epagomenal days, followed by a temporal clause (“during the pure period of five days and when Isis … is spending there…”)[75]. So, the passage would be an invitation not to raise the voice during the days celebrating the births of the principal members of the Osirian family. The text would thus juxtapose an annual event and a periodical one, which seems odd. Moreover, I have no knowledge of any other example of designation of these five days as “pure period”.

The Decree II makes no mention of these periodical visitations of Isis since it highlights the annual

[72] D. INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *Le mythe de la déesse lointaine à Philae*, p. 34, doc. 39.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 82, doc. 139.
[74] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 23.
[75] This hypothesis has been proposed by Prof. Marc Gabolde in unpublished documents.

stay of the goddess on feast days.

The "Throne" (*st-wrt*) designates the holy of the holies of the Temple of Bigeh, the place where the Isis' statue was settled when she went to pay tribute to her husband.

7. Isis' pilgrimage on feast days

Rdj(w) ḏȝy-wr [Ȝst], nb(t) [Jw-rq], r Jw wʿb<t> m hrww n(y)w ḥbw m-ḫnw wjȝ, [Gsdp (?)] (10) *rn.f.*

It will be done so that Isis, mistress of Philae, goes through the Nile to the Abaton on feast days, on board of the boat named (10) *Gesdep* ("The Keeper"?).

Thanks to the parallel in the Decree II, 2b, the lacuna in column 9 brings no real difficulty.

The verb *ḏȝy-wr* corresponds to *ḏȝy jtrw*, "to go through the Nile, to cross the river". The expression is very similar to the coptic ϫⲓⲟⲟⲣ (ϫⲓ + ⲉⲓⲟⲟⲣ), as noted by Junker[76].

The text is here probably referring to the celebrations focused on the 12th of the Epiphi-month (the 3rd month of the Shemu-season), that are mentioned in the Decree II, and in some other inscriptions of Philae[77]. Yoyotte translates not "on feast days" but "on the three feast days"[78], which cannot be excluded.

There are uncertainties about the space available and the translation of "Ges-dep", the name of the processional boat borrowed by Isis to get to the Abaton. The name, here probably in lacuna at the end of the column, is attested in the Decree II. The name *Gs-dp* could mean "Protection" or "The Keeper" as an epithet of the goddess Isis in relation with Osiris[79]. There would be some space for two signs, according to Junker, who quotes possible meanings related to "to protect" and "truth".

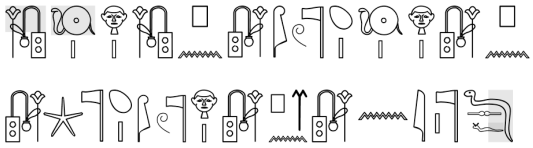
So, according to Junker, there were three different types of boat journeys for Isis to the Abaton[80]:

– a weekly boat journey, in fact rather happening every ten days, similarly to the "rites décadaires" performed at the Djeme Mound at Medinet Habu. This boat journey is known through Decree I and by some texts from Philae Temple (see above);

– an annual boat journey with great ceremony on the 12th day of the 3rd month of the Shemu-season, for the burial of Osiris in the frame of the celebration of the Mysteries. This boat journey is attested through other texts and occurs in the Decrees I (in this line) and II (2b).

[76] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 24.
[77] H. JUNKER, O. DAUM, *Der große Pylon des Tempels der Isis in Philä*, vol. Sonderband, Wien, 1958, p. 203, d-e, 7-12; *ibid*., p. 205, d, 1-8; H. JUNKER, E. WINTER, O. DAUM, *Philä-Publikation* II. *Das Geburtshaus des Tempels der Isis in Philä*, vol. Sonderband, Graz, 1965, p. 78-79, n° 931-932 ; cf. Fr. DAUMAS, *Les mammisis des temples égyptiens*, Paris, 1958, p. 327-328.
[78] J. YOYOTTE, P. CHARVET, St. GOMPERTZ, *Strabon. Le voyage en Égypte: un regard romain*, Paris, 1997, p. 260-261.
[79] See *LGG* VII, 328; H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 28; *Wb* V, 200-201. See also P. WILSON, *Ptolemaic Lexicon*, p. 1111.
[80] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 54-58.

2c. *The divine redaction of the Decree*



Sš Rʿ ḥr sš pn,

sš Šw, sꜣ Rʿ, ḥr sš pn,

sš Gb, sꜣ Šw, ḥr sš pn,

m sš n(y) Ḏḥwty ḏs.f.

Re signed this writing,

Shu, Re's son, signed this writing

(and) Geb, Shu's son, signed this writing,

on the writing of Thoth himself[81].

The god Re is precisely holding the Decree in his hand in the depiction on the left of the text.

Caption of the god in action (on the right of the Decree):

(11) *[Ḏd mdw] j[n Ḏḥwty … ḥr(y)-jb] Jw-rq.*

(11) [Words to say by Thoth … that resides in] Philae.

5. Decree II : Edition, transliteration and translation

(See Annex 2 for diplomatic and continuous editions)

5.1. *Introduction. The translation of the Osiris'* Ba

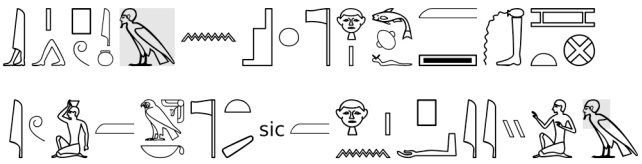
Nt-ʿ n(y) jn(t) bꜣ Wsjr r st.f :

Ordinance to bring Osiris' *Ba* to his place:

This line corresponds to the title of this part of the text (i.e. *Introduction. The translation of the Osiris' Ba*). It is useful to compare this line to the hymn addressed to the Osiris' Ba as a welcome speech in the Decree I. The latter is directly addressed to the god and is particularly expanded and laudatory, while the introduction to the Decree II contains a performative description of the arrival and stay of the Osiris' Ba on the Abaton. The mention *st.f*, "his place", refers clearly back to the

[81] Junker: *(es ist) von Thoth selbst geschrieben* (*op. cit.*, p. 25).

Abaton. It is there, near his corpse, that the Osiris’ Ba belongs to reside.

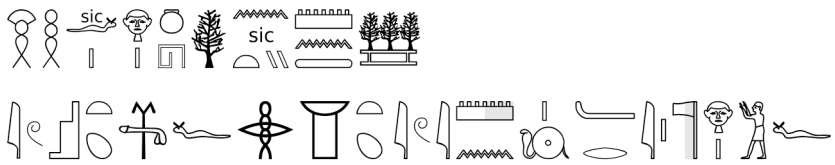


Jj(t) pw jn bꜣ n(y) Wsjr ḥr ḫꜣt.f m Jw wʿb, jw.f m bjk nṯr(y) m ḥr n(y) pʿy s.

“The *Ba* of Osiris is coming on his corpse in the Abaton, being a divine falcon with a human face.

The precision given here is interesting, because the *Ba* is usually said to be a bird with a human head, and not a falcon. This obviously refers to the Falcon of Gods of Decree I.

Jj(t) pw jn bꜣ n(y) Wsjr (“The *Ba* of Osiris is coming”): Infinitive followed by a *pw* in a non-verbal clause. Indeed, the turn of phrase here uses an emphatic construction (literally: *It is to come by the Osiris’* Ba). In addition, the last sign of the line depicts the *Ba* of Osiris and occupies the entire height of the line. This sign has been probably intentionally oversized.



Wꜣḥ.f ḥr nh(w)t n(y)t mn-tꜣ, jw ʒst m-bʿḥ.f ḥnʿ Nbt-ḥwt, jw Jmn-Rʿ ḥr Ḏḥwty ḥr dwꜣ.f.

He perches on the trees of the *mntꜣ*-grove, while Isis is in his presence with Nephthys, and Amun-Ra and Thoth are praising him”.

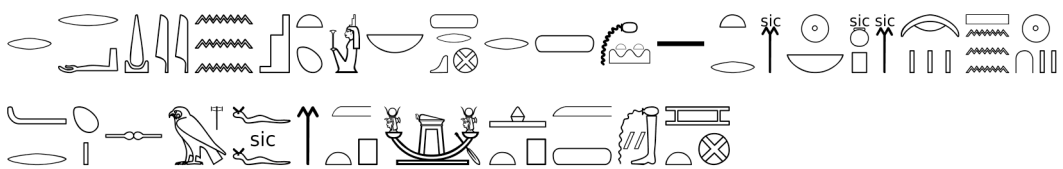
5.2. *The terms of the Decree*

2a. *Introduction*

Jry Ḏḥwty wḏ r tꜣ nb r nṯrj jꜣt tn, Jꜣt-wʿbt rn.s :

Thoth has enacted a decree to all the land to sanctify this place called the ‘Pure Mound’ (*i.e.* the Abaton):

2b. *Isis’ pilgrimage on feast days - The ritual boat journey of Isis*



R rdj ḏ3y 3st nb(t) Jw-rq r Jw-wʿb m (?) tr nb n(y)t rnpt, 3bd 3 Šmw sw 12, ḥr s3.s Ḥr-nḏ(w)-jt.f m Gs-dp, ḥtp(w) m Jw-wʿb.

"It will be done so that Isis, mistress of Philae, goes through to the Abaton, at each (set) time of the year, on the 12th day of the third month of the *Shemu*-season, with her son Harendotes, in the boat *Gesdep*, and stays on the *Abaton*.

The verb *ḏ3y* is equivalent to *ḏ3y-wr* attested in the Decree I, which corresponds to *ḏ3y jtrw*, "to go through the Nile, to cross the river". The expression is very similar to the coptic ϫⲓⲟⲟⲣ (ϫⲁ + ⲉⲓⲟⲟⲣ), as noted by Junker[82].

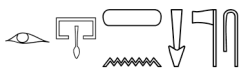
The sign Aa56 𓁷 seems to be written twice instead of the sign M4 𓈖 (*tr, rnp*).

According to Junker, the date quoted refers to the 12 Epiphi when the Osiris' Ba was ritually brought back on the Abaton[83].

Horus is here mentioned as taking part to the ritual journey of Isis, which is not to be found in the Decree I. Indeed, he is acting as Osiris' successor during the Osirian mysteries of the Khoiak month.

The verb *ḥtp* ("to stay") summons up the image of the sun setting in the West.

2c. *The funeral offering to Osiris*



Jr(w) pr(t)-ḫrw n sn.s.

The funeral offering (*prt-ḫrw*) will be accomplished in favour of her brother.

2d. *The libations*

<R tm> rdj(w) ḥr qbḥw ḥr.sn rʿ nb, ḥr tm <rdj> ḥr mw m pḫr.f rʿ nb.

Libations will <not> be allowed to be lacking on them (*i.e.* the offering tables) any day, water will not be allowed to be lacking all around any day.

2e. *The daily ritual on the Abaton*

Ḥr jr(w) ḫt-nṯr jm rʿ nb jn wʿb 3ʿ m 3bd.f.

And the divine ritual will be accomplished there every day by the high priest who performs his monthly office.

[82] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 24; 28.
[83] *Ibid.*

Note the particular written form of *jn* (“by”) in the shape of ꜥ - *n*[84]. However, the line is absolutely clear, as showed by the parallel in the Decree I.

Qbḥw m ʒst m Jw-rq ḥr jrw qbḥ jm.s r ꜥ nb.

The libator of Isis in Philae will accomplish the libation on it (*i.e.* the Abaton) every day.

In this line, we have *Qbḥw m ʒst* instead of *Qbḥw n(y) ʒst* (“the libator of Isis”) attested in the Decree I. The term *qbḥw* corresponds to the Greek function of *choachyte*. Further, the text has *ʒst m Jw-rq* in place of *ʒst nbt Jw-rq*.

2f. *Ban on playing music*

Wḏ.tw ḥr.sn jw tm sḫy sh(ʒ) ḥsj n bynt wḏnyt.

It was decreed about it that it will not be allowed to beat tambour and to play harp or oboe.

Wḏ.tw ḥr.sn (“It was decreed about it”): the pronoun *sn* would have the value of an impersonal (“about it”, and not “about them”), according to Junker[85] (p. 31).

sh(ʒ) / sh(r) (“tambour”): the last sign bears a close resemblance to the sign V32 , maybe as a determinative referring to a tambour, but it also recalls the shape of the tambour, horizontal and hanging from the neck. Otherwise, has to be read *w* in *wḏnyt* (“oboe”).

2g. *Ban on going there*

ḥn ꜥ <tm> rdj(w) sš sw nbw jm.s r ꜥ nb

And it will not be allowed to anyone (*litt.* all men) to pass by there on any day.

This passage shows an ordinary carelessness of the scribe, as Junker says[86], so that it is necessary to correct the text.

It seems important to pay attention to the fact that there is here no mention of inferior priests, to whom access to the island would be prohibited, as Junker was foreseeing as conjecture to a gap in the Decree I (*cf. supra*). Therefore, the ban on going on the Abaton concerns all person potentially passing nearby.

[84] This value is indeed attested in the *Valeurs phonétiques*, t. IV, p. 777, no. 143 only for this text.
[85] H. JUNKER, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, p. 31.
[86] *Ibid.*

2h. ***Prohibition of hunting and fishing***

ḫnʿ tm rdj(w) gr(g) jpt (= ȝpd) nbw ḥr [ḥȝm ...].

And it will not be allowed to catch any bird and to [fish …]".

[ḥȝm?] : "to fish" (Decree II) instead of "to catch fish" (Decree I). If the restitution is correct, the wording differs little from the expression in the Decree I. The rest of the text is lacking, as the north wall is half preserved.

To sum up the differences between the two versions of the Decree, the content of Decree II is very close to that of Decree I, of which it highlights certain elements. Decree II stands out remarkably with its passage on the annual festivities marking the arrival of Isis and Harendotes on the Abaton: "It will be done so that Isis, mistress of Philae, goes through to the Abaton, at each (set) time of the year, on the 12th day of the third month of the Shemu-season, with her son Harendotes, in the boat Gesdep, and that she stays on the Abaton. The funeral offering (*prt-ḫrw*) will be accomplished in favour of her brother."

Fig. 7. Photograph of the end of the remaining part of Decree II (© H. Kockelmann).

6. Results and perspectives

Among the results of this study, some remarkable facts should be mentioned. The state of research on the Abaton has been established, considering recent developments. An in-depth study of the text has been implemented. Indeed, the text has been put in context and the history of the study of the text has been traced. Quality photographs were provided, the structure of the text was presented, the gaps and ambiguities of the inscriptions were the subject of particular attention, and new paleographic remarks were made in the margins of a diplomatic and a linear edition produced methodically for both versions of the text. The purpose has been to study the two decrees in one piece by establishing links between the two attested versions.

The findings of this study clearly show that the publication of a modern scientific edition (and translation) had become necessary at this state of the research about this essential religious text, because of the remaining uncertainties, and this is what I tried to accomplish in this

work. It will allow us to better understand Osirian mythical tombs and ritual practices and make access to the sources easier for both researchers and students.

Throughout the text, the litany addressed to the Osiris' *Ba* has been emphasized by its incantatory nature. The aim was also to make it stick to epigraphic reality. I deleted the haphazard hypotheses and the daring conjectures that had been made, to return to the inscription itself, particularly in Decree I, 1c; 1d; 2b, §1 and §4. A reflection was carried out on the attestations of the comings and goings of Isis in Bigeh, and especially on their rhythm.

Some questions remain unanswered, particularly the possibility of a change of engraver during the engraving of Decree II, and the hypothetical etymology of the name of the boat of Isis, "The Keeper / The Protectress" (?). There are some limitations that this work has had to face, and which remain. Among them, it could be mentioned that: other textual parallels could be added to these considered here; text gaps make it difficult to capture all the details about the Abaton; it is difficult to produce a satisfactory facsimile for epigraphic reasons. Furthermore, it would be interesting to reflect on the presence of two versions of the Decree and on their location, probably related to the relationship between registers and frieze band on a same wall.

In the future, comparisons with other texts will be made easier by the existence of a recent and serious edition. Useful future research work could focus on a detailed analysis of the iconographic program of Hadrian's Gate in connection with the Decrees. As regards Bigeh in general, it would be beneficial to study and publish the inscriptions engraved on the rocks to observe the space occupation on the border between Egypt and Nubia, and the deities emphasized. Despite all the research, the Abaton retains an unfathomable share of mystery, and always will.

7. Continuous Translation of the *Abaton Decrees*

Decree I

(1) *Hail to you, Osiris Wenen-nefer's venerable* Ba*, divine phoenix who generated yourself, the Unique to be unique, who created that is, venerable primaeval god of the* Bau *of the necropolis!*

Venerable Ba *is your name in the Abaton,*

Divine Ba (2) *is your name in Bigeh Island,*

Powerful Ba *is your name in Sekhmet's Temple,*

Appearing Ba *is your name in Philae,*

Mourned Ba *is your name in Isis' Temple,*

Living Ba *is your name in Elephantine,*

Because you are (3) *the Falcon of Gods and Goddesses*.

You are coming in peace to this territory, to this your venerable mound, that Horus is consecrating for you and on which Isis is mourning. […] the enemies […forever?]. You are led to the Osiris' Temple. Your form (4) *is rejoicing up to the sky and you are talking to Re. Amun is sanctifying you and Thoth is making you prosperous in your name. Gleam, gleam in the Nun!*

After that, […this Mound (?) …] Isis [said?] a pleasant word (?) and Thoth sanctified it in his writings in these terms: (5) *"Concerning the Abaton, the holy golden territory of Osiris and his sister Isis, it was decreed about it, from the beginning, about (?) Osiris [born] in Thebes that:*

"It will not be allowed that milk is lacking to this mound where are the mntȝ-grove and the temple (6) *in which Osiris is buried. Will be prepared for him 365 offering tables around this territory, while palm fronds will be arranged on them. Libations on them will not be allowed to be lacking any day, water will not be allowed to be lacking* (7) *all around this territory.*

The divine ritual will be accomplished every day by the high priest who performs his monthly office. The libator of Isis, mistress of Philae, will accomplish the libation on them every day.

It will not be allowed to beat tambour and to play harp or oboe there. And it will not be allowed to anyone (8) *to pass by there on any day, and it will not be allowed [to the powerful and] the weak to pass by there. And it will not be allowed to catch any bird and any fish [on (a distance of)* x+*] 40 cubits to South, North, West [and East].*

And it will not be allowed to raise the voice below (9) *to everybody during the pure period of the (five?) days that Isis, mistress of Philae, is spending there, as She-who-is-on-the-Throne, to accomplish at this moment a libation at each decade. It will be done so that [Isis, mistress of Philae], goes through to the Abaton on feast days, on board of the boat* (10) *named* [Gesdep *(?)*]".

Re signed this writing, Shu, Re's son, signed this writing (and) Geb, Shu's son, signed this writing, on the writing of Thoth himself".

{Caption of the god in action (at the right of the Decree)}: (11) *[Words to say by Thoth … that resides in] Philae.*

Decree II

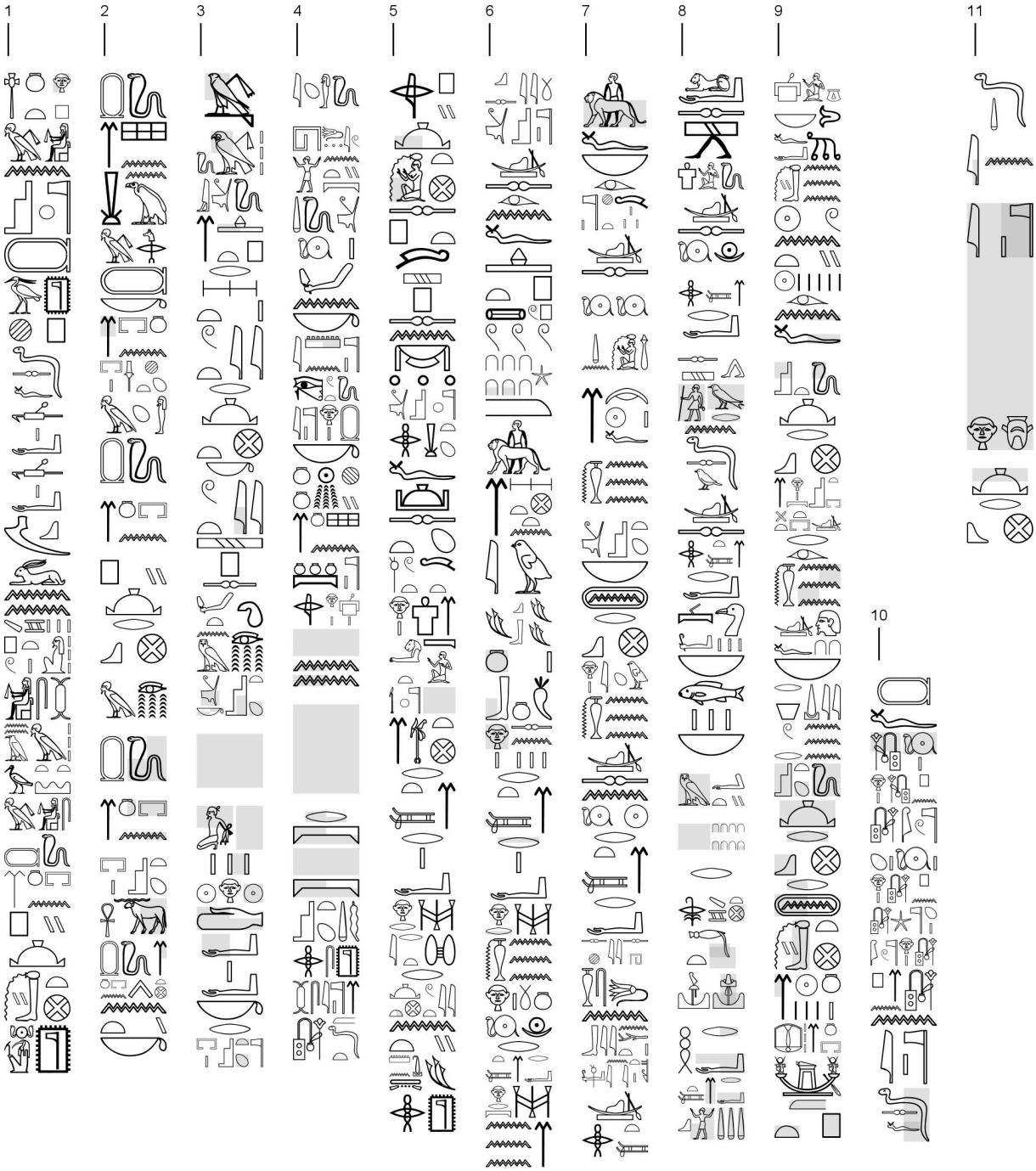
Ordinance to bring Osiris' Ba *to his place: "The* Ba *of Osiris is coming on his corpse in the Abaton, being a divine falcon with a human face. He perches on the trees of the mntȝ-grove, while Isis is in his presence with Nephthys, and Amun-Ra and Thoth are praising him. Thoth has enacted a decree to all the land to sanctify this place called the 'Pure Mound' (*i.e. *the Abaton):*

"It will be done so that Isis, mistress of Philae, goes through to the Abaton, at each (set) time of the year, on the 12th day of the third month of the Shemu*-season, with her son Harendotes, in the boat* Gesdep*, and stays on the Abaton. The funeral offering* (*prt-ḫrw*) *will be accomplished in favour of her brother. Libations will <not> be allowed to be lacking any day, water will not be allowed to be lacking all around any day. And the divine ritual will be accomplished there every day by the high priest who performs his monthly office. The libator of Isis in Philae will accomplish the libation on it* (i.e. *the Abaton*) *every day.*

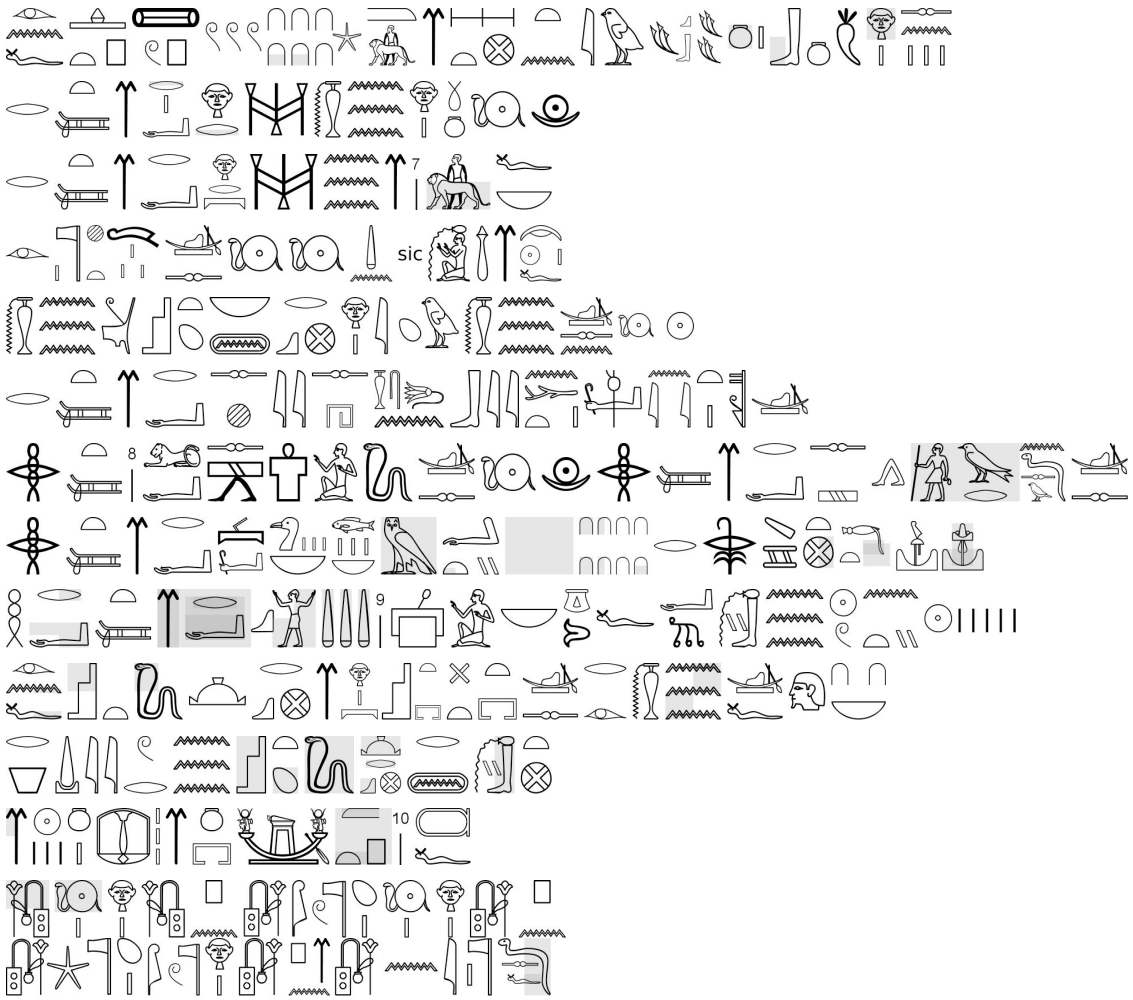
It was decreed about it that it will not be allowed to beat tambour and to play harp or oboe. And it will not be allowed to anyone to pass by there on any day. And it will not be allowed to catch any bird and to fish […]".

Annex 1. Decree I: orthophotograph (© Colin Quentinet)

Decree I: Diplomatic edition



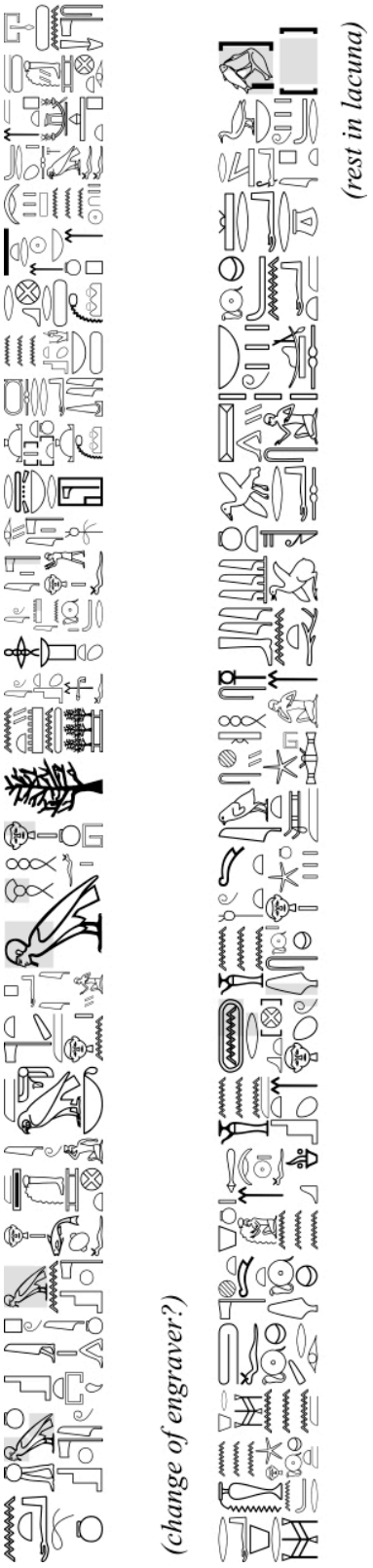
Decree I: Linear edition



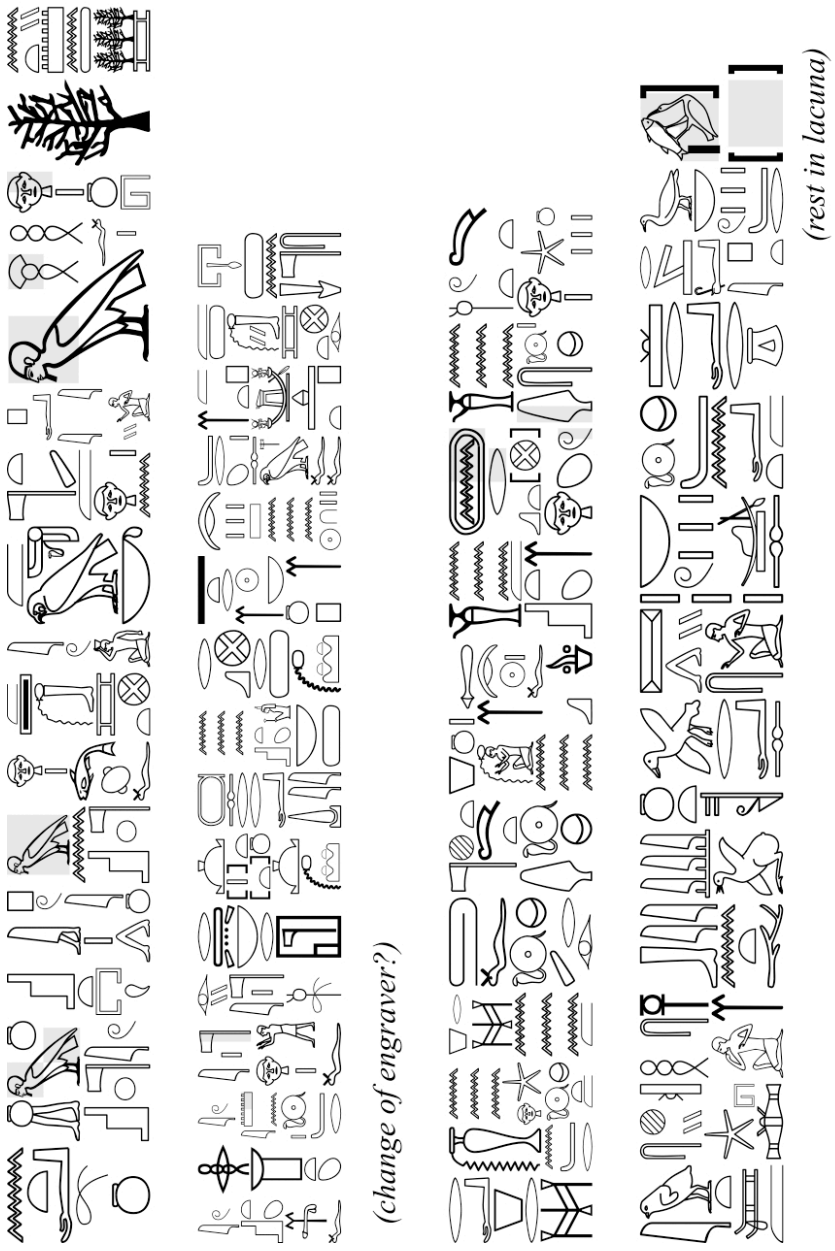
Caption of the god in action (on the right of the Decree):

Annex 2. Decree II: orthophotograph (© Charly De Maré)

Decree II: Diplomatic edition (global view)



Decree II: Diplomatic edition (enlarged)



Decree II: Linear edition

Résumé :

Dans cet article, Ch. De Maré propose une nouvelle édition annotée du *Décret divin concernant l'Abaton*, la source majeure à propos de l'Abaton de Biggeh, la tombe locale d'Osiris. Les termes du Décret incluent principalement des dispositions rituelles journalières et des interdictions ayant cours autour de la sépulture d'Osiris. Ce texte, gravé sur la Porte d'Hadrien à Philae, a été conservé à travers deux versions, ici traduites et mises en contexte avec le souci d'établir des liens entre les deux versions. Basée sur des photographies de haute qualité, cette étude vise à fournir, aux chercheurs et aux étudiants, une base solide et une réflexion approfondie au sujet de questions d'interprétation posées par les incertitudes qui demeurent. En effet, une attention particulière a été consacrée aux lacunes et aux ambiguïtés présentes dans les inscriptions, et de nouvelles pistes sont proposées en marge de l'édition. L'objectif est d'améliorer la compréhension des tombes mythiques et des pratiques rituelles osiriennes. Une réflexion est présentée notamment sur le rythme des pèlerinages d'Isis vers l'Abaton.

Abstract:

In this paper, Ch. De Maré presents a new annotated edition of the 'Abaton Decree', the main Egyptian source that describes the Abaton of Biggeh, the local tomb of Osiris. The terms of the Decree mainly include daily ritual requirements and prohibitions concerning the burial sanctuary of Osiris. This text, carved on Hadrian's Door on Philae, preserved through two versions, is translated and put in context by making interconnections. Based on high-quality photographs, this study aims at offering both researchers and students with a solid basis and in-depth reflection on questions of interpretation raised by the remaining uncertainties. Indeed, particular attention has been given to the gaps and ambiguities of the inscriptions, and new tracks are proposed in the margins of the edition. The purpose is to improve understanding of Osirian mythical tombs and ritual practices. A reflection is notably provided on the rhythm of the periodical boat journeys of Isis to the Abaton.

ENiM – Une revue d'égyptologie sur internet.
http://www.enim-egyptologie.fr

ARTS, LETTRES, LANGUES, SCIENCES HUMAINES ET SOCIALES
UNIVERSITÉ PAUL-VALÉRY MONTPELLIER 3
cnrs
UMR 5140
archéologie des Sociétés méditerranéennes

ISSN 2102-6629