

THE  
ANCIENT FESTIVALS OF THE NILE.

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TRANSLATED BY  
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ON the left shore of the Nile, at Gebel Silsileh, there are three large tablets containing the same hieroglyphical text, and an identical list of offerings. The inscription refers to the ancient worship of *Häpi*, or the Nile, which river is there very narrow and powerful, in the time of the XIXth and XXth Dynasty. The three tablets were first published by M. Lepsius in his *Denkmäler*, III., 175*a*, 200*d*, 218*d*; and the more essential contents have been discussed from a chronological point of view by E. de Rougé in the *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache*, 1866, p. 3. From copies taken by M. Ebers and myself in 1873, I gave an amended edition of the three texts, and a complete translation, in the

*Zeitschrift*, 1873, p. 129, and some additional remarks in the same journal, 1875, p. 175.

In the upper part of these tablets the king is represented making an incense offering to the triad of Amen, Mut, and Khonsu, and a drink offering to Harmachis, Ptah, and Hāpi. The inscription relates the institution of two Nile-festivals, by Rameses II., the observance of which, as it seems, had fallen into neglect; one on the 15th of Epiphi, when the river was thought to come forth from his two chasms; and the other on the 15th of Thoth, when the inundation arrived at *Khennut*, or Gebel Silsileh. Smaller offerings also were appointed for the day of "laying aside the Nile-book," a solemnity which may be considered as the conclusion of the several festivities attending the annual inundation. This took place on the 1st of Choiak, as has been remarked by M. Brugsch. The original decree dated in the first year of Rameses II. was renewed by his son Merenptah I., in his first year, 5th of Paophi, and then again by Rameses III. in the sixth year of his reign, in the month of Phamenoth. The order of the two days is inverted in the text, the month of Thoth being

the first month of the calendar, and therefore first mentioned.

The Epiphi-day, probably dedicated to the invocation, seems to correspond to the *Nihoa* of later times, which Heliodorus, in the ninth book of his romance, asserts to have taken place about the summer-solstice, or 15th of Payni, a full month earlier. This is, no doubt, the same festival which the Arabs found still existing when they entered the country, and therefore prohibited. According to the account of Murtadâ Ibn abi Hagalah, Maqrizi, and others, it was by the sacrifice of a virgin they entreated the river-god on this occasion for a plentiful inundation, on the 12th, of Payni. In still later times, the Copts cast a coffin with a mummy's finger in it into the river, but already, as we are told by Ibn abi Hagalah and Maqrizi, on the 8th of Pachons; the former, or "The Martyr's Festival," was performed down to the year 754, or 755, of the Higraph, when it was finally abolished by the Emir Surghatmash. A different tradition has been substituted in the modern Coptic almanac for the 11th of Payni, when a drop is believed to fall into the Nile and to cause its rising,

the *lailet nuzûl el nuqtah*, which like the other ceremonies is so well described by Mr. Lane in his *Modern Egyptians*. The Thoth-day of the inscription, probably a thanksgiving-festival, seems to be the *wafâ el Nîl*, "the completion of the Nile," in the first part of Mesore, or even the highest height of the river, which in modern times is announced on the 17th of Thoth, corresponding to the "Feast of the Cross."

Pagan, Christian, and Muslim custom and tradition, seem thus to have been mingled in the several observances of the Nilotic festivals, on which the following text of Gebel Silsileh is the earliest authority.



## DECREE OF RAMESES II.

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1 THE year 1, the 10th of the month Epiphi, of the reign of the Majesty of the HORUS-sun, the Strong bull, the truth-loving Lord of the South and the North, the Protector of Egypt, the Vanquisher of the nations, the Golden HORUS, rich in years and great in victories, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and Lord of the world, RA-USER-MA, approved by the Sun, the Son of the Sun, and Lord of diadems, the Beloved of AMEN, RAMESES, who loveth the Nile, the Father of the gods, who created him, may he live, abide, and thrive like the sun for evermore!

2 Blessed be the good god,  
 the NUN-loving<sup>1</sup> Nile,  
 the Father of the gods of the holy Nine  
 dwelling on the waters,  
 the plenty, wealth, and food of Egypt.

He makes everybody live by himself,  
 riches are on his path,  
 and plenteousness is in his fingers;  
 the pious are rejoiced at his coming.

Thou art alone and self-created,  
 3 one knoweth not whence thou art.<sup>2</sup>

But on the day thou comest forth and openest thyself,  
 everybody is rejoicing.

Thou art a Lord of many fish and gifts,

<sup>1</sup> *Nun* is the Oceanus, or the abyss of waters on which the bark of the Sun is believed to sail.

<sup>2</sup> See the "Hymn to the Nile," *Records of the Past*, Vol. IV., p. 109.

and thou bestowest plenteousness on Egypt.  
 The cycle of the holy Nine knoweth not whence thou  
 art,  
 thou art their life.<sup>1</sup>

For when thou comest their offerings are redoubled,  
 4 and their altars filled,  
 and they are shouting when thou appearest.

Thou yieldest unto us,  
 bent to nourish the pious like the Sun,  
 when he ruled over this land.  
 Satisfied is NUN, when his Chiefs lead him in peace  
 uniting their rejoicings.

5 Father Nile loveth him,  
 doing a glorious deed throughout Egypt  
 by his own wisdom,  
 and is strong and wakeful at every time  
 to furnish livelihood for men,  
 to multiply the corn as the sand,  
 and to make the granaries big with gifts.

Wherefore His Majesty was intent  
 6 to glorify the Father of all gods,  
 the Chief on the waters  
 and pondered like THOTH to find things meet to their love.  
 No King did so in this land since the time of the Sun.

His Majesty said as follows :

“Is it not the Nile who nourisheth the world?  
 wealth and abundance come forth after his rising,  
 if everybody be living under his sway,<sup>2</sup>  
 7 enriched when he listeth.”

“I know what is written in the book-store kept in the  
 library, that whenever the Nile cometh forth from the

<sup>1</sup> On account of the offerings afforded by the stream and its inundation.

<sup>2</sup> *Xer ast herek*, “under the place of thy face(?),” the reading is uncertain.

two chasms,<sup>1</sup> the offerings of the gods are to be plenty,<sup>2</sup> and that when the holy water is in the neighbourhood of *Khennut*, it being wide in this very place, the oblations are redoubled to him in the same.”

8 The King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Lord of the world, RA-USER-MA, the Chief of Thebes, the Son of the Sun and Lord of diadems, the Beloved of AMEN, RAMESES, (May he live for ever!) settled in his wisdom His Majesty's orders to redouble the offerings to Father AMEN-RA, the King of the gods, and to the Nile, the Father of the gods, and the Chief upon the waters, twice in the year in the neighbourhood of the holy water of *Khennut*,

9 the venerable place which has no want of wet to hide the widths of Hades before, life, health, strength! the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and Lord of the world, RA-USER-MA, the offspring of the Sun, the Son of the Sun, and Lord of diadems, the beloved of AMEN, RAMESES. May he live like his father RA every day!<sup>3</sup>

[To be given as an offering.]

Objects for the altar are to be presented to this god on the 15th of Thoth and the 15th of Epiphi in the course<sup>4</sup> of every year, according to the (following) list of offerings

<sup>1</sup> The sources of the *Krôphi* and *Môphi* of Herodotus, II., 28. They were believed to cause the waters to rise, according to Maqrizi, I., 59, even by the Copts: “The rising and falling of the Nile, they said, comes from the sources on its shore, which a traveller may see following its course upwards.”

<sup>2</sup> I dare not change the reading of the text: *es* (probably for *su* or *as*) *r zef*, for *r sezef*, proposed by Professor Lushington (*Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch.*, Vol. III., p. 98).

<sup>3</sup> Or “eternally.”

<sup>4</sup> *M hetera*, rather, “at the arriving, in the course,” than “as a tribute of every year.”

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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