Plate I.

THE INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE OBELISKS OF BENEVENTO

BY

ERIK IVERSEN

In that the archaeological and historical problems concerning this pair of obelisks—one of which (A) now stands in the Piazza Papiniana, and the other (B) in the cortile of the Museo del Sannio—will be considered separately elsewhere, we are here concerned only with their inscriptions, which still remain in many respects enigmatic and curious, in spite of an impressive series of editions, translations, and commentaries by Champollion,¹ Ungarelli,² Schiaparelli,³ Marucchi,⁴ Erman,⁵ and, most recently, H.W. Müller.⁶

Since the discovery, in 1892,⁷ of a previously unknown fragment, the inscription of the obelisk in the Piazza Papiniana (A) has been complete, but about one third is still missing from that of its companion in the Museo del Sannio (B). Apart from some minor variants, the inscriptions of the two monuments are identical, but, on one of the faces of B (I), the direction of the hieroglyphs is reversed to make it match the corresponding inscription

¹ *Précis*, planches, nos. 220–21. Cf. also *Aperçu des résultats historiques*, Paris 1827, and Champollion-Figéac, 'Notice sur un ouvrage intitulé "Interpretatio obeliscorum urbis"', *Revue de bibliographie analytique*, Paris 1842.

² *Interpretatio obeliscorum urbis*, Rome 1842.

³ 'Antichità egizie scoperte entro l'abitato di Benevento', *Notizie degli Scavi*, 1893, 267–274.

⁴ 'Nota sulle sculture di stile egizie scoperte in Benevento', *Notizie degli Scavi*, 1904, 118.

⁵ 'Obeliskens Römischer Zeit', *Röm. Mitt.*, VIII, 1893, 210. Cf. also 'Die Obeliskens der Kaiserzeit', *ZÄS*, XXXIV, 1896, 149.

⁶ *Der Isiskult im antiken Benevent*, Münchener Ägypt. Studien 16, Berlin 1969.

⁷ See page 269 in the article by Schiaparelli quoted above in note 3.

of A, which contains the official dedication to the emperor. As already pointed out by Champollion, these were therefore the original front faces of the pair.

Certain syntactic irregularities made Erman suggest that the hieroglyphic texts were translated into Egyptian from a non-Egyptian idiom, which he felt inclined to think had been Greek, in spite of the fact that important parts of his own translations are directly based on Latin terms.

His argumentation is not convincing,⁸ and we shall see that, except for the Greek terms used in the official protocol of the emperor, Latin was probably the original language of the draft. The inscriptions fall into four well-defined parts, each confined to one of the faces of the monuments. The text on the front face, (A, B: I) contains the dedication to the emperor, and that on the back, (A, B: III), the dating and the historical record of the building of a temple to Isis and the erection of the obelisks. The inscriptions on II and IV contain almost identical dedications to Isis, followed by invocations to the goddess for the life and happiness, not, as we shall see, of the donator, but of the emperor. For practical reasons we shall first consider the simplest and least complicated inscription, that on the back (A, B: III), which runs with omission of the imperial protocol,⁹ and the enigmatic phrase *wds ln*, following the name of the dedicator:

In the eight year of immortal Domitian, a noble temple was built and the obelisk erected¹⁰ for Great Isis, Lady of Bene-

⁸ Erman adduces four arguments in favour of a Greek draft: i) The writing Beneventos instead of Beneventon, but the hieroglyphic rendering of the name might just as well represent Beneventus. ii) The use of *ln* with the meaning 'return' in the phrase *wds ln* (an incorrect interpretation, as we shall see), which he considered a direct translation of a hypothetical *κοιζεσθαι* in the Greek draft – for the existence of which there is not the slightest evidence. iii) The dating by regnal years, which is certainly an Egyptian and not a specifically Greek custom. iv) A very vague reference to 'die nicht dem lateinischen Gebrauch, und ebensowenig dem ägyptischen, entsprechenden Form der Weihinschrift'.

⁹ The protocol runs: Horus: Strong Bull; King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands: Horus, son of the God (or as suggested by Harris, who would read $\star$ = Sothis = Isis, 'son of Isis'), whom all the gods love; Son of Re, Lord of diadems: Domitianus. Erman translates the prenomen 'Die Morgenstern, der von allen Göttern geliebte'.

¹⁰ Thus only in B.

ventum, and her Ennead,¹¹ by Rutilius Lupus,¹² *wḏs in n nb tswj*.

As pointed out by Erman,¹³ the date of the inscription—the eighth year of Domitian—corresponds to A.D. 88–89, the period of the conclusion of the Dacian war and the revolt of L. Antonius Saturninus, known as bellum Germanicum, and there are in fact vague references to these event in the dedication to the emperor.

The transcription of the name of the dedicator has given rise to serious controversies. The nomen was read by Champollion as Rutilius,¹⁴ and this interpretation has found general acceptance.¹⁵ The cognomen, spelled in five different ways as

he would read as Lupus or Rufus, assuming that the sign , which he took to represent a lion standing,¹⁶ could be used with the same phonetic value, *lu* or *ru*, as , its recumbent counterpart. This reading, however, was rejected outright by Erman,¹⁷ who, in accordance with the ordinary phonetic value of the hieroglyph in its use as an ideogram for the word *maj*, lion, maintained that the first letter of the name was an *m*. Insisting also on reading and as two separate letters, instead of considering simply as the determinative of the group , or , and at the same time concentrating his criticism on the spelling with ¹⁸ (which is obviously exceptional, being used

¹¹ Thus only in A.

¹² For the transliteration of the name see below.

¹³ *Röm. Mitt.*, VIII, 217, and *ZÄS*, XXXIV, 1896, 156.

¹⁴ *Précis*, planches, p. 26, no. 220.

¹⁵ For the use of for *t*, occasionally adduced as an argument against Champollion's reading, cf. the Borgia and the Albani obelisks, where the sign is used for the same letter in the writing of the name Titus.

¹⁶ *Précis*, planches, p. 26, no. 221.

¹⁷ *Röm. Mitt.*, VIII, 217, and *ZÄS*, XXXIV, 156.

¹⁸ Erman rightly pointed out that generally represents the ending *ius*, when used for the transcription of Latin names, but in the present case, where it is used in only one of five writings of the name, it is probably a simple mistake, brought about by a faulty copying of the last syllable of the name Rutilius, standing immediately above.

B.

in one only of the six occurrences of the name), he refused to accept Champollion's perfectly justified proposal. Instead he substituted an in reality quite nonsensical Mpups or Mpupis, which, supported by the authority of its originator, has haunted the Egyptological literature ever since. Müller, however, reverted

to Champollion's reading, and would read Rutilius Lupus,¹⁹ a name well-established in the records, and occasionally even directly connected with the city of Beneventum.²⁰

In order to overcome the difficulty arising from the use of for l, Müller suggested an influence from Greek λέων,²¹ but another possibility should not be overlooked: that in the original draft, the sign was not intended to represent a lion at all, but a wolf, *lupus*, which would quite simply make the writing a 'hieroglyphic' pun on the cognomen of the dedicator.

In the final phrase *wḏs ln n nb tawj*, Erman would see a translation of 'pro salute et reditu imperatoris', the new-year's acclamation of the fratres arvaes in January 89, during the emperor's absence from Rome.²² Assuming the datival *n*, implied by this translation, to have been omitted 'als ein zu unbedeutendes Praefix',²³ he took *wḏs* as a nominal form of the verb *wḏs* 'to prosper'. The verb *ln*, which he considered identical with (𐩣𐩠) in the inscription on face I,²⁴ he interpreted as an incorrect translation of a hypothetical κοιζεσθαι, by which *reditu* should have been rendered in the equally hypothetical Greek draft. The entire passage he considered a pious invocation for the happy return of the absent sovereign, and the true dedication of the obelisk.

The interpretation is ingenious, and at first sight almost convincing, in spite of the syntactic and philological difficulties involved, but on closer inspection it proves untenable, as will be

¹⁹ *Isiskult*, 11.

²⁰ One Rutilius Lupus dedicated in Beneventum a memorial to a friend (PWRE, I, A, 1, 1265). Another person of the same name owned property in the vicinity of the town about A.D. 101 (*ib.*, I, A, 1, 1265, no. 24). During the reign of Domitian, a Rutilius Lupus commanded the XIII legion as *legatus augusti*, and another was prefect of Egypt in the last years of Trajan (*ib.* I, A, 1263, no. 23). For Baillet's reading of the name as Labienus, see ZÄS, XL, 1902, 147, and T. Zawadzki, 'Un nouveau praefectus castrorum en Égypte', *Chronique d'Égypte*, XLIV, 1969, 106.

²¹ *Isiskult*, 11, note 16 (page 30).

²² *Röm. Mitt.*, VIII, 215-16.

²³ *Ib.*, 212.

²⁴ He translates this phrase: 'Domitian gebracht aus dem Fremdländern'. For the interpretation of (𐩣𐩠), see below.

seen from an analysis of the phrase itself, as well as from its relation to the context as a whole.

It is in this respect highly significant that the passage is not found in that part of the inscription where, above all, we should expect to find it if Erman's translation and his conception of it as the dedication were correct, i.e., in the inscription on the front face of the obelisk, containing the official dedication to the emperor. This runs: '[To] Horus: Divine Youth;²⁵ Nebty:²⁶ He who conquers with force; Golden Horus: He who is rich in years and great of victory; King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Auto-crator, Caesar; Son of Re: Domitianus, the immortal, returned²⁷ from the commonwealth of the Empire,²⁸ and the foreign countries in subjection,²⁹ to his residence³⁰ of the capital,³¹ Rome.'

²⁵ Probably for *n/rj*; cf. the Horus-name , on the obelisk from Praeneste.

Nht is also possible; cf. in line 3, and in the Horus-name of Caligula: Gauthier, V, 46, D. In the present inscription Gauthier emends: *op. cit.*, 99.

²⁶ is omitted in front of the name. Erman points out that a similar phrase, *it m shm.f*, is included in the protocol of Ptolemy XI, see Gauthier, IV, 2, 386, LXXXVII. Written as here, it is certainly copied from the Nebty-name of Ptolemy I; cf. Gauthier, IV, 2, 218, XI.

²⁷ All editors have taken as *i*, and as a form of , 'to bring'. It is, however, a late writing of the verb 'to return'. For used as 'n or a, cf. the spelling of Domitianus . For the confusion of 'n and *ln* in late texts, see below.

²⁸ , 'the two thrones', i.e. 'the two lands', a phrase which in Greek is occasionally rendered by οἰκουμένη. It is here used to signify the commonwealth of the *soeti*, as opposed to , the *nationes exterae*.

²⁹ Erman would explain (B:I), or (n is to be read before *i*) (A:I), as a late writing of *ματοί*, 'soldiers' (*Röm. Mitt.*, VIII, 212, note f), or of , 'enemies' (*ZAS*, XXXIV, 152). It is certainly the phrase , *m ndj*, regularly used about tributary or subjected foreign countries or people: cf. the inscription of Ramesses II on the London obelisk : 'reduced to serfdom'. Cf. also Canopus (7): , which in the Greek text is translated into *υπο την βασιλειαν τασσομενοις* (13); and Mariette, *Dendérah*, I, 23: , 'I have given unto thee Egypt and the foreign coun-

As pointed out by Erman, there can hardly be any doubt that the last passage refers to Domitian's official entry into Rome in A.D. 89, when from a visit to the provinces he returned as the symbolic victor of the Dacian and Germanic wars, in which he had taken no personal part. If, however, the obelisks do in fact commemorate the triumphal return of the emperor, they can hardly at the same time have been raised as an invocation for the granting of a safe homecoming that had obviously already taken place, an argument which adds significance to the omission of the *wds in* formula from the dedication, and must, in itself, raise doubts about its translation elsewhere.

Besides the already mentioned passage in inscription III, where it follows the name of the dedicator, the phrase occurs in the two dedications to Isis on face II and face III, where it precedes the name. Of text II, Erman gives the following translation:³² 'Die Grosse Isis, die Gottesmutter, die Sothis, die Herrscherin der Götter, die Herrin von Himmel, Erde und Unterwelt. Er errichtete einen Obelisk aus rothem Granitstein für (sie), und die Götter seiner Stadt Benevent, für Heil und Bringen des Herrn der beiden Ländern, Domitian, der ewig lebt. Sein schöner Name Lucilius Mpups, es werde ihm ein langes Leben mit Freude gegeben'.

It cannot be denied that the translation is hardly conclusive in so far as concerns the understanding of the syntactic construction of the text, and the explanation of the curious position of *wds in* in the middle of the text, un-introduced by the preposition demanded by the translation, caused the translator the greatest difficulties—which he was able to overcome only by having recourse to the last resort of the commentator, the always rather unheroic reference to the barbaric ignorance of the hierogrammate.

tries as tributaries'; Mariette, *Dendérah*, IV, 29 b: , 'Egypt and the foreign countries come unto thee in subjection'. For these and further references see *Wb.*, Belegstellen, II, 369.

³⁰ For the rare word , meaning 'abode', 'palace', or 'residence', see *Wb.*, and Erman, *ZÄS*, XXXIV, 152–53.

³¹ For the name of Memphis, *l[lawj*, used as a general word for capital, see Brugsch, *Thesaurus*, 630.

³² *ZÄS*, XXXIV, 153.

If, however, by way of experiment, we translate the text with omission of the *wḏs in* invocation, as well as of *rn.f nfr*, which in Erman's translation is curiously unconnected, the syntactic problems are considerably reduced: 'To Great Isis, mother of the God, Sothis, ruler of the Gods, lord of heaven and earth and the underworld³³ Rutilius Lupus erected³⁴ for her³⁵ and the Gods of his city Benevento, this obelisk, that a long life in happiness may be granted him.³⁶ On the understanding that the hieroglyphic text retains the individual words in the original order of the draft, irrespective of the rules governing Egyptian syntax, it will be seen to conform roughly to the pattern: *Isidi erexit monumentum Rutilius*, and for this we have a short, but illuminating parallel in the inscriptions of the Borgia and the Albani obelisks, where 'Sextus Africanus *s'h'.f*', obviously translates 'Sextus Africanus erexit', and where *erexit* has also been rendered verbatim by *s'h'.f*, irrespective of the fact that the true subject of the verb is the name Sextus Africanus, correctly placed first according to Latin syntax. Another observation may be made about the above translation: that the concluding passage, with its invocation for life and happiness, is in itself a strong argument against Erman's interpretation of *wḏs in*, since the text would then contain two invocations, one demanding life and safe return for the emperor, and another demanding life and happiness for the donator, which would be without parallel in a dedicatory inscription, and could hardly flatter the delicate vanity of Domitian.

What has been said about the syntax and the hieroglyphic rendering of inscription II applies also to the parallel text IV, with the exception that the verb (*o = hrj*) is here used without a suffix.³⁷

³³ For Erman's translation see page 22 above.

³⁴ For *s'h'.f* see the commentary below.

³⁵ *o* stands for *n*, and there is room for — in the lacuna; cf. the corresponding passage in IV.

³⁶ The phrase has always been taken to apply to the donator, but we shall see that in all probability it refers to the emperor.

³⁷ That the construction is not that of a passive verb with its subject *mnw*, but an active sentence with the name of the donator as subject, (in spite of the separation of subject and verb, impossible in Egyptian syntax) is proved by the suffix *f* in the phrase *ntrw n'wlf*. This, in a passive sentence, would stand without any word

With the controversial passages left untranslated, the inscription runs: 'To Great Isis, wife of the God, the eye of Re, Lord of heaven and all the gods³⁸ Rutilius Lupus made for her and the gods of his city Beneventum, this monument, in order that joy, life, prosperity, and health, may be granted him'.³⁹

Justice, however, demands that the rejection of an authoritative and generally accepted translation, should be accompanied by an attempt, at least, to replace it with a more likely one, and we shall therefore once more consider the controversial *wḏs in* formula. It is found in no ordinary Egyptian text, and we may therefore infer that Erman was right in his assumption that it represents a translation of a phrase from the non-Egyptian draft of the inscription. We have seen, however, that it cannot be a dedication to the emperor, but that it is always used attributively in connection with the name of the donator. A priori, therefore, it would seem logical to consider it as a hieroglyphic rendering of his title, and, once this is realized, it seems in fact to solve most of the otherwise puzzling problems of all the four inscriptions.

It explains not merely the omission of the phrase from the dedication to the emperor, where it is left out simply because the name of the donator is not mentioned, but also the obvious connection between the name and the phrase in the order parts of the inscription. In III, where it follows the name of the donator, the last part of the inscription would then translate: 'Rutilius Lupus, *wḏs in* of the Lord of the Two Lands; and in II and IV, where it precedes the name, and is extended with that of the reigning emperor, the translation would become equally clear: 'Rutilius Lupus, *wḏs in* of the Lord of the Two Lands, with the beautiful name of immortal Domitian, raised the obelisk, in order that life, prosperity, and health may be given to him', i.e. the emperor. It will be seen that these translations establish a logical

of reference, but in an active one becomes dependent upon the subject Rutilius, which, in normal Egyptian syntax would have preceded it.

³⁸ As it stands, the phrase *nb pt ntrw nbw*, must be an epithet of Re. Erman emends *t* after *nb*, and refers it to Isis.

³⁹ It is highly improbable that any Egyptian hierogrammate would have applied the '*nḥ, wḏs, snb*, formula to any other person but the sovereign, and we shall see that the entire passage refers to the emperor, and not to the donator.

syntactic coherence in the text, and explain the otherwise enigmatic use of the phrase *rn.f n/r*, which is utterly incomprehensible and out of place if associated with the name of the donator, but appropriate and correct when used in connection with that of the emperor. However, even if this interpretation of the text is accepted, we are still left with the problem of what Latin title the *wḏs in* formula translates, and, since we are without any Egyptian parallels, all efforts to solve it must of necessity be based on an analysis of the phrase itself. We have seen that Erman considered *wḏs* as the substantive 'Wohlergehen', 'prosperity', well-known from its use in the '*nḥ wḏs snb*' formula, and *in* as a nominal form of the verb 'to bring', which, under influence from a hypothetical *κοιζεσθαι*, he wished to translate 'Bringen', with the meaning 'return' (*reditu*). It would seem, however, that his conviction that the phrase could only be a translation of the *pro salute et reditu* acclamation, made him overlook the possibility that *wḏs* could also be a derivation of the equally well-established verb 'to go forth', 'to proceed'.

If so, it would be most natural to consider it, not as a substantive, but as an active participle, with the meaning 'who goes forth'. In that case the two verbs *wḏs* and *in* would be correlatives, and *in* would also be a participle, meaning either 'he who brings' or 'is brought', or, if in spite of the missing {, we take it as a form of '*n* 'to return', 'he who returns'.⁴⁰ The entire phrase would then translate as 'he who goes forth and returns', a most appropriate rendering of the Latin title *legatus*.

Since *nb tswj* and *nb ḥ'w* are both among the numerous conventional phrases used to render the title *augustus*, the full title *wḏs in n nb tswj*, would mean *legatus augusti*, and this is, in fact, how the title is used in III, where it follows the name of the donator: *Rutilius Lupus, wḏs in n nb tswj*, that is, *Rutilius*

⁴⁰ The two verbs became confused already in demotic, and from a semasiological standpoint, their relationship can be illustrated by the transitive use of the verb 'return' in English with the meaning 'bring back'. That they had become homonymous – at least in certain forms – is seen from derivations such as *εμε: μν*, 'thumb', listed in *Wb.* under '*nt*, 'Nagel', 'Kralle', although certainly derived from the verb *ⲙⲁ* 'to turn', meaning, like Greek *ἀντίχειρ*, the turned, or opposite finger.

L. legatus augusti. In II and IV, where it precedes the name, and where, for reasons of deference, the name of the emperor is added, the translation would be: 'The legate of the augustus with the beautiful name of immortal Domitian, Rutilius Lupus'.

Any attempt to identify this *legatus* falls outside the scope of the present article, but it should not be overlooked that a Rutilius Lupus did in fact command the XIII legion as *legatus augusti* during the reign of Domitian.⁴¹ There is no evidence to connect him with the obelisk, Egypt, Isis or Beneventum, but it has been suggested⁴² that he was the son of the M. Rutilius Lupus who was *praefectus Aegypti* some time between A.D. 114 and 117, in the last years of Trajan. Be that as it may, the identification of the donator is fortunately without importance for the translation and interpretation of the inscriptions, of which we shall now—in order to justify a long-winded and tedious commentary—give a running translation:

I

[To] Horus: Divine Youth; Nebty: He who conquers with force; Golden Horus: Rich in years and great of victory; King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Autocrator, Caesar; Son of Re: Domitian, the immortal, returned from the commonwealth of the empire and the subjugated foreign parts to his palace in the capital, Rome.

III

In the eight year of Horus: Strong Bull; King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands: Horus, son of the God, whom all the gods love; Son of Re, Lord of diadems; Domitianus, the immortal, a noble temple was built for Great Isis, Lady of Beneventum, and her Ennead, by Rutilius Lupus, legate of the augustus.

II

To Great Isis, mother of the God, Sothis, Ruler of the gods, Lord of heaven and earth and the underworld. The legate of the augustus with the beautiful name of immortal Domitian, Rutilius

⁴¹ PWRE, I, A, 1, 1266, no. 25.

⁴² *Ib.*, 1263, no. 23. The relationship has been questioned by Nagl, *ib.*, 1266, no. 25.