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Jean-François Champollion: News on his method in deciphering hieroglyphs

Recurring the bicentenary of the decipherment of the Egyptian hieroglyphic system by Jean-François Champollion, I would like to present in this favourable venue a homage to the memory and cleverness of the French *savant*. In 2020, I had the opportunity to publish on the *Revue d'Égyptologie* (DE PIETRI 2020) a short manuscript of Champollion (preserved in the *Archivio storico civico* of Pavia, Fig. 1) displaying his own translation of a stela (Fig. 2) he had the chance to see, during his journey to Italy (1824-1826) on the occasion of his visit to Pavia (dated March 1825; see HARTLEBEN 1909, 181-183), in the private collection of Egyptian antiquities belonging to the Marquis Luigi Malaspina di Sannazzaro (MALASPINA DI SANNAZZARO 1832, 41-42). The stela, today kept in the *Musei Civici del Castello Visconteo* of Pavia (inv. no. Eg. 2), has not yet received a proper and complete publication (catalogue entry in MORA 1980, 220; first translation in PERNIGOTTI 2001). Since this manuscript reports and testifies a translation made by Champollion just a little time after his decipherment (1822), I would like to take this opportunity to present a translation of the aforementioned stela comparing it with the French translation provided by Champollion in 1825, underlining main similarities and discrepancies, showing how the young scholar was able to translate almost the 90-95% of the inscription, and focusing on some “gaps in translation” that Champollion left after his effort. This contribution aims at displaying Champollion’s “state of affaire” with hieroglyphs at that time (1825), highlighting once again the genius of one of the Fathers of our modern Egyptology. I offer here a synopsis of Champollion’s translation (red box) compared to my own translation (blue box), highlighting with different colours the main differences/discrepancies.

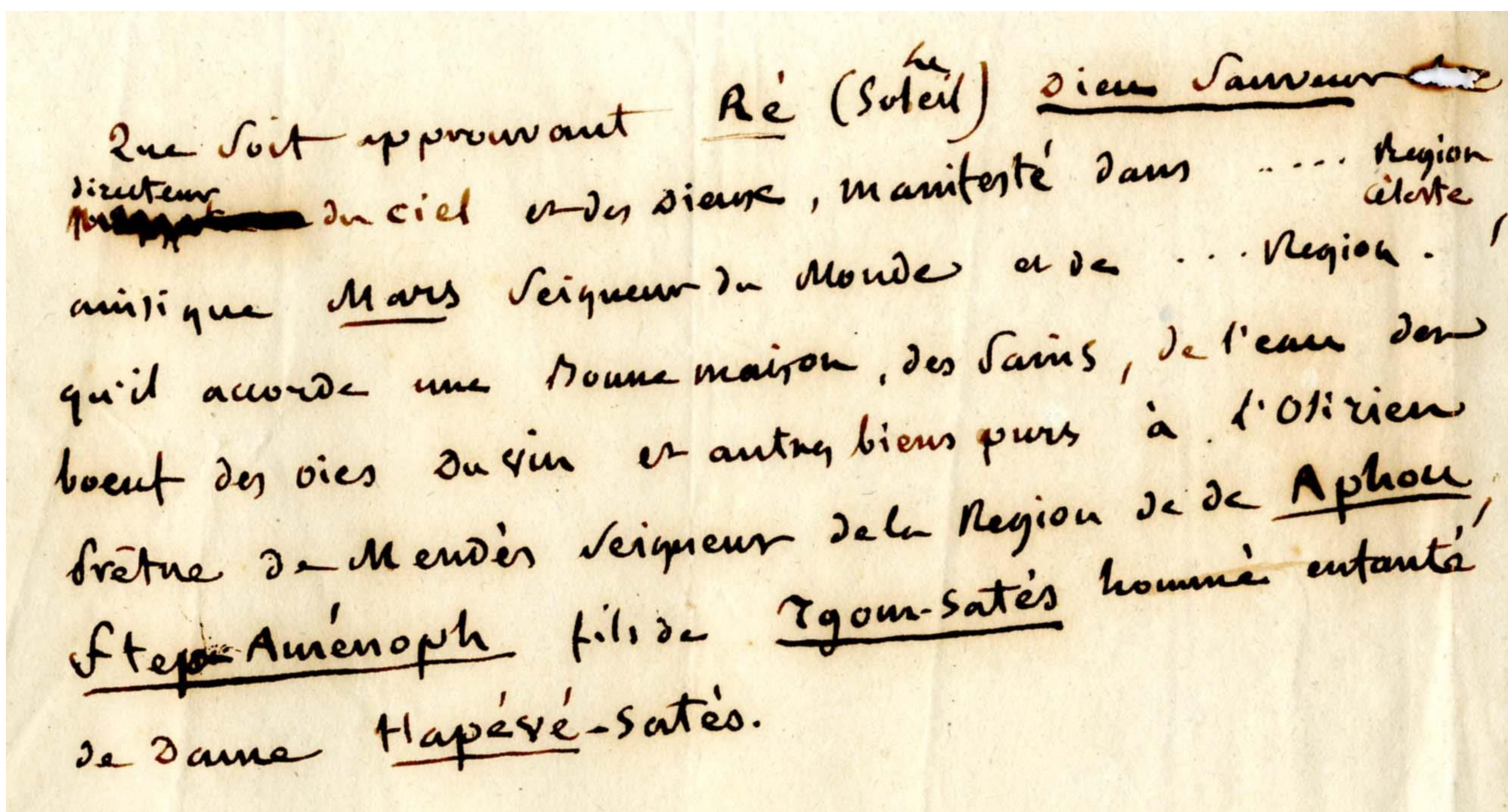


Fig.1: manuscript of Champollion kept at the *Archivio storico civico*, Pavia, Italy (photo of the author)

Que soit approuvent Rê (Le Soleil) Dieu Saveur / ~~protecteur~~ [?] directeur du ciel et des Dieux, manifesté dans ... Région / ^{céleste}, ainsi que Mars Seigneur du monde et de ... Région. / qu'il accorde une Bonne maison, des Pains, de l'eau / des boeuf, des oies [omissis] Du vin et autres bien purs à l'Osirien / Prêtre de Mendès Seigneur de la Région de de Aphon, / Step Aménoph, fils de Igom-Satès, hommè [sic] [omissis] enfanté / de Dame Hapév/ré-Satès [omissis].

An offering which the king gives to Re-Harakhty, the great god above the gods who appeared at the horizon, and to Atum Master-of-the-Two-Lands of Heliopolis, so that he grants an invocation offering of bread, beer, cattle, poultry, incense, alabaster, clothes, wine, milk, and any good and pure goods (to) the Osiris, the pure-of-arms priest of Min, lord of Ipu, Hetepimen, son of Atumirdis, justified, born to the mistress of the house Hapyirdis, justified.



Fig. 2: Limestone stela of Htp-jmn, son of Jtm-jr-dj=s and Hp.y-jr-dj=s, 26th dyn., Eg. 2, *Musei Civici del Castello Visconteo*, Pavia, Italy; (photo of the author)

■ = Champollion left this portions of text untranslated, since he probably was not yet completely aware about the exact meaning of some specific words.

ORANGE TEXT = TEXT OMITTED BY CHAMPOLLION

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