"... within the Altar of the Sun"

An unidentified hieroglyph and the construction of the sun temple Nhn-R^cw

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The expedition inscription Sinai 13, incised at Maghara in the time of King C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj ("Djedkare-Asosi", reigned c. 2355-2317 BC)¹, is the most ancient example of an Egyptian source commemorating the miraculous appearance of a sacred text.² First published by Samuel Birch³ and included in Brugsch's *Thesaurus*⁴ as well as in Weill's *Recueil*⁵ and Sethe's *Urkunden des Alten Reiches*⁶, parts of the inscription have been known for a long time – though not in a very reliabable form. Until recently, the authoritative edition of the whole document was that of Gardiner and Peet (and Černý)⁷, as illustrated below in figure 1.

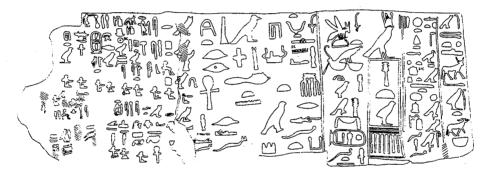


Fig. 1: Sinai 13, according to Gardiner, Peet & Černý (1952-55; I, pl. VII,13)

Lately, however, a further improved copy of the text has been made available by John Baines and Richard Parkinson on the basis of a collation of nineteenth century squeezes in the possession of the British Museum (see figure 2).⁸

¹ All chronological figures given in this paper are in accordance with the lower alternatives of the dates promulgated by von Beckerath (1997: 188). Names of rulers are quoted in a form, the consonantal skeletons of which are close to the reconstructions of the actual pronounciation of the third millennium (cf. Kammerzell 1998). The author is aware that these unfamiliar forms may be considered fairly eccentric by the reader, but still prefers refering to a historical individual with a name by which this person would have been recognized as such in his lifetime.

² Cf. Morenz (1996: 14-16).

³ Birch (1869; 26-27).

⁴ Brugsch (1891: 1491 [no. 10], 1494 [no.20]).

⁵ Weill (1904: 109-116).

⁶ Sethe (1903: 55,11-56,9).

⁷ Gardiner, Peet & Černý (1952-55: I, pl. VII [line-drawing]) and (1952-55: II 60-61 [translation with short philological commentary]).

⁸ Baines & Parkinson (1997: 27).

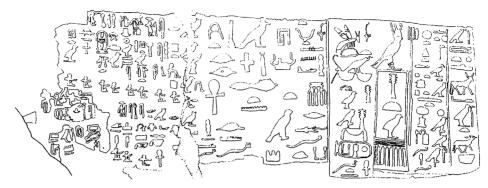


Fig. 2: Sinai 13, according to Baines & Parkinson (1997: 27)

The inscription seems to be lost now and possibly was destroyed soon after it had been discovered by Charles Kerr MacDonald in 1859. It consisted of three sections of similar size.

The four columns to the right give the chronological setting, the central section refers to the actual event, and the text ends with a list naming personnel of rank who participated in the expedition. This paper will be concerned with the initial segment only. The reader will notice that the interpretation of the text and the conclusions drwan from it differ notably from thoses suggested by Baines & Parkinson (1997). These differences are largely due to a new reading, and, while the present author feels no need to reject their explanation on the whole, he wonders whether the two versions may be compatible. A minute discussion of their stimulating paper will not be given.

Their most critical argument against interpretations like the one presented here is dealt with in an excursus.

In spite of the two vertical lines separating the first three columns, the text starts with a short horizontal string of graphemes which then continue in the first column. What we see is an indication of date through reference to the fourth (or third)¹⁰ census of cattle under King C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj, which took place in the year before the inscription was carved. The third and fourth columns contain the titulary and the names of the ruler (see figure 3). The crucial passage is in the second column. Due to

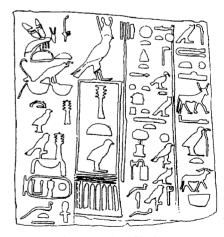


Fig. 3: Detail of Sinai 13

⁹ The accessible pieces of information about the discovery as well as a description of the technique of the inscription are provided by Baines & Parkinson (1997: 10-13).

¹⁰ On the impossibility to determine whether the numeral in question is \(\text{in} \) \(\left(\ln w \right) \) 'third' or \(\text{int} \) \(\frac{fd(.nw)}{or \text{int}} \)' fourth', cf. Baines & Parkinson (1997: 14, note a).

the imprecise nature of the hieroglyphs,¹¹ the actual wording has not yet been found. Almost identical translations have been produced by several scholars since the publication of the standard edition and run as follows:

- "Causing by the god a gem to be found in the Broad Hall of (the sanctuary) Nekhen-Rē^c in the writing of the god himself." (Gardiner, Peet & Černý 1952-55: II, 61).
- "Im Hof (so!) des Sonnenheiligtums *Nhn-R^cw* ließ der Gott einen kostbaren Stein-(block) mit einem Text des Gottes (sicher Thot) selbst finden." (Osing 1975: 153).
- «Faire trouver par le dieu une gemme (?) dans la grande salle du sanctuaire solaire
 Nékhenrê en écriture du dieu même.» (Roccati 1982: 242).
- "Jahr nach der dritten Zählung von Rindern, großen und kleinen: Gott veranlaßt, daß man einen (kostbaren) Stein findet in der breiten Halle des (Sonnenheiligtums)
 Nhn R^c als Schrift des Gottes selbst." (Morenz 1996: 15)
- "Causing by the god (<u>djt ntr</u>) that there be found precious stone (<u>gm.tj</u> ^c3t) in the broad court of <u>nhn-rcw</u>, in writing of the god himself." (Baines & Parkinson 1997: 13).

They all agree that one should interpret the sequence of signs as \(\frac{1}{2} \) \(\frac{1}{2} \)

¹¹ Cf. Gardiner, Peet & Černý (1952-55: II 61, note e): "somewhat obscure."

¹² Cf. Eichler (1993: 32-33).

¹³ Mariette (1885: 229e, col. 3).

¹⁴ Hassan (1944: 241, fig. 101b, line 6). For a discussion whether this form actually belonged to the lemma wsli.t, cf. Fischer (1960: 304 n. 9) and Spencer (1984: 92 n. 65).

¹⁵ Pyr. 807b^N, 866a^N, 905b^{P,N}, 1749a^{M,N}, 1946b^N, 2194c^N.

¹⁶ Pyr. 866a^M.

¹⁷ Pyr. 807bM.

¹⁸ Pyr. 869c^M.

¹⁹ *Pyr.* 214c^N

²⁰ Pyr. 807b^P.

²¹ Pyr. *1941cNt (Nt 770).

²² Pyr. 1069a^P.

²³ Pyr. 1266b^P.

²⁴ Pyr. 1551a^P.

²⁵ Pyr. 1984a^N.

For clarification we should reconsider the content of the passage. What is mentioned is the fact that an inscribed stone of a supposed supernatural origin had been discovered "in the $\frac{O}{O}$ (...) of Enclosure-of-the-Sun-God", which is in a particular part of the sun temple of King Wasilkaarif ("Userkaf", r. 2454-2446 BC). With this in mind, the actual reading of $\frac{O}{O}$ is almost self-evident: we are talking about a monumental altar of the sun temple. One of the Egyptian terms for 'altar, table of offerings' is htp, well attested since the Old Kingdom in written forms like $\frac{A}{O}$ 26, $\frac{A}{O}$ 27, $\frac{A}{O}$ 31, $\frac{A}{O}$ 31, $\frac{A}{O}$ 33, $\frac{A}{O}$ 33, $\frac{A}{O}$ 31, $\frac{A}{O}$ 33, $\frac{A}{O}$ 33, $\frac{A}{O}$ 33, $\frac{A}{O}$ (plur., stat. pron.)³⁴.

While the form $\stackrel{\triangle}{\Box}$ (with additional \Box) does not seem to be common as a writing of htp 'altar' prior to the New Kingdom³⁵, the reason that lies behind employing the phonographic interpretants \Box in $\bigcap_{\square \Box}$ of Sinai 13 is quite clear. They were considered nec-

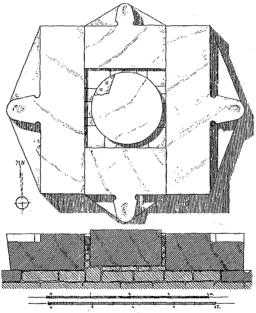


Fig. 4: Monumental altar in the sun temple Šzp-jb-R^cw (Borchardt 1905: 42, fig. 33)

²⁶ E.g. Urk. I 107,16, 108,1; CT II 137f (G2T); CT VI 45e-f (pGard. II).

²⁷ Pyr. 9cN.

²⁸ Pyr. 122a^N

²⁹ E.g. CT II 137f (S1C, S2C^a); CT III 9c (B2Bo, S1C, S2C.), 313d (G1T, G2T); CT VI 9c (B1C, B9C), 19e-f (B1Bo), 25a (B1Bo), 32i (S1C), 32j (S1C, S2C), 40l-m (pGard. II), 211a (S2P), 267v (G1T), 285r-s (B1Bo), 356f (B3Bo). The word has masculine gender (van der Molen 2000: 362) and should be transcribed htp (pace van der Molen 2000: 361-362).

³⁰ E.g. CT III 9c (B1C, B2La, Sq10C).

³¹ CT III 9c (B3C).

³² E.g. CT III 313d (T3L, A1C).

³³ CT VI 9c (B1Y).

³⁴ CT VI 295h (B1Bo).

essary for clarifying the function of a sign not belonging to the standard inventory of Old Egyptian graphemes but, on the contrary, appears to be unique and probably an *ad hoc* creation of the scribe of that inscription.³⁶

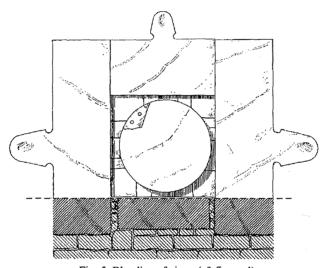


Fig. 5: Blending of views (cf. figure 4)

In spite of the above discussion supporting the interpretation of \Box as \Box htp 'altar (of the sun)', 38 the reading of the second column of Sinai 13 has not yet been completely established. Plainly substituting \Box wsh.t 'broad hall, court' with \Box htp 'altar'

³⁵ Cf. http://aaew.bbaw.de:88/gif/27/27430000/27432650.gif.

³⁶ The nature of the hieroglyphic writing system as an *open system* that could be and was expanded as occasion demanded (already in pre-Ptolemaic times) is underrated in most grammars and text books dealing with the Egyptian script. Above all, the practice to draw conclusions about the working of the system from the numerical size of (modern) sign lists is utterly misleading. For a more appropriate approach, cf. the short remarks of Hornung (1994).

³⁷ Much later, a similarly shaped object was represented in plan view only among the donations given to Amun by Thutmosis III (r. 1479-1425 BC) that were depicted on the northern wall of the Hall of Annals in the Temple of Karnak (see *Urk. IV* 640,8-9).

³⁸ One should notice that the altars of sun temples can also be referred to as $\sqrt[6]{\frac{n}{2}} \underbrace{l}{b} \beta(w).t$ (cf. Posener-Kriéger 1976: 521).

gives rise to a new dilemma. Whereas wsh.t is a feminine noun, htp 'altar' is of masculine gender, presumably not only in the chronolect of the third millennium but throughout Egyptian language history. 39 For this reason, the reading the house history. 39 For this reason, the reading the house history. Nhn- $R^c w$, with a feminine determinative pronoun n.t- has to be excluded. There are two ways to solve this puzzle. On the one hand, we might persist in interpreting as α and take it as a non-standard (that is erroneous) representation of masculine n(i)induced by the circumstance that /t/ in auslaut position had already been weakened and dropped by the time of the late Fifth Dynasty. 40 Alternatively, we might look for a different reading of . As a consequence of the sometimes quite irregular shapes of the hieroglyphs in the inscription, several distinct graphemes are to be taken into consideration as possible equivalents of the rectangular sign in first position (e.g. -, ==, -, -, There is a chance that the group was used for and signified the word that is customarily transcribed as hij, t but, according to its written forms in the chronolects of the Old and Middles Kingdoms, should rather be analysed as $h.t.^{41}$ The precise meaning of OEg. $\stackrel{\square}{=} h.t$ (variants $\stackrel{\square}{=}$, $\stackrel{$ New Kingdom Egyptian (1) As (1) 12 is difficult to determine. It was proposed that the meaning "changed from the original 'ceiling' in the Old and Middle Kingdoms to the 'portico' of the Late and Graeco-Roman periods." However, clear instances of h.t designating a ceiling or roof do not appear in Old Egyptian texts, and the common title $\mathcal{B} = smsw-h.t$ (variants $\mathcal{B} = \mathcal{A}$, \mathcal{A} , fem. \mathcal{A}^{44}) – the only cotext in which h.t occurred during that period - is unlikely to mean 'Elder of the Ceiling'. Judging from the flat shape of the classifier (in \Box , \Box) or logogram (in \Box , \Box) and taking into consideration the

³⁹ Whether the extremely rare New Kingdom forms of the type actually represent a feminine noun htp.t is questionable (cf. http://aaew.bbaw.de:88/gif/27/27430000/274335350.gif, van der Molen 2000: 361-362).

⁴⁰ The sound change /t/ > Ø / ___# is indirectly confirmed by writing a morpheme-concluding but not word-final /t/ (which did not undergo the process of weakening) with ⟨t-t⟩, ⟨tj⟩ or ⟨tj-j⟩. Forms as such are already attested in the Pyramid Texts of King Wanjash ("Unas", r. 2317-2297 BC).

⁴¹ Besides one dubious form from the tomb of Ankhtify at Mo^calla, which possibly designates another lemma, there are no writings with more than a single root consonant prior to the Twelfth Dynasty, cf. Spencer (1984: 155-157), who even claims implicitly that forms with did not occur before the New Kingdom (but see on the stela Louvre C 1 of Nj-sw-Mntw [Sethe 1928: 81,17]). Since in the second millennium the group was often employed as what may be called a secondary uniconsonantal sign, one should resist from labelling all the earlier forms as "defective writings." Gardiner's hypothesis to derive Coptic 2AGIT 'gateway, forecourt' from hij.t/h.t (Gardiner 1947: I 60*-61*, no. 133) has been rejected by other scholars (cf. Spencer 1984: 161 with further references) on the ground that final /t/ would not have been preserved in Coptic (a fact mentioned by Gardiner but dismissed on the basis of his own "undoubtedly wellfounded belief in the inaccurate and confused nature of hieroglyphic spelling"). Thus, we have no reason to assume that h.t was not the original form. Moreover, the word may be connected with masculine hte country grapheme.

⁴² For a more complete, though all but exhaustive list of written forms with references, see Spencer (1984: 155-156).

⁴³ Spencer (1984: 157).

⁴⁴ Stela Louvre C 193 (http://aaew.bbaw.de:88/gif/26/26335000/26337420.gif).

likely lexical relation between h.t and $h^{.45}$, an original meaning of 'courtyard, enclosure' seems more convincing. In any case, there is still some doubt as to whether we may read htp-h.t-h.t-h.t-h.t-h.t-h.t-h.t-h.t-h.t-h.t-h.t did indeed indicate an open courtyard, but that we maintain, as uniquely attested in this inscription, that h.t was written by means of a logogram and a complement only, without initial n. Although this assumption, referring to an otherwise unattested writing, is no more than a mere possibility, it seems preferable to the alternative explanation. Having recourse to an unusual writing is less grave than presuming a mistake made by the ancient scribe.

Accordingly, the right-hand section of Sinai 13 may be converted into standard hier-oglyphs, analysed and translated as follows:

ſ		 			K-K			() \(\hat{\delta} \) (\(\alpha \)
rnp-(t)	m-ht-	zp	fd(-nw)	tnw-t	jķ	cw-1	nb	$rd-t-2$ ntr_1
SBSTFEM.	PREP.	SBST.	NUMORD			SBSTFEM.	INDEF.	VBINF. SBST.
year	after	occasion	fourth	number	ing cattle	small livestock	every	give god
~ <u>~</u>		&->> ДО	B		<u> </u>) = A. ()		BL
gm-t		9-1	m-	htр	h-t-	Nhn-R ^c w		m-
SUBJPASS.		SBSTFEM.	PREP.	SBST.	SBSTFEM.	TOPON.		PREP.
that was found precious ston			one in	altar	courtyard	Enclosure-of-t	he-Sun-	-God in
	A.	* × / J	Qol	E	} &	DE		Ž
zh-	ntr (ds-f	Hrw Dd-h	w	nzw-bjt	nb-(tj)	D^{c}	d-h ^c w
SBST	SBST.	SBST3sm	HEON, PROP.		SBSTSBST.	SBSTDU.:F	EM. PR	OP.
writing	god 1	himself 1	Horus C'it'	ghaadaw	King-Mon	arch Two Ladi	es C	'it'ghaadaw
		(<u>•}</u>		9	<u> </u>			
Dd-bjk-nb	w	Dd-k.	R-R ^c w	cnh	<u>d</u> -t			
PROP.		PROP.		STAT.:3sm	SBSTFEM.			
enduring falcon gold C'it'k			arliiduw	living	infinity			

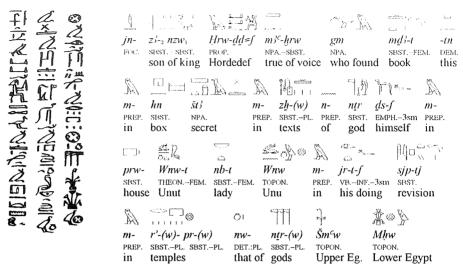
"Year after the fourth time of assessing all the cattle and small livestock, when the god caused that a precious stone with a text of the god himself was discovered within the altar of the courtyard of 'Enclosure-of-the-Sun-God', (in the reign of) Horus C'it'ghaadaw, King-Monarch and He-of-the-Two-Ladies C'it'ghaadaw, Enduring-is-the-Falcon-of-Gold, C'it'karliiduw, who may live eternally."

Excursus

The weightiest evidence presented by Baines and Parkinson against the translations of Osing (1975), Roccati (1982), Eichler (1993), and Morenz (1996) is the assumption that the Egyptian expression jh.t m- zh would not denote 'something (inscribed) with an inscription' (cf. Baines & Parkinson 1997: 17). However, this seems not to be the case, as is shown by the following passage from the Book of the Dead. In the post-

⁴⁵ Cf. above footnote 41.

script of Chapter 137A (Papyrus British Museum 9900 of *Nb-sn=j* = Naville 1886: I, pl. 150, cols. 23-24; XVIIIth Dynasty) we find:



It was the late prince Hordjedef who discovered this roll in a secret box with texts
of the god himself in the temple of Unut, Lady-of-Unu, when he made a revision in
the temples of the gods of Upper and Lower Egypt.

While it is very unlikely that the quoted passage meant "prince Hordjedef found in writing (the words) THIS BOOK IN A SECRET BOX," the explanation given above seems faultless – despite the fact that there might be other possibilities as well. In any case, there is little if any evidence to exclude the translation of m- $z\underline{h}$ as 'with an inscription' or 'bearing writing'. (End of excursus).

In conclusion, the short passage discussed above informs us that in a particular year of King C'it'karliiduw's reign a piece of stone bearing a divine text had been found, that was in some way connected with the altar in the sun temple of Wasilkaarif, a monarch dead for a century. The preposition defining the spacial relationship between the object discovered and the spot where it was found is m- 'in' – and not hr-, as would have been the case, had the stone appeared on the altar. What does this mean, and how may the altar mentioned in our text be related to the archaeological remains of Nhn-R-w? Wasilkaarif's edifice 'Enclosure-of-the-Sun-God' does not show any traces of a monumental offering stone like the one found in the sun temple of King Niwasilliiduw. Herbert Ricke, who excavated Nhn-R-w, distinguished four phases of construction. ⁴⁶ To the last of these belongs an altar made of mudbricks (see figure 6), which might have replaced an earlier structure, although no remains of such have been found. ⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Ricke (1965: 3-31), summarized by Lehner (1997: 150-151).

⁴⁷ Cf. Ricke (1965: 5).

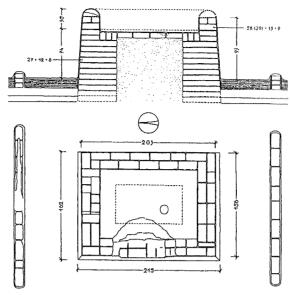


Fig. 6: Mudbrick altar of the sun temple Nhn-R'w (Ricke 1965: 30, fig. 19)

Even though the exact dates of the different transformations of $Nhn-R^cw$ are a matter of conjecture, all archaeologists agree that the altar was build a considerable time after the death of Wasilkaarif. The third construction phase is generally attributed to Niwasilliiduw, and the fourth is assumed to have been achieved soon afterwards. The justification for this widely accepted hypothesis, however, looks rather fragile, being nothing more than the supposition that the subsequent rulers, who did not build sun temples of their own, would have lost all concern towards this kind of religious edifice. There is some empirical evidence that such assumptions are incongruous: Seal impressions bearing the names of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and Wanjash (r. 2317-2297 BC) attest a later usage of $Nhn-R^cw$. The same may be said of several papyri from Abusir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and mentioning deliveries of goods from Abusir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and mentioning deliveries of goods from Abusir Wighther Abusir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and mentioning deliveries of goods from Abusir Wighther Abusir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj and busir written in the rule of C'it

⁴⁸ Cf. Kaiser (1956), Ricke (1965: 15-18 and 27-31), Stadelmann (1984: 1095).

⁴⁹ Cf. the statement of the excavator: "Da mit Menkauhor der Bau von Sonnenheiligtümern aufgehört hat und damit auch das Interesse an kostenspieligem Umbauen eines bestehenden Sonnenheiligtums, wir aber auch noch Abänderungen nach der dritten Bauperiode festgestellt haben, so möchte man den zweiten Umbau größeren Ausmaßes Niuserrê zuschreiben." (Ricke 1965: 28). Even further in this respect went Sethe (1889: 117).

⁵⁰ See Stock (1955: 144), Kaplony (1969: 85-113, nos. US 17-US 20, US 28, US 30-US 33, US 36, US 42-US 43, US 51, US 59).

⁵¹ See pBM 10735 frame 6 recto, line 1 (Posener-Kriéger & de Cénival 1968: pl. XXXVI A), pBM 10735 frame 4 recto, line 2 (ibid., pl. LX A), pCairo 58063 fr. 1 recto (Borchardt 1897: 10-13, Posener-Kriéger & de Cénival 1968: pl. XLVII A), pCairo 58063 fr. 6 recto, col. a (ibid., pl. XLIII A1), pLouvre E.25279 recto, col. c,1-2 and col. d,1-2 (ibid., pl. V), pLouvre E.25416a (ibid., pl.

some inscribed stone fragments were found which presumably belonged to a restoration inscription of C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj. ⁵² Assuming that Borchardt's reconstruction of the badly destroyed text is correct, it would prove not only cult but also building activities in older sun temples under C'it'karliiduw Jasasaj, who had not constructed such a monument of his own.

Taking these facts into account, we may interpret the initial passage of Sinai 13 without much ado and in one operation gain some new insights into King C'it'karliiduw's building activities. The stone inscribed by the god (whatever this object actually was) was found in the course of works that were conducted in the eighth or ninth year of C'it'karliiduw (that is c. 2350 BC) as part of the fourth phase of construction of *Nhn-Rcw* and included the pulling-down of the first altar and its replacement by the extant structure depicted in figure 6. Since there is little reason to assume that the original altar had been built in a more solid manner than its successor, the preposition *m*-has to be understood literally: it was inside the mudbrick construction that the sacred text appeared.

Finally, it might be appropriate to comment on the significant difference of shape between the hieroglyphic sign \triangle and the actual altar of figure 6. The scribe of Sinai 13 did not necessarily know the offering platform of $Nhn-R^cw$ by sight, but obviously had some notion of how the ideal altar of a sun temple looked. That he took as a prototype the monumental 'alabaster altar' of Niwasilliiduw (or a similar exemplar) is not at all surprising.

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Abbreviations

3	third person	ORD.	ordinal suffix
DET.	determinative pronoun	PASS.	passive
DEM.	demonstrative pronoun	PL.	plural
DU.	dual	PREP.	preposition
ЕМРН.	emphatic reflexive pronoun	PROP.	proper name (anthroponym)
FEM.	fem.	S	singular
FOC.	focus particle	SBST.	substantive
INDEF.	indefinite pronoun	STAT.	stative
INF.	infinitive	SUBJ.	subjunctive
m	masculine	THEON.	theonym
NPA.	neutral participle actice	TOPON.	toponym
NUM.	numeral	VB.	verb

XLIX D). Cf. also Winter (1957: 226) and Posener-Kriéger (1976: 519-526 and 612). 52 Borchardt (1905: 72-73).

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