

## DEMOTIC DICTIONARY PROJECT

**Janet H. Johnson**

The Demotic Dictionary Project has made excellent progress this year, thanks in large part to a very generous bequest from Professor and Mrs. George R. Hughes. As a result of this bequest, we have hired Dr. Stephen Vinson as Research Associate, hired two additional Egyptology graduate students, and purchased upgraded computer processing, scanning, and storage equipment. Vinson, Johnson, and long-time graduate student assistant Thomas Dousa have spent the year checking, correcting, and updating the draft manuscript which was first written more than ten years ago. François Gaudard has undertaken the crucial, but potentially mind-numbing, job of checking and correcting background data (date, provenience, publication information) on every text cited in the Dictionary (by a conservative estimate, this will run to over 3,000 different texts!). Rob Harris has taken over the task of scanning all of these documents. Todd Hickey, a graduate student in History, volunteered to check all of our Greek citations and spent a couple of days a week doing this for several months before leaving for Cairo for dissertation research. Thomas Urban of the Oriental Institute Publications Office coordinated contacts with Lloyd Anderson of Ecological Linguistics, who has designed several printing and screen

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display fonts for the Oriental Institute; Anderson has now taken the font designed many years ago by Johnson which includes all of the transliteration characters needed for Demotic (and Egyptian in general) and begun the process of converting it from a "bitmap" font (somewhat ragged when printed on modern laser printers) into a more elegant, sharper PostScript font. To all of these people belongs full credit for their enthusiasm, dedication, concentration, and meticulous concern for detail which is so important in lexicographic work.

In September 1996, Johnson attended the Sixth International Congress of Demotists, held in Cairo. These meetings were extremely productive, with a number of fine papers presenting new texts and new studies of older material. In addition, Congress participants had an excellent chance to talk with one another about current work and ongoing concerns in the field of Demotic studies. It was especially useful to meet and get to know the several young Egyptian scholars who are working on Demotic materials and have not previously been able to attend the international meetings. Side trips to Alexandria, highlighted by a chance to see the results of the recent underwater work near the Pharos, and the Sinai Peace Canal archaeological excavations were included in the program. Johnson gave a brief report on the Dictionary at that meeting, the summary of which is quoted here:

This paper presented a brief status report on the Chicago Demotic Dictionary, the core of which is new words or meanings found in texts published between 1955 (following the publication of Erichsen's *Glossar* in 1954) and 1979. The presentation included a brief survey of the range of content and organization of the Dictionary based on entries for words beginning with the letter Y. Entries for approximately half the letters in the Demotic "alphabet" have been finished except for scanning of Demotic words and preparation of black and white facsimiles from those scans. The entries for the other half of the letters are in various stages of being checked and formatted and also await scans. Through a generous bequest by George Hughes, a full-time Research Associate has been hired and it is hoped that, in two years time, all of the checking, formatting, and most scanning will be completed.

The Dictionary, which must be used in conjunction with Erichsen's *Glossar*, will be published in two formats, standard book format (in two volumes, one volume of Dictionary and one volume of "Text Information" providing name, number, publication information, date, provenience, and access to every text cited in the Dictionary) and on CD-ROM. The latter version will allow users to transfer the gray scale scans to a graphics program to enlarge and enhance the photograph for more detailed study of the script and will also enable typical computer "searches" for related words or entries.

A brief introduction to the Dictionary has been put on the World-Wide Web, including a sample page from the letter F and a sample scan, transliteration, translation, and "text information" for a document in the collections of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago:

<http://www.oi.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/DEM/Demotic.html>

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As a result of discussions during the business meeting concluding this International Congress, information is being solicited for two lists: Scholars Involved in Demotic Studies and Institutions Involved in Demotic Studies. These lists are available from the Demotic Dictionary Web page mentioned above; copies of the lists may also be obtained by contacting the Chicago Demotic Dictionary Project. All of the scholars and institutions involved in or interested in Demotic studies are encouraged to send their names, addresses and other relevant information to Janet H. Johnson, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, USA; e-mail: j-johnson@uchicago.edu.

Some updating can be made to that report. The lists of scholars and institutions interested and involved in Demotic studies initially put together by Johnson as a result of this appeal have now been spruced up by Alexandra O'Brien and can be consulted at:

[http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/DEM/Demotic\\_Directory.html](http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/DEM/Demotic_Directory.html)

O'Brien is a graduate student in Egyptology who has worked for the Demotic Dictionary and now assists Charles Jones in the Research Archives. She has done extensive work pulling together World-Wide Web information and resources on Demotic, and Egyptian generally; see, for example, her "Demotic Texts Published on the World-Wide Web":

[http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/ABZU/DEMOTIC\\_WWW.HTML](http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/ABZU/DEMOTIC_WWW.HTML)

Also see the text of her presentation at the annual meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt (spring 1997) entitled "Dissecta Membra in Araneo, Scattered Remains on the Web":

<http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/ABZU/ARCETALK.HTML>

For those who like numbers, let me start with the number and storage size of the scans we are using for making the citation copies of individual words. Although there are "only" about 3,000 different texts that will be cited, many times that number of scans are required. We are scanning from published photographs and if the published photograph is larger than the size of the scanner bed (the 8.5 × 14.0 inch "window" through which the scan is made), two or more scans are needed to copy the entire text. In addition, many texts are more than one page long and each page gets its own individual scan. As of the middle of July 1997, we have almost 2,500 document scans, amounting to more than 3,000 megabytes (or 3 gigabytes) of information. For comparison, in our Macintosh world, the standard "floppy disk" that is regularly used to transfer information manually from one computer to another holds 1.4 megabytes (or 1,400 K). Thus, we have stored the equivalent of over 2,500 floppy disks worth of scans — and we have a ways to go yet!

The Dictionary files are not quite as impressive in size. Our largest file so far, the 61-page long entry for the letter Q, which was highlighted in the *1994/95 Annual Report*, measures "only" 7.7 megabytes, or 6 floppy disks worth of data. However, the longest files (S and H) are both already over 130 pages long) are still being checked and await their scans of the Demotic words; both will end up much larger than Q when they are completed. Overall, the text of the Dictionary (word entries

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and supplementary information about the texts and all of the publications cited in the Dictionary) currently takes approximately 60 megabytes, which translates into approximately 200 pages of supplementary information and over 1,500 pages of word entries. Of those, approximately 200 pages (files for the letters Y, B, F, L, Q, K, and T) are nearly complete; about 550 pages (files for the letters ʒ, ʾI, ʿ, P, Š, G, and D) are checked but await scans and facsimiles; about 475 pages (files for the letters W, M, N, H, H, H, and T) have had only their preliminary check and need final checking and formatting as well as the addition of scans and facsimiles; and over 300 pages are currently being checked, formatted, and having scans entered (files for the letters R, H, and S).

But of greater interest to most people, whether professional Egyptologists or not, is the content of the Dictionary. Here, too, this has been a productive year. Here I can mention only a few of the interesting philological tidbits that have gained our attention this year. As I mentioned in last year's *Annual Report*, the number and range of titles accorded to women in the Demotic texts is much smaller than that accorded to men, but Vinson has managed to increase the number by at least one, finding a reference to a woman fisherman. Another discovery of his is the probable explanation of the term *grg bnw* "hunting heron" to refer to a domesticated, trained heron used as a live decoy in fowling (a practice attested among modern Egyptian fowling). Dousa's presentation "Imagining Isis: On Some Continuities Between Demotic Documentary Texts and the Greek Isis Aretologies" at the first joint Chicago-Stanford seminar on Hellenistic Egypt (held in Chicago in February) tackled some of the especially difficult passages relating to dreams and cult that are preserved from the archive of a man named Ḥor (or Ḥorus).

Corrections to readings of individual words sometimes improve our understanding of Egyptian society or provide important underpinning to studies of cultural continuity between pre-Demotic Egypt and Egypt in the "Late period," when exposed to extensive foreign cultural influence. For instance, in a medical text from the Fayum that dates from the Roman period (but may well be a copy of an older text), the preserved portion of a broken prescription had been understood by the original editor as instructions for using a reed straw and bowl, but the exact function of those items was quite unclear. Dousa reread a key word in this passage as the word for "vapor," thereby making it clear that the prescription called for the patient to inhale the fumes of a substance through the reed straw. This form of inhalation therapy can be traced back to earlier pharaonic practices; two prescriptions preserved in the early New Kingdom medical text known as Papyrus Ebers likewise specify that a patient suffering from cough suck the vapors of heated medicinal substances through a reed straw. Here, then, we have evidence for the continued use of traditional Egyptian medical techniques at a time when Greek medicine had begun to make some inroads into the Nile Valley.

Some such corrections, frequently resulting from ambiguity in the reading of individual signs or words in the cursive Demotic script, may also, in retrospect, prove rather amusing. For example, there is a word ššw indicating a type of jar or jug, consistently written with two alphabetic š-signs (š). A few examples of a word written šš but using two different alphabetic š-signs (š), each with a stroke underneath and "flesh" determinative rather than "jar" determinative, have regularly been considered variant examples of this word. Most of the attested examples of the non-stan-

dard writing occur in lists of dowry items (especially various items of cloth and clothing, certain types of pots, and so on<sup>1</sup>) which a woman brought with her to her marriage. One example occurs in an oath by which a man named Petekhonsu denied to another named Ameniu that he, Petekhonsu, had taken a šš and a tunic. But the real clue came in an unpublished letter, a copy of which is preserved in the Demotic Dictionary files. This letter, written on an ostrakon now preserved in the Strasbourg collection, includes the statement, "I sent you a šš(?) made of palm to put on your feet." When Vinson checked the manuscript dictionary pages of Wilhelm Spiegelberg, the great German Demotist of almost a hundred years ago whose academic papers are now housed at the Oriental Institute and form an invaluable resource for the Dictionary, he discovered that Spiegelberg had already solved this puzzle (although he never published his solution). The sign being read as a š with a stroke under it is actually a writing of the sign *tw* "sandal." Thus, the word in the Strasbourg ostrakon written with two of these signs was a writing of the dual form "pair of sandals." Separate dual forms are fairly common in Egyptian for things (such as arms, legs, eyes, ears, feet, and sandals) which come naturally in pairs. Once Spiegelberg's reading and translation of this word are applied to the other examples, our understanding of the composition of women's dowries is made more precise (one pair of sandals at the expense of a type of jar). And although we cannot be certain about the value of a pair of sandals (quality, size, and material seem to have influenced the cost of sandals whose prices are recorded in the New Kingdom ostraca from the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina, on the west bank at Luxor<sup>2</sup>), their inclusion in dowry lists and the existence of an oath about the theft of a pair might indicate that they were not of negligible value.

The same mistake, accepting a superficially obvious reading that is completely wrong, also occurred with a singular form of this word *tw* "sandal," even though here this rendering led to an absurd translation. In a magical text (is that why people were willing to accept an absurd translation?) there is a passage that describes a deity who appears in the likeness of a priest dressed in byssus and "wearing a š(?) at his feet." Because the word was written with the "flesh" determinative showing that the word should indicate a part of the body, the word was for many years read š "nose." Finally, several years ago, Robert Ritner,<sup>3</sup> when working on the Demotic Dictionary, followed an old suggestion by George Hughes and recognized that the word actually incorporated this writing of *tw* "sandal" and the deity was actually dressed in *byssus* "wearing sandals on his feet." We do not usually have anything quite as imaginative as jars and noses turning out to be sandals, but attention to detail and consideration of the full context of all of the examples of a word are part of our responsibility. And at least we no longer have priests wearing noses on their feet or ordinary Egyptians shod in pots made of palm!

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1. For a discussion of the items included in dowries as attested in Demotic "marriage" contracts, see *Ägyptische Eheverträge*, by Erich Lüddeckens (*Ägyptologische Abhandlungen*, Band 1; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1960), pp. 291–304.
  2. See the discussion in *Commodity Prices from the Ramessid Period: An Economic Study of the Village of Necropolis Workmen at Thebes*, by J. J. Janssen (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), pp. 292–98.
  3. See "Gleanings from Magical Texts," by Robert K. Ritner, *Enchoria* 14 (1986): 95–106, specifically pp. 100–01.