

## **CHICAGO DEMOTIC DICTIONARY (CDD)**

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The Chicago Demotic Dictionary was happy this year to welcome back François Gaudard, who returned to us as Research Associate after a year with the Epigraphic Survey in Luxor. The rest of the staff includes Jackie Jay (who will be leaving us after this year because she has received a fellowship to finish her dissertation on narrative strategies in Egyptian literature), Foy Scalf,



Mary Szabady (who began working this year and will replace Jackie), and Janelle Pisarik (an undergraduate who is doing volunteer work for us), all under the general direction of Janet Johnson. In addition to our ongoing work checking and correcting drafts (we are currently working on the letters W, Š, and Ț), one of our major tasks this year has been to convert all our data, including our fonts, to the new Macintosh “system 10” operating system. Clement Robinson (an undergraduate computer specialist) is undertaking the task of modifying our fonts and converting our files. We would also like to thank John Sanders and Lec Maj for their invaluable help throughout this process. As we write, we are making good progress. Jan also had the opportunity this spring to participate in a panel entitled “Online Dictionaries for Historic and Lesser Known Languages: An Update,” for the annual meeting of the Dictionary Society of North America, held here at the Oriental Institute in June. She presented a short paper providing an overview of the goals, methods, and current status of the CDD to quite an interested audience.

Lexicography is a challenging discipline which, in addition to requiring a wide knowledge of the language being recorded, demands various skills in several fields plus a great deal of patience and perseverance. Many obstacles stand in the way of the lexicographer, some of which have been discussed in earlier *Annual Reports*. Here we discuss a few more, starting first with ghost words. According to *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, a ghost word is “a word that has come into existence by error rather than by normal linguistic transmission, as through the mistaken reading of a manuscript, a scribal error, or a misprint.” Ghost words are then non-existent words. Although the idea of having such words “haunting” a dictionary may sound very romantic to some readers, ghost words can be a source of major misinterpretations and therefore a lexicographer’s nightmare. Indeed, once such a word has been created, it is not unusual that scholars, trusting their colleagues, should repeat the same error again and again, citing it as a real word in grammars, dictionaries, or other scholarly works, giving it each time a little more credibility.

As a first example, let us consider the Demotic word  $w^{\zeta} \text{ } \text{𐓚}$  which appears in a “notification of payment” dating from the Ptolemaic period (namely Papyrus Rylands 31, line 1). This word was correctly read  $w^{\zeta}$  by Sethe in 1920, but he mistakenly read a definite article ( $p^{\zeta}$ ) in front of it (following Griffith who had made the same error when he first published this text in 1909) and translated it “*Schriftstück*” (“document”). His translation was accepted by Erichsen, who incorporated it, with the same meaning, first in his *Demotische Lesestücke* in 1940 and then in his *Demotisches Glossar*, published in 1954, with a reference to the publication by Sethe and Partsch. Erichsen also cited the same word as occurring in what he considered to be the compounds  $w^{\zeta} (n) \text{ } mkmk$ ,  $w^{\zeta} (n) \text{ } smy$ , and  $w^{\zeta} b^{\zeta}k$ , which he translated respectively “*Eingabe*” (“petition”), “*Klageschrift*” (“complaint”), and “*Original-dokument(?)*” (“original document(?)”). But in 1958, Hughes demonstrated that, in all these cases, we are simply dealing with the well-known indefinite article  $w^{\zeta}$ . In 1980, discussing a note from an article by Reymond, who thought Sethe’s theory was admissible, he pointed out again that “There is no such demotic word as  $w^{\zeta} \dots$  meaning a document of some kind. ... It is always and only the indefinite article, and P. Rylands D. 31, 1 is the only instance in which it appeared that there was such a word because Griffith and Sethe misread  $h.t (n) w^{\zeta} sh gyd$ , ‘Copy of a *cheirographon* [a document written in (a person’s) own handwriting],’ as  $h.t (n) p^{\zeta} w^{\zeta} sh gyd$ .”<sup>1</sup>

A more comical example of a ghost word stems from a misreading of a word in Papyrus Bibliothèque Nationale 215, better known as, although improperly called, *The Demotic Chronicle*. This rather enigmatic text, dating from the Ptolemaic period, deals with the political history of Egypt during the Twenty-eighth through Thirtieth Dynasties. It consists of a series of oracular statements referring to kings ranging from Amyrtaios (404–399 B.C.) to the last native Egyptian

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pharaoh Nectanebo II (360–343 B.C.) and mentions various calendrical dates, rituals, and festivals, as well as various divinities and cities. Each statement is followed by an interpretation usually also quite obscure. The text presents a description of legitimate kingship, illustrating both good and bad kings and showing how their fates are dependent on the manner in which they governed. In one passage (column 4, line 16), the original editor of the text, Wilhelm Spiegelberg, left out one word in his translation, here translated into English: “The measuring tool of the builder. Day 1. It means: The one who is upon the ...?, his father built.” The word  was left unread by Spiegelberg, who preferred a question mark. But in a footnote and in his glossary, he proposed the reading *mimi.t* “female giraffe(?)”<sup>2</sup> by comparison with the word  *mmy* “giraffe,” occurring, for example, in the famous Middle Egyptian hieratic tale *The Shipwrecked Sailor*. It should be noted, however, that Spiegelberg wondered what the meaning of this passage could be. In addition to being hilarious, the image of a pharaoh riding a giraffe is quite surrealistic. Nevertheless, this word was later included in Erichsen’s *Demotisches Glossar*, although with the comment “*Ob richtig?*” (“Is this correct?”). When Jan was working on *The Demotic Chronicle*, she realized that this word is actually a writing of *mi.t* “road,” and it has been so read by recent editors of *The Demotic Chronicle* and by the CDD.

An example from a different time and different culture, namely the Byzantine world, shows us another type of misinterpretation that was at the origin of what could be called a “ghost author.” This involves Suidas, the presumed author of a colossal Byzantine encyclopedia of Greek literature and history compiled at the end of the tenth century A.D. The title of this compilation, *Suda*, is subject to several interpretations. It has been suggested that it derives from the Byzantine Greek word σοῦδα (*souda*) meaning “fence, palisade,” referring to this work as being a stronghold against ignorance, or that it is an acronym, ΣΟΥΔΑ, from Συναγωγή Ὀνομαστικῆς Ὑλης Δι’ Ἀλφαβήτου, a Greek title meaning *Collection of Lexical Matter in Alphabetical Order*. Eustathios, an erudite of the twelfth century A.D. and archbishop of Thessalonika, mistook the title Σοῦδα (*Souda*) for the name of the author, whom he called Σουίδαξ (*Suidas*), in consequence of which, for centuries, generations of classicists took the fictitious Suidas to be the author of this encyclopedia.

Another category of problematic words are the so-called *hapax legomena*. This expression, from a Greek phrase “said once,” refers to “a lexical unit found only once in the surviving records of a language.”<sup>3</sup> The fact that a word is known from a single attestation can render its meaning quite difficult to establish. One of the most famous examples of *hapax legomena* in Demotic occurs in the first tale of Setna Khaemwas (= Papyrus Cairo 30646, in column 5, line 30), from the Ptolemaic period. The beginning of the story is lost, but it is clear that Setna, a son of Ramesses II and the hero of the story, having learned that a book of magic writings composed by Thoth himself was buried with the magician Naneferkaptah in Memphis, forced his way into the tomb. There, the ghost of Ihweret, Naneferkaptah’s wife, told Setna how she, her husband, and their son Merib lost their lives for having stolen the magical book. Setna was so eager to possess the book that he accepted Naneferkaptah’s challenge to play a game of drafts for it. Setna lost three games in a row but, thanks to his magical amulets and scrolls, he eventually succeeded in stealing the book and leaving the tomb with it. Shortly after this episode, Setna met a beautiful woman named Tabubu and was mesmerized by her. Before allowing him to get close to her, she required him to turn over to her all his belongings and to kill all his children. When Setna was finally about to have sex with her, Tabubu cried out and Setna awoke, realizing that all of this was nothing but a nightmare caused by Naneferkaptah. He understood he had to return the book to Naneferkaptah.

The passage we are interested in describes Setna when emerging from his nightmare. It reads as follows: “Setna awoke in a state of heat, with his penis inside a *šhy* and without any clothes

on him at all.” The *hapax legomenon* **ḥwꜣꜣꜣꜣ** *šhyꜣ* has been translated by various scholars in many different ways: “jar,” “mudpuddle,” “vaginal secretions,” “limp, halt,” “tuyère” of a (blast) furnace, or “chamber pot.” Others simply did not translate it at all (all these suggestions are referenced in the entry for *šhyꜣ* in the file for the letter Š). As noted by Robert Ritner, “The uncertain word, attested uniquely here, is determined by two signs indicating dung, and either water or a pot.” Although the exact meaning of the word is still unknown to us, the determinatives clearly indicate that we are not dealing with a body part.

These are only a sample of the range of problematic types of words with which we deal as we strive to identify Demotic vocabulary, its earlier and later Egyptian relatives, and, especially with foreign words, its etymology and usage within Egyptian. Some words are “cut and dried” and one completes the entry quickly and moves along, feeling progress has been made. But in other cases, like these, there is more challenge and, when we do sort it out, a real sense of accomplishment.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> G. Hughes, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 17 (1958): 7, n. a; idem, *Serapis* 6 (1980): 63, n. a.

<sup>2</sup> W. Spiegelberg, *Die sogenannte Demotische Chronik des Pap. 215 der Bibliothèque Nationale zu Paris nebst den auf der Rückseite des Papyrus stehenden Texten*. Demotische Studien 7 (Leipzig, 1914), p. 18, n. 14, and p. 56, #101.

<sup>3</sup> P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (Oxford and New York, 1997), p. 157.