

MIDDLE EGYPTIAN TEXT EDITIONS FOR ONLINE RESEARCH

Janet H. Johnson

Middle Egyptian Text Editions for Online Research (METEOR), funded as part of a Mellon Foundation grant for Less Commonly Taught Languages, made good progress this year on its annotated, interactive, electronic Readingbook for Middle Egyptian, the classic stage of the ancient Egyptian language. This Readingbook includes a corpus of texts representing the numerous genres represented in Middle Egyptian and appropriate for students beginning their study of that language and the hieroglyphic script. Students may access any section of each text, sentence by sentence, in hieroglyphs, and practice reading the hieroglyphs and transliterating and translating the text. A click of a button brings help with reading signs, understanding grammar, or finding vocabulary. In addition, the Readingbook has extensive linked informational sidebars and graphics. The sidebars include brief explanations or descriptions of topics mentioned in the texts and supplementary chronological, geographical, historical, and cultural information. The graphics include digital maps and images illustrating Egypt, the areas where individual texts were discovered, items mentioned in the texts, and to the extent possible, the actual individuals mentioned in the texts, thereby helping the student to place the individual texts in their social, cultural, religious, political, historical, and geographical contexts.

During the academic year 2002/2003, graduate students Foy Scalf and Ginger Emery proofread and copy edited hieroglyphs, transliterations, and translations of several of the texts that have been entered in the database as well as the accompanying textual notes. Harold Hays worked to sort out “ghost hieroglyphs,” out-of-order words or signs, improperly entered grammatical links or explanations, and any other data entry problems identified by the students doing the proofreading and copy editing. Malayna Williams set up a feature within the program that shows students how to draw the individual hieroglyphs, and did data entry for the sign-list (a list ordered by type of object depicted, of all signs used in the inscriptions, with information about the identity of the object and the phonetic and ideographic usage of the sign). She also met with Katherine Strange Burke (who prepared the maps that are currently being used in METEOR) and Michael Berger (manager of the University’s Language Faculty Resource Center and the administrator of our Mellon grant) to discuss the maps which will accompany each text intended to help the student locate the place from which the text comes and other places mentioned in the text. Michael, assisted by Malayna, Vanessa Davies, and Jackie Jay, worked extensively on cultural notes and images for several of the texts in METEOR. He tested the entry feature for cultural information as he input notes for the inscription of Khnumhotep, a nomarch (“governor”) of a nome (“state/province”) in Middle Egypt during the Middle Kingdom. Michael made initial contacts with the University of Chicago legal office and “UCTech” (the University’s office of technology and intellectual property, which helps University faculty and staff with distribution of their “inventions”) to discuss publication, distribution, and copyright issues. Vanessa, assisted by Rod Edwards, began identifying the people and institutions from which we need to request permission to use copyrighted images. David Wheatcroft began putting together a reference and resource bibliography, including references to discussions of individual texts, and especially, supporting documentation.

Sandy Schloen, our programmer, spent much of the year working on the conversion of the Readingbook and its data entry tools to a (Tamino) XML database with sophisticated data and user management and powerful searching capabilities. This conversion will, when completed, produce a fuller-featured application for use by students, teachers, and scholars. The new

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XSTAR (XML System for Textual and Archaeological Research; see separate report) version of METEOR has imported the older Shockwave-based prototype of the dozen texts with their full grammatical analysis and links to related cultural information. The data is now stored in a new, cross-platform (i.e., not limited to PC, Mac, or Unix operating systems but available equally to all), Java interface that provides much greater flexibility for managing users and their access to the data, allowing annotation and commentary by authorized editors, tagging and linking of textual data and related resources based on customized criteria, and providing multiple views of the texts' content. The conversion to the (Tamino) XML database will allow completion of additional editing tools, a mechanism for building and maintaining a corpus-wide glossary, and an enhanced query and analysis feature.

Classroom testing of METEOR continued this year. Johnson taught the beginning Middle Egyptian class during this academic year, demonstrated the METEOR program to the class, and encouraged all students in the class to use the program on a regular basis as a tool while preparing for class. The frequent references to what the program said about a given passage, and the very useful identification of typos and incorrect links, indicate that most students did indeed take advantage of this resource. In addition, the summer course for high school students that is offered each summer by François Gaudard through the Graham School also included an introduction to METEOR; students who have taken François's course in previous years and are now enrolled in the college have indicated that METEOR helped them continue their study of Egyptian in the months following their summer course.
