

---

# The Demotic Dictionary Project

---

Janet H. Johnson

---

Demotic is the stage of the ancient Egyptian language which was used from the Saite period (650 B.C.) through the Roman period (4th century of our era) for texts written on papyrus or ostraca, and occasionally even for inscriptions on stelae such as the Rosetta Stone. Many of the preserved Demotic texts are business and legal documents, private letters, religious and funerary texts, and literary pieces. The Demotic script is the most cursive one developed by the Egyptians.

When William F. Edgerton died he left to the Oriental Institute not only his own library, which has become a kernel of the Oriental Institute Research Archives, but also Wilhelm Spiegelberg's Demotic library, Spiegelberg's and his own files of photographs and hand copies of Demotic inscriptions, and Spiegelberg's Demotic dictionary notebooks. Spiegelberg's materials had been left to Edgerton with the understanding that the Oriental Institute would publish a Demotic dictionary using them as a core. Edgerton and some of his students, including George R. Hughes and Charles F. Nims, worked sporadically on this project but were never able to devote the time and energy necessary to complete such a large task. Little has been done on the project since the early 1950's, when a Demotic "glossary," intended as an interim volume for quick reference, was published by W. Erichsen. Since his glossary does not include all the information that a comprehensive dictionary would include; because many new texts, including some very important texts, have been published since his glossary appeared; and because the Oriental Institute now has the largest core of Demoticists—faculty, retired faculty, and students—of any institution in the United States, and perhaps in the world, it was felt that the time to resume the general Oriental Institute commitment to a Demotic dictionary had come.

In the past year the Demotic materials in the Edgerton legacy have been sorted and assembled in one place. All the photographs and hand copies, many of unpublished texts, have been catalogued and a complete bibliography of Demotic publications, annotated to indicate the texts published or discussed in each item, has been compiled. The next step is a catalogue of the Demotic texts avail-

able in the Research Archives, the University library, and personal libraries at the Oriental Institute in order to determine the percentage of Demotic material to which the dictionary will have access and the amount of material which will have to be tracked down. Only then will begin the long job of collecting and then analyzing the individual words which will go to make up the dictionary. Thus we are still in the preliminary stages, but we look forward to an interesting and rewarding project.