

P H I L O L O G Y

Janet H. Johnson**The Demotic Dictionary Project**

The files of the Demotic Dictionary Project have more than doubled during the past year as the members of the staff work their way through the corpus of Demotic materials published during the last twenty-five years. Since the Egyptians used Demotic (a term denoting both a stage in the development of the Egyptian language and a cursive script ultimately derived from hieroglyphs) for over a millennium, from approximately 650 B.C. (Saite period) into the fifth century of our era (under Roman rule), the corpus of Demotic texts is very large. It is also quite varied, including personal letters, accounts, tax receipts, contracts and other legal documents, scientific treatises, literary texts, and some administrative and religious materials. Both the nature and extent of the Demotic materials make them exceedingly important not only for the study of Egypt during the late period but also for the study of Egyptian economics, law, religion, scientific knowledge, and so on. It was to encourage the publication and study of this corpus—still largely unpublished or inadequately published—that we undertook the project of preparing a Demotic dictionary, which will begin with a supplement to a glossary published in 1954.

The staff this year, as last, consisted of Mark Smith (Research Associate), Robert Ritner (Senior Research Assistant), Richard Jasnou, and Michael FitzPatrick. In addition, Eugene Cruz-Uribe, who had worked on preliminary stages of the project in past years, worked with us for a short time before becoming Membership Secretary. George R. Hughes has given generously of his time and knowledge, again and again clarifying a difficult passage or producing a parallel for a word or usage.

During the first year of our grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (an exceedingly generous gift from a private donor provided the last of the matching funds that we needed for this grant), we began collecting vocabulary from the major literary and religious texts published during the last twenty-five years. (For a description of the steps taken in preparing dictionary cards for each text, see the annual report for 1978–79.) During this second year, we

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have finished this class of documents and begun working on legal texts and personal records. Among the long texts completed this year are a medical treatise detailing prescriptions for curing various diseases, a magical text containing spells designed to force a god to appear in a dream and answer a question or fulfill a request, and a text from the temple archive of one of the major cities of the Fayum treating the layout and function of individual rooms and parts of the temple. We have also finished a collection of Roman period contracts (mostly property sales), a collection of contracts (including marriage contracts) from the village of Deir el-Medina at Thebes, a papyrus recording a strike by the stonemasons in Elephantine which occurred in 557 B.C., and a collection of papyri from Tebtunis including fragments of literary texts, a dream text, a medical text, and a prophetic text. We are now working on a variety of documents: a collection of ostraca recording the visions of a seer associated with a temple at Saqqara, another magical text similar to the one finished this year, two collections of private letters (one from Elephantine, the other from the Fayum), and a collection of contracts from the Fayum. The coming year will be spent trying to complete the basic recording of vocabulary so that we can begin next summer preparing the material for publication.

Because the Demotic script is very cursive, and therefore very difficult to read, almost all texts contain one or more obscure words which the editor does not recognize. Because we record each word in context and with a facsimile, as our files grow we are able to recognize many of these words by comparison between texts. Mark Smith, especially, has made numerous improvements on published transliterations and translations, all of which are recorded in our files and will add to the value of the dictionary when published.

Although statistics can be misleading, it seems appropriate to note that, by having finished the long literary, religious, and scientific texts, we have probably recorded more than half of the "new" words which have appeared in the last twenty-five years (standardized texts such as legal documents and short texts such as most of the accounts, personal documents, and so on, are likely to contain fewer "new" words than the texts already studied). As an initial indication of the extent of this "new" material it may be appropriate to take one letter of the alphabet as representative. In Erichsen's glossary published in 1954, there are 80 words which begin with the letter "aleph" (the first letter of the alphabet). We have in our files another 40 such words. Thus the supplement presenting these words should be a major addition to the lexicographic resources available for Demotic.