

Demotic Dictionary

*Demotic Facsimiles -
Reasons, Methods,
and Problems*

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During the past year, the Demotic Dictionary staff has continued the arduous but necessary process of standardizing and proofreading all text

entries for the dictionary supplement. In addition the bibliographic sources for all cited texts were compiled and entered on computer, with specific information provided when possible for each text's place of origin, date and present accessibility. The designations for place of origin and date, are accompanied by brief explanatory notations including FS ("Find Spot"), meaning that the text was actually discovered there; I ("Internal" evidence), meaning that the text itself indicates its origin or date; onomastics, meaning that recognizable personal names suggest a location or date; and paleography, which means that the style of the handwriting indicates location and date. ▼ The latter problem of paleography has dominated much of the staff's efforts this year. We have just begun making facsimiles of all the words which will appear in the supplement. While our previous research on meanings, nuance, idiomatic expressions, etymology, general discussions, and bibliography will fill most of the supplement, the exact reproduction of words and phrases in their individual handwriting styles will provide the heart of the volume and may well be its most important feature. As case with most dictionaries, our Demotic Dictionary will be consulted more often for "spelling" than for definitions, and "spelling" is a particularly difficult matter in Demotic, where a single word may have a wide range of forms. Copies of "samples" of individual words in distinct handwritings are already found in the *Demotisches Glossar* of W. Erichsen (1954) which served as the basis of our supplement. Unfortunately, virtually none of Erichsen's copies is identified by text. Without knowing where specific words were found, the scholar gains little information on changes in writing across regions or time periods. Most of Erichsen's entries are copied in an idealized "normalschrift" ("normal script") which reflects no specifically attested writing and which shows none of the ligatures which link signs in handwriting. Such ligatures are the characteristic feature which distinguishes any "longhand" from "printed" script, and they are also the source of most problems in reading "longhand" scripts. Much to the chagrin of student and scholar, the Demoticist rarely encounters a neatly "printed" handwriting in "normalschrift." Instead, he daily confronts a bewildering array of signs compressed and spun together with ink, deformed from their "ideal" shapes almost to the point of unrecognizability. Lacking a

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documented, representative selection of handwritings, scholars often misread even common words, for an unrecognized single flick or dot of ink may result in a wildly inaccurate translation. Therefore, the Chicago Demotic Dictionary is including copies of every new, distinctive handwriting of each word examined in the supplement.

The critical need for careful facsimiles derives from the nature of Demotic itself. Designed primarily for handwriting, the Demotic script was known as *ššʿt* or “letter writing” in Egyptian and was intended for correspondence, records, receipts, and other personal and business documents. Only secondarily was it used for formal carved texts, which were normally in hieroglyphs, or for religious purposes, in which the hieroglyphic or hieratic scripts were preferred for reasons of tradition. If carved or painted hieroglyphs should be seen as the Egyptian equivalent of “printing,” Demotic represents the end result of centuries of simplifications of the traditional “longhand” script known as hieratic. In both hieratic and Demotic, many originally distinct hieroglyphic signs may be ligatured together by pulling the brush from one sign to another in a continuous stroke. In the cursive Demotic script, however, these ligatures predominate, leaving few individual signs and yielding a quick Egyptian “shorthand.” Most importantly, the shapes of these ligatures are constantly reduced by the scribes to conform to a few common patterns, so that many linked signs

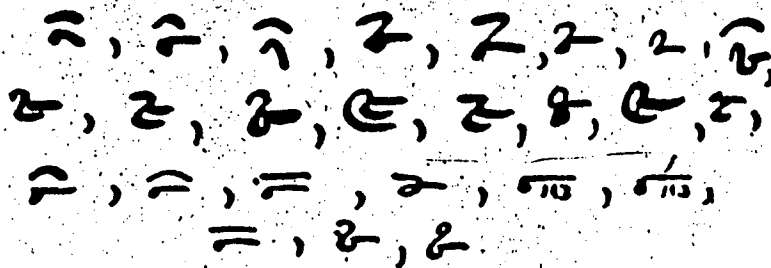
come to be indistinguishable:

b+n, ʿ+n, t+n, r+n, r+t all appear as the group Σ , which also serves to write *qt* “to build,” ʿwy “house,” etc. With simplification and speed governing the script, words are often reduced to a few essential strokes, with only a few dots or lines distinguishing any one of a dozen different words. The writing system itself then often depends primarily not on letters or signs, but on specific graphic indicators such as common groups and accompanying strokes. Minute differences in ink may make major differences in meaning. Consider these words, whose signs have been reduced to forms of the group Σ :

| | |
|---|---|
| bēk “servant” | bnr “outside” |
|  |  |
| ph “to reach” | šm “to go” |
|  |  |

The problem of recognizing such distinctions is made much more complicated by the idiosyncracies of personal handwriting, as can be demonstrated by a few examples, illustrated on the top of the following page, of the simple phrase “to you”.

As is evident, the forms vary greatly, and in certain hands the phrase even becomes identical with the previous group Σ . To make matters worse, some of these writings are equally indistinguishable from forms of the words *wš* “lacking,” *km* “black,” *nšy* “these,” and the phrase *m-ir* “Don’t!” No simple transliteration or “normalschrift” can capture the range of such forms. If the Dictionary’s definitions and discussions will aid in the translation of the language, only by



reproducing the paleographic distinctions of handwriting can the Dictionary aid in the decipherment of its script.

Given the importance of accurate copies of words for decipherment, and for the study of geographical, temporal and individual scribal peculiarities, the Dictionary staff has designed a method for obtaining the best reproductions possible. For every example to be copied within each section, a slip of paper with identifying text and supplemental page reference(s) is prepared to hold the facsimile. We determine what access we have to any given text: whether by Dictionary photograph, published photograph, editor's handcopy or any combination of these. All sources of the text are examined for the best copy of the specific word desired, giving preference to photographics over handcopies. If the quality of a photograph or published handcopy is good, it is xeroxed onto parchment tracing paper. If the quality is marginal, a xerox copy is made and then retouched. If the quality is poor, we make our own handcopies on vellum. We use rapidograph pens of varying fineness in an effort to capture the ductus of the original brush or pen. Copies are double

checked by a senior member of the Dictionary staff, and the completed copy is affixed to its slip and filed. Later it will be photo-offset at the right margin of the completed supplement page.

It is most efficient in terms of ease, speed, and accuracy to rely on xerox copies when possible, but most texts reproduce poorly and must either be strengthened or completely drawn. Because any element of modern drawing might introduce error, all our copies are designated on the slips and in the supplement as retouched xerox (x↔), editor's handcopy (e↔) or Dictionary handcopy (↔). Difficulties (and potential errors) arise in making handcopies for various reasons. A poor quality (dark, grainy) photo is the most common source of problems. The copyist must distinguish between extraneous fibres, genuine ink and shadows or holes in the text, all of which may show up equally dark. With no contrast between words and surrounding dark patches and flecks, the copyist may easily be misled.

The varying thickness of ink strokes is another factor which must be noted in making copies. Stroke thickness is important for determining the order in which a scribe wrote a word - by noting where the brush or pen begins



to run out of ink. It is also important for dating handwritings; the traditional brush with its thick strokes gives way in the Roman period to a reed pen and a thin spidery line. As noted above, our copies are made with pens of different thicknesses to reproduce this feature as much as possible. Carved texts present a different set of problems; one must decide what is carving and what is surface shadow, pitting or scratches, and whether to draw the inside or outside of a carved line. Moreover, since Demotic was designed as a “letter script,” its rounded flowing line adapts poorly to carving, and signs are often malformed, being made blocky or squared.

Broken texts or words require particular attention. The words are indicated as broken on the slips and in the supplement, and the copyist must decide what remains of the ink or carved traces at the edges of holes, on scratched or flaking surfaces and where fibres have been split from the middle of a papyrus. If the text is a palimpsest (one text written atop a poorly erased older text), the copyist must decide which strokes and flecks go with the surface text and which with the earlier. Similarly, where words overlap within any text, the copyist must disentangle the strokes, and conventions must also be applied when words span two or more lines. Problems of disentangling words are equally common when the text is a graffito. Whether carved or painted,

graffiti suffer from random scratches, weathering, and, not infrequently, other overlapping graffiti.

A different set of problems may arise if no photograph is available of a text, and the dictionary must rely on editors’ handcopies. Older handcopies can be notoriously inaccurate, especially if the editor did not understand the Demotic he was copying. With such examples, the Dictionary can only reproduce the handcopy with an explanation of its questionable nature. If different editors’ handcopies are in disagreement and photos are lacking or unclear, all versions of the copied word must be given. Thus on the Moschion stela, a carved Demotic crossword puzzle from the 2nd to 3rd century AD, the same word has been copied both as “ends” and “prisons.” Poor photography coupled with surface scratches on the original stela defeat any attempt to decide between these interpretations. The selection of handcopies from the letter aleph on the following page illustrates a few of the problems and peculiarities of the Demotic script.

Many people have worked this year on different aspects of the Dictionary process. Jan Johnson and I remain the senior members of the staff, checking and correcting both manuscripts and facsimiles. Joe Manning, John Darnell, and Drew Baumann have worked at bibliography compilation and the preparation of facsimiles. Sally Zimmerman spent hours proof-reading the short and long versions of the bibliography, trying to make us consistent and accurate in our manner of citation. The short version, requested by other Demotists at the

“Normalschrift” writing of ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ
 “District of Arsinoe”

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

Ptolemaic writing with brush of
 ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ “character”
 P. BM 10508, 11/11

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ “enclosure”
 P. BM 10575, 6

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ “field (of) grapes,
 vinyard” P.
 Oxford
 Griffith 4,
 3-4

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

actual example in P. Cairo 30606, 1/5

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

Roman writing with reed pen
 P. Harkness, 6/7

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

P. Serpot, 2/1

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ “Egyptian grape”
 P. Magical 29/28

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

Example of ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ “oikonomos,
 steward” in P. Lille 58, B/5

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

Broken example of ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ
 “oikonomos, steward” in P. Cairo 3129, 7

ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩ

1987 International Congress of Demotic Studies in Cambridge (attended by Ritner, Manning, and Johnson) will be published in the Demotic studies journal, *Enchoria*, providing consistent forms of reference for the more esoteric of Demotic publications. Visitors Ursula Kaplony-Heckel, a Demotist from Marburg, West Germany, and Jan Quaegebeur and Willy Clarysse, Demotists and Greek papyrologists from Leuven, Belgium, kindly offered additions and corrections from their own work.

Our main storehouse of knowledge, references, and reasonableness has remained George R. Hughes, through whose mind and memory we continue to check possibilities, probabilities, and references, even

though his eyes have, to our great loss and that of Demotic studies, grown less serviceable.

We have also suffered a loss this year with the death of Charles Francis Nims, who rekindled interest in and commitment to the Demotic Dictionary by his presentation to the International Congress of Orientalists in Paris in the 1970s of the plan under which the current Demotic Dictionary Project was begun. We regret the passing of a major Demotic scholar, an inspiration to our work and, most of all, a friend who loved Egypt, Egyptians, Egyptology, travel, students, teaching, and sharing his thoughts and memories with all his colleagues.