

CHICAGO DEMOTIC DICTIONARY

BRIAN P. MUHS AND JANET H. JOHNSON

Considerable progress was made on the Chicago Demotic Dictionary (CDD) from July 2022 to June 2023, primarily thanks to our research assistants Brendan Hainline, Rolland Long, and Ariel Singer, who have worked patiently and persistently with great attention to very fine details. As a result of their hard work, we can now see some light at the end of the tunnel.

To appreciate this progress, it is useful to review the scope of the project. The completed CDD will comprise three sections: the preliminaries, the letter and number files, and finally the “problem” files. The preliminaries provide the information needed to use the dictionary, such as explanations of the project’s scope and goals and the significance of the layout of the entries; the meaning of the many abbreviations; and full bibliographic information for the Demotic papyri, ostraca, and inscriptions used as primary sources, as well as for the publications about Demotic orthography, lexicography, grammar, and philology that serve as secondary sources. The twenty-four letter files and three number files are the heart of the dictionary; they provide examples of different writings (both spellings and orthographies) of each word organized alphabetically and chronologically, with discussions of various grammatical uses and meanings. The dictionary concludes with three problem files, providing entries for words whose reading, meaning, and placement in the dictionary are uncertain or disputed.

Since 2015, the CDD team has focused its efforts on converting the twenty-seven letter and number files to Unicode and on transferring the files from the word-processing software Word to the publication software InDesign, because the latter better preserves the resolution of the images of Demotic words embedded in the files. This process required extracting images of every example of every Demotic word and writing from the Word files, then individually linking them to their corresponding locations in the InDesign files. By June 2022, twenty-one letter and number files had been completed, four files were undergoing conversion (W, R, D, and numbers), and two files awaited conversion (I and H). This year, by June 2023, three more files were completed (R, H, and numbers), and work was progressing on the remaining three files (I, W, and D). One of the latter files (D) was substantially complete except for some missing images.

Looking ahead, the CDD team hopes to complete the remaining three letter and number files and to turn its attention to the preliminaries and the problem files. The preliminaries are mostly just text but may include a few images that need to be extracted for linkage in InDesign. The prologue has been finished and already converted to Unicode, but the lists of abbreviations and the bibliographies of primary and secondary works cited need to be updated and have not yet been converted. The problem files, however, are a combination of text and images in the same format as the letter files; eventually, they can probably be combined into a single problem file. But first the images need to be extracted and the text converted to Unicode so that both the text and images can be put into InDesign.
