

DEMOTIC DICTIONARY PROJECT

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In the past year, the Demotic Dictionary Project has made significant progress towards closing our manuscript and preparing for final formatting and publication. The Dictionary staff this year included Professor Janet Johnson and Research Associate Steve Vinson as well as research assistants Thomas Dousa, François Gaudard, Alejandro Botta, and Brett McClain. The letters Y, W, B, F, R, L, Š, Q, H, K, T, and T̄ are close to “done,” meaning that all entries have been checked, many to most scans have been entered, and black and white facsimiles made. The letters ʒ, ʕ, ʔ, P, M, S, G, H, and D have been checked for content but await most of their scans. N and H are currently being revised, with N almost finished; only H remains in rough-draft form. The next step will be to complete the insertion of thousands of remaining scans of photographs and hand-copies of actual Demotic writing, a long and difficult process but one which will provide one of the most useful features of the finished dictionary.

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The Dictionary played host to two visiting Demotists this year, Professor Ursula Kaplony-Heckel of Marburg University in Germany and Bryan Muhs, a young American Demotist who now teaches at the University of Leiden. The two were in Chicago to work on the Oriental Institute's collection of Demotic ostraca and to attend the conference of the American Research Center in Egypt, where it was gratifying to see that the number of papers devoted to Demotic was large enough to merit an entire session, and this session was quite well attended and received.

While work on the Demotic Dictionary is of course primarily lexicographical in nature, our in-depth examination of words and their uses not infrequently leads to new insights into the workings of the Egyptian language on the levels of grammar and syntax. One result of this year's work has been substantial clarification of the use of the modest word *mn* "so-and-so, such-and-such." This word is a quasi-pronoun frequently found in the Hermopolis Legal Manual (a Ptolemaic-era book of instructions for drafting contracts of various types) and in magical texts that give the format for magical spells. In both types of text, the word is a substitute for a specific personal name or other noun that would be inserted by the legal or magical practitioner.

We have identified three different ways in which *mn* can be used: absolutely, with a following noun, and with a preceding noun. Used absolutely, *mn* is simply a substitute for a personal name; for example, *pꜣ mn sꜣ pꜣ mn* = "so-and-so, son of so-and-so" (*pꜣ* is the Egyptian masculine singular definite article; *sꜣ* is the word for "son"); *tꜣ mn r-ms tꜣ mn* = "(the woman) so-and-so, whom (the woman) so-and-so bore" (*tꜣ* is the feminine singular definite article; *r-ms* is a form of the verb *ms* meaning "to bear, give birth to," used in a past-tense relative clause).

When a noun follows *mn*, it means "such-and-such a ..."; for example, *pꜣ mn pꜣ ibt* means "such-and-such a month"; *pꜣ mn pꜣ tmy* means "such and such a town." Not all scribes put an article in front of *mn*; for example, in one text *mn ꜣh* is used to mean "such-and-such a field." However, whenever *mn* does have an article in front of it, it is regularly of the same gender as the noun with which *mn* is in apposition. A peculiar exception to this rule is seen in a handful of late magical texts, where *mn* has a feminine article but is in apposition to a masculine noun: *tꜣ mn pꜣ ntr* = "such-and-such a god"; *tꜣ mn n pꜣ ꜣ-shn* = "such-and-such a commission or request." Exactly why this should be is unclear to us; it may be a reflex of the very old Egyptian tendency to regard the feminine gender as also carrying the indefinite and the neuter. That would explain why we have no examples of a masculine *mn* in apposition to a feminine noun (e.g., no **pꜣ mn tꜣ shm.t* "such-and-such a woman"). But at any rate, since this mixing of genders occurs in more than one text, the use of a feminine *mn* with a masculine noun seems to be a regular and permissible construction, at least at this time and in this text genre.

Finally, *mn* can also follow a noun. This is only the case when the noun is something that can be quantified or counted; in these cases, *mn* refers to an indefinite quantity, not the thing itself. For example: *ms.t tꜣ mn* = "such-and-such amount of interest" (here the word *ms.t* "interest," is related to the verb *ms* "to bear, give birth to" we mentioned above; the idea is that the principle "gives birth to" the interest); *nkt mn* = "such-and-such amount of property"; *hꜣ mn* = "such-and-such amount of silver."

An interesting combination of these expressions is found in the Hermopolis Legal Manual, where the author has provided the form for adding the date to a contract.

The scribe who drafts a contract is supposed to write: *hsb.t mn n p3 mn ibt* “the Nth regnal year in such-and-such a month.” This shows that the author of the manual regarded regnal years (*hsb.t*) and months (*ibt*) differently; a *hsb.t* was part of an infinite countable series, but an *ibt* was one of a (limited) group that could be specified.

The peculiar use of feminine *mn* with masculine nouns we mentioned above, which appears to be limited to a particular text genre and particular time period, is only one example of the numerous regional and temporal variations in Demotic vocabulary, grammar, orthography, and usage. Another interesting example of a temporal and/or geographic variation in usage came to light this year in our work on the word *shm.t* “woman.” Aside from its regular use as a noun, the word *shm.t* is frequently used attributively, feminizing its antecedent. Normally, the word will follow its antecedent, as in the phrase *b3k.t shm.t* “female servant” or *w3h-mw shm.t* “female choachyte” (the Egyptian title *w3h-mw* literally means “water-pourer” and was the title of a low-ranking class of funerary priests called “choachytes” in Greek documents). However, the title *w3h-mw* presents a problem. The pattern *w3h-mw shm.t* is attested only in Persian-era Demotic (that is, Demotic written before the Greeks conquered Egypt in 333–332 BC), and only in the area of Thebes (modern Luxor and environs). In Ptolemaic-era Demotic texts from the Memphite area (just south of modern Cairo), the pattern is reversed: rather than *w3h-mw shm.t*, the meaning of which is absolutely clear, we get *shm.t w3h-mw*.

Precisely how this is to be understood is uncertain: Egyptian grammar would permit understanding *shm.t w3h-mw* either as “woman (and) choachyte” or as “woman (of a) choachyte.” General historical and social considerations do not provide us with a definitive answer to our dilemma. The existence of the Theban title *w3h-mw shm.t* leaves no doubt that, at least in Persian-era Thebes, a woman could be a choachyte in her own right. But we also know that in some types of Ptolemaic-era administrative texts women were referred to with reference to their husbands’ occupations (although these references used the word *rm.t* “female person” rather than *shm.t*).

However, a number of lines of argument have led us to suspect that in the case of *w3h-mw*-titles from Ptolemaic Memphis and environs, the translation “woman (and) choachyte” rather than “woman (of a) choachyte” may be preferable. In the first place, there is a fragmentary Demotic stela in the Cairo Museum, found at Giza (not far from Memphis), in which two men with the title *w3h-mw* are named, apparently as dedicators of the stela itself. Accompanying these two masculine names is the name of a woman with the title *shm.t w3h-mw*, who appears on the stela on exactly the same footing as the two men. No husband is mentioned, but the woman’s father is named, precisely as are the fathers of the two men. A *w3h-mw* and a *shm.t w3h-mw* also appear in parallel and on precisely the same footing in Papyrus Louvre 3266, a Memphite contract having to do with the shares of income flowing from choachytal services. At one point in the contract, there is a reference to the “income and the stipends and everything else that belongs to the *w3h-mw* Imhotep son of Pamon together with ... the income and the stipends and everything else that belongs to the *shm.t w3h-mw* Tanitna, daughter of Tanimu.” The most straightforward interpretation is that on the Giza stela and in P. Louvre 3266, the title *shm.t w3h-mw* is simply the female equivalent of the masculine title *w3h-mw* — that is, it is to be taken as “woman (and) choachyte.”

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If this reasoning is correct, then perhaps the other Ptolemaic documents from Memphis (primarily property conveyance contracts) that employ the pattern *šm.t wšḥ-mw* can also be taken as “woman (and) choachyite.” And finally, this may indicate that in other instances in which the pattern *šm.t* plus an occupational title occurs — and again, these are all Ptolemaic and all from the region of Memphis — we may also be entitled to translate “woman (and) title”; for example, *šm.t wḥ* may well mean “woman (and) priest,” and *šm.t nf* may even mean “woman (and) sailor.”

Up until now we have discussed only documentary texts, but of course the analysis of religious and literary texts leads to novel insights as well. One interesting discovery this year was of a new, if hardly surprising, epithet of Min, the ithyphallic god who was identified with the Greeks’ randy Pan. Both were honored in the Wadi Hammamat, where numerous Demotic and Greek dedications to the god(s) have been found. One common epithet in these graffiti was understood by the original editor of these very difficult texts as *Mn pš ḥt n pš tw*, or “Min, the foremost of the mountain.” However, the sign which was taken by the editor of these graffiti as ḥt “foremost” occasionally has a diagonal slash through it, which certainly requires a reading of ḥwt “male.” A better translation of the epithet, therefore, is “Min, the male of the mountain,” a sobriquet in perfect keeping with Min’s most prominent attribute.

Finally, one of the earliest explicit mentions in Egyptian of the dismemberment of Osiris by his brother Seth was discovered by François Gaudard, a research assistant on the dictionary. For his dissertation, Gaudard is working on P. Berlin 8278, a Demotic version of the well-known Egyptian story of the struggles between Horus and Seth, and his work has also borne rich fruit for the dictionary. The story of the destruction of Osiris’ body by his brother Seth is well known from Greek sources but is generally only alluded to in Egyptian texts. Aside from P. Berlin 8278, one of the few other texts that makes the incident explicit is the Papyrus Jumilhac, a cursive hieroglyphic papyrus from the Ptolemaic period, which refers to gathering up specific Osirian body parts, including the head, extremities, phallus, and the divine jaw, among others.

In an unfortunately broken passage, Gaudard has read the phrase [...] *pš šhw mt.t ḥt.t. r-gmz w ... [...] ḥt.t. f*. The word *šhw* is an archaizing variant of the common Demotic verb *swḥ* “to gather” here used nominally: “the gathering.” *mt.t* means literally “word,” but is used regularly to form abstract compounds. The word ḥt is a noun meaning “strip” and appears in the best-known Demotic magical text in the context of a strip of cloth. But here, it is compounded with the word *ḥt* “body, flesh,” and so the entire compound *mt.t-ḥt.t*, literally means “strip-of-flesh-stuff.” This is followed by a relative clause, “which was found [...] ḥt.t. f,” as well as mention of Seth’s being “cheated” by the embalming of Osiris. All in all, we seem to have an unusually clear reference to the sparagmos — the rending apart — of Osiris’ body.

As these examples show, the range and variety of information about late Egyptian society and culture deriving from our lexicographic research has proven to be one of the most interesting and fruitful aspects of our work. We hope to share further results with the interested lay and professional public in the very near future!