MUMMY LABEL DATABASE (MLD)[1]
FRANÇOIS GAUDARD

The highlight of the 2019–20 academic year was the commemoration of the Oriental Institute centennial. The celebration of this major milestone consisted of a formal gala, a series of various events and lectures, the publication of a companion book entitled *Discovering New Pasts: The OI at 100*, and an exhibition introducing some of the various OI archaeological and philological projects.

On that occasion, the team of the Mummy Label Database not only had the pleasure to contribute an article,[2] available online in Adobe Portable Document Format (www.academia.edu/40513993/_The_Mummy_Label_Database_MLD_in_Discovering_New_Pasts_The_OI_at_100_edited_by_Theo_van_den_Hout_pp._213-19._Chicago_The_Oriental_Institute_2019), but was also honored to have its project selected for the exhibition as a representative example of the many OI language projects. Since the MLD deals, among other things, with texts composed in Demotic, it was presented together with the Chicago Demotic Dictionary (see fig. 1).

A selection of three labels from the OI Museum collection (see fig. 2) illustrating some of the shapes (stela shape, rectangular, tabula ansata), materials (wood, stone), and languages (Demotic, Greek) that can be used for mummy labels accompanied the explanatory text (see fig. 3).

From December 10 to 13, 2019, our team member Alba de Frutos García (Universidad Complutense, Madrid) attended the VIII Congreso Nacional del Centro de Estudios

Figure 1. Display of the Chicago Demotic Dictionary and the Mummy Label Database (third column from the left) in the OI centennial exhibition.

del Próximo Orien-
te: *EX ORIENTE AD
LIMINA*, hosted by
the Universidade
da Coruña (Cam-
pus de Esteiro,
Ferrol), where she
presented a paper entitled "Lengua e iden-
tidad en el Egipto ptolemaico: el caso de
los profesionales funerarios." Alba is also
revising her dissertation on the mortuary
workers in Ptolemaic Egypt, which will ap-
pear in the Monografías de Oriente Antiguo
(MOA) series published by the Universidad
de Alcalá Press.

ABOVE: Figure 2.
Mummy labels OIM
E25289, OIM E19387,
and LI-368:34.

RIGHT: Figure 3.
Explanatory text.

The Mummy Label Database (MLD)

In addition to dictionary projects, the OI pursues a variety of other language projects, such as the Mummy Label Database, established in 2007, which is focused on making the approximately 3,100 known and edited mummy labels accessible online to scholars. The project also aims to publish as many of the unpublished labels as possible, to republish all those that have been defectively or incompletely edited, and to locate missing ones. This fully searchable database will be a useful tool for subsequent studies on mummy labels and will contribute to a better understanding of the life of the multicultural population of Graeco-Roman Egypt. The MLD is a joint project of the Oriental Institute, the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona), and the Universidad Complutense (Madrid).

Mummy labels were used in ancient Egypt as a means of identifying corpses of the deceased. Made of wood and more rarely of stone, faience, or even ivory, they were attached to the mummy with a piece of cord and most often inscribed in Demotic and/or Greek. These inscriptions usually consist of short texts giving important information, such as the name, filiation, age, and place of residence of the deceased. In addition, especially in the Demotic texts, mummy labels often include a short formula for the welfare of the deceased in the hereafter, which testifies to their religious function. These small monuments could also serve as cheap substitutes for funerary stelae.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS BY TEAM MEMBERS

The following articles have been submitted or are in preparation:

- François Gaudard, "Funerary Shrouds from Dendera in the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago. Part II: Shroud OIM E4789," to be published in a Festschrift honoring a colleague (submitted).
- François Gaudard, "Funerary Shrouds from Dendera in the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago. Part III: Shroud OIM E4788 (= OIM E42046)" (in preparation).
- François Gaudard, "Funerary Shrouds from Dendera in the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago. Part IV: Shroud OIM E4787" (in preparation).

Endnotes

[1] For further information on the MLD and Death on the Nile, joint projects of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona), the Universidad Complutense (Madrid), and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, readers can consult previous annual reports, available online in Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF): oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/mummy-label-database-mld.

[2] François Gaudard, Raquel Martín Hernández, and Sofía Torallas Tovar, "The Mummy Label Database (MLD)," in *Discovering New Pasts: The OI at 100*, ed. Theo van den Hout (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2019), 213–19.