THE DEMOTIC DICTIONARY PROJECT

Janet H. Johnson

*D*escriptions of work on a dictionary project frequently concentrate on the detailed work involved and the day-to-day process by which information is gathered from texts and put together in reference form in the dictionary. According to the **Oxford English Dictionary**, second edition, a dictionary is "a book dealing with the individual words of a language…, so as to set forth their orthography, pronunciation, signification, and use, their synonyms, derivation, and history, or at least some of these facts." The only "dictionary" for the late stage of Egyptian known as Demotic (used from approximately 650 B.C. until well into the third century of the modern era) is a glossary published in 1954 by W. Erichsen, one of the foremost Demotic scholars of the first half of the twentieth century. His invaluable work is being supplemented by including vocabulary from all Demotic texts published before 1980 (even including a few important ones published since then as well as several important unpublished texts of which there are photographs in the files). Extensive examples of orthography, signification, use, and derivation are also included.

Some reports in the recent past have discussed the audience for the Demotic dictionary —Demotists, Egyptologists, Greek papyrologists, Aramaicists, people working on late period hieroglyphic and hieratic texts, classicists and ancient historians, religious and legal historians, archaeologists, and art historians working on Egypt from just before the advent of the Persian Empire until well into the era of the Roman Empire. Several have discussed various aspects of the mechanics of preparing the dictionary (collecting and organizing vocabulary, writing dictionary entries, preparing facsimiles of individual citations, and so on), including discussions of the changes wrought in our production process by computer advances. A major example of the latter is the switch from dependence on hand facsimiles prepared by the dictionary staff to computer "scans" of published photographs. The resultant ability to incorporate within one computer file all the information about each word, even its picture, provides the convenience of having everything in one place, transferable by computer disk or various electronic means to other computers anywhere in the world. This also provides freedom from numerous potential hazards during the actual publication process. Imagine hundreds of pages of text onto each of which ten to fifteen small pieces of paper with hand copies have been pasted in precise locations; now imagine all the ways in which even a few of those small pieces of paper can come unattached and be lost or, perhaps worse, get reattached in the wrong place!

What is not always clear is how such a reference tool can provide not only the basic reference assistance which is its primary purpose but also can provide insights into many aspects of the culture whose language it is detailing. Egypt is usually considered a conservative culture, living in the past and minimizing change, whether the impetus for such change came from within the society or from an outside stimulus. Although this is not an inaccurate representation when institutions and material culture are looked at on the broadest, most general level, where an essential "Egyptianness" can be seen from late predynastic and Old Kingdom times at least through the Ptolemaic period, more detailed study of such institutions and material culture reveal that change and development took place throughout the course of Egyptian history.

Some of these developments are well attested in the texts and reflected in the Dictionary. For instance, several deities grew tremendously in popularity during the "Late Period" and the dictionary entries for the letter í will include information not only on such old favorites as Amun (*Imn*) and Anubis (*Inp*) but on newly popular Imhotep (*Iymḥtp*) and Amenhotep, son of Hapu (*Imnḥtp, s³Ḥ p*). The historic Imhotep had been a high official of King Djoser, of the Third Dynasty. The deified Imhotep became the patron of scribes by the New Kingdom and in Demotic texts was called Imhotep the Great, the son of (the God) Ptah and (the woman) Khertiankh. He had his own temple in the Memphite area with various levels of priests. The historic Amenhotep, son of Hapu, was a high official under King Amenhotep III of the Eighteenth Dynasty; in Demotic texts he was called the Royal Scribe and bore the epithet "the good scribe" or "the good god" and was served by a priest called a "shrine-opener." Although there are many religious texts written in Demotic, much of the information about the role of the gods and temples in the lives of individual Egyptians comes from the

analysis of the titles borne by people who made or witnessed legal documents (sales, leases, annuities, etc.). Since many of these documents come from the Theban area, there are numerous references to various temples and shrines of Amun in his various manifestations and the people employed by them. Many of these people had religious titles (priest, shrine-opener), but others were employed on the estates belonging to the temples (gooseherd, weaver of royal linen). Anubis "who is on his Mountain," "Overseer of Secrets of the West," and "Foremost of the Divine Booth" retained his popularity as a deity guarding cemeteries and the dead. The entry for "west" (*imnt*) also points up the continuing importance of the west, specifically the western cliffs and desert, as the resting place of the dead. There is a whole subsection devoted to "The West" (*Imnt*) and the deities presiding over it, especially "Osiris, foremost of the West(erners)" and Maat ("cosmic order") and Hathor, both of whom are called "Mistress of the West."

Legal texts not only give titles and employers of individuals, they also reflect both social and economic developments. One term the reading and meaning of which have been much debated is *iw* "payment." In Demotic texts it is frequently used with the extended meaning "(written) receipt" and the phrase "*iw* which stands on (its) feet" means "valid receipt." A person could "make a payment (or receipt) to" someone (using the verb *ir* "to do, make") or goods or an amount of silver (as silver or as money) could "be payment" (also using the verb *ir* "to do, make"). "Receipts for payment" are frequently noted. Legal texts also provide numerous examples of the term *iwy.t*, which is translated "security," "pledge," or "guarantee," and there are actual texts called "pledge document" or "pledge document concerning money." Such texts bear witness to the growing importance of money in the Egyptian economy and the growing dependency in Egyptian society on formal, written evidence rather than oral testimony. That the Egyptian economy had not originally been based on money as we know it is also indicated by the Egyptian terms for buying, selling, and borrowing money: "To buy" is expressed literally as "to bring (*in*) for silver/money"; "to sell" is "to take for silver/money"; and "to borrow" is "to bring silver/money at interest" where the word for "interest" derives from the verb "to bear, give birth."

The developing sophistication of Egyptian mathematics can be illustrated with another *i*-word. The old word *ifd*, now written *ift*, meaning "four" or "four-sided, square," is used in Demotic mathematical texts not only to mean "square" but is also used for "square root" and the related verb meant not only "to determine area (in square cubits)" but also "to be reduced to a square root, to appear as a square root."

Collecting all the examples of a given word also provides the opportunity to compare literary or figurative uses of a word with the literal meaning. A good example of this involves the word *ib* "heart." The heart was, for the Egyptians, not only the seat of emotions but also the seat of thought, and the word could be used both for the physical object and for any emotions associated with it. A wisdom text talks of the "heart and tongue" (*ib ls*) of a wise man, a mortuary text describes the deceased as "sweet of love, pleasant of heart (*ih ib*), and beautiful of character," another mortuary text uses the idiom "to please the

heart" meaning "to delight" someone, and both mortuary texts and magical texts use the term figuratively to refer to "sexual desire." Unlike the word "heart," the word "eye" (*ír.t*) almost always referred to the physical entity; nevertheless, several important Egyptian concepts are illustrated by compounds using this word. Familiar to many of us is the "evil eye" (*ír.t bn.t*). There are women mentioned in legal texts who are named *Sḫ3-(t3)-ír.t-bn(.t)*, literally "Turn back the evil eye!"; in a long literary story one character greets another with the salutation: "May you not suffer from the evil eye!" Similar to the English is the idiom "to open (someone's) eyes" (*wn ír.t*) meaning "to teach." The title "Eyes of the King" known as that of a high official reminds one of the "Eyes and Ears of the King" known from the Persian Empire, but the Egyptian title is attested already in the Eighteenth Dynasty. The term "to write" "as the eyes" of someone means "to review" or "to audit" and there is a formal title *sḫ ír.t* "Audit Scribe."

Another "*í*-word" which shows a wide range of both literal and what we are calling "extended" meanings is the verb *íp* "to count." It is used frequently in accounts and mathematical texts with its literal meaning and with the further meaning "to reckon" or "to keep accounts." There is even a title *sḫ íp* "Account scribe" with the variant "scribe of Pharaoh who keeps accounts." From this basic meaning came a series of related meanings: "to hold (someone) accountable (for something)," "to charge (something against someone)," and "to think about, consider." Similarly, the related noun, also written *íp*, could mean not only "account" or "reckoning," but also "number" and "thought, plan," even "recognition." People, especially soldiers, could be "reckoned" or "assigned" to a specific town. This phrase occurs especially in the combination "so and so, a man of such and such a place (his place of birth) who is assigned to such and such a place (presumably indicating his duty-station)."

It's clear that the old saying is true that when you read (or write) a dictionary, the topic keeps changing all the time. But this adds some of the interest to our work and helps us keep pushing on the more routine aspects. As every year, the strength of the Dictionary has come from its staff. At this writing, we have lost two of our most important staff members, one temporarily, one permanently but not, we hope, completely. George Hughes, who has been our mentor, resource person, and advisor from the beginning of the project, fell and broke his hip, but he, and we, are looking forward to the finish of his "rehabilitation" and his return to his office. Robert Ritner, who has worked on the Dictionary since his student days in 1979 and has been the Associate Editor since 1983, has been appointed Assistant Professor of Egyptology at Yale University, beginning in September, 1991. We are proud of his accomplishments and wish him well; we will also miss all his experience, knowledge, wisdom, and dedication to the Dictionary and we intend to send him queries and questions regularly. His job of checking the contents of all the entries written by Johnson (while Johnson checks all the entries written by Ritner and earlier staff members) will be taken over by Joe Manning and John Nolan, both senior graduate students and long-time dictionary staff who most recently have been preparing and checking facsimiles of individual citations. Drew Baumann has also been working on facsimiles. Some bibliographic checking was done for us during the

PHILOLOGY

school year by Sheldon Gosline; during the summer this work, and the "reading" (i.e., straightening out) of the dictionary card files was taken over by Tom Dousa, a beginning graduate student.

If you have questions about the project or would like to see the "Dictionary in action" (which nowadays largely means watching someone sitting at a computer and then chasing into the library to check publications), we would be glad to have you stop by the Dictionary office (OI 212) when you are in Chicago and give us a chance to talk with you in person. Perhaps we could find a word of special interest to you.