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PREFACE

The work of this book has started eight years ago, when I first bought a grammar of Egyptian language. I had become interested in the Demotic writing and started to study it. However, very few works I have read were designed for beginners on Demotic studies. So, I have started this grammar that is intended to be a teaching aid for those who want to learn Demotic Egyptian. It was not designed nor intended to be a reference grammar, but a "teach yourself aid" book. This work is based primarily on Professor Janet Johnson's "Thus wrote 'Onchsheshonq'" and Professor Edda Bresciani's "Nozioni Elementari di Gramatica Demotica".

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Talita Helena Negro, my fiancée, for her understanding and support during the long process of writing the manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

The chronologically penultimate variety of the Egyptian language is known as Demotic. This name is applied to both language and script. Demotic, from Greek, means “popular”, “ordinary script”, an opposition to hieroglyphic, meaning “divine script”. It probably represented the spoken idiom of the time, being much closer to spoken language than the archaic and classical texts preserved in hieroglyphic inscriptions. Egyptians called Demotic script *sh s.t* “Episcopal script” “cut (brief) script”.

Demotic is the most cursive script developed by the Egyptians, having its origins in the cursive hieratic of northern Egypt, region of the Delta, by dynasty XXVI. The first attested date of use is under Psammetichus I (ca 650 BC) and by the end of that dynasty it had become the official language of everyday affairs. This stage of the language has, in many ways, connections to the preceding stage, Late Egyptian, and its successor, Coptic. Despite these affinities, demotic is a complete separated stage of ancient Egyptian language.

The Demotic script was used for more than a thousand years and during that time a number of developmental stages occurred.

Early Demotic developed in Lower Egypt, attested, particularly, on stelae from the Serapeum at Saqqara. It is generally dated between 650 and 400 BC as most texts written in Early Demotic are dated under Persian period. After the reunification of Egypt, Demotic replaced hieratic in Upper Egypt and became the official administrative and legal script. During this period, Demotic was used only for administrative, legal, and commercial texts, while hieroglyphs and hieratic were reserved for other texts. This period can be divided into Saïtic, Persian and Post-Persian periods, concerning to paleographical aspects.

Middle Demotic (ca 400–30 BC) is the stage known as Ptolemaic Period. This is the “classical” Demotic period. In this stage, Demotic held a higher status, as may be seen from its increasing use for literary and religious texts. Middle Demotic can be splitted into ancient and late periods, very distinguishable in its paleography.

By the end of the 3rd century BC, Greek language became more important, as it was the administrative language of the country and Demotic lost most of its legal force.

When Roman Emperors became the rulers of Egypt (30 BC), Demotic became progressively less used in public life. The emperor Tiberius (14–37 AD) prohibited the use of Demotic in legal documents. There are, however, a number of literary texts written in Late Demotic (ca 30 BC – 452 AD), especially from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, though the quantity of all Demotic texts decreased rapidly towards the end of the 2nd century. After that, Demotic was only used for a few ostraca, subscriptions to Greek texts, mummy labels, and graffiti. The last dated Demotic script is dated to 11th December 452 AD, and consists of graffiti on the walls of the temple of Isis on the island of Philae.

The Demotic script, as well as hieratic, is written from right to left, exclusively. The script contains both phonetic signs and determinatives and many of these can be ligatured in groups of two or more signs. Thus, many words must be learned as units, since they can not be broken into phonetic “alphabet”.

The script is basically an alphabet used to write 25 consonantic sounds. However, demotic is not a purely alphabetic script, but a mixed script. Biliteral and trilateral signs are found, as occurred in hieroglyphic and hieratic scripts, though most of the times uniliteral signs come together as phonetic complements to confirm the sign meaning. Ideograms, signs with a specific meaning

by itself, are found as well and come without any phonetic complement.

Words, almost always, end in determinative sign, and very often, more than one, to classify and determine the category of the word (male, female, god, city, speak, etc). Determinatives in Demotic are less numerous than in earlier stages of the language, tending to a uniformity of use, despite less exact meaning.

The present guide deals with Ptolemaic and Roman Demotic, with regarding to ancient special form. It consists of basic lessons serving as a reference grammar to Demotic language and its script. It gradually introduce Demotic language with plenty of examples to illustrate what is taught, texts to translate, exercises to reinforce what you have learned and a selected vocabulary. Rather than cramming in unnecessary detail, each lesson gives you plenty of practice with Demotic language. The second part of the guide presents a chrestomathy and the third and last part of the guide consists of a vocabulary.

Once you finish the lessons, you will have a great foundation to read, translate and understand, with help of a dictionary and hard work, Demotic papyri, ostraca and graffiti. The major difficulty in Demotic will remain in scribes' handwritings, which may be quite distinctive.