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Frederick W. Read

The sense of the word [. . .]

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THE

SENSE OF THE WORD

BY

F. W. READ.

Dr. A. H. Gardiner's article entitled *The Egyptian Word for 'Dragoman'* [1] is a notable contribution to the right understanding of this puzzling word, and for the first time relates it to the order of ideas to which it properly belongs; while in the majority of instances his explanation clearly gives the sense which the writers of the texts intended to convey. At the same time it is possible that its full meaning has not yet been ascertained; and I hope to be able to show good reasons for taking a slightly different view from that expounded by Dr. Gardiner.

In the first place it may be suggested that two of the examples quoted are not altogether compatible with the translation «speaker of a foreign language» for the late Egyptian . A passage in the Papyrus Anastasi I in which the critic ridicules the composition of the scribe he addresses is thus rendered : «They are confused to hear; there is no speaker of a foreign language ( ) who could interpret them; they are like the words of a man of the Delta-swamps with a man of Elephantine». Notwithstanding the combined authority of Prof. Spiegelberg [2] and Dr. Gardiner it is difficult to admit that «foreigner» or «speaker of a foreign language» is the most natural translation of in this passage. It would surely be a very feeble gibe to tell an Egyptian author that a *foreigner* could not understand him, for why should foreigners be supposed good judges in such a case? What we should expect would be the accusation normally made by generation after generation of controversialists, that the opponent is *no scholar*.

[1] *S. B. A. Proceedings*, vol. XXXVII (1915), p. 117.

[2] *Recueil de travaux*, vol. XIV (1893), p. 41.

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The meaning of the critic may be paraphrased thus : «It is as difficult for a scholar to understand you as for a man of Elephantine to understand one from the Delta».

Again, the title , accepting Mr. Peet's view[1] that the last two words are dependent on , would be better translated by «Royal physician, scholar (or skilled practitioner) in a difficult science» than by «Royal physician, interpreter of a difficult science». It is not the primary function of a physician to be an *interpreter* of medicine, but it is his main business to be a *scholar* in it.

Let us now consider a passage which occurs near the end of the examination of the deceased in the concluding portion of Chapter 125 of the *Book of the Dead*. This passage as given in Prof. Naville's standard text (*Aa*)[2] reads as follows : «'But say who is the god in his hour. Name him'. 'It is the Scholar of the World'. 'Who is he?' 'The Scholar of the World is Thoth'». The variants[3] of in Naville are : (*Ad*); (*Pb*); (*Pa*); (*Ae*); (*Ac*); (*Ab*); (*Tf*); (*Cd*). The passage is also found in the Papyri of Iouiya[4], Nu[5], and Katseshni (hieratic)[6].

That these are all forms of the word is apparent both from the constant occurrence of the initial and from the characteristic variation in the shape of the main hieroglyph. It is of course possible to translate «Interpreter of the World», taking «interpreter» in the same sense as Mr. Peet does in the title at Saqqara, but this rendering would not accord anything like so well as «Scholar» with the known character of Thoth. He is the Scholar *par*

(1) *S. B. A. Proceedings*, vol. XXXVII (1915), p. 224.

(2) Naville, *Todtenbuch*, vol. I, pl. 138, vol. II, p. 330; *Photographs of the Papyrus of Nebseni* (B. M.), pl. 31.

(3) It may be interesting to note that the sign in Nebseni (Naville's *Aa*) is covered with spots. This fact, together with the evidence produced by M. Jéquier (*S. B. A. Proceedings*, vol. XXXVII, 1915, p. 246; *Recueil de travaux*, vol. XXXVII, 1915, p. 113), would seem to leave no doubt that the object called or was an article of clothing, typically of leopard's skin.

(4) Naville, *Funeral Pap. of Iouiya*, pl. 27, 28.

(5) Budge, *Facsimiles of Papyri* (1899), pl. 51.

(6) Naville, *Papyrus funéraires de la XXIe dynastie*, II, 54.

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excellence, as is seen in his functions of scribe and reader of the gods, measurer of earth and heaven, etc.; and in such titles as «Lord of Divine Words (*i. e.* hieroglyphs)» and «Ruler of Books». The translations hitherto offered of the passage from the *Book of the Dead* have been based on the assumption (now clearly seen to be erroneous) that is to be identified with the word known chiefly from Ptolemaic documents, and meaning «to be occupied with, to give attention to». Renouf's version, «He who provideth for the Two Worlds», is accompanied by a note in which he expressly refers to the Greek of the Decree of Canopus[1]. It is somewhat strange that one who justly prided himself on the accuracy of his quotations should have printed as if it were found in the texts. Dr. Budge's rendering, «he who keepeth the record of the two lands», has presumably the same origin[2].

The late papyri, such as that of Turin[3] and Hieratic Papyrus n° 3079 of the Louvre[4], give in place of the reading , which might be expected to throw some light on the meaning of the earlier word. Brugsch supposed it to be identical with the well known «to prefer», which occurs in the Negative Confession and elsewhere[5]. It is evident, however, when the older papyri are examined, that the later reading is not a genuine variant, but a mere blunder. The pronoun and the particle were taken as the phonetic equivalent of the then unintelligible sign , which was discarded. Thus was evolved a «ghost-word» which happened to be the same in form as a real word, with which the scribes may conceivably have confused it.

By accepting «scholar» as the primary sense of the word we not only obtain a more satisfactory rendering of the passages here discussed, but we are enabled to get a much clearer view of the sense development. It is quite in accordance with the laws of language that a word meaning «scholar» should come to be used in the specialised sense «dragoman, interpreter»,

(1) Renouf, *Egyptian Book of the Dead,* p. 219, 224.

(2) Budge, *The Chapters of Coming forth by Day,* Translation, p. 200.

(3) Lepsius, *Todtenbuch,* chap. 125, line 62.

(4) De Rougé, *Rituel funéraire,* XIX; also in Davis, *Egyptian Book of the Dead.*

(5) Brugsch, *Hieroglyphisch-demotisches Wörterbuch,* p. 1549; *Religion und Mythologie,* p. 70.

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from which could arise the meaning «speaker of a foreign language», and hence «foreigner». The first part of the process is well illustrated by the vulgar use of «scholar» in the sense of one who can read and write merely. It is only as used in relation to Thoth that the word in question can be said to denote scholarship in the widest sense; and it may be objected that this use appears too late to be compatible with the view here advocated. It is, however, not always the fact, even in the case of a modern European language, that the various senses of a word emerged in the order in which they happen to be recorded; and it is far less likely to be the fact in the case of Egyptian with its comparatively scanty documents. Moreover, although there is no direct evidence of the date when the 125th Chapter of the *Book of the Dead* (or any part of it) was composed, everything points to its being much older than the earliest extant copies, which were written under the XVIIIth Dynasty. There is therefore no reason why it should not have used the word in the primary meaning of «Scholar».

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