

Workshop on Lexical Semantics in Ancient Egyptian

When. 10-12 December 2009.

Where. Université de Liège – Département des Sciences de l'Antiquité, Egyptology

Call for papers. The quest for meaning is a task that every Egyptologist faces on a daily basis when it comes to understanding Egyptian texts. This quest is sometimes hindered by a puzzling grammar or a complex construction, but it is quite often the case that the meaning of a sentence is obscured by words whose meaning can only be guessed.

Yet, a significant number of studies in lexicology (whose results are more or less integrated in the lexicographical tools) has been published since the birth of Egyptology. But, in this specific field (as in many other sub-fields of Egyptology), one can see a paradox at work: apart from a few exceptions (usually in critical reviews), one can hardly find theoretical discussions in the specialized literature on lexicological/graphical issues. This could be the very reason why the quest for meaning often turns out to be problematic: needless to say, one could not avoid starting with empirical studies, but we are now in urgent need of a thorough methodological basis for structuring the Egyptian lexicon. Therefore, we suggest addressing three essential questions during the conference:

1. Methodology: “How does one find the proper way to the meaning in Egyptological lexicology?” A systematic multi-level approach is probably the most appropriate answer; this includes:
 - 1.1. the graphematic axis (and the questions raised by iconicity in its broadest acceptance);
 - 1.2. the phonematic axis (link between spellings and phonological structures; echoes with other words and sound symbolism);
 - 1.3. the morphematic axis (going back to the root, establishing the derivational patterns, and, if possible, connecting the lexeme with its Afro-Asiatic cognates);
 - 1.4. the syntagmatic axis (collocations and argumental structures should be systematically studied);
 - 1.5. the semantic axis (the semasiological [decomposition of the meaning into its semic features, etc. cf. §2] and the onomasiological viewpoints).
2. The second question has to do with the description of meaning: “How does one find and objectivize the semic features one can use to account for the meaning of a lexical entry?”
3. The third one is about the theoretical frame we want to work with in lexicography: “How does one organize the meanings between lexemes of one or several ‘vocables’?”

Even if the main purpose of this conference is methodological, we would like to emphasize the need of an in-depth analysis of empirical data.

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