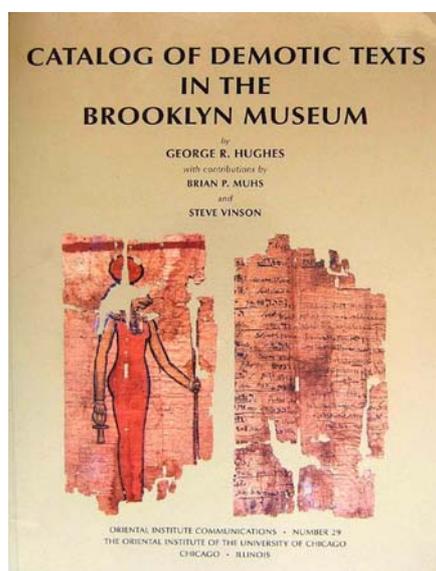


Hughes, G.R. (with contributions by B.P. Muhs & S. Vinson). 2005. Catalog of Demotic Texts in the Brooklyn Museum. – Chicago, The Oriental Institute (Oriental Institute Communications No. 29)

Book review by R. Mairs



This catalogue of the Demotic texts in the Brooklyn Museum is the product of many decades' work by the late George R. Hughes, and has had a more than usually difficult publication history. Several attempts were made to find funding for the publication between its completion in 1985, and Hughes' death in 1992. Happily, it has now been published under the auspices of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, of which, appropriately, Hughes was once Director.

The Demotic papyri in the Brooklyn Museum derive from various sources, but the bulk of the collection was acquired by Charles Edwin Wilbour in Egypt between 1887 and 1896. The Museum received Wilbour's collection in several lots, in 1916, 1935 and 1947. Wilbour kept careful records of his acquisitions in notebooks, and marked ostraca with the place and date of acquisition. Unfortunately, the texts have since been organised according to a number of intersecting and overlapping systems of catalogue or accession numbering (for which Hughes' catalogue provides helpful concordances). In 1937, the Brooklyn Museum also acquired the collection of the New York Historical Society, which was itself composed from three private collections.

Hughes began to compile a checklist of the Brooklyn Demotic texts in 1966, resulting in the present catalogue of some 214 papyri, ostraca, inscribed stones and texts on wood (including a few in abnormal hieratic). The texts are organised by material and by genre, with information on provenance, where available, and a physical description. Further commentary is in most cases limited, usually consisting of an impression of the text's content, or a partial transcription. In a few cases a full transcription, translation and commentary is given. Hughes' purpose in compiling this catalogue was not to produce a full publication of the texts, as stated clearly in the 'Preface' (vii): "This catalog is intended to be only a checklist of the Brooklyn Museum's collection of Demotic Egyptian texts. The assignment given the compiler was to provide both the museum and Demoticists generally with a list of all the pieces plus only such information as would make the list useful. It was not intended to be a complete publication of the texts with the usual transliteration, translation, notes, and photographs or drawings."

The problems inherent in this exercise are something of which Hughes was painfully aware. All salient information should be provided in order to allow the Demotist to assess if a text merits further study, but often the only way to ascertain the precise content or nature of a text is to devote more time to it than is merited for the purposes of catalogue compilation. The resulting checklist is, as Hughes admits, necessarily rather uneven. Although this work essentially bills itself as a detailed inventory, there are elements of it which are on the way to becoming a fully-fledged catalogue of text editions. We can only hope that the less detailed entries will inspire others to produce full editions of the texts in question. The only valid criteria for assessing the importance of the work are, however, those outlined in the 'Preface'. In the task of providing scholars with a useful checklist and handbook of this important collection, it succeeds admirably.

One of the catalogue's greatest virtues is its comprehensiveness. Every text accessible to Hughes, no matter how fragmentary, is included. References are also given for texts from the Brooklyn collection mentioned in earlier publications, which can no longer be located. At the other end of the scale, texts already published are

reproduced with the appropriate bibliography. In the case of bilingual material, it might have been helpful for the reader also to have a transcription of the non-Demotic text, which is generally not provided. These texts are, however, relatively few, and Shelton's (1992) publication of the Greek and Latin materials from the Brooklyn Museum provides the necessary companion volume.

Points of interest and contention within the texts are well highlighted, and there is clear internal referencing to texts of the same genre on different media. Where space does not permit an explanatory note (e.g. on the somewhat intriguing *ḥne* 'bath tax' of no. 91), thorough references to discussions elsewhere are given. Many texts in the catalogue would clearly merit further research, for which this work provides the necessary groundwork. Among them are items of wider historical or sociological interest, such as a clay pot (a votive?) with epithets of Horus (no. 173), or a list of names in Greek and Demotic from Aswan (no. 180), with possible Nubian elements, for which we might posit some connection with the garrisoning of Egypt's southern frontier (full publication forthcoming by the present author).

As with any work subject to even the usual publication delays, new material has, of course, emerged since the completion of Hughes' original typescript. This has been well remedied by the additions of Brian Muhs and Steve Vinson, without altering the integrity of the original work. There is a new bibliography, and recent publications are noted in the catalogue. Elsewhere in the volume's apparatus, there can only be a few complaints, none of them of major import. (A list of abbreviations – of works cited or of terminology – is necessary, but is it necessary to note 'etc' and 'i.e.', which most readers will never have encountered in unabbreviated form?). As already noted, the work is supplied with useful indices and concordances, making for ease of reference. Forty-eight plates, in black and white and in colour, provide good quality images of a large number of the texts included in the catalogue.

Its availability online, as a free PDF file, is likely to further endear this already useful catalogue to scholars, and give it the circulation it deserves. As well as being the home of the Chicago Demotic Dictionary, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago has an ongoing programme of digitising its publications and making them available free of charge online (http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/PUB/SRC/Elec_Publications.html). (In addition to the present catalogue, other publications of interest to Demotists include Johnson, 2000, 2004). Although never a substitute for first-hand examination of the objects themselves, the opportunity to store and manipulate digital images of the volume's plates is especially welcome – although a more comprehensive library of online images of the collection, such as that provided for a number of institutions by the APIS project (<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/projects/digital/apis/>), would be more welcome still. It is only appropriate that a work of such meticulous scholarship, designed specifically as a tool for further research, should benefit from online dissemination, and it is to be hoped that it will provide the impetus for much further study of the Brooklyn collection.

Hughes, G.R. (with contributions by B.P. Muhs & S. Vinson). 2005. *Catalog of Demotic Texts in the Brooklyn Museum*. – Chicago, The Oriental Institute (Oriental Institute Communications No. 29). 115 pp. ISBN 1-885923-27-9. Price € 122.00/\$ 75.00 (paperback).

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