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Millennium Debate

## Response to A. Loprieno

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Professor Antonio Loprieno has given us a vivid report on recent developments in Egyptian language studies, and he has visualized it by presenting examples from his own research. In this way, he has given research in a new spirit, from various aspects of language studies, including phonetics, lexicography, and etymology, to dialect studies and the impact of the social situation.

Complementary to this, I should like to append some account of what has happened in Egyptian language studies, not only in the past 15 years, but beyond—covering a time span of some 50 years. The second half of the twentieth century has seen enormous progress in the understanding of Egyptian syntax and morphosyntax. This is, above all, due to the research of H. J. Polotsky. When analyzing the second tenses of Coptic and their precursors in Late Egyptian (and implicitly in Demotic) he found them to be thematic in character, as opposed to the rhematic character of the basic or first tenses, their employment being conditioned by a following rhematic adverbial expression. Both by analyzing the morphology of the Coptic second tenses and by tracing their essentially thematic use backward to other stages of the language, viz. Late Egyptian and classical Egyptian, he was able to identify a set of “abstract relative forms,” or *that* forms: Old and Middle Egyptian disposed of a tense paradigm of special part-clausal forms of substantival function and meaning, viz. *sdm.n.f* “that he has heard,” *sdm.f* (“imperfective”) “that he hears,” and *sdm.f* (prospective) “that he will hear.” These forms are found to be employed in any function a substantive can have: after prepositions; in genitival relation to another substantive (both in the direct and the indirect genitive); as objects of transitive verbs; as subjects in any one of the basic Egyptian sentence constructions, viz. with nominal, adverbial, and verbal predicates; as nominal predicates; and used absolutely, often with the meaning of a clause of time.

Of all this diversity, one use only was to survive into Late Egyptian and later, namely the adverb-emphasizing role of a subject in the sentence with an adverbial predicate. In the verbal sentence, an adverb is part of the rhematic phrase, consisting of the verb and its extensions. In the adverbial sentence, it is the adverb phrase alone that is rhematic.

As far as Middle Egyptian was concerned, the recognition of a substantival form for each tense was but one side of the medal. On the other hand, the nonsubstantival counterparts of these forms proved to be virtually limited to adverbial use (comparable to the main use of the stative or old perfective): They came to be labeled "circumstantial *sdm.n.f*" and "circumstantial *sdm.n.f*."

It took Egyptology a long time to accept the results of the Polotskyan revolution. In particular, the comprehensive grammars and the textbooks of Old and Middle Egyptian did not take account of it for a long time, though its results came gradually to be reflected in the grammatical studies of many authors. Even then, some made strange use of them. However, this cannot be said of the very effective revival of Late Egyptian studies that started in the Sixties. Its first culmination was the grammar by Černý and Groll (1978). In the works of Groll (1967, 1970) and several followers, the Polotskyan system is of basic importance. The same is true of Demotic studies, in particular those of Johnson (1976, 1986). In Coptic language studies the Polotskyan system is well-established and indispensable.

It is not mere coincidence that those who studied Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic found out rather quickly that the Polotskyan concept is an eminent achievement and not only offers clues to many severe difficulties but rather yields an harmonious and coherent system where up till then, a disparity of detail rules had prevailed. In the later stages of Egyptian the language had assumed a much more analytic character than before. Grammatical information is conveyed to a much lesser extent by vocalization patterns and other features of the lexeme, but is instead conveyed by auxiliaries and particles associated with it. The formation of tense forms like *sw (hr) sdm, f-sôtm* is much more transparent than, say, *iw.f sdm.f* (where it is only by much scrutiny that the verbal form involved can be identified as being one of adverbial or circumstantial function). The identification and differentiation of Coptic forms is further aided by the presence of vowels in the Coptic script on the one hand, and by the attestation of dialectal variety on the other. It is much easier to accept that the second present is different from the circumstantial present (cf. Sahidic *ef-sôtm* plus Bohairic *af-sôtm* versus Sahidic *ef-sôtm* plus Bohairic *ef-sôtm*) than to accept that an Old Egyptian or Middle Egyptian spelling of *sdm.f* may convey several different verb forms. Nevertheless, numerous criteria for such differentiation, such as, for example, the forms of irregular verbs, and restrictions of use of some perfect tense forms, have been collected since the beginning of Egyptian morphological research, and progressive refinement in their interpretation has yielded an evidence that should be sufficient (as just one example, we may refer to the identification of the progressive *sdm.f* by James P. Allen, as a conclusive step after Elmar Edel's recognition of a *sdmw.f* form).

By now, a sort of revisionist "counterrevolution" is under way in reference to Old and Middle Egyptian. It aims at restraining the "syntactic" (or "parts of speech") preponderance of what has unluckily been termed the *Standard Theory*, in favor of "pragmatic" issues or whatever. On closer inspection, though, the target of the opposition is not precisely Polotsky's results but rather what some have made of them. Also, some authors are not aware of the fact that basically diverging theoretical paradigms, as transformational or generative grammar or X-bar theory, are not apt to either verify or falsify a structuralistic analysis. Furthermore, it should be noted that, though the Polotskyan scheme is of great consequence for verbal morphology, Polotsky's own work was rather in the field of morphosyntactics. In working out the basic categories of the verbal system he also yielded its basic paradigms as a skeleton for morphology, with categories like syntactic status, tense, aspect and mode as parameters. The Polotskyan scheme is, therefore, not a handicap for research on "pragmatic" lines (as it might appear according to some contributions to the recent discussion), but rather an indispensable precondition for any valid research in the

field. Time had become ripe for focusing on other aspects of language than morphology, a development that is well mirrored in Loprieno's paper. But of course a founding on the largely established morphological and morphosyntactic facts remains essential.

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