1. Writing and Phonology

1.1   History

Coptic is the name of the final stage of the ancient Egyptian language, spoken and written from the third century AD until perhaps sometime in the seventeenth century. It is still used today in the rituals of the Coptic (Egyptian Christian) Church.

Coptic existed alongside the last stage of ancient Egyptian writing, Demotic, for about two and a half centuries; the last known Demotic text is dated to AD 452. The name "Coptic" is applied to Egyptian texts written in an alphabet derived from the Greek (§ 1.4). The earliest texts, prior to the second century, are usually known collectively as Old Coptic (OC). The earliest use of the Coptic alphabet is for glosses in Demotic magical texts, to specify the correct pronunciation of certain words and phrases; the oldest such examples come from the Ptolemaic Period (after 332 BC). The use of Coptic rather than Demotic to write ancient Egyptian can perhaps be traced to the introduction of Christianity in Egypt, the alphabetic script being preferred for writing Christian scriptures because it was free of the "pagan" taint of the older writing system.

1.2   Dialects

Regional differences in the pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar of ancient Egyptian undoubtedly existed through the history of the language, but they are usually obscured by the hieroglyphic writing system and its descendants, hieratic and Demotic. Coptic scribes, however, regularly wrote the language as they were accustomed to speaking it. As a result, there is no uniform "Coptic" language, but a number of different dialects (Fig. 1). The six most important of these are named after the region of the country they were associated with: Akhmimic (abbreviated A), Bohairic (B), Fayumic (F), Lycopolitan (L, originally called Subakhmimic, A_2; also called Lyco-Diospolitan), Oxyrhynchite (M, for Mesokemic or Middle Egyptian), and Saidic (S, also called Sahidic).[1]

The dominant dialects were Saidic and Bohairic. Saidic, centered in Thebes, is attested from the third to fourteenth centuries AD and was the dominant dialect until the ninth to eleventh centuries, when it was increasingly overshadowed and eventually supplanted by Bohairic. Bohairic, a northern dialect, is first attested in the fourth century AD but is primarily represented by texts from the ninth century and later; it is also the dialect used in the modern Coptic Church. Fayumic is the name of the dialect spoken in the Fayum; it is attested from the third to tenth century AD. The other major dialects are mostly known from texts of the

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1   See Funk 1988. In this book, if no dialect letter is given before a Coptic term, the term is the same all dialects.

fourth and fifth centuries and are Upper Egyptian in origin, from Oxyrhynchus, Asyut (Lycopolitan), and Akhmim.

A number of minor dialects are also known, often from a single manuscript, including P, ancestral to Saidic, from a Theban manuscript; H, associated with Hermopolis; and G, related to Bohairic. Some texts also display a mixture of dialects, such as Saidic with an Akhmimic influence (Sᴬ).
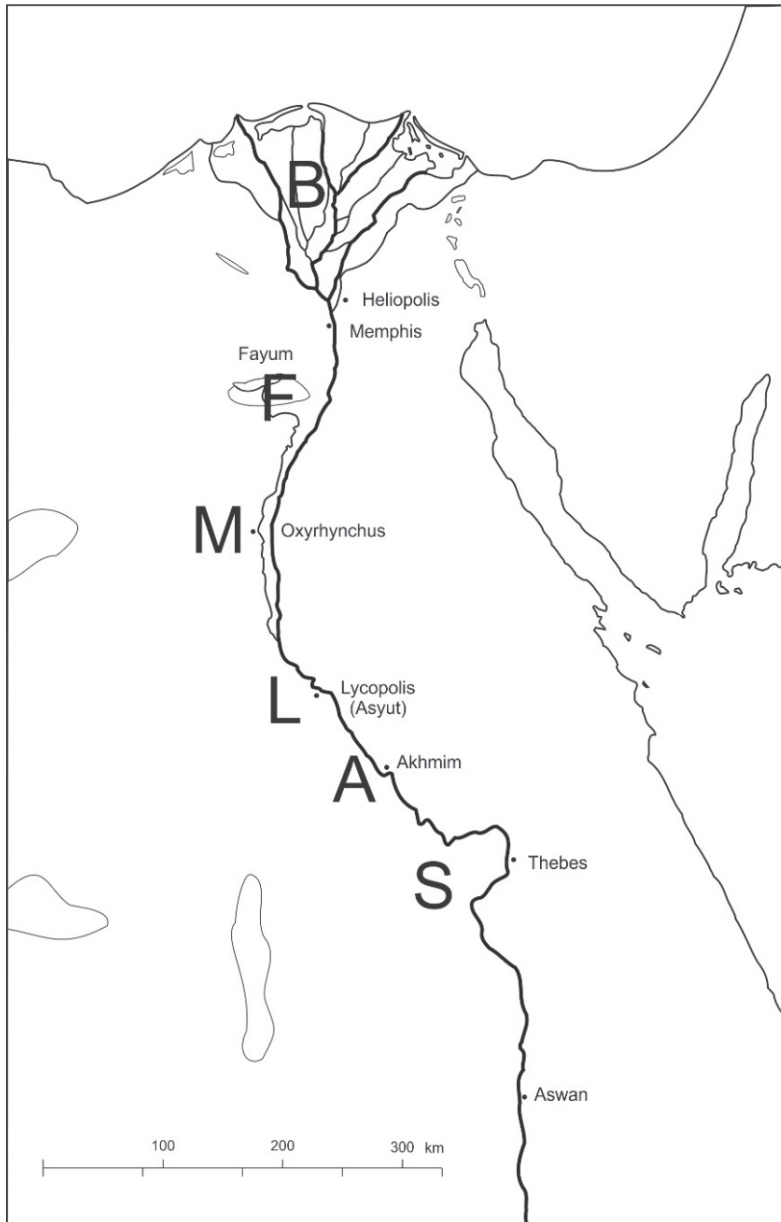

Fig. 1. Map of the Major Coptic Dialects

1.3   Sources

Most Coptic grammars concentrate on Saidic, because that was the primary literary dialect
for much of the language's history. Steindorff 1951 (see the Bibliography), in German, is a
good outline of Saidic grammar, which often notes major dialectal differences. Layton 2000
is a recent comprehensive grammar of Saidic; its basic points are summarized in Layton 2007,
also available online. Lambdin 1983 can also be recommended. For Bohairic, the standard
grammar is Mallon 1926 (reprinted often). The only grammar specifically devoted to dialec-
tal differences is Till 1931, in German.

　　The basic dictionaries of Coptic are Crum 1939 and Westendorf 2008, complemented
by Kasser 1966, which includes dialects M, P, H, and G, identified and systematized after
Crum's dictionary was published. These dictionaries are ordered after the Coptic alphabet
(§ 1.4), but primarily based on consonantal roots, with vowels considered secondarily, so that
ⲕⲱⲛⲥ "pierce," for example, precedes ⲕⲣⲟ "far side." [2]

　　Coptic texts are primarily Christian scripture and the writings of Coptic monks. A num-
ber of the grammars contain reading selections (chrestomathies).

1.4   The Alphabet

The Coptic alphabet is derived from the Greek alphabet, with eight additional signs, derived
from Demotic, primarily for sounds not present in Greek. Some of the signs are peculiar to
a single dialect, some have different values in one dialect than in others, and some are
pronounced differently in the rituals of the Coptic Church than they were in antiquity, due
to the influence of Arabic and reforms during the nineteenth century that aligned the
pronunciation of Coptic more closely with that of modern Greek. The probable phonetic
value of the signs is derived from variant spellings; some have a value similar to that of their
Greek ancestors in the Classical Period (third century BC), when the alphabet was first used
to write Egyptian, rather than that which evolved in the centuries when Coptic texts are first
attested (κοινή "common"). The order of the Coptic alphabet, and the names of its letters,
follow that of its Greek ancestor.

ⲁ	ⲁⲗⲫⲁ	/a/; probably [a],[3] as in Italian *gatta*, perhaps also [æ], as in *hat*, and [ɑ], as in *father*, in some words or dialects
ⲃ	ⲃⲏⲧⲁ	/b/; [β], a bilabial fricative (the *b* of Spanish *cabo*, a [b] sound with the lips not completely closed); name also ⲃⲓⲇⲁ
ⲅ	ⲅⲁⲙⲙⲁ	/g/; in Greek loanwords and as a variant of ⲕ in some words; probably pronounced [k]

2　　In this book, ordering is strictly alphabetical: thus, for example, ⲕⲣⲟ before ⲕⲱⲛⲥ, and ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ "hour" be-
　　fore ⲟⲍⲉ "yard."

3　　Slanted lines mark phonemes. Square brackets indicate probable pronunciation, using symbols of the Inter-
　　national Phonetic Alphabet (IPA); [ˇ] stands for an unknown vowel.

ⲇ	ⲇⲁⲗⲇⲁ	/d/; in Greek loanwords; probably pronounced [t]
ⲉ	ⲉⲓ/ⲉⲓⲉ	/ε/; [ə], like the *u* in *but*, also [ε], like the *e* in *bet*, in some words and dialects; perhaps [ε] when stressed and [ə] otherwise
ⲍ	ⲍⲏⲧⲁ	/z/; [s], in Greek loanwords and as a variant of ⲥ in some words
ⲏ	ⲏⲧⲁ	/e/; [ε], like the *e* in *bet*, also perhaps [e], like the *a* in *bate*, in some words and dialects; also �}ⲏⲧⲁ
ⲑ	ⲑⲏⲧⲁ	/tḥ/ and /tʰ/; in most dialects, this is a monogram for ⲧ}; in Bohairic, it represents an aspirated *t*, as in *tea*; also ⲑⲓⲧⲁ
ⲓ	ⲓⲱⲧⲁ	/i/; like the *i*'s in *cuisine*, both the [ɪ] of *cui-*, and the [i] of *-sine*, and [j] like the *y* in *yet*; often spelled ⲉⲓ in many dialects, and ï after a vowel; ⲉⲓ̈ for /εj/, distinguished from ⲉⲓ for /i/; also ⲓⲁⲩⲇⲁ
ⲕ	ⲕⲁⲡⲡⲁ	/k/; unaspirated [k], similar to the *g* in *go*, and aspirated [kʰ], like the *k* in *key*; in Bohairic, this letter represents [k]; in the other dialects, it may have represented both [kʰ] and [k]
ⲗ	ⲗⲁⲩⲇⲁ	/l/; [l], like the *l* in *lay*
ⲙ	ⲙⲓ/ⲙⲏ/ⲙⲉ	/m/; [m], like the *m* in *may*
ⲛ	ⲛⲉ	/n/; [n], like the *n* in *nay*
ⲝ	ⲝⲓ	/ks/; a monogram for ⲕⲥ
ⲟ	ⲟ	/ɔ/; [ɔ], like the *o* in *not*
ⲡ	ⲡⲓ	/p/; unaspirated [p], similar to the *b* in *bought*, and aspirated [pʰ], like the *p* in *pot*; in Bohairic, this letter represents [p]; in the other dialects, it may have represented both [pʰ] and [p]
ⲣ	ⲣⲟ	/r/; probably like the [ɾ] of Spanish *pero* (pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth); also ⲣⲱ/}ⲣⲱ
ⲥ	ⲥⲏⲙⲙⲁ	/s/; [s], like the *s* in *see*; also ⲥⲩⲙⲙⲁ
ⲧ	ⲧⲁⲩ	/t/; unaspirated [t], like the *t* in the American pronunciation of *batter*, and aspirated [tʰ], like the *t* in *tap*; in Bohairic, this letter is [t]; in the other dialects, it may have represented both [tʰ] and [t]
ⲩ	}ⲉ	/u/; used by itself primarily in Greek words, where it was pronounced [i] or [ε]; in Coptic words, this letter is almost always combined with a preceding vowel, where it was pronounced either [u], like the *u* of *gnu*, or [w], as in *woo* (e.g., ⲛⲁⲩ "see" [na-u] or [naw]); ⲟⲩ represents /u/; ⲟⲟⲩ represents /ɔu/ or /ɔw/
ⲫ	ⲫⲓ	/pḥ/ and /pʰ/; a monogram for ⲡ} except in Bohairic, where it represents an aspirated [pʰ] (as in *pot*)
ⲭ	ⲭⲓ	/kḥ/ and /kʰ/; a monogram for ⲕ} except in Bohairic, where it represents an aspirated [kʰ], as in *key*
ⲯ	ⲯⲓ	/ps/; a monogram for ⲡⲥ

ⲱ	ⲱ	/o/; [o], as in *note*
ⲩ	ⲩⲁⲓ	/š/; [ʃ], like the *sh* in *she*; also ⲩⲉⲓ
ϥ	ϥⲁⲓ/	/f/; [ɸ], a bilabial fricative, like *f* pronounced with the two lips rather than the teeth and lower lip; also ϥⲉⲓ
ϩ	ϩⲟⲡⲓ	/ḥ/; [ħ], harsher than English *h*, pronounced with an audible "rasp"; equivalent to Arabic ح
ⳃ	[ⳃⲁⲓ]	/x/; in Akhmimic, [x], like the *ch* in German *ach* or Scottish *loch* (name not attested)
ⳗ	ⳗⲁⲓ	/x/; in Bohairic, equivalent to Akhmimic ⳃ; also ⳗⲉⲓ
ϫ	ϫⲁⲛϫⲓⲁ	/d̲/; in Bohairic, this sound was unaspirated [tʲ], somewhat like the *d* in *procedure*; in the other dialects it may have represented both [tʲ] and an aspirated [tʰʲ], somewhat like the *t* in *nature*
ϭ	ϭⲓⲙⲁ	/k̲/ and /t̲/; in most dialects, a [kʰʲ] or [kʲ], somewhat like the *c* in *cute* or the *g* in *argue*; in Bohairic, this letter represented [tʰʲ], the aspirated counterpart of ϫ (like the *t* in *nature*)
ϯ	ϯ	/ti/; a monogram for ⲧⲓ

Additional letters occur in Old Coptic and Dialect P: OC ϭ and P ϸ for /x̲/ ([xʲ]) and OC ⸁ and P ⟂ for vowel length or for [ə]. In the major Coptic dialects, the first has disappeared (> ϩ/ⲩ). For the second, most dialects use a doubled vowel, representing [V:]: for example, S ⲙⲁⲁⲩ, FL ⲙⲉⲉⲩ "mother" /ˈma:-u/, /ˈmɛ:-u/; Bohairic and Oxyrhynchite do not use doubled vowels: B ⲙⲁⲩ, M ⲙⲉⲩ "mother."

In Bohairic and Oxyrhynchite, a supraliteral dot or tick (ϫⲓⲛⲕⲓⲙ "movement") is sometimes used to identify a letter that serves as a syllable by itself: for instance, ⲁ́ⲛⲟⲕ or ⲁ̀ⲛⲟⲕ "I" for /a-ˈnɔk/. This is also the case when the letter is a consonant, as in ⲛ́ⲑⲟϥ or ⲛ̀ⲑⲟϥ "he" for /n̲-ˈtʰɔf/.[4] Other dialects use a supraliteral stroke over consonants: e.g., ⲛ̄ⲧⲟϥ "he." This can also span two consonants, as in S ⲩⲟⲙⲛ̄ⲧ "three" for /ˈšɔm-n̲t/. A longer supraliteral stroke indicates abbreviations, such as ASF ⲭ̄ⲥ̄ for ϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ/ϫⲁⲉⲓⲥ "lord."

The phonetic values of ⲉ and ⲏ are uncertain. Variants such as F ⲥⲱⲧⲙ ~ ⲥⲱⲧⲉⲙ "hear" suggest that ⲉ was [ə] — i.e, [ˈso-t̲m] ~ [ˈso-təm] — but variants such as A ⲡⲉ ~ ⲡⲏ "sky" also suggest that it was [ɛ] when stressed, and that ⲏ was either [ɛ] or [e]: thus, ⲡⲉ ~ ⲡⲏ represents either variant spellings of [pɛ], or [pɛ] ~ [pe]. When (ⲉ)ⲓ and (ⲟ)ⲩ follow a vowel, they may have been diphthongal rather than independent vowels: ⲛⲁⲓ "to me" either [ˈna-i] or [nai̯], and ⲛⲁⲩ "see" either [ˈna-u] or [nau̯].

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4   In this book, an underscored consonant signifies a syllabic consonant: e.g., /n̲/ for IPA [n̩]. English has such syllabic consonants in certain words, such as *isn't*, pronounced [ˈɪz-n̲t]. In Coptic, any consonant is capable of syllabic function.

The six major Coptic dialects have several phonological subgroupings. The most important is that of Bohairic and Saidic versus the other dialects: BS have ⲟ and ⲁ in many words where AFLM have ⲁ and ⲉ, respectively. The /x/ of Akhmimic and Bohairic, represented by ϧ and ⳉ, respectively, has become ϩ or ⲱ in the other dialects. Oxyrhynchite has ⲟ in many words where the other dialects have ⲱ. Fayumic usually has ⲗ for the ⲣ of other dialects, and Bohairic distinguishes aspirated consonants from unaspirated ones, where the other dialects do not (or have lost aspiration). Phonologically, Lycopolitan is the most neutral of the dialects, with no unique features.

1.5   Aspiration

Most dialects do not distinguish consonants on the basis of aspiration, just as English *latter* is pronounced [ˈlæt-ɾ̩] in America (unaspirated *t*) but [ˈlætʰ-ɾ̩] in England (aspirated *t*). Thus, S ⲧⲱⲣⲉ means both "willow" and "handle," perhaps distinguished by aspiration: [ˈtʰo-rə] "willow" and [ˈto-rə] "handle." Bohairic is the exception: ⲑⲱⲣⲓ "willow" versus ⲧⲱⲣⲓ "handle." In Bohairic, aspiration generally occurs before a stressed vowel or before the consonants ⲃ ⲗ ⲙ ⲛ ⲣ (called "sonants") or ⲉⲓ/ⲓ or ⲟⲩ preceding a stressed vowel: for example, B ⲱⲟⲣⲧⲉⲣ "become disturbed" /ˈštʰɔr-tɛr/ and ⲱⲧⲉⲣⲑⲱⲣ "disturbed" /štɛr-ˈtʰor/, B ⲑⲛⲁⲭϩⲓ /ˈtʰnaḏ-ḫi/ "the tooth" and ⲫⲓⲟⲙ "the sea" /pʰi-ˈɔm/.

This feature always applies to ⲫ/ⲡ: e.g., B ⲫⲁⲓ "this" /pʰaj/ (like English *pie*) and ⲡⲁⲓⲣⲱⲙⲓ "this man" /paj-ˈro-mi/. It also applies to ⲭ/ⲕ, ⲑ/ⲧ, and ϭ/ⳉ, as in ⲱⲟⲣⲧⲉⲣ/ ⲱⲧⲉⲣⲑⲱⲣ, above, but for those three pairs the distinction is also phonemic, as in aspirated ⲑⲱⲣⲓ "willow" /ˈtʰo-ri/ versus unaspirated ⲧⲱⲣⲓ "handle" /ˈto-ri/. In such cases, the aspirated consonant is usually preserved in unstressed syllables: e.g., ϭⲓⲥⲓ "exalt" /ˈt̠i-si/ and ϭⲉⲥⲫⲛⲟⲩ† "exalt God" /t̠ɛs-ˈpʰnu-ti/.

Since most dialects do not mark aspirated consonants in writing, it is often necessary to look for the Bohairic version of a word, or for its Egyptian ancestor, to determine aspiration.[5] Thus, for example, FLMS ⲕⲱ "throw" is [kʰo] because of Bohairic ⲭⲱ, but AFS ⲕⲱⲧ "build" is [kot] in view of Bohairic ⲕⲱⲧ and Egyptian *qd*.

1.6   Syllables and Stress

In Coptic, a syllable can consist of a single vowel or consonant, as in the first syllable of ⲁⲛⲟⲕ "I" and ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲕ "you." Words can also be monosyllabic: BS ⲟ "big" [ɔ], AS ϥ̄ⲛⲧ "worm" [ɸn̩t]. Syllables can begin or end with consonant clusters: e.g., S ϥⲥϭⲣⲁϩⲧ "he is at rest," theoretically [ɸskʲraħt], more probably [ɸ-ˈskʲraħ-t]. Individual words have one primary syllable that is stressed, usually last or second-last: for example, AS ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲣ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲕⲏⲙⲉ "Egyptian" [mn̩t-r̩m-n̩-ˈkɛ-mə], B ⲙⲉⲧⲟⲩⲣⲟ "kingdom" [mət-u-ˈɾɔ]. In native words, the vowels ⲏ, ⲟ, and ⲱ generally mark the stressed syllable in most dialects: e.g., ABFS ⲃⲁⲣⲱⲧ "bronze" [βa-ˈrot]. The other

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5   In general, Egyptian *k/t/t̠* > aspirated [kʰ/tʰ/tʰʲ] and *q/d/d̠* > unaspirated [k/t/tʲ].

vowels can be stressed or unstressed: AFM ⲁⲛⲁⲕ "I" [a-ˈnak]; ALS ⲃⲉⲕⲉ "wage" [βə-ˈkɛ]; BF ⲓⲛⲓ "get" [ˈi-ni]; ABFLMS ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ "hour" [u-ˈnu]. It is not always possible to determine where the stress lay, although dialectal variants can provide a clue: for example, ALS ⲙⲛⲧⲣⲉ "witness" was [mn̲-ˈtrɛ] because of B ⲙⲉⲑⲣⲉ [mə-ˈtʰrɛ].

Because of the single dominant stress, Coptic nouns and verbs can appear in three variant forms, called absolute, construct, and pronominal. In grammars and dictionaries, the construct and pronominal forms are marked by a final - and ⸗, respectively: e.g., S ⲥⲱⲧⲙ/ⲥⲉⲧⲙ-/ⲥⲟⲧⲙ⸗ "hear." Absolute forms appear either as words by themselves or as the final element of a compound: ⲥⲱⲧⲙ "hear," ϥⲛⲁⲥⲱⲧⲙ "he will hear." Constructs are used as non-final elements of a compound and are usually reduced from the absolute form as much as possible: AS ⲣⲱⲙⲉ "person" [ˈro-mə] and ⲣⲙⲛ̄ϯⲙⲉ "villager" ("person-of-town") [r̲m-n̲-ˈti-mə]. Pronominal forms have a final suffix pronoun: S ⲣⲁⲛ "name" and ⲣⲓⲛⲥ "her name."

1.7 Spelling

Within dialects, Coptic spelling is fairly uniform: the word for "sky," for example, always appears as ⲡⲉ in Saidic and as ⲫⲉ in Bohairic. Variation, however, also occurs, as in Akhmimic ⲡⲉ ~ ⲡⲏ, both spellings of the word for "sky." Variation is common between ⲉⲓ and ⲓ: e.g., FLS ⲥⲉⲓ and ⲥⲓ "enjoy." Other variants, within and across dialects, are ⲃ ~ ϥ, ⲃ ~ ⲡ, ⲓ ~ ⲏ, ⲕ ~ ϭ, ⲣ ~ ⲗ, ⲥ ~ ϣ, and ⲟⲩ ~ ⲃ: e.g., F ⲛⲁϥⲣⲓ ~ ⲛⲁϥⲁⲓ "good," S ⲥⲓⲃ ~ B ⲥⲓⲡ "tick," B ⲛⲏⲃⲓ ~ ⲛⲓⲃⲓ "swim," F ⲕⲉ ~ ϭⲏ "other," S ⲥⲱϣⲉ ~ F ϣⲱϣⲓ "field." In general, scribes seem to have written the language as they heard it.

Variation between ⲣ and ⲗ is primarily a feature of the Fayumic dialect. Most words that have ⲣ in the other dialects have ⲗ in Fayumic: e.g., ALS ⲣⲱⲙⲉ, B ⲣⲱⲙⲓ, M ⲣⲟⲙⲉ versus F ⲗⲱⲙⲓ "person." When Fayumic uses ⲣ, therefore, as in the variant ⲣⲱⲙⲓ, it may reflect the influence of other dialects, such as Bohairic, rather than a variant pronunciation: i.e., ⲗⲱⲙⲓ and ⲣⲱⲙⲓ both pronounced [ˈlo-mi]. This may also have been true for words consistently spelled with ⲣ, such as ⲉⲣⲱϯ/ⲁⲣⲱϯ "milk" (AS ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲉ, B ⲉⲣⲱϯ, M ⲉⲣⲟⲧⲉ), perhaps regularly pronounced [ə-ˈlo-ti / a-ˈlo-ti] in Fayumic.

Most Coptic manuscripts do not separate individual words by spaces or other means (see the Chrestomathy). Some use a dot or other device such as ⳾ to mark the ends of clauses or sentences. In this book, words and compounds with a single main stress are separated from other such words by a space (except in the Chrestomathy): thus, for example, in Exercise 1, ⲡⲉⲛⲟⲉⲓⲕ ⲉⲧⲛⲏⲩ ⲧⲁⲁϥ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲟⲩ rather than undivided ⲡⲉⲛⲟⲉⲓⲕⲉⲧⲛⲏⲩⲧⲁⲁϥⲛⲁⲛⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲟⲩ.

1.8 Morphemic Integrity

Consonants can be affected by neighboring ones: for example, S ⲥⲟⲩⲥⲟⲟⲩϣⲉ "sacrifice" [su-ˈsɔw-ʃə], B ϣⲟⲩϣⲱⲟⲩϣⲉ [ʃu-ˈʃow-ʃə]. Morphemic boundaries, however, are generally respected. For example, although S ⲡⲱⲛⲕ "bail" is B ⲫⲱⲛⲕ [ˈpʰo-n̲k] because of the Bohairic

rule of aspiration (§ 1.5), S ⲡⲱⲛⲉ "the stone," consisting of the morphemes, ⲡ "the" and ⲱⲛⲉ "stone," is B ⲡⲱⲛⲓ, suggesting the pronunciation [p-ˈo-ni] rather than *[ˈpo-ni]. Where other morphemes are part of a word, the same tendency may have applied: for example, B ϭⲓ "carry" is [ɸi] but ϭⲓ "he comes" may have been [ɸ̱-ˈi] rather than [ɸi]. This applies to the morpheme boundary between a consonant and a vowel, not two consonants: B ⲫⲛⲟⲩⲧ̇ [ˈpʰnu-ti] "the God" (ⲡ + ⲛⲟⲩⲧ̇) and ⲭⲣⲓⲙⲓ [ˈkʰri-mi] "you weep" (ⲕ + ⲣⲓⲙⲓ). It is possible, therefore, that words such as B ⲡⲱⲛⲓ and ϭⲓ "he comes" contained an unwritten (and therefore non-phonemic) glottal stop: [p-ˈʔo -ni] and [ɸ̱-ˈʔi].

1.9 Vocalic Alternants and Variants

The vowel ⲱ is usually replaced by ⲟⲩ after ⲙ or ⲛ: e.g., B ms ⲫⲱⲕ and fs ⲑⲱⲕ but pl ⲛⲟⲩⲕ "yours." Word-final ⲱ is usually also replaced by ⲟⲩ in Akhmimic: BFLMS ⲭⲱ vs. A ⲭⲟⲩ "say." Oxyrhynchite regularly has medial ⲟ for the ⲱ of other dialects: M ⲥⲟⲛⲉ vs. ALS ⲥⲱⲛⲉ, BF ⲥⲱⲛⲓ "sister."

The stressed vowel pairs ⲓ vs. ⲁ/ⲉ and (except in Oxyrhynchite) ⲱ vs. ⲁ/ⲟ often appear as alternants in open and closed syllables, respectively: e.g., ALMS ⲭⲓⲥⲉ [ˈtʲi-sə], F ⲭⲓⲥⲓ [ˈtʲi-si] "exalt" vs. AFLM ⲭⲉⲥⲧϥ [ˈtʲes-ṯf], S ⲭⲁⲥⲧϥ [ˈtʲas-ṯf] "exalt him"; ABLS ⲥⲱⲧⲡ [ˈso-tp̱], F ⲥⲱⲡⲧ [ˈso-p̱t] "choose" vs. ALM ⲥⲁⲧⲡⲥ [ˈsat-p̱s], BS ⲥⲟⲧⲡⲥ [ˈsɔt-p̱s], F ⲥⲁⲡⲧⲥ [ˈsap-ṯs] "choose it."

Bohairic has ⲉ before a sonant where the consonant is syllabic in other dialects: e.g., FLS ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅, M ⲥⲟⲧⲙ̅ [ˈso-tm̱, ˈsɔ-tm̱] vs. B ⲥⲱⲧⲉⲙ [ˈso-təm] "hear." In Akhmimic, a final syllabic sonant is regularly replaced by the sonant plus ⲉ: A ⲥⲱⲧⲙⲉ [ˈso-tmə].

1.10 Greek Words

Many Coptic texts contain Greek words in Coptic transcription. Some are used for concepts for which the Egyptian language had no precise lexical counterpart, such as ⲡⲟⲛⲏⲣⲟⲥ "evil" (πονηρός) and ⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ "believe" (πίστευε). Others are more common words, such as the particle ⲇⲉ (δὲ) "and, but." When transcribing Greek words, Coptic scribes often adopted the contemporary Greek pronunciation rather than the Classical one represented by Greek spelling: for example, S ⲇⲓⲕⲉⲟⲥ "just" (Prov. 12:10; Greek δίκαιος) and B ⲭⲁⲣⲁⲕⲧⲏⲣ "mark, sign" (Girgis 1967–68, 61; Greek χαρακτήρ), reflecting the κοινή pronunciations [ˈði-kɛ-ɔs] and [xa-rak-ˈtir] rather than the Classical [ˈdi-kaj-ɔs] (with voiced [d]) and [kʰa-rak-ˈtɛːr]. This suggests that the pronunciation of Greek loanwords was most likely that of contemporary (κοινή) Greek: i.e., ⲁⲓ [ɛ], ⲏ/ⲉⲓ/ⲟⲓ/ⲩ [i], ⲫ [f], and ⲭ [x]: thus, Coptic ⲏⲓ "house" [ɛj] but Greek ⲏ (ἤ) "and, or" [i].

Exercise 1

Below is the Coptic text of the "Lord's Prayer" (Matt. 6:9–13) in Saidic, Bohairic, and Oxyrhynchite with phonemic transcription below the Coptic, divided into syllables, with stress indicated. Practice pronouncing the text.

Saidic

ⲠⲈⲚⲈⲒⲰⲦ ⲈⲦϨⲚ̅Ⲙ̅ⲠⲎⲨⲈ ⲘⲀⲢⲈⲠⲈⲔⲢⲀⲚ ⲞⲨⲞⲠ

/pɛn-i-ot′ ɛt-ḥn-m-pe′-uɛ ma-rɛ-pɛk-ran′ u-ɔp′/

our-father who-in-the-skies may-your-name be-holy

ⲦⲈⲔⲘ̅Ⲛ̅Ⲧ̱ⲢⲞ ⲘⲀⲢⲈⲤⲈⲒ ⲠⲈⲔⲞⲨⲰϢ ⲘⲀⲢⲈϤϢⲰⲠⲈ

/tɛk-mnt-r-rɔ′ ma-rɛs-i′ pɛk-uoš′ ma-rɛf-šo′-pɛ/

your-kingdom may-it-come your-will may-it-happen

Ⲛ̅ⲐⲈ ⲈⲦϤϨⲚ̅ⲦⲠⲈ ⲘⲀⲢⲈϤϢⲰⲠⲈ ⲞⲚ ϨⲒϪⲘ̅ⲠⲔⲀϨ

/n-thɛ′ ɛt-f-ḥn-tpɛ′ ma-rɛf-šo′-pɛ ɔn ḥi-dm-pkaḥ′/

in-the-way that-it-in-the-sky may-it-happen also on-the-earth

ⲠⲈⲚⲞⲈⲒⲔ ⲈⲦⲚⲎⲨ ⲦⲀⲀϤ ⲚⲀⲚ Ⲙ̅ⲠⲞⲞⲨ

/pɛn-ɔ′-ik ɛt-neu′ ta:f nan m-pɔw′/

our-bread that-is-coming give-it to-us today

ⲔⲰ ⲚⲀⲚ ⲈⲂⲞⲗ Ⲛ̅ⲚⲈⲦⲈⲢⲞⲚ

/ko nan ɛ-bɔl′ n-nɛt-ɛ-rɔn′/

throw out the-which-against-us

Ⲛ̅ⲐⲈ ϨⲰⲰⲚ ⲞⲚ ⲈⲦⲈⲚⲔⲰ ⲈⲂⲞⲗ Ⲛ̅ⲚⲈⲦⲈⲞⲨⲚ̅ⲦⲀⲚ ⲈⲢⲞⲞⲨ

/n-thɛ′ ḥo:n ɔn ɛt-ɛn-ko′ ɛ-bɔl′ n-nɛ-tɛ-un′-tan ɛ-rɔu′/ (ⲞⲨⲚ̅ for [′wn̲])

in-the-way ourselves also that-we-throw out the-which-we-have against-them

Ⲛ̅Ⲅ̅ⲦⲘϪⲒⲦⲚ̅ ⲈϨⲞⲨⲚ ⲈⲠⲒⲢⲀⲤⲘⲞⲤ

/ng-tm-di′-tn ɛ-ḥun′ ɛ-pi-ras-mɔs′ (Greek πειρασμός)/

and-you-not-take-us in to-temptation

ⲀⲗⲗⲀ Ⲛ̅Ⲅ̅ⲚⲀϨⲘⲈⲚ ⲈⲂⲞⲗ ϨⲒⲦⲘ̅ⲠⲠⲞⲚⲎⲢⲞⲤ

/al-la′ (Greek ἀλλὰ) ng-naḥ′-mɛn ɛ-bɔl′ ḥi-tm-ppɔ-ne-rɔs′ (Greek πονηρός)/

but and-you-save-us out from-the-evil

Bohairic

ⲠⲈⲚⲒⲰⲦ ⲈⲦϦⲈⲚⲚⲒⲪⲎⲞⲨⲒ ⲘⲀⲢⲈϤⲦⲞⲨⲂⲞ Ⲛ̀ϪⲈⲠⲈⲔⲢⲀⲚ

/pɛn-i-ot′ ɛt-xɛn-ni-pʰe′-ui ma-rɛf-tu-bɔ′ n-dɛ-pɛk-ran′/

our-father who-in-the-skies may-it-be-made-holy namely-your-name

ⲘⲀⲢⲈⲤⲒ Ⲛ̀ϪⲈⲦⲈⲔⲘⲈⲦⲞⲨⲢⲞ ⲠⲈⲦⲈϨⲚⲀⲔ ⲘⲀⲢⲈϤϢⲰⲠⲒ

/ma-rɛs-i′ n-dɛ-tɛk-mɛt-u-rɔ′ pɛ-tɛḥ-nak′ ma-rɛf-šo′-pi/

may-it-come namely-your-kingdom the-which-you-want may-it-happen

Ⲙ̀ⲪⲢⲎϯ ϧⲉⲛⲧⲫⲉ ⲛⲉⲙϩⲓⲭⲉⲛⲡⲕⲁϩⲓ
/m-pʰre′-ti xɛn-pʰɛ′ nɛm-ḥi-ḏɛn-pkaḥ′-i/
In-the-manner in-the-sky and-on-the-earth

ⲡⲉⲛⲱⲓⲕ Ⲛ̀ⲧⲉⲣⲁⲥϯ ⲙⲎⲓϥ ⲛⲁⲛ Ⲙ̀ⲫⲟⲟⲩ
/pɛn-o′-ik n-tɛ-ras′-ti me′-if nan m-pʰɔu′/
our-bread of-the-morrow give-it to-us today

ⲟⲩⲟϩ ⲭⲁ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲣⲟⲛ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ
/uɔḥ kʰa nɛt-ɛ-rɔn′ nan ɛ-bɔl′/
and throw those-which-against-us for-us out

Ⲙ̀ⲪⲢⲎϯ ϩⲱⲛ ⲉⲧⲉⲛⲭⲱ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ Ⲛ̀ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲉⲟⲩⲟⲛ Ⲛ̀ⲧⲁⲛ ⲉⲣⲱⲟⲩ
/m-pʰre′-ti ḥon ɛt-ɛn-ko′ ɛ-bɔl′ n-ne′ ɛt-ɛ-uɔn′ n-tan′ ɛ-ro′-u/
In-the-manner ourselves that-we-throw out those that-are with-us against-them

ⲟⲩⲟϩ Ⲙ̀ⲡⲉⲣⲉⲛⲧⲉⲛ ⲉϧⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲁⲥⲙⲟⲥ
/uɔḥ m-pɛr-ɛn′-tɛn ɛ-xun′ ɛ-pi-ras-mɔs′ (Greek πειρασμός)/
and don't-bring-us in to-temptation

ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲛⲁϩⲙⲉⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲁⲡⲓⲡⲉⲧϩⲱⲟⲩ
/al-la′ (Greek ἀλλά) naḥ′-mɛn ɛ-bol′ ḥa-pi-pɛt-ḥo′-u/
but save-us out with-that-which-wicked

Oxyrhynchite

ⲡⲉⲛⲓⲟⲧ ⲉⲧϩ̄ⲛⲙⲡⲏ ⲡⲉⲕⲣⲉⲛ ⲙⲁⲣⲉϥⲧⲟⲩⲃⲁ
/pɛn-i-ɔt′ ɛt-ḥn-m-pe′ pɛk-rɛn′ ma-rɛf-tu-ba′/
our-father who-in-the-skies your-name may-it-be-made-holy

ⲧⲉⲕⲙ̄ⲛⲧⲉⲣⲁ ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲥⲉⲓ ⲡⲉⲧⲉϩⲛⲉⲕ ⲙⲁⲣⲉϥϣⲟⲡⲉ
/tɛk-mnt-ɛ-ra′ ma-rɛs-i′ pɛt-ɛḥ-nɛk′ ma-rɛf-šɔ′-pɛ/
your-kingdom may-it-come the-which-you-want may-it-happen

Ⲛ̀ⲑⲉ ⲉⲧϣⲁⲡ ϩ̄ⲛⲧⲡⲏ ⲙⲁⲣⲉⲥϣⲟⲡⲉ ϩⲓⲭ̄ⲛⲡⲕⲉϩⲉ
/n-tḥɛ′ ɛt-šap′ ḥn-tpe′ ma-rɛs-šɔ′-pɛ ḥi-ḏn-pkɛḥ′-ɛ/
in-the-way that-is in-the-sky may-it-happen on-the-earth

ⲡⲉⲛⲁⲉⲓⲕ Ⲛ̀ⲣⲉⲥⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲉⲓϥ ⲛⲉⲛ Ⲙ̀ⲡⲁⲟⲩ
/pɛn-a′-ik n-rɛs′-tɛ ma′-if nɛn m-pau′/
our-bread of-morrow give-it to-us today

ⲕⲱ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ Ⲛ̀ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲣⲁⲛ
/ko′ ɛ-bal′ n-nɛt-ɛ-ran′/
throw out those-which-against-us

Ⲛ̀ⲑⲉ ϩⲱⲛ ⲉⲧϣⲁⲛⲕⲱ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ Ⲛ̀ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲛ̄ ⲉⲣⲁⲩ
/n-tḥɛ′ ḥon ɛt-šan-ko′ ɛ-bal′ n-nɛ-tɛ-un′-tn ɛ-raw′/ (ⲟⲩⲛ̄ for [ˈwn̠])
in-the-wayourselves that-usually-we-throw out those-which-we-have against-them

ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲛ̄ⲧ̄ⲛ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲁⲥⲙⲟⲥ
/a-uoʼ m-pr-nʼ-tn ɛ-ḥunʼ ɛ-pi-ras-mɔsʼ (Greek πειρασμός)/
and don't-bring-us in to-temptation

ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲛⲉϩⲙⲛ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ ⲛ̇ⲧⲁⲧϥ ⲙ̇ⲡⲡⲟⲛⲏⲣⲟⲥ
/al-laʼ (Greek ἀλλά) nɛḥʼ-mn ɛ-balʼ n-tatʼ-f m-ppɔ-ne-rɔsʼ (Greek πονηρός)/
but save-us out from-his-hand of-the-evil