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The Egyptian-Coptic language: its setting in space, time and culture*

Abstract: The goal of this article is to provide the non-Egyptological reader with some background information about the Egyptian-Coptic language, focusing on its genealogical affiliations and diachrony, as well as the types of texts in which the language is attested. For a typologically-oriented overview of some central aspects of Egyptian-Coptic language structures, see Haspelmath (this volume).

1 Genealogical affiliations

Egyptian-Coptic was the native language of the population of the northern Nile valley in antiquity. It is considered to represent an autonomous branch of the Afroasiatic phylum (Loprieno 1995; Voigt 1999; Hayward 2000). It is a dead language, and has been one since the 14th century or so, when its last speakers shifted to Arabic; however, it remains in use as a liturgical language. As such, Egyptian-Coptic is by definition a *text language* (Fleischman 2000). While some discussions of Egyptian-Coptic refer to "vernacular" or "spoken" varieties, it is important to stress that modern scholarship has no direct access to any form of the language as it was spoken at any stage (Kammerzell 1998; Richter 2006b).

The remote but clear relationship with the Semitic language family is visible in phonological traits as well as in shared patterns of word formation and morphosyntax (Loprieno 1995).[1] The list of accepted lexical cognates includes several hundred items (Schenkel 1990).[2] There is also evidence of a historical – but not necessarily genealogical – relationship between Egyptian-Coptic and Indo-European (Kammerzell 2005).

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1 On the growing awareness of the genealogical relations of Egyptian with Near Eastern and African languages in 19th-century Egyptology, cf. Richter's paper in this volume.

2 A typological discussion of a phonological issue relating to the identification of Semitic-Egyptian cognates is provided in Gensler's article in this volume.

The genealogical relation of Egyptian with African language families such as Berber, Cushitic and Chadic languages is usually not disputed. However, the precise nature of the relationships is not very clear, at least in part due to the large chronological gap between the attestation of Egyptian and the earliest attested African languages. Currently, Ancient Egyptian does not figure prominently in genealogically- or typologically-oriented areal studies of African linguistics (e.g., Heine & Nurse 2000, 2008 or Dimmendaal 2011).

Further reading: *Semitic-Egyptian relations*: Takács 2004; Militarev 2007; *Afroasiatic-Egyptian relations*: Kammerzell 1995 & 1996; Loprieno 2008; Loprieno & Müller 2012; Mendel & Claudi 1991; Peust 2004; Quack 2002; Satzinger 1999; Takács 1999–2008 & 2004; Vernus 1988 & 2000.

2 Diachrony

The Egyptian-Coptic language is attested in a vast corpus of written texts that almost uninterruptedly document its lifetime over more than 4000 years, from the invention of the hieroglyphic writing system in the late 4th millennium BCE, up to the 14th century CE. Egyptian is thus likely to be the longest-attested human language known.

Traditionally, Egyptologists distinguish two macro-phases in Egyptian-Coptic, Earlier and Later Egyptian (Loprieno 1995; Loprieno & Müller 2012, Allen 2013). "Earlier Egyptian" refers to Old and Middle Egyptian, including varieties of the latter that continued to be used until the end of Pharaonic civilization. "Later Egyptian" comprises Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic. However, the non-Egyptological reader should be aware that the linguistic and sociohistorical nature of Egyptian diachrony are a matter of considerable debate. Moreover, the dates given are approximate and tend to differ somewhat from linguist to linguist.

The main distinguishing feature separating the two macro-phases is generally considered to be a sort of holistic morphosyntactic typology: Earlier Egyptian is seen as synthetic, Later Egyptian as analytic, and – eventually – agglutinating. This distinction is generally considered with respect to the noun phrase, on the one hand, and the verb phrase on the other. Moreover, some scholars have proposed "a diachronic tendency to replace VSO-synthetic structures by SVO-analytic structures" (Hintze 1947 and 1950; Loprieno 1996, 2000 and 2001; Reint-

ges 2012)[3], although other scholars have disputed the analysis of Earlier Egyptian syntax as VSO and Later Egyptian as SVO (Shisha-Halevy 2000).

A detailed presentation is found in Kammerzell 2000: 97, reproduced as Figure 1:

PRE-OLD EGYPTIAN		32nd–27th cent. BCE
EARLIER EGYPTIAN	Old Egyptian	27th–21st, 7th cent. BCE
	Archaic Old Egyptian	27th–22nd cent. BCE
	Standard Old Egyptian	25th–21st cent. BCE
	Neo-Old Egytian	7th cent. BCE
	Middle Egyptian	23th cent. BCE–4th cent. CE
	Early Middle Egyptian	23rd–20th cent. BCE
	Classical Middle Egyptian	21st–14th cent. BCE
	Late Middle Egyptian	20th–13th cent. BCE
	Transitional Middle Egyptian	15th–12th cent. BCE
	Neo-Middle Egyptian	11th cent. BCE–4th cent. CE
LATER EGYPTIAN	Late Egyptian	14th–7th cent. BCE
	Late Egyptian I	14th–12th cent. BCE
	Late Egyptian II	13th–7th cent. BCE
	Demotic	8th cent. BCE–5th cent. CE
	Early Demotic	8th cent.–4th cent. BCE
	Middle Demotic	4th–1st cent. BCE
	Late Demotic / Old Coptic	1st cent. BCE–5th cent. CE
	Coptic	3rd–20th cent. CE
	Standard Coptic	3rd–12th cent. CE
	Late Coptic	11th–16th cent. CE
	Neo-Coptic	19th–20th cent. CE

Figure 1: Chronolectal division of Egyptian (Kammerzell 2000)

To be sure, both subdivisions of Egyptian-Coptic linguistic history are broad and imprecise. However, it is important to stress that they do capture real and sig-

3 On this development which was first noticed, and described as restructuring from *Hinterbau* to *Vorderbau*, by Ewald (1861 and 1862), and was integrated in a more sophisticated concept of Egyptian diachrony by Erman (1880), cf. also Richter's article in this volume, § 7–§ 8.

nificant linguistic differences between the different phases of Egyptian-Coptic, since one occasionally finds unjustified doubts about the matter in non-specialist literature.[4]

2.1 An overview of the major stages of Egyptian-Coptic

2.1.1 Old Egyptian (including Archaic Egyptian or "pre-Old Egyptian")

Archaic Egyptian, or "Pre-Old Egyptian", is the language of the earliest Egyptian texts from the Early Dynastic Period (Dynasties 1–3, roughly the first third of the 3rd millenium BCE).[5] The cultural changes culminating in the early state formation in the Nile valley during the late fourth millennium BCE provided the soil on which a native writing system, hieroglyphs, developed. While many particulars about the initial process of the turn from pictograms and symbols into representations of sounds and grammar in the late Predynastic Period (late 4th millennium BCE) are still debated (Baines 2007; Dreyer 1999; Kahl 1994; Morenz 2004; Vernus 1993), and the sound values of some early hieroglyphs are still unknown, short texts written in a fairly standardized, basically phonological script are found in the Early Dynastic Period (first third of the 3d millennium BCE). Although the newly invented device was first applied to very short textual units, such as nominal designations of items, short lists, and brief funerary formula, the earliest specimens of Egyptian language provide more evidence for lexical items than for elaborate grammar. While some scholars prefer to subsume them under the label of Old Egyptian, there are some hints of a more significant difference between the language of these documents and that of Old Kingdom texts (Kahl 2000, 2001a); particularly striking are phonological differences between Archaic or "Pre-Old

4 E.g., "[the distinction between Late Egyptian and Coptic is] associated with literary and graphic sources rather than with linguistic features *per se*" (Dimmendaal 2011: 70, apparently based on Hayward 2000: 78, which has a similar wording).

5 Egyptian history is traditionally subdivided into four main periods: Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, and Late Period, with so-called 'Intermediate Periods' in between, the first Intermediate Period separating the Old and Middle Kingdoms; the second one separating the Middle and New Kingdoms, and the third one separating the New Kingdom and the Late Period. The Old Kingdom is preceded by the Pre-Dynastic and the Early Dynastic periods. The Late Period is followed by the Hellenistic (Ptolemaic), Roman, and Islamic periods. Although political developments as reflected in this periodization did affect the use of linguistic norms, there is of course no straightforward correspondence between the aforementioned chronolects and those periods.

Egyptian" and Old Egyptian (Kammerzell 1998, 2005). Archaic Egyptian language data are not dealt with in this volume, but see Gensler's article referring to a pre-archaic stage of the Egyptian language.

Old Egyptian is the language of texts of the Old Kingdom of Egypt (Dynasties 4–8, corresponding to the mid- until late 3rd millennium BCE). Old Egyptian is the first phase of the Egyptian language phase that provides us with a significant quantity of texts. However, the textual repertoire is still very limited in terms of genre and accordingly, in terms of of linguistic registers represented in the written record. Apart from some traditional textual genres, which were already fairly well-established by then – nominal designations, short lists and funerary formula – two large text corpora form the basis for our knowledge of Old Egyptian. First, the corpus of the Pyramid Texts, a collection of about 750 spells, recorded in the burial chambers of pyramids of the late 5th and 6th dynasties (ca. 2500–2200 BCE). These spells were to serve the ritual transfiguration of the dead king into a divine being able to enjoy eternal life in the beyond. Their attitude is that of the voice of a funerary priest, fixed and materialized in the medium of script to address the king and to award him eternal life by a perpetual performative speech act ("O thou [king] NN, get up, etc."). Thus the corpus of Pyramid Texts is the main sample of interlocutive (or even allocutive) speech in Old Egyptian. Most examples of constructions encoding the addressee speech role (e.g., 2nd person forms) come from this corpus. The language of the Pyramid Texts is usually considered to represent an earlier language stage than that of the other, roughly contemporary corpus of Old Egyptian texts, so-called autobiographies (Gnirs 1996; Kloth 2002). This genre of funerary texts emerged in 4th-dynasty non-royal tombs, evolving from earlier types of (oral and written) text (Assmann 1983; Baines 1999a). The autobiographies, which extol the virtues and merits of a tomb owner as if spoken by himself, developed into more sophisticated and extensive narratives during the 5th and 6th dynasties (ca. 2350–2150 BCE). Autobiographies are our main evidence for the narrative system of Old Egyptian (Doret 1986; Osing 1977; Zonhoven 2003).[6] Only little evidence of non-monumental, everyday writing is extant from the Old Kingdom, although we have specimens of, e.g., economic records related to temple administration (Posener-Kriéger 1968, 1976, 2004; Posener-Kriéger et al. 2006) and letter writing. Old Egyptian language

6 The most extensive of these texts, the autobiography of *Wni* (on which cf. Eyre 1994; Hofmann 2002; Richards 2004), was Adolf Erman's source when he first explored the linguistic features of Ancient Egyptian, and the morphosyntactic relations between Egyptian and Semitic languages, cf. Richter's article in this volume, § 8.

data are dealt with in the papers of Güldemann, Idiatov, Loprieno, Peust, Reintges, and Stauder in this volume.

Further reading: (*Archaic Egyptian*) *Lexicon*: Kahl 2002–2004 & 2003. *Grammar*: Kammerzell 2005; (*Old Egyptian*) *Lexicon*: Erman & Grapow 1926–1963; Hannig 2003; Schweitzer 2005; *Grammar*: Allen 1984; Doret 1986; Edel 1955–1964; Osing 1977; Schweitzer 2005; Zonhoven 2003.

2.1.2 Middle Egyptian

Middle Egyptian is the name given to the set of linguistic norms found in texts from the Middle Kingdom of Egypt (Dynasties 11–13, roughly the first third of the 2nd millennium BCE). Approximations to this norm continued to serve, in a number of varieties, as the basis of prestigious registers for purposes such as religious and funerary writing over the following two millennia up until Roman times. Middle Egyptian first emerges in texts of the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2200–1950 BCE) and the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1950–1750 BCE). It differs from Old Egyptian mainly in terms of phonology (Peust 1999; Kammerzell 2005), morphology, and lexicon, although recent work also highlights significant syntactic differences (Oréal 2010). The study of these changes is facilitated by the continuing tradition of certain textual genres, such as autobiographies and the huge funerary corpus of so-called Coffin Texts. The latter is a corpus of more than 1200 spells recorded on the inside of Middle Kingdom wooden coffins. These spells were intended to support the eternal life of non-royal persons, as the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts did for the king. In fact, many spells from the earlier collection of the Pyramid Texts continued to be transmitted, albeit with changes, in the Coffin Texts (Bickel & Mathieu 2004). The multiple transmission of the same spells in several text types, providing a range of textual and orthographic variation and thus allowing occasionally to suspend the systemic restrictions of hieroglyphic orthography, makes the Coffin Texts a particularly important source for the study of Middle Egyptian morphology and syntax (Schenkel 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004/5, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009; van der Molen 2000 & 2005, Vernus 1996a & 2004).

Compared to the range and diversity of written texts in the Old Kingdom, the application of writing and the textual repertoire expanded tremendously in Middle Kingdom Egypt. The spread of writing in the sphere of everyday life provides us with a fairly substantial corpus of non-literary texts, which bear evidence for linguistic registers that are less standardized, less conservative and more permeable to innovation (e.g., Allen 1994; Collier & Quirke 2002, 2006; Luft 1992). Among the innovative textual genres of the Middle Kingdom, the most

important ones are non-funerary royal texts (Blumenthal 1970), scientific treatises (Clagett 1989, 1995, 1999), and – most significant for linguistic study – the emergence of a kind of text that has been called, *cum grano salis*, Egyptian *belles-lettres* (Assmann 1974 & 1983; Blumenthal 1996 & 1998; Parkinson 2002; Posener 1956). Unlike other textual genres of Ancient Egypt that were formerly closely connected to delimited compartments of social practice, such as the cult of the dead, they cannot be assigned to any clear-cut *Sitz im Leben*. Linguistically, these "literary" or "belletristic" texts are distinctive for their reflection on and deliberate use of extravagant language (*mdw nfr* 'perfect speech' as they put it) and for their mixing of textual genres, such as autobiographical narrative, prayer and hymn, into text-linguistically hybrid units (Burkhard 1996; Collier 1996). Three sub-genres of Egyptian "literature" are usually identified according to formal and content-related criteria: teachings, discourses, and narratives (Moers 2001; Parkinson 1991 & 1996). Most standard grammars of Middle Egyptian heavily rely on this relatively small and rather atypical corpus of texts for their examples.

Post-New Kingdom applications of an Egyptian idiom supposed to meet the standard of Middle Egyptian are labeled by Egyptologists the term "Égyptien de tradition", "traditional Egyptian", "Neo-" or simply "Late Middle Egyptian" (cf. Vernus 1996b; Jansen-Winkeln 1996 & 2010). Middle Egyptian language data are dealt with in the papers of Güldemann, Haspelmath, Idiatov, Loprieno, Peust, Reintges, Stauder and Winand in this volume. "Égyptien de tradition" is touched upon in Peust's paper in this volume.

Further reading: *Lexicon*: Erman & Grapow 1926–1963; Faulkner 1962; Hannig 2006; *Grammar*: Allen 2010; Borghouts 2010; Gardiner 1957; Jenni 2010; Junge 1978; Malaise & Winand 1999; Schenkel 2012.

2.1.3 Late Egyptian

Late Egyptian is traditionally considered to be a register that was elevated to the rank of a written language during the Amarna period of the New Kingdom of Egypt (14th c. BCE), continued to be used, alongside *Égyptien de tradition*, during the later 2nd and earlier 1st millennium BCE (19th–25th Dynasties).

Late Egyptian differs structurally from Middle Egyptian more strikingly than any other Egyptian language phase from its predecessor. This has often been interpreted as indicating a long-term gap between the norms of written and spoken Egyptian. The relationship between Late Egyptian and various forms of Earlier Egyptian has been conceptualized as a kind of covert diglossic situation (Jansen-Winkeln 1995; Vernus 1996b), which became overt when typical Late Egyptian

features began to penetrate written registers, and, eventually, became consolidated as a relatively coherent system, albeit one with much internal variation. The first instances of certain "Late Egyptian" traits, such as the use of the definite article (*p3, t3, n3*) and possessive-marking by a paradigm of preposed possessive articles (cf. Haspelmath's paper in this volume) surface sporadically already in early Middle Kingdom texts (Kroeber 1970). The label "Late Egyptian" generally refers to texts of the later New Kingdom (19th–20th dynasties, corresponding to the 13th–11th century BCE) and the Third Intermediate Period (21st–25th dynasties, corresponding to the 11th–7th centuries BCE) that share a number of such traits, while otherwise representing rather different norms (Goldwasser 1999). Texts dealt with under this label include genres as different as royal inscriptions from the Amarna period (2nd half of the 14th century BCE) and the Ramesside period (19th–20th dynasties, roughly the 13th–11th century BCE), private hymns and prayers, a number of narratives and "fairy tales" (Hintze 1950–1952), literary texts of the teachings type and of the new genre of love songs, and a substantial corpus of non-literary texts, including private letters and legal documents, administrative documents and records of criminal procedures. One of the standard grammars of Late Egyptian, Černý & Groll (1984), takes a narrow approach to Late Egyptian, limiting its corpus to non-literary texts, while the majority of scholars, notably the "Liège school" of Egyptian language study (Polis & Winand 2013), take a more comprehensive approach, defining Late Egyptian as a label applying to any written registers at least partly open to the norm of everyday life texts of the time. Late Egyptian language data are dealt with in the papers of Collier, Güldemann, Haspelmath, Idiatov, Loprieno, Stauder and Winand in this volume.

Further reading: *Lexicon*: Erman & Grapow 1926–1963; Hoch 1994; Lesko 1982–1990; Winand 1999; *Grammar*: Erman 1933; Černý & Groll 1984; Junge 1999; Neveu 1998; Satzinger 1976; Winand 1992.

2.1.4 Demotic

Demotic is the name of a set of language norms whose appearance in the mid-7th century BCE (early 26th dynasty) is closely connected to the introduction of a new chancellery writing style, distinct from the hieratic cursive (cf. below §§ 5.2 and 5.3). While the other designations have been invented for (such as Old, Middle, and Late Egyptian), or applied to (such as Coptic), Egyptian language phases only in recent times, the name Demotic is an antique designation for an Egyptian writing style. It was chosen by the Greek geographer Herodotus (ca. 450 BCE) to

distinguish two Egyptian writing styles, *hierá grámmata* 'sacred characters' and *demotiká grámmata* 'ordinary characters'. In the first three hundred years after its inauguration in the mid-7th century, thus still during the time of which Herodotus could have had some knowledge, Demotic (both in the sense of a distinct style of cursive writing and of a stage of the Egyptian language) was in fact a medium restricted to administrative and private day-to-day writing, i.e., "ordinary", as opposed to religious and funerary, purposes. Although it was at first reserved for administrative writing, Demotic became gradually used for literary writing (teachings, narratives) and religious texts (cf. Hoffmann & Quack 2007). The latest Demotic text, at the same time the latest datable specimen of any hieroglyph-based Egyptian script, is a visitor's inscription at the Isis temple of Philae from the year 452 CE. In the wake of the influential "Berliner Schule" of Egyptology (cf. Richter's paper in this volume, § 8) Demotic was mistakenly considered as an artificial extension of written Late Egyptian with no connection to actual language change (Grapow 1938; Stricker 1945), and its study was marginalized in Egyptology for quite a while. Johnson (1976) has strikingly shown that Demotic must be the link between Late Egyptian and Coptic, and this view has been fully corroborated more recently (Quack fc. [a]; Simpson 1996). Demotic language data are dealt with in the papers of Grossman, Idiatov, Loprieno and Winand in this volume.

Further reading: *Lexicon*: The Demotic Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago: http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/cdd/; Clarysse 1987; Erichsen 1954; Johnson 1999; Vittmann; 1996; Vleeming 1987; *Grammar*: Johnson 1976 & 2000; Quack fc. (a); Simpson 1996; Spiegelberg 1925.

2.1.5 Coptic

Coptic is the last language phase (ca. 4th century CE – ca. 14th century CE) of the Egyptian-Coptic language, starting with the alphabetization of written Egyptian on the basis of the Greek script, and ending with the language shift of Egyptian native speakers to Arabic in the Middle Ages. The process of *neuverschriftung* of Egyptian during the first centuries CE, resulting in the more or less complete standardization of several Coptic dialects around 300 CE, accompanied (or partially resulted from) a major change in the domain of religion, namely, the rise and spread of Christianity in Egypt. Next to Greek, Latin, and Syriac, Coptic became one of the most important languages of ancient Christian literature. Biblical books and other early Christian texts were translated into and composed in Coptic. A substantial corpus of monastic literature, including normative writings such as

homilies, sermons, and rules, as well as narratives, has come down to us. Other types of narrative include martyrdoms and miraculous stories commemorating the virtues and deeds of saints. In addition, writings of "heretical" movements, such as Manichaeism and Gnosticism, survived (often exclusively) in Coptic manuscripts. Besides its significance as a written medium of literary texts, Coptic also served as the vehicle of written communication related to everyday life. Massive finds of papyri and ostraca in Egypt have brought us many thousands of Coptic documentary texts, such as administrative records, legal documents, and private letters. These texts afford us a precious glimpse of a range of registers, including highly colloquial and informal language, as well as of the idiolectal usage of individual scribes. Coptic language data are dealt with in the papers of Grossman, Haspelmath, Idiatov, Loprieno, Peust and Winand in this volume.

Further reading: *Lexicon*: Černý 1976; Crum 1939; Förster 2002; Kasser 1964; Quack 2005; Richter 2006a; Vycichl 1983; Westendorf 1965. *Morphophonology*: Funk 2009; Vergote 1973–1983. *Grammar* (*Sahidic dialect*): Lambdin 1983; Layton 2004; Polotsky 1987/90; Reintges 2004a; Shisha-Halevy 1986 & 1988; Steindorff 1894 and 1951; Till 1955.

3 Dialects and intradialectal variation

There is little hard evidence for the written representation of distinct geographical dialects before Coptic, although it has been proposed that Earlier Egyptian reflects a northern dialect, Late Egyptian a southern one (Peust 1999: 33; Feder 2005). However, it is only in Coptic that we observe significant differences between dialects. Coptic can be divided into a dozen or so highly standardized written dialects (Funk 1988 & 1991; Kasser 1991c). The best attested Coptic dialects are Sahidic, Bohairic, Akhmimic, Fayyumic, Oxyrhynchitic (also known as Mesokemic or Middle Egyptian), and Lycopolitan (formerly "Subakhmimic"), which is in fact a group of closely-related but distinct dialects. In addition, there are a number of dialects which are sparsely attested, and are generally known by alphabetical sigla (e.g., Dialect I) rather than geographically-based names. Within a particular dialect group, subdialects are often distinguished by number, e.g., L4/L5/L6 for the three major Lycopolitan varieties. The following map (Figure 2) gives an idea

of where some of these dialects likely originated, based on a study of 33 variables (Funk 1988).[7]

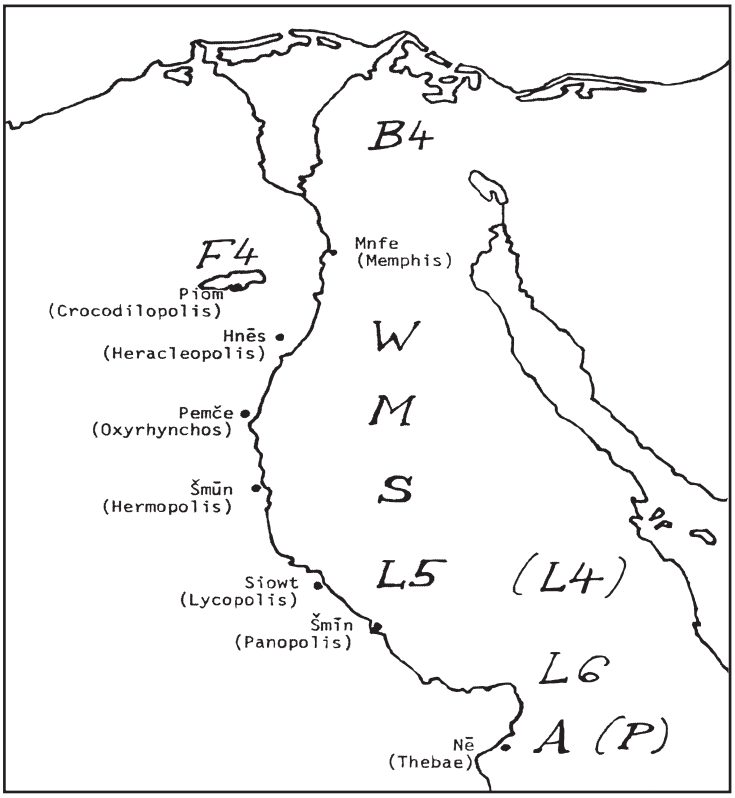

Figure 2: Coptic dialectal geography (Funk 1988)

Many literary and non-literary texts show considerable variation from the norms of the standardized dialects. Interestingly, these "destandardized" texts often show distinctive regional characteristics. For example, Sahidic texts produced in the monasteries of the Fayyum often show particular features, some of which can be attributed to the influence of the Fayyumic dialect. Documentary texts from Thebes (Nē, Thebae) are often strikingly different from comparable texts originating from Ashmunein (Šmūn, Hermopolis).

The regionalization of Egyptian written standards and the occurrence of destandardized norms are not very visible in pre-Coptic Egyptian, although recent

7 See Funk (1988) for important reservations about this map.

work on Demotic may shed more light on this issue. This change in the visibility of diatopic and diastratic variation might be the result of historical changes in the sociolinguistic status of Egyptian during the first millennium CE, which was that of a socially and functionally restricted, recessive language variety, used in certain milieux, for certain purposes, alongside a dominant prestige language, Greek, until the 7th century CE, followed by Arabic.

Further reading: *Bohairic dialect*: Stern 1880; Mallon 1956; Shisha-Halevy 2007. *Lycopolitan dialects*: Chaîne 1934; Nagel 1969 & 1991b; Funk 1985. *Akhmimic dialect*: Rösch 1909; Till 1928; Nagel 1991a. *Fayyumic dialect(s)*: Kasser 1991e; Till 1930. *Middle Egyptian dialect*: Quecke 1974; Funk 1981; Schenke 1978 & 1991. *Dialectal geography*: Funk 1988; Hintze 1984; Kasser 1991c, d & f.

4 Language contact

It is likely that there was never a time in which Egyptian-Coptic was not in contact with other languages. The traces of such contact can be seen throughout its history, although the transparency of the evidence varies. According to some scholars (e.g., Kammerzell 2000, 2005), Old Egyptian proper was the result of contact between languages of different genealogical stocks. Northwest Semitic loanwords are particularly visible in Late Egyptian, and to an extent, in Demotic. Peust has identified a "Napatan" variety of Egyptian from ancient Nubia, influenced by a substrate language.

From the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, due to political changes, contact-induced language change became a more prevalent tendency in Egyptian, notably its lexicon. It is Coptic that is most transparently a "language in contact", having borrowed thousands of Greek loanwords of almost all basic root-types and semantic fields (Kasser 1991g; Oréal 1999; Reintges 2001, 2004b). In the 8th and 9th centuries CE, occasional Arabic loanwords indicate incipient Coptic-Arabic contact, and later Coptic texts from the 10th and 11th centuries, the time when parts of the indigenous population of Egypt began to shift from their native language to Arabic, bear evidence of intensified borrowing from Arabic (Richter 2006a, 2009).

Interestingly, Egyptian-Coptic seems to have influenced languages of the area as well. Kammerzell (2001a, 2001b & 2001c) has suggested that Egyptian influenced West Semitic languages, and perhaps, indirectly, Indo-European languages.

Further reading: *Semitic loanwords in Egyptian*: Hoch 1994; Quack 2005; Vittmann 1996. *Non-Semitic loanwords in Egyptian*: Knigge 2004; Schneider 2004a & 2004b. *Greek-Egyptian language contact*: Feder 2004; Fewster 2002; Fournet 2009; Hasznos 2012; Papaconstantinou 2010; Peremans 1964 & 1983; Rutherford 2010; Satzinger 1984; Torallas Tovar 2010; Vierros 2012. *Greek Loanwords in Egyptian*: Almond 2010; Clarysse 1987; Dils et al. (fc.); Kasser 1966 & 1991g; Oréal 1999; Reintges 2001 & 2004b. *Egyptian Loanwords in Greek*: Fournet 1989; Torallas Tovar 2004. *Arabic loanwords in Coptic*: Richter 2006a. *Coptic substrate of Egyptian Arabic*: Behnstedt 1981; Bishai 1960, 1961, 1962 & 1964; Ishaq 1991; Lucas & Lash 2010; Vittmann 1991.

5 Writing systems

Egyptian-Coptic is attested in a number of native (Betrò 1996; Cruz-Uribe 2001; Schenkel 1984) and non-native writing systems. The most important are sketched in the following sections.

5.1 Hieroglyphs

Hieroglyphs, (a term found in classical authors such as Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, and Clemens Alexandrinus: *hieroglyphiká* [*grámmata*] 'sacred carved letters'): The native Egyptian writing system is one of the few original, unprecedented writing systems in the history of writing, and next to the cuneiform script the most ancient one, emerging from symbolic codes as early as in the late 4th millennium BCE (Dreyer 1999; Kahl 1994; Morenz 2004). The inventory of hieroglyphic signs includes several hundreds of mostly pictorial signs, representing e.g., men, women and gods in different outfits and occupations, parts of the human body, domestic and wild animals, birds, fishes, reptiles and invertebrates and various animal body parts, plants and parts of them, items of the natural environment, and all kinds of artefacts. The standard catalogue of hieroglyphs, the sign-list of Gardiner (1957), comprises 734 signs. However, much smaller repertoires were usually sufficient to write texts. On the other hand, religious texts authored in circles of the priestly élite were complicated by unconventional uses of signs and newly-invented signs, notably the encyclopedic textual universes as carved into the walls of the temples of the Graeco-Roman period, when the number of signs rose to several thousand.

As Kammerzell and Lincke (2012) stress, Egyptian graphemes can fulfill a structured range of functions, based on two parameters: their autonomy and their meaningfulness (cf. Figure 3). Hieroglyphic signs can convey *semantic* values related to their pictorial content (*semograms*), or *phonological* values derived from a word designating the depicted item (*phonograms*), or either of both depending on usage (cf. Figure 4 and 5).

Semograms could be used as logograms, i.e., to write the word designating the depicted item. They were also part of an elaborate system of graphemic classifiers, traditionally called "determinatives" in Egyptology (Goldwasser & Grinevald 2012; Kammerzell & Lincke 2012). Classifiers were written after words (thereby serving as a word division marker) and were to assign words to semantic categories, such as "divine being", "male human being", "female human being", "animal", "bird", "fish", "place-related item", "time-related item", "foreign person/item", "vessel", "textile", "mineral", "grain", "motion verb", "violent action", etc.

Phonograms could encode one consonantal phoneme (uniliteral signs) or a sequence of two consonants (biliteral signs) or even three (triliteral signs, although many triliteral phonograms can also be interpreted as logograms). Phonograms had two main functions: to represent the elements of a consonantal skeleton of lexical and grammatical items, on the one hand (the "autonomous" function, in Kammerzell and Lincke's terms), and, as "interpretants" (traditionally called "phonetic complements"), to redundantly represent elements of sound structure already present in writing. The following figure is a schematic representation of sign functions of Egyptian graphemes:

	[+meaningful]	**[–meaningful]**
[+autonomous]	logograms (inaccurately: "ideograms")	phonograms (in the narrower sense)
[–autonomous]	classifiers (inaccurately: "determinatives")	interpretants ("phonetic complements")
	semograms	phonograms (in the wider sense)

Figure 3: Sign function classes in written Egyptian (Kammerzell & Lincke 2012)

An alphabetic set of uniliteral signs covering the complete (consonantal) phoneme inventory of Egyptian was available, but was never used exclusively.

Grapheme type	Gardiner, Sign-list A1: Seated man	Transcription	Meaning
Semogram: logogram		z	'man'
Semogram: classifier		–	'male person'
Phonogram		.y	(suffixed pronoun 1SG.M)

Figure 4: Hieroglyphic sign Gardiner, sign-list A1, its semographic and phongraphic use

Grapheme type	Gardiner, Sign-list D21: Mouth	Transcription	Meaning
Semogram: logogram		r3	'mouth'
Semogram: classifier	–	–	–
Phonogram		r	(alphabetic sign)

Figure 5: Hieroglyphic sign Gardiner, sign-list D21, its semographic and phonographic use

5.2 Hieratic (and cursive hieroglyphs)

Hieratic (the term applied to one of the Egyptian scripts by Clement of Alexandria: *hieratikṓn grammátōn méthodos* 'sacerdotal script') is the conventional name of the Ancient Egyptian cursive writing. Generally based on and following the orthographic conventions of the hieroglyphic system, the individual shapes of signs have been adjusted to the needs of swift writing on papyrus with the brush-like writing utensil used by Egyptian scribes, leading to more abstract, less pictorial shapes of signs and ligatures (cf. Figure 5, third column). So-called *Cursive Hieroglyphs*, less cursive (and closer to the monumental types) than *Hieratic*, are a writing style especially used for funerary texts, such as Coffin Texts, the Book of the Dead, and royal funerary texts on the walls of the rock tombs of New Kingdom pharaohs in the Valley of the Kings.

5.3 The Demotic script

The Demotic script (to be distinguished from the language phase of the same name, cf. above, § 2.1.4) appeared in the 7th century BCE as a new chancellery script which was to replace late Hieratic (which persisted in the literary domain) in the sphere of day-to-day writing. Its Greek name is first attested in Herodotus' chapter on Egypt (*demotikà grámmata* 'ordinary characters' as opposed to *hierà grámmata* 'holy characters'); its native Egyptian name was *sḫ šꜥ.t* 'document script'. Over time it gained more functions, being used for, e.g., narrative and wisdom literature, religious and funerary texts. The main principle of the Demotic script is formal simplification of signs, with the effect of a considerable decrease in the diversity of shapes (down to about 30 or 40 basic types composed of elements such as vertical, horizontal and oblique strokes, loops, dots etc.), and accordingly, an increase in ambiguity of the meaning of single signs (cf. Figure 6, fourth column). This holds true for both of the two functional types of sign, phonograms and classifiers. The comprehensibility of Demotic is thus strongly depending on standard spellings of whole words, rather than of their components, and in fact Demotic was taught and learned word-by-word, as Demotic school exercises show.

5.4 The Coptic script

The Coptic script was the final result of a shift from hieroglyph-based Egyptian writing systems – all of them, the monumental script and its cursive decendents, still being used in the 4th century CE – firstly to a multitude of idiosyncratic Greek-based systems, the so-called Old Coptic alphabets of the first centuries CE, (Kasser 1991b; Quack fc. [b], Quaegebeur 1982; Richter 2009; Satzinger 1984), and eventually to a few standardized Coptic alphabets around 300 CE (Kasser 1991a). While Late Antiquity saw a remarkable multiplication and spread of alphabets throughout the eastern Mediterranean and beyond, usually derived from either the Greek or the Aramaic alphabet, we are mostly dealing with cases of *first alphabetization*, this is to say, the first time a spoken language was provided with a written medium and thus with the possibility of a literature of its own. *Coptic*, on the other hand, is one of the rare cases of *replacement* of an established writing system by a new one. The Coptic alphabet includes the twenty four characters of the Greek alphabet plus six (Bohairic: seven) letters derived from Demotic signs (cf. Figure 6, right column).

Gardiner, Sign list	Hieroglyphic	Hieratic	Demotic	Coptic
M8: pool with lotus flowers				ϣ (*š*)
I9: horned viper				ⲫ (*f*)
F18:tusk (+ Y1: tied and sealed payrus roll)				ϩ (*h*)
U28: fire drill				ⲭ (*č*)
V31: wickerwork basket with handle				ϭ (*c*)
D37: forearm with hand holding a loaf (+ X1: bread)				ⲧ (*t*)
M12: stalk and leaf of lotus				Bohairic only: ⲯ (*χ*)

Figure 6: Palaeographical change of Hieroglyphic characters in cursive writing, and the six (Bohairic: seven) letters supplementing the 24 Greek letters of the Coptic alphabet.

5.5 Other, non-native scripts

In conjunction with cultural and language contact, Egyptian-Coptic words, phrases and even texts were occasionally transcribed in cuneiform, West Semitic writing systems, Greek, Latin, Arabic, and other scripts.

Further reading: *Hieroglyphs*: Goldwasser 1995 & 2001; Loprieno 1995: 11–27; Schenkel 1984, 1994, 2003; 2011 & 2012: 31–63. *Classifiers*: Goldwasser 2002, 2005, 2006, 2009; Goldwasser & Grinvald 2012; Goldwasser & Müller 1999; Kammerzell 1999; Kammerzell & Lincke 2012; Lincke 2011; Smoczynski 1999. *Hieratic*: Schenkel 1994. *Demotic*: Betrò 1996; Quack (fc. [a]); Schenkel 1994; Stadler 2008. *Coptic*: Felber 2008; Kasser 1991a & 1991b; Quaegebeur 1982; Richter 2009.

6 Concluding remarks

The model of two diachronic macro-phases, comprising five discrete language phases, rests on a fairly sound empirical basis, and has some practical merits. Still, it is a real simplification of linguistic reality, and some aspects of Ancient Egyptian linguistic history are hardly reflected by it. The idea of discrete diachronic stages is challenged by the heavy and long-term diglossia of written Egyptian after the Middle Kingdom. Furthermore, there is considerable internal variation and evidence for ongoing language change, both at the seams of the successive stages and *within* each of the stages. For example, studies have demonstrated that Coptic, which is generally considered to be more or less stable over its thousand-year history as a written language, clearly shows significant diachronic changes (Grossman 2007, 2010); it has also been proposed that language change is visible within Old Egyptian (Kammerzell 2005), Middle Egyptian (Doret 1986), Late Egyptian (Groll 1982; Winand 1995), and Demotic (Quack fc. [a]).

In general, recent scholarship has tended to move away from a broad holistic diachronic conception based on discrete stages, and towards a more fine-grained construction- or feature-oriented approach, combined with a heightened awareness of the importance of sociohistorical parameters for the study of variation. Such perspectives have tended to identify continuous long-term change rather than abrupt shifts or ruptures.

Whatever the empirical validity of the schemes presented above, we think it is helpful for the non-Egyptological reader to have a basic acquaintance with them, since they are used – with or without reservations – by all linguists and philologists working on Egyptian.

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