

Coptic 0 resolutions from the meeting in Leiden, September 2, 2000

Prof. Stephen Emmel
5 October 2000

At its business meeting on 2 September 2000, at the end of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, held at the University of Leiden, in The Netherlands, the International Association for Coptic Studies passed the following resolution unanimously:

0Coptic is a writing system that developed from the Greek script, but claims script status of its own and therefore also deserves disunification from Greek in ISO/IEC 10646-1, for the following reasons:

01. Coptic is the language and writing system of a living religious community, the Coptic community, whose diaspora now extends from Egypt southward into Africa and north and west throughout Europe and into the Americas. The Coptic church is autocephalous. A very active scholarly community investigates the language, literature, history, etc. of Coptic civilization in Egypt, and produces editions and studies of Coptic texts in ever increasing numbers.

02. Over seventeen centuries, a rich and flourishing tradition of graphic representation of Coptic, independent of Greek, came to characterize Coptic document-production, in manuscripts as well as in print. Coptic typography started in Europe as early as 1629, distinct from Greek in layout and typeface.

03. The Coptic writing system uses glyphs such as cannot be found in any reasonable Greek font.

04. The Coptic writing system has features that are alien to Greek. Especially the superlinear elements of the system behave differently from Greek accent and breathing marks. Therefore, it is impossible to administer Coptic text by means of Greek characters.

05. The Coptic community, both religious and secular, and the international community of scholarship dedicated to Coptic studies (Coptology), have been engaged in the electronic processing of textual data for many years already. There is an increasing number of projects worldwide that create and maintain textual databases in Coptic and are interested in exchanging textual data on the basis of the Universal Character Set, such as:

Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari: <http://rmcisadu.let.uniroma1.it/~cmcl> Packard Humanities Institute: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Texts/papyrus.html> Biblioth0que Copte de Nag Hammadi: <http://www.ftsr.ulaval.ca/bcnh/> St. Shenouda the Archmimandrite Coptic Society: <http://www.stshenouda.com>

06. Coptic authors and writers lived in a shared environment together with Greek authors, and so Coptic literature developed in close contact with the Greek-speaking people of ancient Egypt. Therefore it is natural and unavoidable that in Coptic text editions and in studies in the field of Coptology, quotations of Greek text form an integral part; technically, Coptic is processed contiguously with Greek. Coptic text-processing requires, by definition, a clear-cut distinction between Coptic and Greek passages within the same context, which is best realized by a distinction of coded characters on plain text level.

0Therefore, the International Association for Coptic Studies (IACS) requests the Unicode Technical Committee and the Working Group 2 in ISO/IEC JTC1/SC2 to disunify Coptic from Greek in the Universal Character Set. The IACS is prepared to provide expert advice and guidance in the matter of defining a Coptic character set, for the mutual benefit of Unicode and Coptic studies.0

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me. Although my four-year term as president of the IACS came to its prescribed end at the recent IACS business meeting, I was immediately elected to serve as secretary for the next four years, probably with extensions for many years thereafter. Hence I will remain your appropriate contact person at the IACS at least for the next decade. I am also one of the authors of the

resolution quoted above, and I have long been in the forefront of efforts among Coptologists to set standards for the electronic processing of Coptic texts.

Sincerely yours,

Stephen Emmel

Secretary, International Association for Coptic Studies Professor für Koptologie,
Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Institut für Ägyptologie und Koptologie,
Schlaunstrasse 2, D-48143 Münster, Germany (phone +49 251 8324940 or 8324537; fax +49 251
8329933) Editor, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies (Leiden: E.J. Brill); Sprachen und
Kulturen des Christlichen Orients (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag); Journal of Coptic Studies
(Leuven: Peeters Press)

Stephen Emmel emmstel@nwz.uni-muenster.de

