



## REVIEW

### GREEK INFLUENCE ON EGYPTIAN-COPTIC: CONTACT-INDUCED CHANGE IN AN ANCIENT AFRICAN LANGUAGE

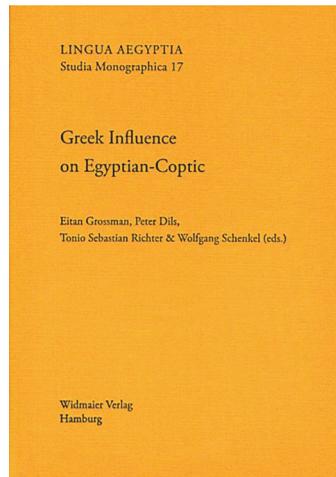
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The influence of Greek on the Coptic language is obvious from the outset. If the script itself were not evidence enough, then the frequent and (mostly) fluent use of Greek lexemes in Coptic texts would surely give it away. However, the obviousness of this simple fact belies a deeper complexity, which has not been fully acknowledged in much of the scholarship on Coptic. How extensive is the relationship between Greek and Egyptian? When did it arise, and what can that teach us about the Coptic language itself? Is the Egyptian example typical of

language contact scenarios, or is Coptic a historical oddity? Is Coptic truly a hybrid of Egyptian and Greek? What can general linguistic studies of language contact say about Coptic, and how can the specific example of Egyptian inform these broader studies in turn? Questions such as these (and many others) trace their way through the nineteen papers in the four sections of this volume, bringing new attention to this subject.

Though the subjects of the chapters vary considerably, combining them in this volume provides a summary of the diverse lines of reasoning and sources of evidence relevant to any discussion of foreign influence on Egyptian. The book also



serves as a validation of the *Database and Dictionary of Greek Loanwords in Coptic* (DDGLC) project (<http://research.uni-leipzig.de/ddglc/>), showcasing the variety and importance of the research that this exciting new tool enables. The eras covered in this book range from the New Kingdom to the Medieval Period, from Late Egyptian to the final impact of Egyptian Arabic. However, the chapters are not organized chronologically, but appear to have been arranged in order of their relevance to the various scholarly communities

invested in the study of Coptic. In this spirit, the book begins with a few reexaminations of established subjects, such as Quack's overview of the history of the Coptic script, and increases in specificity and novelty, ending with Richter's groundbreaking study of Arabic loanwords in Coptic. Here each chapter will be addressed in the order in which it appears.

Following a brief preface, in which the example of Egyptian-Coptic is described as "the most broadly attested case of language contact in antiquity" (p. vii), the book proceeds directly to a discussion of language contact. Muysken's chapter provides a framework for subsequent considerations by

establishing scenarios for contact and borrowing. These scenarios categorize various types of interaction between speakers of different languages, with a particular view toward socio-linguistic concerns. His method of organizing different sorts of language contact (Table 1, pp. 6–7) enables specific predictions about the character and degree of borrowing that should be expected for a given scenario, which in turn enables the categorization of the language contact scenarios for Coptic. The results refine existing consensus views on the asymmetrical social and political relationship between Greek and Egyptian speakers in antiquity. Bagnall's chapter follows this with a more specific examination of social interactions between these two groups. This chapter begins the book's second section, "Views on Language Contact in Roman and Byzantine Egypt," but, given its affinity to the material in Muysken's chapter, those two should be seen as a pair.

Next is Quack's substantial discussion of the development of the Coptic script, "How the Coptic Script Came About." As a summary of the evidence, this chapter is a valuable resource for Coptologists and Egyptologists; as a historical overview, it is sure to become a standard introductory text for students of Coptic. At seventy pages, it is long enough to fully address the diverse sources of evidence required to understand this enormous topic, but not so long that it becomes unwieldy. It is also complemented by high-quality photographs (many in full color) of the relevant papyri, which emphasize the immediacy of the evidence. These primary sources are combined with evidence from the secondary literature to present a vivid and accessible account of the development of Coptic. Evidence from both Demotic and Old Coptic is presented within the main text of the chapter, making it simple for the reader to comprehend the argument at hand without having to follow a reference to another source. The self-contained nature of this presentation will surely make it a standard text for years to come. It stands apart in the breadth of its scope, and unfortunately, this short review can only skim the surface of what has been offered.

From there, the book dives more deeply into specific questions. Tovar's admirable consideration of the evidence for borrowing of Egyptian lexemes into Greek makes the most of a limited resource. Her brief chapter confirms this reader's prior suspicion that borrowing of Egyptian was generally an *ad hoc* process, which contrasts strongly with the continuous relationship in the other direction.

However, much more could be said about what value the subject might have for the analysis of Egyptian phonology (consider what an example such as ἀέντιον might say about the presence of pharyngeal consonants in later stages of Egyptian). Though the data are limited, there is still potential for further research on this topic to provide important insights.

Zakrzewska's chapter addresses many difficult questions regarding the study of Coptic, tying this subject to modern political concerns by means of a vivid illustration of a children's choir singing the Egyptian national anthem in Arabic and Coptic (p. 135). Social issues, both modern and ancient, wend their way throughout the book as a whole, and this chapter offers the most direct treatment of this theme. In particular, the relevance of this issue to questions about the proliferations of Coptic dialects (pp. 140–141 *et passim*) emphasizes the deeply connected nature of these questions to the study of language proper.

The following section, "Borrowing from Greek into Coptic," represents a shift toward a more linguistic and philological focus. Almond's chapter opens the topic with a discussion of Greek adjectives, a particularly fraught subject due to the imperfectly understood historical processes that led to the disappearance of the Egyptian adjective in later stages of the language. Almond's careful analysis of the various adjectival constructions in Greek and their Coptic equivalents advances the discussion considerably, although there is still some (perhaps unavoidable) circularity in applying the consensus understanding of Coptic adjectives as nouns to Greek loanwords (e.g., p. 176).

Egedi continues the evaluation of specific parts of speech with the integration of Greek verbs. This is a subject that arises throughout the book (cf. Zakrzewska's argument on p. 120 and Funk's on p. 378). Two issues appear again and again: the use, especially in Bohairic, of periphrastic constructions with Greek infinitives (e.g., ΕΡΕΠΙΘΥΜΙΝ, p. 197), and the etymological form of the bare Greek verb stem of Sahidic (e.g., ΠΙCΤΕΥΕ, p. 197; cf. p. 122). Both of these questions are addressed on multiple occasions in distinct ways. Unfortunately, this is one case in which the general practice of including cross-references is not diligently observed. The reader who wishes to extract the different perspectives on these questions will have to do a great deal of searching. Fortunately, the two most extensive discussions of these topics appear in Egedi's chapter and in

Grossman and Richter's chapter, which follows directly, and whose title, "Dialectal Variation and Language Change," appropriately summarizes its thesis. Hasznos' chapter follows with a renewed consideration of the linguistic environment of the Coptic period with emphasis on verbs of exhorting. Most notably, his argument downplays the importance of the conjunctive in this role, while paradoxically presenting evidence for its prominence in certain registers (Table 5, p. 259). Taken together, these three chapters (pp. 195–264) provide a thorough overview of the major questions regarding the use of Greek verbs in Coptic.

The following two chapters address other parts of speech (connectors and causal discourse markers), which do not fit neatly into a single category, as Müller acknowledges straightaway (p. 265). On the whole, these chapters resist summarization because of the precise nature of the subject matter, but one concept stands out and provides an appropriate characterization of the discussions found here. Both Müller and Oréal note that the word for "but" (Greek ἀλλά) is borrowed easily, in contrast to *a priori* expectations regarding the borrowability of conjunctions. A possible explanation arises from a consideration of pragmatics. The use of a foreign word emphasizes contrast by standing apart from its native context, which in turn emphasizes the contrastive meaning of the conjunction itself. This and many other novel observations ground the abstract and wide-ranging subject matter of these chapters among readily accessible interpretations.

Grossman and Polis continue the discussion of borrowing for specific parts of speech, paying special attention to prepositions (more generally, adpositions), using the approach of polysemy networks. Their method is certainly innovative, but it also demands that the reader invest considerable effort in order to comprehend it. It should be asked whether this problem requires such an abstract theoretical model when the most pressing questions can be analyzed by means of standard arguments. For instance, the phenomenon of allomorphy in Coptic prepositions might be informed by a philological explanation of their etymologies, with recourse to the linguistic principle of backformation to explain un-etymological forms. The absence of allomorphy in Greek loans follows naturally from this line of reasoning and requires no further explanation. These sorts of arguments overshadow the insights produced by polysemy networks, with the result that their effectiveness is mostly limited to

the finer points, while other nagging questions slip by undetected.

The next three chapters together form the subsection "Borrowing and Dialectal Variety of Coptic." All focus on some aspect of differential borrowing in various Coptic dialects. Funk's chapter reprises the previous discussions of loan verbs while adding some new observations. Bosson considers a specific subdialect of Bohairic, B4, using a data-driven approach. Boud'hors analyzes Fayyumic documentary texts using the *Brussels Coptic Database*.

The final subsection of section 3, "Author and Genre," comprises only two short chapters. Shisha-Halevy considers the use of Greek in Shenoute. Despite its narrow scope, this chapter contains several remarkable points of interest, such as the surprising lack of etymologies for much of the Coptic lexicon (p. 442). Perhaps his most important observation is that Greek elements in Coptic need not retain any connection to their original Greek antecedents. This crucial realization informs this chapter and any other discussion of borrowing in Coptic. Behlmer's chapter appropriately follows that of Shisha-Halevy and contrasts the different loanwords found in Shenoute and Besa.

Finally, the book turns to other examples of foreign influence on Egyptian, namely borrowings from Semitic languages. However, the label "Semitic" assigned to both Levantine borrowings into Late Egyptian and Arabic borrowings into Coptic obscures the obvious differences between these two phenomena. Winand considers the earlier case of Semitic loanwords in Late Egyptian. His analysis utilizes statistical data and a close consideration of individual lexemes to challenge the traditional means of identifying borrowings through their use of syllabic writing (among other factors, p. 482). Richter's chapter, presumably placed last because it has the thinnest connection to any other section, finishes the book on a high note. By taking a serious look at the influence of Arabic on later stages of Coptic, he has opened a new avenue for exploration. This chapter is sure to be essential reading for anyone with an interest in Coptic phonology.

Though the topics addressed in this volume are quite varied, frequent cross-references greatly simplify the reader's task of connecting the material into a unified whole. However, the chapters themselves often depend on one another in unexpected ways. Except in a few notable cases, it would not be prudent to consider any single chapter

from this volume on its own, and the cross-references are often essential for placing these arguments in their proper context. The result is an eclectic mix of topics, which function together as a whole. However, its incredible scope and the inclusion of innovative methodologies make it highly relevant to any question on the study of the Coptic language. The extent of Greek influence on

Coptic impacts some of the most pressing questions in Egyptology, Coptology, and many other related fields. The present volume addresses this subject directly, challenging assumptions that have gone unexamined for far too long. The novel methods and tools presented here have already advanced this research considerably and will surely continue to propel the field forward for the foreseeable future.