


Mallon, A. Grammaire copte, avec bibliographie, chrestomathie et vocabulaire. 2nd ed. Beirut, 1907.


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ALPHABETS, OLD COPTIC. The group of texts designated OLD COPTIC does not represent a linguistic unity, but on the contrary a motley collection of essays spaced out between the first and fourth centuries AD. Chronologically they most frequently predate literary Coptic, but sometimes, though rarely, are contemporary with its beginnings. However that may be, through their character as isolated essays tentatively made, not very systematic or even practically unsystematic, and through their language, in which one observes a significant proportion of pre-Coptic features, they all logically represent a stage prior to that of literary Coptic, including proto-Coptic. The latter is already systematic and makes its appearance in the form of PROTO DIALECTS, many of which have disappeared without leaving any traces, but two of which are nevertheless attested by Coptic documents that have survived the vicissitudes of the tormented history of the Copts: DIALECT I (proto-Lycopolitan) and DIALECT P (an alphabetically and phonologically archaic idiom that often looks like what can be known about a proto-Sahidic, tentatively reconstructed and considered immigrant into the Theban region).

In these circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that each of the Old Coptic texts attests a particular Coptic alphabet (or if one prefers, a particular variety of Coptic alphabet). It is reasonable to suppose that all these alphabets included all the Coptic letters of Greek origin—a supposition and not a certainty, because these very ancient texts are generally too short for each to attest all these Greek graphemes. But there is no reason to suspect that one or more of these Greek letters was systematically eliminated in one or another of these alphabets, as is the case in the Coptic alphabet of a late text like that which attests DIALECT H (cf. ALPHABETS, COPTIC, SYNOPSIS table), which lacks the r, A, and Z of Greek origin. All these Old Coptic alphabets included letters of demotic origin, generally in larger numbers than the Coptic alphabet properly so called, especially since the varieties of Old Coptic have at the same time a number of phonemes more significant than that of the Coptic idioms (the evolution proceeding logically toward phonological and graphical simplification and hence toward a reduction in the number of phonemes and graphemes). The synopsis table of Old Coptic alphabets (Table 1), which includes all the Old Coptic texts that are available and makes use of letters of demotic origin, will make this evident.

The sigla for the texts used in this table are as follows: Schm. = the Schmidt Papyrus (first-second century); Hor. = the London Horoscope Papyrus (first-second century); Mich. = the Michigan Horoscope Papyrus (second century); Mun. = the Munich Papyrus (schoolbook?] second century); Ox. = the Egyptian Oxyrhynchus Papyrus (second century); Mum. = the two mummy labels in Berlin (second century); Illum. = the Illuminated Papyrus (third century); DMP = the Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden (third-fourth century); Par. 1 = first non-Greek section of the Paris Magical Papyrus (fourth century); Par. 2 = second non-Greek section (but not the third and last) of the Paris Magical Papyrus (fourth century).

To the alphabets of these ten texts properly designated Old Coptic are added here, by way of comparison, those of the only two protodialects surviving in Coptic, P and I, because both have preserved certain phonemes of Old Coptic that later disappeared in
Table 1. Synoptic Table of Old Coptic Alphabets, with Commentary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Schm.</th>
<th>Hor.</th>
<th>Mich.</th>
<th>Mun.</th>
<th>Ox.</th>
<th>Mum.</th>
<th>Mim.</th>
<th>DMP.</th>
<th>Par. 1</th>
<th>Par. 2</th>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>( i )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 /k/</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 /q/</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 /s/</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ø?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ø?</td>
<td>Ø?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 /u/</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 /s/</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(L)?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 /ch/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ø?</td>
<td>(X)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(In the following, “A.C. table” refers to the synoptic table in ALPHABETS, COPTIC.)

Line 1 (A.C. table, l. 10): Hor. generally has \( z /k/ \) and \( z /c/ \), but this text tends to confuse these two phonemes, since one also finds several \( z \) for \( /k/ \) and (more rarely) \( z \) for \( /c/ \). Mich. is so phonetically that one cannot be sure here of its witness. Did Mim. also use, alongside \( z \), a kind of \( z /f/ \) (cf. Kasser, 1980, p. 265)? DMP. generally has \( z /k/ \) and \( z /c/ \), but one also finds some \( z /k/ \) (confusion of the two phonemes).

Line 2 (A.C. table, l. 13b–13c): Hor. has \( z /c/ \), while \( P \) has it rather for \( /n/ \).

Line 3 (A.C. table, l. 25): In Schm. the choice of a /s/ for /s/ is strange (in demotic /s/ renders /s/ and also /t/) (C. Bourguet, 1976, p. 82).

One of the texts of Mum. is written from right to left, with all but three of its letters equally turned from right to left, but \( 3 \) remains without inversion; the second text is written from left to right, with its \( 5 \) just as it is. In Mim., in one case, the editor of the text indicates the presence of an \( s / \) (as in \( P \)) in place of \( s / \), but it is preferable to take no account of this reading (at this point the text is almost entirely erased, and the photo shows no trace to allow us to confirm this assumption, however weak). Par. 1, a single example, has perhaps the clumsy draft of a \( s / \) or a \( s / \) (rather than \( a \) or still less \( a \), Kasser, 1980, p. 267).


Line 5 (A.C. table, l. 27): In Schm. generally, the ancient \( h \) is rendered by \( a /h/ \) (of a very particular form; Kasser, 1980, p. 257), and the ancient \( h \) by \( h \). In Ox., the ancient \( h \) is generally \( a /h/ \), and the ancient \( h \) is \( /h/ \). The ancient \( h \) is rendered by a \( /h/ \) in DMP. (two cases), also by \( a /h/ \) (one case), and for preference before a vowel (supplementary details in Kasser, 1980, p. 268). In Par. 2, \( L \) is placed only rarely "before" the vowel that phonologically follows it; most often it is placed above it (like the Greek epigraphic rough breathing, which it much resembles and of which it might eventually be a variant); it also happens that the scribe replaces this \( L \) above the line by a simple "acute accent" or again that he forgets it altogether.

Line 6 (A.C. table, l. 28): In Schm. \( a /h/ \) has the form of a large Greek \( a / \). In Mim. the regular form is decidedly \( a / \) (the two \( x / \) read by the editor of the text are extremely doubtful). In Par. 1, \( /s/ \) is normally rendered by \( \& / \) (two cases), but also (through phonological confusion of \( /g/ \) and \( /c/ \)) by \( s / \) (two cases) or even by \( x / / \) (one case, through the influence of the contemporary Coptic alphabet).

Line 7 (A.C. table, l. 29): Mich. very uncertain.

Line 8 (A.C. table, l. 30): Nothing.

Line 9 (A.C. table, l. 31): In Hor. three cases only, all rather doubtful (phoneme that could be \( /g/ \), grapheme more or less resembling \( a / \) or \( a /h/ \) (Kasser, 1980, p. 264)). In Ox., the possibility of a \( 1 \) remains too hazardous (ibid., p. 264).

Line 10 (A.C. table, l. 34): Hor. presents three cases where \( h / \) is written in place of \( s / \) and perhaps a further case where \( s / \) is written in place of \( s / \) (confusion between the phonemes \( /s/ \) and \( /c/ \)). The only \( h / \) of Mich. is in a context extremely (perhaps excessively) obscure. It is not very likely that \( h / \) of Ox. ever renders \( x / / \) (Kasser, 1980, p. 267). In DMP. there is always \( ? / \) a case where \( /s/ \) is rendered by \( h / \).

Line 11 (A.C. table, l. 35): In DMP there is an uncertain \( h / \) (two cases), a certain \( ? / \) (one case), and a probable \( a / \) (one case). In Par. 2, if \( x / \) regularly renders \( h / / \), it also renders \( x / / \), two out of three times, \( x / \) rendering it (more correctly) only one out of three times (tendency toward the neutralization of the opposition of the phonemes \( /h/ \) and \( /x/ \) in favor of the sole survival of a uniform \( /h/ \)).


Line 13 (no corresponding line in AC table): With regard to DMP, see above, line 5.
Coptic; P even has in its alphabet such a large number of letters typical of Old Coptic that it reaches a total alphabet of at least thirty-five graphemes. This is thus an alphabet as rich as the richest of the Old Coptic alphabets (excluding exceptional graphemes; see below), that of Hor., with its thirty-five letters; one might even say that P has thirty-six graphemes if one admits that the k /k/ of its Coptic-Greek vocabulary is to be distinguished from the k /c/ of its autochthonous vocabulary, the first developing from the Greek k, and the second from a demotic grapheme (see du Bourguet, 1976, p. 75, sign for g, first variant).

To facilitate comparison, the order of the phonemes is that of the final sections in the syncopic table of Coptic alphabets (only nos. 25–36 are concerned), except for /k/ and /h/, placed right at the beginning, and /h/, placed at the very end. In the table hereafter, the sign = indicates that instead of rendering /t/ by a single grapheme, the text in question renders it by two letters, TI, “gem.” signifies that /t/ is rendered not by a grapheme of its own (like D in Hor. [7] and P) but by the second element of a graphic vocalic gemination (see ALEPH).

In this presentation of the graphemes typical of Old Coptic, each is given in a standardized form and no account is taken of its numerous particular graphic variants (sometimes very perceptibly remote from one another); so far as 6 is concerned, it has been fixed in the form that it habitually has in Coptic, although in Old Coptic this form is generally much closer to that (the most usual) of the demotic grapheme for /f/ (du Bourguet, 1976, p. 3), especially with its stem strongly inclined toward the right. Furthermore, the signs are limited to those that appear regularly in these texts (or nearly so); it has not been judged indispensable to include also certain rare forms of Old Coptic graphemes whose use is occasional (or even, in most cases, exceptional) and does not seem to have any particular phonological significance (these unusual forms appear above all in Schm., Hor., Ox., DMP, and Par. 1; further details will be found in Kasser, 1980, pp. 256–57).

Right at the end, in the count of the total number of the graphemes of each Old Coptic alphabet (and of the two proto-Coptic alphabets P and J), account is taken only of the graphemes of demotic origin that appear fairly regularly in these texts (as just explained), and it is assumed with regard to each text that the alphabet it uses had the full complement of the twenty-four letters of Greek origin, according to the assumption made above.

The majority of the graphemes of Old Coptic alphabets presented here are considered, as has been said, as being certainly of demotic origin; for others (especially k /k/; y /h/; x /k/ and, above all, sometimes even j /c/ in Coptic, if not in Old Coptic), even if their appearance is wholly that of graphemes of Greek origin, one may strongly suspect that it is a case of signs of demotic origin having been entirely assimilated graphically to Greek letters that resemble them and have influenced their graphic form.

This series of letters will now be reviewed in the following order: first the graphemes of Greek appearance; then the letters of demotic origin utilized in Coptic; and, finally, the graphemes of demotic origin (whether certain or possible), utilized only in Old Coptic, not in Coptic (the Coptic protoditector P, however, here rejoining the Old Coptic group).

In the enumeration of each of these signs below, there is first indicated, so far as possible, the precise demotic sign from which it derives or may be presumed to have derived; for these references to the demotic graphemes, the work cited will in each case be implicitly du Bourguet (1976, p. 75), where the “usual” graphic forms are presented on the left and their “variants” on the right. Thereafter, the name of the (Old) Coptic grapheme will be given: the name traditionally known in the case of the letters o, u, c, s, x, b, M used in Coptic and a name unknown and to be created in the case of the other letters. The latter has been done, where possible, in relation to the graphic form (which is certain because it can be observed) rather than to the phonological value (sometimes very uncertain and above all very variable from one Old Coptic text to another).

1. k /k/ could strictly speaking be the same grapheme as k /k/ (of Greek origin), /k/ and /c/ being phonologically close to one another and hence liable to be confused; but if that was not the case, the demotic original of k /k/ (not /k/) could be the first variant of the sign for g. Name assigned: kappaoid gina (easier to pronounce than the more exact “kappaoid k(y)ima”).

2. y /h/ (or /h?), always at the beginning of a word, is not very likely to be the same grapheme as y /y/ (of Greek origin), and even if one must record that (with very rare exceptions in F and M) in Coptic y alone (hence not preceded by x, e, or n and not in any case oy) can only be found in a Coptic-Greek word and that at the beginning of a word the Greek y always has the rough breathing, equivalent (the most normal spelling in Sahidic, etc.) to gy in Coptic. This y could thus be a distor-
tion of the Greek epigraphic rough breathing ἃ, placed above the γ and finally confused with it; but this γ /h/ could better still have a demotic origin: see the third of the variants of the sign for ḥ. Name assigned: \textit{Y-shaped grapheme}.

3. \(\chi /\chi/\) could strictly be the same grapheme as \(\chi /\kh/\), corresponding to some local Greek pronunciation; if not, there is some chance that it issued from the fourth variant of the demotic sign for ḥ. Name assigned: \textit{chioid kai} or \textit{chioid kai}. A

4. \(\chi /\epsilon/\) is phonologically so remote from \(\chi /\kh/\) (of Greek origin) that their confusion appears very unlikely (even if one ventures to suppose a local Greek pronunciation in which \(\kappa > \iota\) and \(\varkappa > \varkappa\), hence \(\kh > \varkappa\) \(\varkappa > \epsilon\)); it is more reasonable to make this \(\chi /\epsilon/\) derive from the demotic sign for \(\delta\), first variant (slightly inclined to the left). Name assigned: \textit{chioid janta}.

5. \(\lambda \!/h/\) will evidently be interpreted first of all as a variant (in truth not rare) of the Greek epigraphic rough breathing (the more so since in Old Coptic one finds \(\lambda \!) not only as a letter placed between the other graphemes of its line but also as an “accent” placed above graphemes in its line, as the rough breathing would be placed). One cannot, however, exclude a demotic origin for this sign also: see the grapheme for \(\delta\), fifth or seventh variant (with the final “hook” cut off). Name assigned: \textit{L-shaped grapheme}.

6. \(\eta /\epsilon/\) derives from the demotic sign for \(\dot{s}\), third usual form (see also the fifth and eighth variants). Traditional name: \textit{shai}.

7. \(\dot{i} /\epsilon/\) evidently derives from the same sign as \(\eta\), but completed by a diacritical element. Name assigned: \textit{crossed shai}.

8. \(\eta /\gamma/\) derives from the demotic sign for \(\gamma\), first variant (which is however clearly inclined toward the right, as is \(\gamma\) in its graphic form in Old Coptic; see above). Traditional name: \textit{fai}; in Old Coptic it could also, if preferred, be called \textit{incliined fai}.

9. \(\eta /\gamma/\) derives from the demotic sign for \(\delta\), first usual form. Traditional name: \textit{hais or khaio}.

10. \(\eta /\delta/\) derives from the demotic sign for \(\delta\), usual form (but not without some graphic evolution). Traditional name: \textit{hori}.

11. \(\eta /\delta/\) clearly derives from the same sign as \(\eta\) but is completed by a diaritical element. Name assigned: \textit{barred hori}.

12. \(\eta /\epsilon/\) derives from the demotic sign for \(\delta\), the first of the usual forms or the last of the variants (but in both with some graphic evolution). Traditional name: \textit{janta}.

13. \(\epsilon /\chi/\) (Coptic graphic form) /c/ derives from the demotic sign for \(\kappa\), the first of the usual forms (which has, however, a very small loop and stretches its upper antenna at length to the right, as is the case also with \(\epsilon\) in Old Coptic; see above). It is probable that this form of the Old Coptic \(\epsilon\) should not lead one to confuse it with the graphically very similar one that Par. 1 eventually uses for /c/ rather than for /c/ (see no. 30). Traditional name: \textit{gima}; in Old Coptic one may also call it, if preferred, stretched gima.

14. \(\epsilon /\kh/\) (only in \(\beta\), etc.) could be derived not from the demotic sign for \(\kappa\), but from the demotic sign for \(\delta\), the last of the variants, which resembles a bulging \(\alpha\) with the rounded part below and the two “horns” above (suppression of the left horn would in fact produce a kind of \(\epsilon\)). Name assigned: \textit{aspirated janta}.

15. \(\dagger /\iota/\) is generally considered as derived from the demotic sign for \(\iota\), the second or eighth of the variants (with considerable graphic evolution). It will, however, be remarked that this Coptic letter has exactly the form of the \(\dagger\) in Latin epigraphy, a compendium for /\iota/ more rarely for /\iota/ (cf. Kasser, 1984–1985); a strong graphic influence from the Latin compendium on the demotic sign, strangely absent from Old Coptic but adopted in Coptic, seems to be the least one can admit. Traditional name: \textit{ti}.

16. \(\dagger /\pi/\) is the customary form of the grapheme psi in the Greek manuscripts contemporary with the oldest Coptic manuscripts; all the same, after the adoption of \(\dagger /\iota/\) (a non-Greek grapheme) in Coptic, it was necessary to modify the form of the psi, \(\dagger\) \(\gamma\), to avoid confusion with \(\dagger /\iota/\). (The Coptic texts that still write \(\dagger /\pi/\), all very ancient, are rare.) Name assigned: \textit{tioid psi}.

17. \(\dagger /\iota/\) derives from the demotic sign for \(\iota\), the third of the usual forms, perhaps also influenced by the demotic sign for \(\iota\), the first of the usual forms or the first of the variants. Name assigned: \textit{reversed tau-shaped aleph}.

18. \(\varepsilon /\kappa/\) derives from the demotic sign for \(\kappa\), the second of the usual forms. Name assigned: \textit{zetoid kappa}.

19. \(\varepsilon /\sigma/\) derives from the demotic sign for \(\sigma\), the first of the usual forms. Name assigned: \textit{hyphen-shaped nu}.

20. \(\varepsilon /\eta/\) is the equivalent in Old Coptic most often for /\eta/, but also sometimes for /\eta/ or /\eta/, has particularly variable graphic forms (see above) and derives from the demotic sign for \(\eta\), the second usual form (see also the thirteenth and the twenty-sixth variants for /\eta/). Name assigned: \textit{3-shaped grapheme}.
21. 8, the equivalent in Old Coptic most often for /æ/; but also sometimes for /s/, derives from the
demotic sign for h, the first usual form. Name assigned: 6-spiraled grapheme.

22. 9, the equivalent in Old Coptic (Hor.) of /h/ or (DMP and less clearly) /x/, but systematically equivalent to /æ/ in proto-Coptic P (an inversion of the 8 presented just above?), derives from the demotic sign for h, the usual form (?) or first, third, or sixth variant (strongly developed on the graphic level), or eventually also from the demotic sign for h, tenth variant (?). Name assigned: 9-spiraled grapheme.

23. r /r/ probably also derives from some variant of a demotic sign, but which? For phonological reasons, one cannot compare it with the sign for r, second usual form, or the sign for f, third variant, or the sign for l, second usual form, or even the sign for h, fourth variant. Name assigned: fraction-stroke-shaped grapheme.

24. t /t/ (? in Mich.) does indeed seem to derive from the demotic sign for h, second usual form. Name assigned: stretched-capital-sigma-shaped grapheme.

25. it, the equivalent in Old Coptic of /h/ (Schm. and Ox.), or again perhaps /h/ (DMP), has particularly variable graphic forms: it may be almost vertical (Ox.) or more or less sloping (Schm.); its loop may be closed (Ox.) or less angular and largely open, in the manner of a demotic h (Schm., see further on). "t derives from the demotic sign for h, the usual form or the first of the variants (with, probably, a fairly clear influence from the sign for h, the second usual form; see also the fifth, sixth, and seventh variants, and again, phonologically incompatible, the sixth of the variants of the demotic sign for w). Name assigned: P-shaped grapheme, though one might specify in Ox. three-corner P-shaped grapheme, in Schm. inclined-open-P-shaped grapheme, or in a different way demotic-h-shaped grapheme.

26. f /f/ derives from the demotic sign for h, the third of the usual forms (and fifth and sixth variants). Name assigned: hook-shaped grapheme.

27. c /c/ derives from the demotic sign for d, a compromise (clearly evolved) between the first usual form and the last variant. Name assigned: minuscule-alpha-shaped grapheme.

28. w /c/ derives from the demotic sign for d, second usual form (graphically evolved). Name assigned: reversed-pi-shaped grapheme.

29. k /c/ perhaps derives from the demotic sign for k, the first or second variant (graphically evolved); it is difficult to see its origin in one or other of the variants of the sign for g. Name assigned: divided-triangle-shaped grapheme.

30. The grapheme of Mich. for /æ/ (?) and that of Par. 1 for /æ/ (?) (see no. 13 and Kasser, 1980, p. 269) are decidedly too doubtful to merit being studied here and named, given present knowledge.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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‘AYIN. ‘Ayin (= ') is the voiced laryngeal fricative (Vergote, 1945, pp. 10, 72–76, 79–80), the Arabic c.

It belongs to the phonological inventory of ancient and also later Egyptian, perhaps even as far as the beginnings of demotic (cf. Vergote, 1945, pp. 122–23, and 1973, pp. 31–32; du Bourguet, 1976, pp. 3–4, 75). However, it probably does not belong any longer to the phonological inventory of Coptic or even Pre-Coptic, not even as a CRYPTO-PHONEME, in contrast to ALEPH. (Hence, this discussion will set aside the hypothesis of those who have been tempted to see, or have actually thought to see, a phonemic survival of ' in the second element of the graphic vocalic gemination [see GEMINATION, VOCALIC] typical of certain lexemes belonging to S etc.)

Like the lost 3 or the revived */ (cf. ALEPH), 'ayin nonetheless plays an important role in Coptic phonology; its presence, although anterior to Coptic, has not only influenced the vocalization of contemporary Egyptian but has also often left its mark in the vocalization of certain Coptic dialects and subdialects. On the other hand, it will be noted that in numerous cases '/ itself has not entirely disappeared but has survived in some way, being transformed into */; this phonological aleph (in tachysyllabication) normally appearing in orthography (as a phenomenon of bradysyllabication) through the graphic doubling of the phonologic tonic vowel preceding this */ ('echo effect'), except in the final position (see below and SYLLABICATION).

Thus, according to Vergote (1973, pp. 30–33):