

Syllabic Consonants in Sahidic Coptic¹.

By W. H. WORRELL.

Consonants frequently function as sonants, even in the more familiar languages. Jespersen² says: „Wir haben daher zunächst *Silben ohne Vokal*; hier ist also ein Konsonant der Silbengipfel, und es versteht sich von selbst, daß als solcher häufiger einer aus den Klassen 4 und 5 (Nasale, *l*, *r*) als aus den anderen Klassen auftritt, die sich weniger leicht von ihrer Umgebung genügend abheben, um in Verhältnis zu ihnen als Sonoritätsgipfel gelten zu können.“ He cites as examples: *hatten, binden, Handel, haben, sieben, denken, cotton, cattle, noble, rhythm, chasm, bottom, bacon*, (Croatian) *smrt, prst, srna, brk, kerdo*³. Of course, consonants other than nasals, *l* and *r* may function as sonants: *grabs, holds, logs, stops, trots, rocks*. And not merely continuants, but even stop-consonants, may function as sonants: *grabbed, logged, stopped, rocked*⁴. And these may so function even at the beginning of a word: (dialectic) *gschwind, gsehen*. In Maghribi Arabic⁵ there is great variety of double consonantism at the beginning of words: *lbist, mhelt, ntint, mneddi, ḥdar, ḥṭar, ftah, ftilt, ḥfif, fṣer, shūn, khal, dhal, kbīr, qbel, qdā, qdimt, ktibt, ktīr, qta', bqā, bdā, tqaddem, tqīl*. Such things then are humanly possible, even though not always individually so. Some of these combinations are similar or identical with Sahidic Coptic combinations, assuming that Sahidic was pronounced exactly as spelled, and that the supralinear stroke is only a syllable-accent⁶:

ϣϣⲟⲧⲙ	— <i>fṣer</i>	ⲧⲉⲙⲟ	— <i>dhal</i>	ϣⲎⲟ	— <i>ḥdar</i>
ⲕⲎⲟⲧ	— <i>kbīr</i>	ⲕⲧⲟⲕ	— <i>qta'</i>	ⲡⲧⲟϩ	— <i>bdā</i>
	— <i>qbed</i>		— <i>qdā</i>	ⲧⲠⲓϥⲈ	— <i>tqīl</i>
	— <i>qbel</i>		— <i>ktibt</i>		— <i>tqaddem</i>
			— <i>qdimt</i>	ⲡⲎⲗϩ	— <i>bqā</i>
			— <i>ktīr</i>		

Unfortunately Coptic-Arabic equations can furnish little information, about Sahidic phonology, because Bohairic and Arabic phonology influenced Sahidic after about the tenth century; and Arabic loan-words in Sahidic, in so far as they remain truly Arabic, can have syllabic consonants at the end of a word only. The alchemistic text of CHASSINAT⁷ dates from the ninth or tenth century, and contains a considerable number of technical Arabic words, pronounced for the most part according to Egyptian vernacular. Among them are examples of syllabic consonants at the end of a word⁸:

ⲕⲟⲧϥⲧ	— <i>gust</i>	ⲙⲓϥϫ	— <i>misk</i>	ϩⲟⲃⲙ	— <i>hifš</i>
ⲙⲎⲣϩ	— <i>milh</i>				

Since neither Classical Arabic nor Egyptian nor Egyptian vernacular Arabic introduces any helping vowel between the last two consonants of such words⁹, it is plain that the

1) See my *Coptic Sounds*, Part I (1932), Ch. 1, and TILLS criticism in *ÄZ*, lxxviii, 121f. — 2) *Lehrbuch der Phonetik*, 2nd. ed. (1913), 194. — 3) Actually ending in: *tn, dn, dl, bm*, etc. — 4) Actually ending in *bd, gd, pt, kt*. — 5) STUMME, *Grammatik des tunisischen Arabisch* (1896); FISCHER, *Zur Lautlehre des Marokkanisch-Arabischen* (1917). — 6) Cf. STERN, *Koptische Grammatik* (1880), p. 9. — 7) *Un papyrus médical*, in *Mém. Inst. Fr. Or. du Caire*, xxxii (1921). — 8) Only one example of an accented syllabic consonant: ⲉⲡⲧⲓ for *hindi*. — 9) That is a Syro-Palestinian feature. Egyptian Arabic has however otherwise an abundance of helping vowels.

supralinear stroke in these words indicates not a vowel of any sort but rather the lack of one. It is hard to see any difference between Ϟⲟⲩⲥⲧ and ⲥⲱⲩⲧ, ϣⲧⲬⲩ and ⲱⲬⲩ, ⲙⲏⲣⲗ and ⲙⲉⲣⲗ. All must have been pronounced with a double consonance at the end; and the supralinear stroke is the sign of the vowelless *Silbengipfel*.

In the same text ⲥⲁⲡⲣ and ⲥⲁⲡⲏⲣ occur, but they are not variant spellings of the same pronunciation. ⲥⲁⲡⲣ is the vernacular Arabic form *ṣabr*¹, while ⲥⲁⲡⲏⲣ is the Classical Arabic *ṣabir*. On the same principle ⲡⲟⲩⲩⲁⲧⲣ would be a vernacular form **nūšādir*, corresponding to the classical *nūšādir*. ϫⲱⲣⲉⲗ for *kohl* represents, it is true, the opposite process, the vowel being due perhaps to the slow scribal pronunciation of an unusually difficult combination.

The fact that ⲉ sometimes appears instead of the supralinear stroke does not prove them to be identical. The two spellings may represent two different pronunciations. Words are not always pronounced the same. They vary under changing conditions of speed and stress. In the word *battle*, e. g., there is ordinarily no vowel between the *t* and the *l*; but, when slowly and solemnly spoken, a vowel appears there. It is very unlikely that any considerable vowel-sound would have remained unindicated in Coptic. When ⲉ, or ⲧ or ⲟ (as in SCHMIDT'S unpublished "Old-Fayyumic" texts) appears in place of the supralinear stroke, it is probably only an attempt to represent an obscure vowel which in that particular case has crept in.

Some consonantal combinations in Sahidic do indeed seem to be unpronounceable. ⲥⲥⲱⲧⲙ and ⲩⲩⲩⲉ (for ⲥⲩⲩⲉ) involve only continuants in unaccented syllables, and can be pronounced with one long *s* or *ʒ*, the separate identity of the first syllable thereby disappearing, to be sure, but not without audible effect in compensatory lengthening. With ⲡⲏⲡⲏⲏⲁⲬⲉ², however (supposing the stroke to be nothing but the sign of a *Silbengipfel*), the first syllable, *n*, must be sensibly separated from the second syllable by some change in stress or pitch, for otherwise the word would be indistinguishable from ⲡⲏⲏⲁⲬⲉ. The second syllable must be pronounced as a long *n* to prevent the further confusion of ⲡⲏⲏⲁⲬⲉ with ⲡⲏⲁⲬⲉ. Nevertheless, both these devices are perfectly possible.

ϫⲗⲗ and Ⲭⲥ cannot be satisfactorily examined without their phonetic context. They appear to be shorter than the normal forms, ϫⲗⲏⲗ and Ⲭⲏⲥ. But (supposing the stroke to be nothing but the syllable-sign) it is plain that *l* and the bilabial fricative³, Ⲭ, have become syllabic, in place of ⲏ. Both these consonants may easily become syllabic, especially in Coptic.

Most difficult of all are combinations such as ϞⲞⲱ, ⲡⲏⲏⲏ, ⲧⲧⲟ. When preceded in phonetic context by some more sonorous sound, they can be pronounced by lengthening the period of occlusion of the initial stop-consonant. At the absolute beginning of an utterance, however, the lengthening of the occlusion would not be heard. It could only be felt by the speaker.

1) SPIRO, *An English-Arabic Vocabulary* (1895), p. 332, col. 2, line 6 *a. i.* — 2) Achmimic form. —

3) Ⲭ is not *b*, but something very much like *q* or *or*, for it is confused with these in the manuscripts.