Modern Spoken Coptic and Community Negotiation of Linguistic Authenticity

Jeremy Toomey

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MODERN SPOKEN COPTIC AND COMMUNITY NEGOTIATION OF LINGUISTIC AUTHENTICITY

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MODERN SPOKEN COPTIC AND COMMUNITY NEGOTIATION OF LINGUISTIC AUTHENTICITY

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ABSTRACT

The pronunciation of the Coptic language in the liturgies of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria according to the Greco-Bohairic and Old Bohairic pronunciation standards is investigated, together with the sociolinguistic narratives constructed by two Coptic communities surrounding the use of either standard. Field recordings of the liturgy as recited according to both standards are analyzed in order to describe the phonology of the standards, and interviews with users of both standards are analyzed in order to describe the language attitudes of the users of the language. Points of similarity and difference between the narratives constructed by users of the Greco-Bohairic and the Old Bohairic standards are investigated, and the relevance and application of this data to the question of Coptic language revival is explored.
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Abbreviations

A  Akhmimic (Coptic dialect spoken around the town of Akhmim in Upper Egypt)

Ar. Arabic (used without respect to dialect)

B  Bohairic (Coptic dialect spoken in the western Nile delta; the dialect used by the Coptic Orthodox Church since approximately the ninth century CE)

C  Consonant

Cp.  Coptic (used without respect to a particular pronunciation standard or dialect)

Dem.  Demotic (pre-Coptic stage of the Egyptian language, attested c.500 BCE-250 CE)

EA  Egyptian Arabic (dialect)

F  Fayyumic (Coptic dialect spoken in the Fayyum oasis west of the Nile valley)

GB  Greco-Bohairic (pronunciation standard based on the sound values of Modern Greek, propagated c. 1858 CE by ʿIryān Muftāḥ)

HP  *History of the Patriarchs of the Church of Alexandria*, a historical work detailing the histories of the patriarchs of the Coptic Orthodox Church from its beginning until the twelfth century CE, begun by Severus, the bishop of ʿĀshmūnayn (d. 987)

OB  Old Bohairic (pronunciation standard based on the reconstruction of Coptic as it was spoken before the standardization of ʿIryān Muftāḥ, advanced by Dr. Emile Māher Ishāḵ in his 1975 Oxford Ph.D. thesis, *The Phonetics and Phonology of the Bohairic Dialect of Coptic and the Survival of Coptic Words in the Colloquial and Classical Arabic of Egypt and of Coptic Grammatical Constructions in Colloquial Egyptian Arabic*)

r.  ruled (for dates marking the reigns of various rulers and religious officials)

S  Sahidic (dialect of Coptic originally spoken around Thebes, later the standard dialect across Upper Egypt; the majority of Coptic authors wrote in this dialect)

V  vowel
Transliteration standards

In cases where a particular transliteration is established in a source, as for personal names of authors or titles of reference works, the transliteration used in the source is retained. Transliterations of source text in Coptic, Arabic, and Greek otherwise follow the conventions listed below.

Coptic transliteration, adapted from Grossman and Haspelmath (2015):

A B G Δ E Z Η Ι Κ Λ Χ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ ϩ ω υ ζ θ ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ ϩ ω υ ζ θ ι

Notes:

The realization of a given Coptic sound in a spoken utterance is discussed in the main body of the thesis. The chart given above is a general outline, with some choices made to impose an artificial consistency on the language that does not exist in any particular realization. For example, the Coptic letter <ReceiveProps> may be pronounced [k], [ʃ], or [x], according to its origin in either words of native Coptic (Egyptian) stock or words originating from Greek (Işhāk 1975:351-352). As each of these realizations are already present in the unambiguous pronunciations of <k>, <ʃ>, and <x>, respectively, an indeterminate character with regard to Bohairic Coptic phonology was chosen to represent the character in transliteration. It is not meant to represent the voiceless velar fricative [x] in all cases, but to stand for the Coptic character <x>. In the case of realizations which vary between the two pronunciation standards analyzed in this thesis, the choice of a given character in transliteration should not be assumed to reflect an endorsement of a particular standard on the part of the author. Here again, choices have been made to ensure consistency across transliterations, as well as to avoid confusion borne of the redundancy that would result from attempting to represent both
pronunciations using one transliteration scheme. Accordingly, the above chart shows influence of both standards.

This transliteration of Coptic φ and ϑ reflects the aspiration distinction found in the realization of stops in Egyptian, represented in Bohairic Coptic orthography by the use of corresponding Greek *aspiratae* for the proposed aspirated voiceless stops, e.g., π /p/ → φ [pʰ] (Loprieno 1997:448). This distinction is not present in modern spoken Coptic as used in the liturgy of the Coptic Orthodox Church, where both graphemes are pronounced as [f]. This now purely orthographic distinction is preserved in this transliteration in order to properly represent the underlying grapheme used in the Coptic source texts.

The function of the Coptic letter *jinkim* – represented in Bohairic Coptic orthography by a grave accent placed over the affected letter, e.g., ɾ – is difficult to summarize. Pedagogical resources produced by both Copts and non-Copts covering several dialects of the language suggest that this letter inserts an [e] sound or some variation thereof prior to the consonant over which it is written, or inserts a pause between segments when placed over a vowel (see, for instance, Layton 2007, Younan 2005). Thus Layton (2004:13), in a table of sound values for Sahidic Coptic, divides all consonants into “syllabic” and “non-syllabic” realizations, with all syllabic realizations bearing the *jinkim*, and being transliterated with a superscript <e> preceding the consonant in question. This presupposition about the sound value and function of the *jinkim* has been discussed in the linguistic literature on Coptic for some time, appearing in English with rebuttal in Worrell, who argues that it denotes in Sahidic (where it appears as a horizontal stroke over the affected segment), and in some cases in Bohairic, “a sonant consonant, not an e” (1934:13). With regard to its function in Bohairic in particular, Kasser (1991a) gives different rules for different stages of the dialect. In Classical Bohairic, it is found over any vowel forming a syllable by itself, e.g., ἄφι ἔβολ apʰ.i e.bol ‘he went out’, and over nasal sonorants ϊ and ϋ when forming their own syllables, e.g., ρεμίχινι rem.n.xīmi ‘Egyptian’. In Late Bohairic, the *jinkim* is also added in the following instances: over the first element of word-initial consonant clusters (or word-medial clusters in the case of words of Greek origin); over pronominal prefixes consisting of a single consonant (e.g., κ in Κ ἐκσώτεν eksōtem
‘2P.Masc. hear’); over definite articles both before a consonant and before a vowel (e.g., ḫⲟⲧⲓⲣⲓ epšīri ‘the son’; ḫⲧⲧⲧⲧⲥⲓ etapʰe ‘the head’); and over the auxiliary ḫⲟ ‘be able’, e.g., ḫⲟⲧⲧⲧⲧⲥⲓ ḫⲟⲧⲧⲧⲧⲥⲓ ेⲣⲟc ouatešši eros ‘which cannot be measured’. These additional uses of the jinkim are not explained by Kasser beyond his presupposition that they are probably influenced by Arabic, and that in these cases, unlike the use of the jinkim to mark syllables formed by lone vowels and sonorant consonants in both Classical and Late Bohairic, these other consonants over which jinkim appears never form syllables on their own. If this presupposition regarding Arabic influence on Coptic is true, then there is reason to follow the majority of authors in assuming that in those cases – but not in the cases of sonorant consonants – the jinkim may in fact stand for an epenthetic [e] or similar. Lacking arguments from any camp in the discussion on modern spoken Coptic that would suggest an alternate value, consonants bearing the jinkim other than nasal sonorants ḫ and ḫ are transliterated with <e> preceding them, as above, while ḫ and ḫ are transliterated with a vertical line below them, in keeping with IPA standards for marking syllabic consonants, e.g., ḫⲣⲟⲧⲓ epʰromi ‘the man’, but ḫⲣⲟⲧⲓ m̩ ton ‘repose’. It should be noted, however, that this is not always how words bearing the jinkim are actually realized, and although proponents of both pronunciation standards that are the focus of this thesis agree on the basic aspects of its function (i.e., its role in marking syllabification), its realization varies considerably between the two. This issue is dealt with in chapter 2 of this thesis.

Coptic has inherited from Greek the use of combinatorial overlines to shorten various words and names often found in texts, e.g., ḫⲟⲧⲓⲣⲓ for ḫⲟⲧⲓⲣⲓ for ‘holy’. All such abbreviations are spelled out in full in transliteration, e.g., ḫѳwab. As Coptic attaches many different types of prefixes and suffixes to the noun, fully conjugated forms of nouns of the above type will sometimes be orthographically truncated, allowing for a clear orthographic division between the noun and its affixes. As this thesis does not primarily concern the grammar of Coptic, such information is left aside and examples of this type are transliterated in full as well, e.g. ḫⲟⲧⲓⲣⲓ for ‘our Lord’ is transliterated penčois, rather than pen­-čois, p-en­-čois, etc. Very often natively-produced transliterations will contain such parsing in order to aid in pronunciation.
Arabic transliteration standard DIN 31635, as propagated by the German Institute for Standardization:

Notes:

The Arabic short vowels are transliterated according to their corresponding short forms: a, i, u. The tā’ marbūta (written ی) is transliterated as <a> to mark feminine gender nouns and adjectives when not in the construct state, and <t> within the construct state, in keeping with Arabic grammatical rules governing genitive constructions. A hyphen is used to separate the article from the words to which it is attached. In contrast to the DIN 31635 standard, the article which attaches to the Arabic noun is transliterated without assimilation (e.g., ُ النار ‘āl-nār, not ‘ān-nār).

The use in transliteration of <ḳ> for Ar. ق is retained in the frequent citation of the 1975 Ph.D. thesis of Emile Māher Isḥāḳ, in keeping with the practice of retaining personal names and titles as they appear in source material. Elsewhere, it remains <q>, as outlined above.

Greek transliteration, adapted from UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems (2003):

\[
\begin{align*}
\alpha & \beta & \gamma & \delta & \varepsilon & \zeta & \eta & \theta & \iota & \kappa & \lambda & \mu & \nu & \xi & \omicron & \pi & \rho & \sigma & \tau & \upsilon & \phi & \chi & \psi & \omega
\end{align*}
\]
Notes:

The orthographic convention whereby the sequence $\gamma\gamma$ represents $\eta\eta$ is standardized in transliteration both for Greek words and borrowings into Coptic which have preserved this spelling, i.e., Gk. $\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omega\varsigma$ and Cp. $\Delta\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omega\varsigma$ are both transliterated as *angelos*, not *aggelos*.
Chapter 1 Background

1.1: The aim and scope of the current study

This thesis deals with the pronunciation of the Coptic language in the liturgy of the Coptic Orthodox Church today, and the sociolinguistic narratives constructed by users of the language regarding its authenticity in that context.

In modern times, the Coptic language is pronounced according to either the Greco-Bohairic pronunciation standard or the Old Bohairic pronunciation standard. These two standards differ from one another in the values that they assign to certain letters, and in the syllabification of certain words which bear the jinkim, a stroke which appears over consonants and vowels to indicate syllable boundaries or stress. The history behind the establishment of these pronunciation standards is recounted in brief below.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a teacher of Coptic at the Clerical College in Cairo, ʿIryān Muftāḥ, introduced a new pronunciation of the Coptic language as used in the liturgy of the Coptic Orthodox Church, standardizing it according to the sound values of Modern Greek. This so-called Greco-Bohairic pronunciation standard is the pronunciation found in most Coptic churches and monasteries today, having been adopted and propagated by Coptic Orthodox Church authorities in Cairo since c. 1858 CE. While there is little available in English regarding the circumstances of and motivation for its development, Ishāq (1975:3) quotes from Arabic the Coptic researcher Yassā ʿAbd al-Masīḥ who claims that this pronunciation arose “to approximate the Coptic Church to the Greek Church so that it might be a single unit superintended by one Patriarch”. This ecclesiastical union ultimately did not materialize, but the pronunciation reform spearheaded at that time has persisted and essentially become codified as the ecclesiastical standard in the modern day.

About a century later, a Coptic deacon and researcher named Emile Māher Ishāq sought to recover the pronunciation as it had existed before the reform, his research leading to the submission of a thesis at Oxford in 1975 in defense of his reconstruction, for which
he was awarded a Ph.D. Because it sought to recover an earlier standard of pronunciation, it is known as the Old Bohairic (OB) pronunciation standard. While the GB standard continues to be the standard with which most Copts are familiar, the OB is not without influential and enthusiastic supporters, including the late Pope Shenouda III (r. 1971-2012), who established a school in 1976 for the teaching and propagation of this standard.

With the establishment of these two pronunciation standards of Bohairic Coptic, a renewed discussion on the Coptic language is taking place in some circles of the Coptic community, largely centered around which pronunciation is ‘correct’ and which is not. This discussion, rooted not just (or perhaps not often) in phonology but also in the community’s notion of itself and what it means to be true to ones’ forefathers and history, frames the research question examined in this thesis.

It should be noted that the present study deliberately avoids the term ‘correct’ or the concept of ‘correctness’ with regard to any variety or standard of the spoken language, eschewing it in favor of the concept of authenticity. Coupland (2007:182) provides a definition of what he terms ‘vernacular authenticity’, stating that this concept is “based on beliefs about ontology – how the language ‘really is’; how we find it to be when we seek it out ‘in the community’, and when we observe it empirically without influencing it.” With this definition in mind, the present work seeks to answer the following question: In the absence of a native, vernacular Coptic speech upon which to model their own or to project their own ideas of authenticity upon, how do members of the Coptic community construct their own ideas of what it means to speak or otherwise use ‘authentic’ Coptic?

This is very different than simply assigning a value judgment of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ to a given realization, according to an established standard. Thus, in addition to the analysis of portions of the Coptic liturgy as recited by the priests, deacons, and congregations in both GB and OB parishes (§2.2.1 and §2.4.2, respectively), sections of this thesis are dedicated to parishioners’ insights on a variety of aspects of Coptic not strictly related to their own pronunciation. These topics, such as language revitalization efforts and the politics of language and Coptic identity in the Coptic community, are addressed as critical components of the description of modern spoken Coptic in its full sociolinguistic range.
As this community dialogue regarding linguistic authenticity is shaped within a larger discussion of historical authenticity – i.e., how the ancestors of today’s Coptic community are to inform and shape the practices of that community – it is necessary to first provide an overview of how the history of the Coptic people, their Church, and their language impact this discussion in the present day.

In the following sections, the cultural, religious, and linguistic identities of the Coptic people are laid out according to the historical circumstances in which each arose in order to provide the background needed in order to contextualize the frequent appeals to authenticity, linguistic and non-linguistic, made by the members of the communities surveyed in chapter 2 of this thesis.

1.2 Coptic history in brief

The following sections deal with the history of the Coptic people in their general, religious, and linguistic aspects. As a people whose history is in continuity with the earliest inhabitants of Egypt, it would be too ambitious to attempt to recount their entire history in the present work, and somewhat anachronistic to attempt to give equal coverage to all aspects of Coptic life. The religious and linguistic history of the Copts is treated as primary in the present work in recognition of the reality that they exist as a distinct ethno-religious group within wider Egyptian society, marked by their Coptic language as being of a particular indigenous Egyptian stock – a language spoken by their forefathers as a native tongue, and preserved today in religious ritual. Given this reality, it is neither advisable nor practical to attempt to write a purely secular history of the Coptic people. Coptic historical sources, both ancient and modern, are more often than not uniquely Christian in character, and no attempt has been made in the present work to hide or disguise that fact. As the Copts themselves have invested great authority in ecclesiastical histories, hagiographies, and hymnography to act as transmitters of their history and identity, to ignore these sources in favor of Western, secular sources would be to do at least some degree of violence to the Coptic narrative as it is actually recorded and retold by the Copts themselves.

The above caveat is important to state as a preamble to the presentation of any aspect of Coptic history. It is perhaps particularly true with regard to the tradition of pronunciation
of the Coptic language as preserved and handed down within the Church, as there is a significant difference of opinion between some native and foreign authors regarding the reliability of the Coptic tradition on this point. This will be discussed in detail in §1.3, which deals with previous research on Coptic historical phonology.

Authors on all sides of the question of what should be considered ‘correct’ or ‘authentic’ Coptic often present their theories in terms of preserving the language from corrupting foreign influence – for Coptic authors, often that of Greek; for non-Coptic authors, often that of Arabic. While not all theories regarding the historical phonology of the language seek to defend a set of hypothetical original values for all Coptic letters (the 1975 OB reconstruction of Ḫāk, for instance, only seeks to reestablish the pronunciation of Coptic as it was known prior to the introduction of the GB pronunciation in the mid-19th century), by virtue of their considering particular correspondences between letter and sound to be the result of non-Egyptian influence, all do participate in the narrative in which the speech of the Egyptian was changed by successive waves of contact with other peoples over the centuries.

In order to expound upon this question of the impact that non-Egyptians have had upon the Copts, we shall now turn to a brief overview of Coptic identity in ancient and modern Egypt, beginning with the arrival of the Greeks many centuries before the coming of Christianity, and ending in the present day. In doing so, the historical narrative appealed to by the Copts in their invocation of tradition will be appropriately contextualized, so as to provide a foundation for later analyses of statements which operate within this same narrative made by community members interviewed for this thesis.

1.2.1 Coptic identity in ancient and modern Egypt

The Copts (В ремнихи remn̩ xīmi; Ar. أقباط qibṭ, whence Copt) are the native people of Egypt. According to the Greek traveler and historian Herodotus (The Histories, 2.154), the Greeks were the first foreigners to settle in Egypt, during the time of the Egyptian king Psammetichus (r. 644-610 BCE) who employed them as soldiers and placed Egyptian children in their care so that they might be taught the Greek language. While they would not have been known as Copts during this time period, the
native Egyptians encountered by these first Greek settlers in the time of Psammetichus are the ancestors of the modern Copts.

Extensive research is not required to discover the linguistic and cultural links between these native Egyptians of the pre-Coptic period and the Coptic people of today, as *Coptic* is merely the conventional label given to the period of Egypt’s history characterized by the increased influence of the Greek language on the native Egyptian language, and by the Christianization of the Egyptians which is traditionally tied to the missionary work of St. Mark, the writer of the Gospel of St. Mark and one of the seventy disciples of Jesus, in the latter half of the first century CE. Thus to recount Coptic history is to recount the history of Egypt in a specific period, the same as it is possible to describe the history of Egypt in other eras by other labels of convenience.

An overview of the aforementioned linguistic continuity can be found in many works, such as Hodge (1975), which traces the survival of Ancient Egyptian grammatical forms in Coptic.

Cultural continuity outside of the linguistic sphere is claimed in many works by native Coptic authors. Ragheb Moftah (Ar. راغب مفتاح rāġab muftāḥ, 1898-2001), recognized by Copts as the father of modern Coptic music for his role in preserving traditional Coptic hymnody, was of the opinion that Coptic Church music had its roots in the music of the Ancient Egyptians (Moftah 1997):

Some of the Coptic hymns bear the names of towns which have long since disappeared; for example, the hymn called after Singari, a town in the north of the Delta known in the time of Ramses II; and the hymn called Adriebe from Attribis, a town which formerly existed in Upper Egypt. […] Demetrius of Phaleron, the librarian of the Library of Alexandria in 297 B.C., reports that the priests of Egypt used to praise their gods through the seven Greek vowels which they used to sing one after the other; and, in place of the flute or the harp, the utterance of these vowels produced a very agreeable sound. The music of many of the Coptic hymns is still entirely chanted on the one or other of these seven vowels. The text of certain long chants may consist of only one verse, or merely a single word like Alleluia.
Moftah’s opinion on the origin of Coptic Church music is by no means uncontested (even in works which he co-authored; see the entry “Coptic Music” in The Coptic Encyclopedia for additional possible sources of origin), but nonetheless shows the importance which the modern Copt places on the native Egyptian character and continuity of modern Coptic cultural practice.

If it is debatable to what degree any particular Coptic practice may find its antecedents in supposedly analogous pre-Christian Egyptian practices, there is surprising unanimity among writers of both East and West as to the Copts’ ultimate origins in a general sense. Indeed, we may find in many Western sources that no matter what else is written concerning the Copts, there is almost always an admission of the native origins of the Coptic people vis-à-vis the more numerous Arabs, or more culturally palatable Greeks or other Westerners resident in Egypt. By this admission, there is nothing very peculiar in the fact that a modern Western author intending to demonstrate the cultural and racial continuity of the modern Copts with the Ancient Egyptians would at once heap much scorn upon them, going so far as to castigate writers of his time for “flattering the Copts by attributing to them virtues which they do not possess” (Leeder 1918:309), and yet still feel comfortable titling his work on Coptic customs and habits Modern Sons of the Pharaohs.

The same holds true regarding the Arab-Muslim chroniclers, who occasionally recorded the customs and fortunes of the native Egyptians. The most accessible and detailed of these chronicles is that of fifteenth century Sunni historian Maqrīzī, whose News of the Copts of Egypt (Ar. أخبار قبض مصر ʾāḫbār qibṭ misr) was immensely popular in Europe in translated Latin (1828) and German (1845) editions, and was eventually translated into English and published as A Short History of the Copts and of Their Church in 1873 (Atiya 1991b). In addition to providing for the birth of the Copts through the lineage of the sons of Noah, Maqrīzī refers to the Copts as “the people of the land of Egypt” (Maqrīzī 1873:73), distinguishing them from the Greeks who were “men about the court and public affairs”, a reference to the Byzantine rule that immediately preceded the Arab conquest (ibid:72).
Modern authors just as easily refer to the Copts as “sons of Saint Mark”, in reference to the traditional account of St. Mark bringing Christianity to Egypt (Tadros 2013:9-27). So central is this event to Coptic identity that the majority of Coptic historical texts, ancient and modern, begin with it. Indeed, it can be fairly said that to be Coptic and to be Christian are one in the same, as this label has been given as a marker of religious difference specifically to Christian Egyptians ever since the Arab-Islamic conquest of Egypt in the seventh century CE (Malaty 1993:8).

Thus from some indeterminate point in the first century CE (accounts conflict as to the exact year of St. Mark’s arrival in Egypt, though most place it within twenty years of the crucifixion of Jesus, c.33 CE), the history of the Copts is inextricably linked to the Christian religion. Through their religion, the Copts furthered what must have been nascent developments in other not strictly religious cultural spheres, including the development of the Coptic writing system, which adapted the Greek alphabet to record the native language, augmenting it with six or seven signs (depending on the dialect in question) descending from the earlier Demotic script to represent sounds not found in Greek. Some of the earliest records of this script are found in the form of bilingual Greek/Coptic papyri containing portions of the Bible which date from the second century CE and thus predate the oldest authoritative Greek versions of the scriptures by some two to three centuries (Atiya 1979:2-4). While it would not be until approximately the fourth century CE that Coptic would develop into a fully functional literary idiom in the hands of St. Shenouda the Archimandrite (348-466), this early evidence of Coptic being employed to transmit the writings of the Egyptians’ new religion shows both the early and eager adoption of Christianity by the native Egyptians (to be distinguished from the Greeks and Hellenized Egyptians and Jews at Alexandria, who must have been among the earliest peoples reached by St. Mark during his initial preaching in that city), and the cultural continuity between these first ethnic Egyptian Christians and their pre-Christian forefathers. It may be fairly said that the adoption of Christianity by the native Egyptians represented not a complete break with the cultural patterns established in previous eras, but a repurposing of these same ancient impulses in a new context. Not only was there “a continuous admixture of paganism and Christianity in many parts of Egypt” during the
first two centuries CE (ibid:2), but in a wider sense Egypt was very much a part of the Byzantine world, and hence inherited Greco-Roman influences in art and philosophy that, together with its native traditions, also shape Coptic identity. Witness, for instance, the Fayyum mummy portraits (figure 1, below), naturalistic paintings mostly dated to the Coptic period (for the purposes of this thesis, 1st century CE-642 CE), so named because they are found most abundantly buried together with mummies excavated from the Fayyum basin in Middle Egypt (Ar. الفيوم al-fayyum, from Ср. ύπωθις ἐφιομ ‘the sea, the lake’). These paintings are considered to be representative of Greco-Roman art styles prevalent in Egypt both before and after its Christianization. They differ markedly from the native Coptic iconographic tradition (figure 2, below), and yet both existed side by side for some centuries in Egypt.

Figure 1 Portrait of a boy from Fayyum, 2nd century CE. (Source: Wikipedia)
Greco-Roman cultural influence was not limited to artistic pursuits, but also found expression in philosophy. As shown at the beginning of this section, native Egyptian and Greek cultural ties predate the Christianization of Egypt by many centuries. The Ptolemies founded a school at Alexandria in 323 BCE, cementing Alexandria’s place in the ancient world as a center of Hellenistic learning, and providing the context in which the Hellenized Jews of Egypt would translate the Bible into Greek for the first time (this is the traditional translation of the Old Testament used by all of the Christian East, known as the Septuagint because it was completed by seventy rabbis), as well as establish philosophical schools and ascetic movements of their own, such as that of the philosopher Philo of Alexandria (El Masri 1987:11-13). It is into this world that Christianity first came to Egypt, and so it was in some sense natural that the Christians also have their own school, to propagate their own teachings. This was accomplished, according to Coptic tradition, by St. Mark himself, who founded the Catechetical School at Alexandria. While the exact date of its founding and the identity of its first dean are matters of some dispute, its effect on Christianity as a whole is not, as it was to produce some of the most widely recognized Christian theologians and philosophers in all the world. Its early deans
included such distinguished Christian personalities as Clement of Alexandria (150-215), the controversial Origen (184-254), and Didymus the Blind (313-398). It is said to have outlasted the Ptolemaic philosophical school which was its forerunner and had closed in 415 CE following the murder of Hypatia (Atiya 1979:5), though its own life was probably not much longer than that, as records are very scarce following the aforementioned Didymus (Atiya 1991a). The Coptic Clerical College in Cairo referred to elsewhere in this thesis (variously referred to in Coptic works as a college, seminary, school, etc; all of these are more or less precise translations of Ar. إكليريکیة ʾīklīrīkīya, an obvious borrowing, cf. clerical) is a distinct, much later entity opened in 1873, heralded by Copts as the continuation of the original Catechetical School at Alexandria (Ghali 1991).

From the age of the Catechetical School, the Coptic Orthodox Church, by that time well established in all of Egypt, entered together with the rest of the world’s churches into what can be termed the age of ecumenism, with the establishment of the first great ecumenical councils of Christianity.

It has been related in the tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church at least since Severus, bishop of ʿĀshmūnayn, began collecting the histories of the Coptic patriarchs in the tenth century that Pope Alexander I (r. 312-326), the nineteenth patriarch to serve as head bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church, presided over the first Council of Nicaea, declared in 325 CE by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine (HP II.7). This tradition is apparently at variance with Western Christianity, which has generally considered the Spanish bishop Hosius of Cordoba (c. 256-358) to have presided over the council (Myers 1910). Some modern Coptic sources also agree with the identification of Hosius as the presiding bishop, e.g., El Masri (1987). It is also Coptic tradition that the creed composed at Nicaea, which has stood with some clarification added at the subsequent first Council of Constantinople (381) in all of the churches of the East since that time, was authored by the great Egyptian theologian St. Athanasius, who attended the council in the party of Pope Alexander I at the age of only twenty five. The aforementioned history authored by El Masri gives credit for its authorship to Pope Alexander I, Athanasius (later to be
confirmed as Pope of Alexandria himself, and recognized widely as one of the greatest saints belonging to the Church of Egypt), and Leontius, the Syrian bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (ibid:104).

Of those things which are not in dispute, the canons of the Council itself testify to the prominent place of Alexandria among the early centers of Christianity. In Canon V, it is decreed: “Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis prevail, that the Bishop of Alexandria have jurisdiction in all these” (Percival 1900:81). In the succeeding years, the first Council of Constantinople, convened in that city in 381 on the order of Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379-395), also makes mention of Alexandria, decreeing in Canon II: “The bishops are not to go beyond their dioceses to churches lying outside of their bounds, nor bring confusion on the churches; but let the Bishop of Alexandria, according to the canons, alone administer the affairs of Egypt” (ibid:446). According to some ancient chroniclers, such as Sozomen (400-450), the Coptic Pope of that period, Pope Timothy I (r. 381-384), chaired this council (Malaty 1993:47).

The third ecumenical council, held at Ephesus in 431 on the order of Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II (r. 408-450), was chaired by Pope Cyril, the 24th Pope of Alexandria (r. 412-444), who was the principal opponent of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople who would be deposed at the council (ibid:48).

The above information has been related so as to show the high esteem enjoyed by the Church of Egypt in the context of early Christianity as a whole. All of these councils and the bishops, deacons, and others who are remembered as having played a part in them continue to be honored by the Coptic Orthodox Church, which until the modern day considers itself to be the Orthodox Church of the three ecumenical councils listed above. It is all the more striking, then, to consider how rapidly the Church of Alexandria and its people, so instrumental in the shaping of world Christianity, would fall from grace in the eyes of much of Greco-Roman Christian world in the wake of their rejection of the next council to be called ecumenical, that of Chalcedon, held in 451 on the order of Emperor Marcian (r. 450-457). The reasons for this rejection and the details surrounding this
council are best dealt with elsewhere (for a scholarly treatment of the Coptic position, see Ishak 2013), but it can be said that in the ensuing estrangement from imperial power, the Copts went from being accepted as fellow Christians and rightful citizens of their homeland to being considered heretics and treated accordingly by the ruling Byzantine power. Immediately following the council, a messenger from Constantinople, the imperial capital, was sent to announce to the people of Egypt the exile of the Coptic Pope Dioscorus (r. 444-458), who was then replaced with an Alexandrian priest who was in agreement with the decrees of the Chalcedonian council. This man, Proterius, is described by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty as “an alien royal patriarch” (1993:85), and it is true that neither he nor any who followed in his line were recognized by the Copts or the Coptic Orthodox Church as legitimate leaders of the Egyptian Church. For their part, the Copts continued to recognize the exiled Pope Dioscorus, who died while in exile on the island of Gangra and was succeeded by Pope Timothy II (r. 458-480). Thus the one Church of Alexandria became two, with the portion who had accepted the Council of Chalcedon as authoritative and teaching the correct faith being referred to henceforth by the Copts as Melkites (from the Syriac ܡܠܟܝܐ malkoyo, meaning ‘royal, imperial’, in reference to their having accepted the imperial definition of Christianity as agreed upon at Chalcedon).

This situation created many problems for the Copts and their native church that did not abate in the ensuing decades. Pope Timothy II was exiled, along with his brother, to the island of Gangra just as his predecessor Dioscorus had been, though Timothy would return in seven years to serve the remainder of his papacy in Egypt (HP II.13). There followed for some time a certain chaos marked by exile of the Coptic Popes, rebellions of the Coptic people against the imposition of foreign Melkite patriarchs, and in that atmosphere a hardening of confessional lines according to the positions that each respective community took with regard to the Chalcedonian proclamations.

It is little wonder, then, that Arab chroniclers looking to make sense of how a thoroughly Christian society such as Egypt so easily fell to the Arab Muslim conquerors who beset Egypt in the middle of the seventh century CE would look to the preexisting
divisions among the Christians as the Muslims first encountered them. Maqrīzī, who is rare among the Arab chroniclers in noting fine distinctions between the different Christian groups beyond just their conventional confessional labels (though he does not always correctly apply these), puts the Melkites at the time of the Arab conquest at “above three hundred thousand, all Greeks” (1873:72-73), while of the Copts he writes “[t]he number of these people rose to very many twenties of thousands; for they were, in fact, the people of the land of Egypt, both Upper and Lower” (ibid). He further details some of the social customs governing the relations between the two great sects, noting that the Melkites were the rulers over the Copts, that marriage between the two populations was not allowed, and that their mutual hatred for one another often spilled over into violence. Maqrīzī also relates that the Coptic Patriarch during the time of the Arab conquest, Pope Benjamin (r. 623-662), had been exiled from the patriarchate for thirteen years, and that the Copts had been dispossessed of their lands, both of which he claims the conquering Arab general ‘Amrū ibn al-‘Āṣ rectified upon securing tribute from the Pope, leading the Copts to fight alongside the Arabs to expel the Greeks from Egypt (ibid).

This account in which the Copts help the invading Arabs against the Melkites has been dismissed at least as early as Butler, who found it to be “certainly baseless”, and further added that it is a later narrative not occurring before the fourteenth century, and that “the charge is in direct antagonism to the statement of the nearly contemporary John of Nikiou” (1902:211). Nevertheless, it is but one example of an enduring myth that has contributed to the isolation of the Copts from the majority of world Christianity, of which the so-called Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and the vast majority of Protestants are at odds with the Copts over many things, principally stemming (whether any individual church or person might realize it) from the Copts’ fifth century rejection of the Council of Chalcedon to which those groups, whether at the time or later via having received their theological pedigree via Rome (in the case of the various Protestant groups), at least implicitly assented.

In their double isolation, first from the majority of the rest of Christendom following
Chalcedon and later following the Arab conquest, the Copts can be said to have developed a fiercely independent character in relation to their unquestioned antiquity and steadfastness in their faith. Regarding their reaction to the decrees of Chalcedon, El Masri quotes Dr. Cyrus Gordon as saying “When the Egyptians went to Chalcedon, they were proud of their Pharaonic heritage, and rightly so; they were proud of their Alexandrian Fathers, and rightly so; they frankly told the whole world what they believed, and, when the world refused to listen, they walked out, and rightly so” (1987:vii-viii). This kind of confidence is not just in relation to Chalcedon, but to everything. In having outlasted the early persecutions of Christians that took place under various pagan Roman rulers, and the maltreatment by various Byzantine emperors and officials in the wake of Chalcedon, the Coptic people and the Coptic Orthodox Church to which they belong have cemented as close to a permanent place in Egypt as any non-Muslim minority can have in a Muslim-majority nation, albeit a strange one relative to other most other churches: While they are unquestionably the national church in the sense of being composed primarily of the native inhabitants of Egypt, they are not nationally established in the sense that the Anglican Church can be said to be established in England, with its close relation between the head of state and the Church. Rather it is by tradition, just as it was in the drafting of the fifth canon of Nicaea in 325, that the Coptic Orthodox Church is recognized as the fitting spiritual home of the native Egyptian.

The rule of the Arabs also had an effect on the Copts and their Church. As is seen above in Maqrīzī, it has long been the goal of the Arab chroniclers themselves to justify or at least soften the image of the conquest by appeal to the admittedly difficult circumstances in which the Copts found themselves under hostile Byzantine rule. Too much exposition on this point would be inappropriate in the present work, but truly no discussion of the formation or continuation of Coptic identity could be argued to be reasonably sufficient without at least a brief discussion of it.

In this matter, primary sources record some successes in reestablishing the Coptic Orthodox Church in the wake of many years of Byzantine suppression and control, though overall the picture is mixed at best. From the chronicle of the life of Pope Isaac of
Rakoti (r. 689-692), we find that not only were churches restored, but that under ʿAbd ʿālz ʿAzīz ibn Marwān (r. 685-705) a church was allowed to be constructed at Ḥulwān, a city in Lower Egypt (Hoyland 1997:151). The same governor would also assert the superiority of Islam in explicit ways, however (ibid):

He ordered the breaking of all the crosses which were in the land of Egypt, even the crosses of gold and silver. So the Christians of the country of Egypt became troubled. Then he wrote a number of notices and placed them on the doors of churches in Miṣr and the Delta, saying in them: “Muḥammad is the great messenger who is God’s, and Jesus too is the messenger of God. God does not beget and is not begotten.”

In addition to these types of pressures, there was also the payment of the *jizya* tax that was required of all non-Muslims, which some historical sources maintain was so exorbitant in the degree to which it was levied upon the Copts as to be motivation for the apostasy of both rich and poor Christians to Islam (HP III.18). Despite the relative peace of the earliest years of Arab rule, the catalogue of increasing restrictions and ill treatment of the native Christians is a stark rebuke of the picture of mutual cooperation and tolerance painted by some. The effect of the new edicts which were placed upon the Copts was overwhelmingly negative, and cannot help but be included as a factor in the eventual loss of their place as the majority of Egypt’s inhabitants. While the first years of Arab rule could be described as ambiguous or even marginally positive for the Copts in some respects, the situation within a century after the conquest could be described thusly (Tadros 2013:38):

Caliph Yazid II (r. 720-724) ordered the destruction of church icons, while the Abbasid Caliph Al Hadi (r. 785-786) ordered the destruction of churches. During the reign of Caliph Al Mutawakil (r. 847-861) we encounter the first systematic effort of differentiation by means of appearance. Copts were forced to wear hazel-colored clothes with special marks on them, forbidden to ride horses and ordered to use saddles made of wood while mounting other animals, required to hide
crosses in marches and funerals, and ordered to put statues and marks of dogs or monkeys on the front of their homes. Besides the subjugation of non-Muslims, the new regulations [...] point at marking a distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. The need for such differentiation reflects increased integration and assimilation between the two communities. Naturally, the major reason for that was the substantial increase of non-Arab Muslims from among the local population through conversion.

For all that they faced, the Copts were not passive. Five rebellions occurred between 739 and 773 against the harsh methods involved in the collection of taxes, some of which were participated in by Muslims as well as Christians (Malaty 1993:105). In addition to these revolts, there were the later Bashmurian revolts of the ninth century. Starting in 831 and lasting for over thirty years, groups of Copts living in the Nile delta known as Bashmurians led armed revolts against Arab governance, eventually spreading to Alexandria and Upper Egypt, and being reinforced by the arrival of Spanish vessels looking to assist the overthrow of the Muslims (Marcus 1989:47). This was to be the last major effort by the Coptic people to restore Egypt to its pre-conquest state, as it was finally crushed with such ferocity as to make future organized rebellions unthinkable.

An entirely different sort of challenge to the unity of the Coptic Orthodox Church was presented by the attempts of Western Christians, starting in the fifteenth century, to bring the Copts into formal communion with the Roman Catholic Church. With this goal in mind, the Roman Pope Eugene IV (r. 1431-1447) invited a Coptic delegation to the Council of Florence, convened by him in 1439. This Council was an attempt to reunite with all of the churches which were by that point no longer in communion with the Church of Rome, including those of the Greeks, the Ethiopians, the Armenians, and the Copts. Agreements of union were reached with the representatives of all parties present, but in each case they failed to yield any positive results. As explained in The Coptic Encyclopedia article regarding Coptic participation, “theological formulas were interpreted differently by both parties; [t]he Romans understood it as a true submission of the Copts and Ethiopians to the Roman church, whereas the Copts and Ethiopians at first
understood it as a reunion of equal partners and in the course of time rejected it along with its Latin interpretation” (Bilaniuk 1991).

It would not be until the eighteenth century that any lasting form of union with Rome would occur among the Copts in a substantial number, with the establishment of the Coptic Catholic Church. This Church, which has its roots in the embrace of Catholicism by the Coptic Orthodox bishop of Jerusalem, Athanasius, in 1741, has never been very substantial in number. Two hundred years after the union of Bishop Athanasius, it was reported that the population of Coptic Catholics did not exceed 50,000 (Attwater 1945:72). The Catholic Near East Welfare Association reports that today they number 162,000 (Roberson 2013).

Various Protestant groups began attempting to convert the Copts from Orthodox Christianity to the new European churches in the nineteenth century, starting with the arrival of Lutheran missionaries in 1857, who met with only negligible success (Hamilton 2006:102). Protestant missionaries did manage to provoke reactions from the Copts, however. These ranged from explicitly condemnatory, as in the case of Pope Demetrius II (r. 1861-1870) and his Papal bull against Protestantism, to the mildly bemused, as in the case of the exchange between Presbyterian missionaries, newly arrived in Egypt in 1860, and the Coptic archbishop of Āsiyūţ, who famously answered their call by asking them rhetorically, “We have been living with Christ for more than 1800 years; how long have you been living with Him?” (Atiya 1979:1).

The situation of the Copts in the modern day is one of increasing emigration in response to local and regional pressures. Most remain in Egypt despite numerous obstacles, but since the 1950s there has been a steady increase in the number of Copts settling permanently outside of the country, often in Western Europe and the United States. This has provided the Coptic Orthodox Church with new opportunities for growth and evangelism. The reign of Pope Shenouda III (r. 1971-2012) saw the greatest growth in the Coptic Orthodox Church on a worldwide level in centuries, perhaps ever. When Pope Shenouda III was elected to the Coptic papacy in 1971, there were only seven
churches established outside of the Middle East and Africa. As of 2013, the Coptic Orthodox Church has 202 churches in the United States, 51 in Canada, 47 in Australia, 29 in the United Kingdom, and over 100 churches spread over Western Europe, as well as churches in Japan, New Zealand, Fiji, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Pakistan (Tadros 2013:199). In Latin America, the churches of Bolivia and Brazil have their own bishops. There is additionally a church in Mexico, and land has been purchased in the Dominican Republic for the construction of a church, the first Coptic liturgy in that country having been celebrated in October 2014 (Ramzy 2014).

The Coptic people have, through centuries of adversity and triumph, proven extremely resilient and dedicated to the faith by which they are most clearly defined, not to the exclusion of their pre-Christian, indigenous Egyptian roots, but as a mode of preserving continuity with their past. By this continuity across millennia, they provided through their language the key by which European scholars would eventually decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphs and rediscover the histories of the great dynasties of Egypt. In taking leading roles in the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, they helped to define what was (and for them and their church, still is) considered to be correct doctrine for all of Christianity. In their innovation of monasticism, begun by the great Egyptian hermit St. Anthony (c. 251-356), they inspired similar movements across the world and gave the Christian religion one of its most lasting and transformative institutions. Later, when their authority in religious matters had been discredited and their Church scorned, they kept to their faith despite great pressure and oppression from Byzantine powers. When the Arabs arrived in the seventh century, ushering in great changes that would eventually displace them as the identity of Egypt shifted to that of an Arab-oriented Islamic polity, they lost their language and standing in society, but in time took to Arabic and utilized it in order to secure their continued existence and connect them to the wider world, providing many medieval works of theology, catechesis, and apologia in that language so as to strengthen those who had not apostasized, and to once again defend themselves against the accusations of adversarial rulers.

In this unity of their history, their Church, and their people, the Copts continue on to the
present day. “Such are we Copts,” writes one author of the tendency of the Egyptian to view history as one unbroken line connecting past and present, irrespective of the events which for others might seem to mark separate, discontinuous eras. “Our history is one whole indivisible unit. Nay, it is life itself.” (El Masri 1987:1)

Having shown the historical links between the Coptic people, their homeland, and their church, let us now turn to the Coptic language itself. It is within the context of the discussion on the Coptic language that the Coptic communities surveyed in the present thesis frame various discourses on authenticity, such that is possible for individuals within these communities to make particular pronouncements regarding the nature or authentic character of Coptic within related but slightly differing narratives. These narratives will be explored in the discussions on the role of Coptic within the community (§2.2.2, §2.4.3), and in the concluding chapter of the present thesis.

1.2.2 The Coptic language

When considering the Egyptian language as a whole, it is standard practice to divide its history into three main phases or eras, conventionally named after the writing system employed to record the language during each era. These are, in diachronic order, the Hieroglyphic, the Demotic, and the Coptic. The precise dating of each era, as well as the division of the language into multiple distinct, coterminous languages following developments in grammar, phonology, and writing system, is a matter of some debate among scholars. Peust (1999:27-29) designates the era of written (Hieroglyphic) Egyptian as beginning c. 3200 BCE (further dividing the era into Early and Middle Egyptian, with Middle Egyptian beginning c. 1300 BCE), with Demotic beginning c. 500 BCE with the establishment of Persian and Greek rule, and Coptic largely replacing Demotic by c. 250 CE. This thesis is focused on the last of these stages, that of the Coptic, for which a third century CE dating is widely accepted among scholars (though not without dissenters; Gessman 1976 argues for a BCE dating of the Coptic script, citing in common with some earlier scholars the view that certain developments in phonology characteristic of the Coptic occurred well before the Common Era).
Coptic existed in several dialects (see figure 3, below). The most thoroughly documented is the Sahidic dialect (S), which developed and was popularized as the literary standard via the monastic and other writings of the Egyptian desert monk-saints of the fourth century CE. The Bohairic dialect (B) native to the western Nile delta gradually replaced the Sahidic as the language of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the centuries following the Arab-Muslim invasion, and today remains the dialect of the Coptic liturgy.

![Figure 3 Distribution of Coptic Dialects: Bohairic, Fayyumic, Sahidic, Mesokemic, Lycopolitan, Akhmimic](Source: Prof. Antti Marjanen)

As the Coptic era of Egypt’s history is intimately tied to the Christianization of the native Egyptians under Greco-Roman rule beginning in the first century CE, the Coptic language may be distinguished from earlier eras of Egyptian by the pervasive Hellenization of its vocabulary as part of that same process. In addition to its adaptation of the Greek script to write the language in the new Coptic alphabet (with 6 or 7 additional signs descended from the preceding Demotic stage of Egyptian, which represent sounds not present in Greek), as much as 40% of Coptic vocabulary is of Greek origin (Kasser 1991b). While this vocabulary as it appears in any given text is largely restricted to terms and concepts related to the Christian religion, there is also evidence of
deeper penetration into the Coptic lexicon, including the borrowing of function words such as discourse markers (Reintges 2001).

While there is a general academic consensus regarding the emergence of Coptic as a language of considerable import in the production of native hymns, sermons, and other original pieces of Christian literature by the third century of the Common Era (as opposed to earlier eras, from which the written record preserves mostly Biblical texts), and of its slow decline as the language of the native Egyptian following the Arab-Muslim invasion and conquest began by Umayyad general ‘Amrū ibn al-‘Āṣ in about 640 CE, the exact date of the death of Coptic remains a matter of considerable speculation. There is evidence that the language continued to be used into perhaps the twelfth or thirteenth century CE, when the latest Coptic documents appear in the form of marriage contracts written in the Sahidic dialect (MacCoull 1989:39). Later reports of the language’s survival into the seventeenth or perhaps even early eighteenth century CE are assumed to be unreliable. Peust (1999:31) provides a brief survey of these later reports, all of which the available evidence is decidedly against. The first Coptic Orthodox theological text composed in Arabic was written by Severus (d. 987), bishop of ‘Āshmūnayn in Upper Egypt and initial compiler of the important Coptic historical work The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria (Ar. تاریخ باطرکت کنیسه ˈal-ʔiskandriya ˈal-qibṭiyya), in recognition of the people’s declining knowledge of Coptic (Sanders 2008:170). Outside of Egypt, there is also evidence of decline. It is known from various inscriptions found in the Nubian kingdom of Makuria (modern Sudan) that Sahidic Coptic was present in Christian Nubia until the 11th-12th century CE (Ochała 2014:41), when its functions began to be taken over by the Old Nubian language (itself written in a form of the Coptic script; see Browne 1989), though it is not clear whether this signals the definitive end of Coptic as a spoken language, or the expected decline of the language on the periphery of the Coptic world in a manner concomitant with its similar decline in Egypt itself. It is interesting to note, in any case, that this date fits what we know from the historical record about the adoption of Arabic in the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. Given its pride of place in Christian worship and its function as a marker of difference vis-à-vis the ruling Muslim Arabs, we might expect Coptic to be preserved most tenaciously in the liturgical services of the Coptic Orthodox Church (as it
has been until today, albeit in a much reduced quantity and without being understood without the aid of translation). It is indeed then a serious signal of the impending death of the language that Pope Gabriel II (r. 1131-1145) decreed that readings be proclaimed in Arabic during the liturgy (Tadros 2013:xxv). While this did not conclusively mark the end of Coptic as an everyday spoken language, it is not unreasonable to conclude, following O’Leary (1934) and others, that the language was almost certainly dead by the 13th-14th century CE. There are some who argue that the language continued to evolve after it had ceased being in productive written use (e.g., see Peust 1999:91-95 for a discussion of phonetic changes which appear to have taken place at this time, c. 1300-1400 CE), suggesting that it may have continued as a spoken language for a slightly longer time than can be substantiated from the written record.

Through its preservation in the liturgy of the Coptic Orthodox Church, it has at least continued to be spoken in the sense of being vocalized, and put to use in a particular, if extremely limited and specialized, context. The social and political history of Egypt and the Coptic people brought successive waves of foreign interest in their history, language, and church, spurred on by scientific breakthroughs in the nascent field of Egyptology following Napoleon’s military and scientific excursions into Egypt in the late 18th century. In this climate of newly-arrived scientific and intellectual ideas, a reform of the pronunciation of Bohairic Coptic dialect used in the liturgy was undertaken by ʿIryān Muftāḥ, teacher of Coptic at the Clerical College in Cairo during the time of Pope Cyril IV (r.1854-1861). The resulting standard models its pronunciation on the sound values of Modern Greek for those letters which are obviously common to both the Coptic and Greek alphabets, and is hence popularly referred to as Greco-Bohairic (GB). In 1975, Coptic deacon and researcher Emile Māher Isḥāḳ proposed a reconstruction of the pronunciation of the language as it was prior to the reform. This standard, which is taught and used in very few locations compared to the Greco-Bohairic, is popularly referred to as Old Bohairic (OB).

The differences between the pronunciations of Coptic letters according to the two standards is found in the following table. These are idealized values meant to show the differences between the two standards, as well as the range of realizations considered
acceptable within either standard. The actual realization of any particular letter in the
tongue as it is used in the liturgy is discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. The individual
standards, as well as the environments which condition the realizations shown below (to
the extent that they are presented in the source texts consulted) are also found in chapter
2.

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<th>Coptic letter</th>
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<th>OB value</th>
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<td>Ⲫ</td>
<td>[h]</td>
<td>[h], [h]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲫ</td>
<td>[g], [dʒ]</td>
<td>[dʒ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲫ</td>
<td>[tʃ]</td>
<td>[ʃ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲫ</td>
<td>[ti]</td>
<td>[di]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Differing GB and OB values according to Mattar (1990) and Ishāk (1975)

In addition to the correspondences found above, there is also a difference between the
two standards in their realization of the jinkim, the stroke or accent mark that appears
over consonants and vowels to indicate a syllable boundary (usually by the insertion of a prosthetic \[e\] before the consonant over which it appears) or stress. The GB standard as taught in Mattar (1990) calls for every word bearing \textit{jinkim} to be syllabified according to the presence of this accent mark, whether or not this is actually necessary according to the phonotactic constraints of Bohairic Coptic. The main constraint preserved by use of the \textit{jinkim} is the prohibition of word-initial consonant clusters. However, later Bohairic texts employ the \textit{jinkim} in a range of other contexts outside of this (see transliteration standards, vii). The GB pronunciation inserts prosthetic \[e\] or syllable boundaries in these cases as well, even though they are not transparently phonotactically motivated (i.e., there is no word-initial consonant cluster to be broken up). The OB pronunciation does not do this, which results in differing syllabification patterns according to the two standards. For example, \textit{ⲡ̀ⲉ̀ⲛⲉϩ} \textit{epeneh} is realized according to the GB pronunciation standard as \[ep.én.eh\], and according to the OB pronunciation standard as \[bá.nah\].

The narrative constructed concerning these two standards by those who reject the GB is one of foreign vs. native – or exonormative vs. endonormative – standards of pronunciation. What is meant by this is that the pronunciation of certain letters according to the values of the GB standard (see above) is felt by some to be markedly foreign and inauthentic, as though the users of this standard are imitating Europeans in their pronunciation of \(<\beta>\) as \[v\], \(<\tau>\) as \[p\], \(<\sigma>\) as \[\theta\], and so forth, as these are the values that the corresponding Greek letters (\(\beta, \pi, \theta\)) have according to the sound values of Modern Greek.

Certain letters do not have corresponding Greek forms but instead descend from the earlier Demotic stage of the Egyptian language, such as \(<\epsilon>\). The pronunciation of these letters is still not entirely uniform. As we see from the above table, \(<\epsilon>\) is pronounced according to the GB standard as \[t\text{ʃ}\], and according to the OB standard as \[ʃ\]. This is the same as the pronunciation of \(<\omega>\) (see chapter 2).

This dynamic of exonormative and endonormative standards is a reoccurring theme in the history of previous research on the topic of Coptic historical phonology. As mentioned previously in §1.1, not all writers accept the native Coptic tradition of
pronunciation as a reliable source on this topic, and even those who are critical of the GB pronunciation standard are not therefore necessarily supporters of the other standard (which was not codified until very recently, in any case). In the history of academic discussion of Coptic sounds, there is a range of ideologies expressed. As each of these ideologies has played a part in the discussion of Coptic authenticity in the modern day, the following section will summarize the major English-language works on Coptic historical phonology so as to provide a solid foundation for the analysis of the liturgical recordings described in chapter 2, where the academic and theoretical discussion regarding these standards is compared to the actual realization of the language in practice.

1.3 Previous research on Coptic historical phonology

The early history of Coptic language research is closely tied to the history of ecumenical relations between the Egyptian Church and the churches of the West. These ecumenical efforts, spearheaded by Rome and its partisans with the goal of drawing the Coptic Orthodox Church into the Roman fold after centuries of isolation from both Rome and Constantinople, began in earnest with the Council of Florence, held 1438-1445. It was only at this time that Coptic and Coptic-Arabic manuscripts began to be collected in European libraries (Hamilton 2006:2). The Coptic alphabet was reproduced in woodcut form by Breydenbach in his travelogue Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam (1486), but it would not be until 1659 CE that Petraeus would publish the first phonetic representation of Coptic in Latin letters (Issač 1975:29).

![Breydenbach woodcut of the Coptic alphabet (1486)](Figure 4 Breydenbach woodcut of the Coptic alphabet (1486) (Source: Digitale Bibliothek)
The availability of Coptic texts greatly increased with the European occupation of Egypt in the nineteenth century (Hamilton 2006:258). It is in this era that the earlier, often fanciful (and highly criticized) work of the likes of seventeenth century Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher – who had cast a long shadow over subsequent work on Coptic – began to yield to more well-founded work by both native and foreign scholars, including work on Coptic phonology.

The linguistic study of Coptic phonology has not occupied a large portion of the scholarly work published on the language to date. The early European grammarians often attempted to fit the language into the framework already existing for the study of Greek and Hebrew, leading to many inaccurate and misleading descriptions and transcriptions of the language (for an overview, see Hamilton 2006:195 and following). This prejudice, as well as common romantic ideas regarding the language’s origins and supposed mystical qualities, impeded the growth research on the sounds of modern spoken Coptic until well into the nineteenth century. As recently as the early twentieth century, researcher G.P.G. Sobhy could only muster a bibliography of two articles on the subject, neither of which he had read prior to publishing his own work on the pronunciation of Coptic in the liturgy (Sobhy 1915:19).

Early research on the phonology of modern spoken Coptic also shows the very definite prescriptive biases that have characterized discussion of the language in informal and even some formal settings down to the modern day. While understanding of the language had advanced to the degree that scholars working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries no longer sought to prove a genetic link between Coptic and Greek or Hebrew, the attitudes that privileged these more familiar languages was nonetheless present in descriptions of the language as used in the liturgy. In the preface to his English translation of the Coptic service for the raising of the morning incense, Crichton-Stuart both acknowledges the uncertainty of assigning any definite pronunciation to Coptic at all and simultaneously dismisses as incorrect “the vulgar pronunciation which prevails among the common run of the clergy and singers”, while appraising the Greek-modeled pronunciation of Coptic priests educated at Rome as being “most likely correct” due to the ease with which it may be connected to the sound values of the same letters in
Modern Greek (1882:vii-viii). Over and over again, virtually everywhere in the sound inventory where there is some discrepancy between what the author has termed the vulgar pronunciation and that of the educated, the Greek-modeled pronunciation preferred by the educated is presented as correct, while that of the ‘lower classes’ is assumed to be the result of Arabic interference or corruption of the Coptic. The assumption that Arabic corrupted the originally essentially Greek pronunciation of Coptic is a common one, often heard today in defense of the GB pronunciation standard established and taught within the Coptic clerical school in Cairo some twenty-five years prior to the publication of Crichton-Stuart’s work.

It is curious, then, that there are some places in Crichton-Stuart’s description where we do not find defense of the Greek-modeled pronunciation where we might expect it. For example, in describing the pronunciation of the Coptic letter <ϭ>, pronounced according to the GB standard as [tʃ], Crichton-Stuart maintains it is pronounced as “ʃh, same as ω”, and comments on the tendency of some to pronounce it [tʃ] as only one of three possible variants, without reference to prescriptive notions of correctness with regard to any particular pronunciation (1882:x). The pronunciation of <ϭ> as [ʃ] is in fact a feature of the OB pronunciation standard which purports to be a rediscovery of the pronunciation of Coptic as it was before the implementation of the GB. While placing Crichton-Stuart himself or his work on either side of the modern debate over which of these two standards is most correct would be anachronistic (as OB did not exist as a distinct, codified standard in his time), his having recorded <ϭ> as [ʃ] as relatively late as 1882 could nonetheless point to a slow or incomplete diffusion of the GB pronunciation even among those who may have considered this pronunciation to be the correct way of pronouncing the language.

In common with later authors, Crichton-Stuart ascribes the presence of the prosthetic vowel common to the Bohairic pronunciation of words beginning with CC-complexes as evidence of Arabic influence on Coptic. Without mentioning the letter by name, what he describes is what many authors, Coptic and foreign, have taken to be the function of the jinkim, the grave accent placed over certain consonants in Bohairic orthography which
the native tradition describes as a prosthetic vowel, usually some type of /e/ (see discussion of alternate uses and forms of this marker in Worrel 1934:11-16). He writes: “It may be remarked generally, that when a word begins with two consonants the Copts as a rule pronounce it as if it began with an e. This is almost certainly a custom derived from Arabic: in that language, a word cannot begin with two consonants, and when Arabs try to pronounce foreign words of this kind, they often prefix an e sound” (Crichton-Stuart 1882:x). This is not outside of the realm of possibility for Late Bohairic (see Kasser 1991a), though it is worth noting that some authors working with Sahidic Coptic argue that complex onsets are allowed (Kramer 2006:400), and, as we shall see below, the Bohairic form with word-initial /e/ descended from an earlier CC-initial form as found in Sahidic cannot be assumed to be transformed to V-initial under the influence of Arabic in every case.

Dyneley Prince (1902) takes up the topic of the modern pronunciation of Coptic in the liturgy in a much more empirical fashion than his predecessors, using as an informant one of the greatest Coptic scholars of his day, Claudius Labîb (1868-1918), who at the time taught Coptic at the Patriarchal school in Cairo with considerable success, and under the direction of Pope Cyril V (r. 1874-1927) edited and published the Church’s official editions of the daily readings (Ar. القطمارس القبطي والعبري ʿal-qaṭamārus ʿal-qibṭī w ʿal-ʿarabī; Cairo, 1900-1902 in four volumes – two in Coptic and two in Arabic), the missal (Ar. كتاب الخوئاجي المقدس kitāb ʾal-ḥūlāġī ʾal-muqaddas; Cairo, 1904), and the funerary rite (Cairo, 1905) (Mallon 1907:265). From Labib, Dyneley Prince collects the names of individual Coptic letters as they are known in both upper and lower Egypt, specifically in Cairo, Assiût (Ar. أسيوط ʿāsiyūṭ), Abydos, Luxor, and Assuán (Ar. أسوان ʿāswān), in order to demonstrate that the variation that exists among the pronunciation of a given letter name in particular locations is evidence of the continuation into the modern day of variants that existed between the Sahidic and Bohairic dialects when Coptic was still a living language. “In short, we still have in the conventional utterances of the mass what seems to be a genuine echo of how the ancient language must have sounded both in Upper and in Lower Egypt; and this, too, in spite of the fact that the idiom of the church is orthographically Boheiric. There can be no doubt that in Upper Egypt the Boheiric is
still uttered as if it were Sahidic, i.e. in accordance with the original Sahidic vocalization” (Dyneley Prince 1902:291). This argument is taken up by many in the modern day who insist that the OB pronunciation standard is in fact a rediscovery of the pronunciation of Sahidic, and not Bohairic Coptic as it is argued to have been spoken prior to the pronunciation reform of the 1850s – an opinion that does not necessarily indicate a strong ideological attachment to any particular standard (i.e., it is common for laypersons uninitiated in the controversies surrounding the pronunciation of modern spoken Coptic, who have invariably been raised with the GB pronunciation standard that is common to nearly all churches, to react to hearing OB for the first time by claiming that it is Sahidic, without any prompting or explicit justification for doing so). Dyneley Prince also collects recordings via phonograph of liturgical recitations from the Gospel of St. John as recited at Cairo and Assuán (lower and upper Egypt, respectfully, as the geographical orientation of Egypt follows the flow of the Nile), analyzing the resulting transcriptions side-by-side and using the differences found therein to make general observations about the pronunciation of the language (ibid:294-304).

It is not necessary to recount in detail the content that analysis, but only to emphasize how Dyneley Prince exceeded earlier analyses of the language in its liturgical setting. In addition to rejecting the common view, which would continue to be spread after his publication, that the pronunciation of Coptic in the modern day is somehow degraded and heavily indebted to Arabic, Dyneley Prince argued through analysis of data collected in situ that the variation which was observed throughout the country had its roots not in the ignorance of the lower classes and their resistance to the Europeanized pronunciation of an educated elite, as had been argued by Crichton-Stuart (1882) and others, but in preexisting dialect variation in the language as it was found at various locations throughout the country, such as would be natural to expect with any spoken language spread across a large territory. While he was pessimistic about the dream of Claudius Labîb to revive the language as an everyday spoken idiom – ironically dismissing such a goal as impossible only a few sentences after noting that Labîb had managed to teach his students well enough that they could follow school lectures given in the language, and converse with one another easily on any subject (Dyneley Prince 1902:290) – he also treated the language as though it were a living language, examining the details of its
phonology based on actual recorded speech, not idealizations borne of prejudice in favor of exonormative standards established by Rome and its Western scholars, or for that matter by Cairo and the reform-minded among its teachers and authorities. This shift toward valuing native pronunciations was in itself a step forward, in marked contrast from the openly hostile or dismissive attitudes taken by other writers. Methodologically, the current thesis was undertaken in the same spirit as the work of Dyneley Prince.

In some ways, the work of Sobhy, one of the earliest native Coptic researchers to publish in English, is a continuation on the themes and approaches developed by Dyneley Prince, but exhibits an almost mirror image of earlier dismissive Western scholars with regard to his evaluation of the GB pronunciation which those same scholars had taken to be self-evidently correct. Where they had assumed that the native Copts’ pronunciation was doubtlessly a corruption of the original tongue, Sobhy begins his work with the following appraisal of the state of Coptic pronunciation in Egypt in his day (1915:15):

All modern books written on Coptic by native authors adopt more or less a mutilated form of Greek pronunciation and apply it entirely to their language. Unfortunately none of our native authors here knows sufficient Greek to realise the outstanding mistakes he is trying to form into rules applicable to the Coptic language. I believe that an ordinary uneducated priest in reciting any Coptic prayer in Church, pronounces the language much more correctly, and naturally too, than if he followed those erroneous rules set down in the modern Coptic books […] Indeed he pronounces the Arabic language itself as if it were Coptic. Often and often this fact struck me while I was at Church, standing at a distance from the officiating priest, when it was impossible for me-and I believe for many others-to decide whether he was chanting in Arabic or in Coptic. […] All the priests who have not adopted the modern artificial method of Coptic pronunciation utter most of their words as if they were spelt according to the Sahidic dialect. It must be remembered also that the Church pronunciation of Coptic is the same all over Egypt as I have verified it myself; except in the case of Girga where local characteristics of pronunciation are alluded to […] In Alexandria the pronunciation is certainly contaminated with modern innovations.
It is only in Upper Egypt and some places of Lower Egypt where old priests are still officiating that one hears the Church pronunciation in its purest form.

Sobhy reinforces Dyneley Prince’s view that the native Bohairic pronunciation is essentially a transformation of orthographically Bohairic texts into Sahidic spoken passages, but while Dyneley Prince framed the issue of the interaction of Coptic and Arabic as one of preservation of Coptic from the corruption of the Arabic language (Dyneley Prince 1902:291), Sobhy claims above that it is rather the Arabic of the Egyptian which that has been phonologically assimilated into the preexisting patterns of Coptic pronunciation. Later works by authors such as Bishai (1960, 1961) and Isḥāḳ (1975) would examine the influence of Coptic on Egyptian Arabic in some detail, but what is important for the current study is again the reorientation found in Sobhy away from foreign standards of pronunciation. The aforementioned Isḥāḳ even credits Sobhy as the first to argue against the GB pronunciation (1975:3), placing him firmly on the side of the native tradition of pronunciation.

Later in the article, Sobhy produces a table of Coptic letters with their approximate values. The value of \( \sigma \) in Sobhy’s table is given as “ch in English word chair” (Sobhy 1915:16), with neither the [ʃ] or [g] variants found in Crichton-Stuart (1882:x), and in contradiction to Dyneley Prince, who gives the realization [tʃ] as characteristic of the pronunciation of Cairo (i.e., the GB pronunciation), while Upper Egypt pronounces \( \sigma \) as [ʃ] (1902:303). It seems unlikely that the diffusion of the GB standard would be so complete in the thirteen years between the work of Dyneley Prince and Sobhy as to eliminate what is presented in Dyneley Prince as a salient marker of preexisting dialect difference, but Sobhy regards the [ʃ] pronunciation as an error rather than something characteristic of either dialect, and provides no reason for his judgment (1915:18). Suffice it to say this casts doubt on his earlier claim that the Church pronunciation of Coptic is the same all over Egypt. The article ends with the Lord’s Prayer in Coptic, with transcription according to the native priest’s pronunciation.
In his subsequent work some twenty years later, Worrell provides backing for Sobhy’s intuition regarding \(<\&\rangle\), commenting that it is “only in very late and degenerate Bohairic that \(\&\) is \(\&\)” (1934:1). Elsewhere, Worrell is dismissive of not only Sobhy, but of native tradition as a whole, claiming that not only Sobhy but Dyneley Prince before him “shows that the native tradition presents an impossible state of affairs for any actual language”, and submitting that “even if the native Coptic tradition were recognized as a modern language […], it is not the Coptic in which we are interested” (ibid:2, 4). While dismissive of the claims of Dyneley Prince and Sobhy that the native, non-Greek pronunciation of Coptic is to be held up as pure, Worrell is also critical of the introduction of Modern Greek sound values for Coptic letters, and hence criticized the GB pronunciation standard as “an affectation; as though one were to pronounce all the French words in English according to the present usage of Paris” (ibid:7). Rather, he supposes throughout that Copts took up the Greek sound values as would have been known at the time when adapting the Greek alphabet in order to write their language. This is a reasonable assumption, although its impact on the quest to recover the original sound values of Coptic in any dialect is somewhat less directly relevant to question of this thesis, concerned as it is with the GB pronunciation, which largely takes on the sound values of Modern Greek regardless of what the original Coptic values may have been, and the OB pronunciation, which itself concerns reestablishing the pronunciation of the language as it was before the introduction of the GB standard, rather than the hypothesized original values as they may have existed among the earliest Coptic speakers and scribes. That said, through his rejection of both the native tradition and the GB pronunciation standard, Worrell makes an important contribution to the dialogue among scholars regarding Coptic phonology by showing that one need not align strictly with either ideological camp in order to make substantial gains in the field.

As to the content of his arguments or the Coptic in which he is interested, it strikes the present author as strange that the argument put forth for \(<\&\rangle\) being realized as \([\mathbf{f}]\) and not \([\mathbf{j}]\) prior to the modern day rests on observation that, at a certain point in the evolution of the Coptic people away from their language and toward being monolingual Arabic speakers, we begin to see \(<\&\rangle\) represented in the Arabic-written Coptic learners texts as
ش [ʃ], as Arabic lacks the sound [tʃ] (ibid:5). This is true as far as Arabic phonology is concerned, but does not address the presence of the equivalent Arabic digraph ش <tʃ> to represent that sound in foreign words. This digraph is given in the table provided by Sobhy (1915:16) as the Arabic transliteration of <ʃ>, and Worrell references that work numerous times, so it is not reasonable to assume that he overlooked it. Yet Worrell insists that ش [ʃ] “is the value that Š has at present” (1934:6), at variance with both the insistence of Sobhy that it is “always pronounced as ch in English chair” (1915:18), and the earlier writers already surveyed who include [tʃ] as a variant pronunciation of what is in Upper Egypt [ʃ]. Perhaps Worrell was unaware of these variants, but it seems more likely that in dismissing Sobhy’s defense of the native Coptic tradition, he gave more credit to Arabic for changing this sound than did some his sources.

Most arguments concerning the sound inventory of Coptic focus on a few heavily disputed consonants (as with <ʃ>, above), and so the present thesis will continue in that vein. However, it is worth mentioning Śmieszek (1936) as a representative of parallel work being done on the Coptic vowels. This work sheds light on the development of the _jinkim_ supralinear stroke (in Bohairic occurring as a grave accent, or sometimes a dot; in Sahidic, as below, as a combinatorial line) which prefixes a prosthetic [e] to consonants over which it is present in order to aid in syllabification. Śmieszek represents it in his transliteration as a superscript <e>, arguing it to be a graphemic representation of reduced vowels present in unstressed syllables which may also surface in Bohairic orthographically as word-final ỉ/i/ in those cases where that position is assumed following the loss of a word-final C (1936:1-2). Elsewhere, Śmieszek argues via the following steps for the simplification of geminates after schwa to account for the correspondence between B ermē (ⲉⲣⲕⲏⲡ) and S r̄mjī (ⲣ̅ⲕⲓⲱⲡ), both meaning ‘tear’ (1936:51):

B *r̄mjī > * r̄mmī (by progressive assimilation) > r̄mī (by simplification of geminates) > *rmī = *ermī, written in Bohairic as ermē
This has implications for Bohairic relative to the established discussion in the literature on its relation to Sahidic, whereby Worrell argues that the use of *jinkim* in Sahidic is only to mark sonorant consonants (of which Sahidic had many), never to stand for *e* or the insertion of a prosthetic or epenthetic vowel, as it sometimes does in Bohairic (1934:13). Accordingly, the Sahidic word would be read according to Worrell’s system as /mdi/. If we follow Kasser (1991a) in accepting that Classical Bohairic only marked sonorant consonants ꜱ and ꜱ with *jinkim*, there would have been no way to orthographically indicate the word-initial syllabic <r> present in the intermediate form above, which could explain therefore the presence of an explicitly written <e> in the Bohairic orthography. Worrell characterizes Bohairic as exhibiting “a fuller vocalization” than Sahidic due to a slower manner of speaking (1934:6), so it is possible that the new initial vowel would have been fully vocalized as well, and not just a matter of orthographic convention. At any rate, this is a significant derivation because it shows at least one instance wherein the presence of V-initial word form in Bohairic corresponds to a CC-initial form in Sahidic not due to Arabic influence on Coptic phonotactics, as several authors consulted for this thesis have claimed in discussing the relative frequency of *jinkim* in Bohairic, but due to word-internal changes. Other portions in Śmieszek also help to account for the relatively vowel-heavy appearance of Bohairic texts compared to Sahidic and other dialects, such as the habit found among Bohairic scribes in particular of writing the first element of a diphthong, which is always short, with a long vowel, leading to sequences of long vowels (1936:55; transliteration standardized): S moū (ⲙⲟⲟⲩ) B mōū (ⲙⲟⲟⲩ)

While subsequent work would continue to advance scholarly understanding of Coptic phonology, particularly in its relation to both earlier forms of Egyptian and Semitic (e.g., Lambdin 1958), the next major advance in describing Coptic as it is actually spoken in the modern day was most probably the work of Coptic researcher Dr. Emile Māher Isḥāḳ. Isḥāḳ began his work on the language in Egypt in the 1960s, collecting and analyzing manuscripts from his native Upper Egypt and elsewhere in order to establish the pronunciation of Bohairic Coptic as it was known before the introduction of the GB pronunciation standard by ʿIryān Muftāḥ in 1858. This work eventually led to his massive four-volume thesis *The Phonetics and Phonology of the Bohairic Dialect of Coptic and*
the Survival of Coptic Words in the Colloquial and Classical Arabic of Egypt and of Coptic Grammatical Constructions in Colloquial Egyptian Arabic (1975), for which he was awarded a Ph.D. from Oxford University. This work is the foundational document in the establishment of the OB pronunciation standard. It is referenced extensively in §2.4 of the present work. As such, a detailed description of its contents is unnecessary here. It is sufficient here to note that it far exceeds in its scope any previous work dedicated to Coptic phonology. Of particular note are its detailed sections on the ‘traditional’ (OB) versus ‘modern’ (GB) pronunciations of each individual Coptic consonant and vowel phoneme. Previous work tended to group sounds by class (place or manner – or both, as in Worrell 1934), or to focus on the historical evolution and behavior of a single sound, as in Lambdin’s examination of the bivalence of Coptic eta (1958). Similarly, while previous work (e.g., Sobhy 1915) contained tables listing the Coptic letters with their Coptic names as well as their equivalents as found in Arabic transliteration and English explanation of their assumed phonetic values, only so much information could be imparted in such small space. Ishāk greatly improves on earlier attempts to provide this information by first listing in each section dealing with individual letters the numerous permutations of their names as found in Arabic sources, and later devoting the entire third volume of the thesis (some six hundred pages) to Coptic lexicographical items and their corresponding realization in Arabic via borrowing or derivation, thereby establishing via preponderance of evidence the influence of Coptic on Arabic (particularly Egyptian Arabic, for obvious reasons) that was assumed by earlier writers to be either a degradation of Coptic (as in Crichton-Stuart, Worrell, et al.) or a degradation of Arabic (as in Sobhy). These derivations also connect Coptic to earlier stages of the Egyptian language, as well as suggesting possible cognates in other languages, as in the example given below (Ishāk 1975:819; Coptic transliteration added):

SBF ⲛⲏⲧ ⲥⲱ ⲍⲧ ⲑⲧⲧ ⲥⲱ Ⲋⲧⲧ Ⲋⲧ ⲁⲧ ⲥⲱ ⲁⲧ Ⲋⲧ Ⲋⲧ ⲁⲧ ⲁⲧ Ⲋⲧ ⲁⲧ ⲁⲧ Ⲋⲧ Ⲋⲧ ⲁⲧ ⲁⲧ Ⲋⲧ ⲁⲧ Ⲋⲧ ⲁⲧ ⲁⲧ Ⲋⲧ ⲁⲧ ⲁⲧ Ⲋⲧ ⲁⲧ ⲁⲧ ⲍⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑⲧ ⲑ往外
While such derivations as the above do not directly pertain to the pronunciation of modern spoken Coptic as used in the liturgy, they nonetheless are used in support of the authenticity of the OB pronunciation standard in the face of claims that Coptic was, following the Arab-Muslim invasion of the seventh century CE, so thoroughly degraded by the Egyptians’ shift to Arabic that the relation of the two languages was to, in the words of Worrell, “corrupt the vernacular without benefiting [the] traditional language” (1934:5). To the contrary, in showing not only the Coptic origin of many Egyptian Arabic words and phrases, but also the relation of the Coptic to the Demotic, the common contention that this or that innovation must have come about as the result of late changes within Coptic (either after initial Arabic contact or at another time) is shown to be a difficult argument to sustain. In the above example, the evolution from the Demotic to the Coptic supposes the loss of the initial ‘ayn /ʕ/ – hardly a change that can be attributed to Arabic, which retains this sound – but other, more controversial sound changes in Coptic which are often attributed to Arabic influence are likewise traced to their pre-Coptic origins in Ishāḳ, often via Arabic sources. Such is the case regarding the realization of Coptic <ⲡ> as [b]. This letter has been assumed since the beginning of modern Western scholarship on Coptic phonology to be properly pronounced [p], in imitation of the Greek π. To support this contention, reference is frequently made to the fact that Arabic lacks the phoneme /p/ (e.g., Crichton-Stuart 1882:xiii-ix), making this sound change easily explainable as a fairly straightforward case of Arabic-induced loss of a previously distinguishable segment, and assimilation to the nearest value in the Arabic sound inventory. In support of its value as /b/, not /p/, Ishāḳ provides in translation a quote from Sobhy, taken from his Arabic grammar of the language (Ishāḳ 1975:366):

\[ \text{ⲡ is pronounced like Arabic /b/, and there is no difference between it and the letter ब. The interchange between the two letters began to appear in the Hieroglyphic ‘language’ in the late Roman periods, long before the generation of the Coptic language. It is wrong to say that the soundness of pronouncing \( \text{ⲡ} \) as European /p/ is lost through the influence of the Arabic language on Coptic, as there is no /p/ in the last (i.e., in Arabic). Indeed, this confusion did not occur except in pronunciation only and not in spelling at all.} \] (Sobhy 1925:18)
As stated above, Ishāḳ (1975) is referenced extensively in §2.4 of the present work. The two examples above serve to show the advantages possessed of the native researcher in this case, as his facility with his native Arabic language, as well as access to more material on which to base his conclusions (material which was likely unavailable to previous scholars due to their own lack of Arabic language skills, as well as the difficulty involved in gathering material in an alien country, which is conceivably also not a problem for the native researcher), allows Ishāḳ to provide a much more thorough examination of the language than his predecessors, and to counter some of the assumptions which stood for decades more or less unchallenged in the field of Coptic phonological studies.

There is very little in the wake of Ishāḳ that continues this work, or even that reexamines previous work in a similar vein. As his thesis remains unpublished, and was until very recently almost impossible to find, it is perhaps not surprising that no modern author has taken up this topic. There are a few references to the existence of the ‘reformed’ (GB) pronunciation in recent works (notably Peust 1999, who is somewhat unique in devoting portions of his work to changes that occurred to the pronunciation of Coptic after it is assumed to have died out as an everyday spoken language), but these are usually quite incidental and brief. Even valuable modern work on Coptic phonology such as Loprieno (1997) makes no mention of any particular traditions regarding pronunciation, only the conventions of particular dialects during the centuries in which Coptic was still spoken natively in Egypt and the relationship of particular Coptic forms to earlier eras of Egyptian. Grammars and workbooks produced by native authors for pedagogical use within their churches, associations, or by individual Copts interested in learning their ancestral language have been produced for quite some time now (as evidenced by the quote above from Sobhy’s 1925 grammar), and the most recent of these tend to at least mention the existence of the OB pronunciation standard (as does Younan 2005, who gives OB variants in the opening section on the Coptic alphabet), even while teaching the GB that is common to almost all Coptic churches. These works can hardly be considered scholarly, however.
Of more general use are the various linguistically-focused articles, some already previously referenced in the present section, found in the eight-volume reference *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, edited by prominent Coptologist Aziz Suryal Atiya (1898-1988) and published posthumously in 1991. Because of the inaccessibility of the printed set, the author of the present work has consulted the digitized version hosted by Claremont Colleges Digital Library, known as the *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*, co-edited by Karen J. Torjensen and Gawdat Gabra. This is an expanded digital version, hosting all the articles of the original eight-volume printed edition as well as new content. As all the articles from this work which are referenced by the current author come from the original encyclopedia, for the sake of convenience and clarity in linking the material to its source of origin, the original 1991 publication date is kept in citations of these articles, with website addresses of their current online location in the list of references at the end of this thesis.

With the exception of Dyneley Prince (1902), Sobhy (1915), and possibly Crichton-Stuart (1882), the works reviewed above all approach the subject of Coptic historical phonology from a purely theoretical basis, either without concern for the sounds of the spoken language as pronounced in their day in the Coptic Orthodox Church, or with a dismissive attitude toward that pronunciation. This is ideologically consistent in the case of those authors who considered the pronunciation used in the Church to be self-evidently erroneous or otherwise not worthy of being analyzed. In the modern day, however, with the establishment of the OB pronunciation standard which was not codified until sometime after Crichton-Stuart, Dyneley Prince, Sobhy, et al., had already contributed to the body of research on this topic, there is reason to revisit this subject with a new perspective.

In order to provide evidence of the phonetic differences presupposed by the establishment of the two pronunciation standards analyzed in this thesis, it is necessary to collect and analyze the GB and OB pronunciations as they are realized in the liturgy, separate from the standards found in pedagogical texts and theses. The following chapter
does this, and in so doing, contributes to the body of work on Coptic sounds in a way that was not possible until very recently.

As these different realizations are also the basis for the judgments made by users of the language regarding the correctness or incorrectness of any given realization (i.e., GB users’ evaluation of OB pronunciation; OB users’ evaluation of GB pronunciation), it is also necessary to describe and analyze the actual realization of the language at a given site before moving on to describing the discussion about the Coptic language as it takes place in the community itself. This sociolinguistic aspect of the analyses in chapter 2 is crucial to answering the research question of how members of the Coptic community construct their own ideas of what it means to speak or otherwise use authentic Coptic. For this reason it will form a major part of the analysis not only in chapter 2, but also the concluding chapter.
Chapter 2 Coptic Pronunciation in the modern day

Loprieno (1997:434) defines the problem of assigning a particular underlying phonemic value to a given Egyptian grapheme in the following terms: “[I]n the case of Egyptian (and of many other ‘philological’ languages known only through written records), the distinction between the phoneme as the distinctive minimal unity of the language (/x/) and the often much larger inventory of sounds ([x]) representing its physical realizations is heuristically less predictable than for languages with a better-known philological structure.” Regarding the Coptic stage of Egyptian in particular, he states that the variety of Coptic dialects found in the written record “do not necessarily reproduce local varieties of the language”, but rather that “they represent, to a large extent, discrete sets of mainly graphic conventions for rendering Egyptian in an inadequate foreign script.” (ibid:446)

These two factors – the unreliability of the relationship between a given phoneme and the grapheme which is assumed to represent it (which is a property of all alphabetic writing systems, but is exacerbated in Coptic due to the lack of knowledge about the language outside of written records), and the inadequacy of the script to discretely represent the full range of sounds in the language – lie at the center of the current thesis. While much research on the Coptic stage of Egyptian has been concerned with establishing its phonology, this research has often been hampered by two factors by which every study of the language is constrained: (1) The lack of native speakers to consult regarding intuitions of correctness, and (2) the ideological motivations and assumptions inherent in advancing a particular standard of pronunciation of the language.

The combination of these two main factors has created a number of challenges in the study of modern spoken Coptic, not all of which are directly related to the difficulty inherent in positing a stable and empirically-based relationship between the spoken language and its written form. While the constraint noted in (1) is insurmountable in the modern day, (2) is a challenge that has received far too little attention. For all practical purposes, (1) can be dealt with to some degree by looking at questions of Coptic pronunciation in light of established GB or OB standards (yielding, of course, not exactly native intuitions, nor a single idea of correctness in this context, but at least something
that can be qualified according to a given pronunciation standard); by contrast, (2) has been a feature of academic writing on Coptic phonology since the beginning of modern inquiries on the language (cf. §1.3), but has gone largely unnoticed in that same academic setting, with the exception of Ishāq (1975), who devotes considerable space to the opinions of Sobhy, et al. in order to trace the antecedents of his own position regarding the GB pronunciation.

With this background in mind, this chapter is divided into the following reoccurring sections:

1. Descriptions of the pronunciation standards to be analyzed, as these must stand in for native speaker intuition, by necessity (see above).

2. Introduction to and phonological analysis of the pronunciation of Coptic as found at different sites which use a given pronunciation standard, in order to measure the degree of correspondence of speakers’ actual realizations of the language to the aforementioned standards.

3. Discussion of the role of Coptic in the communities surveyed. This is intended to explore the range of ideological uses to which Coptic is put in the formation of narratives of linguistic and other types of authenticity that are constructed in the Coptic communities surveyed.

In addition to these recurring sections, §2.4.1 contains additional background information on the tradition of OB pronunciation as taught in the churches and monastery of Rochester, NY.

The methodology followed in analyzing field recordings made at GB and OB sites in §2.2.1 and §2.4.2 prioritizes those segments and features that distinguish the two pronunciation standards, so as to aid in their comparison. As such, examples are taken only from among those segments of the liturgy present in field recordings made at both sites, which differ somewhat from one another due to their having occurred during different seasons of the liturgical calendar.
Regarding methodology more generally, interviews were chosen over other possible means of data collection (e.g., written survey, online survey, etc.) in order to give the interviewees the most freedom in formulating their responses, particularly given the reality that most interviewees were L2 or perhaps L3 English users who might therefore find it easier to speak extemporaneously on topics by means of circumlocution than to write answers in English in an inherently limited field, as in a written survey. This proved to be especially useful in the collection of data, as many insights regarding interviewees’ language attitudes toward Coptic came out of spontaneous conversation after the prepared interview questions had been completed. The collection and analysis of the interview data was aided by the thematic grouping of the interview questions (see appendix). Questions were arranged into four groups designed to gather information on the following: (1) previous exposure to the language and self-assessment of competency in pronunciation at an individual and community-wide level; (2) methods and challenges of teaching the language; (3) attitudes about the amount of Coptic used in the community’s services; (4) general feelings about the importance of Coptic.

Upon reviewing the interviews, patterns were discovered in the responses that allowed the researcher to group the answers given in Albuquerque thematically (see §2.2.2), according to those reoccurring themes that were found in the responses of a majority, and a minority, of interviewees. The same process was repeated in the analysis of the Rochester interviews (§2.4.3), which led not to the creation of thematic categories as in Albuquerque, but to the description of responses according to the type of authority invoked in the construction of narratives at that location (most often historical authority, as the OB pronunciation standard is a historically-based reconstruction). This was preferred to the creation or recreation of thematic categories for the Rochester interviews because the overarching context in which the answers were provided prioritized the differentiation of the OB pronunciation standard and the GB pronunciation standard along those lines – i.e., that one was authentic and the other was not, and that this authenticity was conferred upon one standard or denied to the other by reference to its historical pedigree (a point which was made with varying degrees of explicitness by all Rochester interviewees). In this way, a differentiation between the narratives constructed...
in support of the use of the language in the GB and OB communities arose from comparison of the interviews as conducted at both sites not by pitting the statements of GB and OB users against each other, but by looking at what the interviewees themselves prioritized in the construction of their particular narratives as recorded in their responses, and organizing their responses accordingly.

Though more detailed information is available, the demographics of the participants in this study must be described in general terms in order to protect their anonymity. 23 people participated in this study – 12 in Rochester, 11 in Albuquerque. Those in Rochester range from 18 to 81 years of age, and include 7 native Arabic speakers. 4 native English speakers, and 1 native Dutch speaker. 11 participants are male; 1 is female. In Albuquerque, which is the smaller of the two communities, ages were provided in broad ranges, at the request of the community. Albuquerque participants include 5 people between the ages of 20 and 60, and 6 over the age of 60. 7 participants are male; 4 are female. All participants in Albuquerque are native Arabic speakers. All participants at both sites report being naturalistically exposed to Coptic in a church environment, though the specifics of that exposure (e.g., number of years exposed, classes taken, etc.) tend to vary somewhat according to the individual and their ecclesiastical rank of service within the Church, and hence cannot be discussed here due to the likelihood that such discussion could compromise individual identities.

2.1 The Greco-Bohairic (GB) pronunciation

The Greco-Bohairic (GB) pronunciation was introduced as a standardization of the pronunciation the Coptic language by ‘Iryăn Muftāh, teacher of Coptic at the Coptic College in Cairo during the time of Pope Cyril IV (r. 1854-1861). In an event known within the Coptic community as the Coptic pronunciation reform, Muftāh standardized the pronunciation of the language according to the sound values of Modern Greek (cf. §1.2). Natively-produced grammars of the Bohairic dialect of Coptic invariably teach this pronunciation standard. The following description of the phonological inventory and stress of the GB pronunciation standard is adapted from Mattar (1990).
Due to the many rules governing the pronunciation of a given letter in the GB pronunciation, the table below presents the correspondences between a grapheme and its assumed phonemic – or basic – value, followed by environments which condition other realizations. As the GB pronunciation standard is modeled after Modern Greek, as a rule those values which correspond to those found in Greek are generally assumed to be the ‘correct’ values (cf. Crichton-Stuart 1882, referenced in §1.3). In addition to the values listed in the table below, Coptic also forms diphthongs by adding ι /i/, οῳ /ū/, or ι /w/ after vowels: ια /aj/, ει /ej/, etc. (Mattar:19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coptic letter, name</th>
<th>Basic values; other realizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α alpha</td>
<td>“Pronounced like a in ‘father’” (Mattar 1990:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β veeta</td>
<td>v; [b] / <em># and V,C</em>/C#, and in personal names; [w] in VNCα wisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γ gamma or ghamma</td>
<td>g; [ɣ] /C or vowels α, ο, ογ [ū]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δ thetta</td>
<td>δ; [d] in personal names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ε ey</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ζ zeeta</td>
<td>z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η eeta</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>θ theetta</td>
<td>θ; [t] / _ω, τ, η, c; /θ/ _δ, ο, ω</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ι yota</td>
<td>i; [i] in word-medial position; [j] /#_ (e.g., κωτ /jōt/ ‘father’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κ kabba</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>λ lola</td>
<td>l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η mei</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η nei</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>υ exi</td>
<td>ks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ο o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>π pei</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ρ ro</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ seema</td>
<td>s; [s] / _α, ο, ω; in Greek words: [z] / <em>(</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τ tav</td>
<td>t; [t] / _α, ο, ω; in Greek words: [d] / <em>(</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>υ epsilon</td>
<td>i; [w] /#ο_ (e.g., ογον /wɔn/ ~ [uʔɔn] ‘every’); [v] /<em>α, e</em>; [j]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ϕ phei</td>
<td>“ph as in alphabet” (ibid:12) (= [f]); [v]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χ kei</td>
<td>k; in Greek words: [j] / _e, τ, η, γ; [x] /_C, α, ο, ω</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ψ psi</td>
<td>ps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ω oo</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ω shai</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ι fai</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>θ khai</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ς hori</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δ jenja</td>
<td>g; [dʒ] / _e, τ, η</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The stress that is placed on the word at the end of the compound is governed by the following general rules (ibid:21):

1. Stress is on either the ultimate or penultimate syllable of the word.
2. Vowels \( \varepsilon /\i/ \), \( \omega /\o/ \), and \( \omicron /\o/ \) are always stressed.
3. Word-final \( \varepsilon /\e/, \i /\i/ \) and diphthongs \( \varepsilon /\i/ \) and \( \varepsilon /\e/ \) are always stressed.
4. Word-final \( \omicron /\o/ \) is stressed except when it occurs as the suffixed 3PPL, e.g., \( \varepsilon /\o/ \) ‘they untie, undo’ (ibid:237), or in the words \( \varepsilon /\o/ \) ‘back’, \( \varepsilon /\o/ \) ‘lips’, and \( \varepsilon /\o/ \) ‘dreams’
5. Word-final \( /\e/ \) is not stressed, except in some adjectives such as \( /\e/ \) ‘wise’ (GB /save/) and \( /\e/ \) ‘blind’ (GB /velle/), and a few other words such as \( /\e/ \) ‘witness’ and \( /\e/ \) ‘figs’.

Working with Sahidic data, Kramer provides further insights into the probable stress patterns of Coptic, stating that “Coptic has one main stress per word, as far to the right edge of the word as possible, and no secondary stress”, as well as “extensive reduction to schwa or a syllabic consonant in unstressed syllables” (2006:401). The reduction of unstressed syllables to syllabic consonants may be more common in the Sahidic dialect than in the Bohairic that is the focus of this thesis (cf. the observations of Worrell regarding the differences between the pronunciation of the two, summarized in §1.3), but
these observations do provide support for the right-leaning stress pattern expected following Mattar (1990:21).

2.2 Case Study: GB pronunciation at St. Bishoy church, Albuquerque, NM

St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church is a small community located in Albuquerque, New Mexico within the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States. Its members are mostly ethnic Egyptians, and all but the youngest (U.S.-born children of adult members of the congregation) speak Arabic as their mother tongue. Its liturgies are celebrated mostly in English, in keeping with the historical and current stance of Orthodox Christianity that the liturgy be celebrated in the language of the country in which the church is located. Coptic and Arabic are also used, in addition to Greek. When Coptic is used, it is according to the GB pronunciation standard as described in the previous section. The Greek portions are mainly confined to the deacons’ responses and a few Greek-language hymns and doxologies. In practice, the distribution of languages in a given liturgy is somewhat fluid, and it is not uncommon for a portion of the liturgy, or even a particular prayer or hymn within it, to begin in one language and conclude in another. This is facilitated by the use of trilingual Coptic/Arabic/English service books and PowerPoint presentations, which allow the liturgy to be followed at all times by those who may be unfamiliar with the language being used at any particular point.

This thesis focuses on the Coptic portions of the liturgy, which comprise roughly 15% of the total time of the liturgical recording to be analyzed in this section. For the purposes of this thesis, the Coptic portions are defined as those composed of Coptic-language utterances to the exclusion of passages recited in other languages as part of the same dialogue or prayer. This excludes the frequent deacons’ and congregational responses in Greek or English without also excluding individual Greek words that are found in Coptic texts due to the pervasive lexical influence of Greek upon Coptic which, due to the context of the borrowing, includes some of the most central concepts and persons referenced in the liturgical texts.

The recordings which form the corpus consulted in this section and the following section were made at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church over a period two weeks, from
March 1st to March 15th, 2014. This time period falls within the Lenten fasting period on the Coptic Orthodox liturgical calendar, which in that year lasted from February 24th to April 11th. This is significant because during this period the Coptic Orthodox Church celebrates its liturgies according to the liturgy of St. Cyril, not that of St. Basil which is used during ordinary (non-fasting/non-feasting) time. In practice, the differences between this liturgy and that of St. Basil do not preclude referencing the text of the liturgy of St. Basil as a general reference for these recordings, as well. The reference text for the liturgy of St. Cyril prepared by St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Jersey City, New Jersey states that “[t]he priest commences as in the liturgy of St. Basil until the reading of the Gospel” (1998), meaning that a large portion of the two liturgies is the same, though they may have different melodies and different hymns as appropriate for their respective liturgical seasons.

What follows in this section of the chapter is a phonological analysis of the Coptic portions of the liturgy as captured at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church. Text examples are presented in the following format, which are labeled accordingly in their introductory examples in order to orient the reader to the proper identification of each line:

Line (1): The original Coptic text. (CP)
Line (2): Its transliteration, according to the GB sound values established in table 2, above. (TL)
Line (3): Broad phonetic transcription of the liturgical recording. (GB)
Line (4): English translation, as it appears in the official translation (see below). (EN)

The citation following references to particular portions of the liturgy, such as (1993:xxx), refers to the first edition of the English translation of the Coptic liturgy of St. Basil, which was made by a committee formed by Pope Shenouda III (r. 1971-2002) with the goal of standardizing the English translation of the liturgy used in churches throughout the world. All references to the printed liturgical text, including tallies presented in various tables, are based on the text as it is presented in this book. The only changes to that text as presented in this thesis are the replacement of all majuscule letters with their miniscule equivalents and a change to the orthography of one abbreviated form
of a frequently occurring noun (ⲡⲟⲓⲥ, abbreviated here ⲡⲟⲓⲥ), both due to the limitations of the Unicode Coptic font used throughout this thesis. The colon present in the Coptic text marks the end of a measure in the recitation of the text, not consonant or vowel length. Hymns or portions of hymns or responses which lack their own title in the referenced book (e.g., “Hymn/Prayer of X”) are referred to by their opening word or words, as is popular custom.

2.2.1 Analysis of the Coptic portions of the Liturgy

The methodology followed in the analysis of these recordings prioritizes those sound values which differ between the GB and OB pronunciation standards. These are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coptic letter</th>
<th>GB value</th>
<th>OB value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ⲧ</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲩ</td>
<td>[v], [b], [w] in ⲩⲦⲁⲝ [wīsa]</td>
<td>[w], [ū], [b]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲩ</td>
<td>[g], [ɣ]</td>
<td>[dʒ], [g]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲫ</td>
<td>[ð], [d]</td>
<td>[d]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲥ</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲧ</td>
<td>[i]</td>
<td>[ɪ], [ā]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲣ</td>
<td>[θ], [t], [tʰ]</td>
<td>[t], [tʰ], [d]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲩ</td>
<td>[o]</td>
<td>[o] ~ [ō], [u] ~ [ū], [a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲧ</td>
<td>[p]</td>
<td>[b]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲩ</td>
<td>[t], [tʰ], [d]</td>
<td>[d], [dʰ], [t], [tʰ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲯ</td>
<td>[i], [w], [v], [j]</td>
<td>[i], [ɪ], [é], [ʾi], [w], [u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲫ</td>
<td>[f], [v]</td>
<td>[b], [f]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲩ</td>
<td>Cp. words: [k]; Gk. words: [ʃ], [x]</td>
<td>Cp. words: [k]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲩ</td>
<td>[ps]</td>
<td>[bs]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲩ</td>
<td>[ō]</td>
<td>[ō], [o], [ū]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲩ</td>
<td>[h]</td>
<td>[h], [h]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of these GB realizations can be seen in the Trinitarian formula, which is sung by the priest after the congregational response during the Presentation of the Lamb, the ceremony in which a loaf of bread is chosen from among those baked for that day’s liturgy to be consecrated for use in the sacrament of the Eucharist (1993:172). In the corpus of GB liturgical recordings made at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, it is realized as follows:

CP: ⲣⲏⲓ ⲫⲣⲁⲛ Ⲡⲓⲧ ⲛⲉ ⲡϣⲏⲣⲓ ⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲡⲁⲛⲧⲟⲕⲣⲁⲧⲱⲣ:
TL: xen ephrɑn emphiōt nem epʃīri nem pipnevmɑ etowab ūnūti enūōt
GB: hen evran emevjod nem ebʃīri nem bibnevmə etuwbə ūnoti nəzɔod
EN: In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God

Noticeably, relative to the expected values of the GB standard as described in the previous section (those present in the second line of the above example), voiceless stops tend to be voiced in the environment $V_\#$, e.g., $\text{ⲛⲥ̀ⲙⲁⲣⲱⲟⲩⲧ}$ $\text{fesmɑrōout}$, though this is not always the case (note the realization of $\text{ⲛⲥ̀ⲙⲁⲣⲱⲟⲩⲧ}$ $\text{fesmɑrōout}$, which retains its final voiceless stop). Additionally, there is vowel lowering ($\ddot{u} \rightarrow o$, e.g., $\text{ⲡⲓⲡ̅ⲛ̅ⲁ̅}$ $\text{pipnevmɑ}$), reduction ($a \rightarrow \dot{e}$, e.g., $\text{ⲡⲓⲡ̅ⲛ̅ⲁ̅}$ $\text{pipnevmɑ}$), and deletion ($en \rightarrow \eta$, e.g., $\text{ⲛ̀ⲟⲩⲱⲧ}$ $\text{enūōt}$). These realizations are likely due to the shortening of those syllables relative to the stressed syllable that invariably follows them given the right-leaning stress pattern of Coptic, making these unstressed syllables less fully articulated by comparison. The exceptions to this are prosthetic [e] indicated by the $\text{jinkim}$ being raised to [i] in $\text{ⲛⲥ̀ⲙⲁⲣⲱⲟⲩⲧ}$ $\text{fesmarōout}$ and $\text{ⲛⲥ̀ⲙⲁⲧ}$ $\text{nte}$, probably due to the extremely short duration of the
prosthetic [e] in these two cases, and the realization of <o> when not part of the digraph <oy> /ū/, as in ḫōy (full form ḫo̞yab eθowab) and πιπαντοκρατωρ pipantokratōr. In both cases it is raised to /u/. In the case of ḫōy, the stress falls on the penultimate syllable (eθowab), which could provide some motivation for raising of the vowel (cf. above, wherein the shortening of the vowel in unstressed syllables led to its lowering). In the case of πιπαντοκρατωρ, this loan word (Gk. παντοκρατωρ pantokratōr) follows the Arabic tendency to indicate all vowels in loan words via their closest long equivalents, as these are the only orthographic means that Arabic has to indicate the presence of a vowel (barring the use of short vowel diacritics, which are mostly relegated to religious and pedagogical texts), e.g., راديو /rādiyū/ ‘radio’. This /u/ = /o/ ~ /ō/ correspondence is found throughout the Arabic transliterations of both Coptic and Greek words in bilingual Arabic-Coptic texts, as in the case of the following Greek personal names (Ishāk 1975:156; transcription as at source): ἀλλαδιός /alladyos/; Δομετιός /domadyōs/.

To reiterate in general terms, in the above example the jinkim usually prefixes [e] to the initial consonant, though in some cases it is raised to [i]. In several places, unstressed vowels are reduced to [ə], and twice VC sequences containing unstressed vowels are reduced to syllabic consonants. <a> is realized as [a], not the back unrounded [ɑ] expected following Mattar’s suggestion that it be pronounced “like a in father” (1990:16). Stops are often, though not always, voiced following a vowel (emevjod, ηςοιδ). Perhaps most noticeable is the realization of <φ>, which covers all possibilities found in Ishāk (1975) for its realization according to the OB standard, as well as the [v] listed there (but not in Mattar) as characteristic of the GB standard. Also in keeping with the OB standard rather than the GB is the realization of <θ> as [t] rather than [θ].

Given these departures from the GB standard, it is beneficial to survey all potentially affected segments in order to determine the nature and range of correspondences between the orthographic representation and the sounds of the spoken language as captured at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church. The table below shows the segments with varying realizations, with a count given for the total number of tokens found throughout the
corpus, and the realizations of each segment. The percentage of the total represented by any given realization (rounded to the nearest whole number) is presented after the raw numerical count, e.g., \( \lambda \) (123) \([a] (117; 95\%); [\partial] (3; 2\%); [o] (1; 1\%); \emptyset (2; 2\%)\) means that out of 123 total occurrences of the segment \(<\lambda>\), 117 – or approximately 95\% – were realized as \([a]\). Percentages do not always add up to 100\% due to rounding. The digraphs \(<\alpha\gamma> /\text{ū}/ \) and \(<\tau\tau> /\text{ŋ}/ \) are not included in the totals below, because these are orthographically conventionalized sequences which stand for other sounds that are not characteristic of the differences between the two pronunciation standards surveyed in this thesis. The surveyed sections of the liturgy include only those recited in Coptic at both sites, as these are the only sections in which the pronunciation standards as used at each site are directly comparable. This amounts to only eleven sections in total – far fewer than the total number of sections said in Coptic at either site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Realizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \lambda ) (123)</td>
<td>([a] (117; 95%); [\partial] (3; 2%); [o] (1; 1%); \emptyset (2; 2%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \beta ) (30)</td>
<td>([v] (16; 53%); [b] (12; 40%); [w] (1; 3%); [r] (1; 3%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \gamma ) (24)</td>
<td>([g] (22; 92%); [\partial] (1; 4%); \emptyset (1; 4%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta ) (7)</td>
<td>([d] (7; 100%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \varepsilon ) (138)</td>
<td>([e] (126; 91%); [a] (2; 1%); [i] (6; 4%); [\partial] (2; 1%); \emptyset (2; 1%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \upsilon ) (52)</td>
<td>([i] (49; 94%); [e] (2; 4%); \emptyset (1; 2%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \omicron ) (26)</td>
<td>([\theta] (23; 88%); [t] (2; 8%); [s] (1; 4%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \omicron ) (137)</td>
<td>([o] (130; 95%); [\partial] (3; 2%); [u] (3; 2%); \emptyset (1; 1%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \pi ) (87)</td>
<td>([p] (65; 75%); [b] (21; 24%); [f] (1; 1%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \tau ) (65)</td>
<td>([t] (61; 94%); [d] (4; 6%))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \gamma ) (34)</td>
<td>([i] (4; 12%); [w] (14; 41%); [v] (16; 47%))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 GB realizations as captured at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, Albuquerque

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Vowel Count</th>
<th>Vowel Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a (24)</td>
<td>[a] (16; 67%); [e] (7; 29%); [u] (1; 4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x (8)</td>
<td>Cp. words: [k] (1; 13%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gk. words: [k] (4; 50%); [x] (3; 38%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o (29)</td>
<td>[o] (29; 100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ς (12)</td>
<td>[h] (10; 83%); [h] (1; 8%); Φ (1; 8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_ (6)</td>
<td>[g] (2; 33%), [ʤ] (3; 50%); [ʒ] (1; 17%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ς (6)</td>
<td>[tʃ] (3; 50%); [ʃ] (3; 50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>† (18)</td>
<td>[ti] (18; 100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table reveals several broader patterns found in the realization of the language in the relation to the standard as taught in Mattar (1990).

1. **Lack of vowel length contrast.** There is no audible and consistent vowel length contrast – i.e., <α> and <ο> are both realized as [o], and <η> and <ι> are both realized as [i]. To test this, the contrasting long and short vowels were measured in two words which occur in close proximity to one another in the Hymn of the Censer (1993:182), popularly known as *Ti Shori* (Cp. ψⲟⲩⲣⲏ tišourī). In this hymn, the words ςοφⲓ and ηⲓⲏⲓ occur in consecutive lines of the verse. The two words bear the same stress pattern and similar syllabification patterns– af.sôt and nen.nó.bi – yet the long stressed vowel <α> in the former measures approximately 350ms, while the short stressed vowel <ο> in the latter measures 525ms. The difference between the two is in their respective places in the melodic contour of the hymn: af.sōtl is situated between two words which are accented by a sharp rise in pitch and is hence shortened, while the stressed syllable in nenobi is accented by a rise in pitch and is hence lengthened. <η> and <ι> show a similar pattern. In the liturgy recorded for this thesis, the doxology which follows the chanting of Psalm 150 for communion (1993:281) is concluded with a repetition of the ending of the Gospel response *Je Efesmarōut* (1993:201). Both the doxology and the Gospel response ending contain the word ḫⲱⲣⲓ epšīri ‘the Son’, which contains sequential long and short /i/ vowels. Here, as in the above example, the vowel
represented by <ⲏ> /ī/ in the first token of the word measures 203ms, while the vowel represented by <ⲓ> /i/ measures 342ms. In the second token of the word, the measurements differ much less – <ⲏ> is 542ms while <ⲓ> is 584ms – but the difference is still present, and opposite what would be expected if vowel length were truly contrastive in Coptic as it is used today. It should be noted, however, that as the language is not truly spoken, but rather sung or chanted as required by its liturgical context, such measurements are inevitably influenced by the melodic structure of the hymn or prayer in which they are found. In the Trinitarian formula as found elsewhere in the liturgy, as in the Procession of the Lamb (1993:172), the vowel length is as would be expected given the orthography of epšīri, with <ⲏ> measuring 265ms and <ⲓ> measuring 107ms.

2. Variable realizations. Relative to the GB standard as taught in Mattar (1990), certain values are variably realized in speech, in ways that are not captured by the assumed allophonic variation triggered by phonetic environment. An example of this is the value /p/ for <ⲡ>. Emil Māher Ishāḳ, the researcher responsible for establishing the OB standard, has written about that particular letter and its realization, observing that “despite all efforts at teaching the 'reformed' /p/ value, the letter ⲡ is still generally pronounced as /b/” (Ishāḳ 1975:365). This generalization is contradicted by the data as collected at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, where the realization [p] is present in approximately 75% of the tokens of this phoneme, though its release is often aspirated – closer to the original /pʰ/ value of <ⲡ> mentioned in both Ishāḳ (1975:377) and Loprieno (1997:447-448) than the /p/ value proposed in Mattar (1990). Of those which are realized as [b], there is no discernible pattern to their distribution that may suggest a conditioning environment for this realization. <ⲡ> often occurs word or syllable-initial, as nouns are often prefixed with the masculine definite article ⲡ- (pī-) or ⲡ̀- (ep-), and person markers are placed between the definite article and the word to which it attaches, e.g., ⲡⲫⲓⲧ ‘lord’ (article + N) > ⲡⲫⲓⲧⲓⲧ ‘our lord’ (article + -ⲡⲓⲧ- 1P.PL.POSS. + N). Given this, there is a fairly narrow distribution of <ⲡ> in the overall corpus, and it is not uncommon to find two different realizations of the letter in the same passage said by a speaker who has access to [p], as in the following portion of the anaphora, wherein word-initial <ⲡ> is realized as [p], then as [b] (1993:276):
The Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God, this is in truth. Amen.

Other realizations are more evenly distributed throughout the corpus, such as that of $\sigma$, which is realized as [tʃ] in half the tokens, and [ʃ] in the rest. As in the example above, sometimes both realizations occur in the same section, from the same speaker, as is the case in this section of the Thanksgiving Prayer (1993:176):

Also of note regarding the above example is that in contrast to the rule listed in Mattar (1990:10) that $\beta$ in word-final position is to be pronounced as [b], here it is realized as [v] at the end of ΦΗΝΒ. This is in keeping with the observation of Ishāk that $\beta$ is realized as [v] throughout the GB pronunciation, regardless of position (1975:36), though there are 13 tokens of the letter with other realizations in the corpus. Word-initial prosthetic [e] is found in several places despite the lack of corresponding jinkim in the original Coptic text as printed, though this is most likely the result of faulty typesetting, as š and ũ are two forms of the singular masculine definite article found in Coptic, but the layout of the book from which the texts were taken often obscures the presence of jinkim on certain letters. As Coptic nouns are usually prefixed with some type of article,
it is also possible that they have been omitted in many cases when occurring over word-
initial consonants such as those same articles, where they would be expected due to
phonotactic constraints of Bohairic Coptic that do not allow word-initial consonant
clusters (ibid:706). The behavior of the jinkim is discussed in detail later in the current
subsection of this thesis.

Many realizations are found only or primarily in the context of oft-repeated words, such
as the realization of <γ> as [w] in the words εσωγαβ eθowab ‘holy’ and ογωγ owoh ‘and’,
which together account for all instances of this correspondence in the surveyed portions
of the liturgy. This particular realization is in keeping with Mattar (1990), as we have
seen in table 2.

Of those realizations that are not context dependent, some are clearly slips of the
tongue, as in the case of the one instance of <b> being realized as [r], a correspondence
found in neither pronunciation standard. Others appear to be conditioned by their
environments, as in the voicing of /t/ after [o] in words such as ṃογοτ nouoτ [n̩o̩zod]
and φωτ fōτ [bjod] in the doxology referenced earlier in the present subsection. The
realization of <φ> as [b] in the second example in the previous sentence, however, is an
anomaly. This is the value for this letter in most Coptic words according to the OB
standard (ibid:378), but is not found in the GB. This speaker clearly has access to [v],
which would seem the natural choice as the voiced counterpart to [f], if the segment is to
undergo voicing as a result of its environment, i#_ (seemingly unlikely, though possible
due to the lack of pauses to mark word boundaries in rapid speech). Here again may be
evidence of the influence of Arabic on the pronunciation of Coptic, as the priest’s native
Arabic lacks [v], but not [b]. Arabic speakers often use ف /f/ in borrowings containing [v]
from Western languages (e.g., فیدیو /fidījū/ ‘video’), which would be of no use here, for
obvious reasons. This leaves [b] as the closest option to act as a voiced counterpart to [f].
Conceptually, it is plausible that an Arabic-speaking priest may inadvertently draw upon
the phonology of his native language when quickly reciting a doxology from memory, no
differently than any other person who may unknowingly shape their speech in a second
language according to the more easily accessible inventory of their first language.
A much more solid argument for the systematic influence of Arabic on the pronunciation of Coptic can be made in the case of the instances in which <\textalpha> is realized as [s] or [t], as opposed to the expected [\texttheta]. These realizations occur only three times out of 26 occurrences of this letter in the corpus. While their relative rarity indicates that the priest and the deacons have a very good grasp of the mechanics involved in producing this fricative, the ways in which this articulatory target is missed are illuminating. As is substantiated in Ishāk (1975) by many Arabic examples (and confirmed in informal conversations with Arabic speakers at the monastery of St. Shenouda in Rochester, NY), [\texttheta] is exceedingly rare in Egyptian Arabic, and is usually realized as [t] in that dialect (Ishāk 1975:83). Furthermore, it may also be realized as [s] in words borrowed from Classical Arabic (ibid).

3. Absent realizations. Certain realizations are completely absent. This is the case with <\textalpha>, which is never realized as far back as [\textalpha], but instead consistently as [a]. It is in some cases shortened, as when in an unstressed syllable, or very occasionally phonologically reduced to [ə] when in a word-final unstressed syllable. In the corpus, this occurs only in Greek loans such as the word ἀπ’ ψυχής \textit{pipneuma} ‘spirit’ (from Gk. πνεῦμα pneumā), which is almost always followed by ἐθωάβ \textit{eθowab} ‘holy’. This may be a motivating factor in the realization of the ultimate syllable of \textit{pipneuma} as [mə], given the proximity within the vowel space of [ə] and [e] in comparison to [a] and [e]. In the one instance where \textit{pipneuma} is not followed by \textit{eθowab} – in the sequence ἀπ’ ψυχής \textit{epneuma niben} which occurs in the Commemoration of the Saints (1993:251) – it is realized as [ma]. Schwa often occurs epenthetically, as it does in the congregational response during the Offertory, where it is inserted to break up consonant clusters in ἔποιες \textit{epčois} and ἀπ’ προσφορά \textit{nieprosp\textsuperscript{b}ora} (1993:171):
Alleluia. The thought of man shall confess to You,
and the rest of thought shall keep a feast to You.
The sacrifices and offerings receive them unto You. Alleluia.

Note that there is no insertion of schwa in ἀναξιπ ἐψῶγπ, despite the presence of the
cconsonant sequence -ps-. This occurs at a syllable boundary (ep.σῶγπ), but so does the
sequence -ptf- (-pӨ-) in ἄνοι (ep.Өois), which is nonetheless split by a schwa. The
difference appears to be one of stress, as ἐψῶγπ carries stress on its penultimate syllable –
contra Mattar (1990), as this is a prefix and hence supposed to be unstressed (cf. §2.1),
but in keeping with Kramer (2006:401), who suggests left-leaning stress in bisyllabic
words – while ἐψӨois carries stress on its ultimate syllable.

Regarding vowels in general, the realizations listed in table 4 show that despite the
tendency described in Kramer (2006:401) for unstressed vowels to be reduced to schwa,
schwa is rare in the GB corpus collected in Albuquerque. A possible explanation for this
could be found in the characteristically vowel-heavy nature of Coptic music where, in a
practice probably dating back to ancient times, melodies are formed by the elongation of
a single vowel over several musical phrases, sung in either melismatic (free-form) or
vocalise (rhythmic) form (Robertson et al. 1991). The melodies as sung in the liturgical
recordings gathered at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church are much more tightly
constrained than those that are found in other hymns used in other contexts, but this
tendency to accentuate vowels within the setting of the hymns is nonetheless present
throughout the entire Coptic musical canon, and helps to preserve them in many contexts
in which they might otherwise by reduced or elided.
In other contexts, as in stressed ⲉ in ⲉⲝol ebol in the above example, vowels may be raised. This is not uniform, however, and may also occur in unstressed syllables, as in the final vowel in ⲉⲝⲏte nte in the above example. In that case, it is likely due to the extremely short duration of the word-final vowel (cf. the example of the Trinitarian formula at the beginning of this section, wherein what is normally a prosthetic /e/ resulting from the presence of the jinkim is raised to [i] when shortened). In other cases, there is a lowering of vowels, apparently as the result of assimilation, as in the final congregational response at the end of the liturgy, መⲓⲓ ⲉⲥⲏⲧⲫⲟⲡⲓ amīn esešōpi (1993:286), which is realized in the corpus as [amin asaʃobi].

Moving away from general tendencies in the realization of consonants and vowels, there are also more general stress and syllabification patterns to be observed in the gathered data. Because of the role of the jinkim supralinear stroke in providing visual means of marking these aspects of the language, it is appropriate to turn now to its distribution and function throughout the corpus.

A few words of caution are in order before proceeding, as some appearances of the jinkim in late Bohairic texts (post-Arab conquest) are not explainable from a phonological point of view – i.e., their function is uncertain, as they differ in their distribution from earlier eras of Bohairic, when the use of the jinkim was limited to marking vowels and consonants which form independent syllables (Kasser 1991a). This uncertainty, combined with the inconsistent inclusion of the jinkim in the printed text as evidenced in several already-cited examples, must temper any conclusions that may be drawn from the present analysis.

Of the 112 instances of the jinkim that appear over various consonants and vowels in the corpus, all but ten function as syllabifying markers by either prefixing [e] to the consonant over which they appear or marking a vowel which functions as a syllable by itself, usually in word-medial position. The ten that do not perform this function are of the type described in the previous paragraph: their presence does not correspond to any particular realization either in terms of stress or syllabification. Following Mattar (1990:20), it is expected that vowels bearing jinkim form independent, stressed syllables. This is not always the case. Returning to the previously-referenced congregational
response during the Offertory (1993:171), we see that word-final <i> in ὀμεύι outeui is not stressed, although it does form a syllable nucleus. The realized form is [o.me.vi], not [o.me.vi]. However, there are also realizations found in the Commemoration of the Saints (1993:251) that are in line with Mattar (1990) on this point, such as ἱκεά [ni.ke.á].

Elsewhere, where a prosthetic [e] would be expected, one does not appear, e.g., πιπρόδρομος is realized [pi.pro dro mos] (1993:252). The converse situation is also found on occasion, wherein the jinkim is missing in the original Coptic text, but clearly supposed to be present by the included transliteration. This is the case with the priest’s exhortation to the congregation ‘Pray’, in Coptic ἱλλ σλ, which despite not bearing jinkim over the initial syllable is transliterated in the consulted text as eshli (ibid:173, 215). It is realized in the liturgy as [ʃlil], which is not in keeping with the phonotactic constraints of Bohairic Coptic, which does not allow for word-initial consonant clusters. This violation also occurs in the doxology that is sung after Psalm 150 following communion (1993:281), wherein the word πιεκριστός piexristos is realized without the prosthetic [e] that would avoid the impermissible -kr- sequence that now occurs there due to the resulting change in syllabification, as the word is realized as [be.kris.tos], rather than pi.ek.ris.tos, as it presumably would be with the prosthetic [e] provided by the jinkim.

Additionally, this realization is unexpected from the perspective of the GB pronunciation standard regarding realizations of phoneme /x/ in Greek words as [ʃ] or [x]. Instead, the word is pronounced as though it were Coptic, with [k]. The previous realization of this word, in the Prayer of Thanksgiving, contains [x], in keeping with the GB pronunciation standard.
At the level of phonotactics, there is possible Arabic influence. Word boundaries are occasionally violated in order to avoid what would be phonotactically impermissible sequences in the speakers’ native language, Arabic. Kaye (1997:202) reports that Cairene Arabic does not allow sequences of three consonants, even if occurring across a word boundary: “When -CC#C- occurs (i.e., a consonant cluster at the end of a word followed by another consonant), the anaptyctic vowel /i/ is usually inserted, and is pronounced as an ultra-short [ɪ]”. We see this occur in the transition between ḫēḏ-yōnḏeṯ efėouōnh and nak nak in the congregational response sung during the Offertory (1993:171), which would otherwise contain an impermissible CC#C sequence. In addition, the word-final [h] is shifted to the following word. A similar syllabification occurs in the case of oγoγ ṭșaṃn, owoh epsōjp though without the inserted vowel. These [h]-shifts may be motivated by perceptual clarity or articulatory ease, which is likely the motivation for the shift of /p/ [b] in <epsōgp ente> to the word-intial position of the following word, yielding [benti]. -VCC# is certainly a permissible sequence in both EA and Coptic, e.g., EA fihimt ‘I understood’ (Gadalla 2000:8), Cp. παρϰηρευς (1993:252) [piarʃierevs].

The shifted segments and their equivalents in the original Coptic are bolded below.

Possibly related to the above is the insertion of schwa word-finally in ḫνογγ in the Hymn of the Censer (1993:182):
The golden censer is the Virgin; her aroma is our Savior.

She gave birth to Him; He saved us and forgave us our sins.

In this case, the avoided sequence is only two consonants (\(bt\) in fast recitation, as it is orthographically \(b\#t\), and even a sequence which already appears in EA ‘Saturday’, so there can be no question as to whether it is allowed according to the phonology of the speaker’s native language. Technically this is across a word boundary, but there is essentially no pause between the words, making the sequence \([b\#.t]\) – preferable from a production and perception standpoint to \(/bte/\).

Regarding stress, in general the realizations in the corpus follows the rules set down by Mattar (1990) as described in §2.1, i.e., stress falls mainly on the ultimate or penultimate syllable. The exceptions to this are a few, and likely driven by the melody. Because of this they are not generalizable, except that violations of this general stress pattern tend to occur in Greek words, which have their own stress patterns – \(\text{ἀρικαταξίων}\) [ari.ka.tak.sin], \(\text{Ἀντωνίος}\) [an.tó.ni.os], etc.

The analysis of the GB pronunciation as used at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church in Albuquerque shows several interesting tendencies.

1. Errors made in the realization of consonants relative to the values expected by the GB standard as described in Mattar (1990) tend to be in the direction of what are correct values according to the OB standard, such as the realization of \(<\alpha>\) as \([t]\) rather than \([\theta]\), or of \(<\tau>\) as \([b]\) rather than \([p]\).

2. Reduction of vowels tends to be prevented or mitigated by the chant forms in which the language is used, which stress vowels that might otherwise be reduced or deleted.
3. The behavior of the *jinkim* is mostly, though not entirely, in keeping with Mattar (1990). Where it appears, a prosthetic [e] is usually inserted, which then forms the nucleus of a new syllable. In those cases where it appears and prosthetic [e] is not inserted, such as μπροδρόμος *pieprodromos* [pi.pro.dro.mos], the lack of its realization does not violate the prohibition on initial consonant clusters in Bohairic Coptic (in this particular case, that constraint does not apply due to the form of the prefix that occurs before the word, which ends in a vowel and hence generates a CVC sequence at the beginning of the utterance).

Tendencies (1) and (3) are similar to the behavior of the OB pronunciation standard as analyzed in §2.4.2, which raises the question of how far apart the pronunciations truly are, and in turn what it means to construct narratives of linguistic authenticity concerning two pronunciation standards which exhibit so many similarities. This question will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

2.2.2 Discussion of the role of Coptic in the community

The present section consists of a synthesis of interviews conducted at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The interviews were conducted on site following the liturgy over the course of two weeks from March 1 to March 15, 2014. All church members over the age of 18 were invited to participate. Interviews were conducted in English, and covered a wide variety of topics related to Coptic and its role in the community in this church. Using reasonably open-ended questions, arranged thematically, participants were asked about their extent of exposure to the language, feelings regarding their own and their parishes’ pronunciation of it, and about its role in shaping the identity of the community and the Church. Because the OB pronunciation standard is not as well-known as the GB standard used at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, after the interview questions were answered a video was provided from YouTube\(^1\) of a man reciting a hymn from the Midnight Praises (EA تسبحة *tasbeha*), μαρενουών έβολ *marenounonh ebol*, according to the OB standard (with the Coptic text

\(^1\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKdHr4YtMzU
of the hymn embedded in the video, to enable the viewer to follow along), so that the interviewee could be exposed to this standard. The goal was to elicit responses from the interviewee in the wake of what was for most their first exposure to a pronunciation other than the GB with which they are familiar. This tactic proved to be of limited usefulness, however, due to the fact that some interviewees could not read Coptic, and hence had no way to connect the sounds of the spoken language to any standard established via the written language, as would be necessary in any approach involving direct comparison of the written and spoken language, such as that found in the previous section of the present thesis.

Many who can read the script occupy positions of leadership in the church, and a few also teach the language. Rather atypically, one interviewee reported teaching the language using short sentences and words only, not hymns. This is atypical because for the majority of the people, clergy as well as laity, the liturgy is the primary context in which the language is heard, spoken, and learned. As some parishioners cannot read the Coptic script, the experience of learning the language is essentially entirely aural, and hence the knowledge of any particular pronunciation comes through repetition, rather than learning a codified standard in a pedagogical grammar.

It is not surprising, then, that the majority of interviewees exhibited no knowledge of the different pronunciation standards that are discussed in the present work. This is a technical point of interest to those with a particular dedication to the Coptic language, which is not necessarily found among most people in any given parish, particularly when so much of the liturgy is celebrated in English.

This does not mean, however, that the people have no opinions concerning Coptic and issues related to it. For ease of exposition, the responses given in interviews may be placed into a few broad categories, reflecting in a general fashion the values attached to Coptic by the interviewees:

1. **Fidelity to religious and cultural tradition:** The individual’s interaction with his or her religion and culture via the medium of Coptic.
2. **Historical continuity and preservation**: The sense by which the individual may lay claim to various historical narratives via the assertion of Coptic language and identity.

3. **Spiritual impact**: The appropriateness of Coptic as a medium for religious activities (liturgy, prayer, hymnody, etc.)

These are not isolated categories. There is considerable overlap between them, and very often pragmatic concerns such as the need to pray in a language that is understood to the worshiper temper enthusiastic commitment to any individual’s chosen narrative. This particular idea, that what is paramount in answering questions of language use (e.g., which language to use, how much to use, etc.) is that the language used in worship be understood by the people, was frequently invoked by interviewees in both Albuquerque and Rochester, by people at all levels of service within the Church.

Among those who have had more access to the language via classes, and even some who have not, there was some knowledge about different regional pronunciations of the language that varied between geographical centers in Egypt. One interviewee mentioned that they knew of the existence of different pronunciations dependent upon whether the speaker was from Northern Egypt or Southern Egypt. “They have different pronunciations, but it was very close. You could understand it. It’s like a different accent.”

Even without knowledge of the GB and OB pronunciation standards, opinions on the correctness of a given pronunciation were easily elicited among the minority who were able to read the script and connect the pronunciation exhibited in the aforementioned video, which was played for all who were able to read the Coptic script and professed no knowledge of the existence of a pronunciation standard different than the GB standard used in their church.

(The hymn Ṣⲕⲣⲩⲃⲟⲗ marenouōn ⲉ̀ⲃⲟⲗ is playing; the man sings the word ⲫⲣⲟⲫⲏⲧⲏⲥ [brofidas])

‘Profitees’…I think it’s very similar [to the pronunciation used at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church]…I don’t know why he pronounces the H, the H symbol
like ‘a’ – it should be ‘ee’. […] But generally it’s very similar. […] I think generally he’s pronouncing it correctly. Maybe for just this symbol he’s pronouncing it incorrectly, for some reason, I don’t know. But generally he’s pronouncing it correctly.

Another interviewee, interviewed after the above exchange had taken place, said that the video sounded correct. “That is the way I would pronounce it. But I don’t really know the language. I never took classes.”

With the exception of these rare comments on pronunciation, most replies dealt with the language more generally, in connection with the three general categories listed above. Examples of comments in each general category are found below.

Fidelity to religious and cultural tradition

As discussed previously in §1.2.1, it is very difficult to attempt to separate the Coptic people from their religious identity as the native Christians of Egypt, even for the sake of academic study. The present thesis makes no attempt to do so, and in conducting the interviews for this thesis, the author made no attempt to do so.

This does not mean, however, that all replies were explicitly religious in nature. While delivered in a religious context, as Coptic is a liturgical language connected with a specific religious tradition, many replies were phrased in such a way as to be equally applicable in general cultural terms. For some, the idea of adopting a different pronunciation of Coptic would be akin to attempting to change history. “I like the way it is. I support the way it is. For one example, our fathers in English, that they [gave us] the English language – we did not change the English language. It’s still the same, so it’s [the] same thing with Coptic.” Another interviewee concurred: “It’s a language. You cannot just change any language like that. It is a language, and a very old language – you cannot change it now. It wouldn’t be Coptic if you change it.” Others said that, as far as they knew, the Coptic pronunciation as it is used at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church is the original pronunciation. While not referring to the GB pronunciation standard specifically, one interviewee offered the opinion that “the Greek language should be very
close to the Coptic language, and the way that they are pronounced should be very similar.”

Those who were not opposed to the idea of changing the pronunciation seemed to be of the opinion that it is more important that people be able to use Coptic than that they use a standard which might be difficult for them to pronounce. “That’s okay for me because at least it would encourage people to [learn] more language, more words, more expressions in an easier way if we change the pronunciation so that it’s easier to learn.”

Some people also mentioned the influence of Coptic on Egyptian Arabic as an example of the importance of Coptic from a cultural perspective.

…all the Egyptians, including the other religions – which they are Muslims – they speak a lot of words…Coptic words. They’re speaking it in their own dialogues between themselves. Like for example ful mudammes means…fava beans, and that’s how we’re saying [it]; maya…the word maya, which is water, that is [a] Coptic word.

This broaches the question of the use of Coptic by non-Christian Egyptians. The question of its use outside of the Church and the potential revival of the language as an everyday spoken language, which occasionally arose in interviews after the set interview questions had concluded (when interviewees were encouraged to speak extemporaneously on Coptic), was met with some surprise by interviewees for whom it seemed curious that there would be any opposition to this idea. “Why not? It’s a language. They used to speak it, write it, sing with it. It used to be for the daily use […] for everyone.” Others noted that there is more Coptic used in churches in Egypt than in the USA, out of a desire among the Coptic people in Egypt to revive the language as an everyday spoken language of that country. When interviewees were asked if they themselves had a similar desire to revive the language, the consensus was that it should be revived, though some questioned whether this would be possible in Egypt given the religious demographics of the country and the fact that it is associated with a minority
religion. Regarding feelings toward Egypt in general, one interviewee pointed to the importance of Coptic in this nationalistic sense: “[The Coptic language] is important to keep in touch with our mother Church in Egypt. This will really make us feel like we belong to Egypt.”

Historical continuity and preservation

There were also several replies which emphasized Coptic history in a manner that recognized the Copts’ unique status as a minority in Egypt. While very strenuously objecting to any form of separatism from larger Egyptian society, some interviewees did bring up the historical pressures that led to the current situation of the Coptic community in Egypt. In this context, keeping Coptic alive can be seen as part of a larger drive to maintain not just Coptic identity, but the historical narratives remembered and propagated in Coptic circles that might otherwise be forgotten in favor of the dominant Arab-Muslim narrative. In this context, maintaining the use of Coptic in the Church is a point of pride for those belong to it, even if no individual speaks it natively in the modern day. It sets the Church and its people apart from the majority who do not know or use this language in any domain. In the words of one interviewee, “nobody knows it [Coptic] but the Church. The Church…if they didn’t keep saying it, and teaching [it] to the youth, and speaking it until now, it would be dead by now.”

In asserting a different type of narrative, a different interviewee gave the following reason in answer to the question of the importance of Coptic: “I feel that the Coptic language […] is the base of the Greek language too, because the Greek language has many, many different Coptic words in their language.” This idea is especially interesting to consider given the ideological motivation for the introduction of the GB pronunciation standard. As mentioned in §1.1, the GB pronunciation standard is said to have arisen at a time when the Coptic Orthodox Church was considering a future reunion with its Greek counterpart in Egypt, the implication being that this change to the pronunciation would be a boon to the reunion effort.
Spiritual impact

A minority of interviewees also connected Coptic to the spirituality of the Church. This was found more often in Rochester, NY, but still present occasionally in Albuquerque. There were many general comments regarding the Church as a fit spiritual home for the people, and being unchanged in doctrine, and similar ideas that attest to the peoples’ faith in the Church, but fewer replies that explicitly connected the language to the primary worship activities of the Church. Of the replies that made this connection, the following is illustrative of the balance sought between goals of greater Coptic language engagement and the serving the day-to-day spiritual needs of the people.

In reply to a question regarding the importance of Coptic, one interviewee said:

I think it’s important, but you know, in general we should understand what we are praying, so if I do not really understand some vocabulary in Coptic [...], then I should use another language for some terms or for some words. But I think, as I know, the Coptic language is more specific when we pray, especially in Christianity. So the problem is not in the Coptic language, the problem is maybe for me, I should learn more about the Coptic language, and how to pray in the Coptic language.

This approach was also found in the Rochester, NY churches and monastery from which the OB sections of this thesis came, as the interplay between pragmatic concerns (the need to understand what one is praying; the difficulty of learning the Coptic language) and linguistic goals is a common theme in discussions on Coptic language questions not just at this particular location, but presumably also in many Coptic communities around the world. This may be particularly important in the diaspora, where the liturgy is often celebrated in the national language of the country in which the church is located.

One interviewee summarized the issue very succinctly, noting that “even for a regular person who is not a priest, to participate in the Divine Liturgy in any church, you need to show some understanding of a little Coptic”, while also recognizing that “there is no point [to] using more of something people do not understand.” This last point is similar to
the responses received to a question concerning the possibility of changing the pronunciation of Coptic so as to make it easier to speak (as OB users in Rochester and elsewhere claim that the OB pronunciation standard is easier to use; see §2.4.3). Of those who were not immediately dismissive of the idea, several interviewees said that any such change would cause more confusion than comfort.

While the present section is brief, its brevity is in some way indicative of the limits of the central question of this thesis: In the absence of a native, vernacular Coptic speech upon which to model their own or to project their own ideas of authenticity upon, how do members of the Coptic community construct their own ideas of what it means to speak or otherwise use ‘authentic’ Coptic?

This question supposes a level of engagement with the relevant issues in the discussion of the two pronunciation standards of Coptic that, for this particular community, has not yet materialized, and may never materialize. While a majority of those interviewed responded that they would like to see an increase in the amount of Coptic used at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, none mentioned anything about a particular pronunciation of Coptic being preferred over any other. Such questions are outside of the day to day life of the parish and its parishioners.

There are signs of interest in the language outside of the question of its pronunciation, however. The people of St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church are enthusiastic about the language and the history it is a part of. Importantly, they openly speak of a desire to revive the language, and some (though far from a majority) support the idea that the pronunciation of the language could be changed in the process in order to make it easier to learn. This willingness to change the sound values of the language for the sake of its learners is quite forward thinking, and may in fact be a first step towards the revival of the language. While it is engaged with by the people of St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church on a purely ideological and theoretical level, this stance is a noteworthy step forward in that it avoids the prescriptivism or language purism of some of the earlier academic research on Coptic historical phonology (§1.3). It also shows that some people are open to the idea that the GB pronunciation currently used in their church may need to be reevaluated, as it may not be well-suited to be used as the basis for a revival of Coptic
among a people whose native language does not contain some of sounds found in the GB standard as taught by Mattar (1990).

The most successful language revitalization program in modern history, that which revived Hebrew as the national language of the state of Israel, was successful only after much planning, theorizing, and the education of a populace who had not spoken the language outside of their own liturgy for centuries, and that planning, theorizing, and education included just these kinds of issues. Even with its success, there are still questions of Hebrew’s status as an ‘Indo-Europeanized’ Semitic language (Kapeliuk 1996), which are sometimes politicized. It may be that the Coptic people will face similar questions regarding the character of their own language in the process of attempted revival. Based on the input of the people of St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, and of the Rochester-area Coptic churches in the section to follow, there is reason to believe that any such discussion will be primarily focused on linguistic authenticity, rather than on the disputed phonetic minutiae of particular realizations of Coptic letters. It is possible to claim this because at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church this discussion plays out already on a primarily non-linguistic ideological plane that is nonetheless expressed via ideas about language that do not require intensive study of the question of the OB or GB standards.

2.3 The Old Bohairic (OB) Pronunciation

As previously discussed in chapter 1, the Old Bohairic pronunciation was reconstructed in a 1975 Ph.D. thesis by Coptic deacon and researcher Emile Māher Isḥāḳ. This is the foundational work concerning this pronunciation standard, based on years of research including both fieldwork and the consultation of many medieval manuscripts and modern grammatical works in major European languages and Arabic. This thesis, entitled *The Phonetics and Phonology of the Bohairic Dialect of Coptic and the Survival of Coptic Words in the Colloquial and Classical Arabic of Egypt and of Coptic Grammatical Constructions in Colloquial Egyptian Arabic*, was written in defense of the traditional pronunciation of the Bohairic dialect of Coptic as used in the Coptic Orthodox Church,
which has largely been supplanted by the Greco-Bohairic pronunciation introduced circa 1858 by ʿIryān Muftāḥ. As such, in its treatment of individual letters it details only those which differ between the two pronunciations, giving both their realizations and an array of names for each as found in various historical sources.

As the OB standard is a reconstructed pronunciation, it relies more on the correspondences between grapheme and phoneme found in the historical record than on conditioning environments, though these are sometimes mentioned as well. In many cases, the underlying value or function of a given letter can be assumed to be the same in both OB and GB, though according to some examples given in Isḥāḳ, they may be realized differently, e.g., in the case of jinkim, which is realized not only as a prosthetic /e/ in various environments (as in GB), but also as other vowels, as in ḥnɔγt /ɛbnɔdi/ (Isḥāḳ 1975:706).

In addition to the letters and correspondences found below, diphthongs are formed by adding /i/, /ū/, or /u/ after other vowels, as in GB, though the resulting diphthong may be pronounced differently than the GB standard due to different realizations of the individual vowels that make up the diphthong (see table 5, below). Diphthongs may be monophthongized, as in the case of many Greek words which contain diphthongs, e.g., ετην < αιτεῖν (ibid:595).

The graphemes  ngữ,  gı,  γ as well as  ο,  ογ,  γ alternate with one another in written Coptic texts when rendering both Coptic and Greek words (ibid:583). This can be seen in examples from Bohairic texts that exhibit these alternations in the rendering of Greek words, such as the ou < ei alternation found in λογτογργος louturgos < λειτουργος leitourgos (ibid:584). This alternation of vowel graphemes contributes to the variant realizations of certain letters as seen in table 5 (below), because the correspondence between a given grapheme and its realization is variable in the historical record upon which the OB pronunciation standard is based.

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2 This form is not found with jinkim at source, but is listed with jinkim in Mattar (1990:60).
The following table presents a simplified set of correspondences based on the values given in Ishāk (1975). In the case of the letters Ⲧ, ⲧ, and Ⲫ, these are monograms for κς, τς, and τι (Worrell 1934:85-86), and so the realizations that affect their composite letters apply to their realizations as monograms as well, i.e., ⲧ is /bs/, not /ps/ as in GB, and Ⲫ is /di/, not /ti/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter, name</th>
<th>Realizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ⲅ</td>
<td>[a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲇ widah or biḍa(h)</td>
<td>[w] or [ū] /#_, word-medial; [b] / #, _C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲇ</td>
<td>[dʒ], [g]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲉ dalda</td>
<td>[d]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲉ</td>
<td>“/a/, like ⲅ” (Ishāk 1975:425)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲋ</td>
<td>[z]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲋ hāda or irda</td>
<td>[i]; [ā]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲍ titta or deida</td>
<td>[t], [tˤ]; rarely [d]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲍ</td>
<td>[i]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲍ</td>
<td>[k]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲏ</td>
<td>[l]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲏ</td>
<td>[m]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲑ</td>
<td>[n]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲑ</td>
<td>[ks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲓ ow or ou</td>
<td>[o] ~ [ō]; [u] ~ [ū]; [a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲓ bi or bei</td>
<td>[b]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲕ</td>
<td>[r]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲕ</td>
<td>[s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲗ dau or taww</td>
<td>[d], [dˤ]; [t], [tˤ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲗ he or ęe</td>
<td>[i], [i], ([é] in Greek words) / C_C; ['i] ( = Ar. ę) /#<em>; [w], [u] /V</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲙ fiy or bij</td>
<td>[b] in most Coptic words; [f] in Greek words and few Coptic words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲙ ki or schéi</td>
<td>[k] in Coptic words; [k], [f], [x] in Greek words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲩ</td>
<td>[bs]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲫ oh</td>
<td>[ō], [o], [ū]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲫ</td>
<td>[ʃ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲭ</td>
<td>[f]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲭ</td>
<td>[x]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲯ hori</td>
<td>[h] in most words; [h] in a few words, e.g., τωβ /tubh/ ‘prayer’ (ibid:402)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⲱ djendja</td>
<td>[dʒ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Most letters as listed at source have multiple names. When possible, I have chosen two which reflect differing realizations of the letter, e.g., “wida or biḍa(h)” to reflect the realization of <B> as /w/ or /b/.
Unlike the table of GB values presented in §2.1, the above table does not contain basic values, as there are very few conditioning environments presented in the source text in order to account for the variants listed in the “Realizations” column above. Rather, these variants are attested to in the historical record via the surveyed manuscripts discussed in that thesis.

Stress is governed by the following rules (ibid:726-727)

1. Ultimate syllables are always stressed if long (CV\text{C} or CVCC), e.g., ṭ\text{a}υβολθ \text{t}\.\text{a}\text{v}\text{o}\text{l}θ ‘I shall loosen it’; πε\text{f}\text{c}ο\text{m} \text{p}ef\text{f}\text{c}\text{m} ‘his book’.

2. If the ultimate syllable is not long, then the penultimate syllable is usually stressed, e.g., σ\text{c}λε\text{c} \text{s}\text{c}\text{e}\text{l} ‘to comfort’.

3. If both the ultimate and penultimate syllables are short, then the antepenultimate syllable is usually stressed, e.g., π\text{f}ο\text{f}ο\text{r}\text{t}\text{e}\text{p} \text{p}\text{f}\text{\o}\text{r}\text{t}\text{e}\text{p} ‘the trouble’.

Note that these mostly support the same stress patterns as found in GB (cf. §2.1, Mattar rule 1), but that rule 3 above violates Mattar (1990) by placing stress on a bound prefix.

Additional rules involving the affixation of additional syllables follow the above rules. As stated in Ishāk (1975:728-730):

1. The addition of long ultimate syllables to a word with penultimate stress shifts the stress onto the newly created long syllable, e.g., σ\text{c}λε\text{c} \text{s}\text{c}\text{e}\text{l} ‘to comfort’ > σ\text{c}λε\text{c}\text{o}\text{λ} \text{s}\text{c}\text{o}\text{l} ‘to comfort thee’.

2. If short ultimate syllables are added, the stress will shift to the penultimate syllable, e.g., α\text{f}\text{b}ο\text{r}\text{b}ε\text{r} \text{a}f\text{b}\text{r}\text{b}\text{e}\text{r} ‘he threw down’ > α\text{f}\text{b}ε\text{r}\text{b}ο\text{r}\text{t}\text{e}\text{n} \text{a}f\text{b}\text{r}\text{b}\text{o}\text{r}\text{t}\text{e}\text{n} ‘he threw us down’.
3. Additions of -V(C) suffixes onto penultimate open syllables do not shift stress, e.g., ḡwṣwtem af.sò.tem ‘he heard’ > ḡwṣwθmef af.sòθ.mef ‘he heard him’ > ḡwṣwθmou af.sòθ.mou ‘he heard them’.

As with the first three stress rules of OB, the above rules yield mostly the same results as the rules surveyed for GB in §2.1, but arrive at them by different means. Whereas Mattar (1990) assigns rules based on individual segments (e.g., word-final 檄 is always stressed), Isḥāḳ (1975) observes syllable types which, given the orthographic alternations found in Coptic (particularly among vowels), provide much more stable and empirically sound motivations for the stress patterns observed in the language.

2.4 Case Study: OB pronunciation in the Diocese of Rochester, NY

2.4.1 Background: Rochester-area churches as conservators of this tradition

The analysis of the OB pronunciation found in §2.4.2 is based on recordings made at Sts. Peter and Paul Coptic Orthodox Church in Rochester, NY. The interviews with community members summarized in §2.4.3 were conducted at the monastery of St. Shenouda, also in Rochester.

The Rochester-area churches are unique in their use and promotion of the OB standard, which is not used or officially promoted in U.S. Coptic churches outside of this area. This situation is due to the presence of Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishāḳ and his role in area churches and the aforementioned monastery, where he teaches the OB pronunciation. Fr. Shenouda was, before his ordination, Deacon Emile Māher Isḥāḳ, the man responsible for establishing the OB pronunciation via his 1975 Oxford Ph.D. thesis, The Phonetics and Phonology of the Boḥairic Dialect of Coptic and the Survival of Coptic Words in the Colloquial and Classical Arabic of Egypt and of Coptic Grammatical Constructions in Colloquial Egyptian Arabic. In addition to this thesis, he has also published several books

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This spelling is in keeping with his recent English-language works, while the spelling Māher Isḥāḳ is his own transliteration from the Arabic and hence is retained throughout the present thesis for citations of his Arabic works.
in Arabic on various aspects of the language, including a book on the pronunciation of names according to the OB pronunciation standard (1985), a history of the language (1998a), a history of Coptic literature (1998b), and a two-volume pedagogical text which teaches the OB pronunciation standard (2002, 2006).

Prior to the arrival of Fr. Shenouda in August of 1998, all Rochester-area Coptic churches used the GB pronunciation standard. With the arrival of Fr. Shenouda, the OB pronunciation standard began to be taught in the churches of the region via hymn and language classes. The Coptic script was also taught in these classes, and those who learned from Fr. Shenouda in these early years have gone on to teach the Coptic youth in hymns classes which are held in area churches today.

As part of his commitment to the language, Fr. Shenouda has also composed new texts in Coptic, some fit to preexisting melodies known from hymns already sung in various services. For pedagogical reasons, these are usually presented in transliteration, rather than in Coptic script. One text, a prayer to be spoken before eating, is presented with Coptic text and transliteration on the following page.

In addition to these books, classes, and new texts, Fr. Shenouda has also produced books related to the service and rites of the Coptic Orthodox Church, some dating back to his time as a deacon. These include a service book for deacons (1977), portions of the psalmody of the midnight praises (1978), and translations of the Gospel of John (1987) and the Acts of the Apostles (1988). All of the Coptic text in these books is presented according to the standard used by Fr. Shenouda in his writings, which includes various markings (meant to differentiate between the various possible realizations of the consonants and vowels that they are attached to: w/b, f/b, a/i, etc.) not found in texts produced according to the GB pronunciation standard. This includes the book of deacon’s responses, despite the fact that many of these passages are actually in Greek, albeit written in service books in Coptic script. Hence, the OB churches of the Rochester area pronounce the Greek portions of the Coptic Orthodox liturgy according to the Coptic pronunciation, as though they are Coptic.
ΠΝΗΜΑΝΤΕ ΦΟΡΥΙ
THE PRAYER OF THE TABLE (~ FOR THE FOOD)

Τεμωπεμον ητοκ Πενθοικ Ιησους Πιακρισιος (= πενθοικ Ιης Πιακρισιος) και ακσωνη
ναμ ητακαματι.

danšabehmōt endōdk bānsōys ışūs bihrīstōs: ġa aksobdi nān endāyforšī
(We thank you our Lord Jesus Christ: for you prepared for us this table)

Σκουτ ερος μιφρυτ ετακαμον ευπτιον ηνικ νεμ πιτεβτ εκνατ.
esmūw ʿarūs emebrādī 'ādakemūt ʿābidiyū ('e)nʿoyk nam bidābd esnāw
(Bless it as you blessed the five loaves and the two fish)

ユーザ インヘトソシ エブヘン タナナギチュブイシウエウ ナウト アン アラ ノック ペトジェブイシウ ナウト。

mašawiyyo (e)nnyādhisī ʿatwadān danna(e)şdišawiyyo ʿawūh 'ān 'alla enšōk
baddišawiyyo ʿawūh
(Reward those who tired for us: we cannot reward them: but you are the one who will
reward them)

ユーザ ニヨンテソケリ オトシ オブテム エロン エンウ エホル エンウ イモシ ケ

ma nihāki nām niyadhokār woh sodām ʿarōn ʿanʾūš ʿawūl ʾanāgā emmōs ġa bānyūt...
(Give to the poor and those who are hungry: and hear us when we cry out saying: Our
Father...)

(Email: Shenoudian 2014)
2.4.2 Analysis of Coptic portions of the Liturgy

As previously mentioned in §2.4.1, the recordings analyzed in this section and the following section were collected at Sts. Peter and Paul Coptic Orthodox Church and the monastery of St. Shenouda, both located in Rochester, NY. They were collected from August 9th to August 17th, 2014. Approximately 80 families attend the liturgy at these locations, and as in the case of St. Bishoy in Albuquerque, they are mostly ethnic Egyptians. The liturgy is celebrated mostly in English, with Coptic portions comprising roughly 22% of the total time of the liturgical recording to be analyzed in the present section of this thesis. All of the caveats presented prior to the analysis of the Albuquerque liturgy apply to the present analysis as well: the portions of the liturgical recording presented in the following analysis are only those which are shared in common with the liturgy as celebrated in the Albuquerque recording, those these amount to only a fraction of the total number of Coptic portions present in the liturgy as celebrated in Rochester.

Because the OB pronunciation standard is based on the record of Coptic historical phonology as recorded in many different sources over a long period of time, it is would be prohibitively complex in the present work to posit a single artificial standard such as that synthesized from Mattar (1990) for the GB standard to which the liturgy celebrated in Albuquerque was compared. There are simply too many variables and not enough information available regarding conditioning environments to reconstruct an intermediary level between the text as presented in the liturgy service book and its realization. This was possible using Mattar (1990) due the relatively uniform correspondences between the written form and its assumed basic values according to the GB pronunciation standard. As this is not the case with regard to the OB pronunciation standard, examples will be presented in this analysis in the following format, which are once again labeled in their introductory example in order to orient the reader to the presentation of the examples found throughout this section:

(1) The original Coptic text. (CP)
(2) Broad phonetic transcription of the liturgical recording. (OB)
(3) English translation (EN)
Recall the expected realizations of the OB standard as presented above in table 5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Realizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ</td>
<td>[a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[w] or [ū] /#_, word-medial; [b] /#,_C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[dʒ], [g]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ</td>
<td>[d]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>“/a/, like ⲁ” (Iṣḥāk 1975:425)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[z]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[ɪ]; [ä]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[t], [t̚]; rarely [d]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[i]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[k]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[l]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[m]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[n]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[ks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[o] ~ [ō]; [u] ~ [ū]; [a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[b]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[r]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[d], [d̚]; [t], [t̚]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[i], [ī], ([é] in Greek words) / C_C; [ˈi] ( = Ar. ɛ̌) /#<em>; [w], [u] /V</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[b] in most Coptic words; [f] in Greek words and few Coptic words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[k] in Coptic words; [k], [ʃ], [x] in Greek words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲁ ⲁ</td>
<td>[bs]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of these realizations of \( \epsilon \) can be seen in Trinitarian formula (1993:172):

**CP:** \( \text{ⲧⲱⲃⲩⲛ ϫⲑⲣⲓⲛ \n θⲟⲩⲧ \n \n \text{ⲡⲓⲧⲱⲧ} \n \text{ⲡⲓⲡⲯ} \n \text{ⲡⲓⲡⲗⲣⲱⲧ \n \n \text{ⲡⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩϯ} \n \text{ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧ} \)  
**OB:** kan \( \text{ⲡⲩⲧ} \) \( \text{ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧ} \) \( \text{ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧ} \)  
**EN:** In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God

**CP:** \( \text{ⲧⲥⲱⲃⲱⲩⲧ} \text{ⲡⲓⲧⲱⲧ} \text{ⲡⲓⲡⲆⲕⲣⲑⲧⲱⲣ :} \)  
**OB:** fɪsmarut \( \text{ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧ} \) \( \text{ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧ} \) \( \text{ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧ} \)  
**EN:** Blessed be God the Father, the Pantocrator

In this example, there is vowel reduction, including reduction to schwa (underlined) and syllabic consonants (bolded). Deletion of syllables occurs as well. The deletion of the word \( \text{ⲡⲓⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁ} \) is an anomaly, not found elsewhere in the corpus. While there are likely typographical errors to account for the lack of \( \text{jinkim} \) where there is a corresponding word-initial [e] (e.g., \( \text{ⲩⲧⲣⲓⲛ} \)), in comparison with the same text as recited at Albuquerque (§2.2.1), there is still a difference in syllabification related to where the \( \text{jinkim} \) is possibly missing from the printed text: \( \text{ⲧⲱⲃⲩⲛ ϫⲑⲣⲓⲛ} \text{ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧ} \) is realized above as [fismarut], in comparison to the GB realization [efsimarəut]. There is no phonotactic motivation for the prosthetic [e] before the initial \(<\phi \rangle\) in the GB realization, whether this prosthetic vowel is the result of a missing \( \text{jinkim} \) or not, as the presence of the jinkim over the following
consonant, <c>, yields a permissible word-initial CVC sequence without the addition of another prosthetic [e] prior the initial <ф>.

The following chart lists the realizations found in the OB corpus collected in Rochester, as both individual tokens and as percentages relative to the total number of occurrences of a given letter. The same constraints that applied to the corpus collected in Albuquerque apply here as well: the digraphs <oy> /ū/ and <rr> /ŋg/ are not included, and the percentages listed in the Realizations column do not always add up to 100% due to rounding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Realizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α (123)</td>
<td>[a] (103; 84%); [ɔ] (16; 13%); Ø (4; 3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β (30)</td>
<td>[b] (26; 87%); [w] (4; 13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γ (24)</td>
<td>[g] (4; 17%); [dʒ] (20; 83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δ (7)</td>
<td>[d] (7; 100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ε (138)</td>
<td>[a] (119; 86%); [e] (7; 5%); [ɔ] (4; 3%); [ɛ] (1; 1%); Ø (7; 5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η (52)</td>
<td>[i] (11; 21%); [a] (38; 73%); [e] (3; 6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>θ (26)</td>
<td>[t] (26; 100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ο (137)</td>
<td>[o] ~ [ɔ] (121; 88%); [a] (3; 2%); [ɔ] (11; 8%); Ø (2; 1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>π (87)</td>
<td>[b] (83; 95%); Ø (4; 5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τ (65)</td>
<td>[d] (56; 86%); [t] (9; 14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>υ (34)</td>
<td>[i] (11; 32%); [ɛ] (3; 9%); [w] (20; 59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ϕ (24)</td>
<td>[b] (4; 17%); [f] (20; 83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χ (8)</td>
<td>Cp. words: [k] (1; 13%); Gk. words: [k] (3; 38%); [ʃ] (4; 50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ω (29)</td>
<td>[o] (26; 90%); [u] (1; 3%); Ø (2; 7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ε (12)</td>
<td>[h] (9; 75%); Ø (3; 25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χ (6)</td>
<td>[dʒ] (6; 100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ (6)</td>
<td>[ʃ] (6; 100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ρ (18)</td>
<td>[di] (16; 89%); [da] (1; 6%); [ti] (1; 6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 OB realizations as found in the OB corpus recorded at Sts. Peter and Paul Coptic Orthodox Church, Rochester

There are not many generalizations that can be made regarding the realizations of many phonemes in the above list, due to their variability and lack of conditioning environments. Vowel length is once again not predictable from the orthography (cf. §2.2.1). While vowel length can sometimes be known from syllable stress (see below), the effect of the melody on the realization of a given segment makes this difficult.
Accordingly, vowel length distinctions have been left out of the broad transcription in this section and the table above.

One immediately recognizable feature of the hymns and prayers collected in Rochester is that they tend to be said much faster than the corresponding prayers at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church in Albuquerque. The portion of the Thanksgiving Prayer (1993:176) which was prayed in Coptic in Albuquerque lasts 18 seconds. The same portion of the Thanksgiving Prayer as prayed in Rochester lasts 8 seconds. This may be a motivating factor for the loss of syllables and segments in the prayer as recorded below. It is also the case that due to the differing realizations of segments carrying the jinkim, as observed below and in the previous example, there are fewer syllables to be said according to the OB standard than according to the GB standard.

In the same passage as realized in Albuquerque according to the GB pronunciation, prosthetic [e] was inserted in several words where it is not found in the OB example above: φιννβ [efənɪv]; φινωτ [efjot]; πι xtypestοc [biexristos].

The OB example above conforms to the previously-presented table of OB values with the exception of the reduction of the final [i] in [di] to schwa. Despite being reduced in terms of their vowel quality, the realizations above do still conform to the rules set forth in §2.3. Ultimate syllables are stressed if long (CV̅C or CVCC), as is the case with [ebʃojs] (CVCC) and [bəns.dir] (CV̅C). In the case of words with short ultimate syllables, the penultimate syllable is stressed: [bənodərgat(r)], [banúdi], [bəkrísdos].
In common with the realization of the same hymn in the GB case study, the congregational response during the Offertory shows the shift of some segments to avoid phonotactically impermissible segments (1993:171), as highlighted in bold below:

\[
\text{ALLELUIA}: \text{עַלְלְיוֹתָא} \quad \text{תֶּפֶחֶל} \quad \text{וֹעָכִּיָּה} \quad \text{בַּמְּעַרְשָׁה} \quad \text{נַאָק} \quad \text{בֵּול} \quad \text{נָדַע}. \quad \text{כֹּהֲנִי} \quad \text{נִכְּפָרְפָא} \quad \text{אָמּוּנה} \quad \text{בֵּסְכָּלָא} \quad \text{בֵּנְדַא}
\]

Alleluia. The thought of man shall confess to You, and the rest of the thought shall keep 
\[
\text{אַמְבוֹתְוֶה} \quad \text{אַפֶּרֶשְׁאָי} \quad \text{נַאָק} \quad \text{בֵּרְפָסִי} \quad \text{בָּשָׁרְפוֹפָא} \quad \text{בָּשָׁרְפוֹפָא} \quad \text{בֵּרְפָסִי} \quad \text{בֵרְפָסִי} \quad \text{בֵרְפָסִי}.
\]

a feast to You. The sacrifices and the offerings receive them unto yourself. Alleluia.

Also in common with the GB realization is the insertion of [ə] to break up the consonant cluster in [nibərosfora].

While individual phoneme realizations at variance with table 6 presented at the beginning of this section are rare, they do occur. In the Hymn of the Censer (1993:182), we see that the <\text{ט}>, which is listed in the table as having a realization of [i] or [a] is realized in this instance as [e]. <\text{ג}> is also realized as [e], not [a] as expected from the OB value listed in table 6.

\[
\text{דִּיוֹרְפִי} \quad \text{ינָוָה} \quad \text{טֶּלֶּפְּרָבָנָא} \quad \text{נְכָרְפָי} \quad \text{בְּנֶּמֶטְרָי}.
\]

The golden censer is the Virgin; her aroma is our Savior.

\[
\text{אַחֲכֵי} \quad \text{יוֹנָה} \quad \text{אַפָּרְפָא} \quad \text{יוֹמָה} \quad \text{כֹּהֲנִי} \quad \text{בֵּסְכָּלָא} \quad \text{בֵּרְפָסִי} \quad \text{בֵרְפָסִי}.
\]

She gave birth to Him; He saved us and forgave our sins.

An epenthetic vowel is also inserted at the end of ѕиновь. This occurred in the GB realization as well, though the explanation given there does not apply here, as the initial consonant of \text{טֶּלֶּפְּרָבָנָא} is voiced to [d] in this instance, hence matching in voicing with the final consonant in ѕиновь, [b]. This is likely not a true deviation from the standard, but a result
the rapid articulation of the final voiced bilabial stop in the context of the musical measure of the hymn. The vowel in the stressed syllable in ḫnɔ♭很好地 /en.nób/ is elongated to fit the hymn (1.485s of the total 2.93s realization of the word), leaving very little time for the articulation of final stop before the production of <de>. Impressionistically, the two words sound as though they are divided mno#bde, in which case the earlier comments regarding articulatory and perceptual ease that applied to [bə.te] vs. /bte/ in the GB realization of this hymn at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church in Albuquerque may also apply here. [bɪ.de] is easier to produce and distinguish than /bde/.

As was also seen in analysis of the GB liturgy in §2.2.1, portions of the OB liturgy as documented in Rochester have multiple realizations that are at variance with the expected values according the OB pronunciation standard, but are correct according to the GB standard. The doxology sung after Psalm 150 (1993:281) contains the <e> = [e] correspondence, as above, as well as <t> = [ti], rather than [di].

Regarding the realization of jinkim throughout the corpus, it is much more variable than in the case of the GB pronunciation standard. In the OB corpus, it has a syllabic realization (either a prosthetic [e] or a syllable boundary) 74 times, and a non-syllabic realization 38 times (compared to only ten in the GB corpus). As in the previous discussion of its absence word-initially in ḫnɔ♭, in some cases its absence in OB realizations may be motivated by the fact that it is not truly needed. This is true in the case of bisnof, which is syllabified bis.nəf in the OB realization and hence does not include any consonant cluster, either word-initially or anywhere else. According to the GB pronunciation standard, where the word would be syllabified pi.es.nof according to the rules of Mattar (1990), the avoided CC is apparently -sn- in *bi.snof. This form never
surfaces in the OB realization which does not contain the prosthetic [e], however. The relevant section of the liturgy is from the anaphora (1993:276), where the word in question is syllabified *bis.nəf*:

\[
\text{πισῶμα ἡς πιὸν ἐνεμνοῦνα πεννοῦν} \uparrow \text{ φα} \text{ι πε ἔ} \text{ν ομμεωήν} \text{ιν: ἀμ} \text{ιν.}
\]

bisoma nam bisnəf enda ammanjual bennudi faj ba xen ometmaj amin
The Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God, this is in truth. Amen.

In common with the GB data analyzed in §2.2.1, the word *ὡληλʃlīl* ‘Pray’ is realized without the initial *jinkim* that would be expected according to the transliteration provided in the consulted service book (ibid:173, 215), where it is transliterated *eshlil*. In keeping with OB phonology, it has a different vowel value than its GB equivalent: OB *ὡληλ*[ʃlal], GB *[ʃlil]*.

In general, the OB pronunciation exhibits more variety in the realization of its vowels than in the realization of its consonants, while the GB pronunciation exhibits more variety in the realization of its consonants than in the realization of its vowels.

The tendencies found in the OB corpus are in some ways similar and in some ways different than those found in the summation of the analysis of the GB corpus.

1. Users of the OB pronunciation, like users of the GB pronunciation, tend to deviate from their own pronunciation standard in the direction of what are correct values according to the other standard. This was seen in the above data when \(<ε>\) was realized [e] instead of [a], or when \(<\uparrow>\) was realized [ti] instead of [di]. The crucial difference between the two is that a GB user deviating in the direction of a correct GB correspondence is such as \(<\uparrow>\) [b] is likely doing so because of the underlying phonology of their native language (as knowledge of the OB pronunciation standard is low among Copts in general), while an OB user deviating in the direction of correct GB values is more likely to be slipping into patterns learned as a GB user before the introduction of OB in that individual’s community, as there are very few OB users who were not first users of the pronunciation. In either case, the unexpected realizations can be attributed to carry-over from the other system, learned earlier.
2. The reduction of vowels is more common in OB than GB, though the corpus surveyed is too small to make any generalizations regarding this behavior. It does, however, seem to be closer than the GB in this regard to what Dyneley Prince recorded of the pronunciation of Bohairic in his research, only some 50 years after the introduction of the GB pronunciation standard. He claimed that in Upper Egypt, Bohairic was still pronounced “in accordance with the original Sahidic vocalization” (1902:291), which we can assume from subsequent research (e.g., Kramer 2006) would have included this tendency to reduce vowels in unstressed syllables to schwa.

3. The behavior of jinkim is much more variable than in the GB pronunciation. Its presence over a letter yields non-syllabic realizations more often in the OB pronunciation than in the GB, though it is still more often syllabic than non-syllabic. The relative lack of these syllabic realizations, however, results in an overall more fluent speech stream than is observed in the GB pronunciation, as there are fewer inserted syllables in environments where they are not phonotactically required.

These characteristics have an impact on the way that the hymns are sung, which is the primary way that the language is learned. This observation about the nature of the hymns was made in several interviews with OB users as summarized in the following section. This shows that certain connections were made in the minds of OB users between the use of the language and the form of the language used (OB vs. GB). The following section will explore these connections in depth, as OB users in Rochester made both linguistic and non-linguistic arguments in favor of their OB pronunciation, and both types of argument were made in the construction of narratives on linguistic authenticity.

2.4.3 Discussion of the role of Coptic in the community

In the overview of the role of Coptic in the GB community in Albuquerque, NM (§2.2.2), the conclusion was drawn that the discussion concerning Coptic held at that location was primarily a narrative constructed in non-linguistic terms. The importance of Coptic was related to its place in asserting fidelity to religious and cultural tradition, or to a historical narrative about the place of the Copts in Egyptian history and society. More rarely, it was related to specific acts related to its religious domain of use, such as prayer.
The discussion had not naturally turned to pronunciation standards, as the majority of community members were unaware of the existence of the GB and OB standards as objects of study.

In the case of the OB community in Rochester, NY, aspects of all three of the overarching categories present in the NM interviews – fidelity to tradition, historical narrative, and suitability of Coptic in religious worship – were present in the answers given by interviewees. However, there was an added dimension to the narrative constructed by interviewees in Rochester, as the particular pronunciation of Coptic used in Rochester marked the churches of the area as unique relative to other Coptic churches in the USA. Several interviewees referred to the OB pronunciation standard as “our Coptic” in contrasting it with the GB in use at other Coptic churches. “If I go to other churches”, remarked one, “it just doesn’t feel the same as if I’m using our Coptic that we learned here.”

As this thesis is ultimately a study of a community’s construction of notions of linguistic authenticity, and authenticity is contingent upon authority (Coupland 2007:181), it seems most fitting to organize the discussion relayed in the current chapter in terms of authority.

The OB pronunciation and historical authority

The OB pronunciation standard is based on historical manuscripts collected from various places in Egypt by Emile Māher Isḥāḵ. This reconstruction of the Coptic language as it was pronounced before the reform of the mid-19th century is considered by its supporters, including the people of the Rochester-area churches that use this pronunciation, to have historical authority, in the sense that it is held to be a faithful representation of the language as it was known before c. 1858. As it relies upon the written record, however, some people did acknowledge that there is a certain degree of uncertainty regarding how forcefully that claim may be made.
Whether it’s accurate or not, it is the closest thing we think that we have to […] what the last evolution of Coptic was that was a natural evolution […] whether it’s that same exact thing, we don’t know, because we’re reading off of manuscripts, we’re reading off of writings. But it’s definitely different, whatever those writings were are definitely different than what the mainstream church uses now.

By contrast, the GB pronunciation standard is afforded no such leeway, since its historical provenance is definitely known, and therefore the study of Coptic Church history shows it to be a recent invention.

We have a date, a time, a place, and a person who changed the pronunciation into something that it wasn’t, and that’s just not a natural evolution by any sense of the word, by any measurement. That’s why we think we’re the closest to what the pronunciation was prior to the artificial change.

It is interesting to consider the fact that the OB reconstruction, at least in the form in which it is found within the Ph.D. thesis of Emile Māher Ishāḵ, dates to approximately 117 years after the establishment of the GB standard by Ḥaryān Muftāḥ, yet the GB standard is considered the “new” pronunciation standard. The difference between the two is one of historical pedigree. Some of the manuscripts consulted in support of the OB pronunciation standard date as recorded in Ishāḵ (1975) date back to the 15th century, while the GB pronunciation standard does not have verifiable antecedents older than Ḥaryān Muftāḥ himself, save perhaps some Coptic priests trained at Rome had been taught certain realizations of particular phonemes by their European professors (Ishāḵ 1975:35).

Another interviewee made this connection between the language and the hymnody of the Church as an argument in favor for the OB pronunciation standard.

The hymns in the liturgy, where it’s used primarily, those were all formed upon that being the pronunciation. So, if I say it with a different pronunciation, then
I’m actually playing with the hymns, and I’m playing with the liturgy, and I’m playing with other things that…it’s not the way it should have been to begin with, because it was pronounced differently.

Appeals to historical authority were also made in discussions regarding the future use of the language, i.e., what community members feel will or should become of the Coptic language in future generations. One interviewee pointed out the historical precedent set with regard to language use in worship in the establishment of Christianity in Egypt, which involved reaching a mostly native, non-Hellenized audience in their own language.

I myself believe that […] maybe in about a hundred years or so, in the United States we’re probably not going to be using Coptic […] because we’re probably going to have to evolve into an English church. Because Orthodoxy focuses on the vernacular of the people. It doesn’t focus on a liturgical language. […] When Saint Mark came to Egypt, he didn’t force Greek down our throats.

For others, the future of the language is aided by the establishment and use of the OB standard, such that one interviewee said, “If we go back to the traditional pronunciation, it will be easier to revive the language. If we continue to focus on this modern pronunciation, it’s going to be […] much more difficult, because it’s just not how it was spoken.” Again, historical authority is appealed to in dealing with the modern linguistic situation. The same interviewee was clear that this is not a dogmatic stance, however, and answered a question about the amount of Coptic used in the OB churches of the Rochester area by emphasizing that the language itself is not of primary importance.

The most important thing is that you’re praying, in the end. I mean, there’s things that are more important than the language itself. If people don’t understand or people can’t follow or people get discouraged, then, you know, the language shouldn’t be an obstacle. […] And again, it’s not the liturgy that preserves the language, or the hymns.
This exact situation has occurred in area churches, wherein the people became frustrated with the attempts of hymn teachers to encourage them to pray in Coptic.

In the beginning, we tried to teach the people how to say ‘Our Father’ in Coptic, and every liturgy, every time we’d have to say ‘Our Father’ we’d just say *Je Benyot*, and it came to a point where people were just saying, ‘We don’t understand it. We want to say it in our own language.’ So we kind of leaned back on that.

Situations such as these are perhaps one reason why some people did not feel that the amount of Coptic used in the church should be increased. As with the GB community in Albuquerque, appeals were frequently made to the idea that it is necessary to pray in a language that is understood, rather than to preserve the language for its own sake. “To me, praying is in the language you understand, and if we start to do more Coptic, then the people are going to start getting annoyed by it because they don’t understand a lot of it.”

It is clear from speaking with the people of the Rochester-area churches which use the OB pronunciation standard that they feel a deep connection to the history of their language as a part of the larger history of their church. It is also clearly the case that they feel that this pronunciation standard is the more historically valid of the two. In terms of the way that this is expressed, some people are still active users of both pronunciation standards, while preferring the OB. The GB pronunciation standard is still used by some of the people in the church, as it was the sole pronunciation in the area before the arrival of Fr. Shenouda, so most people are comfortable with it and do not have problems switching between the two standards. One user of both pronunciation standards put it this way:

The most important thing is [...] to have an open mind. To be able to expose yourself to the two pronunciations. Not to be a stickler with one and not to oppose the other. And if that’s the case, have evidence. Look at the history. Look at the origins.
The same interviewee continued:

After being exposed to both pronunciations, some of the pronunciation itself within the Greco-Bohairic is inconsistent, even within the same Church. […] Within the same dialect there’s an inconsistency, which is showing that there has to be something original. So it made sense from that point of view of the old pronunciation and being supportive of it.

Others who use both pronunciations have a different take on the GB pronunciation, as one interviewee, after explaining that using GB is sometimes good when praying with people who do not know the OB pronunciation, clarified that this stance is an accommodation, not a preference.

I’m not that lenient about it, because I say to myself if I understand the language, then to me the other stuff is gibberish. So I can’t say something I don’t understand. […] I learned the accurate way of speaking it, and knowing that the other one is wrong, then I can’t pray in a…in a non-language, because it was a made up language…the new way is a made up language in the end. And me knowing that kind of puts it on my conscience to not like saying it in the new way.

Although everyone interviewed had such preferences for the OB, among some of the church’s youth it was not a matter of choosing one over the other. The church has been established in the area for some years now, and some younger members of the congregation do not know the GB standard, having learned only the OB in the local church. While some of the youth reported no problems in adjusting to the GB pronunciation while attending other churches, one said that it can be a challenge, given the differences between the two.

When we go to other churches and we try to sing along, it’s very difficult because it seems like you’re speaking a completely different language. And in other churches not only are they pronouncing the words differently but because of the way that the words flow, the tune of what you’re singing also is changed and it’s very difficult to adjust to what they’re saying.
Ultimately, the argument in favor of the OB pronunciation is one that combines language and religious history, both of which are things that Copts are very finely attuned to. Unlike the situation in Albuquerque, the people in Rochester often used examples from Coptic to support their preference for the OB pronunciation.

You can find probably two churches that say some of, even some of the hymns in Coptic, differently. For example, the word […] awka (ⲉⲩⲭⲏ) […] in the Greco-Bohairic, in what some churches say, many will say evshi, or some will say evki…right? […] You’ll find this, like when the deacon says ebi brosevshi stasite or ebi brosevki stasite, right? Which one is it? You can’t have, even within the modern, or within the current dialect used, the same word […] pronounced in two different ways. So there has to be something then that allows you to trace it back, to see where the origin is.

Even those who did not include examples of the OB pronunciation in their answers nonetheless believed confidently in its correctness, as in the case of one interviewee who said: “It is the correct way. It is scientifically valid. There are no reasons to use the other pronunciation. […] There are arguments, but these arguments are not very strong. […] You have to pronounce the language like it has been spoken for a long time. You can’t just change it on a false basis.”

While several people made a point of mentioning the deficiencies of the GB pronunciation in particular, another interviewee argued that what applies to all languages should apply equally to Coptic.

I find it to be a very simple principle: languages have rules, and those languages should follow those rules. When you start to play with rules, with languages…then it’s no longer the language that we’re talking about. […] If something is correct, then that’s what should be used – propagated and used.

The OB pronunciation and cultural authority

Other arguments made could perhaps be best described as invocations of ‘cultural authority’, i.e., the feeling that the language is central to Coptic identity.
It’s important that we are sticking to, number one, our heritage and our culture. It’s our identity. You know, we’re called Copts. And for us to be Coptic, or Copts, we must speak Coptic and use Coptic. Arabic is not our first language. It’s a foreign tongue. So if Coptic is not going to be [...] spread outside of the Church, at least let’s preserve it inside the Church and use it inside the Church.

Related to this, the language was also spoken of as being particularly important in the Coptic diaspora of the United States, which faces its own unique challenges that are different than those faced in Egypt.

[...] it can be used in a very attractive way, for the sake of people feeling attached to their faith, and their history, and their roots. And I think it’s even more important in lands of immigration outside of Egypt, where people are encountering many different cultures, many different philosophies, many different religions, and besides all that a very secular atmosphere...so...when they have a language that they speak, and they use regularly from their childhood that gives an identity that they feel that they are [...] set apart

In speaking of the OB pronunciation in particular, several people observed that it provides a context to expand the dialogue on the Coptic pronunciation question outside of their church and to increase the visibility of their church and its pronunciation. “If I’m in a church and I pray in Old Bohairic, some of them might inquire, might ask, so it could be a way for me to tell them about it. [...] I have not had any sort of resistance in a church outside of Rochester with this pronunciation.” Another said: “Other people, almost everyone that I’ve talked to, they all say they love this Coptic, they think it sounds a lot nicer [...] I think just the way it sounds would actually bring them into the church.”

The link between the people and their language and history undergirds all of the arguments made in favor of it at both sites surveyed for this thesis. This link has added importance in the narrative constructed in favor of the OB pronunciation in Rochester, however, as at that location there is an added dimension to the community discourse on linguistic authenticity, as people are being taught a pronunciation that they feel is more authentic than that used in other churches. This has an impact on the narrative that they
construct, which can be summarized as being (1) historically informed, and (2) culturally authentic.

(1) Historically informed. Because the people of the Rochester-area OB churches are aware of the historical narrative surrounding the establishment of the GB pronunciation, they are able to use appeals to historical authority in order to strengthen the narrative regarding the authenticity of their particular pronunciation standard. By contrast, in Albuquerque this historical narrative is not widely known among the people, and therefore the narrative surrounding Coptic is more general in character.

(2) Culturally authentic. The use of the OB pronunciation engenders a feeling in the people that this is a form of Coptic that is truly theirs, as it is not shared by churches outside of the Rochester area. Its authenticity and hence its connection to the cultural core of Coptic identity is asserted via its historical pedigree. Recognition of that authenticity then changes or shapes the language use patterns of those who use the more culturally authentic variety, just as the OB users in Rochester shifted to the OB standard from the GB after becoming convinced of the authenticity of the former. Similar to GB users in Albuquerque using the preservation of Coptic in the Church as a means to assert the uniqueness and indigenous character of the Coptic people in an Egyptian context, OB users in Rochester use the OB pronunciation as a means to assert their own narrative amidst the GB-using majority. This narrative is the OB equivalent to the more general argument surrounding fidelity to tradition found in Albuquerque. For example, if, as is claimed above, the Coptic hymns were composed to be sung according to the OB pronunciation, then OB users can claim a unique fidelity to the standards and practices of past generations. Thus, to be most culturally authentic, as well as historically and linguistically correct, is to use the OB pronunciation standard, not the GB.

There are other replies in the above analysis that do not fit neatly within these two general aspects of the narratives constructed in Rochester. These replies instead suggest that there are different levels at which any individual may choose to participate in the construction of narratives about Coptic and linguistic authenticity within the community. For example, the interviewee who talked about the need to eventually abandon Coptic in churches in the United States may seem to be at odds with the general stance of the
community at this location regarding the importance of Coptic and the reasons why it should be preserved. However, this individual also provided several statements that were unequivocally pro-OB, and hence more in line with the general stance of the community that Coptic is important, and that the OB pronunciation of it is particularly important. In this way, this particular interviewee can be said to be a participant in the community construction of the OB/GB narrative that authenticates the OB as the sole authentic Coptic, but perhaps less a participant or not a participant at all in the narrative that links the use or preservation of the Coptic language to the essential identity of the Coptic people or the Coptic Orthodox Church.

These different levels of commitment or engagement with the narratives surrounding the Coptic language and linguistic authenticity are not just accessed by individuals, but can also be said to be reflected in the stances and behaviors characteristic of given communities. These generalized stances will now be analyzed in the concluding chapter of this thesis.
Chapter 3 Conclusion

At a macro level of comparison, the discussion of Coptic linguistic authenticity as it takes place in Albuquerque, NM and Rochester, NY can be said to be unilateral. It is unilateral in the sense that the community that resides in Albuquerque and uses the GB pronunciation is largely unaware of the existence of the OB pronunciation standard, much less the narratives constructed around it. Lacking the background necessary to engage the topic of Coptic linguistic authenticity at this level, the narrative constructed by the community at St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church in Albuquerque instead focuses on general ideas that are unrelated to the particular realizations which seem to be given so much ideological importance in Rochester. The narrative surrounding Coptic (not GB in particular, as again, this is not a salient category for this community, since there is nothing to compare it to) for the community in Albuquerque involves authenticating Coptic in general. It is Coptic in general, and not a particular pronunciation of it, that is authentic. It has been passed down to them in this particular form, which is the only form that they know and use, and they intend to pass it down in this form and thereby continue the tradition that they are charged with preserving and passing on as members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. This is, in essence, the method by which members of this community construct their own ideas of what it means to speak or use authentic Coptic. It is not necessarily in the phonological or phonetic details of the pronunciation that authenticity is granted, but in the actual act of passing on the language. In this approach to the language, what is authentic is what has been passed down to them, and whatever is not included in that is assimilated to it by virtue of the fact that Coptic is assumed to have a singular essence. For this reason, pronunciations at variance with the GB pronunciation used at this church were acknowledged, but treated as “accents” or “mostly correct”.

By virtue of the fact that they are very active in the discussion on Coptic linguistic authenticity, the community members in Rochester construct a more specific narrative than the above. This narrative is informed by the historical record and what it shows concerning the historical phonology of Coptic, as mediated through the scholarly work of Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak. The presence of these various historical sources used to support the pronunciation standard is why the OB users interviewed in Rochester were
able to say, with some degree of confidence, that they believe that their pronunciation is the authentic pronunciation – or at least the most authentic available reconstruction based on the available written evidence. By contrast, in Albuquerque the only community member to make a similar statement about the GB pronunciation was hesitant to affirm its veracity.

The corresponding narrative concerning the inauthenticity of the GB pronunciation is also constructed by OB users in Rochester with support of the historical record. The GB pronunciation is shown to be inauthentic due to its lack of historical pedigree, and hence is rejected as an unacceptable innovation. Its unique pronunciations of particular letters are seen as affectations, and evidence of its corrupted nature in comparison to the uncorrupted phonological system maintained by the OB pronunciation standard.

In this way, while the OB community of Rochester uses the same method of authentication as the GB community of Albuquerque (that is to say, they receive the language in a particular form from others, and pass it down to others), it is distinct from the community in Albuquerque in the content of what it passes down as “the Coptic language”. In the case of the OB community in Rochester, what is passed down does include very definite phonological forms which are considered correct and authentic to the exclusion of forms used elsewhere.

This is not the entirety of what constitutes the Coptic language in this context, however. In both Albuquerque and Rochester, the majority of the conceptual domains activated in the discussion of Coptic linguistic authenticity are non-linguistic. In other words, the majority of this discussion concerns non-linguistic notions that are expressed via the subject of language. This is not to imply that there is an ideological rift between GB and OB communities (as the GB communities, at least, have not attached ideological significance to the existence of different pronunciations), but rather than the essence of what it means to be a Copt is to some extent reified through language and appeals to historical linguistic authenticity, without denying the essential Coptic nature of those who
may use a particular standard that may nonetheless be classified as inauthentic according to the details of the OB historical narrative.

At this non-linguistic level, the communities of Albuquerque and Rochester show points of convergence and divergence in the construction of their respective narratives. These convergences and divergences are explored in the following section, which contains a summary of the non-linguistic aspects which are addressed in the community-level discussions on the Coptic language and linguistic authenticity.

3.1 Points of convergence and divergence

As stated in the conclusion to chapter 2, there are different levels at which an individual may be connected to the narratives constructed within the surrounding community on issues of the Coptic language and linguistic authenticity. Some community members may not participate or may participate only very superficially in the construction of the narrative at a particular level or on a particular point. This is also true of the communities surveyed in the present thesis as a whole. For instance, as related above, the GB community in Albuquerque participates only very superficially in the construction of a narrative on Coptic linguistic authenticity at the level of phonetics/phonology, as this community mostly lacks the necessary background information to make value judgments about pronunciation standards at this level.

The remaining levels or conceptual domains upon which narratives are constructed concerning Coptic linguistic authenticity by either community are non-linguistic. That is to say, the question of pronunciation standards necessarily concerns pronunciation – the sounds of a language connected to some standard (in the Coptic, also connected to a writing system) whereby particular realizations can be said to be either faithful or unfaithful to the set of idealized sounds which constitute that particular standard. Everything outside of this, even if invoked in the context of discussions about language, is essentially non-linguistic.
These non-linguistic levels or domains touched upon in the narratives constructed by the Albuquerque and Rochester communities include:

- Historical identity maintenance
- Essential identity formation
- Nationalistic identity formation

All of these have been placed in the context of the maintenance or formation of these different identities rather than performance of them because at the level in which Coptic is invoked in relation to them, they are generally talked about in this way, e.g., “Coptic is good/bad to help people ____”, not “Coptic makes people ______”.

- Historical identity maintenance. In this narrative, Coptic is connected to the history of Egypt, and to the Church of Egypt – the Coptic Orthodox Church. This narrative is related to the historical independence of the Church and its people from foreign intervention in their affairs, both in the wake of various historical events such as the Council of Chalcedon and the Arab conquest, and in the present day among those who see themselves as carrying on that independent spirit. Here we see different levels of engagement with this narrative in the GB community in Albuquerque and the OB community in Rochester. In Albuquerque, this narrative was framed in terms of the Coptic Orthodox Church being the only place where Coptic has been preserved, and hence the only context within which Egyptians can know their true identity as non-Arabs. Hence, the function of Coptic linguistic authenticity within this narrative is not to be most loyal in passing on the language as the Church must have spoken it or used it in past eras, but to highlight the Coptic language as a link – perhaps the link – to the pre-Arab, pre-Islamic past of the Egyptian people. In Rochester, perhaps due to the greater level of awareness of the specifically linguistic issues surrounding Coptic and what it means to use it authentically, fewer people spoke of the language in such general terms. Certainly, the historical identity narrative as constructed in Rochester includes these ideas of historical independence, but they did not often surface in this context, separate from the need to assert particular ideas about the actual pronunciation of the language.
- **Essential identity formation.** The basis for this narrative is what I have termed in the discussion on the role of Coptic in the Rochester community (§2.4.3) *cultural authority* – the feeling that the Coptic language is central to Coptic identity. This may seem self-evident, yet we have seen in the survey of the role of Coptic in the community in Rochester that not all of the community is equally committed to this proposition, with one person saying that Coptic will probably be abandoned in the future in America. For most people, however, and hence at a community-wide level at both sites, this association of the language with some idea of the essential identity of the Coptic people remains strong. In some ways, it is even stronger in the diaspora, as the social and linguistic conditions in which diaspora Copts find themselves in the United States (learning and using mostly English, even in the liturgy) create a need to reinforce their Coptic identity.

- **Nationalistic identity formation.** This narrative serves both GB parishes and OB parishes as diaspora churches, connecting them to the homeland of the majority of the Church. The communities at both sites surveyed in this thesis described the importance of Coptic and their use of Coptic using a narrative about their connection to Egypt. This was only done so explicitly in Albuquerque, where the importance of Coptic was said to be in its ability to make people feel like they “belong to Egypt”. It was also implicitly asserted in Rochester however, perhaps with greater force in the context of the discussion on linguistic authenticity, through the assertion of the OB pronunciation as being that which is most authentically Egyptian, untainted by the foreign sounds found in the GB pronunciation.

This deeper level of meaning, whereby a certain pronunciation standard may be used and propagated not only because it is what is least phonologically damaged and most historically correct, but also because of what it can convey about the users’ commitment to a certain conception of Egyptian identity arrived at via the discussion of the language, also affects discussions about the possible revival of the language.

In turning to this topic in the final section of this thesis, it is useful to recall what has been said previously regarding the potential challenges involved in reviving the language. In §2.2.2, the prospect of renewed discussions about the true character of the language
was seen as one possible outcome of a serious effort to revive the language. While such discussions are certainly necessary in order to establish what exactly is being revived, it is not inconceivable that these discussions may impede actual progress in teaching and reviving the language according to either pronunciation standard, particularly as both GB and OB users reported that the existence of other pronunciations was usually not a hindrance to comprehension. In §2.4.3, the opinion was expressed in Rochester that the OB pronunciation in particular would more easily facilitate the revival of the language. With these thoughts in mind, the following section will begin by exploring by what criteria Coptic may considered a candidate for revival, and close by imagining how a revival of the language might take place.

3.2 Toward a revival of Coptic

The communities surveyed at both sites were unanimous in their support of a revival of Coptic as a spoken language. While their numbers are too small to make any kind generalization regarding the language goals of the Coptic community on a world or even a countrywide level, the insights provided by the communities in Albuquerque and Rochester nonetheless show that a certain level of commitment to the idea of reviving Coptic exists in both GB and OB communities.

Individuals interviewed at both sites sometimes cited examples of more successful language revitalization efforts to show that the idea of reviving a purely ecclesiastical language is possible. As one member of the Rochester community said, “Other cultures have preserved their languages. And some of them that were dead, [then] revived. Syriac, Hebrew. They were dead. Really dead. And they revived them. […] Why can’t we do the same for Coptic?”

Tsunoda (2006:170-171) provides the following criteria to determine if it is possible to revive a dead language:

1. Degree of language endangerment and death. While Coptic is a dead language in the sense that it has not been learned and spoken as any individual’s native language for
centuries, it is still spoken in the sense of being vocalized within the Coptic Orthodox Church.

2. **Intactness of language structure.** Shinoda (ibid) uses the example of Hebrew to illustrate that the revitalized language is often learned natively by children who create new forms of the language that were unknown in the language’s classical period. This would certainly be the case with a revived Coptic, and it is likely in this aspect of the revitalization that questions of language authenticity would be most often invoked, given that the two pronunciation standards rest on the idea of intactness of pronunciation, i.e., that they either lack or contain foreign, dubious, or otherwise unacceptable speech sounds.

3. **Amount of language documentation available.** Coptic is well-documented, and dictionaries, grammars, and other resources are available from major retailers and local churches.

4. **Individuals.** Here Tsunoda is referring to the goals of individuals involved in language revitalization, from the goal of participating in simple greetings to the goal of becoming fully fluent. The latter is unquestionably more difficult than the former. Priests in both Rochester and Albuquerque report using Coptic to greet fellow language learners, though I only personally witnessed this in Rochester. More substantially, it was reported there that Muslim Egyptians sometimes take lessons in the language, as they consider it to be their native language as Egyptians. This engagement with members of the dominant religious community of Egypt was seen as a source of hope for the revitalization of the language by at least one person, who remarked that “[w]hether Christian or Muslim, many of them perceive of themselves as Egyptians. […] Whether Christian or Muslim, they go and learn the language […] So who knows where the revival of Coptic is going to be.”

Assuming that the above criteria for revival of the language is met, it is useful to look at an example of a different language revitalization or reclamation effort to see how the Coptic community may proceed in attempting to revive their own language. This evaluation will tie the methods used to revive the Miami language to similar methods,
and importantly similar language ideologies, at work in the narrative surrounding Coptic language revitalization.

In his exploration of Miami language revival, Leonard (2011) explores ways in which languages are determined to be extinct by the dominant discourse, and shows how modern Miami language practices subvert that discourse in order to establish more culturally relevant and community directed ways of conceptualizing reviving the language.

The term “extinct” is rejected in reference to the Miami language, as the language is viewed as never having been irretrievably lost. This same perspective was shared by at least one interviewee in Rochester, who described Coptic in the following manner:

Coptic is not by any means a dead language, even though a lot of people think it is just because only a few people in the world speak it. It is still well spoken in the Church. It is still well understood. And it has its rules, it has its grammar, it has its laws. [...] It is being revived right now as a spoken language. Another reason we’re really holding on to Coptic […] is because it was forcefully taken away from us, as an Egyptian people. [...] It is precious to us.

Leonard further challenges the dominant discourse regarding the “genuine” transmission of a language as being solely achievable in the home, rather than through classes, workshops, or other avenues. This is important because “languages that have had a period of dormancy can initially be learned only as second languages; intergenerational transmission is a later stage” (ibid:139). Applied to Coptic, this principle is especially important, as the language has not been preserved in homes, and it is also not allowed to be taught in public schools in Egypt. With this restriction in place, the classes taught in churches such as those which are taught in Rochester are some of the only teacher-directed opportunities to learn the language as a spoken language, rather than as an object of academic or historical study.

These church-based classes are more culturally relevant than the academic teaching of the language that may occur at the university level. This is important as a general principle which guides Miami language revitalization, as well. Leonard (ibid) notes that
“Miami language programs are successful because they are framed around a series of attainable objectives that are informed by contemporary community needs and values.” Thus, when an interviewee in Rochester spoke of reviving the language with reference to its use in the liturgy, this was expressing that same principle – namely, that the goal of reviving the language is in response to the community’s needs and values (cf. earlier discussion in both Albuquerque and Rochester regarding the need to pray with understanding). “We know that Coptic is our language, so we are hoping to revive it, so we are now having our programs of teaching Coptic as a living language […]. We are interested to hear and to speak the Bohairic dialect of Coptic because this is the dialect which is used in the liturgical books of the Church.”

Leonard also challenges the idea of linguistic and cultural stasis which is imposed by the dominant discourse upon Miami people as indigenous people, and which has an impact on what is considered expected and what is considered unusual use of the Miami language (ibid:143).

“So-called unexpected uses of our language are surprising only when somebody is caught up in the notions that indigenous languages cannot change and that their speakers exist in a cultural vacuum. The more straightforward expectation is that they would develop in ways that reflect their population of users and general developments in the world.”

Here it is important to apply this idea carefully to any revival of Coptic. Keeping in mind that the revival of the language is likely to generate discussion regarding its character and the norms to be adopted in reviving it, the idea of language change in a Coptic context must take into account the changes that have already occurred to the language with the establishment of the two pronunciation standards discussed in this thesis. While GB users in Albuquerque were at least somewhat receptive to the idea of changing the pronunciation of the language in order to make it easier to learn and use, this was not the case with the OB users in Rochester. This is understandable given their commitment to the community narrative regarding linguistic authenticity, which states that the OB pronunciation is authentic and the GB pronunciation is inauthentic. The further belief that the OB pronunciation will aid in the revival of the language
(presumably due to its lack of ‘foreign’ sounds such as [v], [p] and [tʃ] which are absent from the phonology of the Egyptian Arabic dialect that would be the mother tongue of the first generation of Coptic speakers) complicates the matter, as they may in fact be correct, but are at any rate outnumbered by the more numerous population of Copts who are only familiar with the GB pronunciation.

This is not to say that the current state is irreconcilable with the goal of continued progress toward reviving Coptic. It bears repeating that before the assignment of Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak to the Rochester area in 1998, all of the churches in that area used only the GB pronunciation. The OB pronunciation was taught, together with the historical evidence in support of it that now forms the foundation of the narrative about Coptic linguistic authenticity in the OB churches, and over a period of time many people switched from one pronunciation to the other. This could happen on a larger scale if the narrative that brought to the peoples’ attention the need for the switch was itself regularly taught together with the language, or as a supplement to teaching the language. This would require individuals who have travelled to the Rochester area or otherwise learned of the pronunciation issue to bring it up in their own parishes and social circles. As of yet, this does appear to have happened, and in the absence of changes at the community level (i.e., entire parishes of GB users switching to OB) it seems unlikely to happen in the near future.

As OB informants themselves have said, there are some things that are more important than this question of pronunciation. Leonard observes that “[t]he fact that the members of a community assert their right to claim, learn, and speak their language is more fundamental” than meeting language-specific targets (2011:141). Such targets in the case of Coptic may include strict adherence to a particular pronunciation standard, though as we have seen in the analysis of the language as it is used in GB and OB parishes (§2.2.1, §2.4.2), such strict adherence does not exist in reality.

The most relevant connection of the experience of Miami language users as written about in Leonard (2011) to the question of Coptic language revival is in both the Miami and Coptic peoples’ redefining the parameters by which they conceptualize their language and imagine its revival. In rejecting the narrative that says these languages are
dead simply because they do not currently have native speakers, both challenge what it means for a language to be alive or dead. In the Coptic context, the language is living as long as it is learned within the community, put to use in the domain in which the community uses it, and passed on to the next generation. At least in terms of the mechanical process of authentication (the “how” in the research question that began this thesis), this authenticates it in both GB and OB parishes, though of course the content of what is being authenticated is different, and the narratives surrounding built around the differences between the two pronunciation standards

Yet as we have seen, it is not that simple. The differing narratives held to at different levels by GB and OB users and communities, reflecting different levels of engagement with the language itself as well as the issues surrounding it, do complicate the construction of ‘authentic’ Coptic in the Coptic community as a whole, if not always in particular communities such as the ones surveyed in this thesis. This leads to the unilateral nature of the community conversation at a more general level of analysis, as the GB community lacks the requisite knowledge to participate in the discussion at the same level as its OB counterpart, and the OB community is for the most part already convinced of the truth and necessity of its narratives.

There is a question that could be asked, then, about the usefulness of such a one-sided dialogue in framing the question of Coptic linguistic authenticity. Can there truly be said to be a community-wide conversation on this issue when so many remain ignorant of it? To take a page from the Miami, I would say that, yes, there is. The perception of the majority as to the status of a language, whether concerning its life or some characteristic of its essential being (e.g., its pronunciation), does not preclude the construction of other narratives that analyze it according to ideological stances at odds with the dominant narrative, or what Leonard (2011) calls the dominant discourse. Therefore, by virtue of the fact that it is being talked about, and especially the fact that the construction of these additional narratives reinforce its relevance to the small number of community members who discuss it with the level of care that the OB users of Rochester do, the community negotiation of linguistic authenticity is ongoing in Coptic population.
In the case of Coptic, an “in-group” majority – that is, a majority of Copts who are unaware of the establishment of two distinct pronunciation standards of their language – has set the dominant narrative, which by and large is content to see Coptic as Coptic without any division into different pronunciation standards. With increased education, however, it is possible to imagine that one day the question of how Coptic linguistic authenticity is constructed will include both GB and OB parishes on equal ideological footing. In that case, the GB and OB communities (if they would continue to exist in those terms) would be able to be described in similar terms not only with reference to the mechanical process by which the language is passed down, but in a corresponding equal activation of all potential conceptual domains which may be activated when considering Coptic in its full sociolinguistic range. It is possible that at that time we could see a renewed effort to revive the language as a spoken language across the whole community, because at that point methodological and ideological questions to be confronted in the revival of the language could be given the proper attention by a fully engaged, fully invested population.
Appendix: Interview protocol

- How did you learn Coptic? (classes, reading, etc.)

- What issues did you have in learning Coptic?

- How do you maintain your ability to use Coptic? (classes, reading, etc.)

- How do you feel about your ability to use Coptic? (self-assessment of level)

- How do you feel about your pronunciation of Coptic?

- How do you feel about the pronunciation of Coptic used in your church?

- Are you aware of other pronunciations of Coptic being used at other churches?

- Have you been to other churches or places (monasteries, retreat centers, etc.) where Coptic was pronounced differently than in your church? If yes, what did you think about that? How did it affect your ability to follow the hymns? (If at all)
• Have you in the past or do you now teach Coptic to people in your church (children,deacons, etc.), or other people?

• If yes, what are some common issues that your students have with learning the language?

• What method(s) do you use to teach them proper pronunciation?

• How long, on average, does it take them to learn Coptic well enough to fully participate in the liturgy?

• How do you feel about the amount of Coptic used in your church?

• Would/do you support an increase in the use of Coptic in your church? Why/why not?

• If yes, how would you recommend increasing the amount of Coptic used in your church?

• Would you support changes to the pronunciation of Coptic in your church if it meant an increase in usage? Why/why not?
• Finally, do you think the use of Coptic is important in your church? The church in general? Why/why not?

• (Any other comments about Coptic, feelings about it, why it is important, etc.)
References


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