Phonetic Reconstruction of Sahidic Coptic for Singing in ⲛⲥⲱⲓ ⲙⲡⲉⲓⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲁⲟⲩⲉ

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The text used in this piece is in Sahidic Coptic, a dialect of the final stage of the Egyptian language. Sahidic Coptic was spoken from about the 4th Century CE to the 17th Century CE. The text comes from a work known as Acephalous Work 22 (acephalous meaning that the beginning of the text is missing) by Shenoute, the abbot of the White Monastery and saint of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Many of the extant non-biblical texts of Sahidic Coptic were written by Shenoute.

The selected text comes from the section of the whole text known as Acephalous 22: YA 421-28. This naming system is used to identify portions of texts because significant lacunae (gaps) of up to 100 pages exist between extant sections of the texts. This fragment largely addresses various activities which God may view unfavorably and also some actions which God may look upon favorably. Below is the translation of the selected text (in italics) with the surrounding paragraphs on either side.

"And woe to those by whom God will be distressed and from whose midst He will seek for a way to come, like a just man, having sought for a way to abandon a people because of their wicked deeds, as the prophet says:

"'*Who is it that will give to me in the desert a distant dwelling place? That I may abandon this people and remain far removed from them.*'

"Blessed is everyone with whom God will be satisfied that He may be pleased to remain their midst, like a just man content with just men and pleased to remain in their midst, because He Himself the Lord is in their midst at all times because of the right and just deeds."

Below are the original Sahidic Coptic text, an interlinear gloss of the text, a reconstructed spoken pronunciation in IPA, and a modified pronunciation of the text in IPA meant for singing. The latter pronunciation is also shown in the score. A transliteration (as would be appropriate for Middle Egyptian or Demotic) is

purposefully not provided as the script is largely based on Greek and a transliteration may confuse the issue of pronunciation. The gloss and IPA reconstructions are those of the composer but draw heavily upon scholarship by experts in the field, credited below.

Oʀɪɢɪɴᴀʟ Tᴇxᴛ
ϫⲉⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁ†ⲛⲁⲓ ϩⲙϫⲁⲓⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲙⲁ ⲛϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲉϥⲟⲩⲏⲩ ⲛⲧⲁⲕⲱ ⲛⲥⲱⲓ ⲙⲡⲉⲓⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲁⲟⲩⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙⲙⲟⲟⲩ

Iɴᴛᴇʀʟɪɴᴇᴀʀ Gʟᴏss*

ϫⲉ-ⲛⲓⲙ	ⲡ-ⲉⲧ-ⲛⲁ-†-ⲛⲁⲓ	ϩⲙ-ϫⲁⲓⲉ	ⲛ-ⲟⲩ-ⲙⲁ	ⲛ-ϣⲱⲡⲉ
Q-who	the.M-CREL-FUT-give-this	in-desert	PREP-a-dwelling_place	PREP-become

ⲉ-ϥ-ⲟⲩⲏⲩ	ⲛⲧ-ⲁ-ⲕⲱ	ⲛⲥⲱ-ⲓ	ⲙ-ⲡⲉⲓ-ⲗⲁⲟⲥ
CCIRC-3MSG-be_distant	CREL-APST-remain	PREP-1SG	PREP-this-people

ⲛ-ⲧⲁ-ⲟⲩⲉ	ⲉⲃⲟⲗ	ⲙⲙⲟ-ⲟⲩ
PREP-PPOS-be_distant	out	from-them

IPA ꜰᴏʀ Sᴘᴇᴀᴋɪɴɢ
[d͡ʒə.ˈniːm p.id.nɑ.ˈdi.nɑj hm.ˈd͡ʒɑ.jə n.uː.ˈmɑ n.ˈʃoː.pə ə.f.ˈuː.nuː n.dɑ.ˈgoː n.soː.ˈiː m.pej.lɑ.ˈos n.dɑ.ˈuː.ə ə.ˈβol m.mo.ˈuː]

IPA ꜰᴏʀ Sɪɴɢɪɴɢ
[d͡ʒə.ˈniːm pid.nɑ.ˈdi.nɑj həm.ˈd͡ʒɑ.jə nuː.ˈmɑ nə.ˈʃoː.pə ə.ˈfuː.nuː nə.dɑ.ˈgoː nə.soː.ˈiː mə.pej.lɑ.ˈos nə.dɑ.ˈuː.ə ə.ˈβol mə.mo.ˈuː]

*This gloss follows the Leipzig rules, of which a PDF is available freely online. A list of abbreviations used in this gloss is provided below.

LIST OF GLOSS ABBREVIATIONS

1SG	First person singular
3MSG	Third person masculine singular
APST	Auxiliary, past
CCIRC	Converter, circumstantial
CREL	Converter, relative
FUT	Future
M	Masculine
PPOS	Pronoun, possessive
PREP	Preposition
Q	Question marker

METHOD OF PRONUNCIATION RECONSTRUCTION

The method used here draws largely from the scholarship of William H. Worrell and James P. Allen. Source texts are listed below. All pronunciation is based on the rules of Sahidic Coptic specifically. This should not be confused with Bohairic Coptic, the dialect that provides the basis for pronunciation in the modern Coptic church.

Stress

• Must be on the ultimate or penultimate syllable.

• As a fusional language, various parts of speech combine to form single words in Coptic. The hierarchy of parts of speech for receiving stress is as follows:

1. verb/noun/adjective/adverb
2. pronoun
3. all other parts of speech

• When possible, ⲉ is left unstressed due to its typical realization as [ə] in Sahidic Coptic. When stressed it is realized as [i].

Consonants

N.B.: Coptic scholars and Egyptologists often reject the vowel/consonant paradigm in favor of the sonant/consonant paradigm. Leo Depuydt posits that there are only two types of phonemes in Coptic: those which must be sonants and those which can be sonants.

- The phonemic inventory of Sahidic Coptic used is the one described by James P. Allen. The one exception is the letter ϫ for which Worrell's pronunciation is used.
- All voiced stops represented in the IPA are realized as half-voiced stops, as described by Worrell. This transcription broadening also occurs in English.

Vowels

- The vowels used are a combination of those described by Allen and Worrell. Both descriptions more closely align with the vowel length theory of Coptic than with the vowel quality theory; the latter posits several more vowels, including [ɛ], [æ], and [ɔ].
- In the IPA for singing, schwas are added in syllables with non-vocalic apices, as is common practice in vocal performance (e.g., English rhythm as [ɹɪ.ðəm] rather than [ɹɪ.ðm]). In many cases, these schwas represent pronunciation of previous forms of Coptic. Their positions are based on the syllabic structure of earlier forms of Egyptian (CV, CVC) rather than on standard practice of English-speaking Egyptologists.
- When there are two adjacent vowels (and not three), at least one of which is a narrow vowel, the vowels are monopthongized if they belong to juxtaposed fusional lexemes and diphthongized if they belong to the same lexeme.
- When three Coptic vowels are juxtaposed, the middle vowel acts as a consonant unless the final vowel is [ə].

Syllabification

- Syllabification invariably occurs on lexeme boundaries, with one exception:
  ‣ Syllables consisting of a single consonant (with sonant function) may be combined with syllables beginning with a vowel in the version for singing.

<u>R<small>ESOURCES</small></u>

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Depuydt, L. (1993). On Coptic Sounds. *Orientalia, 62*(4), nova series, 338-375.

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Worrell, W. H. (1934). *Coptic sounds* Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.