



Johanna Brankaer, *Coptic: A Learning Grammar (Sahidic)*. SILO 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010. Vi + 203. Paperback. \$45.

This Coptic grammar consists of five “parts” (elements, constructions, complex sentences, exercises, selection of texts), as well as glossaries, an index, concordances, and paradigms. It is the first book in the series *Subsidia et Instrumenta Linguarum Orientis*, which includes many forthcoming grammars, exercises, and the like (mostly composed in German).

While this grammar may be a useful *companion* to the standard grammars of Thomas Lambdin and Bentley Layton, its myriad typographical errors, inconsistencies, and

ambiguities leave this reviewer in doubt as to whether it would make a viable *alternative*. The first problem is that the grammar is rife with grammatical errors, not in Coptic, but in the English descriptions, translations, and introduction. This may be due to the fact that the author is not a native English speaker, which is certainly acceptable. However, what is not acceptable is that these many errors (indeed, too many to name here) made their way into the final version of the book, somehow escaping the notice of the editors and those involved in the review and final proofing process.

At times there are font variations for English definitions (e.g., “father” §043, “heart” §048). While most of the translations of Coptic passages are italicized, occasionally some are not (e.g., §250, §393). Periods are employed for separating articles and other morphs (e.g., π.ρ.ω.μ.ε, ἡ.τ.ε.τ.η.φ.ο.β.ε, ϣ.χ.ω), and I find this very distracting. Sometimes these periods are incorrectly typed as semicolons (e.g., §037, §311). Equally distracting is the retention of the separators *-/ε* for prenominal and prepersonal bound states throughout the grammar (e.g., ἡ.μ.ο.ε.ϥ, ε.ρ.ω.ε.τ.ἡ, ἡ.ε.γ). While there may be some pedagogical usefulness in adding the periods and separators, when they appear together the Coptic text is not aesthetically pleasing: μα.ρ.ε.ϥ.ῑ.ῑ.ο.υ.ο.ε.ἡ. ἡ.β.ἰ.π.ε.ε.τ.ἡ.ο.υ.ο.ε.ἡ (§349). Fortunately, the exercises and texts do not include these elements. Many of the English terms and translations are awkward, dated or too technical, or wrong. For example, “decade” (§083), “cipher” (§084), “practitioners” (§141), “breads” (§284), “the one who is *saint*” (§059, π.π.ε.τ.ο.υ.α.α.β), “ship” (§185, ϣ.α.ἰ.ϣ.ἡ.ν.ε), “resuscitate” (§425, τ.ω.ο.υ.ἡ) etc. And at one point (§062), Mary is said to be Jesus’ *wife* (translating the vocative ε.ρ.ἡ.μ.ε in John 2:4)! Other times, primary (or frequent) definitions are lacking (e.g., ε.ε, *then, therefore* [§104], ε.ν.ε.ε.ε, *ever* [§106]). Many of the supralinear strokes in the table of numerals (§085) are off-centered. These are only some of the problems that I can highlight here.

The most significant problem of the grammar, however, relates to structure and organization, which is an essential feature of any grammar. The grammar as a whole reads like a big list of incoherent notes, or perhaps bullets, following one after another. Larger sections are needed with much fuller discussions instead of the smaller, continuous units in this grammar. For example, sometimes full paradigms of conjugation bases and converters are given (e.g., verboids, §156), but other times they are not (e.g., the causative infinitive, §130-131, past, §310-11, etc.). Occasionally, examples are out of place. For example, among the examples that are supposed to demonstrate the placement of the number “two” (ⲈⲛⲁⲮ; §087), we find examples of the number “three” (ⲟⲩⲟⲙⲏⲧ) and the article/indefinite pronoun “other” (ⲕⲉ). Brankaer appropriately employs the grammatical categories used by Layton, and there are abundant references to his grammar. However, it is apparent that many of the Coptic examples and grammatical descriptions are also taken directly from Layton’s grammar (e.g., §207, §286), and in light of these overlaps, it prompts the question of why a new grammar is needed.

These criticisms notwithstanding, there are some nice features of the grammar. The exercises are drawn from various biblical texts (OT and NT) as well as from Shenoute. The “selection of texts” is equally interesting, where we find a catechesis of Theodorus, a homily, an anti-Chalcedonian fragment, the Gospel of Mary, two texts of Shenoute, and more. The paradigms listed in the back of the book are very handy, since students do not have to go searching for a specific paradigm nested in various places in the grammar (although it must be noted that full paradigms are not always given in the main body of the grammar). The “concordance of grammatical terms” is especially convenient, because here Brankaer lists grammatical equivalents between older and newer grammars (e.g., past: *perfect I*; optative: *future III*, *energetic future*, etc.).

I would suggest that this book is convenient insofar as it provides another source of discussion about various Coptic grammatical issues. In order for this grammar to be an alternative to Lambdin or Layton, however, it will need to be thoroughly revised to correct the plethora of typographical errors, mistakes, and inconsistencies. It will also need to be greatly restructured in order to present a more coherent grammar, where simple lists (often scattered) are brought together into fuller sections. With a revision of this sort, I expect that the grammar will be very useful and find its place among the current Coptic grammars.

Brice C. Jones
Concordia University