

## Coptic Language

The English word Coptic stems from the Latin word *Coptus*, which is derived from the Greek word *aiguptios* (Αἰγύπτιος) meaning "Egyptian".

Coptic – in Coptic named *MetRemenkimi* (μετρεμνηκημι) - is the original language of the Egyptian, whose history stretches back thousands of years before the Christian era. The language was spoken in Egypt until at least the seventeenth century A.D.

The old Egyptians called their country *Keemee* (χημη), which simply means “the Black Land”.

The Arabic word “Masr” most probably derives from the word “Masi-Ra” (Μασρα), which means “The Children of the sun”.

Several distinct Coptic dialects are identified; Sahidic, Akhmimic, Bashmuric, Bohairic, Fayyumic and many other subdialects, but the most prominent are Sahidic and Bohairic.

Since the eleventh century the Bohairic dialect was considered to be the main official dialect among the Copts in Egypt. Of course there had been some changes and evolutions along its long history, but the language as a whole remained almost the same. It is comparable with the difference between English at the time of Shakespeare, for example, and the modern English. It is one language: English, in spite of the changes which occurred.

A few words of Coptic origin are found in Greek, some of which were ultimately borrowed into various languages of Europe (e.g. *barge* from Coptic *bari* "small boat" / there are rumors prevalent among Copts that the syllable ‘mas’ in the word Christmas is derived from the Coptic word “mici” which means “to give birth”).

Although Coptic gradually faded with the dominance of Arabic, it did not entirely disappear. Egyptian Arabic is different from the Arabic spoken in other Arab states. The popular language used in Egypt today contains many Coptic words which are used in several different field of the day life, for example:

- "yamm," sea,
- "foute," towel,
- "qulla," a vessel for holding water,
- "timsah," crocodile,
- "halak," earrings,
- "shuna," storage space,
- "nannus, nunu," affectionate terms used to address children,
- "semsem," sesame,
- "parkouk," plum,
- "bisara," a dish made of ground beans,
- "rumman," pomegranate,
- "balah," date,
- "foul," beans, and many of the names used for the different types of fish such as Buri, Labis, Shal and many others.

There are also many names of Towns like, Qahira, Aboutig, Akhmim, Al Fayoum, Assyout, Aswan, Banha, Boulaq, Damanhour, Domyaat (Damyette), Edfo, El Minya, Ermant, Esne, Samannoud, Manfalout, Mankabad, Rashid (Rosette), Sounbat, Tema, Tanta and many others.

Another wide field is also the Surnames, which are often used among the Egyptian such as Fakhri, Fanous, Lawandy, Mina, Mourice, Moussa, Pishay, Pishoy, Ramsis, Tafida, Wisa and many others.

Now Bohairic is the only surviving dialect. It was kept alive first by the strength of the monastic communities of Wadi n' Natrun which used it extensively. Then with the move of the Patriarchate from Alexandria to Cairo in the 11th century, Bohairic, the dialect of the District, became the official dialect of the Church replacing the Sahidic.

Nowadays there are still some families in Egypt, Europe and Australia who are able to speak Coptic. It has been preserved as heritage through the generations. Furthermore there are a number of schools in Egypt, Europe, Australia and North America in which the Coptic language is taught. It is the hope of many Copts that Coptic will one day return to be a daily spoken language.