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ON DEFINITENESS OF THE COPTIC NOUN

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Coptic morphology disposes of three different forms of substantive determination:

1) by means of the definite article: ⲡ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ[1],
2) by means of the indefinite article: ⲟⲩ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ,
3) by means of the "zero article": ⲣⲱⲙⲉ[2].

It seems obvious that pattern no. 1 yields a definite noun syntagma, whereas nos. 2 and 3 yield indefinite noun syntagmata. The problem involved is, of course, what is the relationship of the two indefinite patterns, nos. 2 and 3. First of all it has to be stated that the exposition given above applies to appellative nouns (substantives) only.

Definiteness has different relevance for the various subcategories of the nominal Part of Speech.

a) Substantives and numerals may be definite or indefinite; i.e., definiteness is optional with them.

b) Other subcategories are definite by nature, *viz.* proper nouns, personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and possessive pronouns; definiteness is compulsory with them.

c) On the other hand, interrogative pronouns and indefinite pronouns are indefinite by nature; with them, definiteness is excluded[3].

Definiteness can have a bearing on syntax, *viz.* in the following two cases.

1) Sentences with adverbial predicate, including verbal sentences of the bipartite pattern, are, as a rule, attested with definite subjects only[4]. The paradigm is complemented by constructions of the expanded

[1] This is meant to include also determination by means of the demonstrative pronoun: ⲡⲉϊ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ, and the possessive pronoun: ⲡⲉϥ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ.

[2] With appellative nouns (substantives) there is a paradigmatic relation between "article" (both definite and indefinite) and "no article", hence we may speak of a "zero article" in this case. With other nouns, like proper nouns and pronouns, however, this paradigmatic structure is lacking; they have just "no article".

[3] Indeed, this rule may serve to identify indefinite pronouns as a category: they are nominal elements that are indefinite only, but do not expand the indefinite article, and do not have interrogative meaning.

[4] See P. NAGEL, *Die Determination des Subjektsnomens im Präsens I und das Problem der Satztypen des Koptischen*, in: *Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientwissenschaft* 2 (= Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Wissenschaftliche Beiträge 1980/2), 1980, pp. 77-93. For exceptions to this rule, see the critical review of NAGEL's article by H. QUECKE,

existential sentence pattern, which is attested with indefinite subjects only:

ⲡ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲣⲉⲱⲣⲣⲉ ⲡⲉ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲡⲉϥ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ	ⲛ̅ⲙⲙⲁⲓ̈ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲥⲟⲧⲡ ~~ⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩϥ~~	*vs.*	ⲟⲩⲛ̅-	ⲟⲩ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲗⲁⲁⲩ ⲛⲓⲙ	ⲛ̅ⲙⲙⲁⲓ̈ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲥⲟⲧⲡ ~~ⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩϥ~~

2) The antecedent of a relative clause is, as a rule, definite. Hence, the relative clause is the form an attribute clause assumes with definite nouns[5]. With indefinite nouns, attribute clauses assume the form of clauses of circumstance. These two attribute clause constructions are in paradigmatic correlation:

ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧ-	ⲛ̅ⲙⲙⲁⲓ̈ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲥⲟⲧⲡ ~~ⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩϥ~~	*vs.*	ⲟⲩⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉϥ-	ⲛ̅ⲙⲙⲁⲓ̈ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲥⲟⲧⲡ ~~ⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩϥ~~

The article may be regarded as the nuclear element of a nominal syntagma and the following noun as the expansion of this nucleus (a concept elaborated by A. SHISHA-HALEVY[6]). Accordingly, we may draw up a list of the definite and indefinite noun syntagmata like the following:

Definite noun syntagmata:

definite article + unmarked[7] expansion (substantives, cardinal numbers; also adverbial expressions)

ⲡϣⲱⲥ ⲉⲧⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩϥ; ⲡϣⲟⲙⲛ̅ⲧ ⲛ̅ⲣⲱⲙⲉ; ⲡⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̅ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ

demonstrative pronoun (+ unmarked expansion)

ⲡⲁⲓ̈; ⲧⲉⲓ̈ⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲛ̅ⲟⲩⲱⲧ

in: *Orientalia* 52, 1983, pp. 298-302. The rule pertains already to Late Egyptian (*pace* NAGEL, p. 83), though in Present Tense examples only, whereas the Preterite construction #noun + stative# may have an indefinite subject. See on this H. SATZINGER, *Neuägyptische Studien*, pp. 162-164 (§ 2.3.8.1).

[5] This pertains to Egyptian in general, but also to Semitic languages, as, *e.g.*, Arabic and Hebrew. — Exceptions do occur in Coptic, as elsewhere. A. Shisha-Halevy (*per litt.*) refers me to the following cases: Boh. Num. 15:30 (MS Paris copte 1) ⲟⲩⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲉⲧⲛⲁⲓⲣⲓ (Lag. ⲉⲥⲛⲁ-); "Theban" Prov. 7:5, 10:26 (Bodmer VI); Akhm. Hos. 6:8, Zach. 12:2.

[6] See A. SHISHA-HALEVY, *Coptic Grammatical Categories. Structural Studies in the Syntax of Shenoutean Sahidic* (= *Analecta Orientalia* 53), esp. chapter 4.

[7] The relevant marker would be ⲛ̅-; *cf. infra* for ⲛ̅-marked expansions.

possessive article[8] + unmarked expansion

ⲛⲁ ⲧⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ

possessive pronoun[8] (+ unmarked expansion)

ⲡⲱϥ; ⲡⲉϥⲥⲟⲛ

(ⲛⲓⲙ 'every' with preceding noun[9])

proper names

personal pronouns

Indefinite noun syntagmata:

substantive (*i.e.*, "zero article" + appellative noun) (+ expansion)

ⲣⲱⲙⲉ; ϣⲏⲣⲉ ϣⲏⲙ

indefinite article + unmarked expansion (+ ⲛ̅-marked expansion)

ⲟⲩⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̅ⲥⲁⲃⲉ; ⲟⲩⲛⲟϭ ⲛ̅ⲣⲁϣⲉ

numeral[10] (+ ⲛ̅-marked expansion)

ϣⲟⲙⲛ̅ⲧ ⲛ̅ϩⲟⲟⲩ; ⲥⲁϣϥ̅ ⲙ̅ⲃⲓⲣ ⲉⲩⲙⲉϩ Mc 8:8 (obsolete: unmarked expansion, cf. ϥⲧⲟⲩ-ⲧⲏⲩ)

interrogative (pro)noun (+ ⲛ̅-marked expansion)

ⲁϣ ⲛ̅ⲉϫⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ; ⲟⲩⲏⲣ ⲛ̅ⲣⲱⲙⲉ

indefinite pronoun[11] (+ ⲛ̅-marked expansion)

ϩⲁϩ ⲛ̅ϣⲁϫⲉ; ⲗⲁⲁⲩ ⲛ̅ⲣⲱⲙⲉ

It can be seen that the substantive is the only noun that can be determined in all three ways shown above (definite article, indefinite article, and zero article). Cardinal numbers can be determined by the definite and the zero articles, though not by the indefinite article.

In the following, we will only regard those nouns that can be both definite and indefinite, *viz.* substantives (appellative nouns) and cardinal numbers.

But, on the other hand, definiteness is optional in certain syntactic usages only. *E.g.*, the subject and object of the verbal sentence proper

[8] For the structural interrelation of the possessive article, the absolute possessive pronoun (ⲡⲱϥ), and the "adjectival" possessive pronoun (ⲡⲉϥ), see H. J. POLOTSKY, *Die koptischen Possessiva*, in: *Enchoria* 13, 1985, pp. 89-96.

[9] Including ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ. Although the ⲛⲓⲙ syntagmata most often behave like definite nouns, other cases can be found; *cf.* ⲛ̅ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̅ⲛⲟⲉⲓ ⲁⲛ ϫⲉ ⲛ̅ⲕⲁ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉϥⲙ̅ⲡⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̅ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉϥⲛⲁⲃⲱⲕ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲛϥ̅ⲛⲁϣ ϫⲁϩⲙⲉϥ ⲁⲛ 'you do not understand that anything that is outside the man and about to go into him will not be able to defile him' Mc 7:18; ... ϫⲉ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲛⲁϥⲓ ϩⲁ ⲡⲉⲓ̈ϣⲁϫⲉ 'not anyone will be able to bear this word (but those to whom it was given)' Mt 19:11. Note that SHISHA-HALEVY, *Categories* (*vd. supra*, n. 5), p. 114 (§ 3.1.1.2.1 (3)); pp. 143-144 (§ 5.1.1.0.1), distinguishes a "postpositive determinator", ...-ⲛⲓⲙ (*i.e.*, 'every'), and a "discontinuous determinator", Ø...ⲛⲓⲙ (*i.e.*, 'any').

[10] For one and two-digit numbers only, as the higher units have the structure of ordinary substantives. See W.C. TILL, *Koptische Grammatik* § 166.

[11] *Vd. supra*, n. 3.

may be either definite or indefinite. For the substantive, the morphological opposition that corresponds to this is:

ⲡ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *vs.* ⲟⲩ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ

The corresponding morphological opposition of the cardinal numbers is[12]:

ⲡ-ϣⲟⲙⲛ̄ⲧ *vs.* ϣⲟⲙⲛ̄ⲧ

In other usages, definiteness is excluded[13]:

1) after the ⲛ̄- of the attributive construction: ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲃⲉ; ⲟⲩⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲃⲉ; ⲡⲛⲟϭ ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ; ϩⲛ̄ ⲁϣ ⲛ̄ϩⲉ; ⲡϣⲟⲙⲛ̄ⲧ ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩ[14];

2) after ⲛ̄- in predications of essence and in related usages: ϥⲟ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲃⲉ; ⲁϥϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲓⲇⲁⲅⲱⲅⲟⲥ 'it became a schoolmaster for us' Gal 3:24; ϫⲉ ⲁ̈ⲓⲕⲱ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲕ ⲛ̄ⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲛ̄-... 'I made you father of...' Ro 4:17; similarly,

3) after ϩⲱⲥ: ϩⲱⲥ ϣⲏⲣⲉ ϣⲏⲙ 'as a little child' Lc 18:27;

4) when being part of a composite verb, after auxiliary verbs: ⲣ̄-ⲃⲟⲏⲑⲟⲥ 'to help'; ϫⲓ-ϣⲓⲡⲉ 'to be ashamed' *etc.*;

5) when being part of a composite adjective, after the "conjunct participles": ⲙⲁ̈ⲓ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ; ϥⲁ̈ⲓ-ⲃⲉⲕⲉ *etc.*

In all these cases, and perhaps in some further, the bare noun is used, rather than the indefinite article expanded by a noun. In explaining this, we should probably not speak of *definiteness being excluded*, or even of *indefiniteness being compulsory*, but rather of *definiteness being neutralized*. In none of these cases definiteness is relevant, and Coptic is here economic in admitting neither the definite nor the indefinite article, but uses rather zero determination.

Thus, determination by means of the indefinite article occurs only when definiteness is truly optional in both aspects involved: that is, with nouns that may be both definite and indefinite (though not with

[12] There is a plausible explanation why cardinal numbers do not combine with the indefinite article. The singular indefinite article is formed of the cardinal number 'one', used in its construct state (ⲟⲩ-; cf. ϣⲙ̄ⲧ-ϩⲱⲃ, stylistic variant of ϣⲟⲙⲛ̄ⲧ ⲛ̄ϩⲱⲃ, 'three things'; ⲡⲉ-ϥⲧⲟⲩ-ⲧⲏⲩ 'the four winds'). The Coptic cardinal numbers beyond 'one' are, despite of their pluralic meaning, of singular concord. If they combined with the indefinite article, this would have to be the singular form, ⲟⲩ-, which is a cardinal number itself. This (*ⲟⲩ-ϣⲟⲙⲛ̄ⲧ) is avoided. (Similarly, ⲕⲉ- 'other' has the opposition of the numbers: ⲡⲕⲉ- *vs.* ⲕⲉ-. Unlike English, Coptic avoids combining the numeral 'one' (in English *one* > *a(n)*) with 'other'. But there is no obstacle in combining the plural forms, ϩⲉⲛ- and ⲕⲟⲟⲩⲉ; it seems that ϩⲟⲉⲓⲛⲉ 'some' — the construct state of which yields the plural form of the indefinite article — was not felt to be kind of a numeral, as was ⲕⲉ- 'other'.)

[13] *Cf.* W.C. Till, *Koptische Grammatik* §§ 103-108.

[14] ⲛ̄- followed by a definite noun syntagma is genitival.

cardinal numbers, hence with substantives only), and this only in those syntactic situations that allow both definite and indefinite nouns.

There is, however, an important phenomenon that is not accounted for by this rule. Even where definiteness is optional in the above sense, the indefinite article is not used if the statement is negative. The opposition is here

ⲡ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *vs.* ⲣⲱⲙⲉ, plur. ⲛ̄-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *vs.* ⲣⲱⲙⲉ,

rather than ⲡ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *vs.* ⲟⲩ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ, plur. ⲛ̄-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ *vs.* ϩⲉⲛ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ. This is not a case of definiteness being neutralized, as was discerned above in certain syntactic environments, since both definite and indefinite noun syntagmata are possible in negative statements (*e.g.*, ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ-ⲡ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄ *vs.* ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ-ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄). Here, avoidence of the indefinite article is obviously conditioned by the logical structure of such sentences[15]. Negativity implies that the statement concerns, not individual objects, but rather a class of objects. In Coptic, the appropriate expression of this is obviously the bare noun, rather than the indefinite article expanded by the noun.

On reconsidering the cases where definiteness is neutralized by syntactic conditions, we will find that the same explanation applies to them. In every particular condition it is to a class of objects that reference is made, rather than to an individual object: ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲃⲉ 'the man of the class of the clever'; ϥⲟ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲃⲉ 'he is of the class of the clever' etc. Hence, the zero article determination of the substantive may be compared with the Partitive Case category of languages that dispose of such.

Eventually, the evidence for use or avoidence of the indefinite article shall be summed up systematically. The indefinite article is not used

1) with indefinite and interrogative pronouns,
2) with cardinal numbers (in this case, only the singular article is concerned; the plural form might be expected, were it not precluded by the concord rule of the numerals),
3) with substantives
3.1) in negative statements (this applies, in the main, to subjects and objects),
3.2) wherever definiteness is neutralized, *viz.* after attributive ⲛ̄-, after predicative ⲛ̄-, after ϩⲱⲥ; in composite verbs and adjectives.

[15] Though such a behaviour is far from being general or universal, English offers a close parallel: *no student did pass the exam — no article is used in such sentences* (cf. the corresponding expression with definite noun: *the article is not used*...).