

GÁBOR TAKÁCS (ED.)

SEMITO-HAMITIC FESTSCHRIFT  
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# The Etymology of Coptic "Ashes": Chadic or Nostratic?

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*Einen Beitrag zu wählen, der zu gleichen Teilen Aharon Dolgopolsky und Herrmann Jungraithmayr ehrt – eine Herausforderung! Der eine führender Tschadist mit tiefem ägyptologischen und semitistischen Hintergrund; der andere herausragender Nostratiker und Semitist und Kuschtist und ... überhaupt polyglott wie kaum sonst jemand. Ich versuch's mit der Etymologie der koptischen "Asche"; denn die hat mich sowohl in die Tschadsprachen als auch in das Terrain des Nostratischen geführt, und ich hoffe, dass beide lieben Freunde ein wenig Spaß daran haben!*

A certain number of Late Egyptian, Demotic and Coptic nouns display an ending that resembles the suffix pronoun of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, masculine *-f*, feminine *-s*.<sup>1</sup> As a rule, those ending in *-f* are masculine, whereas those with *-s* are feminine. There is virtually always a doublet without the respective ending, at least in the old language, and often enough such a doublet is preserved until Coptic times. The vocalism reveals that the derivations in *-f* and *-s*, respectively, are not composed of the simple noun and a possessive pronoun. When the possessive pronoun is attached to a noun a characteristic change of the syllable structure will occur, and consequently one of the vocalisation; the derivations in *-f* and *-s*, however, do not show this change. Furthermore, the ending *-s* replaces the ancient feminine ending *-t* in the feminine derivatives, whereas a possessive pronoun would be added to it.

### (1) Noun plus suffix pronoun

<i>dr.t</i> : *čā rat > *čārā' > ⲧⲠⲮⲉ "hand"	<i>dr.t=f</i> : *čār tVf > *čā'təf > ⲧⲠⲠⲮⲠ "his hand"
<i>rn</i> : *rin > ⲤⲠⲁⲚ, ⲀⲚⲠⲮⲈⲚ, ⲢⲗⲈⲚ "name"	<i>rn=f</i> : *rī nVf > ⲠⲚⲠⲮ, etc.

The attachment of vowel-plus-consonant changes the syllable structure of the noun, in accordance with the Proto-Coptic syllable laws.

### (2) Doublets ending in *-f* and *-s*

<i>zwr</i> : *sā wVr > *sā'(wV)' > Ⲙⲱ m. "drinking"	<i>swr-f</i> (beginning of 1 <sup>st</sup> mill. BC) > ⲘⲱⲱⲮ m. "drinking", "carousal"
<i>š<sup>c</sup>d.t</i> : *š <sup>c</sup> o tVt > *š <sup>c</sup> o'tə' > ⲮⲁⲁⲧⲈ f. "piece"	Dem. <i>š<sup>c</sup>t-s</i> > ⲮⲁⲁⲧⲘ f., id.

The attachment of the endings *-f* and *-s* does not change the syllable structure and the quantity of the stress-bearing vowel. Obviously, it was effected after the mechanism of the so-called Proto-Coptic syllable laws had ceased to be operative. "Ebenso wie das Affix *-f* ist auch das Affix *-s* immer nur an den *st(atus) abs(olutus)* und nicht an den *st. pron(ominalis)* des zugrundeliegenden Femininums angetreten,"<sup>2</sup> though it replaces the feminine ending *-t*.

One of these nouns in *-s* is a word meaning "ashes": Coptic ⲤⲀ ⲕⲢⲙⲈⲘ, with a doublet without *-s*: Ⲥ ⲕⲢⲙⲈ (non-standard for \*ⲕⲢⲙⲈ), Ⲁ ⲕⲢⲙⲈ, Ⲣ ⲕⲢⲙⲈ (non-standard for \*ⲕⲢⲙⲈ), Ⲥ ⲕⲢⲙⲈ, m. and f. (!), "ashes, soot, dust" (Crum *Dictionary* 117a). In earlier idioms, only the form without *-s* is

<sup>1</sup> Osing 1976 I, 325-332.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. I, 331.

attested: hieroglyphic *qrmt* (New Kingdom), describing the state of burnt leather tents: probably "ashes"; "smouldering embers"; Demotic *krb*<sup>3</sup> "ashes" or sim.

This hieroglyphic *hapax* is written in syllabic orthography, viz. . The inscription<sup>4</sup> is in vertical lines, in the normal right-to-left orientation. Note that the arrangement of the signs as given by Černý, Vycichl, and Hoch, is not entirely that of the original: ; this would read \*qa/i/u-r-ma-t(a).<sup>5</sup> The spelling which is actually attested points, however, to a reading<sup>6</sup> *qi-ra-ma-t(a)*.

The hieroglyphic and the Demotic-Coptic words are not the same; to hieroglyphic *qi-ra-ma-ta*, a Coptic \***ΚΡΟΜΤ(Ε)** or perhaps \***ΚΡΜΤ(Ε)** would correspond,<sup>7</sup> rather than **ΚΡΜΕ**, etc. This is not attested, though there is a noun **ΚΡΜΤΣ** "darkness" which looks like one of the doublets in -s mentioned above: Demotic *qrmts* "darkness", *SA ΚΡΜΤΣ*, *B ΧΡΕΜΤΣ* "smoke", "mist", "darkness", also "fire", with variant forms *B ΧΡΕΜΣ*, *ΧΕΜΣ*, *ΧΕΜΤΣ*, *F ΚΕΜΤΣ*, *ΚΗΜΕΤΣ*,<sup>8</sup> all m. (!); it is probably related to Demotic *qrm*, *S ΚΩΡΜ* (m.) "smoke", and to **ΚΡΩΜ**, *B ΧΡΩΜ*, *F ΚΛΩΜ* (m.; in *B* once f.) "fire", "flame", and, with partially reduplicated stem (the typical stem-form of verbs with five consonants), *S ΚΡΟΜΠΜ*, *A ΚΡΑΜΠΜ*, "to be dark", and of course also to **ΚΡΜΕΣ** and **ΚΡΜΕ** (etc.), "ashes, soot, dust".

The underlying root is obviously *qrm* (encompassing meanings like *darkness, smoke, ashes, embers, fire*). There is, however, no other word of this root attested in hieroglyphic. The syllabic writing of the New Kingdom is used for words that are new in the written language, and for which therefore no traditional consonantic spelling was in use (and which, in addition, gives a hint at the vocalisation). Many of them are loans from foreign languages, in the main from the Semitic of Canaan. *A priori*, this possibility must be envisaged. A feature that advocates for a Semitic origin is the spelling of the final *-ta* as this is regularly used for rendering the feminine ending *-at-* of Semitic nouns and proper names.

Crum compared an Arabic *qurmās-* with the Coptic lexeme. There is *qirmīš*, var. *qurmūs*, meaning "1. trou en terre, large à l'intérieur, avec une entrée très-étroite, où l'on se retire, pour se garantir du froid ou de la chaleur; 2. place faite dans les cendres pour cuire le pain; 3. nid de pigeon."<sup>9</sup> The basic meaning is obviously "pit", and not "ashes". It is hardly the origin of Coptic *S ΚΡΜΕ(С)*. As Hoch, in his authoritative work on *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Periode*, remarks, "It is uncertain whether the word means specifically 'ashes' ... or 'glowing embers' ... Perhaps cf. the root *gmr*: Ug(aritic) *gmr* 'burning coal'; TA [Talmudic Aramaic], JPA [Jewish Palestinian Aramaic] ... [*gumartā*] 'burning coal'; Syr. ... (*gumurtā*) 'live coals'; Arab. ... (*jamrat-*) 'live coals; smouldering embers'; Akk. *gumāru* 'charred wood; charcoal.'" Of course, the author is aware that, "if the derivation is correct, then there is metathesis of the second two consonants." It can be shown that in general the meanings *embers, ashes, charcoal* are very apt to interchange. Hierogl. *qi-ra-ma-t(a)* "ashes or embers" might go back to a Semitic \**gi/umārat-*, though Demot./Coptic \**qērmV(s)* points to another form, such as a late (1<sup>st</sup> millennium) Canaanite feminine noun \**gi/umrah*. Another possibility is to assume that the New Kingdom word is originally a Semitic plural, \**gi/um(a)rāt-* of the same singular form \**gi/umrat-* that underlies the later lexeme, Demotic *qrm*, Coptic *S ΚΡΜΕ(С)*. Nevertheless, the Semitic origin is not fully convincing. One of the reasons is that a root similar to *QRM*, with a range of meanings like "charcoal", "embers", "ashes", can be found in many languages and language families, whereas the metathetic \**GMR* is hardly ever found.

<sup>3</sup> Sic: with *k*, rather than *q*. In all Coptic idioms except Bohairic *k* and *q* have merged, either in **Κ** or, if palatalized, in **Ϣ**.

<sup>4</sup> KRI IV 9, 1], inscription of Merneptah (ca. 1213 to 1203 BC). After LD III, 199a, column 19.

<sup>5</sup> Hoch 1994 renders it, in his system, as *qu<sub>4</sub>-r<sub>4</sub>-ma<sub>4</sub>-ta*, tentatively reconstructing a Canaanite source form \**gumrātā*.

<sup>6</sup> Hoch 1994, 505ff.

<sup>7</sup> Unless one could advocate for \**qirmāiV* > \**qarmāt(a)* > \***ΚΡΜΟΥΤ(Ε)** or \***ϢΡΜΟΥΤ**.

<sup>8</sup> The forms without *r* are probably influenced by hieroglyphic *kmm*, Coptic **ΚΜΟΜ**, "to become black", and derivatives. Also note the Bohairic forms with **Χ** before the stressed vowels, a feature that regularly points to etymological **Κ**, rather than **Ϣ** or **Ϙ**, as for that).

<sup>9</sup> BK II 725. Similarly Belot 1899, 633, who has also a variant *qirmās-*, and a verb *qarmaša*, "entrer dans son nid (pigeon)".

apart from Semitic. It would be strange to assume that Egyptian took over the secondary root form, GMR, and changed it back to the original form, viz. GRM – and that even twice: both in New Kingdom *qrmt* / *qi-ra-ma-t(a)* and in Demotic-Coptic *qérmV(s)*. Furthermore, the mentioned multilingual root QRM seems to be derived from another multilingual root QR, meaning "to burn", "fire", "black", etc. This again advocates for assuming that QRM is the primary form, rather than QMR / GMR, as attested in Semitic. And the first radical is obviously not G, but rather Q.

### The multilingual root Q-R (K-R) "to burn", "fire", "black", etc.<sup>10</sup>

#### Egyptian

Root  $\sqrt{qr}$ - "burn":

*qrr* "Töpfe brennen" (*Wörterbuch* V, 61, 9-10), attested since Pyramid Texts. Ember (ZÄS 51, 119) compares Akk. *qarāru* "brennen, austrocknen".

*qrr* (*qa-ra-ra*) "Brandopfer" (*Wörterbuch* V, S. 61, 11), attested since late New Kingdom; cf. Coptic  $\text{Ⲛⲓⲗ}$ , id. (perhaps from Heb. *kālīl*, id.).

*qrr.t* "Opferstelle (am Grabe, beim Begräbnis)" (*Wörterbuch* V, S. 61), attested since Old Kingdom; from the same root?

*qr* "roaster": cf. Ward, CdÉ 71, 1996, 28. Hoch (1994, no. 426): "... likely to be related to the Semitic root *qly*: B(iblical) H(ebrew) ... (*qālā*); T(argum) A(ramaic) ... (*qālā*); Syr. ... (*qālā*); Ar(ab.) ... (*qlw*); Eth. ... (*qalawa*); Akk. *maqlū*, all 'to roast, parch, fry, especially of grain.' Cf. [Hierogl.] ... *m-ga—r* [*mgr*] "to broil" ([Hoch's] no. 227) and [hierogl.] ... *ma<sub>4</sub>-qa-ru<sub>2</sub>* [*mqr*] 'hearth' ([his] no. 216)."

#### Hamito-Semitic

Orel & Stolbova 1995 mention the following roots:

No. 1552 \**qar*- "burn; fire": Egn. *qrr* "fire, glaze (pots)" [see above]; West Chadic \**qar*- "burn"; Central Chadic \**kar*- "fire."

No. 2062 \**qar*-/\**qawar*- "burn": West Chadic \**qawVr*- "roast (without oil)": H(au)s(a) *kararā*; Rift \**hwar* "fry", "hot" (Eg. *hr.t* "flame" and *h3* "roast" are probably not reflexes of this root).

Also cf. no. 1084 \**kol*- "be hot, burn": Sem. \**kVIVw* "roast": Akk. *qalū*, Arab. *qlw* [-i-, -u-] "*fire dans une poêle à frire*"; Central Chadic \**kwalu*-. The root \**gir*- "fire",<sup>11</sup> no. 930, is less likely to be a variant or doublet of the roots mentioned.

<sup>10</sup> According to Sergej Starostin's databases (<http://starling.rinet.ru/cgi-bin/main.cgi?root=config>), the following roots may be added: 1. Eurasianic: \**kVwV* "to burn, bake"; Borean (approx.): *KVRV* "to burn, bake". 2. Eurasianic: \**gUrV* "burn, hot coals"; Borean (approx.): \**KVRV* "burn, hot coals". 3. Eurasianic: \**gVIV* "ashes, coals". 4. Eurasianic: \**karV* "black"; Borean (approx.): \**KVRV* "black". For Borean and Eurasianic cf. "... the database of so-called 'Borean' etymologies. It includes entries of various reliability – possible etymological matches between Eurasianic, Afroasiatic, Sino-Caucasian and Austric, the four major macrofamilies of the Old World; potential parallels from Amerind and several African families have also been added, giving the database a distinctly 'global' nature..." (<http://starling.rinet.ru/cgi-bin/bdescri.cgi?root=config&morpho=0&basename=data/euraglobet>). "The Nostratic database, containing most existing etymologies from published sources (Illich-Svitych, Dolgopolskij), plus a number of additions. ... all the reconstructed protoforms are highly provisional, but can be used for further research" (<http://starling.rinet.ru/cgi-bin/bdescri.cgi?root=config&morpho=0&basename=data/nostrnostret>).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Sem. \**gir*- "fire; deity of fire": Akk. *giru*, *girru*; Egn. *qr* "fire" (NB: according to Rössler's system, *q* is emphatic, therefore possibly a reflex of \**k* or \**q* rather than of \**g*; therefore rather from \**kar*- or \**qar*-); Saho-Afar \**gir*-: Saho *gira*, Afar *giraa*; Highland East Cush. \**gir*- "fire": Sidamo, Darasa, Hadiya, Kambatta *giira*. Cf. Rift \**gi*'ir- "embers" (Iraqw *gil'i*, Burunge, Alagwa *gi'iru*). #931 \**gir*- "be hot": West Chadic \**gir-gir* "hot", cf. Hausa *gūra* "set fire"; Central Chadic \**gVr*-/\**gVr*- "hot"; Highland East Cush. \**gir*- "burn".

## Indo-European

There is a wide-spread root, listed by Pokorny (1959, 571-572)<sup>12</sup> as \*ker(ə)- no. 3, meaning "brennen, glühen, heizen". Reflexes are, inter alia, Gothic *hauri* n. "Kohle", Old High German *herd*, Anglo-Saxon *heorð* "Herd"; Old Church Slavonic *kurjo*, *kuriti se* "rauchen".

Pokorny: "Eine verwandte Wurzelf(orm) *krā-s-* als 'Feuerglanz, Glut', woraus teils 'rot', 'leuchtend, hell, schön', in aksl. *krasa* 'venustas, pulchritudo', russ. *krasá* 'Schönheit, Zierde, Schmuck', aksl. *krasn* 'schön, angenehm, weiß gekleidet', russ. *krásnyj* 'rot, schön', čech. *krásnýj* 'schön' ... Ein aus *ker*-erweitertes \*k(e)r-em- sucht man in lat. *cremō*, -āre 'verbrennen (tr.)'..."

On Latin *carbō* see below.

## Dravidian

According to S. Starostin's etymological website<sup>13</sup>, the following roots can be compared: \*kar- "1. black, 2. to burn". South Dravidian protoform: \*kar-; Telugu protoform: \*kar-ŋ-; Kolami-Gadba protoform: \*kar-; Gondwan protoform: \*kar-.

Starostin distinguishes a second protoform \*kar-, meaning "to melt", and he produces numerous very similar protoforms, viz. \*kan-, \*kāt- (?), \*kāl- (all "to burn"), \*kād- and \*kand- "burnt" (the second also "black"), \*ker- "to warm by the fire", \*kūr- "to boil", \*k'ud- "to cook".

## North Caucasian

There is, according to Starostin's published material, no protoform of the meaning "to burn" that would formally corresponds to Indo-European \*ker-, etc., but note the following: \*karV "black; coal": Nakh protoform \*karu; Lak *kalaš* (*kaššal* < *kar-šal*); Lezghian protoform: \*kart-; Abkhazo-Adyghe protoform: \*kə. Note that again "black", the colour of charcoal, is a semantic variation, as with Dravidian \*kar-. There is a further comparable protoform \*kVwrV (?) "smoke". The Nakh protoform is \*kur.

## Altaic

According to Starostin's data, there is also in Altaic no protoform meaning "burn" that would formally correspond to Indo-European \*ker-, etc., though there is \*kàru "black"; Turkic protoform \*Kara; Mongolian protoform \*kara; Japanese protoform \*kūruà- (actually *kuroi*).

We will not adduce for comparison an Altaic form comparable in shape not with Q-R, though with Dravidian \*kan- "to burn", and in meaning with Dravidian \*kand- "burnt". Altaic \*k'eyV "to be burnt" is reflected by Mongolian protoform \*keŋsi-; Tungus protoform: \*xeŋ(-gu-). Also cf. Indo-European \*kenk- (2) "brennen (dörren), weh tun; auch bes. von brennendem Durst und Hunger" (Pokorny 1959, 565).



Multilingual roots Q-R (K-R) and Q-R-M (K-R-M)  
"charcoal", "embers", "ashes", etc.

## Egyptian

Hieroglyphic (syllabic spelling) *qrm.t* (*qi-ra-ma-ta*) "ashes" (?), 19. Dynasty, ca. 1200 BC. Demotic *krb* "ashes" (with merging of *q* and *k*, typical of late Demotic), Coptic *SA* ⲕⲣⲙⲉⲥ, *S* ⲕⲉⲣⲙⲉ, *A* ⲕⲣⲙⲉ, *F* ⲕⲣⲙⲓ, *B* ⲕⲉⲣⲙⲓ (m. and f.) "ashes, soot, dust" (< \*q̣i'úrV, \*q̣i'úrV<sub>s</sub>).

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.indo-european.nl/cgi-bin/startq.cgi?flags=endnnl&root=leiden&basename=%5Cdata%5Cie%5Cpokorny>.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://starling.rinet.ru/Intrab.htm#bases>.

Comparable words: 1. *S* ΚΡΩΜ, *B* ΧΡΩΜ, *F* ΚΛΩΜ (reflecting an older \**KVrámV*) "fire, flame"; 2. Demot. *qrm*, Copt. ΚΩΡΜ (\**qárVm*) "smoke"; 3. Demot. *qrmts* "darkness", Copt. *SA* ΚΦΜΤC, *B* ΧΡΕΜΤC (from \**KVrú'úmtVs*) "smoke, mist, darkness", also "fire" (!), with variant forms *B* ΧΡΕΜC, ΧΕΜC, ΧΕΜΤC, *F* ΚΕΜΤC, ΚΗΜΕΤC (due to an interference of the root \**k-m* "black"); 4. ΚΡΟΜΠΜ (from \**KVrámram*) "to be dark".

Egyptian has another root, with the basic meaning "charcoal" and a derived meaning "black" that seems to be quite different phonetically; nevertheless, it also contains the sequence of an original uvular sound, an original dental and a labial sound: according to the results of Otto Rössler's research, Egyptian *d* derived typically from \**k* (*q*) by palatalisation, and Egyptian *ʕ* corresponds to Afro-Asiatic \**d*, \**ð*, \**dz*, or \**s'* (Semitic \**ḡ*), rather than Afro-Asiatic \**ʕ*. On this basis, Egyptian *dʕb.t* "charcoal" can be reconstructed as \**kDb.t* – a variant of \**krb.t*?<sup>14</sup> Actually, there is a probable variant spelling *drb.t* in the early Middle Kingdom text corpus of the Coffin Texts<sup>15</sup>. Incidentally, it cannot be excluded that Egyptian *dʕb.t* < \**kDb.t* is an old loan, rather than an inherited Afro-Asiatic word.

Coptic *XBBC* derives from metathetic \**dibʕas*, another feminine doublet in *-s*, of old \**dibʕ.at*<sup>16</sup> < \**dʕb.at*. The attested Coptic forms<sup>17</sup> are *S* XBBC, XEBBEC (non-litt.), XEBBC, X(Ε)BC, XHHBC, XHBC, XHIBEC, Xλ(Ε)IBEC; *A* XBBEC; *B* XEBC, XEBZC; *F* XHBB(Ε)C; *P* XBBAC<sup>18</sup>. Some vocalisations seem to be influenced by the word *2λ(Ε)IBEC* "lamp". The normal forms point to an origin in \**dí/úibCVs*, with certain umlaut effects on the stressed vowel. The last-mentioned form XBBAC, however, points clearly to a consonant *k* between *b* and *c*. The primary hieroglyphic form – which does not yet display the metathesis – must be postulated as \**dʕb.at*, i.e. \**čir(V)b.at* < \**kíD(V)b.at*–; with a probable variant \**dír.b.át*, i.e. \**čir(V)b.at* < \**kír(V)b.at*–.

← 1. \**qrm* "ashes"; 2. \**kDb*/*\*krb* > \**čʕb*/*\*čʕb* "charcoal; black"

Hamito-Semitic

Chadic: Orel and Stolbova (1995, #1421) have Hamito-Semitic \**kalem*–/\**kulem*– "charcoal", with reflexes in Central and Eastern Chadic, and one in Rift (South Cushitic): Kwadza *kalem-uko*. The most wide-spread Chadic root for "charcoal" is, according to Jungrauthmayr and Ibriszimow,<sup>19</sup> \**k-l-m*. It is found in all three Chadic branches, and particularly in all groups of East Chadic. Of the other three roots for "charcoal", \**nrn* is found in three groups, in West and East Chadic; \**gbl* in five Central Chadic and two West Chadic groups (cf. Semitic GMR, below); \**lvin*, etc. in one West Chadic group only. Interestingly they say, "we now consider the E(ast) C(hadic) reflexes SM (TUMK) *gulóm*, DM (DANG) *kúlmò*, etc. as loans from Kanuri *kálimi*. This again goes back to a common Nigritic root, which appears, for example, in Sara-Bagirmi as *kulu*."

On the other hand, there are roots with G as first consonant. According to Orel & Stolbova's *Etymological Dictionary* (1995), there is evidence of the simple root *GR* only: no. 986 \**gur*– "ash"; Sem. \**gurār*– "hot ash": Akk. *gurāru*. Cf. Akk. *kirāru* id., "a secondary formation". WCh \**gur*– "ash":

<sup>14</sup> Variation of *d* and *r* is attested in Egyptian, though rarely. The word for "baboon" is spelt <*ʕn*> and <*ʕm*> in the Old Kingdom, and <*ʕnʕ*> in the Middle Kingdom. *Dhʕ* "skin" is spelt accordingly in the Old Kingdom, but <*dhr*> from the Middle Kingdom onwards (that is, after the standard pronunciation of the ayin phoneme had changed from [d] to [ʕ]; *sʕrj* "to make go up" (causative of *ʕrj* "to go up") is spelt <*ʕrjʕ*>, <*sʕʕ*> in the Old Kingdom, later <*sʕrjʕ*>, <*sʕʕrjʕ*>. *ʕbʕ* "treasure" is in Coptic *λ2ϕ*, its plural *ʕbʕ.w*, however, is *λ2ϕωϕ*.

<sup>15</sup> CT IV 327 e; see AECT I 271, spell 336, note 3.

<sup>16</sup> Vycichl 1983, 325.

<sup>17</sup> CD 760a; Westendorf KHW 414.

<sup>18</sup> Cherix 1999, 273.

<sup>19</sup> Jungrauthmayr & Ibriszimow 1994 I, 31.

Sura *kuur*, Ang *kur*. ECh. \**gur* "coal": Ndm *gurē*. It is related to root no. 930, \**gir* "fire". Orel & Stolbova referred also to Rift \**gi'ir*- "embers" (Irq *gil'i*, Bur *gi'iru*, Alg *gi'iru*).

Hoch refers to a metathetic Semitic root \**gmr*: Ug(aitic). *gmr* "burning coal"; TA (Talmudic Aramaic), JPA (Jewish Palestinian Aramaic) ... [*gumartā*] "burning coal"; Syr. ... (*gəmurṭā*) "live coals"; Arab. ... (*jamrat-*) "live coals; smouldering embers"; Akk. *gumāru* "charred wood; charcoal."

In this context, also the Chadic root \**gbl* is remarkable. It has the same initial voiced stop as Semitic \**gmr*, and also the same sequence of postpalatal-labial-liquid. Another comparable instance is found in Saho: *gombod* "ashes". Together with the Semitic evidence, the Chadic forms seem to attest to a root \**gmr/gbl*, different from \**qrm*.

### Nilo-Saharan

Very scant evidence for a root KLM; cf. Kanuri *kālimi*, mentioned above. In Kacipo-Balesi (Eastern Sudanic, Surmic; Southern Sudan & Ethiopia), there is a *gūlmit* "ashes", Turkana has *-kūrō:n* of the same meaning. Otherwise, the most wide-spread root for "ashes" is \**bur-*, e.g. Songhai: Tadakshak, Zarma, Koyraboro Senni, Gao; Saharan: Kanuri (Central); Central Sudanic: Keliko, Lugbara, Bongo, Bagirmi, Ngambay; East Sudanic: Nile Nubian, Meidob<sup>20</sup>, Murle, Sur [Chai (Surmic)]; Shilluk, Lango,<sup>21</sup> Bor,<sup>21</sup> Alur,<sup>21</sup> Achalik,<sup>21</sup> Anywa; Berta.

### Indo-European

Under \**ker(ə)*- no. 3, as adduced above, Pokorny also mentions Lat. *carbō*, *-ōnis* m. "Kohle", though doubtfully. For more than one reason the word gives the impression to be a loan from an unknown language. Phonetically, Greek *κέραμος* "potter's clay" and its derivatives may be compared, though it is semantically closer to "fire" and "to burn" than to "charcoal".

### Altaic

In Starostin's material there is a protoform \**k'ūru(mV)* "ashes, soot"; Turkic \**Kurum* (< \**Krum*) "soot"; Mongolian \**kirbu-su*; Tungus \**xurum-sa*; Korean \**kur* – this being the only form that is short of the extension *-um*, for what reason ever.

What is the relevance of all this for the origin of the Egyptian and Coptic word for "ashes", *qrm.t* / *qrms*? A word of this meaning is not necessarily of the primordial stock; cf. Spanish/Portuguese *ascua* "embers", loaned from Gothic *asgō* "ashes". A Semitic origin of *qrm.t* would be quite probable if a Proto-Semitic root, or lexeme, *QLM* or *GLM* (or, perhaps, with *R* instead of *L*, and/or *B* instead of *M*?) could be ascertained. Could the word be loaned from any other language of those mentioned above? Indo-European has much evidence of the simplex root *KR* "fire", "to burn", though only scanty evidence for an extension of this root with a labial consonant, yielding the meaning "ashes, embers, charcoal" (originally: \*"material burnt/to be burnt"?). Egyptian contacts with Altaic languages may be excluded. Among the Nilo-Saharan languages, Nubian is the only one that may be considered from a historian's standpoint, but evidence for the root in question is absent, both in Old Nubian and in the modern Nile and Mountain Nubian languages. There is, however, a branch that is genetically related to Egyptian, and that has unequivocal evidence of the root in question, and that is Chadic. It is, however, not conceivable that the Egyptian of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC took over words from a Chadic language, as there do not seem to have been any contacts between speakers of Egyptian and historical Chadic idioms. The only plausible assumption is that *qrm.t* "ashes" is a good old Egyptian lexeme – one of the not so few isoglosses between Egyptian and Chadic – that is, by chance, not attested in the written sources of an earlier date than the New Kingdom. The first form attested may be a kind of collective noun in the form of a substantivised feminine nisba adjective, *qrm.tj.t* / \**qurVmti(t)*<sup>22</sup> (or \**qurmāti(t)*?), derived from the noun *qrm.t* / \**qurma(t)* "ash(es)" which is on its part at the origin of

<sup>20</sup> Thelwalls "Meidob Nubian".

<sup>21</sup> Greenberg *Languages of Africa* 95.

<sup>22</sup> For the *i* vowel of the feminine nisba ending cf. Satzinger "Zur Kontraktion".

Demotic *qrm.t*, Coptic **ⲕⲣⲙⲉ**(C). It is most probably a lexeme that did not belong to the standard lexicon of Middle Egyptian. Instead, another lexeme is used for "ashes", viz. *ss* (sporadically attested in the Middle Kingdom), or *ssf* (earliest attestation in the New Kingdom)<sup>23</sup>; both seem to mean "to burn (trans.)", in addition to "ashes". It may of course be mere coincidence that *qrm.t* is not attested earlier. When the word appeared for the first time, in the New Kingdom, there was no standard spelling available for it to the scribe, and he rather chose the syllabic writing.

A parallel story is that of the word for "charcoal", Egyptian *d<sup>c</sup>b.t* (\**d<sup>i</sup>b.at*), Demotic *ḏb.t*, Coptic **ⲠⲃⲐ** / **ⲠⲉⲐ**. It obviously originates in another layer of the proto-Egyptian idiom(s), with the late proto-Egyptian palatalisation of \**k* (*k* > *č*, analogous to *k* > *č*, *g* > *j*), and with a shift \**r* (or \**l*?) > \**d*. There is probably a doublet, or variant, *ḏrb.t* (Middle Kingdom). In contrast to *qrm.t*, however, *d<sup>c</sup>b.t* is attested in the written tradition from the Pyramid texts of the Old Kingdom onwards.

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<sup>23</sup> According to Osing 1976 I, 326, an early derivation in *-f*. Texts of the Ptolemaic period have *ssf* instead, as if the root were \**sf*.