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The origin of the Later Egyptian discontinuous negative particle *ỉwnʒ* ~ *ỉn* ~ AN as a reanalyzed lexical reinforcer "piece"

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ABSTRACT

With the Later Egyptian negative particle best known from under hieroglyphic script as the sequence transliterated *ỉwnʒ* and as the Coptic ⲁⲛ *an*, scholarship has largely recognized the resemblance of the French *ne… pas* construction and the applicability of cross-linguistic insights around the grammaticalization of a lexical reinforcer. Yet, although this particle potentially influenced similar constructions in Arabic and Berber and even helped identify Jespersen's Cycle, its origin remains unresolved. Here, the previously-unnoticed comparative implication of possible linguistic divergence identifies new Coptic evidence and thereby a new etymological candidate: a reanalyzed word meaning "piece", which word also survives as an identically-written archaic noun that has been mislabeled a "prefix". Revealingly, a preliminary database search and happenstance uncovered historic usage predicted by and congruous with this Coptic evidence, especially a manuscript variant of the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*. However, more attestations are desirable, despite the improbability of their survival.

KEYWORDS

Polarity items – negation – Jespersen's Cycle – group (syllabic) writing – *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*

أصل أداة النفي المتقطعة في اللغة المصرية المتأخرة *ỉwnʒ ~ ỉn ~ AN* كمعزز لغوى أعيد تحليله بمعنى «قطعة»

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الملخص

تعرف أداة النفى فى الكتابة المصرية المتأخرة، المشهورة في النصوص الهيروغليفية بالتسلسل المدون *ỉwnʒ* والمقابلة القبطية ⲁⲛ *an*، وقد لاحظ الباحثون تشابهاً مع التركيبة الفرنسية *ne…pas* ، كما استفادوا من دراسات لغوية مقارنة حول تقنين معززات لفظية. ومع أن هذه الأداة قد تكون أثرت فى تراكيب موازية باللغات العربية والأمازيغية وساهمت في رصد دورة يسبرسن، فإن أصلها ظل غامضاً. تظهر هنا هذه الدراسة دليلاً جديداً للمقارنة من اللغة القبطية لم ينتبه إليه سابقاً، وبالتالى مرشحاً لغوياً أصلياً جديداً: كلمة أُعيد تحليلها تعنى "قطعة"، وهى الكلمة التى ظلت محفوظة بصورة اسم قديم مكتوب كتابة متطابقة وأُسيء تصنيفه سابقاً كـ "بادئة". حيث أوضحت عمليات البحث المبدئية فى قواعد بيانات وصدفة وجود استخدامات تاريخية توافق مع هذا الدليل القبطى، لا سيما نسخة من مخطوطة قصة الفلاح الفصيح. وعلى الرغم مع ذلك، تبقى هناك حاجة إلى المزيد من القرائن القوية، وذلك بسبب صعوبة بقاء مثل هذه الأدلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية

عناصر قطبية – النفى – دورة يسبرسن – الكتابة المقطعية (المقاطع) – قصة الفلاح الفصيح

For well over a century, scholarship has generally recognized the emergence and development of a Later Egyptian discontinuous negative particle that appears under hieroglyphic script as the sequence transliterated *iwn*ʒ, under Demotic script as the sequence transliterated *in*, and under Coptic script as ⲁⲛ *an* (*e.g.* Gardiner 1904: 130, 133–134; Volten 1959: 21; Davis 1973: 192; Kickasola 1975: 3–6; Černý 1976: 8; Johnson 1976: 61–63, 194; Vycichl 1983: 11; Meltzer 1990: 71; Loprieno 1995: 93, 140–142, 171, 181–182, 233; Winand 1997: 223; Johnson 2000: 90, 95; Junge 2005: 113; Lucas – Lash 2010: 381, 390; Lucas 2013: 407, fn. 9; Funk 2014: 126, fn. 3; Müller 2016: 57–59; Osing 2019: 171; Oréal 2022: 212).[1] For well over a century, much scholarship has also recognized the existence of a cross-linguistic pattern best known from the French *ne… pas* construction in which lexical reinforcement of negation can grammaticalize into a general negator, as well as this pattern's resemblance to the Later Egyptian development (*e.g.* Gardiner 1904: 134; Volten 1959: 21; Kickasola 1975: 3; Vycichl 1983: 11; Meltzer 1990: 72–74; Loprieno 1995: 141, 269, fn. 97; Winand 1997: 232–233; Junge 2005: 113; Lucas – Lash 2010; Lucas 2013: 406–407; Müller 2016: 57; Allen 2020b: 41; Buzi – Soldati 2021: 260; Müller 2021: 64). However, notwithstanding the implications and thus the investigatory leads of this line of thinking, there is still "no consensus as to the correct etymology" of this negative particle, in regards to its "possible earlier history as a less grammaticalized form" (Lucas 2013: 407, fn. 9). In fact, it has even been pessimistically lamented that "[u]nfortunately, the prehistory of *iwn*ʒ cannot be traced" (Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 141). Remarkably, this gap in scholarship has persisted, even though this Egyptian-internal development interests several other groups of scholars. For instance, this particular etymon was historically important in the identification of the cross-linguistic phenomenon that became known as Jespersen's Cycle (Gardiner 1904; Willis – Lucas – Breitbarth 2013: 6). It is also debated whether this negative particle influenced similar constructions in Arabic and Berber (*e.g.* Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 136–146; Lafkioui – Brugnatelli 2020) – for example, the slightly variant *mā… -š* negations "found in the Arabic dialects spoken across coastal North Africa including on Malta, in and around Palestine, and in parts of Yemen and Oman" (Lucas – Lash 2010: 383), or the *ul… kra* negation of Kabyle (Lucas 2007: 405).

Now, however, a previously-unnoticed comparative implication of the possibility of an ongoing situation of linguistic divergence is employed to identify new Coptic-script evidence and thereby propose a new etymological candidate: a reanalyzed word meaning something like "piece", which word also survives as an identically-written archaic noun that has been

1 Apart from the conciseness required in the title, abstract, and section headings, this article tries to consistently distinguish between language phase and script-type through two consistent vocabulary choices. In accordance with previous scholarship's recognition of a single linguistic trajectory for this one discontinuous negative particle, it terms it a phenomenon of "Egyptian" and specifically "Later Egyptian", per the common linguistic categorization of "Earlier Egyptian" versus "Later Egyptian" (*e.g.* Loprieno 1995: 5–8; Stauder 2014). This linguistic phenomenon also occurs across different script types that present different evidentiary advantages and disadvantages – most importantly, Coptic script and its more transparent representation of vowels, versus group (syllabic) writing. Thus, this article prioritizes using the word "script" after words such as "Coptic" and "Demotic", in order to keep attention on the particle's long-term trajectory and thereby prevent potential confusion that claims are somehow being made about smaller-scale language phases. That said, in several instances a word such as "Coptic" has been used when describing previous scholarship, to reflect that work's underlying use of a single word for both script and language phase.

mislabeled a "prefix". Furthermore, diachronic investigation involving a preliminary database search as well as a bit of luck has also uncovered three potential historic examples predicted by and congruous with this new evidence. Most importantly, a manuscript variant from the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* captures a colloquial speech alternation and thus indicates how speakers of Egyptian could optionally employ the pre-grammaticalized polarity item, including in a negative context that would produce grammaticalization into the negative particle. Although sources with the pre-grammaticalized polarity item are unlikely to survive, more examples of it are of course desirable. Nevertheless, converging lines of evidence indicate that the proper etymology of Egyptian's discontinuous negative particle may have finally been found.

THE CROSS-LINGUISTIC GRAMMATICALIZATION OF THE LEXICAL REINFORCEMENT OF NEGATION

To take a deeper view of applicable patterns occurring across the world's languages, observations around this mysteriously-originated Later Egyptian negative particle (Gardiner 1904) helped crystallize recognition of the larger cross-linguistic phenomenon now known as Jespersen's Cycle, in which negations are frequently grammaticalized from lexical reinforcers like "generalizers" referencing all possible situational permutations or "minimizers" bearing a meaning of some increment or small portion (Israel 2011: 43–47; Willis – Lucas – Breitbarth 2013: 6–7; Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 10, 36–44).

In such usage, these negations constitute advanced negation-associated trajectories of the broader and messier category of "polarity items", in which different language-specific expressions reference scales of possibility and can express maximal extent in a positive context, a negative context, or both (Israel 2011: 7, 23, 36–41, 43–47; see Missael 2025 for an overview of this and other similar constructions in Egyptian). For example, to take a basic positive context, one can say "I'm going to drink that bottle of wine", but one could also add a scale-referencing polarity item and state in a more-totalizing fashion "I'm going to drink that bottle of wine *to the last drop*".

To think specifically about the birth of elements of negation from this broader and messier class of polarity items, though, grammaticalization is known to arise from two types of elements found in negative contexts. In response to a question such as "What are you doing?", a generalizing reply can be made like "Not *a thing*" (*i.e.* no single thing that it is possible to conceive). Alternately, in response to a question such as "Do you mind helping me?", the simple "No" can be expanded as the more vigorous minimizing reply "Not *a bit*" (*i.e.* not the smallest possible portion).

To take examples from well-known languages, a word meaning "nothing" has such an origin in English – that is, *nothing* arose from negation and "thing" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2023b, *s.v.* "nothing"). Such words also developed across Romance – for instance, the Italian *niente* arose from negation and "being" (*cf.* Latin *ens, entis* "being"), or the Romanian *nimic* from negation and "crumb" (*cf.* Latin *mica* "crumb") (Alkire – Rosen 2010: 303, 351, fn. 22).

One subset of this larger phenomenon is the emergence of discontinuous negators (Israel 2011: 43–47; Willis – Lucas – Breitbarth 2013: 6–7) – that is, two-part negations like the French *ne… pas* of *je ne sais pas* "I don't know", in which each part of the negation is separated by other lexical material that it sandwiches and negates (Alkire – Rosen 2010: 303–304). Here, of course,

one must immediately mention the similar constructions found in some varieties of Arabic (*e.g.* Brustad – Zuniga 2019: 425; Leddy-Cecere – Schroepfer 2019: 452–453), as well as in some Berber languages (*e.g.* Mettouchi 1996); with both of these, some degree of ultimate influence from Egyptian has been posited and is still being debated (*e.g.* Lucas 2007; Lucas – Lash 2010; Lucas 2013: 404–419; Kossmann 2013: 332–334; Souag 2018; Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 136–146; Lafkioui – Brugnatelli 2020).

As regards these and other languages, then, it is thought or suspected that this type of peculiar discontinuous negative construction has historically emerged from a lexical reinforcer that first appeared as an optional object of the negated verb. In the case of French, the negative *pas* is cognate to the word *pas* "step", the logic being that a minimizing lexical reinforcer in a construction such as "I won't move *a step*" lost its concrete particularity and then extended to other contexts beyond narrow situations of movement, eventually becoming a mandatory feature of negation as a discontinuous particle appearing in conjunction with the more-original means of negation (Alkire – Rosen 2010: 304; Israel 2011: 46; Hansen 2013: 53–63; Willis – Lucas – Breitbarth 2013: 6–7; Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 37–38). In comparison, a similar but slightly different and slightly more distant origin has been hypothesized for Egyptian Arabic, wherein native speakers of the last phase of Egyptian whose speech already contained a discontinuous negative particle sought to identify a post-verbal negator in Arabic and came up with a lexically different, generalizing one stemming from "thing" (Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 142–143).

In any case, two notable systemic traces of this phenomenon can occur. First, because the discontinuous negation particle originated as a lexical reinforcer, native speakers can come to feel that this reinforcer is itself a strong, self-sufficient negative that is more powerful than the historically more-original but more-eroded negation with which it co-occurs, and thus they can start to use it alone in some constructions. For example, think of the French *pas moi* "not me" or *pas mal* "not bad" (Alkire – Rosen 2010: 304; Fortson 2010: 347; Hansen 2013: 63–66), wherein the particle shows a syntactic position much different from that of the historically-originatory direct object, incidentally. Second, a situation of linguistic divergence may persist, in which the word that originally served as the lexical reinforcer continues to exist alongside the negation that grammaticalized from it. Thus, French continues to have a word *pas* meaning "step" as well as a discontinuous negation particle *pas* historically deriving from "step" (Hansen 2013: 58), although native speakers may be unaware of the historic connection between these words. Although not certain outcomes of this grammaticalization, both of these occurrences are nevertheless understandable and telling traces of such a negation's development.

THE CONSISTENCY OF COPTIC EVIDENCE WITH POSITING SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WITHIN LATER EGYPTIAN

In this regard, scholarship taking within its purview the later phase of the Egyptian language rendered in Coptic script already properly and influentially outlined more than a century ago how the negative particle ⲁⲛ *an* strikingly matches these cross-linguistic patterns in multiple ways (Gardiner 1904: 134).

First, the negative particle ⲁⲛ *an* appears discontinuously as part of a set phrase ⲛ̀… ⲁⲛ *n… an* (Gardiner 1904: 134) and it is still taught as such within current major grammars (*e.g.* Layton

2011: 193–194), including through an explicit comparison to the French *ne… pas* construction (Allen 2020b: 41; Buzi – Soldati 2021: 260; Müller 2021: 64).

Second, within this set phrase, that negative particle surfacing in Coptic script as ⲁⲛ *an* appears to be historically more recent than the other negative particle (Gardiner 1904: 134), and it is implicitly or explicitly assumed as such in a range of still-standard resources like an etymological dictionary (Černý 1976: 8, 103), a diachronic overview of the Egyptian language (Loprieno 1995: 140), and specialized linguistic studies (Johnson 1976: 61–63; Funk 2014; Oréal 2022: 212).

Third, this more-recent particle known from under Coptic script as ⲁⲛ *an* began appearing without its long-time and historically older counterpart and thus can start to serve as the sole negator (Gardiner 1904: 134), and this possibility is taught as such within current major grammars (*e.g.* Layton 2011: 193; Allen 2020b: 41; Buzi – Soldati 2021: 260–261; Müller 2021: 204–205).

Admittedly, this line of analysis has not strongly considered how Egyptian's discontinuous negative particle is more locationally flexible than the rigid direct object-like position seen in French phrases like *je ne sais pas* "I don't know". For instance, reference grammars indicate that the Egyptian particle seems to have acquired a particular affinity for appearing after what was conceptualized as the negated unit, even if this unit was the entire utterance (*e.g.* Neveu 2015: 59, 94–95; see also the examples in Winand 1997: 224–227; Osing 2019: 172–178), or even if the smaller negated unit was not the verb (*e.g.* Layton 2011: 192–194):

bn	*wn-f*	*irm-i*	*iwnʒ*
NEG	was-3MS	with-1S	DISCONT.NEG
"He was not with me" (P. Mayer A, 3, 28, in Neveu 2015: 59)			

ⲙⲏ	ⲙ̄	ⲡⲁⲓ	ⲁⲛ	ⲡⲉ	ⲡϣⲏⲣⲉ	ⲙ̄	ⲡϩⲁⲙϣⲉ
mē	*m*	*pai*	*an*	*pe*	*p-šēre*	*m*	*p-hamše*
INTERROG	NEG	this/MS	DISCONT.NEG	is/MS	the/MS-son	of	the/MS-carpenter
"Isn't this one really the carpenter's son?" (Matthew 13:55, in Layton 2011: 193)							

Nevertheless, the French *pas moi* "not me" and *pas mal* "not bad" display striking dislocation of the particle and its expansive reapplication well beyond what one would expect from its origin as a direct object *pas* "step", a very helpful illustration of how such mobility and innovative use can emerge through grammaticalization. So, these nuances of the particle's long-term development within Egyptian do not rise to the evidentiary level of counterbalancing the other striking similarities between the French and Egyptian particles as manifestations of Jespersen's Cycle.

Thus, for all three of these reasons – its appearance in discontinuous negation, its apparently later origin than the other negator with which it co-occurs, and its continuing power where it even begins to be used as sole negator – it still seems most logical to draw the same overwhelming inference that was already made more than a century ago (Gardiner 1904: 134): this Egyptian negative particle likely had its origin as some form of lexical reinforcer, on par with the cross-linguistic phenomenon observable in other languages like French.

And yet, despite recurring recognition that the Later Egyptian discontinuous negative particle arose in a comparable historical development, it has nevertheless been observed fairly recently that there is still "no consensus as to the correct etymology" of this negative particle, in regards to its "possible earlier history as a less grammaticalized form" (Lucas 2013: 407, fn. 9). This explicitly-stated lack of consensus is mirrored in an apparent lack of any new etymological theories mentioned in the periodic multi-year overviews of recent work in Coptic linguistics (Richter, T. S. 2016; Reintges *n.d.*; Müller 2025). Similarly, no already-proposed etymology is included in or explicitly adopted by subsequently-published grammars (*e.g.* Allen 2020b: 41; Buzi – Soldati 2021: 260–261; Müller 2021: 64); a high-profile consolidation of current knowledge of Coptic that broaches diachronic issues (Richter, T. S. 2023); or related specialized linguistic scholarship (*e.g.* Funk 2014: 126; Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 141; Oréal 2022: 212).

Although some of this omission is attributable to the strong synchronic emphasis dominant within the study of Coptic (Layton 2011: xiii), it still must be admitted that there is nothing quite satisfactory presented in the current bundle of five often-tantalizing proposals (Meltzer 1990: 71–72; Winand 1997: 233–234).

Two proposals lose plausibility in their derivation from parts of speech different from those originating lexical reinforcers found in other languages to which the Later Egyptian development bears such strong resemblance (Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 36–44).

First, a lack of cross-linguistic parallels and a lack of an obvious grammaticalization pathway make it seem unlikely that this particle could have emerged from some sort of copula stemming from a participle of the verb transliterated *wn* (Groll 1970: 155).

Second, relatively underdetailed claims currently make it difficult to evaluate a group of similar proposals presenting variations of the idea that this particle is some transmogrification of another affirmative particle transliterated as *in* (Meltzer 1990: 75–76; Winand 1997: 234–235, citing insights of Osing 1979 and with overall findings reaffirmed in Winand 2017: 506–507; Osing 2019, publishing work that complements Osing 1979). Such a modification of a pre-existing "emphasizing particle" (Meltzer 1990: 75) that functions as a "focal marker" (Winand 1997: 235) or "focalising partic[le]" (Winand 2017: 506) does not clearly fit into known cross-linguistic patterns. An even earlier and apparently somewhat similar structure *n… is* is interesting and worthy of examination in its own right. But, attempts to discern in this other, older structure a causal forcefield that somehow channels a particle into an otherwise commonplace linguistic development (Meltzer 1990: 74–76; Osing 2019: 171) is to explain *obscurum per obscurius* (*i.e.* to shed light on an unclear thing through reliance on something even more unclear). Since less information exists about this earlier structure, it seems unwise to claim it as an antecedent that corresponds to the later Egyptian structure in a peculiar twinned challenge to what has been described for other languages of the world. Apart from speculation around a possible historic connection to another particle in Semitic (Osing 2019: 182), these varying proposals also do not provide sufficiently deep etymologies to enable a more-thorough cross-linguistic evaluation of anything that might have historically produced this predecessor particle (*e.g.* if there was posited a development from a prepositional phrase like the translation value "at all" given in Winand 1997: 235, fn. 54, this particle could be put into conversation with programmatic statements like that of Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 39: "Although such prepositional phrases [such as the Old Saxon 'in this world' and 'in this life'] are already adverbial in nature, there

appear to be no attested examples of prepositional-phrase generalizers grammaticalizing as sentential negators"). In fact, a major weakness of these proposals is the identification of the discontinuous negative particle with other Egyptian words transliterated as *in* and used to introduce an "agent" and/or "interrogative" (Meltzer 1990: 75–76) or a larger statement with a value like "indeed" ("certes" per Winand 1997: 234, or "fürwahr" or "wahrlich" per Osing 2019: 179–182). For, these larger proposals are destabilized, to the extent that the other words can be provided with concrete and convincing Egyptian-internal etymologies that break apart the seemingly unitary "particle" upon which so much argumentation relies. And, it must be said that these other etymologies do indeed seem possible, although multiple such probative attempts go well beyond the scope of this present analysis.

Third, it seems at least at first glance that it is relatively more plausible for there to have been a post-positive repetition of the more-original negative particle in a stressed versus unstressed and prone-to-disappearing form (Davis 1973: 192). In an important addition to that original proposal, there has indeed been identified a cross-linguistic pattern of "clause-final repeated negators" (Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 42–44). However, "it is not clear to what extent such repetition actually feeds the renewal of the expression of sentential negation" (Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 42), nor is it clear within such a development why native speakers of Egyptian would use different writings for such an innovative use of the negative particle (would they be unable to recognize the identity of the repeated negative particle? if they could recognize its identity, why would they need an orthographic distinction between the two appearances of the particle?).

A fourth proposal more convincingly draws comparisons with a historic particle meaning "again" that is transliterated as *ꜥn*, appears under Coptic script as ⲟⲛ *on*, and has historic attestations in negative contexts (Volten 1959: 21–27; see Winand 2008 for a fuller discussion of nuances of this particle). It does occur across the world's languages that indefinite words develop into negatives and even retain at least for a time some usage in positive contexts – for example, the French words *personne* "(no)one", *rien* "(no)thing", and *jamais* "(n)ever", although only the last still enjoys any positive usage, and that only in the phrase *si jamais* "if ever" (Willis – Lucas – Breitbarth 2013: 27, 35; Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 154–157). Furthermore, this proposal provides a decently plausible explanation of grammaticalization-attendant phonetic reduction to explain the vowel letter difference in Coptic script forms (Volten 1959: 26–27). Here, it must further be admitted that this correspondence does seem to occur in the stressed form ⲟⲙⲉ *ome* and the unstressed compound form ⲁⲙ- *am-* for "clay" (Crum 1939: 254–255), and it is narrowly consistent with phonological descriptions of Coptic vowel patterns (Peust 1999: 175, 211, 251–252, 270). Yet, this likely phonetic difference that corresponds to the difference in vowel letters nevertheless speaks a bit against it (Meltzer 1990: 72). For example, it is not clear if such a regular difference in phonetics and stress maps onto the co-existing positive and negative usages of such a word in any other language. It is also somewhat unclear if this vocalic alternation could have already arisen within Later Egyptian, since the sound transliterated as *ꜥ* and described as a voiced pharyngeal fricative may have still been present through a much later point in time when Demotic script was in use (*p. c.* Carsten Peust; Peust 1999: 99–100, 102–103; Allen 2020a: 29–30).

A fifth and very briefly-stated proposal takes the cross-linguistic pattern very seriously and accordingly suggests the negative particle's origin in a lexical reinforcer meaning something

like "aspect" (Vycichl 1983: 11). But, although possible, a presumably generalizing meaning like "aspect" for a lexical reinforcer seems slightly askew (*e.g.* "That impacts *no aspect*"...?). Additionally, since the only other Coptic-script forms adduced are ϵινϵ *eine* "to resemble" and ⲁⲩⲁⲛ *auan* "color", the existence of such a lexical reinforcer like ⲁⲛ *an* meaning "aspect" is rendered a little too conjectural and thus a little suspect, including because no concrete guidance is provided for any specific hieroglyphic-script forms that could be sought in order to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis (Winand 1997: 234).

That said, past proposals have recurringly made a very important point, that the group (syllabic) writing found in the hieroglyphic-script form transliterated as *ỉwn3* likely indicates scribal perception of a newly-emerged word and thus it did not necessarily correspond to a foreign word or the standard writing of whichever word birthed the negative particle (Volten 1959: 26; Groll 1970: 155; Davis 1973: 192; Meltzer 1990: 73, 75; Winand 1997: 234–235; for resonant general observations on the typical scope of this manner of writing, see Winand 2017: 506–507; Kilani 2019: 5). As a further important nuance on this point, it has also been perceptively observed that the underlying word probably formed "a non-standard feature before Late Egyptian" as part of the *Volkssprache* (Meltzer 1990: 75). Additionally, there has been raised the topic of the phonetic shape of the negative particle during the time of hieroglyphic script when it was transliterated as *ỉwn3* (Gardiner 1904: 133; Volten 1959: 23, 26; Meltzer 1990: 73; Winand 1997: 234), as well as the topic of what has been analyzed as the particle's determinative and how it was possibly used to signal an interjection (Winand 1997: 234). As a very reasonable evidentiary move, it should also be noted that multiple proposals simply assume that other words surviving into the era of Coptic script can shed light on the ultimate origin of this Later Egyptian negative particle (*e.g.* Volten 1959: 21–27, and its analysis of ⲟⲛ *on* "again"; or Vycichl 1983: 11, and the mention there of ϵινϵ *eine* "to resemble" and ⲁⲩⲁⲛ *auan* "color").

THE LATER EGYPTIAN DISCONTINUOUS NEGATIVE PARTICLE'S PROBABLE ORIGIN IN A REANALYZED WORD "PIECE"

To start from the point of comparison with the French *pas* and its continued existence in two graphically-identical forms – a negative particle and the simple noun that historically birthed it via lexical reinforcement – it seems methodologically most advantageous to attempt to avoid the confounding factor of odd and possibly misleading hieroglyphic script being applied to a newly-emergent form (Volten 1959: 26; Groll 1970: 155; Davis 1973: 192; Meltzer 1990: 73, 75; Winand 1997: 234–235). Instead, it could be more helpful to look for a semantically-plausible, identically-written word from the later era of Coptic script. For, if the pair of *pas* and *pas* survived in French in an ongoing situation of linguistic divergence, why could not the same sort of survival have occurred in Egyptian?

Indeed, although automatic appeal to Coptic-script tokens is not always justifiable, it should be noted that some past proposals have simply assumed their relevance (*e.g.* Volten 1959: 21–27; Vycichl 1983: 11). Furthermore, this approach seems very defensible in this particular case, due to the similar timespans involved with both the Romance and Egyptian developments. On the one hand, there lasted approximately 2,200 years from ungrammaticalized precedents found in the Latin playwright Plautus all the way through modern French (Hansen 2013: 54–56). On the other hand, there stretched 1,700 years of known *grammaticalized*

forms between early examples from the Nineteenth Dynasty (Winand 1997: 224, 231–232) and the more-transparent representation of vowels found in the Coptic-script portrayal as ⲁⲛ *an*. These timespans seem not only roughly but also strikingly equivalent, especially because one must assume centuries of development in Egyptian prior to the negative particle's earliest known grammaticalized appearances (*i.e.* some number of centuries that pushes 1,700 years more towards 2,200 years). Admittedly, cross-linguistic comparison can say nothing about one language's particular history, and it cannot prove that a word that was originally used as a lexical reinforcer survived into Coptic script through the vagaries of Egyptian's evolution. Nevertheless, comparison can and indeed does show that it would have been extremely plausible for such a situation of linguistic divergence to have persisted within Egyptian.

To follow this line of thinking, then, one is immediately struck by the existence of another ⲁⲛ *an* that is identified in one standard Coptic dictionary as a "prefix in collective numerals" (Crum 1939: 10), especially because of the reanalyzed noun that etymologically lies at its heart.

Shaped around the core of a widely-recognized, long-standing Egyptian lexical item transliterated as *ꜥ* and given commonplace definitions like "item" and "piece" (Faulkner 1962: 36), this so-called "prefix" ⲁⲛ *an* has been perceptively derived from a phrase that bore a similar meaning like "unit" or "set" (Spiegelberg 1899: 21; Spiegelberg 1913: 124; Černý 1976: 8; Vycichl 1983: 12). Attestation-wise, it appears in a small set of numeral-including forms like ⲁⲛⲧⲁⲓⲟⲩ *antaiou* "set of fifty" from ⲧⲁⲓⲟⲩ *taiou* "fifty" (Crum 1939: 10, 440; *cf.* *ꜥ 5* "five p[ieces] of clothing" cited by Faulkner 1962: 36). Notably, the lexical item identified at the heart of this so-called "prefix" could easily have served as a minimizer with the expected sense of some increment or small portion in an original lexically-reinforced statement such as "I'm not giving *a piece*" (evidently, the sense of this single word was flexible enough to apply to both single items and a set composed of multiple identical units, much like the English "piece" and "ten-piece"). Furthermore, and as cannot be emphasized enough, this lexical item's graphic form is the same as the negator and thus would be consistent with a situation of linguistic divergence, as is the case with the French *pas* "step" and the identically-written negator that it birthed.

In terms of the striking nasal portion of the prefix written as ⲁⲛ *an* in Coptic script, one small but ultimately explicable complication is that this lexical item transliterated as *ꜥ* came to be historically collapsed with the following genitive marker transliterated as *n*, as has already been correctly outlined in its astute etymology featured in fundamental scholarship (Spiegelberg 1899: 21; Spiegelberg 1913: 124; Černý 1976: 8; Vycichl 1983: 12).

Furthermore, although plausible in and of itself, the recurring etymology of this other ⲁⲛ *an* also enjoys substantial cross-linguistic support that this previous scholarship has not recognized. Reanalysis across morpheme boundaries does occur in languages in high-frequency contexts. For example, the English word *adder* appeared in Old English as *nǽddre* (like the German *Natter* "adder"). But, due to confusion around the indefinite article, something like *a nadder* was conceptually reallocated as something like *an adder* and so the word known now was birthed (Campbell 2020: 99). Since a word followed by a genitive marker is also a high frequency context, it is very plausible that such a reanalysis could have taken place within Egyptian as part of the *Volkssprache* (Meltzer 1990: 75). Indeed, it would be as if English birthed new words *paira* and *setta* from, respectively, the phrases *pair of* (*e.g.* "pair of socks", "pair of shoes", "pair of gloves") and *set of* (*e.g.* "set of Legos", "set of silverware", "set of drums"). In fact, an extant English parallel to this Egyptian etymology would be the chiefly British slang

cuppa from "cup of (coffee/tea)", which has existed for almost a century. Currently first known from 1925 as part of the phrase "a cuppa coffee" in a work of P. G. Wodehouse, it began appearing by 1934 as *cuppa* alone without a dependent word specifying a beverage (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2023a, *s.v.* "cuppa"). Presently, it continues to be common parlance among many native speakers, and it regularly surfaces in very mainstream places from major British newspapers to the high-profile writing of famed Canadian author Margaret Atwood, whose near-future dystopian science fiction novel *Oryx and Crake* features a coffee chain named "Happicuppa" (Atwood 2003). Thus, this already-convincing Egyptian etymology involving reanalysis seems even more sound than previous scholarship has recognized, both because of the overall likelihood of reanalysis, and because a comparable construction in another language shows a similar developmental trajectory.

Interestingly, this last English parallel also provides motivation to further interrogate the Egyptian evidence and even more firmly posit a likely connection between the two forms of ⲁⲛ *an*. Specifically, the word *cuppa* has become a self-standing word susceptible to regular grammatical processes in ways impossible for its unreanalyzed progenitor *cup of*. For example, *cuppa* can not only appear without a following word like "tea" or "coffee", but it can also undergo pluralization, as seen in a 2020 *Guardian* headline about heart-warming pandemic-time socialization efforts like "community cuppas" (*i.e.* socially-distanced teatimes) (Murray – Pidd 2020). In this vein, it might appear at first that there is some ambiguity about whether an Egyptian phrase such as ⲁⲛⲧⲁⲓⲟⲩ *antaiou* "set of fifty" from ⲧⲁⲓⲟⲩ *taiou* "fifty" (Crum 1939: 10, 440) really does historically index to a self-standing unit ⲁⲛ *an*. Here, an objector could ask, aren't we overinterpreting a very straightforward sequence, and couldn't it just be a word like ⲁ *a* followed by a genitive marker like ⲛ *n* and then the numeral, and so there was never any self-standing word whose shape matches that of the discontinuous negative particle? Yet, much like the pluralization of the English parallel *cuppa*, susceptibility to one major grammatical process shows that this word ⲁⲛ *an* really did independently exist at some point in time in a way that has directly fed into Coptic-script attestations. Here, striking evidence is contained in scattered tokens like the rendering of the famous biblical passage wherein adoring women contribute to the growing jealousy of Israel's current king Saul against its eventual king David by singing out upon those men's return from conflict with the Philistines, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7 in the New Revised Standard Version). In the equivalent verse found in standard editions of the corresponding Hebrew and Greek text, the number units "thousands" and "ten thousands" show simple pluralization like occurs in the English phrasing – respectively, the standard, unproblematic noun pluralizations visible in the prepositional phrases בַּאֲלָפָו *ba'ălāp̄āw* vis-à-vis ἐν χιλιάσιν αὐτοῦ *en khiliasin autou* and בְּרִבְבֹתָיו *bəriḇəḇoṯâw* vis-a-vis ἐν μυριάσιν αὐτοῦ *en muriasin autou*:

הִכָּה	שָׁאוּל	בַּאֲלָפָו	וְדָוִד	בְּרִבְבֹתָיו
hikkāh	*šā'ul*	*ba-'ălāp̄āw*	*wə-ḏāwiḏ*	*bə-riḇəḇoṯâw*
slay/PERF.3MS	Saul	in-thousand/PL/his	and-David	in-ten.thousand/PL/his
"Saul slew by his thousands, and David by his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7, in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* 1997)				

Ἐπάταξεν	Σαουλ	ἐν	χιλιάσιν	αὐτοῦ	καὶ	Δαυιδ	ἐν	μυριάσιν	αὐτοῦ
epataksen	*saoul*	*en*	*khiliasin*	*autou*	*kai*	*dauid*	*en*	*muriasin*	*autou*
strike /PAST.3SG	Saul	in	thousand /DAT.PL	his	and	David	in	ten.thousand /DAT.PL	his
“Saul struck down by his thousands, and David by his ten thousands” (1 Kings 18:7, in *Septuaginta* 2004)									

However, in some well-known Coptic-script tokens (Crum 1939: 10; Černý 1976: 8; Vycichl 1983: 12), the plural concept for the numbers written ⳩ *šo* “thousand” and ⲑⲃⲁ *thba* “ten thousand” is achieved within equivalent prepositional phrases by reiterating the sequence ⲁⲛ *an* and creating ⲁⲛⲁⲛ⳩ *ananšo* “sets of a thousand” and ⲁⲛⲁⲛⲑⲃⲁ *ananthba* “sets of ten thousand” – that is, something etymologically like, “setta setta thousand” and “setta setta ten thousand”:

ⲥⲁⲟⲩⲗ	ⲁϥ⳩ⲁⲣⲓ	ϩⲉⲛ	ⲛⲉϥⲁⲛⲁⲛ⳩ⲟ	ⲟⲩⲟⲟϩ	ⲇⲁⲩⲓⲇ	ⲁϥ⳩ⲁⲣⲓ	ϩⲉⲛ	ⲛⲉϥⲁⲛⲁⲛⲑⲃⲁ
saoul	*a-f-šari*	*khen*	*ne-f-an-an-šo*	*ouoh*	*dauid*	*a-f-šari*	*khen*	*ne-f-an-an-thba*
Saul	PAST-3MS- -smite	in	the/PL-3MS- -set-set- -thousand	and	David	PAST-3MS- -smite	in	the/PL-3MS-set-set- ten.thousand
“Saul smote by his thousands, and David smote by his ten thousands” (1 Kings 18:7 in de Lagarde 1879–1880: 70)								

In another important albeit less-recognized token cited in previous scholarship (Crum 1939: 10; Vycichl 1983: 12), an identical reiteration also occurs in the translation of the Festival of “Weeks” through ⲛⲓⲁ̀ⲛⲁⲛⲍ̄ *nianan7* (*i.e.* “sets of seven”), as can be seen across different versions of the same verse from Exodus:[2]

וְחַג	שָׁבֻעֹת	תַּעֲשֶׂה
wə-ḥag	*šəḇuʿōṯ*	*taʿăśeh*
and-festival	weeks/FPL	do/IMPERF.2MS
“And you should observe the Festival of Weeks…” (Exodus 34:22, in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* 1997)		

καὶ	ἑορτήν	ἑβδομάδων	ποιήσεις
kai	*heortēn*	*hebdomadōn*	*poiēseis*
and	festival/DOBJ.FS	weeks/gen. PL	do/FUT.2S
“And you shall observe the Festival of Weeks…” (Exodus 34:22, in *Septuaginta* 2004)			

2 To limit unnecessary orthographic complications, the dot-like *djinkim* found in de Lagarde (1867) has been replaced with a tick-like *djinkim*, which can be more easily rendered in word processing via a Greek grave accent. Also note the Greek-derived manuscript convention of representing a number via a letter with a line over it (for discussion of this common occurrence, see Layton 2011: 58, for example).

ⲟⲩⲟⲟ	ⲡⲓⲯⲁⲓ	ⲛ̀ⲧⲉ	ⲛⲓⲁ̀ⲛⲁⲛ$\overline{\text{ⲍ}}$	ⲉⲕⲉ̀ⲁⲓⲫ
ouoh	*pi-šai*	*nte*	*ni-an-an-7*	*eke-ai-f*
and	the/MS-festival	of	the/PL-set-set-7	OBLIG.2MS-do-DOBJ.MS
“And you should observe the Festival of Weeks…” (Exodus 34:22, in de Lagarde 1867: 214)				

Such forms indicate that the unit-term and the ensuing genitive marker really did coalesce and really did historically function in tandem, since only a single discrete word could have been susceptible to the article-less grammaticalized reiteration that occurs elsewhere with common nouns rendered under Coptic script (*e.g.* ϩⲟⲩ ϩⲟⲩ *hoou hoou* “one day after another” or ⲙⲁ ⲙⲁ *ma ma* “one place after another”, as cited in Layton 2011: 175). For, to make the matter clear, if the underlying word had not been reanalyzed as ⲁⲛ *an* at some point, such a reiteration like ⲁⲛⲁⲛ *anan* should not have been grammatically possible.

Thus, one is also forced to wonder whether the term “prefix” for this word ⲁⲛ *an* is a little misleading, since other prefix-like morphemes like the “agential base” ⲣⲉⲫ- *ref* (Layton 2011: 95) do not seem susceptible to the widespread process of grammatical reiteration, as evidenced by rules and attestations found in one current descriptive grammar (Layton 2011: 52–53, 81, 175, 214–215, 230–231, 359). A digital humanities corpus search for a form beginning ⲣⲉⲫ ⲣⲉⲫ… *ref ref…* (*Coptic SCRIPTorium* 2023) also proved fruitless. Here, too, note previous scholarly hesitancy to accept such a “prefix” reiteration, which hesitancy even reached the point of introducing sigla to mark the reiterated “prefix” as an accidental redundancy ⲁⲛ{ⲁⲛ} ⲑⲃⲁ *an{an}thba* (Černý 1976: 8).

Rather than ignoring or striking this troubling text, however, it seems better to accept this reiterated form as valid, and to instead conceptualize this other ⲁⲛ *an* as an archaic noun with an extremely limited distribution with numerals. That is, this ⲁⲛ *an* is the Coptic-script vestiges of what likely had become perceived as a historic compound-noun construction (Loprieno 1995: 56–57), albeit one incorporating small-scale syntactic embedding like can occur with other similar reiterations (*e.g.* the use of prepositions with ϩⲟⲩ ϩⲟⲩ *hoou hoou* “one day after another”, as cited in Crum 1939: 730). For, given the conceptual resonance with the plurals of the corresponding Greek and Hebrew texts, it seems undeniable that this piece of lexical detritus still continued to display the noun-like property of reiteration, or at least it did so within the phraseology inherited by or employed for biblical translations.

To summarize this line of thinking, then, it is very likely that the Later Egyptian negative particle known as the Coptic-script ⲁⲛ *an* arose as a reanalyzed word like the English *cuppa* or the hypothetical *setta* and then became a minimizing negator in the style of the French *pas*, even as it managed to also survive as an archaic noun that largely behaves like a prefix in number phrasings like “setta fifty” and “setta setta ten thousand”. Furthermore, it did all this against a backdrop where its historic identity was somewhat effaced by its earlier, different rendering in hieroglyphic script as *iwn3* due to speaker non-recognition of its lexical origin.

In regards to that standard rendering in hieroglyphic script, it is still extremely valid to adopt the recurring observation that scribes applied group (syllabic) writing to an inner-Egyptian form that they perceived as new (Volten 1959: 26; Groll 1970: 155; Davis 1973: 192; Meltzer 1990: 73, 75; Winand 1997: 234–235). Also notable is the further perceptive nuance that this word probably first emerged in the *Volkssprache* (Meltzer 1990: 75).

To go beyond that, though, several aspects of this particle's writing as the sequence transliterated as *iwn3* should be highlighted and can even be tentatively better understood under the etymology of this current proposal.

First, the portion transliterated as *iw* clearly corresponds to the initial vocalic portion of the later Coptic-script writing, as was assumed in some past proposals (*e.g.* Gardiner 1904: 133; Volten 1959: 26; Meltzer 1990: 73; Winand 1997: 234). Proposing a relation of this word to a word transliterated as *ꜥ*, then, immediately confronts questions about when what has been identified as the voiced pharyngeal fricative transliterated as *ꜥ* began disappearing (*p. c.* Carsten Peust; Peust 1999: 99–100, 102–103; Allen 2020a: 29–30). Questions also arise about whether and how such a sound may have surfaced in and interacted with orthography, especially group (syllabic) writing (Kilani 2019). Concerning such inquiry, the early date of the presumably vocalic beginning of the sequence transliterated as *iwn3* thus forms a point of interest. Yet, the finer details of the historical phonology of the voiced pharyngeal fricative are still mildly unsettled (Peust 2022), as are the exact sound values of some hieroglyphic signs (*e.g.* Roberson 2018; Quack 2022). It is also worth bearing in mind the recent identification of long-standing phonetic misinterpretation involving the short, common Egyptian "place" word transliterated as *bw*, including within a non-etymological spelling of another short, common Egyptian word *bw nb* "everyone" (Mihalyfy 2026: 8–14); specifically, Coptic tokens like [ϩⲛ̄]ⲟⲩⲙⲉ *[hn]oume* "(in) truth" actually indicate the phonetic reduction of the initial bilabial stop in words like *bw mꜣꜥ* "truth", a change enabling the use of *bw nb* for the quite separate root *wn nb* (> ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ *ouon nim* "everyone", *lit.* "every being"). So, the unexpectedly early vocalic beginning of the sequence transliterated as *iwn3* cannot automatically be discounted as inherently implausible and used to reject any consideration of this current proposal's etymology. For, it seems, the surprisingly uneven state of comparable research on Egyptian also makes it very possible that something else may be occurring that is not yet quite fully understood with the underlying word and its orthography, or with related matters of historical phonology and sound change. Such a deep re-examination of these diachronic subtleties of Egyptian's sounds and spelling is of course beyond the scope of the present etymology, even as it indicates a possible miscongealing of scholarly consensus on this matter.

Second, the portion transliterated as *n3* could correspond to the simple closing nasal, as was assumed in some past proposals (*e.g.* Gardiner 1904: 133; Volten 1959: 26; Meltzer 1990: 73; Winand 1997: 234). However, it is also very possible that this group (syllabic) writing transliterated as *n3* could at some point have been a deployment like the known sequence *n3* that has a later counterpart ⲛⲁ *na* under Coptic script (Kilani 2019: 115–116; note also the Demotic-script parallel with the Later Egyptian adjectival verbs' prefix *n3-* in light of its correspondence to some Coptic-script tokens beginning in ⲛⲁ- *na-*, as seen in Johnson 2000: 47 vis-à-vis Černý 1976: 104, for example). In other words, at one time this lexical reinforcer and its spawned negative particle may have existed in a fuller form that would have come down into Coptic script as something like ⲁⲛⲁ *ana*, but at some point in time this fuller form lost its final vowel, likely before its representation in Demotic script as the sequence transliterated as *in*. This position is likely surprising at first glance. Yet, this reconstruction would merely be consistent with an underdiscussed appearance of the same genitive marker's dative usage in the phrase ⲛⲁⲙⲉ *name* "truly" (from the sequence transliterated as *n mꜣꜥt* "for truth" per examples in Černý 1976: 78, though note its omission in Fecht 1960: 18–20; also observe the

vowel present in the -ⲛⲉ- *-ne-* of the word ϫⲉⲛⲉⲡⲱⲣ *jenepōr* "roof", which has been accepted as deriving from *ḏ3ḏ3 n pr* "head of the house", *e.g.* Černý 1976: 316). In such tokens as well as in other evidence supporting this reconstruction (Peust 2024: 129), there appears before the historic noun not the typical Coptic-script form ⲛ̄ *n* that precedes nouns, but rather a fuller form very much resembling the forms with personal pronouns (*e.g.* ⲛⲁϥ *naf* "for him"'; note also how Crum 1939: 216; Allen 2020b: 32 include a vowel letter variance of ⲛⲉ= *ne=* in some Coptic-script forms, which variance would be consistent with ϫⲉⲛⲉⲡⲱⲣ *jenepōr* "roof"). If the genitive marker before nouns was historically something more like */na/* as survives in the phrase ⲛⲁⲙⲉ *name* "truly" and with prepositions like ⲛⲁϥ *naf* "for him", it stands to reason that an Egyptian reanalyzed noun would have potentially contained the closing vowel of the genitive marker and that scribes deploying group (syllabic) writing could have chosen to render it. Although not certain, this is nevertheless a very interesting possibility that the sequence transliterated as *n3* holds open, even as it also disturbingly suggests that even group (syllabic) writing could be rapidly undermined by sound change and thus become a somewhat opaque tradition in and of itself.

Third and lastly, the closing man-holding-hand-to-mouth Gardiner A2 determinative of *ỉwn3* is still more enigmatic yet and has been plausibly explained as deriving from the mark of an interjection (Winand 1997: 234). However, the possibility that it served as some type of marker of closing vocalism should also be considered (*cf.* Kilani 2019: 73).

THREE POSSIBLE EARLY EXAMPLES OF THE LEXICAL REINFORCER "PIECE", IN TWO RELATED POLARITY ITEMS

So far, Coptic-based evidence placed within cross-linguistic perspective has led to the identification of the lexical reinforcer that likely gave birth to the Later Egyptian negative particle. But, the important question remains: are there any historic attestations of this minimizer in a lexically recognizable form, in the centuries preceding the early grammaticalized examples from the Nineteenth Dynasty (Winand 1997: 224, 231–232)?

With such a search, expectations should not be high. Previous research has properly highlighted how the negative particle's originating word probably constituted "a non-standard feature before Late Egyptian" as part of the *Volkssprache* (Meltzer 1990: 75). Indeed, this observation greatly resonates with how precedents for the French development are found in renderings of informal speech in the Latin playwright Plautus (Hansen 2013: 54–58; Alkire – Rosen 2010: 37, 303–304). Thus, register restrictions should lead us to expect that any such usage would be very assiduously strained out, except perhaps in occasional texts of a literary or documentary nature, or within the very rare incursions of informal speech into formal texts. Moreover, this unfortunate relative rarity would be further compounded by the differential survival rate of ancient texts, since texts in stone are those that most readily survive, but they also come from the genres that are the least likely to contain any interesting and illuminating lexical attestations.

As a matter of fact, these surmises were largely borne out by a preliminary examination of the relevant word within 639 different sentences, inclusive of some reading variants (*Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* 2023). In this tentative research foray undertaken subsequent to hypothesis formation, a multitext database was searched for not only hieroglyphic and hieratic

occurrences of the lemma ꜥ "portion, piece", but also the potentially-related lemma "region, side, administrative area"; since this latter lemma survives in identically-written Coptic-script tokens like ⲁⲛⲧⲱⲟⲩ *antōou* "mountainous region", it might be historically connected through an expanded conceptual application of a base sense like "part" (Spiegelberg 1899 and 1913; Vycichl 1983: 12). Although ultimately irrelevant, the inclusion of this second lemma made for a broader initial search, as did the long and dwindling right-tail of the timespans revealed – that is, 2686–526 BC and 2686 BC – 200 AD, respectively. Design-wise, the likely scarcity of attestations made it seem preferable to cast a broader net, rather than a narrower one. And indeed, despite the seeming abundance of these respective 590 and 49 sentences and their reading variants, the vast majority were very straightforward and very unenlightening occurrences within monumental texts, such as lists of goods in tomb inscriptions. This uninformative and exceedingly prosaic usage also overwhelmingly recurred within the much smaller subset of non-monumental texts.

All of that said, however, this search did nevertheless manage to uncover two examples where the word "piece" forms part of two different polarity items, both of which were contextually flexible, and both of which appear in the half millennium preceding the appearance of the discontinuous negative particle transliterated as *iwn3*. First, in the Twelfth Dynasty, a letter copy found among the Lahun papyri contains a stock prepositional phrase that can be re-read as containing "piece", albeit in a differently-patterning polarity item than that that birthed the negative particle (Papyrus Cairo JE 71581, formerly known as Papyrus Berlin P. 10017; for an edition of it and assigned dating to the reign of Amenemhat III, see Luft 2006: 113–117). Second, with the Twelfth Dynasty literary work the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, a version known from a Thirteenth Dynasty manuscript deploys the lexical reinforcer "piece" in a positive context, and moreover does so in a manner consistent with its reinterpretation as discontinuous negation when placed into a contemporaneous negative construction (18.1 and 18.4–5 in Papyrus Berlin P. 10499, also known as Papyrus Ramesseum A; for probable dating, see Parkinson 2012: 1–3).

Additionally, after this carefully-delimited preliminary search was completed, good fortune happened to surface what may be a rare negative-context use of the minimizer, in an inscription of the Eighteenth Dynasty's Thutmose II (Sethe 1906: 138, included in but perhaps misinterpreted by Gardiner 1957: 342).

If these interpretations are correct – and other plausible interpretations are possible, especially with this last inscription of Thutmose II – the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasty examples would then chronologically place the earliest-known, multifaceted usage of polarity items with "piece" to around 1800–1700 BC. Then, the potential Eighteenth Dynasty example could possibly bridge the ensuing multi-century gap and show grammaticalizing usage in a negative context in the early 1400s BC, just a few hundred years prior to the 1200s BC and the sudden and notorious Nineteenth Dynasty blossoming of the full-fledged negative particle in its origin-disguising group (syllabic) writing (Winand 1997: 224, 231–232; for dates underlying these rough calculations, see Shaw 2000: 480–489). Very strikingly, too, if one looks backward from the first recognizable appearance of the divergence situation with the widespread use of Coptic script in 300–400 AD, these examples stretch across approximately 2,200 years, neatly paralleling the timespan from Plautus through modern French (Hansen 2013: 54–56; Alkire – Rosen 2010: 37, 303–304).

Parsing these three examples, however, requires a more-intensive conversation with cross-linguistic reasoning about polarity items. Although this analysis has mostly dwelt on the negation-associated trajectory of one polarity item – namely, a minimizing lexical reinforcer that eventually became a self-standing negative particle – the broader and messier world of polarity items becomes relevant when taking a wider view and considering the larger patterns intersecting with the earliest stages of this crucial development. For example, with the proposed originatory phrasing for the negative particle, a positive counterpart can also be envisioned – that is, in response to a request to have a taste of wine, there can be issued not only a denial "I won't give *a drop*", but also a rarer condescending minimal apportionment like "Sure, I'll give you *a drop*" (Israel 2011: 38: "The asymmetrical distribution of forms [includes] forms which can occur in either context but which in actual usage show a marked preference for one polarity or the other"). Similarly, it is also possible for the same base word found in a given polarity item to appear in other, differently-structured polarity items – for example, within the long-term history of French, there has appeared not only a *pas*-like negative particle descended from *goutte* "drop" that survived in lexicalized phrases with words like *voir* "see" and *comprendre* "understand" (Price 1990; Hansen 2013: 56, fn. 5), but also the prepositional phrase *jusqu'à la dernière goutte* "until the last drop" (*Trésor de la Langue Française* 1981: 369). Although these two general phenomena are not identical to the most important trajectory resulting in a negative particle, they nevertheless become extremely important when thinking through what this analysis has identified as potentially the earliest Egyptian examples, when the lexically-recognizable minimizer "piece" was apparently circulating more broadly and feeding into the pivotal negative contexts that led to its ultimate grammaticalization.

For the crucial period of transition, the inscription of Thutmose II about a Nubian revolt (Sethe 1906: 138) may be an incredibly important witness to incipient grammaticalization breaking through register barriers into a monumental text, if an alternate translation is preferred to two fairly plausible translations of a crucial line containing the arm hieroglyph Gardiner D36.

In the first translation possibility (Sethe 1914: 68), this arm hieroglyph is paired with the preceding verb in order to form an idiom meaning "oppose":

n	*ḫsf-ꜥ*	*n*	*ipwty-f*	*ḫt*	*tȝ.w*	*f[n]ḫ.w*
NEG	oppose (< "impede the arm") /IMPERS	GEN	envoy-3MS	through	land/PL	Phoenician /MPL
"One does not oppose his envoy through the lands of the Phoenicians"						

Here, it must be noted that a parallel from Sinuhet appears without a genitive marker intervening between the body part in the verbal idiom and the specification of the following person (Faulkner 1962: 197), and consultation of a wider set of chronologically-scattered variants indicates that different phrasing possibilities with and without the genitive particle did indeed exist throughout Egyptian's history (*Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* 2026). Thus, it is very plausible that this inscription could merely contain that verbal idiom.

In the second translation possibility (Breasted 1906: 49; Gardiner 1957: 342), this same arm hieroglyph is interpreted as an evocative but somewhat redundant phrasing where "the arm of the envoy" is largely equivalent to "the envoy":

n	*ḫsf*	*ꜥ*	*n*	*ipwty-f*	*ḫt*	*t3.w*	*f[n]ḫ.w*
NEG	impede /PASS	arm	GEN	envoy-3MS	through	land/PL	Phoenician /MPL
"His envoy (*lit.* 'the arm of his envoy') is not impeded through the lands of the Phoenicians"							

As with the first translation, this translation also seems plausible.

A third translation is also possible, however, wherein the key hieroglyph is read not as "arm", but rather as the lookalike minimizer "piece" already being used as a discontinuous negative particle:

n	*ḫsf*	*ꜥ n*	*ipwty-f*	*ḫt*	*t3.w*	*f[n]ḫ.w*
NEG	impede /IMPERS	DISCONT.NEG (< piece-GEN)	envoy-3MS	through	land/PL	Phoenician /MPL
"One does not impede his envoy through the lands of the Phoenicians"						

Here, it must be remembered that comparable constructions do show different lexical items intervening between the verb and its subject (*e.g.* a number of the examples in Stauder 2014: 34–35, 39–40), and such a placement of an intervening word would resemble the placement of the discontinuous negative particle. That said, this third translation possibility cannot be decisively proven against the fairly plausible options of the other two translations, especially the first. Nonetheless, it is possible and intriguing, and this interpretation would link the negative particle with a writing that reflects its etymological origin.

In fact, a little additional plausibility is lent to this interpretation from another, earlier attestation of the minimizer in question, in a manuscript variant of the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* that is much less ambiguous than the inscription of Thutmose II and that has much stronger evidentiary value.

In the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, one fragmentary manuscript provides a very under-appreciated variant where the pharaoh's repeated command to "provide sustenance" is supplemented with a polarity item and slightly rephrased as "provide *a bit of* sustenance" (B1 112 and 113 vis-à-vis R 18.1 and 18.4–5; Parkinson 1991: 20, 21; Parkinson 2012: 90–91). In the correctly-translated primary version for the given section, the command occurs twice in a well-preserved section of text:

ir	*swt*	*ꜥnḫ*	*ḥmt-f*	*ḥnꜥ*	*ḫrd.w-f...*
do/IMV	but	sustenance	wife-3MS	with	child/PL-3MS
ir	*grt*	*ꜥnḫ*	*sḫti*	*pn*	*m-ḥꜥw-f*
do/IMV	still	sustenance	peasant	this/3MS	in-body-3MS
"But give his wife and children sustenance... Also give this peasant himself sustenance" (B1 112 and 113)					

In the fragmentary manuscript, however, the corresponding, mildly variant section does not remain in its entirety (see the fourth table of Vogelsang – Gardiner 1908 for images and some helpful transliteration). But, even despite prominent gaps, phrasing alternation is evident – an alternation, in fact, that notably includes insertion of the word identifiable as "piece" and an ensuing genitive particle (*pace* the odd "Zustand des Lebens" rephrasing read by Vogelsang 1913: 82, as well as the unconvincing "written provisions order" posited by Perry 1986: 243–244 as "a detail of the administrative procedures involved"):

[*ir*	*s*]*wt*	*ꜥ n*	*ꜥnḫ*	*ḥmt*	*sḫti*	*pn...*
do/IMV	but	piece (< piece-GEN)	sustenance	wife	peasant	this
ḥnꜥ	*s*[*wt*]	*ir.t*	*ꜥ n*	*ꜥnḫ*	[*sḫti*]	*pn...*
with	but	do/INF	piece (< piece-GEN)	sustenance	peasant	this
"But give this peasant's wife *a bit of* sustenance... along with giving this peasant *a bit of* sustenance..." (R 18.1 and R 18.4–5)						

Through this small but significant variant, the command is conceptualized more specifically as some magnanimous deigning to provide a minimal amount of nourishment. That is, the polarity item "piece" is deployed in a positive context within a command to "Give *a bit of* sustenance!", versus some negative order like "Don't provide *a bit of* sustenance!" Indeed, although the surviving portions of this particular manuscript do not include the particular amount given in response to the command, the better-preserved papyrus indicates a daily bread allotment that would be appropriate for the lowest-level worker, a quantity consistent with such a command to provide only basic support for the peasant (Parkinson 2012: 92, quoting Leprohon 1975: 97: "Such a modest amount might help prevent the audience from imagining that the peasant would grow suspicious at an overgenerous treatment, and the amount places him 'in his proper social standing'...").

Although appearing in a positive rather than a negative context, this particular phrasing is nonetheless highly suggestive, because more-widespread use of this attested minimizer would be consistent with reinterpretation as a negative particle. That is, this word "piece" as used in the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* could have been understood as discontinuous negation, when put into a negative context. Although no such phrasing is present in the surviving text, the base verb of the "provide sustenance" idiom nevertheless appears elsewhere in the text in a negation (B1 152, *cf.* Parkinson 1991: 24; Parkinson 2012: 129):

n	*irr-k*	*st*
NEG	do-2MS	it
“You will not do it” (B1 152)		

All questions about the “problematic” gemination aside (Parkinson 2012: 129), this appearance of the verb with “it” nevertheless allows for a textually-grounded thought experiment via a relatively straightforward replacement of the direct object with the variant “sustenance” phrasings found in the two manuscripts in question. If the direct object is replaced with the first “sustenance” phrasing, a simple and unambiguous negated statement is produced:

n	*irr-k*	*ꜥnḫ*
NEG	do-2MS	sustenance
*“You will not provide sustenance” (artificial example combining B1 152 with phrasing of B1 112 and 113)		

If the direct object is replaced with the second “bit of sustenance” phrasing, however, an important ambiguity emerges. In the lexical sense, the phrase can function as a polarity item:

n	*irr-k*	*ꜥ n*	*ꜥnḫ*
NEG	do-2MS	piece (< piece-GEN)	sustenance
*“You will not provide *a bit of* sustenance” (artificial example combining B1 152 with phrasing of R 18.1 and R 18.4–5)			

However, structural ambiguity also permits a speaker of Egyptian to perceive the word “sustenance” alone as the object of the negated verb, while understanding the reanalyzed minimizer as a discontinuous negative particle:

n	*irr-k*	*ꜥ n*	*ꜥnḫ*
NEG	do-2MS	DISCONT.NEG (< piece-GEN)	sustenance
*“You will not provide sustenance” (artificial example combining B1 152 with phrasing of R 18.1 and R 18.4–5)			

In other words, simply putting the attested polarity item into a pretty contemporaneous negative context immediately reveals the crucial grammaticalization trajectory. Although the evidence that one has is not always the exact evidence that one would wish to possess, it nevertheless turns out that the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* phrasing variant is exponentially more germane than it might at first appear.

Furthermore, to put this usage into a still-broader context, and to move into examination of the third and final potential historic usage identified here, it should also be noted that originating alongside of this usage of “piece” there may have been another polarity item using this same minimizer, albeit in a standard prepositional phrase. Specifically, a certain particle

known from under Coptic script as ⲣⲱ *rō* can bear as one of its meanings a sense like "at all" in both positive and negative contexts (Crum 1939: 290–291; Shisha-Halevy 1990: 120–121; Depuydt 2001: 119–123), and it can also be traced at its core back to an identically-written Egyptian word transliterated as *r* (Erman – Grapow 1928: 395; Černý 1976: 135; Vycichl 1983: 171–172). Given that striking connection, one must wonder if this particle is not another historical descendent of that same lexical reinforcer meaning "piece", albeit as a coalescence with the preposition often transliterated as *r* and of course without any following genitive marker transliterated as *n*. In this conceptualization, this same word "piece" would figure into a slightly different polarity item with a sense like "to a piece" – that is, something like "through the very last piece", signifying absolutely complete and utter totality with every single item that one could ever fathom (*cf.* Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 38–42). That said, it may not be possible to soundly evaluate this other etymology for some time, given how the phonetics, phonology, and sound changes of Egyptian are all often uncertain and open to debate, especially in regards to vocalism. Yet, if in the future this other particle can be convincingly traced back to the Egyptian word transliterated as *r* and translated as "piece", its very existence under Coptic script would thus constitute additional evidence for the underlying word's historic use as a lexical reinforcer, much like how the French phrasing *jusqu'à la dernière goutte* "until the last drop" (*Trésor de la Langue Française* 1981: 369) has diachronically surfaced in the same language that created a negative particle from *goutte* "drop" (Price 1990).

Indeed, this other particle ⲣⲱ *rō* became surprisingly germane in the preliminary search for less-grammaticalized attestations of lexical reinforcement using the word transliterated as *r* and translated as "piece".

To finally arrive at the third and final example of possible historic usage, a copy of a Twelfth Dynasty letter discussing transport of cattle has been interpreted by previous scholarship on the Lahun papyri so that the word in question is read either as "hand" within a compound preposition or as "piece", albeit in a conceptually expansive sense like "portion" or "share" (Luft 2006: 115; see Luft 2006: 113–117 for an edition of and commentary on Papyrus Cairo JE 71581, formerly known as Papyrus Berlin P. 10017). Notably, and as this analysis will question, both of these interpretations assume attachment to the ensuing prepositional phrase, when it is perhaps better detached and interpreted as the historic predecessor to the particle ⲣⲱ *rō*.

In the compound preposition interpretation, the word in question is read as "hand" and combines with the preceding preposition and the following genitive marker, producing a phrase like "for the lord" (Simpson 1965: 32) or perhaps "at the disposal of the lord" (Wente 1990: 78):

mi	*n.tt*	*nb.t*	*r r n*	*nb...*
as	which	all	to (< "to the hand of")	lord
"As all is for the lord"				

However, this interpretation has been reasonably disputed due to a lack of clear parallels for the following genitive marker in such a phrasing (Luft 2006: 115).

In the conceptually expansive interpretation, the word in question is understood as "piece", but it is translated as "portion" or "share", and it is again linked with the ensuing prepositional phrase (Luft 2006: 115):

mi	*n.tt*	*nb.t*	*r*	*ꜥ*	*n*	*nb…*
as	which	all	to	share (< "piece")	of	lord
"As all is for the share of the lord"						

However, although plausible, this interpretation nonetheless cannot explain the phrase's resemblance to the etymological origin posited for the Coptic particle ⲣⲱ *rō*.

Alternately, this sequence can be parsed so that this crucial prepositional phrase groups with the preceding "all" as a lexical reinforcement similar to the Coptic-script token ⲣⲱ *rō* "at all" (*i.e.* "to a piece"), with the next prepositional phrase then becoming a self-standing unit presenting the genitive marker in its possession construction-deployed dative sense "for the lord":

mi	*n.tt*	*nb.t*	*r ꜥ*	*n*	*nb…*
as	which	all	completely (< "to a piece")	for (< "of")	lord
"As all is completely the lord's"					

Besides harmonizing with the general etymological origin posited for the Coptic particle ⲣⲱ *rō*, this interpretation also matches the preceding *nb.t* "all" and introduces a fitting nuance wherein the polarity item references a scale of possibility and emphasizes maximal extent in a positive context (Israel 2011: 7, 38–41). Interestingly, it had already been noted that the letter's author employed "a rather casual tone" ("einen ziemlich saloppen Ton"), something evident in the text's other instructions like to send the best (Luft 2006: 117). Thus, this interpretation produces another such mildly hyperbolic colloquial phrasing. That said, although the strange vertical placement of this line in the copy of the letter has led to its interpretation as grouping with the foregoing text (Wente 1990: 78) or as an incomplete sentence written as a postscript (Luft 2006: 115), it may also be possible to combine it with the following, horizontally-written requests like the one to send the best. In this reading, the clause would then segue into the following sentence like other attested texts with the particle *iḫ* "so" (Gardiner 1957: 176), thus forming initial heightened deference in an "instruction from below": "As all is completely the lord's, so the lord should have sent from the best…" (*mi n.tt nb.t r ꜥ n nb… iḫ di nb… ini.t m bw nb nfr*). In this way, the polarity item in question would thus not only merely echo the other scalar references from the text, but also actually figure into a single unit with them (*e.g. m bw nb nfr* "from the best").

In any case, whether understood as a sentence fragment or interpreted with the following lines, this alternate reading nevertheless lends a little further plausibility to the possibility that the later Egyptian negative particle originated in the same minimizer "piece". Based on likely descendants known from under Coptic script, this polarity item does not appear to have ever become exclusively associated with either positive or negative contexts, and its

existence within this prepositional phrase is technically separate from the usage that ultimately produced the negative particle. Yet, in light of how other languages such as French can present both type of constructions from the same minimizer across their diachrony, the presence of this prepositional phrase in Egyptian nevertheless serves at a minimum to show that this crucial minimizer could indeed be used in polarity items, and even during the most critical timeframe as the other, more important usage upheld here on different grounds. Of course, a fuller diachronic analysis is very much desirable for this complementary usage of the minimizer. Prospectively, this analysis would identify later attestations like that of Wenamun 1.56 (*i.e.* the exclamation *m r ꜥ* "Not at all!", which mirrors a preceding colloquial interjection that can be identified as *wn* "Yes!" via Layton 2011: 186). It would also carefully differentiate other, apparently etymologically separate structures that incorporate an element transliterated ꜥ (*e.g.* many of those treated in Pantalacci 1985; Winand 2009). Nevertheless, despite this remaining work, this phrasing in a Twelfth Dynasty letter still appears to provide a very interesting glimpse at the historic use of minimizers within Egyptian.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

To close, it cannot be emphasized enough that we should bear in mind our expectations for the shape of an analysis touching on the diachronic development of Egyptian. A traditional-looking, philology-compatible article that seeks to collect a good many Egyptian examples and define historic form distributions has its place in giving us a sense of how Egyptian has historically functioned, and the present analysis not only acknowledges several such distributional analyses, but also largely accepts them and builds on them without much if any substantial dispute (*e.g.* the tracing of early grammaticalization in Winand 1997). However, sometimes there are severe language-internal barriers to finding numerous examples or charting a language's development using clues found entirely from within, and such is the present situation. When the Later Egyptian negative particle first appears in its widely-recognized form transliterated as *iwn3*, its very method of writing obscures what has been termed its "prehistory" (Meltzer 1990; Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 141), and pointed issues of textual attestation and survival are implicit within the previous, eminently dependable research position that the particle originated as "a non-standard feature before Late Egyptian" as part of the *Volkssprache* (Meltzer 1990: 75). In such a situation, one major resource for fresh insights is our robust and still rapidly-developing knowledge of cross-linguistic grammaticalization (*e.g.* Kuteva *et al.* 2019) – which form of knowledge, in fact, had already long ago started to surface in scholarship (*e.g.* Gardiner 1904), although the crucial implication of the possibility of an ongoing situation of linguistic divergence had not been explored in seeking to identify the original etymon. Similarly, with the particular Egyptian candidate thus uncovered and its proposed emergence from a reanalysis of a genitive marker, cross-linguistic insights also help to assess the plausibility of that item's received etymology – which etymology, in fact, does seem very dependable, and that etymology has now been deemed even more trustworthy because of further arguments for its cross-linguistic plausibility. Although it should not need stating, Egyptian was a human language, and appropriately-applied cross-linguistic knowledge is very much relevant and can help suss out leads and evaluate the merits of various proposals about Egyptian's historical development, whether in place of or as a supplement to "the traditional

philological method" of extensively collating Egyptian-internal usage (Love 2021: 340). Cross-linguistic comparison can of course be done poorly, and evidence can of course indicate that certain concrete analyses of Egyptian in this vein are pretty unlikely or even clearly invalid. And yet, that said, Egyptian's base potential to manifest cross-linguistic tendencies should not be in dispute. At times, however, it seems that strongly philological scholarship has been relatively unconcerned with or unduly resistant to such linguistic thinking and its proper evidentiary weight, perhaps in part due to other emphases in scholarly training or even the comparison-averse "particularism" also affecting Egyptology in areas like social history (Cooney 2021: 33–34). Here, it is also worth bearing in mind that although Egyptian has historically very deep attestation and a very long history of attestation, the span of time between Middle Egyptian and earlier Coptic-script texts is roughly the same as between, for example, the Latin playwright Plautus and the Romance languages of today (*e.g.* Alkire – Rosen 2010: 37, 144, 187, 196). So, depending on the particular point of comparison, it is not as if the amount of time at play should automatically lead us to suspect linguistic behavior that is radically different from other languages that display some similar development. Thus, given relevant cross-linguistic guidance anchored in Egyptian specificities, questions for Egyptian can be improved, and the collective scholarly enterprise can benefit from being provided possible paths to better answers, especially in a murky situation where no consensus yet exists, and where earlier evidence is incredibly scarce. In fact, the theory produced through such analysis turned out to have surprising predictive power for Egyptian; an accordingly tailored search and a healthy dose of luck produced three possible examples from a fitting timeframe before the emergence of the fully-grammaticalized negative particle, and one was of rather good quality and rather direct applicability. Accordingly, it would be unjust criticism to point to these scarce examples as somehow a fault of the project; in fact, fair-minded evaluation of source problems indicates that few examples if any are expected to survive, and scarce examples that fulfill a prediction made on other grounds are significant, especially in light of current scholarship's hopelessness about our ability to identify and trace the "prehistory" of the negative particle. Indeed, to push back against that unwarranted pessimism, these *written* attestations have now called into question that occasional framing of the issue: the Later Egyptian negative particle of course has a backstory, but this current analysis now posits that this backstory is no longer some hypothetical and inaccessible "prehistory", but rather an extant and discernible "history" that involves multiple written sources, above and beyond the interpretation of the divergence situation seen in chronologically later material.

Indeed, as this analysis has shown, this later material strongly suggests that the Later Egyptian discontinuous negative particle known from under Coptic script as ⲁⲛ *an* arose in a cross-linguistically typical manner as a lexical reinforcer, in this particular case from reanalysis of a word transliterated as ꜥ that originally meant "piece". Through a search then performed in order to further investigate this hypothesis, it was found that this word "piece" factored into at least two separate polarity items found during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties. An Eighteenth Dynasty inscription may additionally show the crucial usage in the negative context that would result in the known Nineteenth Dynasty examples, when the negative particle appears in fully-grammaticalized form and in a manner of writing that disguises its lexical origin. Although the three possible historic usages are somewhat susceptible to other respectable interpretations, especially the Eighteenth Dynasty inscription, the striking example

from the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* seems particularly strong and in fact rather decisive: it is from exactly the right time period and from exactly the right kind of textual genre, and the very existence of a phrasing variant perceptible across two manuscripts indicates that we are dealing with the predicted polarity item, albeit in a positive context rather than the more-common negative one. Furthermore, it only takes insertion of the phrasing variant into an attested negative construction from the same text to reveal the crucial structural ambiguity permitting reinterpretation as a discontinuous negative particle.

Although barely broached here, an interesting but ultimately tangential issue deserving of further thought is how the discontinuous negative particle became severed from its direct object-like position and segued into the later-attested distributional patterns (*e.g.* Winand 1997: 224–227; Layton 2011: 192–194; Neveu 2015: 59, 94–95; Osing 2019: 172–178). Here, a promising working hypothesis is an Egyptian-particular reinterpretation and broadening of the discontinuous negator's syntactic scope (*p. c.* Yaroslav Gorbachev); quite possibly, its easily-understandable post-grammaticalization usage with short units like single intransitive verbs led to its reinterpretation as an end-of-unit marker applicable to other, non-verbal syntactic units and even the unit of the entire utterance (*cf.* Winand 1997: 230; Layton 2011: 194 on use of the negator to single out a specifically-negated preceding element). Another interesting but ultimately tangential issue is a number of other relatively uncommon words that are also possibly related – for example, an identically-written word found in place-indicating compound nouns like ⲁⲛⲧⲱⲟⲩ *antōou* "mountainous region" ("part"? "portion"?) (Spiegelberg 1899 and 1913). Also interesting is the older and seemingly somewhat comparable discontinuous negation construction employing the sequence transliterated as *is*, which has obliquely surfaced in some proposals (*e.g.* Meltzer 1990: 75–76; Winand 1997: 234; Osing 2019: 171), not to mention diachronically-attentive linguistic overviews and teaching materials (*e.g.* Loprieno 1995: 172; Richter, B.A. 2023: 41). Both this older construction and the later and etymologically-separate discontinuous negator definitely deserve fuller systematic analyses in relation to patterns of usage vis-à-vis things like the negators transliterated as *bn* (> ⲛ̀ *n*) and *bw-pw* (> ⲙ̀ⲡⲉ- *mpe-*), although this is not yet possible due to ongoing research on core related matters like negative strengtheners (*e.g.* Missael 2025), the negative existential cycle in Egyptian (*e.g.* Oréal 2022), and these negators' orthography and underlying sounds (*e.g.* Mihalyfy 2026). Etymologies of a number of other forms also deserve further attention, including the similar particles somewhat resembling the *r ꜥ* usage of the minimizer (*e.g.* many of those treated in Pantalacci 1985; Winand 2009). To look outward, too, Egyptian data might also benefit scholarly discussions about the cross-linguistic development of negation – for example, by providing a case study illuminating how the development of a bare noun into a negator interfaces with the development of articles (Breitbarth – Lucas – Willis 2020: 38, 79–83).

However, and as is more important for reconstructing the evolution of Later Egyptian negation, much more diachronic research is needed, to see if more congruous usage of the word transliterated as ꜥ can be identified. If further examples exist at all as this proposal has outlined, this endeavor may require a great many hours of intensive research to come up with very few examples, if one does not already know of them from ongoing work with the applicable corpuses, or if one does not get lucky and somehow quickly stumble across them. One must also consider the possibility that other, clearer tokens may only exist in very marginal texts that are yet to be edited or that are even yet to be found, and so this additional

confirmation may not be possible right now; instead, it may only occur after the discovery of some new texts in Egypt, or with the rediscovery of other texts down in the depths of some archive. Thus, in order to more efficiently allocate scarce scholarly hours and to hasten the pace of investigation and exchange with experts who command or can access scattered textual corpuses, there is a clear benefit to publicizing the present state of research and its standing prediction, especially via an Open Access journal.

To the extent that there can be identified additional earlier examples of lexical strengthening, especially in negative contexts, this proposal will be further supported, thereby providing an even sounder etymology to the particle that underlies the original "Jespersen's Cycle" observations and that may have locally influenced Arabic and eventually some Berber languages. If such examples are found, more questions will also be raised about the nature of Egyptian's historical phonetics and phonology and their relation to orthography like group (syllabic) writing, for example.

To the extent that no more examples emerge over time, however, this proposal will have been weakened a little – though, given the totality of the evidence presented here, future scholars might go astray if they don't heed it "one little bit". At the very least, the present strengthening of the traditional and very sensible etymology for the "piece"-derived ⲁⲛ *an* appearing with Coptic numerals (Spiegelberg 1899: 21; Spiegelberg 1913: 124; Černý 1976: 8; Vycichl 1983: 12) presents a major difficulty to any future scholarship that would take a different tack and try to identify a completely separate origin for the ⲁⲛ *an* of the discontinuous negator. The current body of evidence supporting the traditional etymology of the ⲁⲛ *an* found with numerals is substantial, and it does not seem capable of being put into serious doubt. Accordingly, any other future proposal would seem to necessarily imply the very odd claim that Egyptian happens to contain a very curious word that looks exactly like the discontinuous negator and that is cross-linguistically consistent with development into a discontinuous negator, but somehow this identical word is not the negator's origin.

Thus, by all current appearances, a long-standing etymological mystery of over a century may have been finally solved at long last.

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