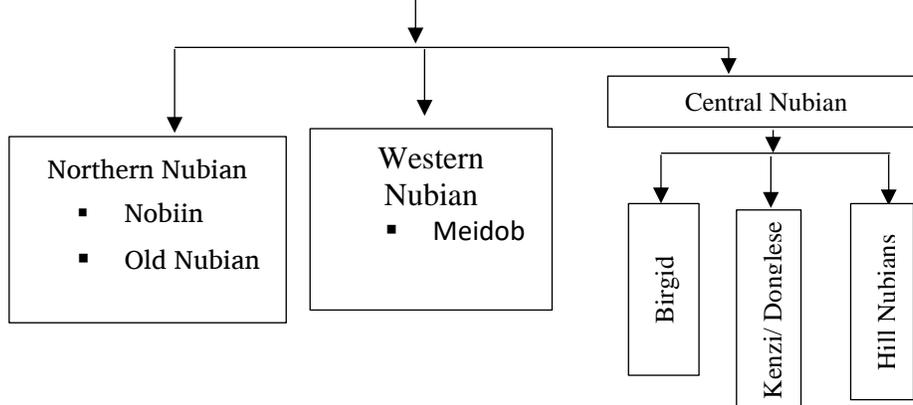


A brief description of the Nobiin language and history
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Nobiin language

Nobiin (also called Mahas-Fadichcha) is a Nile-Nubian language (North Eastern Sudanic, Nilo-Saharan) descendent from Old Nubian, spoken along the Nile in northern Sudan and southern Egypt and by thousands of refugees in Europe and the US. Nobiin is classified as a member of the Nubian language family along with Kenzi/Dongolese in upper Nubia, Meidob in North Darfur, Birgid in Central and South Darfur, and the Hill Nubian languages in Southern Kordofan.

Figure 1. The Nubian Family (Bechhaus 2011:15)



In the 1960's, large numbers of Nobiin speakers were forcibly displaced away from their historical land by the Nile Rivers in both Egypt and Sudan due to the construction of the High Dam near Aswan. Prior to that forcible displacement, Nobiin was primarily spoken in the region between the first cataract of the Nile in southern Egypt, to Kerma, in the north of Sudan. The following map of southern Egypt and Sudan encompasses the areas in which Nobiin speakers have historically resided (from Thelwall & Schadeberg, 1983: 228).



Nubia

Nubia is the land of the ancient African civilization. It is located in southern Egypt along the Nile River banks and extends into the land that is known as “Sudan”. The region Nubia had experienced writing since a long time ago. During the ancient period of the Kingdoms of Kush,

the Kushite/Nubians used the hieroglyphic writing system. During the time of Meroe, the Nubians¹ developed a consonant-based logographic (Abjad) writing system known as Meroitic script which was prevalent on their ancient temples (Putman 2008).

A new writing style known as the “Old Nubian Script” appeared in Nubia beginning in the 5th century (Werner et al. 2000:22-23), following the rise of the three mediaeval Christian Nubian Kingdoms; Alodia, Makuria, and Nobatia. It uses primarily Greek letters with the addition of some Coptic and Meroitic letters. Through the Christian Nubian era, Old Nubian script prevailed as the main writing system for at least ten centuries. The collapse of the last Nubian kingdom Alodia in the sixteenth century and the dominance of Islam in Nubia caused the gradual extinction of Old Nubian script. After the Islamization of Nubia, which likely began with the collapse of Dongola in 1323 (Lobban 2003:148), the Arabic culture and the Arabic language influenced Nubia. The modern Nobiin community of today is a bilingual and speaks both Arabic and Nobiin.

Old Nubian Script

The archaic form of Nobiin is called Old Nubian (Bechhaus 2011:20) and it was used as the official language of the Nubian Christian Kingdom of Nobatia. It was inscribed in the so-called Coptic-Greek alphabets with some domestic modifications in both calligraphy and orthography, and appeared in the ancient Christian scripture, which conspicuously distinguished the Old Nubian corpus contents from other Coptic ones. The Old Nubian script

OLD NUBIAN ALPHABET

ⲁ	a	ⲓ	i	Ⲡ	r	Ⲕ	sh
ⲃ	b	ⲕ	k	Ⲙ	s	Ⲩ	h
ⲅ	g	ⲗ	l	Ⲛ	t	Ⲭ	j <small>(as Eng. judge)</small>
ⲇ	d	ⲙ	m	Ⲟ	u	Ⲯ	ñ <small>(as Eng. singer)</small>
ⲉ	e	ⲛ	n	Ⲥ	ph	Ⲱ	ñ <small>(as Eng. onion)</small>
ⲏ	z	ⲣ	x	Ⲩ	ch <small>(as Germ. Bach)</small>	Ⲕ, Ⲕⲟⲩ	ou, w <small>(as Eng. wish)</small>
ⲑ	ê	ⲟ	o	Ⲡ	ps		
ⲓ	th <small>(as Eng. thin)</small>	ⲡ	p	Ⲕ	ô		



uses the twenty-four Greek letters in an uncial style. In addition, the Old Nubian script employs three characters taken from the Coptic alphabets: (Ⲕ: shai), (Ⲩ: hore), (Ⲭ: kyima), and three additional Meroitic letters (Browne 2002:6): (ⲅ), (Ⲱ), (Ⲕ). These scriptural Meroitic symbols represent respectively the IPA sounds; [ŋ], [ɲ] and [w].

Figure 3. Old Nubian Letters²

¹ The term Nubia is equivalent to Kush and it represents a region which extends from the South of Egypt to include contemporary Sudan and South Sudan and part of other neighboring countries where descendants of Kush had settled.

² Old Nubian Alphabet. MediaWiki (contribs). [23 November 2010] available from Medieval Nubia Info Website: http://www.medievalnubia.info/dev/index.php/File:Old_Nubian_alphabet_Eng.png [access on Sep 30, 2018].

NLS Nobiin Orthography “nobiin agii”

In the last fifty many Nobiin writing methods came into being as a response to the strong will of the local community to preserve its endangered language. In 1990s attributed Dr. Mokhtar Khalil Kabbara, a Nubian professor who worked in the Department of Antiquities at Cairo University. worked on the revitalization of the writing of the Nobiin language using the Old Nubian script (Mokhtar 1996:8). His orthography was popular among many Nubians in Egypt and Sudan. Motivated by the work of Dr. Kabbara, lately the Nubian Language Society (NLS) developed a phonemic orthography known as “nobiin agii” to write Nobiin based on Old Nubian script. nobiin agii is an uncial which employs the use of one-size characters. The main function of nobiin agii is to represent properly the Nobiin phonology and to preserve its phonological characteristics. This orthography includes twenty-four letters; seventeen are consonants, five are vowels, and two are semivowels.

The vowels in Nobiin are either long or short. In nobiin agii method, a macron sign (-) is used on top of the vowel letter to indicate its vocalic length. It is noteworthy to mention that the use of the macron on top of consonants and vowels is found in Old Nubian Script but for a different purpose.³

Short vowels	transliteration	Long vowels	transliteration
ⲁ	/a/	ⲁ̄	/aa/
ⲉ	/e/	ⲉ̄	/ee/
ⲓ	/i/	ⲓ̄	/ii/
ⲟ	/o/	ⲟ̄	/oo/
ⲟ̄̄	/u/	ⲟ̄̄̄	/uu/

Letter	IPA transliteration
ⲡ	/b/
Ⲕ	/c/
Ⲍ	/d/
Ⲓ	/f/
Ⲓ	/g/
Ⲓ	/h/
Ⲍ	/j/
ⲕ	/k/
ⲕ	/l/

³ Top-marking of both vowels and consonants in Old Nubian Script is not either to indicate vocalic length, or to indicate gemination of consonants.

М	/m/
N	/n/
Г	/ŋ/
Ф	/ɲ/
Р	/r/
С	/s/
Ω	/ʃ/
Т	/t/
Ъ	/w/
Ï	/y/

Letter	Example	Meaning in Eng.
Δ	ΔΓ	mouth
Ε	ΕΓΕΔ	sheep
Ι	ΙΔ	man
Ο	ΟΓ	chest
ΟΥ	ΟΥΡ	head
Δ̄	Δ̄Γ	sit (imperative)
Ε̄	Ε̄Ν	mother
Ῑ	ῙΓ	fire
Ο̄	Ο̄Γ	call, invite (imperative)
ΟῩ	ΟῩΝΙ	our (1st pl poss. pronoun)
Π	ΠΟΥΡΟΥ	girl
Β	ΚΙΒΒΑΔ,	gazelle, deer
Δ	ΔΙΡΤΑΔ,	hen
Φ	ΦΕΝΤΙ	palm tree
Γ	ΓΕΛ	red
Ζ	ΖΑΡΑΜ	sky, heaven
Δ	ΔΙΓΙΡ	rat
Κ	ΚΟ	lion
Λ	ΑΛΛΙ	robe
Μ	ΜΟΥΡΤΙ	horse
Ν	ΝΟΓ	house
Γ	ΓΦΟΓΕCСΙ	flower
Ф	ΜΔФ	eye

ρ	ḄṖṬἰ	island
Ϸ	ϷἰṖṖ	sailing boat
ϣ	ϣḄNḂἰ	ostrich
Ṭ	ṬḠḂ	son
Ṣ	ṢἰNḂἰ	star
ἰ	ἰḠ	my mother (mama)

Georgetown University Nobiin Documentation Project

This collection contains a description of the phonology, morphology, and basic word order properties of the Nobiin language, compiled by fourteen students at Georgetown University during and after a one-semester Field Methods course on the language, led by Professor Hannah Sande. It also contains recordings (.wav files) of collected texts and translation-based elicitation sessions. All recorded material is accompanied by transcriptions in IPA, glosses, and English translations (.pdf files).

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