Ancient Egypt was very much a crossroads. Its location in the north-eastern corner of Africa made it a central hub for trade with the Near East, the Mediterranean, and cultures to the south. Builders, traders, diplomats, travellers and nomads passed through the country bringing with them their languages and scripts as well as their knowledge of science, literature, art and mathematics.

Although foreigners could occupy high positions in the Egyptian administration, the official political narrative portrayed everything outside Egypt’s borders as chaos and a possible threat to its sovereignty. During the first millennium BC Egypt was conquered by Libyan, Nubian, Assyrian and Persian armies – each defeat brought cultural changes in its wake.

The conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great in 332 BC resulted in the introduction of a new language, Greek. The indigenous language was also transcribed into a new alphabetic script called Coptic.

Later, under Roman rule (30 BC – AD 395), Egyptian influences were phased out and indigenous Egyptians were considered to be on the lowest rung of society, far below Romans and Greeks.

The Egyptian language clung on as the language of the Coptic Church and its survival is a key tool in reconstructing the sound of Ancient Egyptian.