

## 2 Greek Meets Egyptian at the Temple Gate: Bilingual Papyri from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt (Third Century BCE–Fourth Century CE)

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The linguistic cohabitation of Egyptian and Greek in Egypt is one of the longest in the ancient world. It extends from the conquest of the country by a Greek army led by Alexander of Macedon (332 BCE) until sometime after the Arab conquest (641 CE). While throughout this time Egyptian remained the majority language, under the Ptolemies Greek became the linguistic vehicle for state administration, one of two languages used for the administration of justice, and the language privileged by the country's cultural elites. Greek retained its roles and prestige after Egypt's incorporation into the Roman Empire (30 BCE), while Egyptian came under hard pressure as a means of written communication and eventually transitioned to an alphabetic script based on Greek – a language we know as Coptic.

This chapter will present the sources and contexts of Greek–Egyptian bilingualism and will outline the main angles from which the phenomenon has been approached in research carried out at the interface of papyrology, Egyptology, linguistics, and ancient history. The core of the chapter presents a selection of case studies that give glimpses into the shifting relations between the two languages over time and exemplify typical bilingual settings and interactions, and the questions raised about them. Where possible, examples will be derived from the domain of religion, broadly defined. This vantage point appears advantageous for multiple reasons. An important reason is its potential to yield new perspectives that will complement the earlier studies and accounts of multilingualism in Egypt (e.g., Bagnall, 2021; Depauw, 2012; Fournet, 2009; Lieven, 2018; Papaconstantinou, 2010; Peremans, 1964, 1983; Rémondon, 1964; Rochette, 1996; Thompson, 2009; Torallas Tovar, 2010a,b; Torallas Tovar & Vierros, 2019; Vierros, 2012, 2014). Another reason is the key role that the Egyptian religious functionaries, priests, and temple-trained scribes played as part of the Ptolemaic administrative machine. This role, that facilitated greatly the Greek rule in Egypt, was contingent on bilingualism. A third, no less important, reason is that in the realm of religion the relative

I am grateful to the reviewers for constructive comments and to Aneta Pavlenko for important feedback, inspiring discussions, careful editorial work, and, not least, patience.

positions of the two languages were less given than in the other arenas in which they interacted. In fact, Egyptian was the conveyor of a venerable religious tradition that fascinated the Greek segment of the population and motivated cultural and linguistic transmission from Egyptian to Greek.

The fascination that the Egyptian religious and historical traditions could exert on Greeks is evidenced by the closing lines of a hymn inscribed on the forecourt gate of the temple of Isis-Thermouthis at Narmouthis (Medinet Madi) in the Arsinoite district (Fayum). It was one of four hymns in traditional Greek meters and diction that an otherwise unknown individual with the Egyptian-inspired Greek name Isidorus ('gift of Isis') dedicated sometime in the 80s BCE. The closing verses of the hymn comment on the incorporation in it of Egyptian lore, in particular of legends about Pramarrēs, the deified Middle Kingdom ruler Amenemhat III, founder of the Narmouthis temple:

Having learned these things with certainty from men who research and record the past / and having myself inscribed and set them all up publicly, / I translated for the benefit of Greeks the power of a prince who was a god / since no other mortal possessed such power. (Hymn IV, 37–40 my translation and emphasis<sup>1</sup>)

Isidorus advertises his mediating role in the transfer of knowledge from the Egyptian tradition to interested speakers of Greek. He takes pride in the linguistic competence that allows him to "translate" (*hermēneusa*) an Egyptian tradition and set it up in Greek linguistic and literary guise on the temple gate where it would be accessible to monolingual visitors. So great is Isidorus' linguistic self-consciousness that he even claims a share in the power attributed to the legendary god-king by dint of subtly disguised ambiguity: "No other mortal" in the last verse may refer both to Pramarrēs and the bilingual translator/poet.

By referring to his hymns as "translations," Isidorus expressly inscribed his act of linguistic and cultural mediation in a tradition pioneered circa two centuries earlier by the Egyptian priest Manetho. The historian Flavius Josephus informs us that in *Aegyptiaca*, a universal chronicle with the focus on Egyptian history and religious tradition intended for a Greek readership, Manetho undertook "to translate the Egyptian history from the sacred writings [i.e. writings in Hieroglyphic and Hieratic]." <sup>2</sup> This programmatic statement by Manetho, which Josephus presumably reported accurately, launched the tradition of communication and translation from Egyptian to Greek in the domain of religion but was not met with unanimous approval in Egyptian priestly circles (Rochette, 1995).

<sup>1</sup> An alternative translation can be found in Moyer (2016, p. 233).

<sup>2</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.26.

Isidorus was one of those who by virtue of their language skills facilitated the flow of religious ideas and traditions from Egyptian to Greek. His cultural adherence – since at that late phase of the Hellenistic period it makes little sense to speak of ethnic Greeks or ethnic Egyptians – and his precise association with the temple are uncertain. More significant is the location in which he chose to display his ‘translation’ – the gate of the Narmouthis temple (Moyer, 2016). As the inner space of Egyptian temples was accessible to priests only, the temple gate and the sacred way leading up to it were arenas of manifold activities (financial, judicial, civic, etc.) and hence a hub of interactions, linguistic and cultural, between inhabitants of diverse linguistic backgrounds (Clarysse, 2010a).

## **2.1 The Sources and Research Methods on Bilingualism in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt**

The keys to unlocking Egypt’s bilingual culture have been provided by papyri, inscriptions, and graffiti in the two languages. The study of these source texts gathered pace after Napoleon’s campaign (1798–1801) and the decipherment of Hieroglyphs by Champollion (1822). The inscription on which this milestone development relied, the ‘Rosetta stone,’ is a bilingual/three-script document in Egyptian (Hieroglyphic and Demotic) and in Greek, with a religious background. It records the decree by which the congregation of the Egyptian priests at Memphis (196 BCE) conferred honours on Ptolemy V Epiphanes for benefactions to the temples and his love of Egypt and its people (Bowman et al. 2021, no. 126). Its role in the decipherment of Egypt’s earliest writing system is emblematic of the role played by documentary evidence (papyri, inscriptions, etc.) in illuminating Egypt’s bilingual culture. The authoritative statement of the Egyptian priests also foregrounds the significance of religion and its practitioners in Greek–Egyptian linguistic interactions.

Papyri and inscriptions host a wide variety of written text types: literary and official texts, as well as texts that document life in the Greco-Egyptian society in its different phases and aspects at various social levels. Official and private correspondence, petitions and declarations to authorities, private agreements, court proceedings, handbooks of magic and applied spells, medical treatises and prescriptions, school texts, hymns, prayers, oracular questions, horoscopes, mummy labels, and funerary inscriptions are only a sample of the text types represented among this rich source material.

The textual corpus is sufficiently wide-ranging in space and time and socioculturally diverse to offer a cross-section of language use and interactions under Greek and Roman rule. However, this rich body of evidence also poses challenges. A serious challenge is that the research basis consists exclusively of written texts. The perspectives thus gained pertain largely to language use in

written communication; in certain cases, what we get is views on biliteracy (Mairs, 2012). On the other hand, as some of the case studies discussed below demonstrate, oral communication is not entirely out of sight. Some texts allow assumptions or raise questions about the language(s) of the oral interactions preceding or following the production of a written text. Moreover, the chance survival of the material and the uncertainties surrounding the provenance of texts that have emerged by way of the antiquities trade entail that our view of the linguistic tableau in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt is bound to remain partial. By far the most conspicuous gap concerns the linguistic environment in the capital, Alexandria. As the papyri from the city have perished due to the humid climate in the Nile delta, reconstruction of the linguistic mosaic in that major urban center relies on the limited number of texts from Alexandria recovered elsewhere, the inscriptions from the city, and linguistic perspectives embedded in literary texts. Finally, a balanced evaluation of Greek–Egyptian bilingualism requires publication of more source texts in Demotic and, not least, collaboration between experts in Greek and in Demotic papyrology so that complete studies of bilingual texts can be produced to complement the perspectives gained by some recent milestone publications (Mairs & Martin, 2008–2009; Renberg & Naether, 2010; Vandorpe & Vleeming, 2017).

To understand Greek–Egyptian bilingualism/biliteracy, scholars examine (a) the content of the relevant texts, (b) their language, and/or (c) material and graphic aspects. Information about the circumstances in which the text was produced, the persons mentioned, their relations and activities, as well as references to written or oral communication in Greek or Egyptian have allowed researchers to identify typical bilingual settings and intermediaries. The grammar of the text (spelling and morpho-syntactical variation, semantic shifts, nonstandard expressions) indicate the degree of a scribe's familiarity with Greek or Egyptian and disclose first language (L1) influence. The script and/or scribal implements used, and the relation between the language(s) and structure of a text also contribute insights on linguistic competences.

The evidence that occupies center stage in the study of Greek–Egyptian bilingualism includes (a) bilingual documents, written partly in Greek and partly in Egyptian and (b) bilingual archives, that is, assemblages of documents that pertain to an individual or a group (typically, a family) that comprise documents in Greek, in Egyptian and/or bilingual documents. Monolingual texts are not devoid of interest either, especially when they contain mentions of code-switching, oral interpretation, (in)ability to write or communicate orally in Greek or in Egyptian, or when they display language use typical for bilinguals (peculiar spellings, calques, expressions translated literally, etc.). Translations, explicitly presenting themselves as such or identifiable on other grounds, indicate the social sectors in which bilingual

professionals were active. In the case of Egyptian and Greek pride of place is held by religious settings, notarial offices, and the law courts.

Accordingly, the prevailing approaches to Egyptian–Greek language contact have been sociohistorical and sociolinguistic, with greater or lesser emphasis on either element or a balanced combination. The former approach has been pioneered in studies of bilingualism by Egyptologists, papyrologists, and ancient historians with a particularly active research tradition in the Low Countries (Clarysse, Peremans, Pestman, Rochette, Vandorpe, and others). Adams' (2003) monograph examining the contacts between Latin and indigenous languages within the Roman Empire has stimulated a flood of sociolinguistic studies of language interactions within the empire and beyond (e.g., Adams et al., 2002; Mullen & James, 2012; Vierros, 2012). Finally, important insights into the interplay between scribal traditions and language choice have been generated by studies informed by the principles of material philology (Cromwell & Grossman, 2017).

## 2.2 Case Studies

### 2.2.1 *Dreams of Bilinguals*

Among the earliest and most interesting bilingual papyri from Hellenistic Egypt is a private letter in Greek, below which the sender has added a dream narrative in Demotic (Renberg & Naether, 2010). The papyrus has been assigned to the latter half of the third century BCE, that is, within a century or so from the Greek conquest. The letter was sent from a man called Ptolemaios to a friend called Achilles. The sender's name was associated with the Macedonian-Greek dynasty, while the recipient has the name of the legendary protagonist of Homer's *Iliad*. Achilles may have resided in the Arsinoite district (Fayum), an area densely populated with Greek settlers. The correspondents may have been either descendants of the settlers or Hellenized Egyptians (Prada, 2013; Renberg & Naether, 2010). Parts of the letter are lost or obscure, but this is what can be gleaned from what remains. Ptolemaios informs his friend about a dream he had, that apparently concerns Achilles. The formulation that connects the letter with the dream narrative reads as follows:

*[I]t also (?) seemed good to me that I should fully inform you about the dream, so that you will know in what way the gods know you. I have written below in Egyptian, so that you will know precisely. When I was about to go to sleep, I wrote two short letters, the one concerning Taunchis the daughter of Thermouthis, the other concerning Tetimouthis the daughter of Taues, who is the daughter of Ptolemaios. And yet one more [letter] exiting I placed . . . [the text breaks off]. (translated in Renberg & Naether, 2010, pp. 51, 54, my emphasis)*

In the conclusion of the letter Ptolemaios exhorts Achilles to “pour a drink for [anoint] yourself, in which manner *I too celebrated a fine day.*” He introduces the Demotic dream narrative thus: “I saw myself in a dream in the following way: I am standing at the doorway of the sanctuary. A priest is sitting there, and many people are standing beside him.” The narrative is concluded with the reassurance, issued either by the narrator (Ptolemaios) or by the priest who figures in it: “Psais, <the> great god, *knows your name*, I recognized (?) it in my heart. The good order, may it be known” (translated in Renberg & Naether, 2010, p. 54, my emphasis).

Before commenting on the language and contents of this remarkable document, it is worth noting that Ptolemaios writes both the Greek and the Demotic sections with a reed pen, the writing implement of Greek scribes, instead of switching to the rush pen traditionally used by scribes of Demotic (Kidd, 2013; Tait, 1988). He thus adheres to a new scribal fashion, that of writing Demotic with a reed pen, that emerged at around the time when the letter was written and that has been associated with bilingual scribes trained in both traditions (Clarysse, 1993). Ptolemaios’ Greek is competent and free from spelling errors. It has two remarkable features: (a) verbal echoes of the administrative jargon (*diasaphēsai* [to fully inform you]; *hypegrapsa* [I have written below]) and (b) expressive Egyptianisms, the most remarkable of which is the expression “I celebrated a fine day” (*hēmeran kalēn ēgagon*). It is unattested in Greek and is considered to be a translation of the Egyptian phrase *ir hrw nfr*, which designates celebration and (often uncontrolled) festivity occasioned by a religious festival (Renberg & Naether, 2010; Prada, 2013). In my view, a more accurate description of this expression is as a combination of Greek loan translation of the Egyptian “good/fine day” (*hrw nfr* = *hēmeran kalēn*) with the Greek verb used in the phrase “celebrate a religious festival” (*agō heortēn*). Ptolemaios’ transposition of an Egyptian religious concept into Greek produces a syntactically and semantically innovative fusion of the two languages.

The expression “in what way the gods know you,” which is not idiomatic in Greek either, is likely to have an Egyptian background too. Even if no precise equivalent can be offered in Egyptian, it is echoed in the expression “Psais . . . *knows your name*” in the Demotic part and reflects the Egyptian belief that dreams convey messages about the attitude of the gods and therefore offer the opportunity to humans to influence the divine will (Renberg & Naether, 2010). In sum, the graphic and linguistic picture of the document reveals the impact of advanced bilingualism with linguistic innovations in both directions. This would have been the result of substantial contact with both languages, which would have been achieved either through scribal training and administrative work, as indicated by other features in the language of the letter, or through a mixed family background.

As to the relation between the language in which the dream was conveyed (Egyptian) and the language in which Ptolemaios usually dreamed, the issue is complicated since the dream reported was in all likelihood an incubated dream, that is, a dream induced by sleeping in a temple with the purpose of divination. In Egypt and other ancient cultures, the messages conveyed by divinatory dreams were encoded in puns or word plays, the ‘keys’ to which were found in dream interpretation manuals. The code-switch for the dream conveys above all the Egyptian religious frame within which dream interpretation was sought, not necessarily the primary dreaming language of Ptolemaios himself, whatever his ethnic or cultural identity and his L1 may have been (Kidd, 2011; Prada, 2013). In any case, encoding and comprehension of puns indicates advanced proficiency in Egyptian.

Half a century or so later, in the much better documented setting of the Serapeum at Saqqâra, the necropolis west of Memphis, we come across a pair of bilingual siblings who also recorded their own and others’ dreams in Greek and Demotic (Legras, 2011; Thompson, 2012; Wilcken, 1927). The two brothers were offspring of a Macedonian soldier-settler. The older brother, Ptolemaios, spent twenty years (ca. 172–152 BCE) in voluntary confinement at the precinct of Astarte/Ishtar. Ptolemaios’ dreams were recorded in Greek (Lewis, 1986). This is hardly surprising given his insistence on his Greek identity in petitions concerning disputes he had with Egyptians. More perplexing is that he recorded in Greek dreams of individuals with Egyptian names, to wit the young woman Taues and the man Nektembes. Their dreams contain first-person sequences, that is, we hear the dreamer narrate her/his dream and report her/his own words and the words of others, as for example, in Taues’ dream: “I wished to turn back; I was saying that *all these many together are nine*. They said: ‘*yes, you are released; you may go.*’ It is late for me” (translated in Lewis, 1986, pp. 81–82, my emphasis).

This discontinuity raises a question: Would a native speaker of Egyptian dream in Greek or did Taues communicate her dream to Ptolemaios in Egyptian and he translated it into Greek to submit to one of the Greek dream-interpreters at the Serapeum (Renberg, 2017)? We know that Taues and her twin sister needed the brothers’ writing services to compose petitions in Greek, but we do not know whether she had oral communication skills in Greek. If she had, it is not inconceivable that she had dreams in Greek since comparative studies show that bilingual dreaming does not require a high level of second language (L2) proficiency (Sicard & de Bot, 2013). At any rate, most of the communication between the twin sisters and the Macedonian brothers, Ptolemaios and Apollonios, is likely to have been in Egyptian.

Similar questions are raised by two Demotic dream records attributed to Apollonios (Botti, 1941; Bresciani et al., 1978; Legras, 2011). Did Apollonios, who wrote mostly in Greek, dream in Egyptian? Or did Demotic priest-scribes

translate his dreams from Greek? The former option is a strong probability as some of the linguistic traits of Apollonios' Greek reflect the influence of Egyptian (Vierros, 2021). It is all the more interesting that a double identity is negotiated in one of these dreams: "Second [dream]. A man sings: *Apollonios in Greek, Peteharenpi in Egyptian is the one who knows this*" (after Quack, 2008, p. 373, my emphasis). The speaker identifies Apollonios in Greek and then gives the Egyptian equivalent of his name (Peteharenpi means 'the one who Horus of Buto [Greek equivalent: Apollo] has given'). The double identification of Apollonios almost certainly nods to the practice of 'polyonymy,' that is, the use of double names by individuals. Research into this social practice in Hellenistic Egypt suggests that its popularity rose steadily from the second century BCE and that one of the most common name combinations was that of corresponding theophoric names – one Greek, the other Egyptian (Coussement, 2016). There is no evidence that Apollonios had a double name in real life, but the dream at least holds out this possibility for him.

Awareness of Greek–Egyptian linguistic and theological equivalents is attested by another papyrus copied by Apollonios. It contains the Greek version of a piece of Egyptian historical fiction, *Nectanebos' Dream*, or *The Prophecy of Petesis* (Ryholt, 2002; Wilcken, 1927, pp. 369–374). The multiple Egyptian formulae reflected in the Greek text leave no doubt that we are faced with a translation that discloses the linguistic and theological adaptations of the Egyptian hypotext when it supplies the Egyptian word for the boat that transports god Onuris ("a papyrus boat, called *rōmps* in Egyptian, came to anchor at Memphis") and the Greek equivalent of this divine figure ("called Onuris in Egyptian and Ares in Greek").

The large archive of ostraca, also from Saqqâra, that belonged to the funerary priest Ḥor of Sebennytos, furnishes a comparable view of the language competence of a mobile Egyptian religious functionary active in the same sanctuary at around the same time (ca. 167/6–147 BCE). Ḥor had held a lower-class priestly office at Isiopolis (Delta) before moving to Saqqâra to give his services to the ibis-cult associated with Thoth, the god of writing. Ḥor's written record – oracular dreams pertaining to contemporary events apparently communicated to the king, personal dreams, petitions, memoranda, and hymns – is almost exclusively in Demotic (Jennes, 2019; Ray, 1976). Sole exceptions are drafts of a dream oracle from Hermes Trismegistos addressed to the country's rulers (Ray, 1976, pp. 1–6). The Greek of these drafts is "execrable" (according to Ray), with major problems of syntax and semantics and at least one sequence in draft B depends directly on Egyptian (Ray, 1976, p. 3). Ḥor's writings indicate that he operated in a Egypto-centric universe in contrast to the linguistically mixed world of Ptolemaios and his younger brother Apollonios. It is noteworthy that the only two references to a



language/script in Ḥor's writings concern Egyptian: "speaking the words of the Egyptian(s)" and "I gave it to him (in) writing of the Egyptian(s)" (Ray, 1976, pp. 5, 112). Hor turned to Greek only when he needed to pass his message across to the Greek-speaking authorities at the highest level. Even then, and despite the faultless spelling, the Greek text went through several drafts to reach a syntactically functional state – which indicates a low level of competence in and minimal active use of this language.

### 2.2.2 *Egyptians in Contact with Greek: Bilingual Archives*

There is virtually no chance that we will manage to form an accurate picture of communication in the army, in the markets, and on the streets where Greek and Egyptian speakers mixed on a daily basis. We are better placed when it comes to notarial offices, vital nodes of language contact, where oral discourse of the transacting parties was translated into written text in one language, the other, or both.

Egyptian notary offices were traditionally attached to a temple and notarial deeds contained the clause that the notary "writes in the name of the priests of . . ." (Chaufray & Wegner, 2016; Zauzich, 1968). Scribal training took place under the auspices of temples. Scribes often held priestly office and priests held multiple scribal titles that reflected their administrative tasks (Arlt, 2008; Muhs, 2005). As a result of a policy of expanding the network of Greek notary (agoranomic) offices and making the registration of Demotic legal instruments mandatory from 146/5 BCE, the volume of business at temple notary offices shrank and so did temple income (Pestman, 1985a).

Greek notarial offices recruited bilingual scribes. Some were members of the established Egyptian families of temple-trained scribes, who used Greek names when acting as agoranomic notaries and Egyptian names in their private transactions (Pestman, 1978; Vandorpe, 2011; Vierros, 2012). The proficiency of Greek notarial scribes in Demotic has been proven for the early Roman Arsinoite district (Fayum) where, even in strongholds of Egyptian cults (Tebtynis, Soknopaiou Nesos), the Demotic titles of notary scribes reveal their identity with the known 'Greek' notaries (Muhs, 2005). Their bilingualism and ability to serve Greek and Egyptian clients alike probably played a part in the success of the Greek notarial offices, especially in areas with dense Egyptian populations (Vandorpe, 2011).

Bilingual papyrological archives of funerary priests spanning from the second century BCE to the early first century CE indicate that in these circles Greek was used for the mandated liaisons with the authorities or in connection with disputes referred to Greek magistrates or Greek courts (Clarysse, 2010b). Petitions to higher authorities were in Greek. This is exemplified nicely by a series of appeals for protection addressed to Ptolemy X Alexander I by another

of the funerary priests active at Saqqâra, Peteesis, son of Chonouphis at 99–98 BCE (Thompson, 2012; Wilcken, 1927, pp. 453–472). Greek was also the language of transactions involving state revenues. This is evidenced by the tax receipts and an agreement regulating dues in connection with mummification rights, all in Greek, in the archive of the undertakers of Apollonos polis, Cynopolite district (Clarysse, 2007, 2010b).

Translations of documents from Demotic were made in the context of disputes referred to Greek magistrates or Greek courts, the popularity of which grew steadily among Egyptians. When in 117 BCE the funerary priest Horos was caught up in a dispute over the ownership of a house in Great Diospolis (Thebes/Luxor), his lawyer produced a Greek translation of the sale agreement, originally drawn up in Demotic, to support his client's claim to the property (Bagnall & Derow, 2004, pp. 218–225). Other translations of Egyptian documents into Greek in this and other archives were also made for use in court. Even documents without known context – but with the tag “translated [from Egyptian]” – are likely to have been produced in connection with legal battles (Vandorpe & Vleeming, 2017).

Thompson (2012) has stressed the contribution of legal engagements to Hellenization in Egypt. To illustrate the point, she analyzed the use of Greek by Peteesis' descendants at Saqqâra: When in 89 BCE Peteesis' son, Chonouphis, made out a loan to an Egyptian by the name Peteimouthes, the agreement was drawn up in Greek. Peteesis' granddaughter Thaues-Asklepias, whose Greek alias commemorates her father's association with the great Asklepieion near Memphis, had her Demotic marriage agreement registered in a Greek notarial office and referred the case against her husband for failure to comply with the terms to a Greek court. This option became available to Egyptians from 118 BCE when a royal decree connected the language of the documents with the court that would hear a potential dispute (Pestman, 1985b). Nevertheless, this generation's turn to Greek was not wholesale, since in 78 BCE the funerary revenues of Peteesis' homonymous grandson were stipulated in a Demotic agreement. The determining factor for the use of Greek by practitioners of the Egyptian religion was possibly pragmatism and the need for some sense of security, perhaps connected with the view of Greek courts as more powerful and the enforcement of their decisions as more efficient. In contrast, transactions pertaining to matters of traditional religion (mummification) and involving fellow Egyptians relied on Demotic.

Geographical situation within the country and the ethnic composition of the population in the area must have made a difference too. While the descendants of the Egyptian Peteesis at Saqqâra gravitated toward Greek two centuries after the inception of the Greek rule, language use in the family of the Greek cavalry officer Dryton at Pathyris south of Thebes apparently moved in the opposite direction in the mid-second century BCE. Dryton drew up three wills in Greek

and even copied Greek poetry. His second wife, Apollonia-Senmonthis, had her private financial agreements drawn up mostly in Greek after 136 BCE when a Greek notary office opened at Pathyris. However, the next generation in the family turned to Demotic in their private affairs (loans, marriage contracts, divorce agreements). Only their petitions and some tax receipts are in Greek. The fact that their mother's family and the families of their spouses were firmly embedded in their Egyptian milieu and its legal preferences and traditions, as well as the location of Pathyris far from the more Hellenized parts of Egypt possibly played a role in the family's linguistic choices (Clarysse, 2010b; Vandorpe, 2002, 2014; Vierros, 2008).

The written trail of Dryton's family raises complex questions about oral, reading, and writing competences. It is possible that family members spoke both languages, but this is less certain of the female members. Dryton and his son Esthladas wrote passable Greek, but the former's competence in Demotic may have been limited. Since he received at least one letter in Demotic, Dryton may have had reading competence in Egyptian too (Vandorpe, 2002). Alternatively, he may have resorted to a notarial or other scribe who read it for him, as he and his family members did when they drew up notarial or private agreements in Egyptian. It is highly unlikely that Apollonia-Senmonthis was literate in any language since her husband wrote her accounts in Greek. This is even more certain for their daughters. The lack of private letters by or to the female members of the family could be an indication of illiteracy. This would be compatible with what we know about the education of women and what we know of this Egyptian-dominated community in which Dryton had difficulties getting hold of people literate in Greek to witness his will – instead he resorted to witnesses subscribing in Egyptian, three of them local priests (Vandorpe, 2014).

## **2.3 Egyptian in the Roman Period: From 'Collective Agraphia' to a Greek-Inspired Script**

### *2.3.1 Speaking Egyptian, Writing 'Greek'*

The position of Demotic as a language of private legal documents was critically affected by a set of requirements for contractually validated agreements that took effect in the late Ptolemaic/early Roman period (Depauw, 2012; Lewis, 1993). Signatures in the witnesses' chosen language were replaced by subscriptions of the transacting parties in Greek (Muhs, 2005). We encounter a hybrid practice in the documents from the archive of Satabous, a priest at Soknopaiou Nesos (Arsinoite district), drawn up at different points during the first hundred years of Roman rule (Hoogendijk & Feucht, 2013).

In 11 CE Satabous bought a house from a priest by the Greek name Chairemon. The agreement was drawn up at the Greek notary office at the village where the seller resided. The body of the agreement is in Demotic, followed by a summary of contents (registration note) in Greek, the declaration of the seller in Greek, and the declaration of the buyer in Demotic (Muhs, 2014, pp. 113–115). This bilingual arrangement suggests that Greek notary offices incorporated linguistic services formerly available through temple notaries. The graphic and material features of this impressive document confirm this idea. The Demotic sections are written with a reed pen, a writing implement associated with the Greek scribal tradition, while the overlap of the papyrus sheet-joins (right over left) reflects the direction of writing in Greek. This and other documents from the archive are transitional from a linguistic viewpoint too. By the end of the first century CE Demotic ceased to be used for notarial documents and other document types, such as tax receipts (Vandorpe & Clarysse, 2008). As priests in a stronghold of the Egyptian religion, Satabous and his descendants continued using bilingual legal documents and some of them (Satabous and his eldest son Herieus) subscribed in Egyptian, be it due to illiteracy in Greek or as a statement of identity. On the other hand, bilingual and Hellenized members of the Egyptian priesthood like Chairemon or the Kronion-Isidora family at Tebtynis (Hickey, 2012; Muhs, 2005) were far better adapted to the new climate created by the promotion of Greek by the Roman administration.

As Greek gained in prominence and Demotic was increasingly confined to the religious sphere (temple libraries, internal temple affairs, funerary industry), scribal competence in Demotic declined. This resulted in a state of “collective agraphia” (Fournet, 2020, p. 4) as the Egyptian-speaking majority was left with the sole option of using Greek for all types of written communication, including private correspondence. Very few letters in Demotic are extant after the late first century CE (Bagnall, 1993, 2021; Depauw, 2006). Thus, larger segments of the population became familiar with Greek – some for professional reasons and some with the aid of bilingual intermediaries (scribes or readers). This is illustrated by the note that prefaces a letter in Greek from the mid-second century CE. The letter was sent by a man called Ptolemaios to his mother, Zosime, and his sister, Rhodous. The addressees must have been illiterate in Greek since an added message instructs an anonymous intermediary: “You, whoever you are, who are reading the letter, make a small effort and translate to the women what is written in this letter and communicate it to them” (Bülow-Jacobsen & McCarren, 1985, pp. 78–79). The use of the technical term for translation (*methermēneuō*) indicates that the sender envisages the linguistic transposition of the message, apparently into Egyptian, which would have been the language spoken by the two women despite their nice Greek names.

Some of the phonological features of Ptolemaios' Greek, especially the confusion /e – o/ in unstressed syllables, testify to the influence of Egyptian phonology on his spelling. Studies of phonological and morpho-syntactical variation in the rich corpus of papyrus documents have demonstrated the value of an individualized sociolinguistic approach to language variation in documents, one that differentiates between internal developments in Greek and crosslinguistic influence (Bentein, 2015; Dahlgren & Leiwo, 2020; Leiwo, 2010, 2017; Stolk, 2017; Vierros, 2012, 2021). Features that indicate Egyptian influence on written Greek have been identified already in the third century BCE archives (Clarysse, 1993, 2010c; Evans, 2012). For a society in which the connection between language use and ethnic identity is not straightforward, the challenge is to distinguish between variation arising from (a) imperfect L2 command, (b) L2 influence on L1 in Greeks with prolonged exposure to Egyptian and (c) language contact phenomena. With the passage of time, Egyptian-influenced features manifested themselves in written Greek at all levels (Torallas Tovar, 2010b). Some researchers have even argued that from the second century CE an 'Egyptian variety' of Greek is discernible, at least on the phonological level, with stress-induced vowel reductions as its prime indicator (Dahlgren, 2016).

Linguistic influence of Greek on Egyptian appears modest before the adoption of the Coptic script. Greek loanwords in Demotic fall into certain, semantically specialized, groups: titles (for gods, kings, officials), derivatives of proper names, and terminology pertaining to the administration, the army, and economic life (Clarysse, 1987). These overlap to a large extent with realms of social life in which Greek held a dominant position. The picture changes dramatically with the emergence of the Coptic script. After this turning point the presence of Greek loanwords in Egyptian (now collected in the *Database and Dictionary of Greek Loanwords in Coptic*; see also Grossman et al., 2017) becomes all-pervasive. This puzzling development, which cannot have arisen from the slim basis of Greek loanwords in written Demotic, has received two complementary explanations: (a) that Greek loanwords were part of the oral repertory of Egyptians to a far greater extent than the written record indicates and (b) that the priest-scribes of Demotic filtered out Greek in an act of linguistic purism (Ray, 1994). An idiosyncratic corpus of second/third century CE texts on potsherds (ostraca) from the Narmouthis temple area indirectly confirms the first part of this explanation. They preserve coherent Demotic texts with syntactically integrated Greek legal and administrative words. This unique corpus of bigraphic texts takes us back to the domain of religion and the various activities under its auspices (administrative, educational, and scholarly) that harboured bilingualism and convergence.

### 2.3.2 Egyptian 'Meets' Greek: Graphic Convergence

During the Roman period the personnel of Egyptian temples was caught between competing pressures: on the one hand, the preservation of the indigenous religious-literary culture and the forms of writing in which it had been encoded and, on the other, adaptation to a new linguistic environment with increasing societal bilingualism. The temple libraries from Tebtynis and Soknopaiou Nesos testify that for the first two centuries of the Roman rule Egyptian priests and scribes held on to tradition. However, transactions with Roman authorities were carried out entirely in Greek. The shift of language of the popular 'oracular question tickets' to Greek may signal adaptation to the linguistic preferences of the clientele that sought this form of divination (Ripat, 2006). Part of the temple personnel must have been Greek-speaking, since Greek versions of internal temple manuals were in circulation, such as the translation of *The Book of the Temple* preserved on a papyrus now split between Oslo and Washington, P.Oslo I 2 + P.Wash.Univ. II 71 (Messerer, 2017, no. 10).

Increasing osmosis with Greek was presumably a propelling factor toward a milestone in the history of Egyptian, the development of the alphabetic script known as 'Coptic,' which proceeded in parallel with gradual abandonment of the traditional scripts for Egyptian. As late Demotic is close to Coptic, the rupture is not linguistic but graphic. The Coptic script, the earliest full-fledged specimens of which are assigned to the third century CE, is based on the Greek alphabet with six additional graphemes derived from Demotic for the Egyptian phonemes for which the Greek alphabet offered no satisfactory equivalents (Depauw, 2012; Fournet, 2020; Quack, 2017; Stadler, 2008). During a protracted transitional phase that starts in the late first century CE diverse graphic experiments, not necessarily connected to each other, evidence attempts to encode Egyptian using the Greek alphabet enhanced with Demotic-derived symbols. They are subsumed under the highly reductive term 'Old Coptic' (Love, 2016).

The uses to which the 'Old Coptic' script systems were put, and the types of texts encoded, provide clues about the circles that may have pioneered the graphic fusion of Egyptian and Greek. 'Old Coptic' scripts were used either for 'phonetic glossing' or to encode substantial, coherent texts (Quack, 2017). 'Phonetic glossing' refers here to annotations scribbled above text sequences written in older forms of Egyptian (Hieroglyphic, Hieratic). They serve the purpose of phonetic clarification, spelling out the vowels that were not noted in these script systems. Phonetic glossing appears in a broad spectrum of liturgical, literary, and ritual texts. It is also in evidence on Narmouthis potsherds in the form of inline transliterations of nouns, mostly divine names, also given in

Hieroglyphic or Hieratic. These texts are considered as products of a scholastic, scribal milieu (Giannotti, 2007; Rutherford, 2010). The longer coherent texts in 'Old Coptic' encode religious expressions with individual focus (a prayer for justice, a horoscope, and a related manual, a manual of lot divination, parts of handbooks of magic, mummy labels) or are of purely private character (Quack, 2017). Early specimens of standard Coptic (annotations, glossaries, and parts of notebooks with school exercises) are also remnants of scholastic educational activities (Fournet, 2020). From the present vantage point, it appears legitimate to connect the emergence of Coptic with the religious domain broadly defined and with the scholarly and scholastic activities that unfolded inside and around the gates of Egyptian temples.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I tried to show that the realm of religion broadly defined, where Egyptian enjoyed a strong position, may offer a nuanced view of Egypt's bilingual culture and of the relation between the native language and Greek. It is, therefore, worth special attention and further research at the interface of Greek and Demotic papyrology. Sociohistorical, sociolinguistic, and material approaches to the papyrological and inscriptional evidence raise important questions and yield insights in the constant negotiations between language use, identity, and factors such as family connections, education, requirements by the authorities, and religious practices.

Loss and fragmentation of the source material mean that a complete picture of bilingual settings and scenarios in the domain of religion in Greek and Roman Egypt is out of sight. We are, however, in a position to discern the crucial role of temple-trained scribes in the communication between the Egyptian-speaking majority and Greek authorities, as well as their contribution to the continuation of the native religious and legal traditions. While segments of the priesthood remained linguistically introvert for much of the Ptolemaic period, others were open to translation, cultural and linguistic. The incorporation of members of the Egyptian scribal families into Greek notary offices meant that bilingual notarial services were concentrated under the same roof, but the development ultimately undermined the economic power of the temples. The decisive push that the Romans gave to Greek by using it as a *lingua franca* propelled greater convergence. A manifestation of convergence is the development of Coptic, a result of graphic fusion of Egyptian and Greek. Its emergence, perhaps as a result of scholarly and scholastic activities in libraries and scribal schools attached to temples, confirms the significance of the domain of religion as an arena for bilingual encounters in Egypt and a field worth further investigation.

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