

# The Influence of Atticism on Non-Literary Papyri: The Case of θᾶπτον

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**Abstract** In this paper, I will discuss the formation of an Atticist register and explore its impact on language use. In particular, I will examine how Atticist practices were consistently recognised as a way of expressing one's level of education and class membership, and how they were reused and appropriated by individuals, even outside literary contexts, for stylistic purposes. The analysis will focus on the use of the Atticist form θᾶπτον in place of the more common form τάχιον in documentary papyri.

**Keywords** Atticism. Norms and usage. Register shibboleths. Indexical order. High-register Greek.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Register and Stylisation. 2.1 Register: Definition and Problems. – 2.2 Atticist Lexica and Register Markers. – 3 The Influence of Atticism on Non-literary Language: Methodology. – 3.1 The Case of θᾶπτον. – 3.1.1 On the Alternation θᾶπτον/τάχιον. – 3.1.2 Distribution in Literature. – 3.1.3 Θᾶπτον in the Papyri. – 4 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction

In the second century CE, the Atticism movement emerged as a prominent expression of the purist trend that had shaped the Greco-Roman world since at least the first century BCE. Advocating for the use of Classical Greek over Koine Greek, Atticism emphasized adherence to Attic morphological, lexical, and syntactic features. The creation of Atticist lexica highlighted an evolving tendency to use language as a means of constructing social identities. Educated speakers

distinguished themselves by adopting linguistic features that set them apart from the general population, making education and elitism the defining characteristics of their identity. In this chapter, I will focus on the main features of this Atticising register and see what kind of impact it had on language use. Among a number of variants describing the internal variation of the Greek language, the selection of Atticising features was almost always a conscious phenomenon expressing an attempt “to tailor linguistic styles in projects of self-construction and differentiation”.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Atticism affected not only literary and rhetorical production, which are the most studied contexts of Atticist influence, but it also had a broader and more pervasive impact on communicative situations, such as private correspondence, in which we would not expect to find high purist features. This is primarily due to the ideological background of Atticism, which played a crucial role in shaping the identity of the imperial Greek elite and their sense of Hellenicity. Atticist practices were consistently recognised as a way of expressing one’s level of education and class membership and were thus reused and appropriated by individuals, even outside literary contexts, for stylistic purposes. This shows the profound impact of purist practices on language.

Several studies have already examined the impact of Atticism on non-literary sources, trying to understand how Atticism is related to register distribution and stylisation. However, the most comprehensive contributions dealing with lexicon,<sup>2</sup> morphology and orthography<sup>3</sup> are unpublished. R. Luiselli, particularly, offers a comprehensive understanding of high register Greek in non-literary papyri in close connection with the theory of style and stylisation in the early Byzantine age. This thesis provides the basis for a consistent part of the analysis conducted in this article. Other studies focus on specific features, such as the analysis of W. Clarysse on the alternation of ῥᾶττον and ἑῥᾶττον in papyri and inscriptions,<sup>4</sup> K. Bentein’s study on complementation patterns<sup>5</sup> and on the alternation of finite vs. non-finite complementation in postclassical and early Byzantine Greek,<sup>6</sup> and P. James’ thesis on the use of complementary participles and

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<sup>1</sup> Eckert 2012, 97-8.

<sup>2</sup> Roumanis 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Connolly 1983 and Luiselli 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Clarysse 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Bentein 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Bentein 2017.

infinitives with verbs of perception and declaration in Roman and Byzantine documentary papyri.<sup>7</sup>

The interesting aspect of these studies is that they discuss the question of register, which is particularly crucial when dealing with Atticism. The creation of Atticist Greek as a register recognised, accepted, and performed by different members of society is an important stepping stone in understanding the impact of purist practices on language. The enregisterment of Atticist features was supported by an ideological construction based on the idealisation of the classical past (see § 2.2), and their diffusion was clearly established in the instruments (lexica, grammars) used in schools.<sup>8</sup> The appearance of metalinguistic sources from Upper Egypt, which express archaistic tendencies and partly reproduce the glosses of the Atticist lexica, indicate that Atticist tools were used in schools at various levels of education (see the second-century *P.Lond.Lit.* 183, containing remnants of an Atticist lexicon possibly ordered alphabetically, *P.Oxy.* VII 1012, a third-century papyrus which contains entries from another purist lexicon and a treatise on literary composition datable to the first or second century CE, and *P.Oxy.* XV 1803 with twelve entries of an Atticist lexicon beginning with σ).<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, we have other indirect evidence for the use of Atticising features in non-literary sources. For example, Philostratus (*Discourse* 1 and *Lives of the Sophists* 2.33) advises imperial secretaries to use a moderate degree of Atticism when writing imperial correspondence. Similarly, Phrynichus, the author of one of the strictest second-century Atticist lexica, *Eclogue of Attic Nouns*, praises Cornelianus, the addressee of this lexicon and the newly elected imperial secretary (secretary *ab epistulis Graecis*), for “making the imperial tribunal Greek and Attic(istic) and acting as a teacher not only of the actual words to be used, but also of appearance, facial expression, voice, and posture” (see *Ecl.* 357). At the same time, Phrynichus criticised other secretaries *ab epistulis Graecis*, such as Alexander of Seleucia, for their linguistic ineptitude and their lack of necessary skills (see *Ecl.* 234 and 324).<sup>10</sup> These testimonies suggest that evidence of Atticising tendencies can usually, but not necessarily, be found in official documents, especially when these documents require a certain level of formality and sophistication, as in the case of imperial correspondence. However, several elements need to be taken into account when evaluating linguistic features in non-literary documents, especially in cases where the

<sup>7</sup> James 2007.

<sup>8</sup> For a general introduction to the Atticist lexica, see Matthaios 2015, 290-6.

<sup>9</sup> See Favi 2022; Dundua 2024, 68-102; and Luiselli 1999, 85-113.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of the relationship between Phrynichus and Alexander of Seleucia, see Favi 2021.

context does not determine the use of a specific register. Thus, while one would expect to find Atticising elements in chancery documents, a question that remains unanswered is to what extent the pervasiveness of Atticism goes beyond the context-based register and becomes an element of stylisation in private letters as well, and what are the factors that may determine the use of Atticist features in these cases. In this paper, I will show that acts of purist intervention are found not only in official texts but also in private contexts and that high-profile purist words were not necessarily associated with an overall effort to use a highly sophisticated language. Atticising forms are often used as markers for register upgrading, and in this respect, they can also be used by speakers who are not very familiar with the Greek language but still have stylistic ambitions.

Since this study is very limited to a single feature, it does not aim to reach final conclusions. Its primary intent is mostly to arise a few points which should be considered in the analysis of the phenomenon of Atticism. The analysis of purist features in non-literary language is functional to better understand Atticism as a cultural phenomenon and the impact it had on shaping social perceptions of language variation. It can also tell us something about the actual impact of changes from above, as top-down changes coming from a prestige group and prescribed in grammar, but also in the sense of above the level of awareness, where language users consciously recognise and adopt variants. Moreover, this study aims to stimulate a reflection on problematic concepts, such as the relationship between register and the distribution of linguistic features, and the role of speakers/writers in the process of stylisation.

Thus, before proceeding to the analysis of Atticist items, the next section will be devoted to an examination of the question of register and the problematic assumptions related to the interplay between situational context and linguistic features (section 2). In this context, I will explore the creation of an Atticising register, and I will try to use the modern concept of register shibboleths<sup>11</sup> to describe the activity of the Atticist lexis in the process of register construction. I will then examine the influence of Atticism on non-literary language, focusing on the alternation between ῥᾶχιον and ῥᾶττον (section 3). Finally, some conclusions will be drawn, with reflections on what questions this line of research can open up (section 4). While the approaches taken from modern sociolinguistic studies serve to provide a theoretical framework for the question of enregisterment and stylisation, the evaluation of the impact of purism can only be analysed through a careful investigation of metalinguistic sources (lexica and grammar) and the actual reflection of their prescriptions on language use. The single case

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<sup>11</sup> Silverstein 2003.

study proposed by this analysis does not imply any generalisation but only aims to offer some methodological perspectives.

## 2 Register and Stylistation

This first section is devoted to the creation of an Atticising register and the way it is reflected in non-literary practices. Here, I take register as a linguistic repertoire that is culturally associated “with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices”.<sup>12</sup> This definition is discussed in the next section (§ 2.1), along with all the problems related to using the concept of register to analyse non-literary sources. The following section (§ 2.2) will instead focus on the formation of an Atticist register, since, as A. Agha claims, “The social existence of a register requires some clarity not only about the metapragmatic models that typify its forms and values but an understanding also of the social processes through which such models are institutionally disseminated across social populations”.<sup>13</sup> This will give us an idea of the broader perspective and define the framework for the analysis of the case study, which will translate the macro-sociological level into the analysis of the micro level. Indeed the second part of this chapter will focus on how different expressive possibilities (e.g. Atticising features as promoted in the lexica) are individually appropriated or, “developed in ‘stylistic practices’, with writers acting as ‘stylistic agents’, and manipulating the indexical potential of features, breaking fixed conventions, using existing elements from another register, etc.”<sup>14</sup> to produce their own styles. As Eckert argues, style is a crucial element in the study of sociolinguistic variation because it represents the place of individual expression of broader social distributions of variation,<sup>15</sup> and as such it is an important link between the individual and the community. While the two concepts of register and style are problematic and of difficult definition,<sup>16</sup> in this case, register will be taken as the more stable variety (literary register, Atticising register) recognised by a community of practice, and style will define the way items of one or

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<sup>12</sup> Agha 2004, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Agha 2004, 43.

<sup>14</sup> See Bentein in the introduction to this volume.

<sup>15</sup> Eckert, Rickford 2001.

<sup>16</sup> See Biber, Conrad 2009, 17-23 for a discussion of the difference between register, genre and styles and an overview of how these concepts have been used in previous studies.

more registers are reused in individuals' practices.<sup>17</sup> The question of literary production, with its own implications in terms of genre, register and style,<sup>18</sup> will not be considered in order to focus only on non-literary texts.

## 2.1 Register: Definition and Problems

The treatment of register in this chapter combines a sociolinguistic perspective, as proposed by A. Agha's definition of register as a linguistic repertoire that is culturally associated with a particular social practice,<sup>19</sup> with a more static perspective proposed by D. Biber and S. Conrad, mostly based on taxonomic and descriptive schemes.<sup>20</sup> The first approach is functional for understanding the ideological context that underpins the formation of the Atticising register and the selection of Atticising features, while the second is functional for problematising the relationship between context-based and language-based approaches to register.

As J. Stolk argues,<sup>21</sup> documentary papyri show variation not only across different types of documents but also at various levels of the language (syntax, lexicon, morphology). As such, they cannot be analysed as a homogenous corpus. However, the concept of register has been used to analyse the distribution of variation, which can be observed not only in the same corpus but also, for instance, in the same archive: papyri belonging to the same archive can show different registers or different degrees of the same register.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, register variation has been understood as a continuum,<sup>23</sup> with different varieties (high register – literary, Atticising –, middle register, low register) not being taken as fixed categories but rather as representing points on this continuum. However, while this idea of register continuum overcomes the problem of the strict separation between different registers, one of the problems that still remains is the assumption that there is a strict relationship between high-register

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<sup>17</sup> With regard to style, Biber, Conrad 2009, 18 claim that “the most common application of this concept is to describe systematic variation within the register/genre of fiction”.

<sup>18</sup> For which see Willi 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Agha 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Biber, Conrad 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Stolk 2021.

<sup>22</sup> However, as Stolk 2021 claims orthographic and morphological variation is governed by external factors different from those governing the spread of syntactic and pragmatic features.

<sup>23</sup> Bentein 2020, 385.

texts (official texts) and a low number of non-standard features, and low-register texts (personal texts) and a high number of non-standard features, as the following table would suggest:<sup>24</sup>

Continuum	High	Middle	Low
Context-based	Official texts	Business texts	Personal texts
Language-based	Low number of non-standard features	Average number of non-standard features	High number of non-standard features

As J. Stolk claims, “One would assume that the results of the context-based approach largely overlap with the language-based approach, but this expectation is not always born out in the case of papyrus documents”.<sup>25</sup> This idea has already been formulated by C. Brixhe & R. Hodot through the concept of ‘non-étanchéité des registres’, which implies the appearance of a feature conventionally attributed to one register in a text that is assumed to belong to a different register.<sup>26</sup> This means that, although one might assume that a letter – due to its unofficial nature – would reflect a specific linguistic variety (e.g. a low or colloquial variety), the various elements of orthography, morphology, and syntax do not necessarily adhere to a single register or variety. Instead, they often display a high degree of internal variation, which may result from conscious or unconscious choices made by the author (see the cases of the private letters analysed below). Conversely, this also applies to official or business texts, which may occasionally exhibit features of a lower register. This phenomenon is not new, as such variation is also evident in literary texts, and even more so in Atticising writers where significant shifts in the register are noticeable.<sup>27</sup>

Various studies have demonstrated this by analysing the presence of innovative forms in high social contexts. Indeed, as shown by P. James, there are cases of official documents that can display ‘low’ or ‘late’ orthographic and morphosyntactic features.<sup>28</sup> J. Stolk investigated the same phenomenon with a special focus on orthographic varieties.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, K. Bentein, focusing on the distribution of complementation patterns, showed that while there is a tendency to use patterns that already existed in the classical period in formal

<sup>24</sup> This table is taken from Stolk 2021, 302.

<sup>25</sup> Stolk 2021, 302.

<sup>26</sup> Brixhe, Hodot 1993, 9.

<sup>27</sup> See Cassio 1999, 1005-7 and Kim 2010.

<sup>28</sup> James 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Stolk 2021.

contexts, “some innovative formations (e.g. ὥς ὅτι with the indicative, ὥς with the infinitive and the participle, ὅπως with the infinitive) also appear in higher social contexts”.<sup>30</sup>

On this line, in what follows, I will reuse the concept of ‘non-étanchéité des registres’ to analyse whether morphological features conventionally associated with the high register also appear in non-official documents. In doing so, I will explore the relationship between linguistic behavior and sociolinguistic contexts in different types of sources, showing that even private letters display a great variety of styles/registers, sometimes with clear stylistic ambitions, which may be due to different factors (such as the author’s status, the addressee, the circumstances, etc.).

## 2.2 Atticist Lexica and Register Markers

As A. Agha claims, a register comes to exist through sociohistorical processes of enregisterment, “processes by which the forms and values of a register become distinguishable from the rest of the language (i.e., recognizable as distinct, associated with typifiable social personae or practices)” for a given community of practice.<sup>31</sup> Ideological factors support the creation of an Atticising register and the use of this register as a form of identity definition, providing alternatives between various forms which are functionally equivalent but socially and stylistically marked. The use of οἶομαι in place of νομίζω or ξυν- in place of συν- (see Moeris’s Atticist lexicon ο 28 and ξ 2, 3 and 4 respectively) became a mark of education and class membership, expressed in the following format: “We/the educated community use X which is Attic and acceptable, they (those who are ignorant, the masses) use Y which is not appropriate”. Atticist lexica, therefore, propose a repertoire of characteristics (linguistic signs connected with the register’s use), associate these features with a range of pragmatic values (positive/negative values linked with the register, e.g. correct, pure, acceptable), and provide a definition of a social domain (categories of persons that can use and recognise the register’s forms), linking linguistic features (alleged Attic forms) to social categories (well-educated speakers belonging to the Greek elite).<sup>32</sup>

This process can be defined in terms of indexical order.<sup>33</sup> Linguistic features are drawn from their linguistic context and serve as

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<sup>30</sup> Bentein 2015, 140.

<sup>31</sup> Agha 2004, 37.

<sup>32</sup> These are the features Agha 2004, 37 describes as essential for register organisation and change.

<sup>33</sup> See introduction to this volume.



markers (indexes) of membership and identity.<sup>34</sup> The creation of an Atticising register is an aspect of the dialectical process of indexical order,<sup>35</sup> which entails the association of specific values (linguistic appropriateness, purity, education, etc.) to certain linguistic features. Atticising lexica, in particular those which show a more prominent purist profile (e.g. Phrynichus' *Eclogue*), present variants in the form of a binary opposition between Attic and non-Attic features, where Attic is what is recommended and usually corresponds to linguistic features less common in the contemporary language, and non-Attic is the objected option, often represented by morphological, syntactic, and lexical phenomena which characterise Postclassical Greek – although in many cases these can also be features already existing in classical Greek.<sup>36</sup> This binary structure proposed an opposition between linguistic features intended for use by the community of educated speakers and, as such, consciously used and recognised as markers of education, and those used by common people.

The features which are described as typical of Atticist Greek could represent what in modern sociolinguistic studies has been described with the concept of 'register shibboleths', namely "salient pillars" which provide anchors to certain registers reflecting a tendency to organise linguistic variability by presuming "the existence of distinct, indexically contrastive ways of saying what counts as the same thing".<sup>37</sup> These register shibboleths are the most marked and evident features among less evident features belonging to the same register, and as such, they become emblems of identity. Speakers style themselves "as identifiable social types through the control of a repertoire of registers, and especially of their emblematic shibboleths".<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Eckert 2012, 94.

<sup>35</sup> See Silverstein 2003, 212-3.

<sup>36</sup> For an introduction to the Atticist lexica and their social role in the context of the Imperial age, see chapters 1 and 2 in Swain 1996; Schmitz 1997; and Kim 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Silverstein 2003, 145.

<sup>38</sup> Silverstein 2003, 146.

### 3 The Influence of Atticism on Non-literary Language: Methodology

In order to assess the impact of Atticism on non-literary sources, I will start with Atticist prescriptions and select those features that are more relevant for analysing the impact of Atticism on language users.<sup>39</sup> The selection of features relies on the differentiation of three typologies of purist intervention, based on the types of features proposed. As suggested by Luiselli, three different cases should be considered:<sup>40</sup> out-of-fashion features that experienced very limited reintegration into the linguistic system of the Roman period – these forms can easily serve as register shibboleths, acting as markers of the Atticising register; out-of-fashion features that had a more extensive reintegration; and features that never went out of fashion but coexist with Koine variants. However, we should be cautious when determining whether a linguistic form was truly common or uncommon, especially if we are basing this judgment solely on the absolute number of instances. Thus, this approach does not provide a full picture of how common a form really was, particularly in the case of the middle category – those forms that underwent more extensive reintegration –, but it could be useful to identify certain trends. Here, I will focus only on the first typology, as these cases best reveal the purist approach of the lexica and the possibility of unconscious use of Atticist features is less likely.

Regarding the analysis of the sources in terms of register, I will reuse D. Biber and S. Conrad's approach,<sup>41</sup> and for each analysed text, I will try to investigate the three main components covered by the description of the register: the situational context (a), the linguistic features (b), and the functional relationships between the first two components (c). Specifically, D. Biber and S. Conrad suggest describing the situational context on the basis of the following parameters:<sup>42</sup> participants, including the types of relationships between the different participants; mode of communication; production and comprehension; circumstances; setting, including time and place; and communicative purpose.<sup>43</sup> However, when it comes to papyrological sources, some information cannot be retrieved. For example, the social background of the sender of a document and his personal relationship with the addressee cannot always be described in detail, nor can the educational background and social status of the

<sup>39</sup> In this context I will not focus on a single archive but I will rather analyse the distribution of a single feature (ῥᾶλλον in this case) in the papyri.

<sup>40</sup> Luiselli 1999, 117.

<sup>41</sup> Biber, Conrad 2009, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Biber, Conrad 2009, 39-47.

<sup>43</sup> See Stolk 2021 for a careful evaluation of all these elements.

addressee or other people involved. In addition, this type of texts requires special attention to other elements, such as distinguishing the author or sender of the document from the scribe, since some of the linguistic features of the text could be due to one or the other. Furthermore, as J. Stolk argues, although the circumstances of production are not always taken into account in register studies, they are of particular importance for the papyrological corpus: “Whether the language of a particular papyrus has been produced freely at the spot, noted down from dictation, revised during a drafting process or copied from a written draft or model can make a significant difference to the type and number of non-standard forms attested in a document”.<sup>44</sup> While J. Stolk discusses these issues with particular reference to orthography, they are equally applicable to other aspects of linguistic variation.

Another crucial element to take into account is the fact that the relations between the participants are defined in terms of two main domains: private and official. A private setting does not include texts produced by the government, but it may include documents from a professional, legal or commercial context. The official category comprises documents related to public administration, judiciary, and military.<sup>45</sup> This dichotomy is often associated with a degree of formality, in which private documents are considered to have a low level of formality, as opposed to official documents which are considered to be more formal. The difference in the level of formality between these various types of documents is likely to influence linguistic choices.<sup>46</sup> As mentioned above, this distinction requires special care. While official documents, especially those from the imperial chancery, are expected to use a certain kind of language, for private documents, the context would not automatically require the performance of high register features. However, other factors may come into play as much as the level of the individual’s stylistic ambition.

A final methodological note pertains to the evaluation of style in private papyrus documents. While style is generally defined as “a set of co-occurring variables associated with the speaker’s own persona”,<sup>47</sup> which can vary according to context, people involved, etc., the evaluation of the style of the author of a papyrus letter is more complicated, since we often have only a single document for a single author (as in one of the letters analysed below). This does not allow us to assess whether the style used in a particular context is specific to the author or mainly due to the circumstances.

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<sup>44</sup> Stolk 2021, 306.

<sup>45</sup> See Stolk 2021, 307.

<sup>46</sup> Bentein 2015, 108.

<sup>47</sup> Eckert, Rickford 2001, 5.

### 3.1 The Case of θᾶττον<sup>48</sup>

This article will only deal with the adverbial neuter: θᾶττον. The form θᾶττον belongs to the first typology of purist tendencies – out-of-fashion features that saw a very limited reintegration into the linguistic system of the Roman period – and as such it is particularly useful for studying purist attitudes. Moreover, it is a feature that is extensively discussed in various lexica. It also shows a kind of variation between three forms θᾶττον/θᾶσσον/τάχιον, which is functional for an analysis of register distribution, all the more so because it has a clear Attic flavour with the presence of -ττ-. Numerous are the Atticist prescriptions on θᾶττον as the following examples show:

[Hdn.] Philet. 18: θᾶττον ἐρεῖς, οὐχὶ τάχιον· καὶ βραδύτερον, οὐχὶ βράδιον· καὶ αἰσχρον, οὐχὶ αἰσχροτέρων· καὶ κάκιον ὁμοίως. (Dain ed.)

Phrynich. *Ecl.* 52 τάχιον Ἑλληνες οὐ λέγουσιν, θᾶττον δέ. (Fischer ed.)

Moeris 7 τάχιον οὐ λέγεται παρ' Ἀττικοῖς ἀλλὰ θᾶττον. (Hansen ed.)

Moeris 18 θᾶττον <Ἀττικοί>· τάχιον <Ἑλληνες>. (Hansen ed.)

The Atticists' preference for θᾶττον is in line with other prescriptions about comparatives or the replacement of -σσ- with -ττ-.<sup>49</sup> However, Atticist prescriptions about other comparatives, such as ἥττω in place of ἥσσανα (see Moeris η 10 ἥττω Ἀττικοί· ἥσσανα κοινόν)<sup>50</sup> seem to have a slightly different impact. While ἥττω still finds attestations in different contexts, in Ptolemaic papyri, as much as in Septuagint, and the NT, showing that it never completely disappeared from non-literary or non-classicising language, the case of θᾶττον is more relevant since the form was almost totally replaced by τάχιον in the Koine.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> On the alternation of the two forms and the way lexicographical sources deal with this alternation, see Benuzzi 2024.

<sup>49</sup> For the replacement of -σσ- with -ττ- see Connolly 1983.

<sup>50</sup> For which see Pellettieri 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Other cases of comparatives are discussed in the lexica i.e., βραδύτερον vs βράδιον, ἔγγιον vs ἔγγύτερον.

### 3.1.1 On the Alternation θᾶττον/τάχιον

The adjectives in -ύς, -εῖα, -ύ usually form their comparatives with the suffix -ιον/-(y)ον- and their superlatives with -ιστος.<sup>52</sup> However, some of them also have alternative forms with the suffixes -τερος and -τατος. The alternation between forms like θᾶττον<sup>53</sup> and τάχιον shows the realisation of the two variants in -ιον and -(y)ον.<sup>54</sup> H. Seiler suggests that the form with -ιον is more recent and ταχίων replaces θᾶττον/θάσσων to achieve better morphological clarity (τάχιον is closer to ταχύς and it is a more evident comparative based on ταχύς).<sup>55</sup> Alongside these comparative forms, there exists a secondary comparative in -τερος, which is directly derived from the positive form.

### 3.1.2 Distribution in Literature

In the classical period, θᾶττον and θάσσων are the forms used, with θᾶττον being the one attested in all classical authors except Thucydides and the tragedians (Sophocles and Euripides), who have θάσσων.<sup>56</sup> The first attestation of τάχιον is found in Menander (fr. 333 K-A), although some of the editors are skeptical about the authenticity of this form,<sup>57</sup> while ταχύτερον is used by Herodotus and Hippocrates, but they also have θάσσων. Θᾶττον is still the most common form in Aristotle (with over 200 attestations), who also has τάχιον (3 cases) and ταχύτερον (3 cases). In Hellenistic writers, θᾶττον is still the only form used in Polybius, while Diodorus Siculus has two attestations of θᾶττον (both in *Bib. His.* 34) and five attestations of τάχιον. In the NT τάχιον is the only form attested.<sup>58</sup> In the Septuagint the common form is τάχιον, which is always used with the only exception of θᾶττον in *Macc.2.*, a book showing different Atticising features<sup>59</sup> – however, alteration of manuscript tradition should be taken into consideration in those cases.<sup>60</sup> The use of τάχιον is still consist-

<sup>52</sup> See Seiler 1950, 35-7; Kühner, Blass 1890-92, 1: 556; Jannaris 1897, § 519b; Schwyzler 1939, 1: 538 and 539 fn. 4.

<sup>53</sup> With regard to the length and the accent of the vowel α, see Seiler 1950, 39-40, Barber 2015, 9 (with a discussion of the different forms in Herodian) and Vessella 2007.

<sup>54</sup> These two allomorphs seem to follow Sievers' law for which see Barber 2013, 159 and 162-4.

<sup>55</sup> Seiler 1950, 36-7 and Barber 2013, 159.

<sup>56</sup> For this kind of alternation in Attic, see Lupaş 1972, 114-15.

<sup>57</sup> See app. Kassel-Austin.

<sup>58</sup> See Moulton, Howard, Turner 1906-76, 164.

<sup>59</sup> Thackeray 1909, 184 and Cerroni 2024.

<sup>60</sup> See Kilpatrick 1963.

ent before the full development of Atticism in authors like Plutarch, who shows 18 attestations of ῥᾶχιον compared to 18 of ῥᾶττον and 10 of ῥᾶσσαν, Flavius Josephus with 51 attestations of ῥᾶττον, 20 of ῥᾶχιον and 4 of ῥᾶσσαν, and Dio Chrysostom with 12 attestations of ῥᾶττον, 3 of ῥᾶχιον and 3 ταχύτερον.<sup>61</sup> In imperial times, ῥᾶττον is the most common form in Atticist authors, such as Aelius Aristides, Lucian, Philostratus, with no attestations of ῥᾶχιον in Aelius Aristides and in Philostratus and only one in Lucian in *Soleocist* 7.16, where it is mentioned as the model for the mistaken form βράδιον. ῥᾶσσαν found attestations in Galen (together with ῥᾶχιον and ταχύτερον), although it is still the less common option compared to ῥᾶττον. Cassius Dio shows a rather different picture with 24 attestations of ῥᾶσσαν and 10 of ῥᾶττον. With regard to the Atticising Christian authors, they also show a more increasing presence of ῥᾶττον: for instance, Basilus of Caesarea has many attestations of ῥᾶττον and a very few cases of ῥᾶχιον (3) and ταχύτερον (4). Likewise, in Clemens Alexandrinus ῥᾶττον is found 16 times while ῥᾶχιον only 5.

Although each author should be closely examined to see whether the different forms are used in different communicative contexts, a general oscillation is observed, with a predominance of ῥᾶττον in Atticising authors.

### 3.1.3 ῥᾶττον in the Papyri<sup>62</sup>

Between the third and the first century BCE, the only instance of the comparative is ῥᾶσσαν and it is found in a papyrus belonging to Zenon's archive, *P.Ryl.Gr.* IV 565 (TM 2421), a letter from Deinon to Zenon dated to 250 BCE, which shows signs of a sophisticated style.<sup>63</sup> It is significant that the form used here is ῥᾶσσαν and not ῥᾶττον, which is instead the form used in the papyri of the third century CE, after the full manifestation of Atticising tendencies. ῥᾶχιον has its first attestation in *P.Amst.* I 89 10 (first century CE) and started becoming common from the first century CE onwards. Between the first and the fourth century CE ῥᾶχιον and ταχύτερον are the most attested forms. The form ῥᾶσσαν is attested in two official documents written on ostraka dated to the second century CE (*O.Krok.* I 41 44 and *O.Krok.* I 42 13).<sup>64</sup> After the fourth century CE, there is no attestation of these forms, but only the positive form (or the adverb ταχέως) is attested.

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<sup>61</sup> See Schmid 1887-97, 1: 86.

<sup>62</sup> See Gignac 1976-81, 1: 146; 2: 152 and 154.

<sup>63</sup> On linguistic variation in the Zenon's archive, see Logozzo 2015 and Evans 2010.

<sup>64</sup> See Cuvigny 2006.

In all the attestations we have on papyrus, ῥᾱττον appears only four times in documentary papyri. All cases are attested not before the end of the second or the beginning of the third century CE. There are also eleven cases of ῥᾱττον in literary papyri reporting pieces of texts of Philodemus (*P.herc.* 207, 229, 807, 1050, 1008, 1251, 1471), Plato (*BKT* 2 p. 52-3 and *BKT* 2, p. 3-51) Xenophon (*P.Oxy.* LXXV 5046), Aristophanes (*P.Ant.* II 75), Basilius of Caesarea's letters (*BKT* 6 p. 23), and rhetorical compositions such as the *Encomium of the fig* (*P.Oxy.* XVII 2084) and an invocation of Imouthes – Asklepios (*P.Oxy.* XI 1381). Among these sources, we possibly list a festal easter letter (*BKT* 6 p. 55-109) dated to the seventh century CE. Attestations of ῥᾱττον are found also in two fourth-century magical papyri, *PGM* II 87 and *PGM* IV 199, 1467. Since this volume is on documentary papyri in this context I will focus only on the four cases mentioned above.<sup>65</sup> The four testimonies of ῥᾱττον appear in three different types of texts: 1) a document issued by the imperial constitution, 2) a petition, and 3) two private letters. While the first two types of texts belong to kinds of documents that would conventionally be placed towards the right end (high register) of the register continuum, since as official documents they would be expected to show high register features, the last two cases are more interesting, since they have a private setting, but nevertheless show a purist feature (ῥᾱττον). In what follows, I will not provide a full commentary on the first two papyri, which have already been analysed by Luiselli,<sup>66</sup> but I will reuse some information from Luiselli's analysis and contextualise it in a register-based approach. I will then focus on the two private letters.

#### 1) Imperial constitution: *P.Oxy.* XVII 2104 (TM 61407)

This is a letter from Severus Alexander to the *Koinon* of Bithynia, preserved in three different copies: W Dig. 49.1.25 (from Paul's Respon-  
sa); *P.Oxy.* XVII 2104 (= Oliver 1989, 541); and *P.Oxy.* XLIII 3106 (=

<sup>65</sup> However, considering that the corpus of the magical papyri is not homogenous but exhibits a high degree of internal variation, this would be an interesting area to explore. D. Kölligan gave a presentation titled *Greek Magical Texts and their Contribution to the Lexicography of Atticism* at the workshop *Ἀττικοί and Ἑλληνες: Atticism and Koine Between Linguistic Practice and Grammatical Theory*, organised by the ERC project *Purism in Antiquity: Theories of Language in Greek Atticist Lexica and their Legacy*, held in Venice in January 2024. In his presentation, which included the two cases mentioned above and listed by Kölligan among the doubtful examples, he explored whether the usage in the magical papyri confirms the prescriptions of the Atticist lexicographers. He concluded that while many judgments of the Atticists are confirmed, each individual case requires closer scrutiny.

<sup>66</sup> Luiselli 1999.

Oliver 1989, 542) which should be the official copy.<sup>67</sup> The form θᾶττον is attested in the first two papyri, while in *P.Oxy.* XLIII 3106 the passage containing this line has been lost. The textual discrepancies shown by *P.Oxy.* XVII 2104 suggest that the language of the letter was probably changed in the course of its transmission. However, as Luiselli argues, θᾶττον was undoubtedly present in the original text of the letter, “as is shown by the agreement between a source removed more than one step from the original and the independent line of transmission represented by Paul’s lost Responsa and the manuscript tradition of the Digest”.<sup>68</sup> As mentioned above, the text will be analysed according to D. Biber and S. Conrad’s criteria (see section 3):

a. Situational context

Genre: Imperial constitution; Content: Letter of Alexander Severus to the *Koinon* of Bithynia on the right of appeal. Complaints had been received of attempts on the part of the local authorities to limit this right;<sup>69</sup> Participants: Imperial Chancery, official administration; Setting: public; Date and place: 222 CE, Egypt, Oxyrhynchus.

b. Linguistic features

In the surviving text, there is no obvious presence of ‘non-standard’ features, and besides the use of θᾶττον, no other purist features seem to appear.

c. Functional relationship between a) and b)

Language choices reflect the official context of the document. This occurrence of θᾶττον in a document produced in the third-century imperial chancery does not come alone. Another example of the same kind is a letter (inscription) from Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE) to the Ephesians,<sup>70</sup> which presents two attestations of θᾶττον. No example of τᾶχιον seems to occur in Roman and late Roman imperial Constitutions. Imperial constitution is a genre which shows a rather extensive presence of purist items. Indirect sources seem to refer to a purist practice in the Imperial secretary. Philostratus, as mentioned above, advises imperial secretaries to employ a moderate degree of purism in writing imperial correspondences, inviting them to mix Atticist features with elements belonging to the current usage (*Discourse* 1). This seems to suggest that Atticising practices were employed in the context of the official correspondence. Moreover, Imperial letters were issued by the department of *ab epistulis*, and many sophists

<sup>67</sup> See Luiselli 1999, 120

<sup>68</sup> Luiselli 1999, 130.

<sup>69</sup> See Oliver 1989, 541-2.

<sup>70</sup> See Oliver 1989, 329-32.



seem to have been appointed to this position.<sup>71</sup> Philostratus himself, in other passages, comments on the style of two sophists Aelius Antipater and Aspasius employed as secretary *ab epistulis* (*Lives of the Sophists* 2.24 and 2.33). Similarly, Cornelianus, the addressee of Phrynichus' Atticist lexicon, was appointed secretary *ab epistulis*, probably under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. This may suggest that Cornelianus, as well as other sophists, may have played a role in the composition of these letters or at least in spreading the use of Atticism in the chancellery, and this is what Phrynichus tells us in the passage quoted in the introduction to this chapter (*Ecl.* 357). However, many details related to the role of the secretary are unknown, so it is not possible to evaluate the actual impact of purism on the basis of these indirect sources. On the other hand, more significant is the presence of other Atticist features in imperial constitutions, as analysed by Luiselli.<sup>72</sup> The selection of purist items attested in these sources is quite significant since they are mostly features which show an unmistakable Attic flavor (-ττ-, διδόασι, ἵστε, τήμερον, μέχρι, οἴομαι with infinitive and accusative construction) and as such can be defined as sorts of register shibboleths. These words were often used in texts which did not present an overall refined language, but they still stand out as marks of purist refinements.

## 2) Petition: *P.Vind.Tand.* 2 (TM 15456)<sup>73</sup>

### a. Situational context

Genre: Petition;<sup>74</sup> Content: The papyrus contains a complaint from the former exegetes of Heracleopolis to the prefect of Egypt. The exegetes report that he was abused by a group of people, including a certain Theodosius mentioned in the papyrus. Other individuals are also mentioned, though their relationship to the author of the petition is unclear. The papyrus is a draft; <sup>75</sup> Participants: interaction between officials; Setting: public; Date and place: 238-244 CE, Egypt, Antinoopolis.

<sup>71</sup> See Bowersock 1969, 50-8.

<sup>72</sup> Luiselli 1999, 166-78.

<sup>73</sup> For an analysis of this papyrus see Sijpesteijn, Worp 1976, 5-12.

<sup>74</sup> See Mascellari 2021, 1107 fn. 5 discussing whether this document should be classified as a petition.

<sup>75</sup> See Luiselli 1999, 126 fn. 1. With regard to the phenomenon of self-correction and textual-revision in Greek documentary papyri as evidence for awareness of style among

b. Language

The language of the papyrus displays elements of rhetorical style. For instance, it features the sequence πέπονθά τε καὶ παρ' ἔκρ[σ]τα πάσχω (l. 9), the use of the term ἰκετηρία (l. 4) in place of the more common βιβλίδιον, which is used at l. 8, and signs of lexical variation, with alternating terms like ἰκετηρία, βιβλίδιον, and βιβλίον (l. 15). Additionally, it includes words not commonly attested in papyri, such as ἔταιρία ('association') and συγγενεία ('kinship') at l. 10, and μελλησμός ('procrastination') at l. 22. Moreover, it is noteworthy that θάττον appears in a sequence (lines 5-6: τὴν σὴν ἀγχίνοιαν θάττον κατανοήματος) which presents two unusual words: ἀγχίνοια ('sagacity'), very rare in documentary papyri, followed by κατανόημα ('contrivance'), which does not find any other attestation in documentary papyri. Finally, the stylistic ambition of the text is reflected in textual alterations,<sup>76</sup> such as corrections of misspellings or stylistic modifications, showing concern for language and style.<sup>77</sup> The use of purist items aligns well with this overall concern for stylistic precision.

c. Functional relationship between a) and b)

Language choices reflect the official context of the text. The use of a purist term is associated with distinct stylistic ambitions and with the pompous, reverential language likely employed by the author to present himself as a respectable figure before the prefect, in contrast to those he is accusing.

While the two papyri (*P.Oxy.* XVII 2104 and *P.Vind.Tand.* 2) analysed above show the use of purist items correlated with a more formal setting expressed either by the genre (imperial letter) or by a clear stylistic ambition (petition), the following two papyri represent more interesting cases since they are private letters.

### 3) Private letters

Private letters occupy a privileged position in the context of stylisation because they show more stylistic creativity than other types of texts, although, as K. Bentein reminds us in the introduction to this volume, "one should not underestimate the extent to which particular

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the educated elite in Egypt, see Luiselli 2010, and specifically pp. 76 and 89 with regard to this petition. See also Mascellari 2021, 32-4, more generally on draft copies.

<sup>76</sup> More general on this see Luiselli 2010.

<sup>77</sup> See Luiselli 1999, 126 with a list of corrections.

communicative choices were made unconsciously, through lack of understanding of one or more pragmatic paradigms". However, such a mark of Atticising style as θᾶττον was rare outside of literary usage. In this respect, it is likely a conscious choice, indicating the author's deliberate engagement with linguistic features for the purpose of stylisation. The other attestations in private letters feature τάχιον (30 cases). These letters, dated between the first and the fourth century CE, show a great variety of registers.<sup>78</sup> Some of them present stylistic ambition, for instance, the second/third-century private letter *P.Haun.* II 16, 13 (TM 26598), which shows a careful use of words and classicising forms such as ἦττον and μέχρι. Nevertheless, the form used here is τάχιον. The very restricted presence of θᾶττον in letters confirms that it saw very limited reintegration into the living language and suggests that its use reflects a conscious selection of Atticising material. In the first case presented below, the letter is written by a gymnasiarch to his family members. The second is a letter written by an official, whose first language is Latin, to another official.

### 3.1) Private letter: *P.Tebt.* II 451 (TM 31370)<sup>79</sup>

Ἦρων Λιβελάρῳ τῷ [τιμ(ιωτάτῳ) καὶ Ἡρακλείῳ]	
τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς πλεῖστα [χαίρειν.]	
προαιρέσεως ἡμῖν παρεμ[φερούσης]	
ἄχρι οὗ ὁ ἀγαθὸς Λουκρήτις παραγέν[ηται καὶ ἐνέγκη?]	
ἐκ τῶν ἐπισταλέντων μοι ἀπο[χῶν τὰ ἀντίγραφα?]	5
κεχρονισμένα εἰς Μεσορή δ. καὶ [μὴ ἄλλως ποιή-]	
σης ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ μήτε δι[+/-2]ε[ ]	
ὑπολαβεῖν τὸν Λουκρήτιν ἀναγ[ ]	
πάντος τρόπου ἀπόπεμ[ψο]ν τὸν τ[ε λόγον τῶν ἐπι-]	
μηνίων θᾶττον ἵνα αὐ[τὸν διαπέμψῃ τὰ]	10
γράμματα ἅμα Πρωτάρχῳ κ[αὶ? εἰς Ἀλεξάν-]	
δρειαν. ἤδη γὰρ προθύρω[μα ]	
πρὸ τῆς σῆς ἐξόδου ἀκο[λούθως δια-]	
πέμψασθ(ε) πρὸς ἑμὲ Σαραπί[ωνα ]	
ἵνα ἔλθωσι ἐντὸς τοῦ Φα[ ]	15
α. διεπεμψάμην σοι τε[ ]	
θα φέρων Γέτα τῷ καὶ Εὐδαί[μονι. ]	
λοιπίσθω δὲ ἡ γ[λυ]κντάτη σ[ύμβιός μου ]	
νέχθαι ὅσον δε[ ]	

<sup>78</sup> Luiselli 1999, 123-4.

<sup>79</sup> The text is taken from Quenouille 2015. For an analysis of this papyrus, see Quenouille 2015, 127-40.

εἰσὶν σχεδὸν ἐ[	]	20
λίνους, σουδάριν.[	σου-]	
δάριν Εὐδημῶ[	]	
Ἑρωνεῖνφ..[	κο-]	
λοβίων ζεῦχ[ος	εἰς δα-]	
πάνην (δραχμὰς) ῥ, ἐγὼ [	]	25
τα καὶ τῶν εἰς[	κηρια-]	
πτάρια σου εὐ[	]	
Μυρισμὸς. ἀσπ[άζου	]	
ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸν[	τῆς γλυκυ-]	
τάτης θυγατρ[ὸς μου.	ἀσπά-]	30
ζομαι καὶ [	κατ' ὄ-]	
ν[ο]μῶ καὶ [	]	
μου Θιντι[θιῶτα	]	
καὶ Πρωτα[ρχ	]	
Διογένην [	]	35
καὶ Μῶρον [	]	
κατ' ὄνομα [	]	
[ ], [ ], [	]	
ἐρρωσθαι σε   ὑμᾶς εὐχομαι.		39+x

Heron to Liberalius, the [most revered, and Heraclea,]  
many [greetings] to the brothers and sisters.  
Through the goodwill shown to us, [  
until the good Lucretis arrives [and gives me  
and brings me the copies of the [receipts sent to me,]  
dated the 4th of Mesore. And [do nothing else?]  
in Alexandria, nor[  
to suppose that Lucretis [  
In any case, send the [statement?]  
of the month's money as soon as possible, that he may send [up  
the]  
Letters together with Protarchus and [and? to]  
Alexandria. For the porch was already [  
before your departure according to [  
Send to me Sarapion [  
so that they may come by the xxth Pha[- month name  
To you I have sent [  
bringing Geta, who is also called Eudai[mon  
But it shall (not?) grieve (my) sweetest [wife?...  
carried so much but [  
they are almost [  
linen [ ], a sweat cloth [  
a sweatcloth (to?) Eudemone[  
the Heroneinos [  
x pair of underjackets [ as]

issue 100 drachmas. I [  
And from the [  
Your wax container [ the  
Myrismos. Greetings (?) [  
from me to the [family name  
[of [my] sweetest daughter?  
I also greet [  
by name and [  
my (kinship name?) Thinti[thius  
and Protarchus [  
Diogenes [  
and Moros [  
by name [  
... [  
I wish you that you stay healthy.<sup>80</sup>

This letter is written by Heron, a gymnasiarch, to his brother Liberalius and his sister Heraclea. The text is fragmentary and incomplete with the ends of lines being lost.

a. Situational context

Genre: Private letter. Content: The letter was written by Heron to his siblings, providing them, especially his brother Liberalius, with instructions on how to perform certain tasks. Since the right half of the lines is missing, these instructions are obscure and incomplete. However, they reference some receipts that a certain Lucretis is to bring to Heron, as well as to whom the report for the month's money should be sent. Liberalius is then instructed to send a message to a certain Serapion. The letter also mentions an object sent by Heron to his brother, followed by a list of clothes and other items. It remains unclear whether these items are for personal or commercial use, or perhaps connected to the author's role as a gymnasiarch.<sup>81</sup> There are other letters written by the same author (*P.Tebt.Quen.* 22 and 23, and *P.Tebt.* II 419, which also report instructions that Heron sends to a number of people to perform various tasks).<sup>82</sup> Setting: private; Date and place: Tebtynis, end of second/beginning of third century CE.

b. Language

The language of the papyrus is quite varied, without any indication of 'non-standard' features. Instead, it retains the use of

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<sup>80</sup> This translation was made on the basis of the translation provided by Quenouille 2015.

<sup>81</sup> See Quenouille 2015, 138-9.

<sup>82</sup> For an analysis of these papyri see Quenouille 2012, 156-66.

the second aorist ὑπολαβεῖν. The expression ἄχρι οὗ also appears in *P.Tebt.Quen.* 22, 4 and *P.Tebt.* II 419, 13-15. This expression seems to be quite common in the Roman and Byzantine periods. However, the absence of the final sigma might indicate a level of sophistication, as the form ἄχρισ became more common in Postclassical Greek, while ἄχρι was considered more 'correct' (see Phrynichus' *Eclogae* 6 Μέχρισ καὶ ἄχρισ σὺν τῷ σ ἁδόκιμα· μέχρι δὲ καὶ ἄχρι λέγει). The letter also contains some uncommon forms in papyri, such as the aorist imperative ἀπόπεμ[φο]ν, which is rare in documentary papyri and is found only in *P.Mil.Vogl.* IV 219, 4. Additionally, there is a series of objects mentioned that are very rare or unattested elsewhere in papyri, including κηριαπτάρια (ll. 26-27), which appears here for the first time, σουδάριν, a Latin loanword also rarely attested in papyri, and προθύρωμα, which has only one other known occurrence.<sup>83</sup>

c. Functional relationship between a) and b)

Unlike the letter analysed below, for which we have no further evidence, Heron is the author of other letters (*P.Tebt.Quen.* 22 and 23, and *P.Tebt.* II 419). These letters provide insight into the author's style and help us determine whether the presence of a purist trait is incidental or reflective of Heron's overall linguistic style. The language of these other letters is also varied. As mentioned, two of them include the expression ἄχρι οὗ. Additionally, they feature forms common in Postclassical Greek. For instance, in *P.Tebt.Quen.* 22, we find a -μι verb conjugated according to -όω verbs at l. 4 παραδοῖς (for παραδῶς).<sup>84</sup> Similarly to our papyrus, *P.Tebt.Quen.* 23 contains forms that are uncommon in documentary papyri, such as πάντα ποιήσον, which appears in only one other documentary papyrus, instead of the more typical πᾶν ποιήσον or πᾶν οὖν ποιήσον. It also includes the uncommon construction ἀναπέμψης διὰ. However, in other cases, as in *P.Tebt.Quen.* 22, the author uses much more common expressions, such as ὡς ἐνετιλάμην σοι (l. 11) and μὴ ἀμελήσης (ll. 12-13).<sup>85</sup> The form θᾶττον is the only purist feature used in all the letters. This author seems to have a distinctive style, at times following the conventions of letter writing, while at other times introducing innovations. His use of a purist feature in a context that does not adhere to traditional rules of

<sup>83</sup> For an analysis of these words, see Quenouille 2015, 136-9.

<sup>84</sup> See Quenouille 2012, 156.

<sup>85</sup> On the widespread use of these expressions for orders in private letters, see Tibiletti 1979, 70-3.

The following letter presents a completely different situation.

3.2) Private Letter: *P.Oxy.* I 122 (TM 31348 = *P.Lond.* III 768 descr.)<sup>86</sup>

While in the previous case, the private letter was addressed to family members, here, the letter is sent from an official to the prefect of a legion.<sup>87</sup>

[.....]ς Γαιανός· χρησ[τ]έ μου  
[ἀδελφ]ῆ Ἀγήνωρ, χαιῖρε.  
[τὰ πα]ρὰ σοῦ κομισθέντα μοι  
[περὶ τή]ν τῶν Κρονίων ἡμέραν  
[εὐθ]έως ἔλαβον· πεπόμεφιν  
δ' ἂν αὐτὸς θάπτον πρὸς σέ εἰ παρ-  
ῆσάν μ[οι] πλείονες στρατιῶτοι,  
ἀλλ' Ἐπ[.....]ς ὑπέστρεφεν, ἡ-  
μεῖ[ς] δὲ ἀγρεύειν τῶν θηρίων  
δυνάμ[ε]θα οὐδὲ ἓν. ἐπέμψαμεν  
δέ σοι κ[.....]ων[.....]ου ἀπὸ αἰλῶν  
ὧ̑ χρη[σ]....]ω[.....] ἐρ[ρ]ῶσθαι σε,  
κύριέ μου ἀδελφε,  
πολλοῖς χρόνοις  
καὶ προκόπτειν εὖχομαι.

<sup>86</sup> I reproduced the text as reported in Grenfell, Hunt 1898. There are a few divergences with the text reported on papyri.info: e.g. ll. 2 and 13 ὁδελαφε vs ὁδελαφεῖ and ll. 5 and 12 ἡδεῶς × 2, in place of εὐθεῶς in Grenfell and Hunt (l. 5) who do not integrate in the second case (l. 12).

<sup>87</sup> Although the concept of ‘private’ applied to a letter written by an official to another official might not be exact, I follow the categorisation proposed by Stolk 2021, 307 and mentioned above at § 2.1. See also Grenfell, Hunt 1898 mentioning the “familiar tone” of the letter, and Sarri 2018, 176–81, with examples of private letters between officials.

On the *verso*

[.....]ιω Ἀγήνορι ἐπάρχῳ

From [...] Gaianus. Greeting, my good brother Agenor! I received at once about the day of the Saturnalia what you dispatched to me. I should have sent to you myself more quickly if I had had more soldiers with me; but [...] went back and we cannot catch a single animal. I send for your use [...] I pray, my dear brother, for your lasting health and prosperity.<sup>88</sup>  
[...] To the prefect Agenor

Gaianus, a high-ranking official, writes this letter to Agenor, a prefect of a legion. According to Luiselli, an examination of the script shows that the body of the letter was written by a scribe and Gaianus added the farewell.<sup>89</sup> The problem, in this case, is to determine to what extent Gaianus was responsible for the style and linguistic features of the letter.

a. Situational context

Genre: Private letter; Content: A private letter from Gaianus to the prefect Agenor, in which he confirms the receipt of what the addressee had sent and apologises for not being able to catch the wild animals he had requested due to the small number of soldiers with him; People: interaction between officials. As B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt suggest,<sup>90</sup> Gaianus' high rank is indicated by the placement of his name before that of Agenor, by the familiar tone of his remarks, and by the mention of the soldiers under his command; Setting: private; Date and place: 238-244 CE, Egypt, Oxyrhynchus.

b. Language

In terms of language, Luiselli identified a mixture of high- and low-register features which are classified as follows:<sup>91</sup>

High-register features: breathings used three times; retention of ᾠν in an unreal apodosis in the indicative (5-6) – although the absence of ᾠν was also quite common in classical as much as in Atticising authors;<sup>92</sup> the word Κρόνια to render Latin Saturnalia; the use of ἔλαβον in place of ἔλαβα. However, as Luiselli mentioned, these elements can be interpreted in two ways. It is possible that here Gaianus is making an effort to avoid low

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<sup>88</sup> Transl. Grenfell, Hunt 1898.

<sup>89</sup> Luiselli 1999, 228. More generally on this phenomenon, see Sarri 2018, 126-9.

<sup>90</sup> Grenfell, Hunt 1898.

<sup>91</sup> Luiselli 1999, 228-9.

<sup>92</sup> See la Roi 2022b discussing the conditions for the modal particle to appear and not appear in apodoses of counterfactual conditions.



register features (e.g. ἔλαβα), to conform to classicising style (with the retention of ᾶν in an unreal apodosis in the indicative, which was probably felt as a sign of sophistication), and to refine his lexicon (with the use of Κρόνια in place of Σατορνάλια, the latter attested in Arr. *Epict.* 1.25.8 and in the second-century papyrus *P.Fay.* 119.28). Alternatively, he may have just followed his normal usage as ἔλαβον was still common in an unmarked register,<sup>93</sup> and Κρόνια, found in Latin-Greek bilingual glossaries, could have been an “automatised linguistic act”.<sup>94</sup> However, it seems to me that these elements, along with the presence of θᾶττον, could indicate an attempt to elevate the register. Low-register features: the morphological mistake στρατιῶτοι (l. 7) in place of στρατιῶται; the omission of the augment in the pluperf. πεπτόμφειν – however, the augment is present in other secondary tenses, see ll. 5, 8 and 10;<sup>95</sup> the presence of an unreal apodosis with the pluperfect (which is explained as a possible Latinism πεπτόμφειν ᾶν = *misissem*);<sup>96</sup> the possible interference between Greek and Latin syntax in the position of οὐδὲ ἔν, which far from the partitive genitive does not appear in his natural position in Greek (ll. 8-10).<sup>97</sup> Regarding the morphological mistake, it could be a scribe’s slip, as it would be difficult to reconcile such a basic error with the care the author of the papyrus demonstrated in other aspects. Concerning the other features, the absence of the augment in the pluperfect was a widespread and acceptable postclassical feature, while the syntactic Latinisms could have been unconscious ‘mistakes’ committed by Gaianus. As the editors have pointed out, both Gaianus and the scribe are native speakers of Latin, which would explain the influence of Latin, also revealed by the shapes of the letters.<sup>98</sup> In this context, the use of a stylistically marked element such as θᾶττον stands out as an explicit mark of classicising style. The fact that this is the only purist marker – given that the author could have opted for the more archaic ending -η instead of -ειν for the pluperfect –<sup>99</sup>

<sup>93</sup> The form ἔλαβον is still widely attested in papyri between the second and the third century CE.

<sup>94</sup> See Luiselli 1999, 229.

<sup>95</sup> Luiselli 1999, 229 takes δυνάμεθα as an unaugmented imperfect. Here I follow Grenfell and Hunt and take it as a historical present.

<sup>96</sup> See Blass, Debrunner, Rehkopf 1976, § 360. However, see la Roi 2022a discussing the use of the pluperfect indicative in Ancient Greek.

<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of this see Luiselli 1999, 230 ff.

<sup>98</sup> Grenfell, Hunt 1898, 189.

<sup>99</sup> Moeris’ Atticist lexicon η 3 ἥδη Ἀττικοί· ἥδ’ εἰν Ἑλληνες.

seems to suggest that the choice of ῥᾶλλον over the more common ῥᾶχον (which was still perfectly acceptable and the more obvious choice) was a deliberate attempt to signal sophistication, functioning as a register shibboleth. A speaker less confident in Greek might have chosen this feature as a clear mark of refinement, compensating for other elements that reveal an imperfect command of Greek (see the items listed above as low-register features). The use of this element aligns well with the other high-register features identified above, which, however, do not carry the same immediate significance as ῥᾶλλον, which is the most marked and evident feature among less evident features belonging to the same register. In his attempt to elevate the style of the letter, the author of the papyrus may have intentionally used this obvious purist element to demonstrate erudition and perhaps to please his addressee.

In this respect, this papyrus shows that the use of highly purist words in antiquity was not necessarily associated with official contexts or with a univocal sophisticated language, but could have been used in more variegated context. Forms with a very obvious purist profile, such as ῥᾶλλον, were probably also used by speakers who did not have a perfect command of the Greek language as safe markers to upgrade the register.

c. Functional relationship between a) and b)

The use of ῥᾶλλον appears in different types of texts that show more or less adherence to purist features and generally to high register conventions. This suggests that purist features became register markers, probably used as a form of stylisation. However, the effects of purist intervention on epistolary communication were variable and may have depended on various factors: the sender, the addressee, the context, etc. Yet, the fact that most of the time we do not have multiple letters written by the same person, as in this case, makes it difficult to determine whether the purist intervention is influenced by an external factor (such as the addressee) or simply reflects the author's typical linguistic behavior, as seen in the previous case. The text of this private letter shows evidence of linguistic sophistication in the use of ῥᾶλλον. In this case, the roles of Gaianus and the addressee may have influenced the choice of certain register features. By using more sophisticated language, Gaianus may have intended to signal his high-ranking official status, as already indicated by the placement of his name before that of Agenor. Moreover, we cannot exclude that the choice of a highly purist form might have been due to the fact that Gaianus is a Latin speaker. The author of the letter does not seem to have a perfect command of Greek and the different registers and he probably

used what he learned in school for his everyday communication. This, for instance, would also explain the very didactic use of spirits, which is quite unusual in documentary papyri. This raises another question, which will not be discussed in this context, concerning the role of foreigners in the reproduction of Atticising Greek. In a context in which acceptance in the community of educated speakers was based on the ability to reproduce a high register Greek, the adoption of purist features in the language of non-native speakers may have been an attempt to stylise their language in accordance with the demands of the Greek elite, and in this respect, purist elements such as ῥᾶττον may have served as ‘salient pillars’ providing anchors to an Atticising register.

#### 4 Conclusion

Far from being an exhaustive study, this paper, with the analysis of a single case study, aimed to problematise the study of Atticism exclusively as a literary phenomenon and to examine the actual impact of purist tendencies on language use. In this respect, the analysis of cases of stylisation in different types of sources, and especially in the case of private letters, where the private setting would not give rise to expectations of purist intervention, gives us a basis on which to build further research and a more systematic investigation of Atticist features in the private epistolary production – with particular care for non-Greek native speakers. Thus, this paper was meant to raise a few points: First, the choice of Atticising features does not depend exclusively on the context of production but may be due to other factors – e.g. the role of the author, the addressee, etc. – and may reveal an attempt at stylistic ambition. Second, purist elements may be accompanied by features of common Greek, and, in this case, they function as a kind of register shibboleth, anchoring to a particular register. In this respect, they may be useful for those who do not have a perfect command of the Greek language because they are not native speakers. This approach gives us a different perspective from which to look at the prescriptions found in the Atticist lexica and to see what effect they had on language usage, becoming conscious signs of education that can be used for stylistic purposes. Moreover, this approach is functional for looking at Atticism from a broader perspective, not only as a phenomenon that affected high literary production but also as a phenomenon that had a real influence on the kind of changes from above – intended as conscious choices – that were used as instruments of stylisation at different points of the register continuum.

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