Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings
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Seeing the (Smaller and) Bigger Frame: Framing Late Antique Egyptian Writers and Documents Through Bilingual and Biscriptal Choices

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Abstract The paper uses framing theory to explore the role of register in the occurrence of bilingual and biscriptal phenomena in different parts of late antique and early Islamic documentary papyri (fourth-eighth c. AD) with Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Arabic. Framing proves relevant on both the (con)textual and sociohistorical levels, especially at the edges of texts across registers, while 'body' variation is limited to more formal texts. Formulaicity is crucial, as changes pertain to fixed phrases that mark the structure of the document, often supported by (palaeo)graphic changes. Variation also serves culturally shaped symbolic functions (group membership, prestige, legal validity), building a multilayered message.

Keywords Bilingualism. Register. Framing. Papyrology. Late antiquity.

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1 Introduction

During late antiquity, the amount of surviving Latin papyri from Egypt decreases, while the language (or even only the script) occupies a marginal, stereotyped role restricted to legal practices.[1] While Greek, the main language of documentation for centuries, remains popular, Coptic first makes its appearance in private, less official documents, and mainly in monastic milieux. It becomes more widely used and permeates a greater number of registers, including higher ones, from the sixth century onwards.[2] Documentary Coptic endures the Arabic conquest of 642 AD, as the language and writing of the conquerors takes hold no sooner than the eighth to ninth century. Despite the long-standing tradition of prioritising the study of documents purely written in a single language, primarily the Greek one, it is now understood that bilingualism, digraphia, and resulting linguistic and writing occurrences were present in the vibrant written culture of late antique Egypt.

In this linguistic melting pot, occurrences pointing to languages and writing systems in contact, such as code-switching, transliterating or script-mixing, could, contrary to modern standards, even penetrate the writing of formal and legal texts penned by trained professionals. In many documents, scribes employ bilingual and biscriptal strategies (e.g. the routine repetition of amounts in Greek and Coptic), proving that a certain degree of instrumentalisation of bilingual speech and bilingual writing existed at the time.[3] These phenomena are significant, because they shed light on the social dynamics of different languages and their graphic representation in the multilingual environment of late antique and early Islamic Egypt. For instance, a well-disseminated scribal tradition making use of two scripts and languages is the case of Greek notarial signatures in Latin script, from the fifth to the seventh century: *di emu*… (δι᾽ ἐμοῦ…) ‘through/by me…’.[4] Another example, where a change of writing style (*script-switching*) is now accompanied by a change of language (*language-* or *code-switching*), is found in Coptic contracts from the Theban area in the seventh and eighth centuries AD. From the 720s, many of the scribes drawing up these

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1 Fournet 2019, 89-90; Iovine 2019.

2 Fournet 2020, 76-118; Papaconstantinou 2008, 84-6.

3 Richter 2014, 143-4.

4 Apostolakou 2020; Diethart, Worp 1986.

documents tend to use Greek formulaic language and writing in their opening invocation formulae, as well as their closing signatures;[5] these changes may become even more pronounced by complementary palaeographic deviations (e.g. increased spacing or indentation). As far as inter-writer variation within the same text goes, one may also include official subscriptions in a different language and script, such as the Latin additions *legi* 'I read', *recognoui* 'I acknowledged' or *signaui* 'I signed' at the end of otherwise Greek documents, under this category. Another clearly visible frame is created by Greek-Arabic protocols prewritten on the upper part of the document (e.g. in the Qurra archive); these are independent from the main text,[6] but operate the symbolic function of signalling Arabic authority.

There are a few points that these documents and the bilingual and/or biscriptal phenomena they host have in common. To begin with, they appear in highly formulaic documents, yet formulaicity does not seem to hinder their occurrence. On the contrary, in some cases (e.g. the official Latin subscriptions or the transliterated *tabellio* signatures), we could go as far as saying that their different language or writing is part of the formula. In general, it could be said that especially contracts seem to give space to 'non-standard' language and script choices, reminiscing Stolk's observation on the high frequency of 'non-standard' orthographic choices in contracts, especially in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.[7] More importantly, they all appear either in the opening or closing parts of the text (which are themselves typically formulaic), thus serving a framing function to the document, which is often aided by changes in layout. This means that non-standard language and script combinations delineate and signal the beginning and ending of the text, while they also mark its official character by following conventions and requirements such as the inclusion of the invocation formula or the signature of the scribe. A framing approach helps to unlock not only immediately textual and practical considerations (*textual framings*), but also gain access to sociolinguistic interpretations (*contextual framings*),[8] as it brings to light different functional values attached to each linguistic or graphic variety (e.g. the use of Latin as the language and writing of the Roman law).

Frames are 'definitions of a situation' that interlocutors establish in interaction,[9] characterised by flexibility and intertextuality, as they are shaped dynamically and on the basis of prior interactions.

5 Cromwell 2017, 172; 2018, 262-8; 2020, 136-8.

6 In framing theory terms, these protocols act as "material that forms a 'threshold' of the main text", and may be listed under what Wolf 2006, 19-20 calls *paratextual framings*.

7 Stolk 2020, 311-12.

8 On different types of framings in literature and other media, see Wolf 2006, 12-21.

9 Goffman 1974, 10.

As framing theory was introduced to explain everyday communication and its multilayered messages,[10] it would be interesting to explore its possibilities by extending it to everyday documents including those in lower registers, and specifically to private letters. Furthermore, researchers such as Gumperz, have acknowledged the relevance of code-switching to the framing of the message; according to the latter, it can be a 'contextualisation cue', i.e. a "verbal sign which, when processed in co-occurrence with symbolic grammatical and lexical signs, serves to construct the contextual ground for situated interpretation and thereby affects how constituent messages are understood".[11] By extending such observations to writing, the next step is to examine the contribution of such alternations in language and writing to the shaping of meaning in private letters. Viewing variation in language and script choice through the lens of framing theory has the potential to further elucidate meaning-making on two levels: first, these choices, often appearing, as it seems, in the opening and closing parts of documents, can frame and indicate specific communicative acts and registers; moreover, this approach provides insights into the wider, sociohistorical/cultural frame in which this variation and its association to certain communicative types are formed, such as the social status of different languages and scripts, and the evoked identities of the (writing) subject.[12]

While several studies[13] have examined bilingual and biscriptal at-

10 Gordon 2015, 330.

11 Gumperz 2015, 315-16.

12 This may or may not coincide with the 'initiator' (for example, the sender of a letter or the initiating contracting party) of the document, even (though somewhat less likely) in private letters, due to the wide use of scribes or literate individuals writing on behalf of initiators in Egypt (for different types of writing agents, see Ast 2015; on the impact of scribal intervention on the language of private letters, see Halla-aho 2017).

13 It is true that there are a few works on bilingual and biscriptal phenomena which focus on letters. To mention a few, Choat 2010 looks into early Coptic epistolography, and the influence of Greek and Demotic on its formulaic language, as well as bilingual late antique monastic letters (Choat 2017). A recent contribution by Fendel 2022 deals with Coptic syntactic interference in Greek letters, while Halla-aho 2013 examines Greek influence on the syntax, lexis, and phraseology of Latin letters in Roman Egypt. There are works concentrating on bilingual archives containing letters, such as those of Adams 2003, 593-7 and Nachtergaele 2015 on code alternation in the Claudius Tiberianus archive. Oréal 2017 explores "the pragmatics of code-switching" through the use of Greek particles in Coptic letters from Kellis. When it comes to ancient epistolographic code-switching and Greek-Latin contact beyond Egyptian sources, it is worth referring to studies on Cicero's bilingual correspondence, such as those of Elder, Mullen 2019 or Swain 2002. In the first work, we also find a section on script-switching, and the implications of its relationship to code-switching (Elder, Mullen 2019, 120-5). A closer example to the purposes of the present study is the one of Pezzella 2022, who performs a sociolinguistic and palaeographic analysis to explore the functions and social meaning of code-switching in the 'letters of Theon' and their contemporary epistles from Oxyrhynchus. She mentions the symbolic use of Latin in 'stereotyped and structural sections', such as the address, as

titudes in both less and more formal papyri, comparing the influence of register on their occurrence and position remains underexplored. Do certain registers allow for more or fewer such phenomena or affect their type? Or do we find the same patterns across registers? To help bridge this gap and respond to similar questions, after summarising the sociolinguistic reality of fourth- to eighth-century Egypt, as well as basic concepts of framing theory (§ 1), this paper is divided into two main parts: The first and main one (§ 2) explores the framing and other functions of language- and script-switches in letters, taking their more or less official character into account. The combinations of languages and scripts/writing styles examined are Greek-Latin (§ 2.1), Greek-Coptic (§ 2.2), and Coptic/Latin-Arabic (§ 2.3), in an attempt to bring together different late antique documents that are traditionally examined separately. The second section (§ 3) seeks to better understand this framing role of opening and closing switches by comparing them in terms of functions and motivations to changes taking place in other documents (primarily, but not only, contracts), including their body.[14] Ultimately, this study attempts to tackle the question of whether structural organisation in relation to text type, register, and communicative goal plays a role in the type, frequency or meaning of the bilingual and biscriptal phenomena we meet in papyrological sources. Both parts use examples of late antique and early Islamic documentary papyri using more than one language or writing styles, with assigned dating from the fourth to the eighth century AD. The limited sample is chosen with the criterion and objective of discussing different functions of framing in language- and script-switches, and is organised roughly chronologically. Corrections of such occurrences are added when relevant, as they reflect metalinguistic considerations of the writing subject, and present the inclusion or exclusion of such changes as a conscious choice. This approach is meant to cover overall contribution to sense-making on the two levels described above: a) the immediate, textual and contextual frame of the document (including register, communicative goals, linguistic and graphic variation), and b) the wider sociohistorical frame coding and decoding these meanings. The paper is completed by concluding remarks and suggestions for future research (§ 4).

well as the addition of literary quotes in openings and closings, alluding to the fact that the position of switches can be relevant to their interpretation.

14 As 'body' I define the text following the opening and preceding the closing section of the document, which typically preserves the core message.

2 Bilingual and Biscriptal Phenomena in Letters

Although, for the objectives of this paper, private epistolography is used in opposition to documents that are associated with higher registers, it should be emphasised that, just as other text types, not all letters fall under one and the same register category. As Bentein[15] shows, even texts that would *a priori* be considered as belonging to the same register may vary significantly on different linguistic levels; he hence proposes to rather talk about a 'register continuum'. Zooming in, Halla-aho[16] observes that variation can be found within the same letter or even within the same level of language organisation. From the viewpoint of orthographic errors, Stolk[17] also argues against obscuring register variation in letters by holistically assigning them a 'low' register. It therefore seems imperative to be cautious with generalisations and take multiple factors into account while analysing letters, such as linguistic and graphic characteristics, communicative goal, and the relationship of participants. Framing is a good method for preventing generalisations and resisting stereotyped ideas on register, as one of its central ideas is that it constitutes a dynamic process.

Below I discuss examples of late antique letters where different functions of code- and script-switching are evident. For a very rough estimate, a quick search on Trismegistos[18] shows that, from a total of 9952 letters dating to the period from the fourth to the eighth centuries AD, 278 (2.8%) are bilingual. The majority (206 or 2.1% of all letters) are Coptic/Greek, followed by Arabic/Greek (43/0.4%), and, finally, Greek/Latin (29/0.3%). Awaiting an extensive quantitative study on late antique and early Islamic bilingual (and/or biscriptal) letters, the aim of the present paper is to qualitatively examine a limited number of representative case studies of primarily Greek-Latin and Coptic-Greek texts, with the addition of some involving Arabic, which are traditionally examined separately, while briefly summarising previous discussions. Their switches are viewed keeping framing theory in mind, with simultaneous comments on relevant graphic aspects.

15 Bentein 2015.

16 Halla-aho 2010, 172.

17 Stolk 2020, 313.

18 The database can be accessed at `https://www.trismegistos.org/`.

2.1 Greek-Latin

In the fourth and fifth century, we still find interchanges between Greek and Latin, as happened previously during the Roman period. As perhaps expected in bilingual epistolography, some of the changes pertain to greetings and salutations. Adams[19] discusses code-switching in subscriptions of letters and calls it a 'special case'. After mentioning the fact that it is conceivable that the sender uses the subscription to add a personal touch, he lists a number of possible explanations for the switch: the fact that the sender may have been illiterate in one language or might have taken the addressee's competence into account; another possibility would have to do with limitations posed by the scribe's linguistic knowledge and literacy. Adams delves deeper with the aid of three fourth-century letters, which prove that these interpretations are inadequate: *P.Abinn.* 16 (Philadelphia?, 346-351), *P.Oxy.* LV 3793 (Oxyrhynchus, 340), *P.Mert.* III 115 (uncertain provenance, early fourth century). Concerning the Latin greeting in one of these cases (*P.Abinn.* 16), which seems to be written by the same hand as the Greek text, the sender and addressee seem to be familiar with both Greek and Latin, as is additionally supported by our knowledge from the Abinnaeus archive. The same holds for *P.Mert.* III 115, where we find the addition of a Latin final greeting. This is an unexpected language choice by the writer (perhaps the sender), who does not seem to know Latin very well. Judging by the presence and quality of the Greek language in the rest of the letter, we would expect Greek to be the most convenient option for both sender and addressee. In *P.Oxy.* LV 3793, the editor's 'easy' interpretation that the correspondents were soldiers and should therefore communicate in Latin does not explain why, contrary to the Latin subscription, the rest of the letter is in Greek. Adams concludes that the reasons for switching to Latin in subscriptions should be sought in two more plausible scenarios; first, the acknowledgment of the shared bilingual identity and consequent group membership of the correspondents (which could also apply to military settings); second, code-switching may be used as "an act of divergence, that is a deliberate and symbolic departure from the preferred language of the addressee", as an expression of identity or display of power.[20] We could summarise the motivations proposed by saying that code-switching is employed as a way of framing individuals as partakers of the social connotations attached to the language and writing they use. This code-switch, due to its final position and contrast with the preceding text, becomes a marked choice[21] with symbolic value.

19 Adams 2003, 396-9.

20 Adams 2003, 399.

21 For code-switching as a marked choice (social indexical code-switching), see Myers-Scotton 1993; 1998.

Epistolary greetings and salutations are indeed a 'special case', as the discussion of their functions can go even further. Blumell[22] redates three Oxyrhynchite letters (*P.Oxy.* XVIII 2193; 2194; *P.Köln* IV 200) that belong to the so-called dossier of Theon to the late fourth or early fifth century. Pezzella[23] conducts a sociolinguistic study on the same corpus, adding a number of coeval letters from the area, while also paying attention to palaeography. The letters come from a Christian environment, and are possibly written by the same scribe, who seems to be biliterate, trained in Greek and Latin. They all have the same type of address in Latin on the back, with the structure *redde serbo dei tempore*[24] followed by the name of the addressee in the dative. The letter *P.Köln* IV 200 is additionally completed by a Latin salutation, which also establishes a Christian context (10: *vale apud deum* 'be well with God'). As the upper part of the papyrus is lost, we cannot be certain if there was any Latin phrase in the opening of the text. The other two letters, however, begin with Christian literary quotes[25] in poorly formed Latin, which Blumell[26] identified as parts from a Latin translation of the *Acta Apollonii* (25). Theon and his addressees must have belonged to a Christian circle with some knowledge of Latin, which at the same time gave them a Romanised identity. The effect of adding Latin excerpts becomes more significant considering the fact that the communicative goal of the sender is a request, which is reinforced by invoking the Christian identity of the sender, as well as reminding him of his mortality and subjectivity to divine judgement.[27] As Pezzella notices, the scribe clearly separates these quotations from the central message, and adds three oblique strokes marking their end.[28] By borrowing this literary[29] graphic device, further highlighting the position of the quote

22 Blumell 2008.

23 Pezzella 2022.

24 The word-for-word translation would be 'deliver to the servant of God in time', but Sijpesteijn 1994 suggests that *tempore* may refer to *serbo dei*, expressing a temporal restriction. According to this assumption, the translation would be 'in this life on earth/for the time being servant of God', creating hope for a better position in the afterlife.

25 *P.Oxy.* XVIII 2193, 1-3: *Una mortis condidit* | *deus lues autem com* (l. cum) | *m*[*o*]*rtis fieri* 'God ordained one death, in the moment of death they dissolve'. *P.Oxy.* XVIII 2194, 1-5: [±12]. […]. [±22 | ±15]*os et probatos et inpe*ṛ*ato*|*rum* (l. imperatorum) *e*ṭ *s*ẹ*natorum et maximo disserto et pau*|*peros una mortis condidit deus, lues autem* | *com mortis fieri* "[… for all men(?), good] and bad, emperors and senators, the mighty, the eloquent, the poor, God ordained one death, in the moment of death they dissolve" (transl. Blumell, Wayment 2015, 587, 591).

26 Blumell 2012.

27 Blumell 2012, 73-4.

28 Pezzella 2022, 141.

29 The 'literalisation' and rhetorical character of late antique letter-writing, which was prominent during these centuries (especially the fourth), is also relevant. The

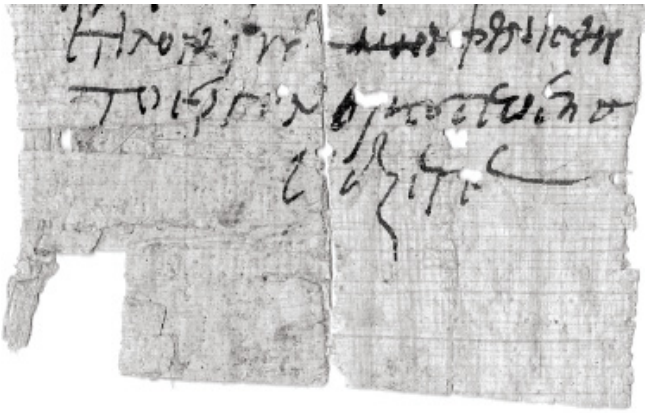

Figure 1
P.Oxy. LXXXV 5529 (Oxyrhynchus, fourth c.), 10-12: [ἀπό- | (not on image)] στιλον ἵνα μὴ ἀφανισθῇ | τὸ ἔργον. opto te bene | ualere. 'Send [Sirikios] so that the work is not lost. I wish for your good health'. © Courtesy of The Egypt Exploration Society and the Faculty of Classics, University of Oxford, 83/32(c)

at the beginning of the document, the digraph scribe turns it into a multilayered frame for the letters, as it makes their request more compelling by enhancing it with divine authority, while also building a shared religious and cultural identity for the correspondents. This framing is complete once Latin is added at the end and back side of the letters, fully surrounding the Greek message.[30] It could be said that both the change in language and its graphic representation contribute to raising the register of this private letter, giving it a more official and scholarly tone.

As salutations are an integral structural part of letters, the role of formulaicity should not be overlooked. Formulaic language is closely connected to register and can signal certain text types. The language of letters is considered one of the least formulaic in documentary practice, but the opening and closing sections are exceptions to this. The structural parts hosting farewell formulae can be more easily identified visually not only by different language and script choices, but also by other palaeographic variations or changes in layout that may accompany this variation. In *P.Oxy.* LXXXV 5529 (Oxyrhynchus, fourth century), a recent addition to the corpus of Greek-Latin Oxyrhynchite letters, the main text of the letter is Greek, but the author prefers Latin for the salutation of the final lines, possibly with some relevance to his official position and the military context: *opto te bene* | *ualere* 'I wish for your good health' (11-12). Apart from

Latin quote could be considered as a type of an introductory *prooimion* to the letter (see Fournet 2009, 46-52).

30 These switches are reminiscent of Wenskus' *emblematic code-switching*, which, although vague (Adams 2003, 346) mainly refers to the addition of literary quotes at initial and final positions of non-literary texts (Wenskus 1998, 19). Its main function is to mark the bilingual identity of correspondents (5-6).

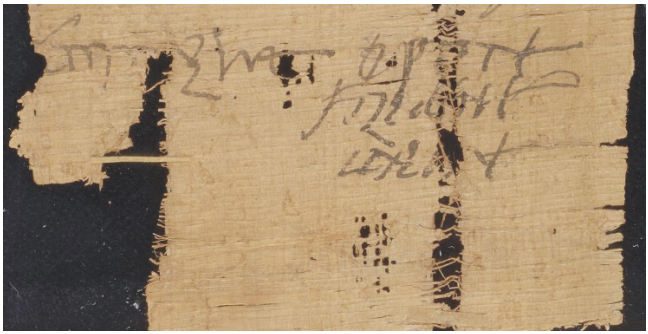

Figure 2
P.Mert. III 115 (early fourth c.), 28-30: ἐπιτάξῃς. Opto te | fili bene | valẹre. '… to impose. I wish that you, son, are in good health'. CC BY – 4.0. © Chester Beatty, Dublin, CBL MP 115

shifting from Greek to Latin writing, in the case of line 11, within the same line, especially the final word of the farewell formula (*ualere*) graphically stands out against the Greek text preceding it, with a very cursive writing marking the end of the document **[fig. 1]**. It resembles other formal signatures and subscriptions found in official documents, which makes sense considering the fact that this correspondence concerns a request of one official to another.

Similarly, in the Greek *P.Mert.* III 115 (uncertain provenance, early fourth century), where the sender gives 'fatherly' advice to the addressee, the final salutation is written in Latin: *opto te* | *fili bene* | *ualẹre* 'I wish that you are in good health, son' (28-30). The Latin writing stands out as it is more sloping compared to the Greek one **[fig. 2]**.

It is organised in three short lines that form a square-like shape on the bottom right side of the papyrus. According to Sarri,[31] placing the final greeting right after the end of the body of the letter, often squeezed close to it, was the standard positioning of farewell formulae added by a different hand[32] in Roman times, a practice that was later adopted by senders of letters signing in their own hand **[fig. 1]**. In this way, valedictions functioned as signatures that, especially in official but also in private letters, authenticated the letter and prevented any later additions. A change to a language and writing that, especially in the late antique period, fewer people were familiar with, could have further supported this function, aside from

31 Sarri 2018, 188-9.

32 Previous editors have speculated that the Latin subscription of *P.Mert.* III 115 **[fig. 2]** was added by a second hand, the one of the sender: *P.Mert.* III (ed. Thomas), p. 52: "presumably it was added by the sender in his own hand"; *CEL* III 224bis (ed. Cugusi), p. 278: "il mittente […] appone, probabilmente in proprio pugno, la soscrizione in latino". Due to the lack of supporting palaeographic indications, it is still possible that the same hand employed a different style for the writing of the final salutation.

(but also relating to) the symbolic and group-membership functions of code-switching already discussed by Adams.

2.2 Greek-Coptic

Before other non-literary genres, Coptic makes its appearance in private and business letters, especially within monastic settings.[33] One of the first Coptic-Greek (sub)archives is that of Nepheros (360-370) at the Melitian monastery of Hathor (Kynopolite/Herakleopolite nome). The vast majority of its letters are Greek, but even there the Coptic background and digraph skills of the writer still come through in some cases. In one of the few Coptic ones, *P.Neph.* 15 = *SB Kopt.* II 899 (uncertain provenance, fourth century), addressed from a certain Papnoute to Nepheros, the writer makes an interesting correction of both language and writing style in his final greetings. At the bottom of the front side, he starts writing the greeting in Greek: ἀσπάζομε τοὺς… 'I greet the…' (5). These few words, where we already find an orthographic deviation (ἀσπάζομε instead of ἀσπάζομαι), indicate that his Greek language skills are imperfect. At the same time, he has now changed his Coptic hand into a cursive Greek one. He then crosses it out and continues with Coptic greetings (6) on the back side, flexibly shifting back to the main language and writing style of the letter. This is an impressive witness to the familiarity of the writing subject with both Coptic and Greek greeting formulae, as well as the fact that he eventually made the conscious choice of writing in Coptic and not in Greek. The Christian environment could be responsible for the shift, creating a spirit of 'brotherhood' between Papnoute and the religious figures he greets, who could, besides, also be better acquainted with this 'community language', as Choat calls it.[34] In this sense, the writer may have opted for Coptic because he considered it helpful in respect to the request he makes. Structure, layout,[35] and materiality seem to play a role once again, as the change to Greek appears at the end of the main message and simultaneously at the end of the front side of the papyrus sheet. This is reinforced by the fact that the writer makes a second change from Coptic to Greek on the back side, this time to write the address, possibly accommodating the preferences of the letter carrier. It seems tempting to go as far as saying that the writer had the tendency of or was used to making

33 Fournet 2020, 9-14, 18.

34 Choat 2017, 21.

35 See also Bentein 2024, who analyses the social significance of variation on multiple semiotic domains (language choice, layout, document format) in this and other texts from the Nepheros archive.

these changes at the end or edge of the sheet. Writing Greek initial and final greetings in early Coptic letters is fairly common too, as, for example in the fourth-century ostraka *O.Douch* V 508, 547, 524, 606, 636,[36] which have a Coptic body, but open or close with Greek formulae with χαίρειν 'to greet' and ἐρρῶσθαι 'to be healthy'. These ostraka express the message of senders (most of whom appear to be relatives of recipients) in what should have been their everyday language of communication while following Greek epistolographic conventions in the prescript and farewell sections. The same pattern is found in primarily Coptic letters from the Dakhla Oasis dating to the second half of the fourth century (ca. 355-380). In particular, if we go through the second volume of the edition of Coptic documentary texts from Kellis, *P.Kellis* VII, out of a total of nearly seventy letters, more than half (forty-three)[37] preserve a Greek address on the back side, while about a third (twenty-five)[38] have a Greek initial and/or final greeting. "In formulaic epistolary elements, then, there is fairly ready movement from one language to the other", Bagnall[39] concludes, linking formulaicity and text type to language- and script-switching.

The same correction as the one by Nepheros, from Greek to Coptic, albeit this time only graphic, is found two centuries later, in a sixth-century Coptic letter, *P.Ghent.* inv. 48 (Aphrodite?, sixth century), regarding various fiscal matters. Although the names of correspondents have been lost, the editors[40] find certain internal cues which could possibly point to a monastic background. Palaeographically speaking, the scribe adopts a mixed style with a combination of majuscule/bilinear and minuscule/quadrilinear letter forms, characteristic of this transitional period. Despite this fact, he chooses to correct the 'Greek' writing of the letter *eta* to its more 'Coptic' equivalent in the closing formula at the end of the letter, by adding a vertical stroke to the 'Latinate' form (<h>), turning it into a majuscule one (<Ⲏ>) **[fig. 3]**.

The closing formula includes the trinity phrase borrowed from Greek (ἡ ἁγία τριάς 'the Holy Trinity') (14), and this is where the Greek grapheme (not appearing elsewhere in the Coptic text) occurs. This implies that the scribe was digraph and his writing was likely momentarily affected by this Greek element, as remarked by the

36 These are briefly mentioned by Luiselli 2008, 717.

37 *P.Kellis* VII 60-2; 64-8; 70-82; 84-90; 92-3; 97; 99; 102-3; 105-6; 109-11; 113; 115-16; 120; 123. We can also note the possibility of Greek-Coptic script-mixing in the spelling of the name Τεϭσογις, appearing in the Greek address of *P.Kellis* VII 109.

38 *P.Kellis* VII 59; 65; 72; 75; 77-8; 82; 84; 86-7; 91-2; 94-5; 102-3; 105-8; 112-13; 116; 118; 123.

39 Bagnall 2011, 88.

40 Amory, Stolk 2024.

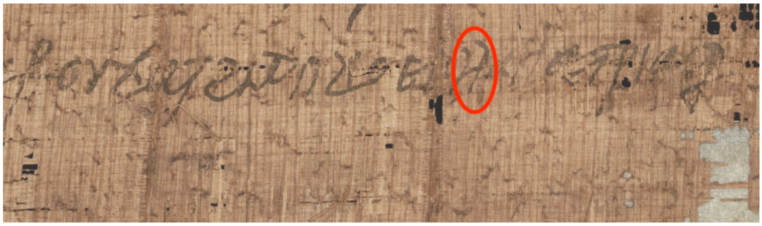

Figure 3 *P.Ghent*. inv. 48 (Aphrodite?, sixth c.), 14: ⳁ ⲟⲩⲭⲁⲓ̈ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲏ ⲁⲅⲓⲁ ⲧⲣⲓⲁⲥ. ⳁ 'Greetings in the Lord, the holy trinity'. (Ghent University Library, Ghent University Library, BHSL.PAP.000048). The corrected *eta* appears circled

editors. Script-mixing thus seems to appear unintentionally in this case, but the correction shows a conscious choice and extra caution to avoid script-mixing at the closing section, and preserve the Coptic look and character of the text. This means that the 'Coptic' frame here lacks the textual dimension (unless we think of it as not created by a change but in terms of coherence), and is focused on (re) presenting the 'brotherhood' (3-4, 13) between the correspondents.

While the Greek language and/or writing lose ground in more informal and monastic contexts, they seem to maintain a certain prestige in epistolography for the centuries to come. However, their use seems all the more marginal and symbolic as Coptic becomes more established. If we move forward to the eighth century, for example, we can read a heavily abbreviated Greek prescript on the first line of *SB* I 5951 = *P.Ryl.Copt.* 278 (Hermopolite, seventh/early eight century),[41] a letter addressed from the pagarch to village headmen and priests: Φλ(άουιος) Μερ[κοῦρε σὺν θ(εῷ)] πάγαρχ(ος) δι' ἐμοῦ Σευήρου 'Flavius Mercurius, pagarch [with god], through me, Severus' (1). Considering the official character of the letter, featuring a request for supplying workmen, the sender and/or his scribe may have intended to present himself as an authoritative figure. The main message is in Coptic, which must have been the clearest and preferred option of the village elders and priests. In fact, Berkes managed to track some contemporary Hermopolite parallels (*BKU* III 420, *P.LouvreBawit* 50), sent from pagarchs to village officials, where we find a Greek introduction of the same format, followed by the message in Coptic, pointing to a special administrative genre in the area in early Arabic times.[42] The presence of the Greek language (followed by a switch to Coptic), its placement at the first line of the letter (perhaps also aided by cursive, abbreviated writing and crosses) must have given a distinct appearance to these texts,

41 Berkes 2017, 234-5.

42 Berkes 2017, 237.

creating the necessary frame of formality and distance between pagarchs and important village figures. In brief, this is another example of the symbolic functions of code-switching being used for administrative purposes, which is highlighted by its position at the opening section of the document.

Communicative goals such as making a request and politeness strategies employed toward the achievement of senders' purposes seem to play an important role in the choice and change of language and writing at the end of letters. In *P.Aphrod.Let.Copt.* 20 (Aphrodite, sixth century?; Dioskoros archive), a Coptic letter concerning the case of a woman named Madjesdjé, the sender, Kyros, addresses a higher-ranking person to make a request. As the editor remarks, while it seems that he was, to a certain extent, bilingual and digraph, and thus able to add his greetings in Coptic in accordance with the rest of the letter, he chose Greek for his final salutation (16-19): ⳨ ἐγὼ δὲ Κῦρος ἐλάχιστος πολλὰ προσκ̣υ̣ν̣ῶ̣ κ̣αὶ. ⸗ [...] ἐπ̣ὶ τ̣ο̣ὺ̣ς. μ.. [± 3] | μετὰ τῶν συνόν̣τ̣ω̣ν̣ αὐτῆς καταξιώσατε παρακληθῆ̣ι κελεῦσαι μαθεῖν τ̣[± 3] | τὸν δοῦλον αὐτῆς Φοιβάμμωνα ὅτι μετὰ τ̣ὸ̣ν̣ Θ̣εὸν οὐκ ἔχει καταφυγὴν εἰ̣ μὴ τ̣ῆ̣[ς σῆς] | *vacat* π̣ρ̣οστ̣ασίας, δέσ̣π̣οτα [± 3] "Moi, l'humble Kuros, je salue profondément et vers des... | parmi les personnes qui habitent avec elle, qu'elle daigne bien vouloir ordonner d'apprendre (?) [à ?] Phoibammôn, son (= fem.) serviteur, qu'après Dieu, il n'a pas d'autre refuge que celui de | [son] patronage".[43] This choice is, at least at first glance, curious, as external motivations such as those concerning technical terms do not apply.[44] The practiced hand he uses shows that he was well-acquainted with writing Greek (likely more than writing Coptic). Vanderheyden comments that the choice of Greek, apart from a matter of acquired writing skills, could have to do with the fact that Kyros addresses someone with a higher position, and, in that case, not only the Greek language, perhaps traditionally associated with respectful greeting formulae, but even its elegant writing may have seemed more appropriate, enhancing the polite character of the request.[45] Strategic politeness choices are evident in the language too (e.g. ἐλάχιστος, πολλὰ προσκ̣υ̣ν̣ῶ̣, final religious invocation, δέσ̣π̣οτα, plural vocative of politeness), where a respectful and humbled tone is adopted. The above social and textual (graphic and linguistic) conventions create a double frame for the letter, its message, its sender and receiver, and their relationship.

43 Translation by Vanderheyden 2015, 2: 196. I hereby wish to thank Loreleï Vanderheyden for giving me access to her PhD dissertation, in anticipation of her resulting monograph, which is currently under press.

44 Vanderheyden 2015, 1: 26, 46.

45 Vanderheyden 2015, 1: 47. Letters of request were among the most common types of late antique letters with a high frequency of politeness features (see Papathomas 2007, 498, where most of the polite expressions mentioned here are separately discussed).

A comparable example from the early Islamic period is *CPR* XXXI 11 (Hermopolite?, eight century), a Coptic business letter whose receiver may have been an official, ending with a fragmentary Greek line where δέσπο(τα) 'lord' (6) is also legible. The address on the back is also in Greek, with many abbreviations. As Colomo, the editor, observes, the scribe is proficient in both Greek and Coptic; the writing of the whole text combines both majuscule and minuscule letter forms and exhibits a clear influence from Greek cursive, 'producing a rather homogeneous graphic impression' (*CPR* XXXI, 24). Nevertheless, δέσπο(τα) still stands out in terms of its 'Greek' *pi* form (ϖ), ligatures, and typical Greek abbreviation, and by being positioned at the bottom-centre of the letter.[46] In addition, the beginning and end of the text are demarcated by crosses, the final one following δέσπο(τα). These symbols also shape the address on the back side (written in the same Greek style and in a thicker pen), dividing the names of addressee and sender: [† θε]οτηρ(ή)τ(ῳ) δεσπ(ό)τ(ῃ) μ(ε)τ(ὰ) Θεὸ(ν) προστ(ά)τ(ῃ) τῷ εὐκλε(εστάτῳ) Κύρῳ † Σενούθης ἀναγ(ν)ώ(στης) αὐτ(οῦ) δοῦλ(ος) † 'To the God-protected lord and protector with God, the most honourable Kyros, Shenouthes, lector, his servant' (7). Apart from their simple deictic function, which was very common in later documents, Christian symbols could be added to the address on the back side of letters, and, especially in Coptic letters of the Arab period, could even indicate a potential association of the writer with the church.[47] The preserved Coptic text, albeit incomplete and unclear, supports such an assumption, as it abounds in religious references. Regarding the Greek language used in the address, it should be noted that it reflects the same deferential tone as the subscription δέσπο(τα) on the front side, acknowledging the higher position of the addressee, while framing the sender as his and God's 'servant'.[48] As noticed by Amory, the address of a letter, as the first written part visible to recipients of a papyrus, significantly impacted their perception of politeness devices employed by the sender.[49] It follows that the selection and formatting of the language in the address, particularly when making a request, must have been a meticulous process for the sender. To sum up, in these and other similar examples, language choice(s), politeness strategies, palaeography, and layout are skilfully adapted to the needs of the letter, in order to create a relationship of trust and respect between correspondents.

46 On the graphic differentiation of the final δέσποτα and its relation to politeness in Greek letters see Amory 2022, 58-9.

47 Amory 2023, 63-4, 67.

48 The polite connotations of this form of address have been diachronically studied by Dickey 2001.

49 Amory 2022, 59-60.

Although a shift to a different language and writing style could be meaningfully used as demonstrated, it should be mentioned that it is also common to find Coptic letters with lexical items borrowed from Greek that typically appear in openings and closings but could not qualify as code-switching at this point. One such instance is the phrase σὺν θ(εῷ) 'with God' found at the beginning of many Coptic letters (e.g. *CPR* II 236 [Arsinoite, eight century]).[50] The Greek prepositional phrase can be traced in the opening line of letters much later, as in *CPR* XXXI 13 (Hermopolis?, tenth/eleventh century), when documentary Greek in Egypt was virtually obsolete, further proving that it was not really used because of its lexical content, but merely as a way to mark the opening of the letter.[51] Such examples, in combination with the increasing amount of letters exclusively written in Coptic, reveal that, in later centuries, Coptic depended on the Greek language less and less, as Greek was left with a visual, symbolic value comparable to that of Latin in the former period.

2.3 Coptic/Latin-Arabic[52]

Examining eighth-century letters, it would be negligence to fully exclude Arabic from the discussion.[53] The Coptic-Arabic letter *CPR* II 228 = *P.Gascou* 24 (Middle Egypt-Fayum?, eight century?), reedited

50 "On lexical grounds, σὺν θεῷ is not indicative of language selection", Cromwell 2013, 284 remarks. She also provides a list with the different types of documents it appears in, including letters (284-5 fn. 16).

51 The phrase has its widest spread in later Coptic texts beyond documents; it is thus not just an epistolographic convention, but rather functions as a more general marker of the beginning of texts (see Vincent Walter's forthcoming PhD dissertation).

52 I have deliberately excluded Greek-Arabic letters from the discussion with the intention of briefly discussing less popular or studied combinations, although framing plays an important role in Greek-Arabic epistolography too (see, for example, Richter 2010, 201-2 on eighth-century Arabic-Greek *entagia*, 'demand note' business letters from the governor to taxpayers, from the Qurra dossier). On Coptic-Greek *entagia* see Cromwell 2022, and most relevantly comments such as the following on p. 355: "These Coptic texts belong to a larger body of *entagia*, which appear from as early as 687/88 until the early Abbasid period […]. The Coptic texts are quite standardised and, while Coptic is used for the main body of the texts, they are framed by Greek formulae that are linguistically and visually demarcated from the Coptic components".

53 For a discussion of Arabic letters see Grob 2010, esp. 193-7, where she demonstrates the graphic differentiation (through cursiveness, ligation, indentation, etc.) of initial and final blessings. Arabic letters offer a nice example of how changes in style could be used to separate and highlight the beginning and end of letters without being accompanied by a language switch, especially since handshifts in Arabic epistolography were much rarer (87). This reference is not meant to imply that this was a special characteristic of Arabic letters, as the same practice was adopted in other monolingual letters, for example the Greek ones, on which see, for instance, Luiselli 2008, 689: "Specific devices, such as indention and blank spaces, are used to lay out the constituent elements of the prescript, and to separate the final clause from the preceding

by Boud'hors,[54] no longer gives the impression of a Christian environment. The communication must have been between two individuals, most likely business associates, who had converted to Islam, as Krall, the first editor, had already hypothesised (*CPR* II, 180). The main text is written in Coptic, in cursive writing, and it is likely that the scribe had been trained in Greek. As Boud'hors points out, converted wine dealers such as the initiator of this letter could continue communicating in Coptic for business purposes, especially with monastic communities.[55] The address on the bottom of the back side, following a large space separating it from the body of the letter, is written upside down first in Coptic and subsequently in Arabic. The Coptic address is significantly longer, with a *vacat* between the two correspondents, whereas the Arabic one is very concise, essentially preserving only the name of the addressee, as was common in Arabic epistolography of the time.[56] On top of practical considerations such as taking the letter carrier into account, this double address immediately frames the correspondents as having a double identity, and emphasises their Arabisation.[57]

Another intriguing case is a recently edited private letter, *P.Lond.* inv. 3124 (Palestinian-Egyptian area, end of seventh-ninth century), which seems to pertain to personal updates and business matters. Presumably a dictation product, the core text is 'allographic', as Internullo[58] calls it,[59] meaning that Arabic is transliterated in Latin letters. Apart from its unique significance for Arabic phonology, as it records vowels in Arabic at an early stage, it is further interesting to see a scribe who is educated in the Latin language and writing after the Arab conquest. The letter starts with an invocation[60] and extensive greetings in Latin (1-6), and then continues in Arabic in Latin characters. This means that, through transliteration, the Latin script is preserved, whereas on the level of language choice, there is a switch to Arabic after the Latin opening. According to the editors, the sender dictated starting "in Latin, possibly as a courtesy

section. By contrast, thematic articulation within the main body of the letter is as a rule not marked visually".

54 Boud'hors 2016.

55 Boud'hors 2016, 78.

56 See the comment by Vanthieghem in Boud'hors 2016, 88, note on line 36.

57 For more on the contact between Arabic and Coptic in documents of later centuries (including a discussion of a Coptic letter with evidence of linguistic borrowing from Arabic), see Richter 2008.

58 Internullo, D'Ottone Rambach 2018.

59 On the same text and its discovery, see also Internullo 2016.

60 The presence of an invocation in the prescript, in this case in Latin, is an influence from Arabic epistolographic conventions (Grob 2010, 82) also present in Greek letters of the Arabic period (Luiselli 2008, 697-9).

towards his correspondent Iohannes, using probably all the Latin formulae that he knew – as the repetitions suggest a limited repertoire in Latin" (66). Both the sender and the receiver seem to be familiar with (oral) Arabic, as well as at least basic formulaic Latin, possibly belonging to the same circle. This brings us back to the central role of formulaicity when it comes to switches taking place at the edge of the letter – and the minimum linguistic competence (and, in other cases, literacy) it requires.

To conclude, there seems to be a close relationship between the emergence of bilingual and biscriptal phenomena in late antique and early Islamic letters, highlighted by changes in layout and other visual cues, on the one hand, and formulaic language, register, and communicative goal, on the other.

3 Comparison Between Biscriptal and Bilingual Phenomena in Letters and Other Documents

After getting an idea of the types and functions of switches at the beginning and end of letters, a comparison should be made, not only to changes positioned in the body of letters, but also to the ones taking place at the edges of other text types. Starting from the first, it is easy to notice that changes in the body of letters are more difficult to find. While framing on the textual level is inherently harder to achieve in this position compared to openings and closings, writers do not seem to prefer the body of letters for framing themselves and their message in certain cultural or symbolic ways either. A factor that should nevertheless not be overlooked is the fact that many letters were dictated. Consequently, it is to be expected that changes of language and/or writing take place especially in the final greetings, where senders may wish to sign personally, and where, for this reason, changes of hand are frequently met. In such cases, it could be said that framing is of a different type, as it depends on external circumstances; yet, this does not mean that the visual result and linguistic choices could not be carefully selected or do not frame the letter and its correspondents in the ways already explained. On the contrary, the effort and style of personal subscriptions were likely valued and interpreted by recipients. As Fournet observes, after changes in the materiality and format of letters, which became most noticeable in the fourth century, the starting point of our investigation, the graphic quality of letters increased. This tendency is, as he notes, characteristically evident in visually and linguistically intricate salutations.[61] Conversely, changes in the body of other, offi-

61 Fournet 2009, 30, 32.

cial documents, appear to be a more common phenomenon, and, for some, even constitute the established practice. Such is the case of court proceedings, where the main speeches are rendered in Greek, while their introduction, some speeches of[62] or between officials, and the description of the hearing process are usually in Latin. The code-switching (also resulting in script-switching) in the report most likely reflects real circumstances of the hearing, with the exception of the writing convention to introduce speeches in Latin.[63] Greek is used because it is comprehensible by most, whereas the use of Latin portrays officials as powerful figures with Roman authority and brings them together in a group.[64]

One occurrence not limited to openings and closings that appears rather regularly starting from the fourth century is Greek-Coptic script-mixing in Egyptian names of people and places (e.g. the commonly found Πιαϩ 'field' used in the composition of toponyms) in a variety of Greek documents, including letters, like *P.Amh.* II 154 (Hermopolite, ca. 630-650; *CPR* XXV, 190), *P.Apoll.* 63 (Apollonopolite, second half of seventh century, cf. *BL* VIII 10), and *P.Neph.* 12 (Omboi?, fourth century, after 352, cf. *BL* IX 173). Nevertheless, this interesting writing phenomenon does not seem to be an intentional choice but mostly emerges as a result of an *ad hoc* phoneme-to-grapheme conversion process, due to the simultaneous knowledge of both Greek and Coptic(-only) graphemes. In more official documents, half of which are contracts, place names written like so are visually emphasised by the use of superlinear strokes, showing some degree of awareness concerning the script-mixing.[65] One of them is *ChLA* XLI 1194 =*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67329 (Aphrodite, May-June 524, cf. *BL* XIII 57), a bilingual document of legal proceedings where a single trigraph, as it seems, scribe, on top of writing in Latin and Greek according to the usual pattern described above, shows evidence of Coptic literacy with his Greek-Coptic spelling of an estate (Πιαϩ Σε), which he also overlines.[66] Initial evidence suggests that letter writers may not have felt such a pressing need to highlight this blending of scripts in the body of their text, a practice which makes more sense in the context of more official texts, where certain details need to be easily retrievable, although superlinear strokes in letters and above

62 The verdicts of magistrates needed to be in Latin until 397, when an imperial constitution allowed the judges to issue them in Greek (Pedone 2022, 180).

63 The equivalent in letter-writing would be code-switching as the outcome of dictation.

64 Adams 2003, 384.

65 Apostolakou 2023, 293.

66 On the writing styles and skills of the chancery clerk and the contact of Greek, Latin, and Coptic as evidenced in this document, see Pedone 2022.

Egyptian toponyms specifically are generally found. The bilingual and/or digraph background of writers can trigger unintended language- and script-mixing in more official documents too. In the contract of *SB* I 4505 (This, 11/10/606 or 608), a priest began writing his witness signature in Greek, then, due to the knowledge of both languages and likely his better familiarity with Coptic, started writing the Coptic formula, but deleted and corrected it back to Greek once he realised, matching the rest of the text and signatures.[67] The difference between less or more formal registers, then, is the attention given to preventing or stressing these phenomena and their functional implications, often rooted in diglossic or 'digraphic' considerations.

A visible change in writing transpires in the recording of practical details such as Greek dates in Coptic texts, which needed to be easily detectable.[68] This is a common practice in official documents such as contracts or accounts, but can also be spotted in some letters. The dating formula is located close to the beginning or end of the text, especially in letters. A quick preliminary search indicates that these letters pertain to official correspondence. These phrases are (semi-)formulaic and abbreviated in specific ways, requiring a certain level of scribal training. An instance of a Coptic letter with a Greek date is *P.Lond.* IV 1635, 8 (Aphrodito, early eight century) addressed to the pagarch Basilios. In terms of framing, a fascinating earlier example of a Greek official letter with Latin date(s) is *P.Oxy.* L 3577 (Herakleopolis, 28/1/342), which has captured the attention of many researchers.[69] This is sent by the *praeses prouinciae Augustamnicae* to two propoliteuomenoi. Two different dating formulae in Latin, a consular one and a shorter one, appear in two different 'edges' of the text, namely the lower margin, following the main text, and the upper left margin, going beyond the writing frame. These are, according to Rea, added by the same hand.[70] I will not go into details about their language, parallels, and origins, as they have been sufficiently discussed. It suffices to stress their symbolic significance as elements marking and ensuring validity in an environment where documentary Latin literacy is progressively rarer. This function is stressed by the fact that the later insertion of a second date is 'inorganic', as Iovine[71] calls it, and does not provide any additional information. In general, it makes sense that legal and other formal

67 Schneider 2019, 255.

68 For a survey on relevant 'tags' and their functions (many of which can extend to later periods) in Ptolemaic financial accounts written by digraph scribes, see Mairs 2012.

69 To name a few: Adams 2003, 391-3; Conti 2022; Iovine 2019, esp. 163-7; Sarri 2018, 174-5 fn. 613.

70 *P.Oxy.* L 195.

71 Iovine 2019, 162-3.

documents have a higher number of formulaic elements throughout the text, whereas the core message of letters is supposed to be more personal(ised). Consequently, the writing depends not only on the sort of text but also on the specific contents, register, and communicative goal, as well as the training of the scribe, while its position in the text remains important. It could perhaps be claimed that there is a difference in terms of length, meaning that switches taking place in the body of documents, like script-mixing and short phrases conveying practical information, are of a more limited extent, whereas changes in openings and closings may extend to several lines (cf. literary quotes, extensive greetings or invocations). Overall, even if language or writing choices of scribes in official documents vary more often in the body of the text, openings and especially closings are still a more fertile ground for these contact-induced/shaped changes, and carry not only practical but also symbolically significant meanings, just as in letters.

There are undoubtedly other practical factors affecting language and writing choices that need to be taken into account. A few have already been mentioned, such as accommodating the preferences of the receiver or the letter carrier. It should also be kept in mind that, in many letters, there is a handshift for greetings and salutations, where senders take on the writing. Their choices may differ from the ones used in the remaining part, and may actually be the only or one of the few options they have. Short, fixed phrases like greetings can be more easily learned and practiced, whereas the main message of letters is virtually different every time. The same holds for signatures in contracts, where, apart from the principal scribe, multiple writers may sign at the end, such as the contracting parties, witnesses or people signing on their behalf. Their limited literacy is often evident by their clumsy handwriting or orthographic and other errors, indicating that they may have learned and memorised how to write their signature – a fixed phrase, just like greeting formulae – and not much beyond that. Other language- or script-switching such as invocation formulae and details about when and where the contract was drawn up at the start of the text signal its beginning, just like opening greetings in letters. Signatures mark the end of contracts in the same way final salutations do, additionally enhancing the validity of the document. In addition to the narrower textual frame, the selection of a specific language and/or script or writing style is culturally shaped, as it relates to the social status and connotations associated with them, creating a social frame (be it religious, literary, cultural, legally reliable, etc.) for the letter or contract, their contents, and people immediately involved.

4 Conclusions and Further Research

This paper set to explore bilingual and biscriptal phenomena in late antique documentary papyri from the fourth to the eighth centuries AD in a multifaceted analysis grounded on framing theory. The framing of texts, initiators, and messages was examined on two levels; first, their immediate (con)textual level (including linguistic and graphic variation, layout, the specific communicative goal, etc.), and, second, their sociohistorical environment, according to which specific languages and scripts or writing styles had acquired certain functional and symbolic values. Sources included representative examples from epistolography, wide-ranging in terms of formality, involving Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Arabic. Observations based on this sample were then compared to typically formal or legal documents, and primarily contracts. Variation in language and script choice in opening and closing sections was contrasted to the one appearing in the body of texts for both groups of documents.

Findings suggest that most variation is concentrated in openings and especially closings in the case of both letters and contracts, at times emphasised by other visual cues (e.g. large spacing dividing it from the main text), thus contributing to the clear structural division of the document. Formulaicity seems to be a key factor, as variation usually concerns fixed phrases: in letters, mostly greetings and salutations; in the rest, opening formulae and official subscriptions or signatures. In legal and official documents, an additional validation and authenticity function is relevant, and external regulations and scribal training come into play. Reasons that are specific to each letter, its communicative goal (e.g. making a request), and the relationship between correspondents (or at least the one they try to evoke) must be considered, but variation often has a symbolic function that is culturally shaped, just as in official documents. Despite some exceptions, mostly in more official documents, fewer instances of switches between languages and scripts can be found in the body of texts, which is less formulaic (especially in letters), proving that the beginning and end favour the emergence of these occurrences. There, changes are clearly visible and immediately accessible, and thus more easily interpretable. Keeping advances in the materiality and format of late antique letters in mind, the presence of code- and script-switching in openings and closings of letters could be considered as another factor enhancing the graphic differentiation of these parts. It is worth mentioning that a chronological presentation of examples mirrors sociohistorical developments whereby the position, status, and connotations of different languages and their writing shift over time.

The bottom line is that, even if differences in small points exist, bilingual and biscriptal phenomena can appear across different text

types and registers, as all variation is moulded within the same multilingual and multiscriptal environment. This could not have left an intensely writing-oriented society such as Egypt unaffected, as is reflected not only in intentional and symbolic, but also in accidental contact-induced occurrences. This study shows that Egyptian writers made creative use of multilingual and multigraphic devices, characterised by both flexibility and regulation, to present a multilayered message. It appears that framing theory is particularly useful in terms of highlighting variation in ancient written everyday documents, as it can provide insights into both the narrower and bigger picture of their message. It unlocks meanings beyond one single mode of communication, for example merely language, by evaluating all information available. This is especially crucial in ancient everyday texts, where materiality, layout, and graphic representation were crucial for the message. Therefore, all meaning-making resources should be taken into account to restore the context and other information that may be lacking today, and to put the message 'back in its frame', so to speak.

To do so, it would be useful to integrate different levels of analysis, such as materiality, and understand how they interact with linguistic and (paleo)graphic choices and how they contribute to meaning under the scope of framing. To this end, a comprehensive and perhaps diachronic quantitative study on bilingual and biscriptal documents would be useful in order to gain a more concrete idea about the dissemination and evolution of the phenomena in question. Apart from zooming out, the opposite is also possible, for example by comparing switches of a single bilingual and/or digraph writer across registers, and observing any differences or patterns. Finally, further research on corrections of biscriptal and bilingual phenomena is encouraged, as it was shown to shed light on writers' intentionality and the social evaluation of different languages and writing styles at the time.

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