Chapter 3

Coptic or Greek? Bilingualism in the Papyri

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annotated and edited for publication by Arietta Papaconstantinou

Introduction

The scope of this paper will be Coptic–Greek bilingualism as seen from late antique documents, and so the bias of the discussion will be on writers and readers of both languages as opposed to speakers. In particular I would like to focus on some bilingual Greek and Coptic archives dating from the fourth to the seventh century. Starting with the Byzantine period and continuing well beyond the Arab conquest of Egypt in the seventh century, I hope to show how the use of the Coptic and Greek languages in everyday life in Egypt varied and developed over time. I shall also be looking at why Egyptians recorded some things in Coptic and other things in Greek, sometimes very faltering Greek.

I believe that it is important to try to bring together the Coptic and Greek sources for Egyptian society, because modern studies usually create a dichotomy between ‘Greek-speaking culture’ and ‘Coptic-speaking culture’. I, personally, do not think that such a dichotomy existed from the Byzantine period onwards, but feel that this misconception arises from the fact that scholars rarely specialise in both Classical and Egyptian

† The title of this article is that of a paper given by the author at the Linguistics Seminar of the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge (5 November 1997). A different version of the same paper, which developed the papyrological aspects and reduced the linguistic section, was given at the University of Trier on 29 June 2000. The two versions are too close to be edited as two separate papers, and are here merged into a single article. The documents of the accompanying handouts have been integrated where relevant, and annotation has been added. The original files of the oral seminar texts and handouts are on a disk deposited with the author’s papers at the Griffith Institute Archive in Oxford. There were few footnotes by the author, mostly containing comments on work in progress. These original footnotes are marked [SJC]; all other footnotes are mine. I have kept the oral style of the seminars throughout, but have eliminated remarks and interjections that were time- or place-specific. Some of the material in this article has been published in different form in the author’s ‘Papyrology and the utilisation of Coptic sources’, in P. Sijpesteijn and L. Sundelin (eds), Papyrology and the history of early Islamic Egypt, Islamic History and Civilization 55 (Leiden 2004) 21–44. I am very grateful to Alison Hobby and Elizabeth Fleming at the Griffith Archive for their assistance and to James Clackson for permission to edit and publish this paper.
languages; and universities, museums and libraries usually have separate departments for Classical and Egyptian civilisation.

In the case of a large number of texts excavated in the last two centuries, Coptic and Greek manuscripts were strictly divided, with the result that they can be stored by one institution in different places – witness the British Library, for example. Coptic and Greek texts are also usually edited separately – sometimes, as in the case for the Coptic documents from the archive of Dioskoros of Aphroditō, whom I shall be discussing later, because they can no longer be traced with ease. Whereas most of the Greek texts from his dossier were published soon after they were discovered, it was seventy or eighty years before the Coptic texts began to be edited and published. As a result of a combination of these factors, it can be hard to reconstruct with any precision the degree of bilingualism in Egypt at a given time. Add to this the accident of survival of manuscripts in Egypt, the northern part of the country and, in particular, Alexandria, being almost entirely unrepresented in the papyrological evidence.

Before going any further, I shall give a short introduction to the Coptic language, one of the lesser known ancient languages, which may only be familiar to you as ‘Egyptian written in the Greek alphabet’, and I shall focus more specifically on its relation to Greek and try to show how Greek has influenced the Coptic language and vice versa.

The origins of the Coptic language

The term ‘Coptic’ is probably derived from the Arabic form of the Greek Αἰγύπτιος, ‘Egyptian’. It is used to describe the last phase of the Egyptian language, an autonomous branch of the language phylum known variously as Afro-Asiatic, Hamito-Semitic or Semito-Hamitic. Egyptian is one of the oldest and longest documented of the world’s languages, and it evolved into Coptic some time before the third century CE – the first Coptic texts date from the late third and early fourth centuries.

Before Coptic, there were five distinct phases of the Egyptian language that were written in monumental hieroglyphs or in the cursive form of hieroglyphs known as Hieratic: these phases are Old Egyptian (about 3000–2000 BCE); Middle Egyptian, the Classical phase of the language (2000–1300 BCE); Late Middle Egyptian (from 1500 and lasting for more than a millennium); and Late Egyptian (1300–700 BCE). Then we come to the precursor of Coptic, Demotic (seventh century BCE–5th century CE), which despite its name was used for literature as well as administration, and is distinguished by its fiendishly difficult script, essentially hieroglyphs written in a very cursive hand. That native Egyptians themselves found Demotic difficult is suggested by their attempts at rendering their language in Greek script – the origins of Coptic.

With Coptic, the Egyptian language underwent a major cultural change, abandoning its characteristic hieroglyphic script as well as its various cursive written forms. With the adoption of the predominantly Greek script, Egyptians also changed the direction

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2 See A. Loprieno, Ancient Egyptian: A linguistic introduction (Cambridge 1995) [SJC].
of their writing. Egyptian is usually read from right to left, although monumental inscriptions vary the direction of writing for purposes of symmetry.

Influenced by Greek, the Egyptian graphic system changed from non-alphabetic to alphabetic. We can see that alphabetisation had already begun during the Demotic phase of the language. Put very simplistically, the earlier Egyptian writing system involved pictographic signs functioning as phonograms and semagrams. Phonograms could represent one, two or three consonantal phonemes; semi-vocalic phonemes are sometimes indicated, and vowels almost never. Semagrams – known to Egyptologists as determinatives – classified a word according to its semantic sphere, and for many basic items these could function on their own.

Greek-language influence in Egypt

The beginning of Greek-language influence in Egypt can be traced to the first regular contacts between Greeks and Egyptians in the XXVIth Dynasty (seventh to sixth centuries BCE) well before Alexander the Great took control of Egypt in 332 BCE. Under Alexander, however, Greek became the language of administration and so began to play an increasingly major role in Egyptian life. Many bilingual documents in Greek and Demotic were produced in the Ptolemaic period, and even the occasional trilingual document including hieroglyphs – the Rosetta Stone for example, from the beginning of the second century BCE.

The first experiments in combining the two languages were transliterations of Greek names into Egyptian, and conversely of Egyptian names into Greek. A hundred years or so after Alexander’s conquest, longer Egyptian texts began to be rendered in Greek letters. One of the most important texts to have survived from this period is a bilingual Greek–Egyptian word-list from al-Hibah that gives the Egyptian equivalents of Greek words in Greek transcription.\(^3\) A Greek graffito from the temple of Seti I at Abydos involves a lengthy Egyptian religious formula, and it has been suggested that the writer was an Egyptian who could read and write Greek but not Demotic. The graffito can be dated to 202–201 BCE.\(^4\)

The origins of Coptic, therefore, appear to stem from the fact that, when native Egyptians themselves found the Demotic Egyptian script difficult to interpret, they made attempts at rendering their language in Greek script. Initially there were six main


Coptic dialects, corresponding to different geographical areas, and they are recorded with different writing systems and phonologies. I think that this multiplicity suggests that Coptic developed quite informally in different parts of Egypt. Some scholars, however, have tried to suggest that some sort of official committee was responsible for the birth of Coptic – as, for example, happened in the case of Turkish.

The reason why Egyptians lost their ability to decipher Demotic has been attributed to changes in schooling in the language brought about by the Ptolemaic, Greek-speaking government. As a result of these changes, Egyptian students no longer learned how to ‘fill in the gaps’ in their vowel-less script. Some Demotic texts came to depend on an accompanying Greek transcription to act as a guide to pronunciation. These texts are predominantly magical, and it is easy to appreciate how correct pronunciation is essential in a magical text where only precise utterances might be efficacious.

It is clear that, from Ptolemaic times, Egyptians were familiar with Greek and some had access to Hellenising education. We can see evidence of bilingual education in some second-century CE Demotic ostraka found at Narmouthis in the Fayyūm. They are inscribed with what appear to be school exercises in which Greek is mixed with Demotic. By this time, the Roman period, not only are Greek words in Greek script incorporated into Demotic texts, but Demotic scribes attempt to write native Egyptian words in an alphabetic way, combining Greek and Demotic signs.

Old Coptic

There is an intermediate stage between Demotic written in Greek script and the first known Coptic texts from the third century CE. This intermediate stage is known as Old Coptic and it is essentially Egyptian written with Greek characters but with the addition of some signs based on Demotic prototypes. Greek even influenced the final shape of the additional Demotic letters of the Coptic alphabet, such as ω, which resembles an omega with a tail, or δ, which is like a Greek delta. Coptic and Greek writing sometimes looks so similar that people mistake manuscripts in one language for the other.

Old Coptic texts are predominantly pagan in nature and date from the first two centuries CE down to the fifth century. The latest texts are contemporary with the oldest Christian/Gnostic Coptic texts that date from the third and fourth centuries. Many Old Coptic texts are connected with Greek texts or with the Greek language, which suggests that writers from the Greek tradition were responsible for compiling them. A text known as the Old Coptic London Horoscope is written on a papyrus with two Greek texts, another horoscope and the funeral oration of Hyperides.

The transition from Demotic to Coptic is difficult to date. It is a question of linguistic changes as well as of a new script. The morphology and syntax of Old Coptic is closer

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5 This is the opinion expressed primarily by Tito Orlandi in several works, most explicitly in his ‘Introduzione alla letteratura copta’, in id., Omelie copte (Turin 1981), esp. 7–8.
to Coptic than to Demotic, but Old Coptic uses very few Greek words (such as ἄγγελος and ἀήρ), which reflects the nature of the Old Coptic texts more than anything else.

Greek loan-words in Coptic

In contrast, even in the earliest Coptic texts, Greek words played a major role – in fact, Greek came to comprise around 20 per cent of the Coptic lexicon. Of these, I might add, 1.6 per cent are originally Latin. Greek words in Coptic texts are often referred to by the term ‘Copto-Greek’, and I shall be using this term a lot today.

The process of lexical borrowing from Greek into Egyptian had begun with Demotic that used some Greek words, and a small number of Greek words appear to have entered the Egyptian language sufficiently early so that, by the time they came to be represented in Coptic, they had been naturalised. The following examples will show how much some of them have been altered from the Greek original – to the point that they are included in Coptic dictionaries that do not usually include words of Greek origin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Word</th>
<th>Coptic Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>μηλωτή</td>
<td>μηλωτ</td>
<td>skin garment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πίναξ</td>
<td>πίναξ</td>
<td>dish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πέλεκυς</td>
<td>πέλεκυ</td>
<td>axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σεμίδαλις</td>
<td>σεμίδαλ</td>
<td>fine flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>στατήρ</td>
<td>στατήρ</td>
<td>stater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἄγκυρα</td>
<td>ἄγκυρα</td>
<td>anchor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lexical borrowings from Greek into Coptic range from the expected terminology associated with administration, military organisation and cultural borrowings to everyday items, including common verbs. The following Coptic private letter will demonstrate the frequency and range of Greek words in everyday use.7

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Before everything I kiss [the hands and feet?]

of your lordly holiness ...

and brother and beloved ...

the one who inherited the name of the patriarch in

deed and word, Abraham the hospitable. God is one!

You have stopped writing south to the meizoteros, oh my brother,

Apa Ananias, and you have not even deemed me worthy of a couple of lines

nor even remembered my name in those letters,

although you remembered quite a number of things. Believe

me, that I, in the meantime, this worthless one have not ceased

to think of you night and day although you did not write

to me (even) up to today, not even through our father Apa

Phoibammon. Write to me (with news of) your health, I the un-

worthy Azael, for I have never any care

day and night except thinking of you.

PTO.

Apart from the Greek introductory formula προ παντων, there is also a certain amount of terminology: patriarch in line 4, for example. Also, some peculiarly literary Greek words and phrases have entered the Coptic writer’s consciousness: δικτίξιν in line 7, and νυχθήμερος in line 11, which contrasts with its Coptic equivalent in line 15. It is interesting to note that Greek words such as ‘sea’, θάλασσα, and ‘desert’, ἔρημος,
were borrowed. This is curious as Egypt practically invented the concept of ‘desert’ and has some perfectly good words of its own. What I think stands out in this text, however, are the Greek conjunctions: οὐδέ lines 8 and 12, καὶτέρ line 9 and καὶ γαρ line 14. Such usage is common even in Coptic documents.

Conversely, the Egyptian language also left its mark on the Greek language as spoken in Egypt – there is evidence of Egyptian influence not only on the phonology, but also, very occasionally, on the morphology of Egyptian Greek.⁸

Outline of the Coptic language

I shall not spend too much time on Egyptian linguistics, which is not my field, but I would like to outline some features of the Coptic language. Initially there were six main Coptic dialects, which are recorded with different phonologies and divergences in their writing systems. I believe this suggests that Coptic developed in different parts of Egypt quite informally and also perhaps that Coptic did not emerge all at once under governmental pressure.

The most important early Coptic dialects were: Bohairic, used in the northern part of the country, initially in the Western Delta; Fayyûmic, in the area around the Fayûm, south-east of the Delta; Akhmimic, used in the southern half of the country; and finally the most widely used dialect, Sahidic, which has been dubbed the ‘classical’ form of Coptic. Sahidic was used throughout Upper Egypt, or more accurately everywhere south of Memphis, which is just south of modern Cairo.

Copto-Greek

At this point I should say a little about how Greek words are represented in Coptic. It is clear that whoever was responsible for forming the classical Coptic language, Sahidic, had a good knowledge of classical Greek. In a few rare examples, Greek is even accentuated in Coptic literary texts – mostly correctly. In what follows I shall outline some of the characteristic cases of Copto-Greek forms found in Coptic texts, which also reflect the various ways in which Coptic phonology left its mark on Egyptian Greek.

a. Vowels

Itacism is a recurrent phenomenon in Egyptian Greek and can be easily explained as a sign of Coptic influence, because Coptic has only three front vowel phonemes corresponding to the four Greek front vowels. Here are some examples of the forms it can take:

⁸ See S. Torallas Tovar, ‘Egyptian lexical interference in the Greek of Byzantine and early Islamic Egypt’, in Sijpesteijn and Sundelin (eds), Papyrology and the history of early Islamic Egypt, 163–98.
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The following examples show confusion between α and ε, and α and ο, resulting from the fact that none of the Coptic dialects had more than two phonemes corresponding to the three Greek phonemes α, ε and ο.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α=ε</td>
<td>εφορίσμος &lt; ἀφορισμός</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α=ο</td>
<td>σενβούλας &lt; σύμβουλος; κοστρόν &lt; κάστρον</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α=ε</td>
<td>λαίτι &lt; ἔτι; κερός &lt; καφρός</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α=ο</td>
<td>λαίπος &lt; λοιπάς; καινωθής &lt; κοινότης</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ε=ι</td>
<td>τημοσίων &lt; δημόσιον; εκκλησία &lt; ἐκκλησία</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ω=ι</td>
<td>προροφορεί &lt; πληροφορείν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ω=ο</td>
<td>νομοκος &lt; νομικός</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ο=ω</td>
<td>δικέος &lt; δικαίως; μογίς &lt; μόγις</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ο=ε</td>
<td>ετος &lt; λοιπόν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ο=ο</td>
<td>κατοικορεί &lt; κατηγορείν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>οΥ=Ο</td>
<td>ΑΜΦΙΒΟΥΛΙΑ &lt; ἀμφιβολία</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another common characteristic is the false aspiration, as in ἑθνος (ἔθνος), ἐλπίζειν (ἐλπίζειν), or ἑικών (εἰκών).

b. Stops

The representation of stops is also noteworthy in Egyptian Greek. There is frequent confusion between gamma and kappa, delta and tau, and to a lesser extend beta and pi. This can be explained by the fact that there is no distinction between voiced and voiceless stops in Coptic. Beta is a voiced bilabial fricative in Coptic, so beta and pi are not often confused.

The influence of Coptic can also be seen behind the confusion of voiceless and aspirated stops in Egyptian Greek: kappa and chi are confused, as are theta and tau, pi and phi. The confusion may be put down to the fact that Bohairic is the only Coptic dialect with aspirated stops.

**Very common**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Γ=Κ</td>
<td>Γάρπος &lt; καρπός; κραφί &lt; γραφή</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ=Τ</td>
<td>Χρήσιμος &lt; χρήσιμος; σεντεκτίων &lt; ἵνδικτίων</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(the particles ΟΥΔΕ < οὐδέ and ΟΥΤΕ οὔτε are interchangeable in Coptic)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Α=Ρ</td>
<td>Ασθόφορος &lt; ἀθλοφόρος; λίτρα &lt; λίτρα</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c. Sibilants and Liquids

There is also no distinction between voiced and voiceless sibilants in Coptic, nor is there a distinction between the liquids – at least not in the Fayûmic dialect, which normally uses ι where other dialects show ρ.

*d. Treatment of θ, φ and χ*

Except in the Bohairic dialect, the Greek letters θ, φ and χ are taken as representing Τ+2, Π+2 and Κ+2. I have given some examples of Coptic words with these usages.

The Greek word θάλασσα was interpreted in Coptic as Τ-2ΑΛΑΣΣΑ: the initial Τ was taken to be the Coptic feminine definite article, resulting in the form 2ΑΛΑΣΣΑ. Similarly θέτα and φι are used to represent the feminine and masculine definite article respectively followed by Coptic 2 (b) at the beginning of a word – hence ΦΘΒ = Π-2ΘΒ (the thing) can be written as ΦΘΒ or Π-2ΘΒ.

| θ, φ and χ = Τ-2, Π-2 and Κ-2 in Coptic (except Bohairic dialect) | Exx. in Coptic words ΦΘΒ = Π-2ΘΒ; ΦΘΒ = ΝΜΚΟ; ΗΘΟΒ = Π-2ΘΒ; ΜΑΧ = ΜΑΚ2; θάλασσα > Τ-2ΑΛΑΣΣΑ (Τ = Coptic fem. def. art.) > 2ΑΛΑΣΣΑ |
| θ, φ and χ modified in Copto-Greek forms: | θ > Τ2 Exx. θηταυρός > ΤΕΣΑΥΡΩC and καθίστημι > ΚΑΣΙΧΤΑ |
| θ > Τ2 Exx. θηταυρός > ΤΕΣΑΥΡΩC and καθίστημι > ΚΑΣΙΧΤΑ | φ > Π2 Exx. φωνή > Π2ΘΝΗ |
| χ > Κ2 Exx. χαίρε > ΚΕΡΕ and οἰκομάλωτος > ΕΚ2ΜΑΛΩΤΟC |

Conversely in Coptic, Greek words containing *theta*, *phi* and *chi* can be modified to give the forms listed here – rather rare forms, by the way.

Another special usage of Greek consonants in Coptic involves the superlinear stroke. This is a stroke written above a consonant to denote that it should be preceded by schwa. I have given examples of Copto-Greek forms that exhibit this phenomenon.
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eb, el, em, en and ep > B, X, N, N and P
2βδωμας < ἐβδομάς, 2Απιζε < ἐλπίζειν, παρμβολη < παρεμβολή
Ντολη < ἐντολή, σπερμα < σπέρμα

Morphology of Copto-Greek

Now let us have a look at how Greek words behave in Coptic. There is very little sign of morphological bilingual interference between the two languages because of the differences in their inflectional systems. A few noteworthy features are listed below.

a. Nominal morphology

Case declension in Coptic is indicated by prepositional prefixes – there is no inflectional system as in Greek. One can appreciate why Egyptians writing Greek might have difficulty with Greek case endings. This is a feature that often enables us to identify an Egyptian writing Greek: often nouns are left in the nominative case, which is the form in which they are usually rendered in Coptic, and this happens in Greek texts from all periods.

Copto-Greek nouns show many of the same features of nominal morphology as koine texts – for example thematisation of athematic nouns (e.g. 3rd > 1st/2nd decl. Μαρτυρος instead of Μαρτυς), and athematisation of thematic nouns (1st/2nd > 3rd decl. – Διακων not Διακονος). I have also noted the unusual form ΥΔΑΤΟΝ, which looks like a thematic second declension back-formation from plural to singular: ΥΔΑΤΟΝ < ὑδωρ.

Plural forms

An interesting exception where Coptic morphology does affect Copto-Greek is that in a few rare instances an Egyptian plural suffix may be applied to a Greek noun. Thus, by analogy with a Coptic word such as ΤΒΝΖ (beast, plurals ΤΒΝΟΥΕ / ΤΕΒΝΟΥΩΥ), the feminine plural suffix -ΟΥΕ / -ΩΥΥΙ is applied to Greek feminine nouns such as ψυχη > ΨΥΧΟΥΕ or ΨΥΧΩΥΥΙ. The usual Copto-Greek form would be ΝΕ-ΨΥΧΗ, i.e. the plural definite article ΝΕ- followed by the noun ψυχη. I should point out that Coptic feminine plural endings added to Greek nouns are rare, and seem to be restricted to old texts. There are some examples in the Coptic Manichaean Psalmbook.9

b. Form of Greek verb in Coptic

When Greek verbs are adapted for use in Coptic, they always function in the same way as a Coptic infinitive form – they are never converted like Coptic verbs into the construct or static forms. The following morphology list shows some common verbal forms,

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including frequent transitions from one conjunction to another as found elsewhere in Egyptian Koine.

**Examples of Copto-Greek Verbs**

- -αινε > -ΔΝΕ: ΧΜΑΝΕ; ΚΙΑΝΕ
- -ύω > -εύω: ΚΩΛΕΥΕ < κωλύειν; ΜΥΝΕΥΕ < μηνύειν

**Contract verbs**

- ΔΠΑΡΝΑ = ἀπαρνεῖσθαι
- ΠΛΕΑ = πλεῖν
- ΕΠΑΙΝΟΥ = ἐπαινεῖν
- ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΕΙ / -ΟΥ / -Α = εὐχαριστεῖν

- -έω / -ώω > -εύω:
  - ΗΜΝΕΥΕ < ὑμνεῖν
  - ΠΛΕΥΕ < πλεῖν
  - ΟΚΝΕΥΕ < ὀκνεῖν

**Addition of -ν-**

- ΕΡ-ΣΤΑΥΡΩΝΙΝ (Bohairic) (compare Sahidic ΣΤΑΥΡΟΥ) σταυροῦν
- ΙΣΤΑΝΙΝ (compare form ΙΣΤΑ) ἰστάναι

- -μι verbs

  - ΚΕΡΑ = κεραννύναι
  - ΠΗΣΣΕ = πηγνύναι
  - ΔΙΚΝΕΥΕ = δεικνύναι

There has been dispute among scholars as to which form of the Greek verb is used in Coptic. Sometimes it looks like an imperative form, and sometimes an infinitive, because different Coptic dialects accommodate Greek verbs in different ways. The Bohairic dialect precedes a Greek infinitive form with a verbal auxiliary ΕΡ- (make/do), Fayyūmic likewise uses ΕΛ-; whereas the classical dialect, Sahidic, often uses something that looks like a Greek imperative form. It may be, though, that Sahidic adapts a form of the infinitive, sometimes using active forms instead of mediopassive ones, e.g. the active form ΑΚΠΑΖΕ derived from ἀκπάζεσθαι is the one most commonly used. One may also note that it is not only the present stem of a Greek verb that is used in Coptic, but rather aorist forms: ΠΑΘΕ and ΠΑΡΕΛΘΕ.

So here is a quick summary of how Sahidic, Bohairic and Fayyūmic accommodate the Greek verb πιστεύειν in the phrase 'he believed': Sahidic has ΔΨ-ΠΙΣΤΕΥΕ; Bohairic ΔΨ-ΕΡ-ΠΙΣΤΕΥΙΝ; and Fayyūmic ΔΨ-ΕΛ-ΠΙΣΤΕΥΙΝ.

The reason why one particular form of a Greek verb was chosen over another cannot always be ascertained, and can by no means be pinned down to regional variance. For example, in the contract verbs section in the morphology list above I have given three variant forms of the verb εὐχαριστεῖν (ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΕΙ / -ΟΥ / -Α), and in fact all three
forms occur in roughly contemporaneous non-literary texts from the same site (Dayr al-Balā‘izah) in Middle Egypt.

c. Conjunctions and prepositions

The table below lists some of the large number of Greek conjunctions and prepositions used in Coptic. They indicate that there was close contact with the Greek language and are an integral part of Coptic syntax. In a couple of cases Coptic inflectional morphology is projected onto the Greek prepositions παρά and κατά so that they can take a suffix pronoun e.g. ΠΑΡΑΡΟΣ *beyond him*; ΚΑΤΑΡΟΣ *according to us*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Coptic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ἀλλά</td>
<td>ἀλλά</td>
<td>but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀντί</td>
<td>ἀντί</td>
<td>instead of ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀρα</td>
<td>ἀρα</td>
<td>then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>adversative/indicating change of subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εἰ μή τι</td>
<td>εἰμήτι</td>
<td>unless, except (for)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καίτερ</td>
<td>καίπερ</td>
<td>although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καίτοι</td>
<td>καίτοι</td>
<td>although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καίν</td>
<td>καίν</td>
<td>even if, even though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κατά + acc</td>
<td>κατά</td>
<td>distributive or according to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μάλιστα</td>
<td>μαλίστα</td>
<td>especially since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μέν .. δέ</td>
<td>μέν (.. δέ)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μηπως</td>
<td>μηπωσ</td>
<td>lest, that, so as to prevent that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ὅσον</td>
<td>ὅσον (also ἐνὁσον and ἐφοσον)</td>
<td>so long as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ὅταν</td>
<td>ὅταν</td>
<td>when(ever), as soon as, such that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ὅτε</td>
<td>ὅτε</td>
<td>when, in which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>παρά + acc.</td>
<td>παρά</td>
<td>beyond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πρός + acc.</td>
<td>πρός</td>
<td>in respect of, according to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τότε</td>
<td>τότε</td>
<td>then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χωρίς</td>
<td>χωρίς</td>
<td>unless, without ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ώς</td>
<td>ώς</td>
<td>as, as though = on the grounds that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. ΚΑΤΑ, ΠΑΡΑ have construct forms for use with pronominal suffixes): ΚΑΤΑΡΟ = and ΠΑΡΑΡΟ = e.g. ΠΑΡΑΡΟΣ *beyond him/it*. 
Bilingual interference

a. Coptic influence on Greek lexicon

In contrast to the large number of Greek words in Coptic, very few Egyptian words appear to have been borrowed into Greek – only a couple of dozen mainly agricultural or commercial terms, as well as some terms for weights and measures. When an Egyptian word is used in a Greek text, it may be marked out in some way: for instance, in Greek papyri from Aphroditō a horizontal superlinear stroke is sometimes drawn over Egyptian toponyms, and even a few common Coptic nouns used only by notaries may be marked with such strokes to help readers identify non-Greek words.

b. Coptic influence on Greek syntax

Just as Egyptian made little impact on the Greek lexicon, likewise there is not much evidence of Coptic syntactic influence in Greek. A rare example of a Copticism can definitely be detected in a phrase such as κατὰ δύο δύο (two by two), where the repetition of a noun to represent distribution is paralleled in Coptic usage κατά γνάφ γνάφ – with the interesting twist that, although nominal repetition is sufficient to denote distribution in Coptic, κατά is often included as well.

c. Greek influence on Coptic

Conversely, there is not much evidence of Greek influence in Coptic syntax, but occasionally Greek appears to be responsible for reassigning gender in Demotic and Coptic. For example, the masculine ἑμόι (salt) may have changed gender from its feminine Egyptian antecedent (ḥmɜt) as a result of the masculine ὀ ἁλς. There are also some instances of meanings being loaned from Greek into Coptic, e.g. ἐο (face) may come to mean person by analogy with Greek πρόσωπον; and ὕε (wood) assumes the meaning cross just as Greek ἐλς is a synonym for σταυρός.

d. Mistakes made by Egyptians trying to write Greek

The Greek papyri from Aphroditō have yielded a number of examples of Coptic-speakers trying to write Greek, and thus they give a valuable insight into the interplay between the two languages among the town’s inhabitants. Quite a few Copts appear to have had a limited knowledge of Greek. They might have the ability to write their agreement to a legal contract, for example. The following text is an excerpt from a sixth-century Greek lease of land, in which the lessee signs partially in Coptic, partially in Greek.\footnote{P.Mich. XIII 666, 38.}

\begin{verbatim}
ANOK MHNA WQEP YATE stoichei moy taute t' miathwosi ois pro(eita) †
\end{verbatim}
I Mena, son of Psate, agree to this lease as stated above

An even earlier example can be found in a late fifth-century text from Oxyrhynchos, which also shows some Coptic embedded in the Greek text: Ἄννας θείμενα Ἀπά Κίον = ἌΝΝΑς ΤΖΙΜΕ ΝΑΤΑ ΚΙΟΝ.\(^{11}\) It also illustrates the above point on the treatment of \textit{theta} in Coptic.

A lease of land from Aphroditō dated to the mid-sixth century illustrates the problems an Egyptian with an imperfect training in Greek might experience when trying to express himself in a more complex way. It is a witness declaration from a lease of land dated to around the mid-sixth century, and written by John, son of Promaōs, the \textit{anagnōstes} of the church of Apa Promaōs.\(^{12}\)

\[
\text{μαρτυρο δὲ ὅτι ἄγουσα (ἦκουσα) παρὰ τοῦ προγεγραμμένου (προγεγραμμένου)
προεστάτων (προεστῶτος) ἐπειτρέπον (ἐπιτρέποντος) ἱωάννου (Ἰωάννην) τῶν (tón)
εὐλαβήστατων (εὐλαβέστατον) πρεσβήτρων (πρεσβύτερων) ἐπείοισεν (ποιῆσειν)
τιαύτη (ταύτην τὴν) ὁμολογία (ὁμολογίαν)
\]

\[I\text{ bear witness that I have heard from the aforementioned manager that he ordered John, the most-discreet presbyter, to execute this agreement.}\]

Apart from the mistakes in case and number, one can also note the phonological feature ἄγουσα for ἤκουσα. The usage τιαύτη in the last line may reflect influence from the Coptic feminine demonstrative article \textit{τί}.

You may remark that it is odd in the last example that someone with the title of \textit{anagnōstes} (reader) – who presumably was more literate than the majority of ordinary people – made so many mistakes when writing Greek. However, the implications of the title \textit{anagnōstes} are not so straightforward. A Greek text from Oxyrhynchos involves the \textit{anagnōstes} of a village church who does not himself write out the standard Greek formula giving his assent to the document, so that scholars have wondered whether he could not or would not write in Greek.\(^{13}\)

\textit{e. Byzantine imperial dating formula in Coptic}

One final example, and a rather nice example I think, of how unfamiliarity with Greek could lead a Copt astray, and an insight into how Copts interpreted Byzantine

\(^{11}\) I have been unable to identify this text and found no indication in the author’s papers as to its origin.


institutions, is to be found in an inscription dated 609/10 CE, which contains the Coptic version of the standard Greek formula:

βασιλείας καὶ (?) ὑπατείας τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου ἡμῶν δεσπότου Φλαουίου Φωκᾶ τοῦ αἰωνίου αὐγοῦστον καὶ αὐτοκράτορος

In the reign and the consulate of our lord, the most sacred Phokas, the eternal Augustus and emperor

(Γ)ηθεὶπαδία νπεύκαεις ετογαλβ φούκα πίγνπειαων ετκωτμ αγο ετμαζτε

(In) the reign and the consulate of our holy lord, Phokas, the one (who is) in this aeon and who hears and rules

This, amazingly, is the only Coptic inscription that contains a date mentioning the reign of a Byzantine emperor – a significant fact in itself. It comes from the monastery of Epiphanios at Thebes and dates to the reign of Phokas. It attempts to translate the Greek terms of the imperial titulature into Coptic. Noteworthy is the rendition of the title augustus, which is curiously translated by the Coptic ΕΤΚΩΤΜ (who hears) – possibly, as the papyrologist Klaas Worp suggests, through confusion with a form of Greek ἀκούειν (to hear) such as ἀκουστός. The ‘incorrect’ form ἀγουσα above in the witness declaration supports this thesis very well. Another imperial title, autocrator – literally ‘self-ruler’, implying absolute sovereignty – is translated a little more understandably with the Coptic ΕΤΑΜΑΖΤΕ (who rules).

Education in Coptic and Greek

There is a fair amount of evidence for bilingual education in late antique Egypt, much of which has been analysed in a recent study of the teaching of writing skills in

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15 In fact there is at least one more inscription in Coptic dated by a Byzantine regnal year, even more surprisingly dating from after the Arab conquest. It is an epitaph from Kellia mentioning ‘the reign of Justinian the emperor’, who according to the archaeological context should be Justinian II (685–695 and 705–711): see J. Partyka and R. Kasser, ‘Choix d’inscriptions provenant d’autres ermitages des Rouabiya’, in EK 8144, II: Explorations aux Qouco er-Rouabiya, Rapport des campagnes 1982 et 1983, ed. P. Bridel and N. Bosson (Leuven 1994) 448–49, no. 303.
Graeco-Roman Egypt. Some school texts demonstrate how the terms ‘Hellenic’ and ‘Coptic’ are not polar opposites. Take, for example, a notebook that has been dated very early, to the end of the third century. It is made up of a series of wooden tablets, one of which preserves a Coptic excerpt of one of the Psalms, bound with another tablet with a rhetorical paraphrase of a passage of the Iliad. There is also evidence of the predominantly Coptic-speaking inhabitants of the monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes copying out extracts of Homer in the late sixth century and after. Later I shall also be looking at the archive of a bilingual sixth-century Egyptian whose library included works of Homer and Menander.

Little is known about the teaching of Greek and Coptic in schools, but practice alphabets copied out by beginner students may provide valuable clues. Some Coptic alphabetic exercises show the Greek letters separated from the additional Demotic signs, often by a dividing line, or a different method of arrangement. There are also alphabetic exercises in which the Greek letters are copied in reverse order or randomised, but the Coptic letters follow in their usual order. The conscious separation of the Greek from the Egyptian elements by students may suggest that they had prior knowledge of Greek, and that the exercise was part of the acquisition of Coptic reading skills. This practice would reverse the common assumption that bilingualism only moved in one direction, that is, that Coptic speakers might learn Greek, but Greek-speakers would not learn Coptic. An exception is provided by a fourth-century literary text, the Letter of Ammon, in which Ammon, as a Greek-speaking convert to Egyptian monasticism, learns to speak Coptic at his adoptive monastery.

Part II - The texts

Now I shall discuss some of the bilingual Coptic–Greek archives, focusing on who was writing what and why. I should point out that I do not use the term ‘archive’ in the

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16 R. Cribiore, Writing, teachers and students in Graeco-Roman Egypt (Atlanta, GA 1996).
17 Ibid., no. 388. [SJC]
19 Cribiore, Writing, nos. 92 and 95. [SJC]
20 A common enough phenomenon; see P. van Minnen, ‘A late antique schooltablet at Duke University’, ZPE 106 (1995) 175 n. 4. [SJC]
21 R.S. Bagnall, Egypt in late antiquity (Princeton, NJ 1993) 245. [SJC]
22 For a full list of known or identified Coptic–Greek archives (16) see the Leuven Database of Papyrus Archives, which includes constantly updated bibliographical information and lists of all the texts belonging to each archive: http://www.trismegistos.org/arch/index.php, accessed 25 February 2010. The ones presented here are the best-known of these, as well as the papyri from Kellis that are not listed as a proper ‘archive’ in the accepted sense of the term. The LDPA also lists as the archive of Basilios, pagarch of Aphroditō the group of papers known as the Qurra archive, on which see the article by Tonio Sebastian Richter in this volume. This is a trilingual archive, as
traditional sense of papers collected together in antiquity, but rather take it to mean papers that have been related, in modern times, to one particular person or group.

The earliest Coptic documents: Fourth-century bilingual archives

The earliest dateable Coptic documents – most of which are private letters – can all be associated with texts in other languages. Many derive from bilingual or other multilingual archives. Most of these texts also originate from a monastic milieu, and, in particular, from Upper Egypt. I would like to stress the existence of these Upper Egyptian bilingual monastic archives to correct the misimpression that Upper Egyptian monks were monolingual, as claimed in the literary sources.23

There are three surviving archives dating from around the mid-fourth century and providing evidence of the widespread use of Coptic by this time: two of the archives are concerned with monks belonging to the Meletian doctrine, and the third, the archive of Apa John, which also contains the largest number of Coptic documents, may belong to a well-known historical figure. I shall be looking at his archive in more depth below.

Recently a number of fourth-century Coptic, Greek and Syriac texts have been found at what has been termed a Manichaean settlement at Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis. It will be some time before these have been analysed fully and it is hoped that they will give us more information about bilingualism, possibly even trilingualism, in early Coptic society.

Archives from Kellis

I shall start with the most substantial fourth-century archives, those found in Kellis. Within the last two decades,24 excavations at this provincial village in the western part of the Great Oasis – now known as the Dakhleh Oasis – have revolutionised our perception of late antique Egypt. Thanks to texts discovered in what has been termed a ‘Manichaean settlement’ at Kellis,25 we now have access, for the first time, to information about the everyday lives of a group of adherents to the gnostic religion founded by Mani in the third century CE. We already have quite a sizeable corpus of Manichaean literature from Egypt, primarily from Medinet Madi in the Fayyum, much further north, where the...
codices now in Berlin and Dublin are said to have been found. These are written in Coptic, and I should mention that Coptic is an especially important language for the study of Manichaeism since substantially more Manichaean literature is preserved in Coptic than in any other language.

In the course of the last ten years of excavation at Kellis, a large number of Coptic and Greek texts have been found in the ruined houses, dating predominantly to the mid-fourth century. Although it will be some time before the textual material can be analysed fully, I shall now try to summarise the information on bilingualism and even multilingualism provided by the texts published so far. Without a doubt, they provide evidence for widespread Coptic–Greek bilingualism at this time in Egypt, as well as indicating that some people knew, and were actively involved in teaching, Latin.26

The texts also show that some people at Kellis still used Syriac, the language of the first generation of missionaries who came to Egypt to spread the new religion. A number of bilingual Syriac–Coptic glossaries excavated at Kellis may have been exercises in translation from one language to the other. As a whole, the Syriac texts found at Kellis are primarily, though not entirely, religious in content.27 A Greek letter addressed to a man called Theognostos also preserves a name written in Syriac on the verso.28 Furthermore, this text provides evidence of people learning Greek at Kellis because Theognostos is asked to send a ten-page notebook to someone called Ision who has become a ἑλληνιστής. This term is translated by the editors as a ‘user of Greek’. It has also been suggested that Ision is described in the text as a ‘Syriac reader’, but this reading is uncertain.29

An indication of the level of Coptic–Greek bilingualism at Kellis may be had from a noteworthy phrase in a Coptic letter addressed to an inhabitant of one of the houses, where the reader is told to ‘study your Psalms either in Greek or Coptic’.30 Here it is the Manichaean Psalms that are undoubtedly intended, and a number of copies of them have been found at Kellis, along with other Manichaean literature.

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26 P.Kell. V 20, 24–6: ‘The great Teacher let him [Piene] travel with him, so that he might learn Latin (MNTΠΡΟΜΑΙΟΣ). He teaches him well. Could this be evidence that Piene was being trained as a missionary to go to the West? Or was Latin of use in Egypt? Was Teacher a native speaker of Latin – from North Africa, for instance? See also P.Kell. I 77, 30. [SJC] The verso of this very damaged papyrus contains what appear to be the remains of an official document, which may have had a part in Latin; one reads: μεθ’ἂ Ρωμα, followed by the mention that it was added or posted (? προετέθη or, as suggested by the editor, προετέθη) in Antinoe on 20 Epeiph.

27 For instance, a school tablet with a Coptic exercise practising syllables (P.Kell. V 10) also preserves a short Syriac text. [SJC]

28 P.Kell. I 67, 20. The name was read Loui Shai by M. Franzmann. [SJC]

29 In her review of the edition, Andrea Jördens offers the reading ἀναγνώστης συναγιτικός on examination of the plate: Münstersche Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte 17 (1998) 130. [SJC] However, the suggestion of N. Lewis, ‘Notationes legendis’, BASP 34 (1997) 30, seems much more plausible, namely that the ἀναγνώστης συναγιτικός (for συνακτικός) read by the editors should be understood as a reader “tending to bring together” (sc. everything he can lay his hands on), i.e. he was a voracious reader.

30 P.Kell. V 19, 13–14; also cited in P.Kell. II p. viii with n. 12. [SJC]
Other Coptic texts from Kellis may contain long passages in Greek, often in the opening or closing formulae of a letter. Sometimes the language changes from Greek to Coptic mid-sentence. Many of the Coptic texts have an address on the verso written in Greek, a practice found elsewhere in Egypt. Often the docket of a document will also be written in Greek. The converse of this practice is found in some seventh- and eighth-century Greek documents from Middle Egypt that have an address or docket in Coptic. The reason for writing the address or docket in a different language from the main text is not clear, and I welcome suggestions for interpretation.

The editors of the texts have attempted to provide an overview of how the people of Kellis – and people from the Nile Valley writing to family members and others at Kellis – used Coptic and Greek for different purposes, based on the finds in one of the seven or so houses excavated. Greek thus appears to have been reserved for external, formal and administrative usage, whereas Coptic was favoured for domestic and internal usage. This is a pattern that we will see repeated even in the seventh-century archives.

Focusing on the documents that relate to the family of Titoue (Greek Tithoes), we can see this division in practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Coptic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(all addressed to Tithoes or his son)</td>
<td>(written by Titoue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sale of a slave</td>
<td>private letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private agreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orders for payment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one surviving document written in Coptic is a private letter written by Titoue to his father. The rest of the documents are directed to Titoue and are written in Greek, and they include two legal agreements, two orders for payment, and a fragmentary letter. Titoue was a carpenter who may have lived in 'House 2' at Kellis; one of the letters reveals that he intended his son to go into a monastery to learn linen-weaving.

It is hoped that Kellis will yield up further extraordinary texts to challenge our perception of late antique Egypt. The site has already provided us with a unique ostrakon that may contain the only secular text written in Old Coptic script – I mentioned earlier that Old Coptic texts tended to be pagan. The Kellis ostrakon is a brief document containing greetings to several people, their children, and servants, and it may be dated

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31 P.Kell. V 11, 13, 22, 36, to name but a few. [SJC]
32 P.Kell. V 22, 2–3: ‘To my masters and most honourable brothers (and sisters): Pempnouthes and Kyria and Maria and your children by name and my mother Tamouenia’ (the part in italics is in Coptic). [SJC]
33 For instance P.Athen.Xyla 5, 6, 12, 13, 17, 18. [SJC]
34 House 3. [SJC] See the table given by the author in her 'Papyrology and the utilization of Coptic sources', 38.
to the mid-to-late third century CE, judging from the pottery on which it was written.\textsuperscript{35} Although the script is Old Coptic, the language of this text is Coptic. It is hoped that further material in Old Coptic will be found in future excavations at the site to increase our knowledge about the development of Coptic in the Dakhleh Oasis.

**The Archive of Apa John**\textsuperscript{36}

At around the same time as the Kellis archives, we have the archive of Apa John. The documents in this archive have been dated from around the second half of the fourth century and they give the impression that John was a well-respected and influential member of the community: many letters contain requests, addressed to him in Coptic and Greek, from fellow monks, ecclesiastics, officials, soldiers and others, asking for him to intercede on their behalf with officials from the government administration, the military, or the judiciary.

The documents fall into three broad categories. In the first of these, John is asked to use his influence with officials in the government administration. In one Coptic letter he is asked to deal with an assignment of land imposed on an unwilling recipient; and in one Greek letter he is asked to intercede with the tax-collector.\textsuperscript{37}

In the second category, John is asked to use his influence with army officials: two Greek documents are concerned with requests for exemption from army service,\textsuperscript{38} and one also asks for a military tribune to be told to remove some Goths from a widow’s house;\textsuperscript{39} in a Coptic document he is asked to get an acting praepositus to make allowances for a sick person.\textsuperscript{40}

In the final category, John is asked to use his influence with the judiciary: two or three Coptic documents ask for help concerning trials in the governor’s court;\textsuperscript{41} in another Coptic document, the author asks John to intercede on behalf of an old man who is in prison.\textsuperscript{42}

John is also addressed in Greek and Coptic with requests for prayers, in his capacity as a spiritual leader. A Greek letter mentions that the Dux has received John’s blessing.\textsuperscript{43}

The profile of Apa John that these documents conjure up led the papyrologist Constantine Zuckerman to equate him, rather convincingly I think, with the well-

\textsuperscript{35} I. Gardner, ‘An Old Coptic ostraca from Ismant el-Kharab?’, ZPE 125 (1999) 195–200 and pl. X; see 196 for the date. [SJC]


\textsuperscript{37} P. Ryl. Copt. 273; P. Lond. III 1014.

\textsuperscript{38} P. Herm. 7.

\textsuperscript{39} P. Herm. 17.

\textsuperscript{40} P. Ryl. Copt. 271.

\textsuperscript{41} P. Ryl. Copt. 270, 273 and 311.

\textsuperscript{42} P. Ryl. Copt. 272.

\textsuperscript{43} P. Lond. III 981 (and pl. 74) = Chrest. Wilck. 130.
known monastic figure John of Lykopolis. Lykopolis is modern-day Asyūṭ in Middle Egypt. He lived in a time when a ‘holy man’ could be a political force and when a line of communication ran from the Egyptian desert all the way to Constantinople. He had the ear of the emperor Theodosius I, for whom he made politically advantageous prophecies, including allegedly predicting Theodosius’s victory over Maximus in 388.

John of Lykopolis is described in works written by a number of people who visited him in Egypt, including Palladius, the author of the Lausiac History, who records that John was a Copto-speaker who communicated with Greek-speaking visitors through a translator – though he doesn’t mention whether John could perhaps read and write Greek, despite not being able to speak it. In connection with this claim, I would like now to focus on one text from Apa John’s archive, which may date to after 381 CE. 

In this document, Apa John is asked by the writer, Psois, to arrange to have him exempted from army service. What interests me about this text is that Psois chooses to write in Greek, even though he clearly has great difficulty with the language. There are several corrections on the original – made by Psois presumably, although this is not made explicit and no plate was published with the text. I shall not examine all of the problems in this text but will simply point out some characteristic mistakes made by Egyptians writing Greek. They include:

\[\text{verso}\]

\[\text{ἀπόδος τῷ δεσπότῃ ἀναχωρητῇ Ἰωάννῃ.}\]
A tendency to decline nouns incorrectly; to put nouns and adjectives in the
wrong case – usually the nominative case, e.g. l. 1 ἀγαπητός Ἰωάννης instead of
dative ἀγαπητῷ Ἰωάννῃ, l. 6 εἷς ἐπιστολῆ instead of accusative μίαν ἐπιστολῆν (?)
and in the same line Ψόις instead of acc. Ψόίδα; l. 13 Κύλλος instead of Κύλλου.

The text is very confused ll. 3–4 – πάσας γὰρ ψυχῆς ἔζωσον σοι – is this an attempt
to express πάσῳ γὰρ ψυχαὶ ἔζων σοι (for all souls live/lived through you)? Or
πάσας γὰρ ψυχάς ἐσωσεν σου διὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν ὁ παντοκράτωρ (the Almighty
saves all souls by reason of your piety)? Unfortunately the writer’s grammar is so
unreliable that certainty is impossible.

The plural imperative form l. 12 παράδοτε is used instead of the singular παράδος
(hand over). This could be caused by confusion of number rather than of
imperative forms.

In ll. 16–17 Psois writes to John, ‘You have given (ἔδωκας) my children to the
money-lender’, which makes little sense. One should rather read ἔδωκα (I have
given), assuming a confusion in verbal forms. However, ἔλαβες is used correctly
in l. 10.

We also see examples of classic Coptic interference on Greek phonology (tau
and delta are confused): συτέποτε ll. 17–18 and τάκτυλος l. 19.

Another noteworthy feature of this text is its use of punctuation – the editor did not
mark it in on the text, but it is included in the apparatus. Punctuation is often used by
writers of Greek texts who are unfamiliar with the language they are using, and it is a
feature of school texts, where words or even syllables may be separated by punctuation.
It is interesting to note that another Greek text that may be from Apa John’s archive also
features some punctuation.

Is Psois, the would-be draft-dodger, writing this important document himself? The
standard of literacy does not suggest that it was written by a professional scribe. If, as
seems likely, Psois was a Copt, why didn’t he write to John in Coptic as others did, on
equally important matters? Why did people struggle to write in Greek when Coptic
appears to have been their first language?

This text helps to refute any notions of Coptic as a nationalistic language – as certain
scholars have argued.47 It doesn’t add up that a Copt should be struggling to write in
Greek when Apa John, a local Coptic hero, could, it seems, be approached in Coptic.
Another fact that strikes a blow at the concept of Coptic as a nationalistic language is
that we have examples of anti-Chalcedonian literature, i.e. anti-government literature,
composed in Greek before being translated into Coptic. Clearly the Coptic–Greek
dichotomy is not so straightforward.

We may presume that Apa John, to whom the documents are addressed, could read
and possibly write Coptic. One letter that has been attributed to this archive may have
been written by him.48 There is, however, some dispute over whether this document

47 For instance T. Orlandi, ‘Letteratura copta e cristianesimo nazionale egiziano’, in A.
48 P. Amh. II 145 (and pl. 21) = Chrest.Wilck. 53.
comes from his archive at all. At the end of the text there is a five-line greeting in Coptic: ‘I greet you, my brother Paul, and everyone in your house, in the Lord’. Is this written by the same person who wrote the Greek text above it? Despite the attempt at literary style evident in the Coptic hand, there are certainly some similarities between the ways in which some letters are formed in both texts, but the overall impression is that they represent two different styles. We know that different styles of handwriting were taught to advanced students, but is this a conscious effort to make the Coptic look different from the Greek? Although Coptic and Greek texts are often mistaken even by papyrologists, and later I shall mention several individuals who wrote Coptic and Greek in pretty much the same hand, I think that there is a distinctive Coptic style.

Sixth-century bilingual Coptic and Greek archives

In order to get to the famous Dioskoros, we have to pass over the fifth century, for which there isn’t much papyrological evidence in either Coptic or Greek, and move into the sixth century, which is when the Coptic language began to be used for external, as well as internal, private affairs. For the first time, Coptic came to be used for legal documents, but, despite this development, legal documents still continued to be drawn up in Greek for people who explicitly say that they do not understand Greek. Sometimes people who give their assent to a Greek document may declare that it was translated into Coptic for them. This is the case for the last will and testament of an important figure in the Coptic Church, Bishop Abraham of Hermonthis, that was drawn up in the early seventh century.49

Dioskoros of Aphroditō: Poet, notary, teacher50

The most important of the sixth-century archives belongs to one of the ‘stars’ of Coptic and Greek papyrology, Dioskoros of Aphroditō, who combined the roles of poet, notary and teacher. He is equally happy writing in Coptic or Greek, and he helps to banish any misconceptions we might have about Coptic being used only by low-class Egyptians, a view that is quite common even today among papyrologists and other historians. Dioskoros is the best-documented example we have of an Egyptian who combines the


50 See http://www.trismegistos.org/arch/detail.php?tm=72&i=4, accessed 25 February 2010. Most of the Coptic texts of this very bulky archive (615 texts listed in LDAP) remain unpublished. Sarah Clackson was preparing their publication. A guide to the archive is being prepared by Jean-Luc Fournet.

Dioskoros was born into a land-owning family, and his father Apollo was an important man who founded a monastery. Dioskoros lived mostly in a village in Middle Egypt called Aphroditō. This was no ordinary village, however, because it was allowed to collect its own taxes, by decree of the Byzantine emperor. This privilege was the source of much contention over the years, and was to cause problems for Dioskoros, whose father had previously been responsible for the tax collection. In fact, it may be said that Dioskoros was driven to compose what has been called the worst poetry in antiquity as a result of some of his misfortunes.\footnote{Dioskoros travelled to Constantinople twice in his lifetime in order to represent Aphroditō’s right to collect its own taxes, and to defend himself on the charge of having extorted taxes from his fellow villagers. [SJC] On Dioskoros see L.S.B. MacCoull, Dioscorus of Aphrodito: His work and his world, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 6 (Berkeley, CA 1988); J.-L. Fournet, Hellénisme dans l’Égypte du VIe siècle. La bibliothèque et l’œuvre de Dioscoros d’Aphrodité, MIFAO 115 (Cairo 1999); and the collection of essays cited in the previous note.}

Dioskoros was driven out of Aphroditō by the actions of a local official who tried to confiscate some of his land. He then went north to the city of Antinoopolis, where he spent a few years petitioning the governor of the region over the matter of the injustices committed against him. Whilst there, he worked as a notary, producing documents in Greek and Coptic with equal ability. We know little about his life when he eventually returned to Aphroditō, except that he died in 585 CE.

In addition to his personal documents, some of the books from Dioskoros’ library have also survived, stored together in a jar, and they show that he received a classical education. He appears to have been a devotee of Homer and Menander: in addition to a copy of the Iliad, Dioskoros also possessed a codex of the plays of Menander, among other works. The poems Dioskoros wrote show how greatly he was influenced by Homer and Menander, and even the Greek documents he wrote as a notary bear the mark of Homer.\footnote{In his papers there is also an example of a Menandrian maxim translated into Coptic: Cribiore, Writing, no. 228. [SJC] This is not identified as belonging to Dioskoros by Cribiore. This was most probably the author’s opinion after having worked on Dioskoros’s Coptic papers in view of their publication.}

It is remarkable, however, that no works of Christian content were found with the other items from Dioskoros’ ‘library’ – for example, there is no copy of the Gospels or Psalms, with which he clearly was familiar, to judge from citations of them in the documents he wrote. In one of his petitions he uses biblical references as well as invoking
the name of Zeus! Perhaps all of Dioskoros’ Christian works were given to his father’s monastery, the administration of which is present in many documents of the archive, and which Dioskoros himself joined in later life. Similarly, Dioskoros’ juridical reference works – none of which is known to have survived – may have been sent elsewhere after his death.

Texts concerned with the administration of Dioskoros’ father’s monastery were written in both Greek and Coptic, and three legal documents drafted by Dioskoros himself also survive – two arbitration documents and a cession of land, all dated to 569 CE. Although there was still a tendency at that time for Coptic to be used for personal business, and Greek for official documents, these language-groupings are by no means fixed in Dioskoros’ archive.

In addition to the books in Dioskoros’ library that he read for pleasure, there are also books, some written in Dioskoros’ own handwriting, that indicate that he was involved in an advanced level of teaching, possibly fulfilling the functions of a grammatikos. In addition to his copy of the Iliad, he also possessed a copy of the scholia minora to the Iliad. Both books show signs of having been revised extensively. Who were Dioskoros’ pupils likely to have been? Members of his own family are the most likely candidates. At any rate, his students were Egyptian-speaking, to judge from the Greek–Coptic glossary that he compiled presumably for teaching purposes. This glossary is an immensely valuable linguistic document because it records a number of otherwise unattested forms or meanings of words, as well as some hapax legomena. As is the case with most educational glossaries, Disokoros’ glossary is arranged thematically, and sometimes the Greek lemmata are glossed with Copto-Greek words – that is, Greek words borrowed into Coptic.

It is interesting to note that Dioskoros wrote Coptic and Greek documents in a slightly different way: when he writes Coptic documents and Greek literary composition, he uses a rounded, sloping majuscule hand, but for Greek documents he uses a more cursive, generally upright script. Is this a conscious decision on Dioskoros’ part? Were Egyptian scribes trained to write Coptic and Greek documents in different ways? I shall now discuss a seventh-century archive in which a bilingual notary called Paul writes both Coptic and Greek documents in the same way.

55 Fournet, *Hellénisme*, 681. [SJC]
56 For an alternative interpretation of the glossary see Papaconstantinou, ‘Dioscore et le bilinguisme’, 80.
57 It is interesting to note that Dioskoros also copied a spell for protection against evil spirits in Greek rather than Coptic, on the back of a legal contract: PCair.Masp. 167188, 1–5; the spell is translated in M. Meyer and R. Smith, *Ancient Christian magic: Coptic texts of ritual power* (San Francisco 1994), no. 22. He may also have written a medical text: PCair.Masp. II 67141, II 20–28: *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994) 320, n. 22. [SJC]
Pachom of This – Purple-dealer\textsuperscript{58}

The archive of Pachom the purple-dealer (πορφυροπώλης) consists of Coptic and Greek documents that illustrate the interaction of two provincial families for almost a quarter of a century, from 592 CE in the reign of the emperor Maurice, all the way through the reign of Phokas, and up to 616 CE in the reign of Heraclius, the last Byzantine emperor to rule Egypt.

In Pachom’s archive we meet another notary who – like Dioskoros of Aphroditō – is equally skilled in both Coptic and Greek, and we can see how Coptic was beginning to be considered a valid legal language even in a small town in Egypt by the beginning of the seventh century, although important financial transactions such as property conveyances, which might have to be produced as evidence of ownership in a court of law, were still written in Greek.

Pachom was a bit of a local magnate. He owned properties in the big city, Panopolis, as well as in the small village of This where he was residing when the documents from his archive were drawn up. Three of the thirteen papyri belonging to this archive are in Coptic. Two of these are concerned with the engagement of Pachom’s daughter; a third document is too fragmentary to amount to much, but may be a loan contract. The Greek documents are varied: there are four property conveyances, one property division contract, a lease, three loan contracts, and a labour contract.

The notary who drew up the last six documents in Pachom’s archive was a certain Paul son of Megas, also of This. He wrote the two Coptic engagement contracts concerning Pachom’s daughter (both on the same day): one for Pachom, and one for his prospective son-in-law. Paul also wrote four Greek legal documents, a labour contract, two loan contracts, and a property conveyance. He wrote both Greek and Coptic documents in the same type of hand, although his Greek hand does show more ligatures and other cursive tendencies.\textsuperscript{59}

Apart from informing us about bilingual notaries, the Pachom archive also gives us an insight into the capacity of people without formal scribal training, especially the clergy, to write in Greek and Coptic. All the signatories in the documents whose titles are preserved are priests or deacons, and the same is true for all but one of the witnesses. The same witnesses turn up in more than one document: all the witnesses to Pachom’s copy of his daughter’s Coptic engagement contract occur in Greek documents. It may be that some of the people are professional witnesses, such as are found in Arabic documents for example. These were people who were recognised as dependable members of the community, although not necessarily people who could write.


\textsuperscript{59} See for instance the bilingual CPR IV 23 (inv. G 10117) and SB I 4505 (inv. G 1631), whose photographs can be consulted on the website of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek: http://aleph.onb.ac.at/F?func=file&file_name=login&local_base=ONB08, accessed 26 February 2010.
Patermouthis of Syene: Boatman-cum-soldier\textsuperscript{60}

Even with its new-found status, however, Coptic was not considered as legally valid as Greek by all Coptic-speakers. At the turn of the seventh century, another bilingual archive features an Egyptian family still using Coptic for private affairs and communications with relatives – and Greek for more official, public documents. This family lived right down on Egypt’s southernmost border at Syene (modern Aswān) – that is, away from the main administrative centres. The protagonist in the archive, Patermouthis, was a boatman-cum-soldier, and also a man of property and money-lender before he finally went bankrupt. The Greek papyri from the archive of his family span well over a hundred years, from the end of the fifth- to the second decade of the seventh century, and all are legal documents, many concerning property acquisition and money-lending. They reveal a fair amount of family dispute over inheritance, mainly as a result of constantly dividing and re-dividing residential property.

The four Coptic texts from Patermouthis’ archive are much humbler specimens than the Greek documents – for a start they are much shorter, and they reveal the more private side of Patermouthis’ family. Two of them may involve Patermouthis’ wife Kako. One document is addressed to her and concerns the settlement of a debt she owes. The other is less easy to interpret, but it may have been issued by Kako to her brother concerning a debt he owed to Patermouthis. So far I have not mentioned the issues of women’s literacy, chiefly because it is often very difficult to determine when a woman is actually writing a document rather than a scribe, or relative on her behalf. In the second-century archive of the strategos Apollonios, there are twenty-five Greek letters issued by women – most appear to have been written for them by a scribe, but some appear to have been written by the women themselves. These letters are currently being studied as part of a more general survey of women’s letters, and, until they provide evidence to the contrary, it can probably be assumed that most Egyptian women did not learn Greek in addition to Coptic, unless they were involved in business or other external dealings.\textsuperscript{61}

The position of women in second-century Egypt may be exemplified by a phrase in a Greek family letter, where the writer asks his reader to make an effort to translate the contents of the letter for ‘the women’. Even at the end of the sixth century, a Greek sales contract from Patermouthis’ archive is said to have been read out and translated into Egyptian for two sisters.

With the case of Patermouthis’ wife, Kako, I feel that it may be significant that the one text that is addressed to her as the protagonist was written in Coptic rather than Greek. Was Kako at least able to read Coptic even if she was unable to read or write Greek? All we can conclude is that the Patermouthis archive continues the practice of using Coptic for private family business, and Greek for external affairs.


\textsuperscript{61} See now R. Bagnall and R. Cribiore, \textit{Women’s letters from ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800} (Ann Arbor, MI 2006).
Coptic or Greek? Uncertainty as to which language is used for a document

We have seen from the papyri that Greek and Coptic were used in everyday life alongside each other. One of the effects of this close association is that it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a text was intended to be read as Greek or Coptic. This is particularly true of accounts, lists and receipts, and other short texts where a lot of Greek terminology is employed, often in heavily abbreviated forms. The example below, a sixth- or seventh-century loan contract from Elephantine that has been claimed as Coptic and Greek by different editors, clearly illustrates this fact:

In the case of this particular text, it may influence one’s interpretation to know that it was found along with a number of Coptic texts. Hints that it was written by a Coptic-speaker are also found at the beginning of line 2 in the phrase ΕΠΡΑΠΟΣΙΤΩΝ, which appears to involve the Coptic preposition e- (to) followed by the masculine definite article p- (the) prefixed to the Latin word praepositus. Also, at the beginning of line 4, this Coptic definite article is found again before the Greek σιτώ (wheat).

Another type of text in which there is similar confusion about the language are tax receipts. A large number have been recovered from the Theban region in the south of Egypt, mostly dating to the eighth century and mostly written in Coptic. Indeed, by the eighth century the status of Coptic was such that it was now used for administrative purposes. Some Greek tax receipts were still drawn up and in some instances the same scribes and signatories turn up in Greek and Coptic Theban tax receipts. I have found a puzzling instance of someone being issued with a Greek receipt for one kind of tax and a Coptic receipt for another. It seems that the choice of language was not always straightforward: it was not necessarily dictated by social status, document-type, date or region.


63 On this subject, see the paper by Jennifer Cromwell in this volume.
Coptic document with a Greek summary

It is standard practice for Coptic receipts and some accounts to end with a Greek summary, usually written by the same scribe. Below is an example of a Coptic text summarised in Greek by another scribe in a different format. The Coptic letter gives orders for wine to be delivered to various people, and it is followed by a Greek list of these people and the amounts they are to be given, written by a different scribe in a small Greek hand.\(^{64}\)

### P.Lond.Copt. 1130, from Ashmūnayn (Hermopolis).

\[†\text{Τ}ΙΟΥΩΟΩ\ ΟΥΝ \ΕΤΡΕΚ\mathrm{δω}λ\ ΠΗΡΠ \ΕΒΟΛ \ ΝΣΟΟΥΤΝ} \]
\[ΝΚΤΙ \ ΝΝΕΙΡΩΜΕ \ ΕΙΑΙΣΑΙΧΟΥ \ ΝΑΚ \ ΕΤΕΝΑΙΝΕ} \]
\[ΠΠΑΤΑ \ ΑΙΛΑΛΩ \ ΖΗ \ ΜΝΩΜΟΥΝ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC} \]
\[ΖΡΟΥΟ \ ΤΜΟΝΑΧΗ \ ΜΑΤΙΑΣΕ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC} \]
\[ΠΑΜΟΥΝ \ ΠΡΟΜΠΙΓΟΥ \ ΜΝΤΧΜΗΝ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC} \]
\[ΙΩΣΑΝΗΣ \ ΠΟΥΙΕΙ \ ΜΝΓΕΩΡΓΗ \ ΜΝΠΚΕ} \]
\[ΓΕΩΡΓΗ \ ΜΑΤΙΑΣΕ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC \ ΦΩΙΒΑΜΩΝ \ ΜΝ} \]
\[ΙΑΚΩB \ ΝΕΚΟΥΔΕΟC \ ΜΝΤΧΝΟΟΥC \ ΝΚΑΔΟC} \]
\[ΝΕΘΩM ΤΙΟΥ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC \ ΤΡI \ ΝΝΕΚΟΥI \ ΩΟΜΝΤ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC} \]
\[ΝΕΜΑΝΓΑΜΟΥΛ \ ΩΟΜΝΤ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC \ ΠΙΑΖ ΠΑΖΑ \ ΜΑΑΗ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC} \]
\[ΑΠΑ \ ΙΟΥΣΤΕ \ ΠΑΠΙΖΟΙ \ ΜΑΑΗ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC \ ΝΖΑΜΙΟΥΥΕ \]
\[ΜΝΤΑΣΕ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC \ ΑΥΩ \ ΠΡΩΜΕ \ ΕΤΝΑΕΝΙΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ} \]
\[ΝΑΚ \ ΤΙ \ ΟΥΚΑΔΟC \ ΝΑΙ \ ΑΥΩ \ ΤΙ \ ΖΝΕ \ ΝΚΑΔΟC} \]
\[ΕΠΩΝΨΗΡΡΕ \ ΤΙ \ ΖΝΕ \ ΕΠΣΟΛΑΛΨΗΡΕ \ † \ ΑΥΩ \ ΖΩΛΩ \ ΕΒΟΛ \]
\[ΝΣΟΟΥΤΝ † ΟΥΧΑI ΖΜΠΙΟΕΙC † ΩΩ \ ΖΙΝΑΣΟΥ} \]

\[\text{verso}\] \]
\[ΤΙ \ ΣΝΑY \ ΜΠΙΜΑ \ ΝΟΥΩM \ ΤΙ \ ΣΝΑY \ ΝΑΜΑ \ ΝΜΑΤΕ \]
\[ΤΙ \ ΣΝΑY \ ΜΠΙΜΑ \ ΖΡΩ \ ΠΑΝΘΩΤΕ \ ΤΙ \ ΣΝΑY \ ΝΕ- \]
\[ΡΗΒΗΡΟΙC \ ΑΥΩ \ ΤΑΧΗ \ ΜΩΚ \ ΑΥΩ \ ΠΡΟΧΕ \ ΕΜ \]
\[ΝΙΜ \ ΜΑΡΕζΝΠΟΜΕ \ ΧΟΛΕΖ \ ΕΒΟΛ \ †} \]

\[† \ δι(ά) \ Άπολω(τος) \ πρ(εσβυτέρου) \ οί(νου) \ κά(δοι) \ μη} \]
\[Ρούθ \ μοναχή} \ ις} \]
\[Παμουν διάκ(ονος) \ ιη} \]
\[αβα \ Ιουστα \ πατρ(\ ) \ ωρυ(\ ) \ ια} \]
\[Μηνα \ πρε(σβύτερος) \ απα \ παα \ ια} \]
\[τω \ μικρον \ πεδιον \ γ} \]
\[Ιωάννου \ γε(\ ) \ γε(\ ) \ ιβ} \]
\[Γεωργίου \ γε(\ ) \ γε(\ ) \ ιβ} \]
\[Γεωργίου \ γε(\ ) \ γε(\ ) \ ιβ} \]
\[Φαβάμων \ κου(\ ) \ ζ} \]
\[Ιακώβι \ κου(\ ) \ ζ} \]

\(^{64}\) \textit{P.Lond.Copt.} 1130, from Ashmūnayn (Hermopolis).
It is interesting to see how the Greek text diverges from the Coptic in a few respects – for example, some people mentioned are known by different names in Greek than in Coptic. Possibly the person who received the letter wrote the account as he checked off each of the people designated to receive the wine. Someone appears, at any rate, to be reading the Coptic and interpreting it into Greek for accounting purposes.

Late Coptic documents in Greek script only

I would like to finish up now by mentioning the handful of Coptic documents written in Greek script, i.e. without using any of the additional Demotic letters, or just employing one or two of them. These fascinating documents date from the eighth century and later, and are mostly private letters, but also include a legal document – a guarantee. They employ a particular idiom related to the Bohairic dialect that is usually associated with northern Egypt, but some of the place names mentioned in the texts may suggest that they come from the Fayyūm region. I give here the opening lines of one of these documents; this is a private letter written by one monk to another mentioning various everyday affairs including ‘craftsmen’ – a rather mundane text all in all.

Line 1†

χενπραν ενπνουδι ενσζορπ νωβ νιβεν τισχαει τιερασπαζεσθε ενπαμαεινουδι ενσον

† χενπραν νηνουγ τωοιτ νζοοι νιβεν †τζαι τερασπαζεσθε νηνακνουγ †νον

In the name of God, first of all, I write to and greet my God-loving brother,

65 The editor (Crum) suggests τοπ(ο)υ φακ(ου) to match ΠΜΑ ΝΟΥΩΜ.
66 There are many other inconsistencies between the two lists, including some elements in the Greek that do not appear in the Coptic, that would speak against a straightforward ‘summary’. This certainly deserves further investigation. I have left the content of the article intact.
The letter begins with a very common Coptic introductory letter formula that shows a confusion of tau and delta: the second word is ενπνουδι for ΝΠΝΟΥΔΙ; unlike Bohairic, which the dialect of this text most resembles, pi is used rather than phi; the verb \textit{ασπαζεσχε} is accurately represented as a mediopassive, while this form often becomes \textit{ασπαζε} in Sahidic and other dialects.

It is interesting that these Coptic documents in Greek script are all written in what can be described as ‘Greek’ rather than ‘Coptic’ hands. Why are these texts written in Coptic and not Greek? The great Coptologist, Walter Ewing Crum, suggested that they were written by Greek-speaking Egyptians whose familiarity with the native language was limited – possibly members of a Melkite community (i.e. supporters of the imperial church). Although such sects are indeed known to have existed in the Delta, I prefer to see these unusual texts as evidence of another of the many regional variants of Coptic. So is the use of Greek script in these texts a political statement? And do we have evidence of a Coptic dialect that is to be associated purely with Greek speakers?

\textbf{The eighth century and beyond}

Despite the gradual emergence of Coptic as a valid language for external affairs beginning in the sixth century, Greek kept its status in Egyptian society even after the last Byzantines were long gone. After the Arab conquest, Greek and Coptic were adopted as the official languages of the new administration.\textsuperscript{67} Documentary scribes were still being trained in Greek and Coptic in the eighth century, as reflected by the large number of tax receipts in these languages that survive from this period. These receipts have mostly been recovered from the Theban region in the south of Egypt, and most were written in Coptic. However, some tax receipts were still drawn up in Greek, and,

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{67} What is meant here is probably that administrative documents at the local level, such as tax receipts, were issued in Coptic at that time. However, Coptic never became an official language of the Arab administration. This question is addressed at length in Tonio Sebastian Richter’s analysis in this volume of the trilingual archive of administrative documents from early eighth-century Aphroditō known as the Qurra archive or, perhaps more appropriately, the archive of the pagarch Basilios.
\end{footnote}
in some cases, they used the same scribes and signatories as the Coptic receipts.⁶⁸ Even a century later, when documents drawn up in Greek are rare, the pervasive influence of traditional Greek usages can still be seen in some Coptic documents. Witness the long invocations of the Holy Trinity and dating formula in Greek still used in some eighth- and ninth-century Coptic legal contracts drawn up in Middle- and Upper Egypt.

Concluding remarks

To sum up: following the conquest by Alexander in the fourth century BCE, Egyptians became more and more accustomed to seeing and hearing Greek. Several centuries later, Coptic arose from a thoroughly bilingual Egyptian–Greek milieu, as its alphabet and lexicon make clear. During Ptolemaic, Roman, Byzantine and, to some extent, Arab rule, there was usually an incentive for Egyptians to acquire some familiarity with Greek, even if it meant just learning a few key words and phrases. Knowledge of Greek was necessary for everyday life because of the important role documents played in these highly bureaucratic government administrations. People could expect to be called upon to provide documents written in Greek to prove that they had paid their taxes or fulfilled their corvée duties, for example. Although there is evidence that some government documents might have been translated into Coptic – such as a public decree that aimed to prevent the fraudulent activities of tax-collectors –, on the whole it appears to have been expected that people should be able to understand Greek.

From the ninth century, the increasing Arabisation of the Egyptian population led to a decrease in the use of Coptic, although there is evidence for its being in everyday use still in the eleventh century. Both Greek and Coptic, however, lived on well beyond the first millennium in Egypt as liturgical languages – but I am rather doubtful about the statement made by the Arab historian, Al-Maqrīzī, that Copts in Upper Egypt still had a full knowledge of Greek in the fifteenth century.⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Maqrīzī, Khiṭaṭ, 4.2.1045.