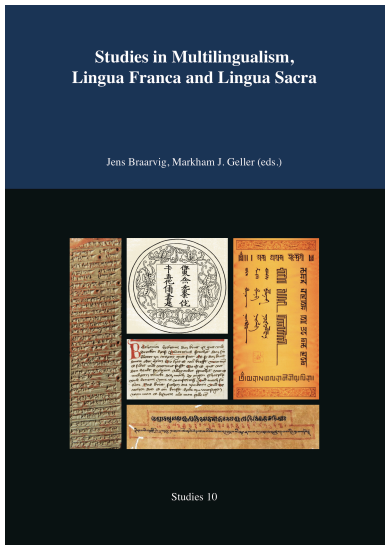


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Studies 10

Alexandra von Lieven:

Some Observations on Multilingualism in Graeco-Roman Egypt



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Chapter 12

Some Observations on Multilingualism in Graeco-Roman Egypt

Alexandra von Lieven

Sometime after 96 BCE, a man called Isidoros composed four hymns to different Egyptian gods which he had inscribed on the door-jambs of the temple of Isis in Narmouthis, today Medinet Madi, a town in the Fayum.¹ In principle, hymns to deities are a typical subject for the decoration of Egyptian temples, particularly from the later periods. Normally, they were composed in the Egyptian language and written in hieroglyphs. They usually lack an indication of authorship, unless it is graffiti of private individuals who are portrayed speaking the hymns.

The hymns of Isidoros, however, are very different from this common pattern. They do give the name of an author, not a speaker, and they are beautiful official carvings rather than graffiti. Moreover, they are not in Egyptian language and script, but in Greek. Nevertheless, the hymns extol the local Egyptian deities Isis-Renenutet (in Greek Isis-Hermouthis), Sokonopis, Anchoes and, under the name of Porramanres, the builder of the first temple in Narmouthis, King Amenemhet III. The fourth hymn, which is entirely dedicated to this king, who himself was long deified,² is of particular interest here. Firstly, Isidoros praises the king's divine qualities, particularly his ability to communicate with birds, and his descent from "Ammon, who at the same time is the Hellenes' and Asians' Zeus." For this he alludes to "those who have read the sacred scriptures," presumably the priests. Then he asks rhetorically for the king's name and continues:

The one who raised him, Sesoosis, who went to the east of the sky, he gave him the beautiful name of the glistening sun. Interpreting his name, the Egyptians called him Porramanres the Great, the Immortal. As for me, I heard from others of a remarkable miracle, namely that he drove in the mountains on wheels and with a sail. Securely having been informed by men who impart their knowledge, also after myself having translated all these deeds, I explained to the Greeks the god's and the ruler's power, demonstrating that no other mortal held similar power. Isidoros composed these verses.

This text touches on several levels on the question of cultural interaction between Greeks and Egyptians in Egypt, multilingualism being just one of the more obvious issues. For example, the explicit *interpretatio graeca* of the Egyptian god Amun as Zeus is noteworthy as well.³

Apparently, Isidoros consulted sources in Egyptian language on deified Amenemhet or Marres, as he is usually called in the Graeco-Roman period (the element Porra- is nothing

¹É. Bernand (1969, 631–652, pl. CV–CVIII (no. 175)); Vanderlip (1972); Moyer (2011, 2016).

²See Widmer (2002, 275–279) and von Lieven (2007b), s.v. *ʿImn.w-m-ḥ3.t N.i-M3'.t-R w*.

³Colin (2003, 275–279); von Lieven (2016c).

but the word “Pharao”). When he states that he translated the deeds to which he refers, it is not entirely clear whether he means that he did an actual translation of an existing story before composing the present poem or whether in fact the poem, which draws its inspiration from the Egyptian stories to which it hints, is itself the supposed “translation.” However, the wording rather seems to indicate the former. Thus we would have to reckon with yet another work of Isidoros. An interesting question is of course also whether Isidoros himself was Egyptian or Greek (see below).

Before returning to these questions, a broader look at the phenomenon of multilingualism in Graeco-Roman Egypt is in order.⁴ For most of Egyptian history, obviously, Egyptian in its successive historic-linguistic stages had been the dominant language in this country. Nevertheless, for purposes of diplomatic communication and trade, other languages were already studied in the New Kingdom by a small number of people. At least from the Amarna cuneiform tablets, it can be proven that Egyptians learned Akkadian.⁵ For even older periods, one may assume the same situation without actually being able to prove it positively.

It would be interesting to know whether the Libyans and Nubians ruling in Egypt in the Third Intermediate Period⁶ used much of their own language within Egypt or whether they were already that much Egyptianized that they only spoke Egyptian. From the evidence—or rather lack thereof—the latter is strongly to be suspected. The same seems to hold true for the Hyksos earlier, although again it is impossible to prove either way.

In the Late Period, which was dominated by the Assyrians and the Persians, for the first time foreign rulers invaded countries that were not previously Egyptianized at all. Especially under the Persians, Aramaic became the language of official documents.⁷ There is also evidence for translations of literary works from one language into the other.⁸ Apart from translations, also mere transcriptions of Aramaic texts into Demotic writing and vice versa are attested, among them the famous case of pAmherst 63.⁹ Unfortunately, these transcripts are notoriously difficult to make sense of today. Occasionally, Aramaic and Egyptian Hieroglyphic inscriptions can also be found on a single commemorative stela, where usually the Egyptian text serves to label the traditional Egyptian deities, while the main text of the stela with the personal details of its owner is in Aramaic.¹⁰ However, the period of Persian rule was rather short and soon Aramaic disappeared again from the cultural mainstream in Egypt, the thriving Jewish community excepted.

Its place was taken by Greek under Alexander and the Ptolemies. Even during the Roman period, Greek remained the dominant language in Egypt, although Latin was also used there.¹¹ In the beginning, Greek also was only used as the official language of the new rulers, but did not gain too much prominence outside the Greek immigrants’ circles proper. However, this quickly changed, probably not the least due to the fact that those immigrants

⁴Colin (2003); Thompson (2009); Fournet (2009); Torallas-Tovar (2010); Clarysse (2010).

⁵A good indicator for this are the Egyptian-style red verse points added to two mythological texts among the cuneiform tablets found in Amarna, see Izre’el (1997, 43–61, pl. XIX–XXX).

⁶Vittmann (2003, 2006).

⁷Porten and Yardeni (1986–1999); Vittmann (2003, 84–119).

⁸Vittmann (2003, 104–106); Quack (2002, 2009, 6, 2011); Lippert (2008, 87).

⁹Vittmann (2003, 115–119); Quack (2010a).

¹⁰A fine example is given in Vittmann (2003, 106–110, figure 47). Apart from the inscriptions, the stela in question shows other interesting details, particularly the strange tail at the lower end of the winged sun-disk, which makes it look very similar to the winged lower part of the typical representation of the Persian deity Ahuramazda.

¹¹Fournet (2009, 421–423).

often married Egyptian women. Thus it is to be expected that already the first generation of offspring from those bicultural marriages also was raised more or less bilingually. For example, documentary texts like the material gathered by Clarysse and Thompson in P. Count. (2006a) show an increase from 8 % mixed marriages in the third century BCE to already 25.5 % by taking the turn from the third to second century into the calculation as well.¹² The more ground Greek gained, the more incitement there will have been to learn Greek also among the purely Egyptian population. This especially holds true for the highest strata of society including the priesthood, as only the knowledge of Greek opened up career possibilities of the highest order.¹³ Moreover, getting the status of a “Hellene” meant lower taxes, which should have been enough reason to stomach some Greek lessons. In the lower strata of administration, both Demotic and Greek are found side by side, often even switching in the middle of the same papyrus from one to the other and back again.¹⁴ Only from the level of the Nome administration upwards, Greek was the exclusive language used. However, after the insurgences against the Ptolemies in the mid-second century, control was tightened. Already from 165 onward, the presence of Greek strongly increases in tax documents and from 145 onward, documents needed to have a Greek subscript containing a sort of abstract of the contents to be juridically valid at all. Nevertheless, Demotic documents continue to be used even in the Roman period.¹⁵

While the eagerness of Egyptians to learn Greek has long been accepted by scholars, only rarely is it admitted that also Greeks might have wished to learn Egyptian in turn. Usually Cleopatra VII is cited as an exceptional example,¹⁶ at the same time implying that her desire to learn Egyptian was an exception to what was otherwise the norm. However, there is reason to be a bit doubtful about such claims. It may very well be true that Cleopatra was the only member of the Ptolemaic royal family who ever learned Egyptian, but as for her subjects a much greater number of cases is to be expected. Of course there is little explicit evidence. But that is not surprising, these people were just living their lives, not expecting scholars two millennia later to puzzle over their language abilities. Thus we have to content ourselves with chance evidence. Such evidence does indeed exist. A clear case is, for example, the Greek letter UPZ I 148¹⁷ written in the second century BCE by a woman to a man, congratulating him on learning Egyptian writing (Αιγύπτια γράμματα), so he could teach the youths (τα παιδάρια) at an Egyptian physician’s and thus earn money for his old age.

¹²Clarysse and Thompson (2006b, esp. 326–328).

¹³Thompson (1992).

¹⁴Thompson (2009, 408–409).

¹⁵On the coexistence of the two juridical systems, see now in extenso Lippert (2008, 85–189). Despite its modest title, this publication contains the most up-to-date evaluation of the sources.

¹⁶It was recently explained by Huß (1990) with a possible Egyptian mother, whose existence, however, cannot be proven.

¹⁷See Wilcken (1927, 635–636 (no. 148)), somewhat differing interpretation by Remondon (1964). While Remondon’s comments on the strictly philological details have some merit, his musings about the cultural background betray more his own prejudices than adding anything to the understanding of the text. For example, his view that the text would testify to the Greeks wanting to maintain an unchanged Egypt, thereby depriving both the Egyptian medicine of the chance to progress via Hellenization as well as restraining the expansion of Greek science in Egypt (p. 144) seems to the present writer a rather desperate craving for negativity not justified by any evidence in the actual document. Apparently, it never occurred to Remondon that native Egyptian medicine could indeed have had any real value in itself. Contrast the study by Stephan (2005). The latter, however, sadly only relies on the medical papyri of the older periods (New Kingdom and earlier). For a true review of the question, of course, a comparison with medical treatises composed or at least copied in the Late and Greco-Roman periods would be in order.

Other such chance evidence is the growing number of cases where Greeks seem to have held priestly titles for Egyptian cults and left statues of themselves inscribed in Hieroglyphs!¹⁸ However, such cases can only be pinpointed with relative security in the Early Ptolemaic period, because with the lapse of time, more and more Egyptians also took Greek names, probably to improve their social standing and tax status.¹⁹ Sometimes it is evident that one and the same person had two names, one used in Greek documents, the other in Egyptian documents.²⁰ Such names can be entirely unrelated to each other, but often they are translations or at least equivalents of each other. Thus a Petese might have called himself Isidoros or a Petehor could have become an Apollodoros. But also purely Greek names without any Egyptian equivalent are attested as second name. A particularly inspired example is certainly the case of the *dioiketes* Harchebi, son of Pamnevis and Tasheretbastet, whose alternative name Archibios is not only a true Greek name, but almost a phonetic equivalent to his Egyptian name (which would normally have been rendered in Greek as Harchebis).²¹ Needless to say, this does not make the task easier to assign a culture of origin to a specific person.²²

Moreover, after the second or third generation of cultural mixing and intermarriage, it becomes almost futile to grope around in the mud for any differing cultural identities. To know what language or languages a specific person would have spoken is even more difficult. It seems likely that this depended from the situation, with Greek being used for more official situations of communication and Egyptian for more personal ones, as well as for matters of traditional religion.²³

A fine example is the *dioiketes* and *archisomatophylax* Dioskurides known from several Greek documents as a top figure of second-century Ptolemaic administration.²⁴ Apparently this man had an Egyptian mother and when it came to matters of eternal well-being, he wanted to be buried in an Egyptian sarcophagus with a Hieroglyphic inscription giving his titles and some biographical details hinting at him having been involved in suppressing the Egyptian revolts in 165, a fact that is also suggested by the Greek sources. Interestingly, the Hieroglyphic inscriptions of the sarcophagus are very faulty and in the more conventional parts clearly depend on a model originally produced for a woman (but not the mother!). One wonders whether Dioskurides himself might have tried his best to choose the texts without actually being too fluent in Egyptian...²⁵

Another interesting case is the *syngenes* Platon Junior, son of another Platon, who apparently also was *syngenes* and moreover *strategos* of the Thebaid in 88 BCE, and of an Egyptian mother.²⁶ Again, the Greek documentation for father and son shows them to have exerted political, administrative, and military functions, while the statue the younger Platon had inscribed for himself in Hieroglyphs proves that he not only held a considerable num-

¹⁸Collombert (2000); Coulon (2001); Vittmann (2006, 585–590); Klotz (2009). On the relations between the priests and the Ptolemaic court and administration in general, see now Gorre (2009, esp. 528–543).

¹⁹Thompson (1992, 326).

²⁰Clarysse (1985, 1992); Thompson (2009, 411–412); Quaegebeur (1992).

²¹Klotz (2009, 285).

²²For a good survey of the problem, see Clarysse and Thompson (2006b, 318–332).

²³For a long time, it had been assumed that no foreigners were allowed to serve as Egyptian priests. By now, it is clear that this is not true. For a general discussion, see e.g. Vittmann (1998), to which can now be added several more examples, see the following notes and references.

²⁴Collombert (2000).

²⁵And certainly not classical Middle Egyptian at that!

²⁶Coulon (2001).

ber of Egyptian priestly titles, but even served as a medium for oracles spoken by the god Amun in Thebes. No wonder then that even in the field of Egyptian religion, as the case of the Isidoros hymns shows, Greek could be used on purpose to propagate certain cults more widely.

And indeed, these hymns are not the only case where a text propagating a deity claims to be a translation from the Egyptian. Similar claims can be found in pOxy 1381, a text in praise of Imuthes-Asklepios, that is, the deified Egyptian sage Imhotep.²⁷ Again the author claims to have translated a story relating to Imhotep, unfortunately the part of the papyrus that would have contained the translated text is mostly lost. It would indeed be interesting to see whether this was really a translation of the story dubbed “The Life of Imhotep” by its prospective editor Kim Ryholt.²⁸ The latter, also known under the nickname “Djoser and the Assyrians” is a Demotic literary text which deals with the magical exploits of Imhotep, who helps king Djoser fight the Assyrians. The glaring anachronism involved in this notwithstanding, such a text would have served well to explain why Imhotep was a divine being worthy of veneration. Moreover, there is an interesting similarity between this and the Porramanres hymn by Isidoros. Isidoros also gave a reason for the divine nature of Marres, namely his ability to talk to animals as well as the bizarre incident when he sailed on wheels in the mountains. Both sound at least to the present author very strongly like referring to a literary text of the sort attested aplenty in the corpus of preserved Demotic historical romances. As demonstrated by the Tebtynis finds, such narratives were kept in temple libraries and read by priests, thus the claim that this information derived from “sacred scriptures” is fully justified.²⁹ In fact, there even do exist some remnants of a Demotic narrative on Sesostri and Amenemhet in pCarlsberg 411, which contain animals, although not birds, but at least a laughing dog.³⁰ The existence of a tradition of Amenemhet talking to birds is however corroborated by Aelian On Animals VI,7,³¹ who mentions Amenemhet III alias Mares having talked to a pet crow. This information cannot derive from the hymn in Narmouthis directly as the text does not detail the kind of bird involved. Aelian further says that the tomb of the crow would be shown in Krokodilopolis in the Fayum. Again, this proves that his source must be a different one, not the text by Isidoros.

At any rate, translating Egyptian religious or literary texts can be positively proven by other examples with better documentation for versions both in Egyptian and in Greek.³² A case in point would be the so-called Myth of the Sun’s Eye,³³ again a Demotic composition containing the dialogue of two deities on all sorts of esoteric matters, interspersed with fables to illustrate important moral points. Fragments of the Greek translation dating to the second half of the second century CE, but unfortunately without provenance, have been known

²⁷Grenfell and Hunt (1915).

²⁸Ryholt (2009). Quack (2009) to the contrary thinks that the Greek text might have been a translation of the great dialogue between Pharaoh and Imhotep on the theological interpretation of the temple decoration (unpublished fragments in Florence). The latter he thinks moreover to be possibly related to the text published by Erichsen and Schott (1954). Currently, though, none of these hypotheses can be proven.

²⁹There is no need that “sacred scriptures” need to be in Hieratic, let alone Hieroglyphs, as some Egyptologists might object.

³⁰Information by email from K. Ryholt, fully discussed in von Lieven (2007b).

³¹Aelian (1971); Grimm (1990).

³²While for the texts presented below both Greek and Egyptian versions are preserved, for others a similar situation cannot be proven positively, but may still be inferred from philological details of the Greek versions. For two likely cases see Jasnow (1997) and Quack (2003). On the whole question see Quack (2009, 4–6, 32–34).

³³Cenival (1985, 1988, 1989).

for a long time.³⁴ On first impression, the Greek version seems to omit the more esoteric parts of the original version, thus making the text more accessible to Greeks. Although this would fit well with the statement by the translator of pOxy 1381 in his verbose preamble that “Throughout the composition I have filled up defects and struck out superfluities, and in telling a rather long tale I have spoken briefly and narrated once for all a complicated story,” it is important to state clearly, as Luigi Prada did recently, that the preservation of the Greek text in comparison to the Egyptian version does not really allow for such far-reaching conclusions.

Another interesting case is the Book of the Temple, which was originally composed in Middle Egyptian, later translated into Demotic and finally into Greek.³⁵ All three versions are attested from the second century CE, language preference apparently depended from the abilities of the users. While the Hieratic Middle Egyptian and Demotic versions were spread all over Egypt, the Greek fragment comes from a place well-known for its Greek papyri, namely Oxyrhynchus.

While indeed the majority of papyri from Oxyrhynchus are in Greek, there were of course temples of Egyptian deities there, particularly the main temple for Thooris, and from the library of one such temple, a small number of fragments of several papyri in Egyptian language and scripts are preserved.³⁶ Some of them even contain supralinear glosses in Greek script. Further study of these fragments is needed. On first inspection, it seems that the glosses just contain a transliteration into Greek for the sake of easier pronunciation. Thus they would be similar to some parts of the famous Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden.³⁷ Also among the Greek Oxyrhynchus papyri, like the already cited pOxy 1381, several have clear Egyptian contents, usually related to religion. Thus, it is to be assumed that they will also have been translations.

But not only religious texts were translated. Even for a legal manual, the so-called Codex Hermopolis, a translation into Greek can be proven (pOxy XLVI 3285, second cent. CE).³⁸

The interesting question is of course whether any translations from Greek into Egyptian can be found. Currently, the present author is aware only of one text explicitly claiming to be a translation from the Greek, namely an unpublished letter in Demotic language, but Hieratic script from Tebtynis.³⁹ For bilingual administrative texts on the level of private business documents, it is sometimes difficult to know which version is the primary one and which is secondary. For the Greek subscripts of Demotic documents it is generally to be assumed that the Demotic version is the primary one for the very nature of such subscripts.⁴⁰ However, in the bilingual papyri from the archive of Zenon, the Greek text is written first and the Demotic one second,⁴¹ so maybe for once there matters were the other way round. This would fit with the fact that in the Zenon archive, Greek generally prevails.

³⁴West (1969), Totti (1985, 168–182), and Thissen (2011). For the dating and other important observations see Prada (2012).

³⁵Quack (1997, 2016b).

³⁶Unpublished, personal observation. A joint publication of this material by J. F. Quack and myself is planned in the series *Texts from Excavations*. Preliminary presentation in Quack (2016a).

³⁷Griffith and Thomson (1904–1909); Dieleman (2005).

³⁸Rea (1978, 30–38); Pestman (1985); Lippert (2008, 88).

³⁹To be published by J. F. Quack.

⁴⁰Lippert (2008, 136–137, 139, 149).

⁴¹Pestman (1980).

Apart from this, for the trilingual Ptolemaic decrees it has been proposed that their texts were originally composed in Greek and then translated into Demotic and a patchwork language written in Hieroglyphs.⁴² This supposition is based on certain grammatical features of the Demotic versions that betray a dependance on Greek.

In fact, the Greek origin of these texts can even help to explain the presence of the Hieroglyphic patchwork version, as it ties in very well with the fascination of Greeks with the different Egyptian types of writing.⁴³ Apparently, it was then felt that also the linguistic character of the two Egyptian versions needed to be slightly different, a stance that otherwise is never attested in the Egyptian material.⁴⁴ Never, with one exception, that is. The exception is the two funerary Rhind papyri.⁴⁵ They lack a Greek version, as they were just written for an Egyptian priest and his wife for their personal posthumous well-being. However, it is very likely that they derived their inspiration from the trilingual decrees nevertheless. Maybe their owner was involved in composing such decrees, as apart from his Egyptian priestly titles he also held the Greek title *syngenes*.⁴⁶

That Demotic-Greek bilingual decrees could also be used below the level of royalty is proven by the decree issued by the priests of Karnak in honour of the *strategos* Kallimachos.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the Demotic text, which is much shorter than the Greek one, has not yet been published to date.

Probably the most striking bilingual semi-literary text is the stela of Moschion,⁴⁸ where possibly the Greek version is to be considered the primary one, in view of the fact that Moschion is also a Greek name. The shakiness of such arguments has already been mentioned. Moreover, however, some ideas in the text like the nine Muses are Greek as well.

Although both versions basically convey the same ideas, written once in Greek and once in Demotic, it is questionable whether one can rightfully claim this as a translation proper. At any rate, this is a stela containing a sort of riddle, with crossword elements and acrostic parts, both in Demotic and in Greek,⁴⁹ which was set up to glorify Osiris in fulfillment of a vow. The purpose was “proclaiming it to Greeks and natives (*Ἑλλῆσι καὶ ἐνδαπίοισιν*)” as the Greek texts puts it or, in the Demotic version “to the men of Egypt and the Greeks (*r n3 rmt.w-n-Kmy n3 Wynn*)”—note the changed order, by the way! One part in each language is written acrostically, giving the name of the dedicator. In the Greek it is stated that the number of lines corresponds to the number of the muses—and indeed *Moschionos* just gives nine letters to start the lines with. Unfortunately, in the Demotic, the entity to which the number

⁴²Simpson (1996, 22–24).

⁴³Iverson (1961, 38–56).

⁴⁴For the normal Egyptian way to deal with historic linguistics, see von Lieven (2007a, 223–250; 2013) (the latter particularly focusing on the situation in the Greco-Roman period).

⁴⁵Möller (1913).

⁴⁶Born in 68 BCE, he might very well have been involved in such an enterprise even if up to now there is no trilingual decree attested that late in the Ptolemaic period.

⁴⁷Stela Turin 1764, see Hutmacher (1965), Bernand (1992b, 106–109; 1992a, 109–115), Farid (1995, 289; 1993, 49, pl. 17) and Vleeming (2001, 130, no. 156). Contrary to the claims copied throughout the literature, the stela that was reused for the decree certainly did not date to the New Kingdom originally. For stylistic reasons in relation to the deities remaining from the original design, it must have dated to the Late Period, possibly the twenty-fifth dynasty (as the published photos are rather bad, a better dating is difficult).

⁴⁸É. Bernand (1969, 413–428, pl. LXXV–LXXVII (no. 108)); Vleeming (2001, 199–209 (no. 205)).

⁴⁹Similar stelae in Hieroglyphs have been found several times from New Kingdom and twenty-first to twenty-second dynasty Thebes, see Clère (1938, 35–38), Zandee (1966), Stewart (1971), Troy (1997) and Coulon (2006, 24, pl. VI b).

of lines is equivalent, has been lost due to damage. As is it in fact seven lines, the seven Hathors seem to be a likely choice, but there would be other possibilities. At any rate, the letters *Mskyʒn* would only have filled six lines. Now, groups of six deities are not easily to be found in Egyptian religion, in contrast to groups of seven, which are rather frequent.⁵⁰ So what to do? Of course, in Demotic one could write a name with a person determinative at the end. However, that would not have fitted well into an acrostic. Instead, the scribe who composed the text resorted to a stroke of genius. He wrote not the person determinative, but the animal determinative, which fitted the literal meaning of Moschion “calf.” In fact, somewhere else in the Demotic part,⁵¹ Moschion’s name is apparently translated as *Ms*, which not only sounds similar to the beginning of the Greek name, but even means “calf.” As for the determinative in the last line of the acrostic, it looks in Demotic exactly like the sign for the male article *pʒ*—and indeed that is the word, with which the last line *pʒ i.iri iʀi tʒ hbʒy* “the one who has made the board [...]” starts.

For literary texts in the narrower sense there is no secure evidence whatsoever that Greek material was translated into Egyptian. Rather, it seems the Egyptian priests put their Greek to good use and read Homer in the original. At any rate, the temple library of Tebtynis, which is a treasure trove for Demotic literature, also contained a manuscript of the *Iliad*.⁵² The only case where a translation of a Greek text into Egyptian might at first be suspected is a fragment of a Demotic papyrus with a description of foreign nations resembling the well-known Greek texts of such kind.⁵³ Yet, the preserved text does not represent a translation of any known Greek model. Thus, unless it is derived from an otherwise lost Greek ethnography, one has to reckon with an original Demotic composition just inspired by the Greek genre.

In fact, it is very likely that some priests not only translated older Egyptian texts into Greek, but that they even composed new texts in the lingua franca of the period, not unlike a modern German scholar giving a paper at a conference in Germany in English for the sake of international colleagues. A well-known example of this is of course the famous Manetho already in the earlier Ptolemaic period,⁵⁴ but it is likely that there were in fact many more such cases. A documented Roman Period example would be Chaeremon, although he is a special case as he lived in Rome at least during a part of his life.⁵⁵ Isidoros of Narmouthis, the author of the hymns, might well also have been such a person. Maybe he was in fact a local priest with the Egyptian name Petese—certainly the name would fit since the main local deity had been a form of Isis—even if of course Petese was a very common name.

In the literature, it was questioned whether Isidoros was an Egyptian since he speaks of “the Egyptians” as if he was not one of them.⁵⁶ The same holds true of “the Greeks” though. Thus it is really impossible to answer the question and probably also futile. What is instructive, however, is the fact that he links the name Porramanres with the sun. This betrays a clear understanding of the Egyptian name behind the Greek rendition. Porramanres is of

⁵⁰ Rochholz (2002, esp. 36–142).

⁵¹ Text E, see commentary in Vleeming (2001, 202).

⁵² Tait (1977, 93–94, pl. 9).

⁵³ Quack (2010/2011).

⁵⁴ Waddel (1940).

⁵⁵ van der Horst (1987).

⁵⁶ É. Bernand (1969). Vanderlip (1972, 96, 102) remains rather vague. The best discussion to date is to be found in Moyer (2011, 2016).

course “Pharao Maa-Re,” indeed containing the name of the sun god Re, as is fitting for the king’s throne name.

With Egyptians like Manetho, and others who composed texts in Greek or translated traditional material into Greek, the world of Egyptian thought and culture was in principle open to international dissemination. And indeed this is what happened in many fields. A good example is the recipe for Kyphi, a prized incense mixture used in the Egyptian cult for fumigations.⁵⁷ Two versions of this recipe are attested in the temple texts of Edfu, one of them with a parallel in Philae. Manetho is credited with a Greek treatise on its production, which unfortunately is lost. Nevertheless, many other later Greek authors gave such recipes, which are likely ultimately to have derived from Manetho’s account, even if they tend to be embellished and expanded more and more over time, eventually up until the thirteenth century CE. The version in Galen however is still very close to the version in Edfu.

Thus, particularly in the field of the sciences and pseudosciences, we have to reckon with texts in Greek language containing genuine Egyptian concepts. This is especially true in the field of astrology.⁵⁸ Thus it is possible to find explanations for some of the iconography on Roman period temple ceilings from Egypt in astrological treatises in Greek language like, for example, Teucer of Babylon—Babylon in Egypt, that is, the Greek name of Old Cairo.

For the modern researcher, this means of course two things. For the Egyptologist, it means that he or she need to take Greek sources (or even sources in other languages like Latin or the like, derived from lost Greek sources) much more seriously. There is no point in ignoring any document because it is supposedly “Greek” rather than “Egyptian,” as is unfortunately still done too often. For the Classicist, on the other hand, it means that claims about supposed Egyptian concepts or even the translation of an Egyptian original also need to be taken much more seriously than is usually the case. It has long been customary to reject such claims by ancient authors as *topoi* without any reality. However, as more and more hard evidence for that very reality crops up, it seems high time for a change of attitude.

In the later Roman period, Greek dominated more and more in all fields of Egyptian society. In everyday communication, it is likely that even speakers of Egyptian language interspersed a great deal of their sentences with Greek vocabulary.⁵⁹ At least this is the impression to be gained from the Narmouthis ostraca.⁶⁰ These ostraca come from the vicinity of the temple in Narmouthis and date to the late second and early third century CE. They contain Demotic texts dealing with administrative problems, school exercises, astrological calculations and much more. Some of the later ones show a very peculiar mixture of Demotic and Greek. The Egyptian text is littered with Greek words, but still the different scripts with their different directions of writing are retained for each language.

⁵⁷For details and a discussion of some of the Greek and Latin sources, see von Lieven (2016a).

⁵⁸On the relationship of Greek astrological treatises with Egyptian temple ceilings, see von Lieven (2000, 150–152). Other striking examples for such transmission phenomena are the so-called dodekaoros, von Lieven (in press), or the decans, Quack (in press).

⁵⁹For the development, see Feder (2004). The problem with such assessments is that for most of the time, one has to rely on either literary texts, which were likely originally to have been composed long before their actual attestation, see e.g. Quack (2002), or with documentary texts, which tend to be very formulaic. Thus, Greek loanwords have little possibility of creeping into the documentation, even with no conscious effort to avoid them, as has been supposed, for example, by Clarysse (1987) and Vandenbroucke and Clarysse (1998).

⁶⁰Bresciani, Pernigotti and Betrò (1983); Gallo (1997), with review by Quack (1999); Menchetti (2005), with review by Quack (2006/2007).

The next logical step is of course to switch to Greek letters for writing the Egyptian words, adding a few letters for sounds not available in Greek. This is precisely what had been done already for a while in the context of magical spells where the correct pronunciation was vital.⁶¹ Now however, this system was adapted to general use. Thus, what is called Coptic was born.⁶² This development was recently analyzed anew by R. Bagnall and J. Quack.⁶³ Bagnall is certainly right that the development of the Coptic language was much more complex in its details than has often been assumed in the past. Yet, it is no surprise that a text from an ostrakon from the third century from Kellis⁶⁴ should be more evolved into the direction of “true” Coptic than texts from the second century. This does not at all speak against the development of the roots of Coptic in the pagan milieu, although it is certainly true that this should not be limited to the context of priests and temples exclusively. The Christians just adapted one such system at the time when it was already quite evolved. This is no compelling argument for necessarily postulating a new, independent development to be linked to Christianity as the driving factor for change. Different systems of “Old Coptic” in different places and with different stages of evolution over the decades already within the pagan culture would in fact be a very likely assumption. After all, the same can be seen also within the system of late monumental hieroglyphic orthography, commonly referred to as “Ptolemaic.”⁶⁵ While following common principles everywhere,⁶⁶ this also exhibits great variations in the details, with certain signs being very common for a certain phoneme in one temple while being rather rare with this value in another.⁶⁷

At any rate, in Coptic, the multilingualism of Egyptian and Greek has given rise to a single new language comprising elements of both its parent languages. While in terms of grammar it retains many structures of Egyptian, the Greek elements are by no means limited to nouns and other such clearcut lexical features. Even within Coptic, the extent of Greek influence is fluid, depending, for example, on the particular dialect or on whether it is an original Coptic composition or a translation of a Greek original, like, for example, the Coptic Bible.⁶⁸

While there is still multilingualism between Coptic and Greek proper,⁶⁹ in the Byzantine period there is no more Egyptian language without Greek elements, as Coptic is the Egyptian of the period.

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⁶¹ Compare the famous statement by Iamblichus VII 4–5 (1966, 191–195) and the examples discussed in von Lieven (2016b).

⁶² In fact, the texts on some of the later Narmouthis ostraca could linguistically already be called Coptic, just that they retain the Demotic script for the Egyptian words.

⁶³ Bagnall (2005); Quack (2017).

⁶⁴ Gardner (1999).

⁶⁵ Quack (2010b).

⁶⁶ For those principles, see Kurth (2009, 31–100, esp. 31–39).

⁶⁷ A case in point would be Ꞗ with the value *m*, which is very frequent in Deir Shelout, Zivie (1982–1986), but not very widely used in other temples. See further Kurth (2009, 14–25).

⁶⁸ In fact, there is variation even between the different dialects of Coptic, see Feder (2006).

⁶⁹ See e.g. Clackson (2010).

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