

## Roman Cultural Knowledge in Egypt? The Case of the Greek-Latin Bilingual Papyri.

A sizeable number of Greek-Latin bilingual papyri survive from the ancient world. The range of the texts is enormous: they vary from short glossaries to bilingual selections from Aesop and Virgil, and from conversation manuals to the works of grammarians and Roman jurists (for a convenient overview, see Dickey 2012, figure 1.1). To date, scholarship has mostly focused on studying linguistic questions. Thus Rochette and Adams have devoted major works to in-depth analyses of translation practices and bilingualism in practice. Studying a large corpus of bilingual texts that includes texts preserved in the MSS tradition, both Rochette and Dickey have been pushing the material further by discussing what these texts can tell us about language education in the ancient world. Yet overall, scholars of ancient literature and cultural historians have largely neglected these texts.

In this paper, I will argue on the basis of several case studies that Greek-Latin bilingual papyri from Egypt can often be understood as disseminating Roman cultural knowledge to people in the Hellenized parts of the Empire. That is to say, I suggest that the texts I will discuss are best understood as short-cuts to cultural knowledge that was essential for interacting successfully with Roman individuals—those who would make up the higher, administrative echelons of the province. This reading of the evidence probably becomes clearest from the juristic papyri (in Latin) annotated in Greek, which will be my first case study (in particular PSI 11.1182). Based on a close reading of the marginalia, I suggest that acquiring a basic knowledge of Roman law must have been useful for Greek speakers in all sorts of situations. While the scholarship has traditionally argued that the readers of these papyri were trying to enter the law schools or the Empire's bureaucracy, I argue that some acquaintance with Roman law was useful

as well at a more modest level, such as when writing petitions (cf. ChLA 11 503) or networking with elites.

In my second case study I expand my reading of the bilingual evidence to non-legal texts as well, and I will focus on the letter collection in *P.Bon. 5*. This papyrus contains several sample letters in Latin and Greek that provide models for expressing commiseration as well as congratulations to the addressee. Notable examples are the letter to a friend who was excluded from another friend's will, the letter to a friend who did receive an inheritance, and the letter to a slave who received his freedom. Developing Dickey's argument that bilingual papyri should in general be seen as sample texts coupled with a literal translation in the language of the user to help the user understand the example, I will argue in some detail that *P.Bon. 5* was targeted at a Greek-speaking audience (cf. Rizzi and Molinelli for a comparative study of the syntax of the letter). I will then show through a close reading that the letters promote maintaining a type of Roman *amicitia* similar to—though not as high-brow as—that found in the letters of Cicero, Pliny, and Fronto.

### Bibliography

Adams, J. (2003). *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*. Cambridge

Dickey, E. (2012). *The Colloquia of the Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana. Volume 1*.

Cambridge

Rizzi, E. and P. Molinelli (1994). 'Latin and Greek Compared: Word Order in a Bilingual Papyrian Text (P.Bonon. 5)'. In: J. Herman (ed.). *Linguistic studies on Latin. Selected Papers from the 6th International Colloquium on Latin Linguistics (Budapest, 23-27 March 1991)*. Amsterdam, pp. 113-127

Rochette, B. (1997). *Le Latin dans le Monde Grec*. Leuven