

Latin in Egyptian Documents between Caracalla and Diocletian*

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Abstract

The third century A.D. is known to be a major historical watershed, including Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* (A.D. 212), which extended Roman citizenship to almost all the inhabitants of the Empire, and Diocletian's reforms (A.D. 285-305), which inaugurated Late Antiquity. An overview of Latin and bilingual documentary texts on papyrus, *ostraka*, and tablets produced in Egypt in this century, and a comparison with evidence from the previous and following ones, will lead to some considerations on the spread and significance of the Latin language in this province.

Keywords

Latin papyri, Egypt, Third century A.D.

The problem

A tenet widely accepted in papyrology and corroborated by the quantity and textual typology of the evidence says that documentary papyri produced in Egypt entirely or partially in the Latin language are almost exclusively to be referred to a military *milieu*. This may be true if one looks at large numbers and on a large scale, comparing the typologies of Latin documents to those in Greek or Demotic, but a more precise approach is required if one focuses on the whole of Latin documentary evidence from the province of Egypt.

It *is* true that the production of documents wholly in Latin, or bilingual Latin–Greek, directed from provincial bureaus to military units, or drafted within those very units, continued more or less

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uninterrupted for four centuries of Roman power (1st cent. B.C. – 4th cent. A.D.), only dwindling in the last two centuries of Late Antique Egypt (5th-6th century). Military bureaucracy envisaged highly standardized documents, which can be found in Egypt as well as in other Roman outposts, like Dura-Europos or Vindolanda, at the opposite corners of the Empire. Scholars have so far outlined a remarkable uniformity of layout and typologies in the documents which came out of the military *officia*¹ (rosters, requests of probation, probation letters, orders from higher to lower ranks, monthly and daily reports). The need for a monolingual bureaucracy for top-ranking military commanders, who travelled extensively, was keenly felt. Even when the separation between West and East became a fact and there are fewer Latin military documents than before, certain trends remain consistent in their contents and aims, even though outwardly changed as a result of the altered historical context.²

That said, something can still be said for those Latin and bilingual documents that do not specifically refer to the proceedings and the daily *routine* of Roman army. Everything that was not a roster, a *pridianum*, a guard roster, an official letter from one higher rank to another, and so on: rather, personal letters between civilians, business documents in and outside the camp – loans, purchases, and contracts can sometimes be in Latin when the actors are soldiers³ or landowning veterans – deeds, testaments and declarations from civilians or former soldiers (i.e. veterans), and the like. Documents, in short, where the link with the official proceedings of the army was very thin; where the people beyond the documents, even if soldiers themselves, take care of their own business and family matters. In this respect, not only a wider range of documentary typologies is attested (see below) in comparison with the document types found in military bureaus, but also a significant variation occurs in the percentage of Latin in the documents themselves as Late Antiquity emerges. In the first two centuries of the Empire (1st-2nd century), a Latin document on papyrus, *ostrakon* or tablet is more often than not a real text, sometimes associated to a shorter or equally long Greek text, and sometimes fully in Latin. After the fourth century A.D., these wholly or partially Latin texts unrelated to Roman army are almost completely wiped out, with only a few exceptions, often from or to the highest chanceries;⁴ for the remaining centuries of Roman – after A.D. 395, East-Roman – presence in Egypt, Latin is used as a frame for Greek documents (the

¹ I refer to Salati 2020. Other sources include the seminal Fink 1971, and Stauner 2004.

² Instances of this trend can be found e.g. in the receipts: see ChLA III 203 (= P.Lond. inv. 482, A.D. 130, TM 78865) and ChLA XLV 1328-1330 (= P.Vindob. inv. L 119-121, A.D. 399, TM 23788, 18755-18756); or in the epistulae probatoriae, the letters of probation a recruit needed to be enlisted in a *numerus*: see the one in P.Oxy. VII 1022 (A.D. 103, TM 78569) for six *tirones*; the one enclosed in P.Dura 89 col. II ll. 14-15 (A.D. 239, TM 44820), and eventually, in a totally different style and language but still in Latin and still answering to the same purpose, the one in P.Ryl. IV 609 (A.D. 505); or in the list of soldiers: see BGU IV 1083 (A.D. 32-38, TM 9457) and ChLA XVIII 660 (= P.Paris. BNF inv. Lat. 3147, A.D. 324-329, TM 70000).

³ Some considerations in Arangio Ruiz 1948; Iovine 2017, 51-53.

⁴ The list includes less than thirty items for two centuries, from ChLA XIX 687 (= P.Strasb. inv. Lat. 1, A.D. 317-24, TM 70001), a recommendation letter from a *rationalis* to the *praeses Phoeniciae* Achillius, to ChLA XLIV 1301 (= P.Vindob. inv. L 75, A.D. 465-467, TM 70088), an imperial constitution.

Prozessprotokolle) or for tags, i.e. to mark documents in other languages.⁵ Something must have happened between those centuries (namely, during the third century A.D.) that radically changed the status of Latin in documents produced in Egypt.

The flow (1st-2nd A.D.)

In the chronological fork between the beginning of Roman occupation in B.C. 30 and Caracalla's constitution in A.D. 212, a considerable quantity of Latin and bilingual Latin-Greek documents on papyrus, *ostrakon* and tablet not directly connected to the Roman army was drafted in Egypt.⁶

- 21 papyri linked with business and/or land, referring to overseers and stewards of Roman – mostly imperial – property in Egypt, Roman bankers or traders, and landowning veterans. Among these items one finds lists – of men, of payments, of slaves, of objects; communications concerning business; and contracts, sometimes in Greek with Latin subscriptions;⁷

- 17 papyri and tablets (mostly tablets) connected with family matters and referring either to soldiers in active service or to Roman citizens (veterans and their spouses, sons and daughters) living in the *chora*: birth declarations of legitimate (*professiones*) and illegitimate (*testationes*) offspring, and one certificate for a thirteen-year old wearing his *toga pura*;⁸

- again, family matters of the Roman citizens living in Egypt – this time, not concerning children, but adults – are the object of 17 papyri and tablets consisting in testaments *per aes et libram*, dotal arrangements, and marriage contracts;

- 9 papyri contain copies (locally produced) of communications from the Imperial chancery (originally written in Rome): constitutions, rescripts, and the like. This sort of documents, emanated by the most exalted seat of Roman power, were of course in Latin;

- a set of 8 papyri containing business documents among soldiers, unconnected with the necessities of the unit: mainly loans, acknowledgments of debt, purchases;

- 3 tablets referring to guardianship according to Roman law – one of them certainly containing the copy of a request for a *tutor* granted by the prefect of Egypt;

⁵ As far as court proceedings go, a study on this typology by B. Palme and A. Dolganov has been announced; see also Coles 1966 and Adams 2003, particularly chapter 3.VI.1. For Latin tags in Latin or Greek documents, see e.g. – on dating formulae – Iovine 2019.

⁶ All the evidence presented below has been gathered thanks to the unpublished census of Latin and bilingual – or trilingual – papyri, *ostraka* and tablets from the Eastern portion of the Empire, North Africa and Italy from 1st B.C. to 8th century A.D., produced within the frame of project PLATINUM, where I served as a post-doctoral scholar. Given the unpublished status of most of our research and of the census itself, I have been asked not to disclose the full designation and catalogue number of all the gathered documents, but only of a partial selection – namely, those quoted in 3.

⁷ On this set of documents cf. Iovine-Salati 2020.

⁸ How, why and when Roman citizens in Egypt used Latin language and Roman law in their everyday life – and how this changed after A.D. 212 – is the object of many important contributions and will therefore be not discussed again in this paper. See the seminal Mitteis 1891; Arangio Ruiz 1946-47; Mitthof 2000; Thomas 2007; Alonso 2013; Modrzejewski 2014; Alonso 2016, with bibliography attached.

- 3 declarations of *cretio hereditatis*. The history and meaning of this procedure in Roman law are still under discussion; suffice it to say that *cernere hereditatem* signalled the acceptance of an inheritance legally transmitted by a testament.⁹ It has been hypothesized that these *cretiones* on papyrus are in fact unnecessary acts and the result of provincial misunderstanding of the correct Roman procedure: the documents certify that a *cretio* has been made, but in fact they represent, for those who requested the documents, the *cretio* itself.¹⁰

- 2 papyri containing *Prozessprotokolle*.

- 2 private letters among slaves. These are probably related to the business documents, as these slaves most likely were linked to Imperial properties in the province;

- 2 formularies for Latin documents, which law practitioners – or whoever drafted the acts described above – kept and employed in order to write correctly worded documents;

- 1 *manumissio inter amicos*¹¹ and 1 receipt for the payment of the *uicesima libertatis*, after an enfranchisement (but it may be later than A.D. 212);

- 1 declaration of the annulment of an unspecified quantity of documents; probably following a fulfilled debt or credit among slaves;

- 1 petition filed by veterans; this sort of document finds a relevant parallel in a papyrus drawn up outside Egypt.¹²

To these 88 documents one can add 31 documents whose fragmentary state or ambiguous content makes it difficult to establish their exact typology (though most of them do seem to belong to a military *milieu*); and several private letters among soldiers, or official letters from top-ranks to lower ranks, which have not been accounted for here because of their hybrid nature – they are halfway between an official military document and a private, personal product involving both personal matters and the daily life and duties of the soldiers.

3. The ebb (3rd A.D.)

Now for the Latin and bilingual Latin-Greek documents dated or datable in the previously chosen chronological fork (A.D. 212-285) and not related to everyday life within Roman army.

⁹ See Beduschi 1973; and for problems concerning *cretiones* on papyrus, Besnier 1931; de Zulueta 1932; 1933.

¹⁰ It has been suggested by M. Amelotti «che i provinciali, incapaci di fare e addirittura di comprendere la *cretio*, ma al contempo convinti della sua giuridica necessità, si limitassero a certificare di averla compiuta. Le ricordate *cretiones* non sono state in realtà precedute da accettazioni, solenni o meno, in forma orale, del cui compimento diano attestazione. Sono esse stesse gli atti di accettazione, redatti per iscritto con la partecipazione di *testes* e *signatores*, ma in cui si rispetta l'esigenza della *cretio* documentando che essa sarebbe stata già compiuta» (Amelotti 1966, 128; the spacing is mine).

¹¹ The unpublished P.Vindob. inv. L 98 recto (written before A.D. 152; TM 70101).

¹² That is PSI IX 1026 (A.D. 150, TM 17460).

(a) The most widely represented group consists of 5 copies, drafted in Alexandria and brought to the *chora*, of certificates in which the prefect of Egypt grants to a petitioner *agnitio bonorum possessionis*.¹³ This documentary typology – so far unattested in Egypt before the third century A.D. – testifies the adoption of a procedure envisaged in Roman law for those problematic occasions when a Roman citizen died intestate. In such a circumstance, whoever wanted to inherit the *bona* of his dead relative had to request *bonorum possessio* before a tribunal. In Egypt this could take place only in Alexandria and with the prefect himself, to whom a Latin petition had to be addressed.¹⁴ Quite naturally, the Latin text is always followed by a Greek translation or a Greek summary. Nothing in the five extant documents points to a particular *milieu*; in other words, we do not know whether the petitioners – who seem all to come from Oxyrhynchus or Antinoupolis – were veterans from the army or simply Graeco-Egyptians granted Roman citizenship through Caracalla's constitution. Accordingly scholars believe that this typology began being requested specifically after A.D. 212; that is, its usage would be a direct result of the extension of citizenship.¹⁵ The petitioners are certainly aware that the procedure is peculiarly Roman.¹⁶ It is possible that those who requested the procedure, available to a much larger set of people in Egypt after A.D. 212, hoped to achieve a better outcome in case of intestate death than what they would have obtained under peregrine law. A study by W. Clarysse on Ptolemaic hereditary customs, whether according to ancient Egyptian laws or to Greek ones, shows that neither legal tradition placed the same importance on the will as in Roman law. Most Graeco-Egyptians died intestate and their estate went to the closest heir in the line of succession, who would have divided it among the other heirs. When testaments are extant, they are done for specific purposes, e.g. to disinherit one son, or protect one's wife should she become a widow.¹⁷ It is possible that Graeco-Egyptians took advantage of the newly available procedure of the *agnitio bonorum* to counteract any undesired effects of Egyptian customs in cases of intestate death. By using this procedure, an heir was able to claim his or her relative's estate for him- or herself only.

(b) Next comes a set of 4 enfranchisements of slaves (*manumissiones*). 2 of them are *inter amicos*, a typology of enfranchisement of slaves with a long history within Roman law and apparently employed in Egypt – as a recently discovered evidence suggests – not only after A.D. 212,

¹³ P.Daris inv. 200 + P.Ryl. IV 610 = SB XVIII 13610 (A.D. 223, TM 13851); P.Bagnall 3 (A.D. 239, TM 70139); SB I 1010 (A.D. 249, TM 23051); P.Oxy. IX 1201 (A.D. 258, TM 21587); P.Thomas 20 (A.D. 269-270, TM 78797).

¹⁴ See Voci 1967, 177-201 for a full account of the *bonorum possessio* in Roman hereditary law (in this case, the one *sine tabulis*, i.e. operating in an *ab intestato* situation). One of the most recent studies on the formulary of these documents on papyrus, also containing a survey of the extant *agnitiones* from Egypt, is Santos 2009. More on the details of the formulae in Katzoff 1969.

¹⁵ Santos 2009, 161-162.

¹⁶ After having been granted the *bonorum possessio*, the petitioner signalled the fact (in Greek, of course) to the local magistrates, referring to a deed done κατὰ τοῦ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἥθους. See e.g. P.Lugd.Bat. III 7 (A.D. 256-257, TM 17280); also P.Oxy. XIX 2231 (A.D. 241, TM 22181) and P.Amh.Gr. II 72 (A.D. 246, TM 21676).

¹⁷ Clarysse 1995.

but also as early as the first half of the second century A.D.¹⁸ This procedure was, therefore, appreciated and employed by Graeco-Egyptians – whether or not they are Roman citizens is impossible to establish¹⁹ – during all first three centuries of Roman power, perhaps becoming more popular after 212. The exact reason why provincials preferred this specific procedure of enfranchising instead of the legal ways available through local customs is unclear. In his foundational and up-to-date article, M. Pedone states that procedures such as the *manumissio inter amicos* and the enfranchisement according to Graeco-Egyptian customs were decidedly different inasmuch as the latter procedure was more often than not a cover for a slave who redeemed himself for money, whereas a *manumissio inter amicos* cannot be understood as a purchase agreement of any sort, but a *do ut facias* system with little to do with buying and selling.²⁰ In this difference might lie the reason for the preference of some provincials for one procedure over the other. The remaining 2 documents, containing *manumissiones* not specifically *inter amicos*, are P.Lips. inv. 136 (after A.D. 212)²¹ and T.Fouad inv. s.n. (A.D. 241).²²

(c) A set of 4 copies of requests for a *tutor mulieris*, addressed to – and granted by – the prefect of Egypt.²³ Like requests of *agnitio*, these too had to be drawn up in Latin with a Greek translation or summary at the bottom of the document. This typology is attested before A.D. 212 (see above), and its continuing appeal for provincials even after A.D. 212 has been explained by A. Arjava to lie in the differences between tutorship in Graeco-Egyptian custom and in Roman law. Women with a Roman *tutor* were able to perform more activities without that *tutor*'s assistance; and through the *ius trius liberorum* (τέκνων δίκαιον) they were released from the necessity of tutorship.²⁴

(d) 3 business documents among soldiers.²⁵ There is no significant difference between these and those from the preceding centuries.

¹⁸ P.Mich. inv. 5688 c (mid-3rd A.D., probably written after A.D. 212), published in Stornaiuolo 2019; T.Amh. inv. s.n. (= Chrest.Mitt. 362 = FIRA III 11; A.D. 221, TM 23523). One ought also to signal two Egyptian documents in Greek language, probably containing translations of a lost *manumissio inter amicos* in Latin: P.Lips. II 151 (A.D. 246-267, TM 78449); P.Oxy. IX 1205 (A.D. 291, TM 21591). A full survey of the evidence beyond Egyptian papyri, with detailed discussion, is in Pedone 2019.

¹⁹ Whereas *mancipationes*, *testamenta per aes et libram* and other documentary typologies were only available to Roman citizens, it seems that *manumissiones* of slaves were open to non-citizens too, being regarded as an act referring to any sort of slave in any sort of community (not just that of the Romans). See D. 1. 1. 4 «manumissiones quoque iuris gentium sunt. Est autem manumissio de manu missio, id est datio libertatis: nam quamdiu quis in servitute est, manui et potestati suppositus est, manumissus liberatur potestate. Quae res a iure gentium originem sumpsit, utpote cum iure naturali omnes liberi nascerentur nec esset nota manumissio, cum seruitus esset incognita: sed posteaquam iure gentium seruitus inuasit, secutum est beneficium manumissionis. Et cum uno naturali nomine homines appellaremur, iure gentium tria genera esse coeperunt: liberi et his contrarium servi et tertium genus liberti, id est hi qui desierant esse serui». A more detailed outline in Volterra 1956.

²⁰ Pedone 2019, 31-41.

²¹ TM 69993.

²² = FIRA III 1, TM 70157.

²³ P.Heid. inv. Lat. 10 (A.D. 219, TM 69989); P.Mich. III 165 (A.D. 236, TM 21331); P.Oxy. XII 1466 (A.D. 245, TM 21867); P.Oxy. IV 720 (A.D. 247, TM 20419).

²⁴ A detailed discussion in Arjava 1997; see also Frezza-Brezza 1931; El-Mosallamy 1997.

²⁵ ChLA XLIV 1303 + XLV 1348 (= P.Vindob. inv. L 77+145, A.D. 266, TM 70090 + 70124); P.Oxy. XLI 2951 (A.D. 267, TM 16515); ChLA V 285 (= P.Mich. inv. 2276, III A.D., TM 69889).

(e) 2 *professiones liberorum*, one on papyrus (a copy of the regular *professio* on tablet) and the other on tablet.²⁶ They do not differ significantly from the extant examples of *professio* from the preceding centuries.

(f) Only one document referring to hereditary problems: a declaration of received inheritance.²⁷ The declaration is done by a former γυμνασίαρχος, now *decurio* ~ βουλευτής of Oxyrhynchus, son of a εὐθηνιάρχης, and exempted from paying the *uicesima hereditatum*. He declares that his daughters have inherited their mother's estate; the woman died intestate. He attaches to the document the death certificate of his wife. The fact that the mother died intestate suggests that a request for *agnitio bonorum* preceded this document; and this *agnitio* in Latin might have triggered (or required) from a top-ranking civil official in Oxyrhynchus a Latin declaration that the *bonorum possessio* actually took place. The document is not a *cretio hereditatis*, nor does it mention any act of the kind, but it seems to imply that a *cretio* has been made of an estate that the inheritor obtained through an *agnitio bonorum*, since the relative died intestate.²⁸

(g) 1 *Prozessprotokoll*.²⁹ This does not differ significantly from examples of the text type from the preceding centuries.

(h) 1 communication from the Imperial chancery: in this case, the copy of a letter from Elagabalus to the prefect of Egypt.³⁰ Such documents are attested in all the centuries of Roman power on Egypt.

(i) 3 documents referring to internal proceedings of the prefect's chancery in Alexandria: a receipt to a εὐθηνιάρχης for some wine, released from an *agrimensor* of the prefect of Egypt – hence the use of Latin, since the *agrimensor* is employed in the provincial chancery;³¹ the grant of a travel permit, requested by Valeria Maeciana to the prefect in order to set sail for Pamphylia – in fact, the request is in Greek, and the prefect answers in Latin by ordering the *procurator Phari* to let the woman depart;³² and the register of an auction, where the *fiscus* has acquired – probably as a result of bankruptcy – an estate and is trying to sell it to the highest bidder.³³ The choice of Latin here is not surprising nor does it mark a trend; internal dealings in the provincial chancery or deeds closely referring to it – such as a letter from the prefect to a procurator or the auction of *bona* belonging to the *fiscus* – must have been frequently composed in Latin in order to be accessible to administrators and employees from other regions of the Empire.³⁴

²⁶ P.Oxy. XXXI 2565 (A.D. 224, TM 16888); SB VI 9200 (= T.IFAO inv. s.n., A.D. 242, TM 17869).

²⁷ P.Oxy. VIII 1114 (A.D. 237, TM 21736). The scribe is so scrupulous to do the document properly that he defines the inheritance as «hereditatem seu bonorum possessio[nem]» (ll. 10-11).

²⁸ See fn. 10 for the provincial *cretiones* according to M. Amelotti.

²⁹ P.Ross.Georg. V 18 (A.D. 212-213, TM 17525).

³⁰ P.Bub. I 4 col. XXIX (A.D. 221, TM 23403).

³¹ P.Cair. inv. J 49503 (= SB III 7181a, A.D. 220, TM 18859).

³² P.Oxy. X 1271 (A.D. 246, TM 21785).

³³ P.Oxy. XX 2269 recto (A.D. 268, TM 17204). The papyrus is mentioned in Alessandri 2005.

³⁴ A noteworthy instance of this is ChLA XXVIII 839 (= P.Genova inv. 1156 recto, late IV-early V A.D., TM 70008), a copy – drawn up in Alexandria – of a document coming from Constantinople. See Fontanella 2019, 217-218.

To these 24 documents one can add 3 other documents of more uncertain nature or whose dating is not precise enough to locate them in this list;³⁵ there are also three seemingly private letters, probably among soldiers, but very fragmentary and hardly legible.

The evidence in context

It is possible to draw preliminary conclusions based on the sheer number of available manuscripts. Outside the Roman forts, the number of Latin and bilingual documents on papyrus, *ostraka*, and tablets drops from somewhere between eighty and one hundred items to less than thirty. If one considers the following centuries and the further reduced presence of Latin in documents produced in Egypt,³⁶ the third century seems to mark the beginning of a new phenomenon: the disappearance of Latin texts of provincial deeds and bureaucratic documentation, which accelerates to its conclusion in Late Antiquity.

This loss is somehow paralleled by a loss of specific text typologies. This can be seen in two different branches of Latin documents.

- A first, and less momentous event is the disappearance of Latin paperwork concerning Roman bankers or merchants – business documents such as lists of accounts and payments – which are no longer found after the mid-second century A.D. One may suppose that this sort of business was conducted or supervised by Latin-speaking stewards or overseers (coming from Italy?) only in the earliest years of Roman Egypt; afterwards, Greek-speaking administrators slowly replaced the others. As remarked elsewhere, one can notice that economic activities of Roman citizens after the beginning of the second century A.D. increasingly involved landowning, mainly in the hand of veterans.³⁷

- It is in this respect – the veterans and their paperwork – that one witnesses the major transformation in documentary evidence. The alleged disappearance of Latin testaments, already noticed by scholars,³⁸ is only one part of a wider phenomenon of disappearance, which involves nearly every type of documents listed before A.D. 212.

Caracalla's constitution must have been the main cause. It is not necessary here to inquire further into the significance of such a document for the inhabitants of Egypt; much valuable scholarship on

³⁵ T.Ross.Georg. V 26 (TM 30682) is the fragment of a census declaration: it is written in Latin and then translated in Greek (the verb used is ἀπογράφομαι, as in the customary κατ'οἰκίαν ἀπογραφαί). It has been dated by its first and only publisher to the third century A.D. There is no photo, nor have I been able to track down the tablet. ChLA I 10 (= P.Gen.Lat. inv. 5 verso, after A.D. 211, TM 63821) contains a list of works of art which might be connected to Imperial property in Egypt, but nothing can be said in this respect. Eventually, ChLA X 436 recto (= P.Berol. inv. 14090, TM 69934) contains accounts mentioning one or more *dispensatores*, and is perhaps to be referred to Imperial freedmen; but the dating is completely uncertain (3rd cent. A.D.).

³⁶ See fn. 4. Latin literary or juridical papyri from Late Antiquity are of course a different matter, not discussed here.

³⁷ An updated discussion in Iovine-Salati 2020.

³⁸ Amelotti 1966, 217-250.

this point has been produced. Such scholarship and the evidence considered here lead to some new reflections. As long as there was a distinct minority of Roman citizens in Egypt – a separate *πολίτευμα* which was entitled to certain privileges and whose participants could effectively distinguish themselves from other groups and emphasize their status, when required – here Roman law must have been considered a good asset. Its procedures, which required the use of Latin, were regularly employed when status, inheritance, or family were at issue.³⁹ After 212 nearly everyone was a Roman citizen, and there was no longer any point in distinguishing oneself by the use of the textual typologies of Latin documents seen above. The Graeco-Egyptians therefore applied the same principle of legal shopping they had applied before⁴⁰ and resorted to Roman procedures only when there was a distinctive advantage in comparison with other already available customs: as in the case of *agnitio bonorum*, *tutela mulieris*, and the like.

The inhabitants of the *chora*, to sum up, must have felt the use of Latin to be no longer necessary for their documents after 212, except for a handful of circumstances when its power could still be of value. In this respect, the third century is a watershed in the evolution of Latin documents in Egypt, since it marked their decline in the countryside and their survival in the only place where they will be found in the following centuries: the provincial offices, representatives of Roman power in the province. The travel permit, the register of the auction, and the recipe that survive might have been stock documents, drafted in great quantity. The bureaus of Alexandria must have provided much more Latin documentation than what is now extant; like other documents produced by them in any language, they have been almost completely lost. After Diocletian's reforms, these offices multiplied, from a single one in Alexandria to two, three, four, and eventually up to seven;⁴¹ and they continued to produce Latin documents, or – more frequently – Latin sentences and formulae, until the last century of Byzantine Egypt.⁴²

³⁹ Alonso 2016, 64.

⁴⁰ I found the syntagm in an unpublished preliminary draft of Alonso 2016; I have been allowed *per litteras* by Prof. Alonso himself – who created the syntagm – to use it, as it particularly suits my intentions here.

⁴¹ For the development of Roman administration in post-Diocletian Egypt, see Palme 2007.

⁴² The already mentioned P.Ryl. IV 609 (A.D. 505), and the much more fragmentary P.Vindob. inv. L 169 (late V-early VI A.D.), both *epistulae probatoriae*, testify the capability of the provincial bureaus (for the Rylands papyrus, those of the Thebaid) to produce fully Latin documents at least till Justinian's era. As for Latin formulae on Greek documents, one can go even further: P.Cairo Masp. I 67031 (A.D. 543-545, TM 18995), a decree in Greek issued by the *dux Thebaidis* with a Latin dating formula at the bottom – «dat(um) XIII K<a>l(endas) Decembri(s) Antinu(poli)».

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