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VIERROS (M.) **Bilingual Notaries in Hellenistic Egypt: A Study of Greek as a Second Language.** (Collectanea Hellenistica V). Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, 2012. Pp. 291. €19.50. 9789065691033.

Although multilingualism and cultural interaction in Hellenistic Egypt have long attracted scholarly interest, the challenges of the sources and the relative scarcity of those working on both Greek and Egyptian material mean that the linguistic details of Greek-Egyptian bilingualism remain largely unexplored. Marja Vierros' study of language use among bilingual *agoranomoi* (public notaries) in Ptolemaic Egypt therefore comes as a significant addition to the field. The core of the book is an analysis of the Greek in the surviving notarial contracts from Upper Egypt, written by notaries whose first language was Egyptian. Vierros' main thesis is that many of the linguistic idiosyncracies in these documents, previously condemned as 'bad' Greek, in fact reflect consistent patterns and strategies which are explicable in terms of the writers' bilingualism. The technical analysis is embedded within a broader socio-historical treatment, making the book also of relevance to those interested in wider questions of multilingualism and cultural contact.

Part 1 (Chapters 2-4) explores the socio-historical and linguistic context. The survey of Hellenistic Egypt's linguistic landscape(s) in Chapter 2 will be particularly useful for non-specialists, and helpfully emphasises the difficulties of extracting ethnic, cultural and linguistic information from ethnic labels and onomastics. Chapter 3 establishes the local context, with an examination of language use in and around second-century Pathyris. Although a tightening of Ptolemaic control over the area after the Great Theban Revolt led to an increase in Greek documentation, demotic was still widely used; most families with Greek contracts in their archives had blood or marriage ties with *agoranomoi* (62-70). As a qualification to previous scholarship, Vierros persuasively suggests that language choice was sometimes determined by pragmatic rather than cultural considerations: for instance, Greek contracts were used for more valuable transactions, perhaps because of their immediate registration and validity in Greek courts (59-60; 65).

Chapter 4 turns to the notaries themselves, examining the types of document they produced, their working practices, and the careers of known *agoranomoi* from the Thebaid. Key here is a discussion of authorship (90-100). Although different hands are found writing under the name of one notary, most documents signed by a particular notary were probably written by him (105). The palaeographical analysis also highlights the richness of the source material, which provides a rare opportunity to study individual linguistic and orthographic practice. Particularly evocative is the case of the 'Hermias hand', whose distinctive features might suggest a left-handed scribe (95-6). A lack of images detracts somewhat from this section.

Part 2 (Chapters 5-7) presents a detailed linguistic analysis of the Greek in the 148 surviving agoranomic documents from the Ptolemaic Thebaid, which come for the most part from Pathyris and Krokodilonpolis and date between 174 and 88 BC. In general, the notaries' Greek displays few phonological and morphological irregularities (Chapters 5-6), but problems sometimes arose with syntax: two notaries in particular struggled to use Greek cases correctly, unsurprising given the lack of morphological case-marking in demotic Egyptian (140-58). However, Vierros shows

that their usage is not as chaotic as previously thought, and reflects certain patterns: Hermias, for example, often inflected only the first name of a group correctly and put all the others in the nominative case – so-called ‘phrase-initial inflection’ (140-47).

Perhaps the most exciting results are in Chapter 7, which assesses several syntactic irregularities that are explicable in terms of Egyptian syntax and may therefore represent transfer from the notaries’ first language. The strongest case is relative clauses: Vierros argues convincingly that some notaries’ tendency to inflect Greek relative pronouns in the wrong gender and number reflects influence from Egyptian relative clause structures (177-94). The conclusions are followed by four appendices, including helpful document and image concordances.

As Vierros readily acknowledges, with this type of analysis one often comes up against the limits of the evidence. Frequently, no definitive explanation can be given for a particular phenomenon, or even for broader patterns. When notaries’ orthography meticulously follows the standard, for instance, this could indicate high linguistic competence, or that they rarely spoke or heard contemporary Greek (107); one might regard syntactic errors as more suggestive of lower competence, although Vierros attributes Hermias’ and Apollonios’ more frequent grammatical mistakes to a higher level of bilingualism (175). There is also the question of wider applicability – most of the linguistic idiosyncracies under analysis occur in the Greek of one or two notaries. Yet the book amply demonstrates the rewards of Vierros’ approach, and it is to be hoped that it will indeed ‘further encourage the Greek, demotic and Coptic papyrologists studying Greek and Roman Egypt to combine their knowledge’ (229).

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