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ONE SCRIPT FOR TWO LANGUAGES
LATIN & ARABIC IN AN EARLY
ETEROGRAPHIC PAPYRUS[*]

Arianna D'Ottone Rambach[**] · Dario Internullo[***]

This contribution presents a unique papyrus letter in Latin script and Latin language and in Latin script and Arabic language that is possible to date, on palaeographic grounds, from the end of the 7th to the 9th century AD. This precious witness is examined under the historical, graphical, linguistic and cultural point of view and its provenance is discussed accordingly. An edition of the whole text is provided and a number of correspondences in Arabic are suggested.

KEYWORDS: Latin, Arabic, papyrus, allography, correspondence

WITHIN the frame of continuing research aiming at reviewing and studying the *corpus* of Latin documents written on papyrus during the early and high Middle Ages (5th-11th century), one of the two authors of this article, Dario Internullo, made a striking discovery at the British Library; he found a private epistle bearing a Latin-Arabic text in Latin letters. The identification of its content was not immediate and only with the help of the other author, Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, did the nature of the document become apparent. A first presentation of the papyrus was published by Internullo shortly afterwards, but only the Latin texts were discussed in that article.[1] On this occasion, and by combining the skills of a historian of medieval Latin culture with those of an Arabist, we are now able to offer a first complete edition of the text. Its main purpose is to lay the groundwork for still deeper studies, not only about this evidence, but also about the more general relationship between Latin culture and Arab culture during the Middle Ages, as well as the survival of Latin culture in the Islamic world.

[1] DARIO INTERNULLO, *Un unicum per la storia della cultura. Su un papiro latinoarabo della British Library (P.Lond. inv. 3124)*, «Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Moyen Âge," CXXVIII, 2, 2016; https://mefrm.revues.org/3233, also for details concerning the discovery.

This work is divided into three sections:

1. A description of the papyrus, its textual typology and its possible composition practice; a short discussion of the Latin peculiarities follows;
2. The cultural and linguistic aspects of the Arabic text and their importance for the studies of Arab culture are illustrated and discussed; and
3. The transcription, the edition and the translation of the text in Latin, as well as a list of correspondences Latin-Arabic and their translation.

I. The papyrus and Its Latin side (Dario Internullo)

The papyrus, acquired by the British Museum after 1956 and eventually transferred to the British Library, was formerly part of the collection of Georges Anastase Michaelidis (1900-1973). He was a Greek collector who spent most of his life in Egypt, where he bought from the antiquarian market several papyri, ostraka, and manuscripts, but also seals, bas reliefs, and scarabs.[2] Because Michaelidis gathered his collection through purchases in this region, it is very likely that the provenance of the papyrus is Egyptian.

Preserved in its entirety, the papyrus consists of a single sheet, 295 mm high and 240 mm wide. It has damage along a central vertical line and two horizontal, parallel lines (the former in central position, the latter 70 mm from the top). That these damages are in consequence of folding the papyrus is almost certain, but is not clear how *exactly* it may have been folded. Considering the address on the *verso*, it may be assumed that, when folded, the papyrus appeared to be a small rectangle, with the sender's name on one side and that of the recipient on the other. If this was the case, however, there should be a further "damage line" in the lower section of the papyrus, but in fact there is no evidence of such damage. The material of the writing surface is not particularly valuable: it appears to be rough and thick, and is very far from early medieval documents produced in official or highly formal contexts, such as the papyri written in Ravenna and Rome.[3] Its context must have been rather an unofficial one. As for the layout, whoever wrote the text had it in mind to use the available space as efficiently as possible: the top margin measures 20 mm (25 if we consider it from the first "ideal" base line); the lower one, calculated, starting from the last line, measures 5 mm only; the left one

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[2] *Who was Who in Egyptology*, ed. by W. R. Dawson, E. Uphill, Egypt Exploration Society, London, 1995, p. 286; Sarah J. Clackson, *The Michaelidis Manuscript Collection*, "Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik," c, 1994, pp. 223-226; Internullo, *Un unicum* cit.

[3] For these papyri see Jan-Olof Tjäder, *Die nichtliterarischen Lateinischen Papyri Italiens aus der Zeit 445-700*, Lund-Stockholm, C. W. K. Gleerup, Astroms Forlag, 1955-1982 (= *P.Ital.*). An overview of medieval Latin papyri will be published in D. Internullo, *Latin Documents written on Papyrus in the Late Antique and Early West (5th-11th century): An Overview*, in *28th International Congress of Papyrology*, Barcelona, in press.

is of 10 mm, while the right one coincides in most cases with the edge of the papyrus. No evidence of lining can be found, although the interlinear space remains a constant at around 15 mm.

The text, which contains 6 lines in Latin language and 16 lines in Arabic language, plus 2 lines on the *verso* in Arabic too, is written by a single hand both on the *recto* and the *verso*. It is traced with dark brown ink by a pointed pen, and runs across the fibres on the *recto*, along them on the *verso*. The writing is upright and shows a slow *ductus* – no ligatures are to be found, except for three cases in which a ligature *ti* occurs, with the shape of a 'reversed Beta' (l. 6, *gratiia*; 12, *bitiiti*; 13, *atiimtuạ*; *verso*, l. 1, *ạtiualla*). It probably marks an assibilated sound /ts/.[4] In some letters, such as *b* and *e*, the strokes sometimes appear even to be disjointed. The letter shapes are attributable to the period of the so called "medieval graphical particularism", and are connected to the new Roman cursive tradition: *a* is opened at the top; *i* can have either the short or the long form; *e* has the shape of the number "8", a shape that is not common, within Latin script, before the late 7th century; *t* shows a "handle" before the vertical stroke: this form becomes widespread from the 7th century onwards.[5] Abbreviations are marked by a short horizontal stroke above the letters, and concern either final *-m* or *nomina* (*sacra*) such as *Deus*, *Dominus*, *Iohanne*, and the words *quod* and *senper* [*sic*]. Punctuation signs are used, in the form of a double dot (:) – apparently used to signal a pause – or of a vertical, slightly curled stroke crossed by another horizontal curved stroke (÷) – apparently used to signal an interrogative tone. The general aspect of the script and the execution of some letters appears to be not so far from that of some witness subscriptions on documents produced in Italy during the 8th and 9th century.[6] All these data are useless in identifying a place of writing – no peculiar regional features can be found in them – but they help in considering the papyrus as the product of a quite elementary level of Latin literacy, and to suggest the period from the end of the 7th to the end of the 9th century as a plausible chronological range for the writing. The presence of an internal address or prescript (line 1), which disappears in the 9th century among Arabic

[4] About this ligature, see ANTONIO CARTELLI, MARCO PALMA, *L'evoluzione del legamento "ti" nella scrittura protobeneventana (secoli VIII-IX)*, in Pierre Lardet (ed.), *La tradition vive. Mélanges d'histoire des textes en l'honneur de Louis Holtz*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2003, pp. 35-42.

[5] On the letter *e* see JAN-OLOF TJÄDER, *Later Roman (Common Script). A Tentative Definition in Anticipation of a Forthcoming Monograph*, in *Calames et Cahiers. Mélanges de codicologie et de paléographie offerts à Léon Gilissen*, Bruxelles, Centre d'étude des manuscrits, 1985, pp. 187-199. For *t* see ISABEL VELÁZQUEZ SORIANO, *Las pizarras visigodas. Edición crítica y estudio*, Mursia, Publicaciones de la Universidad de Murcia, 1989, n. 43, 44, 46, 104, where also very similar forms occur.

[6] For the subscriptions see *ChLA* XXIII 734 (746-747); XXVI 803 (748); XXXIII 966 (761); XXXIII 976 (763); XXVIII 852 (769); XXIII 746 (771); XX 702 (799); LVIII 1 (804); LXI 17 (810); L 4 (816); LVII 1 (829); LVIII 4 (847); LVIII 5 (848); LVIII 9 (876); LVI 13 (886). See for an overview ARMANDO PETRUCCI, ROSARIO ROMEO, *«Scriptores in urbibus». Alfabetismo e cultura scritta nell'Italia altomedievale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992. Petrucci defines the writing of the Western subscriptions «un tracciato semplificato (e a volte dissociato) della corsiva nuova» (p. 25).
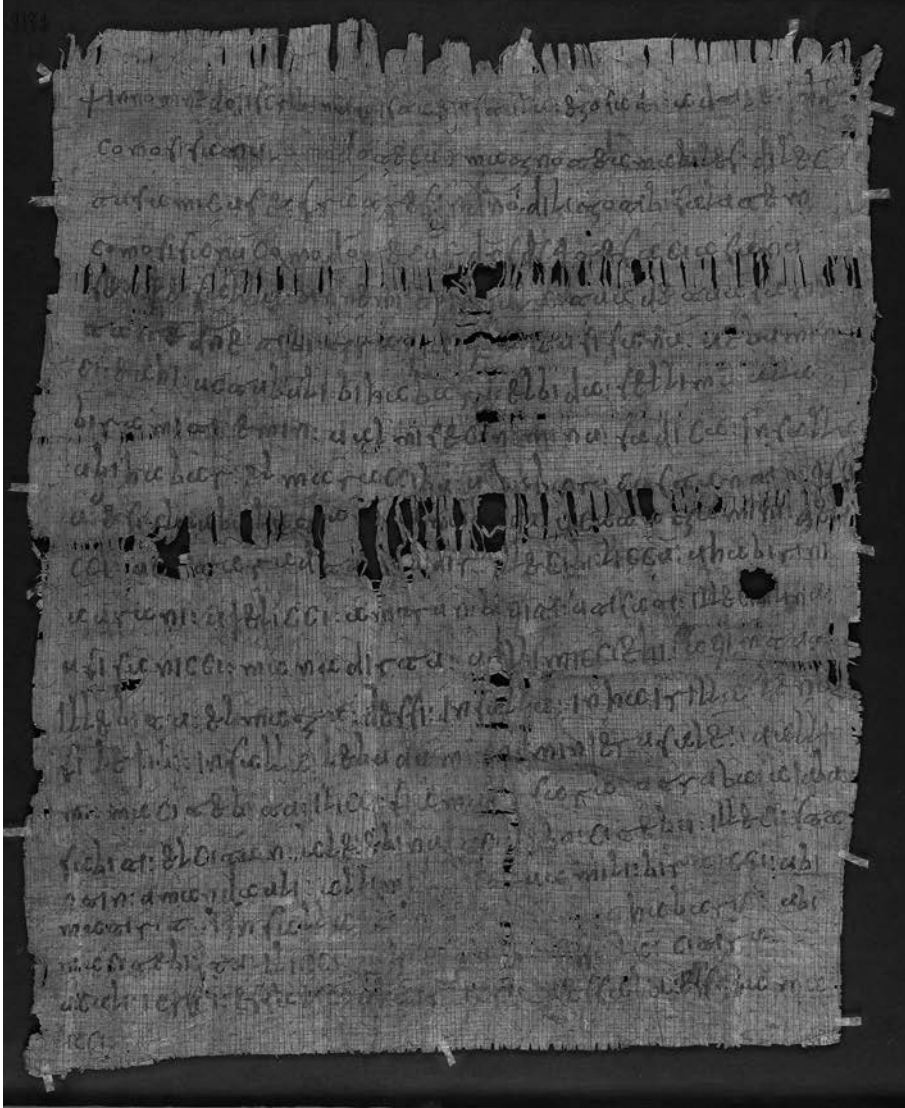
Fig. 1. (©) British Library Board, 3124*r*.

letters, may suggest the 8th century as the more likely date; however, the plurilingual and multicultural nature of the document induces to approach this parallelism with caution.[7]
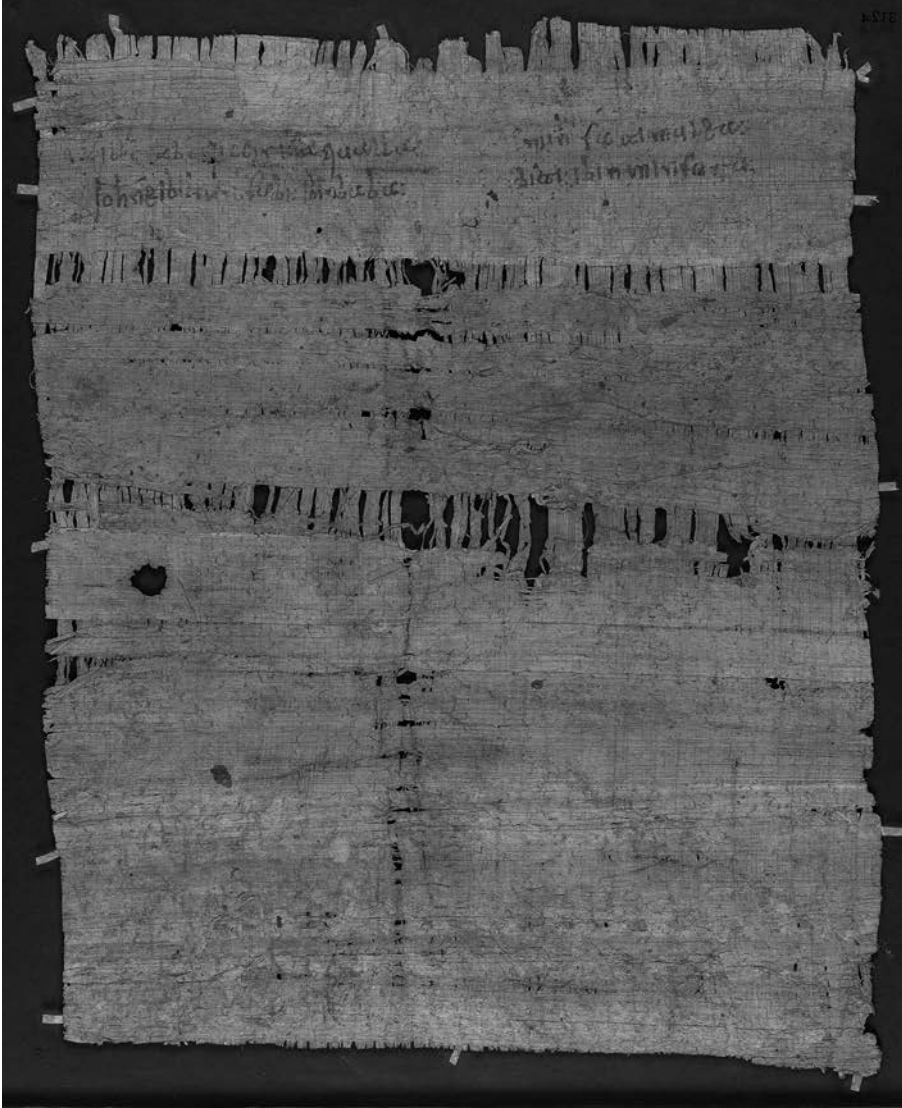
FIG. 2. (©) British Library Board, 3124*v*.

As for the textual typology – on which more details are provided below by Arianna D'Ottone Rambach – the papyrus is a letter, written by a man named *Sati* to a friend of his named *Iohanne*. More specifically, it fits well into the group of Arabic "private letters" studied by Eva Mira Grob. Different from so-called "business letters", this kind of text is distinguished by a number of religious formulae and the involvement of more than two

people.[8] The first feature is clearly visible both in Latin invocations (lines 1, 3, 4, 6) and in Arabic ones (lines 8, 14, 15, 19), whereas the second feature is identifiable in the involvement of at least three people, that is *Sati*, *Iohanne*, and *Custantin* (lines 1, 9, 17-18). Moreover, the use of a personal and repetitive style, detectable both in Latin and in Arabic, suggests that category as the more likely framework for the understanding of this papyrus.

Private Arabic letters were often dictated (or their text was delegated) by the sender to a scribe or more generally to any literate person.[9] Probably the papyrus itself is the result of a similar practice. If we assume such a hypothesis, we must suppose that the sender, the scribe and the recipient belonged to the same social and cultural *milieu*, and that they had a relationship with one or more institutions in which Latin culture was still alive, probably a Christian monastery. But in this case, the exceptional combination of languages and script might be therefore explained also in connection with some fortuitous circumstances (see Arianna D'Ottone-Rambach below). The scribe was certainly familiar with Latin writing and to some extent with Latin language, but the sender and the recipient must have had some knowledge, at least in oral form, of Latin formulae.[10] At an oral level, all of them seem to be familiar with the Arabic language. In addition, since an earlier letter of the recipient is mentioned in the introductory formula (line 2), we should consider the papyrus as part of a wider epistolary network, probably built and perpetuated with other similar bilingual letters. For the Arabic letters some cases are known, in which: "the person delivering the letter was introduced as someone who could write the recipient's reply":[11] we cannot exclude that the same scribe had written the previous letter of *Iohanne*, and would have written further letters of him.

Another typical feature of Arabic private letters is a linguistic level which, within a particularly repetitive style, can be defined as "oral, or better, vocal."[12] One can affirm this not only for the Arabic – see Arianna D'Ottone Rambach below – but also for the Latin. If orthographical peculiarities such as *co-* for *quo-* and *iscrib-* for *scrib-* (or *inscrib-*) are quite common among early

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[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 123-126 and see *infra* Arianna D'Ottone for further bibliography. For the papyrus, I found more general resemblance with the Arab letters than with the Latin-Greek late antique and early medieval ones, but obviously further researches in this sense are needed and welcome. About the late antique Christian letters on papyrus, see Lincoln H. Blumell, *Lettered Christians. Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2012. About the Latin letters of the early middle ages see *Lettere originali del Medioevo Latino (7-11 sec.)* i-ii, directed by Armando Petrucci and edited by Giulia Ammannati, Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, 2002-2012. About Latin letters in general see Paolo Cugusi, *Corpus Epistularum Latinarum*, i-iii, Firenze, Gonnelli, 1992-2002.

[9] Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters* cit., pp. 86-89.

[10] In any case, Latin formulae seems to respect the most common patterns of Arabic letters: the papyrus shows in the first line an invocation, a prescript, and a prooemium with initial blessings, well-being and a confirmation about a previous letter: see Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters* cit., pp. 82-83.   [11] *Ibidem*, p. 101 (about a letter of the 8th century).

[12] *Ibidem*, pp. 123-126, but also *passim*.

medieval Latin written evidence, the form *binne mi* (*venit mihi*, line 5) and *tu si sanum* (*tu sanus es*, line 6) are very close to the Romance languages, and re-call the best-known earliest Romance texts like the Italian inscription of Com-modilla's catacomb, the "Veronese riddle", the "Placiti Cassinesi" and many others.[13] These peculiarities could coincide with the oral formulae dictated by *Sati* to the Latin scribe. From the typological point of view, a quite similar (but distinct) context can be found in Greek witnesses' subscription of Italian papyri. In these documents the notary dictates some Latin formulae to a per-son who can use only Greek writing, usually a merchant or a banker coming from the East: in transcribing what he hears, this person reproduces devia-tions that probably come from the spoken level, like *ed espontaneo* (*et sponta-neo*), *ed eis relicto es* (*et eis relectum est*), and *veienti cattur* (*viginti quattuor*).[14] No similar peculiarities can be found in the original Latin letters of the early Mid-dle Ages, but the ones that had been preserved until today are written in more formal and official contexts;[15] it is plausible, then, that the peculiarities of the papyrus, as well as the Greek subscriptions of the Italian papyri, are the result of a particular relationship between orality and literacy. Thus, this Eastern papyrus witnesses the survival of Latin in the East in a period in which that language has been considered by a number of scholars to have disappeared.[16]

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[13] See for a survey ALBERTO VARVARO, *Il latino e la formazione delle lingue romanze*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013. For the Italian documents here mentioned see LIVIO PETRUCCI, *Alle origini dell'epigrafia volgare. Iscrizioni italiane e romanze fino al 1275*, Pisa, Plus - Università di Pisa, 2010; ROBERTA CELLA, *Storia dell'ita-liano*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2015, par. 1-4; MARCELLO BARBATO, *Dal latino alle* scriptae *italoromanze*, in SERGIO LUBELLO (ed.), *Manuale di linguistica italiana*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 9-30. See also ROGER WRIGHT, *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France*, Liverpool, Liverpool Uni-versity Press, 1982; MICHEL BANNIARD, *Du Latin aux langues romanes*, Paris, Colin, 2005.

[14] These examples are in *P.Ital.* 37 (AD 591, Classe; signed by *Pacificus*). For other Greek subscriptions see *P.Ital.* 30 (AD 539, Ravenna; signed by *Iulianus*, *argentarius*, the famous banker who founded churches in Ravenna); 6 (AD 575, Ravenna; signed by *Petrus*, *collectarius*); 36 (AD 575-591, Ravenna; signed by *Petrus*, *collectarius*); 18-19 (AD 590-598, Rome; subscribed by the noble *Stephanus*); 20 (AD 590-604, Ravenna; signed by *Iannes*, *negotiator*); 16 (VII^in AD, Ravenna; signed by *Marinus*, *chrysokatalaktis*); 24 (VII [half] AD, Ravenna; signed by a *vir honestus* whose name has not been preserved).

[15] *Lettere originali del Medioevo* cit., I, nr. 1 (VI^ex-VII^in, Rome(?), letter of a high-rank ecclesiastic); II/2, Nr. 1 and 2 (both of them of 788, written in Rome and [perhaps] in Spoleto respectively, the former on behalf of the pope Hadrian I, the latter on behalf of the abbot of Saint-Denis *Maginarius*).

[16] See the remarks of Arianna D'Ottone Rambach below. About Latin culture in the East see BRUNO ROCHETTE, *Le latin dans le monde grec. Recherches sur la diffusion de la langue et des lettres latines dans les provinces hellénophones de l'Empire romain*, Bruxelles, Latomus, 1997; PAOLO RADICIOTTI, *Manoscritti digrafici grecolatini e latinogreci nella tarda antichità*, «Papyrologica Lupiensia», VII, 1998, pp. 153-185; ID., *Manoscritti digrafici grecolatini e latinogreci nell'alto medioevo*, "Römische Historische Mitteilungen", XL, 1998, pp. 49-118; JAMES NOEL ADAMS, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language, Cambridge*, Cambridge Univer-sity Press, 2003 and ID., *The Regional Diversification of Latin (200 BC - AD 600)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; SERENA AMMIRATI, *Sul libro latino antico. Ricerche bibliologiche e paleografiche*, Pisa-Roma, Serra, 2015; MARIA CHIARA SCAPPATICCIO, *"Artes Grammaticae" in frammenti. I testi grammaticali latini e bilingui su papiro. Edizione commentata*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2016 (with most recent bibliography); LUCIO DEL CORSO, *"The Remains of the Day". Latin as a Language of Culture in Late Antique Egypt. The Papyrological Evidence*, in GRAHAM BARRETT, MARGOLIS J. OREN (ed.), Latinity in the Post-Classical World, Oxford, in press. The new *corpus* of Latin texts on papyrus, to be published within the ERC-Project PLATINUM (Università di Napoli "Federico II", directed by the same Scappaticcio), is providing new evi-dence about the circulation of Latin culture in the East between Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages.

II. Arabic in Latin Letters (Arianna D'Ottone Rambach)

Papyrus BL 3124 illustrates the phenomenon of "allography",[17] that is, the adoption of a different alphabet for writing a language already provided with an alphabet commonly known and accepted. Cases of allography in the Mediterranean world are not rare,[18] but this particular combination – Arabic language in Latin letters – is rather unusual.[19] Its early date – the papyrus can be dated from the end of the 7th to the 9th century on palaeographical grounds[20] – renders it extremely important. A case of Qur'anic excerpts in Latin script is known, but these excerpts are quite recent, dating to the 17th century,[21] and not at all comparable with the piece of evidence offered by Papyrus BL 3124.

Pointing out the importance of the "large body of contemporary transcriptions in other languages"[22] for the pronunciation of early Arabic, Simon Hopkins gave in 1984 a list of documents in other scripts – mainly Greek.[23]

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[17] The phenomenon of a language written in a different alphabet received different denominations such as: allography, transliteration, heterography, garshunography. These terms are examined by George A. Kiraz, *Garshunography: Terminology and Some Formal Properties of Writing One Language in the Script of Another*, in, *Scripts Beyond Borders. A Survey of Allographic Traditions in the Euro-Mediterranean World*, edited by Johannes Den Heijer, Andrea Schmidt and Tamara Pataridze, Louvain-La-Neuve, Peeters, 2014 (*Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain*, 62), pp. 65-73. The use of the term "allography" to designate the act of writing a language in the script of another is adopted here following choices made in the scientific literature, see Johannes Den Heijer and Andrea Schmidt, *Scripts Beyond Borders: Allographic Traditions and Their Social, Cultural and Philological Aspects. An Analytical Introduction*, in *Scripts Beyond Borders*, pp. 1-63, in particular: pp. 2-3. For describing the allographic phenomenon, Xavier Luffin employed also the French word "metagrammatisme", see Xavier Luffin, *Le phénomène du metagrammatisme dans le monde musulman: approche d'une etude comparative*, "Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung." 54, 2-3 (2001), pp. 339-360. See also Delio V. Proverbio, *Specimina Vaticana Eterographica*, in *Studi in onore del Cardinale Raffaele Farina*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2013 (*Studi e Testi,* 477-478), 2 vols.: vol. II, pp. 938-1009.   [18] See Scripts Beyond Borders, cit.

[19] The opposite case is also attested, see D. Baglioni, *Italoromanzo in caratteri arabi in un diploma magrebino del Trecento, in Contatti di lingua-Contatti di scrittura. Multilinguismo e multigrafismo dal Vicino Oriente Antico alla Cina contemporanea*, edited by D. Baglioni and O. Tribulato, Venezia, Ca' Foscari, 2015, pp. 177-195. In the volume *Scripts Beyond Borders*, cit., for example, a number of languages written in Arabic characters (Bielo-Russian, Turkish, Chinese, Croatian and the corpus of Romance languages (Portuguese, Spanish, Ladino), known with the name of Aljamiado), are recorded, but there is no mention of Arabic texts in Latin script.   [20] See Internullo, *supra*.

[21] See Karl V. Zetterstéen, *Some Chapters of the Koran in Spanish transliteration*, "Le monde oriental" V, 1 (1911), pp. 39-41. Limited to personal names and dating to the early 20th century, are some engraved seals in brass with names both Arabic and (sometimes misspelt) Latin character, see Venetia Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum*, London, The British Museum, 2011 (*British Museum Research Publication*, 160), p. 116.

[22] Simon Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic Based upon Papyri Datable to Before 300 A.H./912 A.D.*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984 (London Oriental Series, 37), pp. 1-2.

[23] To Arabic words in Greek letters registered mainly in papyri dating from the 6th to the 8th century AD, but also on epigraphs, are devoted some recent contributions, but they are limited to single words (personal names, toponyms and oikonyms) and to some single Arabic sentences see Andreas Kaplony, *On the Orthography and Pronounciation of Arabic Names and Terms in the Greek Petra, Nessana, Qurra and Senouthios Letters*, "Mediterranean Language Review" 22 (2015), pp. 1-81: in 300 letters and documents, datable from the 6th to the 8th century AD, Kaplony (p. 2) spotted some 500 Arabic words written in Greek letters; see also Zbigniew T. Fiema, Ahmad Al-Jallad, Michael C.A. Macdonald and Laïla

The most famous of these allographic texts in Arabic language and Greek letters is the late 9th-10th-century manuscript fragment, known as Violet Fragment, after Bruno Violet (1871-1945) its first editor.[24]

Today it is possible to update this corpus of Arabic texts in different alphabets, with an 11th-century medical recipe (*entagion*) probably written in Sicily (Paris, Suppl. Gr. 1297);[25] a few texts in Coptic alphabet,[26] and an old example in Syriac characters (*g/karshuni*).[27]

NEHMÉ, Provincia Arabia: *Nabataea, the Emergence of Arabic as a Written Language, and Graeco-Arabica*, in *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, edited by G. Fisher, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 372-433: in particular pp. 421-432 for Graeco-Arabica and *The Pronunciation of Old Arabic*; AHMAD AL-JALLAD, Graeco-Arabica I: *The Southern Levant*, in *Arabic in Context. Celebrating 400 Years of Arabic at Leiden University*, edited by A. Al-Jallad, Leiden, Brill, 2017 (*Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics*, 89) pp. 99-186 in particular p. 6 and pp. 46-47 (for the single phrases in the Petra and Nessana papyri); AHMAD AL-JALLAD, *The Arabic of the Islamic Conquests: Notes on Phonology and Morphology Based on the Greek Transcriptions from the First Islamic Century*, forthcoming.

[24] See BRUNO VIOLET, *Ein zweisprachiges Psalmfragment aus Damaskus*, "Orientalistiche Literaturzeitung" 4 (1901), cols. 384-403, 425-441, 475-488. The most recent edition of the Arabic text has been given by JOSHUA BLAU, *A Handbook of Early Middle Arabic*, Jerusalem, The Max Schloessinger Memorial Foundation-Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002 (*The Max Schloessinger Memorial Series: Monographs, 6*) pp. 68-71. One recent contribution discussing the contents of the Violet Fragment is by MARIA MAVROUDI, *Arabic Words in Greek Letters: The Violet Fragment and More*, in *Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Middle Arabic and Mixed Arabic Throughout History (Louvain-la-Neuve, 11-14 May 2004)*, edited by J. Lentin and J. Grand'Henry, Leuven, Peeters, 2008 (*Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain*) pp. 321-354: plates I-VII, pp. 342-354. On the Violet fragment see also: FEDERICO CORRIENTE, *The Psalter Fragment from the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. A Birth Certificate of Nabaṭī Arabic*, in *Eastern Crossroads. Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy,* edited by J. P. Monferrer Sala, Piscataway (NJ), Gorgia, 2007, pp. 303-320; GIUSEPPE PETRANTONI, *La traslitterazione greca del salmo 78, 77 di Damasco e la diglossia nel mondo arabo*, "Rivista di cultura classica e medievale" LIV/1 (2011), pp. 285-307; RONNY VOLLANDT, *Arabic Versions of the Pentatheuc. A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian and Muslim Sources*, Leiden, Brill, 2015 (*Biblia Arabica*, 2), pp. 55-58 and ALEXANDER TREIGER, *From Theodore Abū Qurra to Abde Azrié: The Arabic Bible in Context*, in *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, edited by Miriam Hjälm Leiden, Brill, 2017 (*Biblia Arabica*, 5) pp. 11-57. Kaplony, in his overview of Arabic written in Greek, did not include, for sake of consistency, the Violet fragment and earlier Greek inscriptions from Bosra, see ANDREAS KAPLONY, *On the Orthography and Pronunciation*, cit., p. 2. Besides Greek one has also to recall a few witnesses of Old Arabic in South-Arabian characters, see CHRISTIAN J. ROBIN, *Before Ḥimyar. Epigraphic Evidence for the Kingdoms of South Arabia*, in *Arabs and Empires*, cit., pp. 90-126: p. 102, n. 2.4 and p. 126, n. 2.34.

[25] This latter document is particularly significant because it attests "that the transcription of Arabic in Greek characters was a phenomenon expanded in areas outside Syria-Palestine and included not only ecclesiastical but also secular texts," MAVROUDI, *Arabic in Greek Letters*, p. 331. See also BARBARA ZIPSER, *Griechische Schrift, arabische Sprache und graeco-arabische Medizin: ein neues Fragment aus dem mittelalterlichen Sizilien*, in "Mediterranean Language Review", 15 (2003/2004), pp. 154-166.

[26] To the references quoted in Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, p. 2, n. 4, and those cited by DEN HEIJER and SCHMIDT, *Scripts Beyond Borders*, p. 54, n. 59, it is possible to add MARIE LEGENDRE, *Perméabilité linguistique et anthroponymique entre copte et arabe: l'exemple de comptes en caractères coptes du Fayoum Fatimide*, in A. Boud'Hors, A. Delattre, C. Louis, T.S. Richter (eds.), Coptica Argentoratensia – *Textes et documents. Troisième université d'été de papyrologie copte (Strasbourg, 18-25 juillet 2010) (P. Stras. Copt.)*, Paris, Éditeur de Boccard, 2014 (*Collections de l'Université de Strasbourg. Études d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne. Cahiers de la bibliothèque copte*, 19), pp. 325-440. And a trilingual glossary Coptic-Arabic-French is extensively illustrated by ASLANOV CYRIL, *Le français au Levant jadis et naguère. À la recherche d'une langue perdue*, Paris, Honoré Champio, 2006 (*Linguistique française*, 12).

[27] Besides the references pointed out by JOSHUA BLAU, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic. A Study of the Origins of Middle Arabic*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981² (Scripta Judaica, V) p. 42, n. 1 – quoted by Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, p. 2, n. 4 – see also: FRANÇOISE BRIQUEL

Considering this framework, Papyrus BL 3124 is significant because it provides us with an early and continuous text recording, in Latin characters, both consonants and vowels of the Arabic language. From the end of line 6 onwards, the text of the papyrus turns from Latin (ll. 1-6)²⁸ into Arabic (ll. 6-22), and gives us a unique document, enlarging the corpus of sources for the phonetics and phonology of early Arabic as well as its morphology, syntax and lexicon.

The document, that counts 22 lines on one side and two lines on the other, is a letter between two private persons.²⁹ The current hypothesis about its provenance is that it was probably written in the Middle East, in the Palestinian-Egyptian area.³⁰ The elements that lead to this hypothesis are the use of papyrus as writing material, the fact that the document was supposedly acquired in Egypt together with other pieces of Egyptian provenance,³¹ and

CHATONNET, ALAIN DESREUMAUX, ANDRÉ BINGGELI, *Un cas très ancient de garshouni? Quelques réflexions sur les manuscrit BL Add. 14644*, in *Loquentes Linguis. Studi linguistici e orientali in onore di Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti*, edited by P.G. Borbone, A. Mengozzi, M. Tosco, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2006, pp. 141-148. See ALESSANDRO MENGOZZI, *The History of Garshuni as a Writing System: Evidence from the Rabbula Codex*, in *Meeting of Afro-Asiatic Linguistics held in Udine (May 21ˢᵗ-24ᵗʰ 2007)*, Padua, S.A.R.G.O.N., 2010, pp. 297-304.

²⁸ For the use of Latin legends, consisting on an abbreviated version of the *shahāda*, in the Arabic-Islamic coins of early 1ˢᵗ/8ᵗʰ century-North Africa, see TRENT JONSON, *The Earliest Dated Islamic Solidi of North Africa*, in *Arab-Byzantine Coins and History. Papers Presented at the Seventh Century Syrian Numismatic Round Table held at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, on 10ᵗʰ and 11ᵗʰ September 2011*, edited by T. Goodwin, London, Archetype, 2012, pp. 157-167; TRENT JONSON, *The Earliest Islamic Copper Coinage of North Africa*, in *Coinage and History in the Seventh Century Near East 4, Proceedings of the 14ᵗʰ Seventh Century Syrian Numismatic Round Table held at The Hive, Worcester, on 28ᵗʰ and 29ᵗʰ September 2013*, edited by A. Oddy, I. Schultze and W. Schulze, London, Archetype, 2015, pp. 217-240, and TRENT JONSON, *A Numismatic History of the Early Islamic Precious Metal Coinage of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula*, unpublished PhD thesis at University of Oxford, St. Cross College - Trinity Term 2014, in particular pp. 34-38 for the Latin-epigraphic type and the Arabic/Latin bilingual type.

²⁹ In an overview of the 7ᵗʰ-13ᵗʰ century Egyptian epistolary production in Arabic, Werner Diem observed that male correspondence – a man writing to another man – represents the most common typology of correspondence. Moreover, most of the Egyptian letters dated between the 7ᵗʰ and the 9ᵗʰ century, if we exclude official letters, are between unknown middle-class people, see WERNER DIEM, *Arabic Letters in Pre-Modern Times. A Survey with Commented Selected Bibliographies*, in *Documentary Letters from the Middle East: The Evidence in Greek, Coptic, South Arabian, Pehlevi and Arabic (1ˢᵗ-15ᵗʰ c CE)*, edited by E. M. Grob and A. Kaplony, "Asiatische Studien" LXII, 3 (2008), pp. 843-883: p. 845. This is also the case of our papyrus: the sender and the recipient are two men lacking, for the moment, a specific identity. For the importance of early Arabic private letters on papyrus as a historical source for the Muslim society in Egypt, especially during the first two centuries of Islam, see KHALED M.M. YOUNES, *Joy and Sorrow in Early Muslim Egypt: Arabic Papyrus Letters, Text and Content*, PhD diss., Leiden University, Leiden Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University, 2013 (https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/21541) (last checked September 2017).

³⁰ It seems worth drawing attention to the fact that the Sinai and Palestine regions are possibly the areas in which some of the oldest instances of allographic writing – e.g. Greek-Armenian and Greek-Georgian allographies – are attested, see DEN HEIJER and SCHMIDT, *Scripts Beyond Borders*, cit., p. 23. As for the destination of the Arabic letters on papyrus found in Egypt, it has been pointed out that, considering the places named in their texts and addresses, they were sent mostly within the region with the exception of the cases of Egyptians travelling outside Egypt and writing to their land of origin, cfr. DIEM, *Arabic Letters*, cit., p. 846.

³¹ The papyrus was part of the Michaelidis collection see INTERNULLO, *supra*.

the mention of the city of Jerusalem – *Jerusale(m)* – at line 15.[32] It seems worth noting that the toponym – *Jerusalem* – employed in the letter is not an Arabic-Islamic one – as *Bayt al-maqdis/muqaddas* or *al-Quds*.

The sender, named twice – first line of the *recto* and first line towards the right on the *verso*, seems to have a Muslim name: *Sati* / Ar. *Sāti'*.[33] The document also contains two other personal names: *Ioh(ann)e*, the recipient of the letter, mentioned twice – last word of the first line of the *recto* and line 2, towards the left, on the *verso* – and *Custantin*, mentioned at line 9.

The onomastic data seem to point towards Egypt, where, as stressed by Arietta Papaconstatinou, "in the late seventh and especially in the eight century, Greco-Roman names had become quite common, even in documents that were not legal, and were thus more representative of society as a whole."[34] In particular, the Latin imperial name *Konstantinos* is attested in at least two Egyptian regions – the Theban west bank and Aphrodito – and the Latin form of the Greek name *Ioannes* can be compared to the Greek *Ioannakios* which is also attested in the Theban area.[35]

[32] It seems interesting to recall that on the copper coinage of 72-74 AH/AD 692-694 of 'Abd al-Malik the mint city of Filasṭīn was rendered in Greek as IEROSOLEU (sic, per IEROSOLU) – see MICHAEL BATES, *The Official Imperial Image and Full Greek Mint Name – Copper Coinage of 'Abd al-Malik, 72-74 (692-694)*, online text: https://numismatics.academia.edu/MichaelBates (checked on July 2017). Moreover, "the majority of the Arab-Byzantine fulus struck in Jerusalem name the city as Iliya (the Arabic form of Aelia), but no convincing explanation has yet been suggested for this unexpected reappearance of the Roman colonial name", YA'AĶOV MERSHORER with GABRIELA BIJOVSKY and WOLFGANG FISCHER-BOSSER, *Coins of the Holy Land. The Abraham and Marian Soafaer Collection at the American Numismatic Society and The Israel Museum*, New York, The American Numismatic Society, 2013 (*Ancient Coins in North American Collections*, 8, vols. I-II), 2 vols.: vol. I, p. 80.

[33] Until recently the most ancient letter of an Arab merchant known was one attributed to the early second century of the Hijra on both textual and paleographical grounds, written on the *verso* of a fragment, containing the text of Exodus, from a Latin codex dating back to the 5th century; see YŪSUF RĀǦIB, *La plus ancienne lettre arabe de marchand*, in *Documents de l'Islam médiéval: nouvelles perspectives de recherche*, edited by Y. Rāǧib, Cairo, IFAO, 1991, pp. 1-9. However, a papyrus from Egypt, containing a business text and attributed to the 1st/7th century, represents nowadays the most ancient document of this kind, see PETRA M. SIJPESTEIJN, *Travel and Trade on the River*, in *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt*, edited by P.M. Sijpesteijn and L. Sundelin, Leiden, Brill, 2004 (*Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts*, 55) pp. 115-152.

[34] See ARIETTA PAPACONSTANTINOU, *'What remains behind': Hellenism and Romanitas in Christian Egypt after the Arab Conquest*, in *From Hellenism to Islam. Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, edited by H.M. Cotton-R.G. Hoyland-J. J. Price and D.J. Wasserstein, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 447-466: pp. 458-459. For the Arabic version (Sawīrus) – via Greek and Coptic – of the Latin personal name Severus on 8th century coin weights in glass from Egypt, see GEORGE C. MILES, *Contributions to Arabic Metrology I. Early Arabic Glass Weights and Measures Stamps Acquired by the American Numismatic Society 1951-1956*, New York, The American Numismatic Society, 1958 (Numismatic Notes and Monographs, 141), p. 63.

[35] See PAPACONSTANTINOU, *'What remains behind'*, cit., p. 459. I like to recall also a certain Ioannes son of Isidorus (Yuḥannis b. Isidūr) – of the monastery of Apa Apollo in Bāwīt – who received, in 136 AH/AD 753, a bilingual – Arabic and Coptic – tax-demand note (*entagion*) to which a note in Greek was added as proof of payment. This document, in the University Library of Cambridge (P. Camb. UL Michael 807), comes from the collection of George Michaelidis like the P. London 3124, see PETRA A. SIJPESTEIJN and SARAH CLACKSON, *P. Clackson 45-46. A Mid-Eight-Century Trilingual Tax Demand Related to the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit*, in *Monastic Estates in Late Antique and Early Islamic Egypt. Ostraca, Papyri and Essays in Memory of Sarah Clackson (P. Clackson)*, edited by A. Boud'Hors, J. Clackson, C. Louis and P. A. Sijpesteijn, Cincinnati-Ohio, The American Society of Papyrologists, 2009, pp. 102-119 and pl. XIX.

The use of Latin, in a late 7th-9th century document from the Palestinian-Egyptian area, is quite unexpected: historians are, however, not unanimous about the chronology of the use of Latin in the Middle East.[36]

As far as manuscript production is concerned (books and documents), it is interesting to recall two Latin papyri from Nessana, 100 km away from Jerusalem, one of which is a fragment of a codex containing Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*, dating back to the late 5th/6th century.[37] These fragments have also been considered as having been imported from Egypt, Nessana being on the route linking Syria and Egypt, with script comparisons from literary papyrus codices found in Egypt. It is therefore likely that the use of Latin in the Near East ceased in the 6th century and the presence of Latin papyri in Nessana attests only that these materials were preserved there until the abandon of the city in the 7th-8th century.

On the other hand the presence of Latin around Jerusalem becomes less puzzling if one looks at literary sources of the early 9th century: for instance, the *commemoratorium de casis*, a sort of account of church and monasteries around Jerusalem, composed for Charlemagne shortly after 807 AD, reports that in the Mount of Olives there were three churches and several monks "qui sedent per cellulas, eorum qui graeca lingua psallent XI, Georgiani IIII, Syriani VI, Armeni II, Latini V, qui Sarracenica lingua psallit I".[38] The exceptional combination of languages and script of Papyrus BL 3124, as long as no other similar exemplar comes to light, might therefore be explained in connection with some fortuitous circumstances like the passage, or the presence, of a western monk or a merchant in an Arabic speaking region.

Papyrus BL 3124, a private letter, represents an example of a documentary production different from the Violet Psalm, the well-known Arabic allographic text in Greek letters – which is a codex fragment. This element must

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[36] According to Rachel Stroumsa it was "a complete anachronism" whilst for Hagith Sivan Latin was still taught in 7th century Nessana, see RACHEL STROUMSA's unpublished PhD thesis entitled *Peoples and Identities in Nessana*, Duke University 2008 and HAGITH SIVAN, *Palestine in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 86-87, both quoted by SERENA AMMIRATI, *Sul libro latino antico. Ricerche bibliologiche e paleografiche*, Pisa-Roma, Serra, 2015. For the multilingualism in early Islamic Egypt, see *New Frontiers of Arabic Papyrology: Arabic and Multilingual Texts from Early Islam*, edited by Sobhi Bouderbala, Sylvie Denoix and Matt Maczycki, Leiden, Brill, 2017 (*Islamic History and Civilization*, 144).

[37] For a wide and well documented study of the Latin manuscript production in the Roman provincial regions between the 3rd and the 7th century, see AMMIRATI, *Sul libro latino antico*, in particular Chapter II, pp. 45-72: *I libri latini tardo antichi prodotti nelle aree provinciali (secoli III-VII D.C.)*, especially pp. 63-65.

[38] See *Commemoratorium de casis Dei vel monasteriis, in Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo VIII, IX, XII et XV*, edited by TITUS TOBLER, Leipzig, Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1874, p. 79. See also the *Itinerarium Bernardi monachi Franchi, ibidem* at p. 91 (about people speaking *linguam Romanam*). One should also remark that contacts between West and the Holy Land emerge from sources like the labels of relics found in the *Sancta Sanctorum* chapel of the church S. Giovanni in Laterano (Rome): among them, many labels refer to relics coming from the Holy Land: see BRUNO GALLAND, *Les authentiques de reliques du Sancta Sanctorum*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2004 (Studi e Testi, 421), and JULIA MARY HOWARD SMITH, *Care of Relics in Early Medieval Rome*, in *Rome and Religion in the Medieval World. Studies in Honor of Thomas F. X. Noble*, edited by V. L. GARVER and O. M. PHELAN, Farnham-Burlington, Ashgate, 2014, pp. 179-205.

be stressed, as it is linked to a different process of production. Whilst Papyrus BL 3124 can be considered to be the result of an oral process of dictation, the Violet fragment is the outcome of a book production process involving a written model (Ar. *aṣl*), possibly in Arabic. The vocalization of the Greek text of the Violet fragment, e.g. the article el- (CA *al-*), is the consequence of the internal dictation of the scribe. On the other hand, the lack of assimilation of the article with solar letters, in the Violet fragment, points to a copy executed from a written exemplar.[39]

The Violet fragment consists of two folios, quite damaged, containing the Psalm 78 (Psalm 77 in the Septuagint version) written in two columns per page, with the Greek text on the left side and the Arabic text in Greek script on the right.[40] From an accurate drawing of the fragment, made by Bruno Violet at the beginning of the 20th century,[41] it was possible to discern that the script was an example of Uncial, typical of the Syro-Palestinian area. The fragment has been recently reconsidered by Maria Mavroudi, who published photographs and suggested to date it from the late 9th to the 10th century.[42]

Mavroudi also stressed the fact that the fragment, and its system of transcription, were not created for practical purposes such as an ignorance of the Greek or the Arabic language: rather, this fragment testifies to the strong link to Greek as a Christian language, and it represents an ideological outcome rather than a practical product.[43] Moreover, she demonstrated that the copyist/author of the transcription knew Greek and Greek grammar well, highlighting all the elements connecting the Greek transcription to grammatical treatises such as those of Michael the Synkellos and Dionysios Thrax. Therefore, the transcription of the Violet fragment appears to be an "erudite" text, in which the Arabic part seems to reproduce a written language rather than a spoken one. However, the hypothesis that the Violet text "could possibly be

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[39] See *ultra*.

[40] On the importance of the Greek transcription of an Arabic text, and in particular on the extreme value of the fragment found in the *Qubbat al-khazna* – containing a continuous text, see JOSHUA BLAU, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic, Based Mainly on South-Palestinian Texts from the First Millenium*, Louvain, Sécretariat du Corpus SCO,1966-67 (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Subsidia* 27-29), p. 31 and HOPKINS, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic,* pp. 1-2.

[41] The Violet fragment comes from the *Qubbaᵗ al-khazna* find discovered in the year 1900 in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus. For the history of this find and an overview of the multilingual materials found, see PAOLO RADICIOTTI and ARIANNA D'OTTONE, *I frammenti della Qubbat al-khazna di Damasco. A proposito di una scoperta sottovalutata*, "Nea Rhome" 5 (2008), pp. 45-74 and 7 plates and ARIANNA D'OTTONE, *Manuscripts as Mirrors of a Multilingual and Multicultural Society. The Case of the Damascus Find*, in *Convivencia in Byzantium? Cultural Exchanges in a Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Lingual Society*, edited by B. Crostini, S. La Porta, Trier, Wissenschaftlicher, 2013 (*Bochumer Altertumswissenschaftliches Colloquium; Bd.* 96), pp. 63-88.

[42] A photograph of the fragment is also published by VOLLANDT, *Arabic Versions*, cit., p. 57, fig. 2. Unfortunately, Vollandt only cites a 2011 contribution in German dealing with the history of the Qubbat al-khazna, rather than the original 2008 contribution on the rediscovery of the find by Radiciotti and myself, see RADICIOTTI and D'OTTONE, *I frammenti della Qubbat al-khazna di Damasco*, cit.

[43] See MAVROUDI, Arabic Words in Greek Letters, p. 328.

read as an attempt by pre-Islamic Arabic-speaking Christians to assert their communal identity by using a script that they associated with their Byzantine rite" has recently been put forward by Ahmad al-Jallad who proposed an early date for the fragment – "probably […] between the 4th/5th centuries CE".[44]

These elements needed to be borne in mind in order to make a comparison with Papyrus BL 3124 and to highlight some of the peculiarities of this latter. Papyrus BL 3124 seems, in fact, the result of a process of dictation. It has already been noted that "the culture of most Arabic-speakers appears to have remained a fundamentally oral one until well after the revelation of Islam. […] However, this general reluctance to write Arabic […] extended much further, and until relatively late it does not seem to have been used for writing on any subject, even letters, legal documents, bills, etc. […] Thus an Arabic speaker would either learn the language and script of Aramaic or Sabaic in order to be able to write, or employ someone to write, in these languages for him/her."[45] Therefore, it would not be surprising that a private person, when sending a letter, would have employed someone to write for him, considering that the people able to write in Arabic in early Islamic times were mostly professional scribes, working in chancelleries, and scholars.[46] The Arabic speaker sender, *Sāṭiʿ* (*verso*: line 1, towards right), must have been dictating. He started in Latin, possibly as a courtesy towards his correspondent Iohanne, using probably all the Latin *formulae* that he knew – as the repetitions suggest a limited *repertoire* in Latin[47] – before suddenly switching to Arabic.[48] The scribe was apparently someone with a graphic and linguistic education in Latin.

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[44] See DEN HEIJER and SCHMIDT, *Scripts Beyond Borders*, p. 54, n. 58. A contribution by A. Al-Jallad devoted to the Violet fragment and entitled Graeco-Arabica IV: the Damascus Psalm Fragment is announced in AHMAD AL-JALLAD, Graeco-Arabica I, p. 1, n. 2 and AHMAD AL-JALLAD, *Ancient Levantine Arabic. A Reconstruction based on the Earliest Sources and the Modern Dialects*, PhD diss., Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass.), p. 145.

[45] FIEMA, AL-JALLAD, MACDONALD and NEHMÉ, Provincia Arabia, pp. 397-398. Recently published inscriptions from different regions of the Arabian Peninsula would confirm, on the other hand, that Arabic language and script were spread "throughout the whole of Arabia shortly after the Islamic conquest", CHRISTIAN J. ROBIN, *Introduction*, in *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language. Papers from the Special Session of the Seminar for Arabian Studies held on 24 July 2009*, edited by M. C. A. Macdonald, Oxford, Archaeopress, 2010 (*Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 40) pp. 1-4: p. 2.

[46] It has been already stressed that "writing is a skill that must be learned" and that "many Christians indeed spoke colloquial Arabic dialects but did not necessarily receive training in Classical Arabic and often could not even read its script", DEN HEIJER and SCHMIDT, *Scripts Beyond Borders*, cit., p. 49. Therefore, the motive for this allographic document seems to be entirely practical.

[47] For a case of Greek papyrus from Nessana, in which "the writer begins composing an official letter […] but after seven lines – five of which are spent on salutations and courtesies – he becomes dissatisfied with his efforts" and then goes repeating only one sentence several times as an exercise, see RACHEL STROUMSA, *Greek and Arabic in Nessana*, in *Documents and the History of the Early Islamic World*, edited by A.T. Schubert-P. M. Sijpestejin, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2015 (*Islamic Civilization and History. Studies and Texts*, 111), pp. 143-157. For the hypothesis that the first lines in Latin language might be translation of Arabic formulas, see *supra*.

[48] For the phenomenon of code-switching in Judeo-Arabic, see JOACHIM J.M.S. YESHAYA, *In the name of the God of Israel. Judeo-Arabic language and literature*, in *Scripts Beyond Borders*, pp. 527-538: p. 533.

As for the contents, it seems likely that the letter is linked to some kind of business, possibly the trade in linen – as the word *elcitan* (Ar. *al-kattan*) at l. 17 might suggest[49] – and it contains general requests of news about people and things.

From a linguistic point of view, the Arabic text can be described as written in Middle Arabic as some of its features discussed below are typically found in Middle Arabic texts. Moreover, it is possible to note some of its stylistic elements, such as: the use of the epistolary past (line 16: *macitebtu ilicci* for: *mā katabtu ilayka/i* – meaning: *what I am writing to you*),[50] and the use of *formulae* of salutation (line 21) in which the word *salām*/peace appears;[51] but also, notably, the fact that words were transcribed on the basis of phonetic principles, free from the influence of Classical Arabic orthography.[52] The transcription provided by Papyrus BL 3124 is therefore of exceptional interest.

As far as the transcription is concerned, it is possible to make the following observations,[53] remembering that the Latin alphabet utilizes 23 letters – compared with the 28 of the Arabic *abǧad*.

The vowels

In the ll. 6-22, corresponding to the Arabic text in transcription, only four vowels are employed: *a*, *e*, *i*, *u*. No *o* is registered.

The following may be noted: the *imāla*[54] of the long vowel *ā* in the pronoun *ḏālika* that becomes *delicci* – broken between ll. 10-11: this *imāla* can be compared with *κεν* for *kāna* in the Violet fragment;[55] the preposition *li-* before a suffix pronoun of 1st plural person (*-nā*) becomes *e*: *lena* for *la-nā* (l. 14); the short or long *u* vowel is noted in Papyrus BL 3124 always with *u*, as at l. 7 and 17.

Diphtong -ay

Contrary to the evidence given by the Violet fragment,[56] the diphthong *–ay* is often rendered as *i* as in l. 16: *ilicci* and l. 20 *iliccu(m)* for *ilayk-a/i/um*, and l.

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[49] On the importance of textile trade in Egypt, attested by business letters, see KHALED M.M. YOUNES, Textile Trade between the Fayyūm and Fusṭāṭ in the 3rd/9th century according to the Banū ʿAbd al-Muʾmin Archive, in *Documents et histoire – Islam VIIe-XVIe s. Actes des journées d'études – Sciences historiques et philologiques II, Hautes Etudes Orientales – Moyen et Proche Orient 5/51*, edited by A. Regourd, Geneva, Droz, 2013, pp. 313-334.

[50] But it is not possible to exclude the possibility that the sender might here make reference to a previous letter and in this case the sentence can be understood: *what I wrote to you*.

[51] See DIEM, *Arabic Letters*, cit., p. 854.

[52] This same feature has been already noticed for Early Judeo-Arabic and for Greek texts in Coptic, see YESHAYA, *In the Name of the God of Israel*, p. 530; NÉLI MAKHARADZE, *Le manuscrit bilingue gréco-géorgien du Liban*, in *Scripts Beyond Borders*, pp. 539-554: p. 544.

[53] These are only some notes that deserve further work by linguists, papyrologists, philologists, dialectologists and language historians.   [54] See HOPKINS, *Studies in the Grammar*, pp. 4-5.

[55] See HOPKINS, *Studies in the Grammar*, p. 8.

[56] See HOPKINS, *Studies in the Grammar*, p. 17.

22: *alicci* for *'alayk-a/i/um* and, on the *verso*, l. 2 *biti* for *bayt*; even if at least once it is preserved and not contracted *as* in l. 21: *uhair / wa-ḫayr*.

Tanwīn

Papyrus BL 3124 indicates the pronunciation of *tanwīn* as in pause, without the final *n*, at line 20: *citira* = *kaṯīr^an* in continuity with the Violet fragment registering gedda = *ǧidd^an*.[57]

The consonants

– The letter *'ayn*, of *'alà* for example, is not registered in any way in the text. One can also infer from this detail that no *'ayn* is registered in the entire text – an event that has to be taken into account when deciphering the text. Some of the solutions proposed introduce, in the Arabic part, the letter *'ayn* as expected; this is the case, for example, of *bida* for *biḍā'a* (l. 7) and of *ian(i)* for *ya'nī* (l. 15).

– The Latin text registers a long *i* as the first letter of the toponym Jerusale(m) that has been transcribed in Arabic with a *ǧīm* rather than a *yā'*: more researches are needed to understand both the palaeographical and phonetic value of this long *i* and of its correspondent sound in Arabic.

– For the transcription of the letter *ḫā'* as in *bihabar* (l. 7, 9 for *bi-ḫabar*), *uhabirini* (l. 11 for *wa-ḫabbir(ī)nī*); *uhabar* (l. 19 for *wa-ḫabar*) and *uhair* (l. 21 for *wa-ḫayr*) Papyrus BL 3124 invariably uses the letter *h*.[58]

– In Papyrus BL 3124 the letter *šīn* is rendered with a simple *s* (l. 8 and ll. 14-15: *insalla*) the same letter employed for the *sīn* (line 21: *essala*(m)).[59] On the other hand, Hopkins noted that, according to the diacritic device (a dash) employed in some early documents to differentiate the letters *sīn* and *šīn*, these two letters seem to have coalesced.[60] In the Violet fragment, instead, the letter *šīn* is transcribed with the letter χ, also employed for transcribing *ḥā'* and *ḫā'* so that, if one reads the text aloud, the meaning of the word must first be understood in order to choose the correct sound.

– Occlusives (dentals) replace spirants (interdentals) so that the pronoun *ḏā-lika* becomes *delicci* – broken between ll. 10-11 – with *d*[61] and *kaṯīr^an* becomes *citira* with *t*.[62]

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[57] See Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, p. 43.

[58] In Greek is sometimes transcribed with χ and sometimes, in post-conquest documents, is not represented at all, see Al-Jallad, Graeco-Arabica i, p. 14-19.

[59] In post-classical Latin, the sound corresponding to the letter *s* varied between *s* and *sc*: septrum/sceptrum, as Fulvio Delle Donne pointed out to me and Dario Internullo during the discussion that followed the presentation of the fragment in the seminar, *Tra latino e arabo. A proposito di un'inedita testimonianza papiracea*, Napoli, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, 20 June 2016.

[60] See Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, cit., p. 37.

[61] For the shift of *dhāl* to *dāl* in living speech, see Blau, *A Grammar*, cit., pp. 107-108 and Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, cit., p. 36.

[62] For the shift of *thā'* to *tā'*, see Blau, *A Grammar*, cit., pp. 106-107 and Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, cit., p. 35. For the transcription of *ṭ in Greek, see Al-Jallad, Graeco-Arabica I, p. 19.

– In all the occurrences of the name Allāh, Papyrus BL 2134 attests a double *ll*, as in *insalla* (l. 8, 14, 15, 19), *inhairilla* (l. 14).[63] Moreover, it is noteworthy that the expressions starting with *in* are written in one word suggesting that they were pronounced as an amalgamated compound.[64] Moreover, a double *ll* is employed for the preposition such as *ilà* written *ille* (l. 17) or *'alà* written *alla* (l. 7) which in Arabic have just a single *l*.

The definite article

In Papyrus BL 3124 the article is always attested as *el* (with *e* instead of *a*),[65] and a difference is made according to whether it is followed by a coronal consonant/sun- or moon-letter:[66] the assimilation is registered at l. 21 in two occurrences – *essalama* for *al-salām*/*as-salām*, and coherently there is not assimilation at l. 9: *elmaracciba* for *al-marākib* (?). In the Violet fragment, instead, the Arabic article is always transcribed as *el-* (for CA *al-*), even before words starting with one of those letters for which an assimilation is expected.[67] For example: OEΛNAP / *w-el-nār* / *w-en-nār*; EΛΣEMA / *el-samā* / *es-samā*.

The verb

For the long *ū* in some verb declensions, the transcription in the Violet fragment, χεβιγου for *šabi'ū* (they are sated),[68] and in the papyrus, uctubu / *uktubū* (l. 7)[69], are coherent.

The II form of the verb takes the place of the IV form, even when this latter is attested: *uhabirini* (= *wa-ḫabbir(ī)ni*) "inform me";[70] and possibly *uallimi* (*wa-'allim*).

Preposition

At l. 13, *ubisanicci* might stand for *bi-ša'nik*, considering – on the one hand – the fact that *bi-* supplants *fī* and – on the other – that the expression *fī ša'n* (because / for / as to) was considered to be a preposition in itself.[71]

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[63] On the *tafḫīm*, see Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, cit., p. 42. It seems interesting to note also, that the preposition *ilà* is transcribed in the papyrus with a double *ll*.

[64] See Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, cit., pp. 51-52.

[65] Since the 6th century there is evidence of the "raising of /a/ to /e/ in the article at Petra", Al-Jallad, Graeco-Arabica i, p. 48.

[66] On the assimilation of the article *al-* to coronal consonants in Arabic words written in Greek alphabet in papyri and inscriptions, see Kaplony, *On the Orthography and Pronunciation*, p. 4 and Al-Jallad, Graeco-Arabica I, p. 48.

[67] "In no domain is the influence of CA so decisive as in the realm of orthography. Even Violet, written in Greek letter, is not free from it: the definite article is spelled el even before solar letters", Blau, *A Grammar*, p. 61.   [68] See Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, cit., p. 68.

[69] At l. 17 *icitebu* can be an imperfect (CA *yaktubūna*) having the suffix -*ū* (and not -*ūna*), see Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, cit., pp. 134-135.

[70] See Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar*, cit., p. 73, and n. 5.

[71] See Blau, *A Grammar*, cit., p. 242 and p. 245.

III. The text (Dario Internullo)

Transcription[72]

Recto

1 + innomined(omi)niiscribimusistaepistula (:) egosati (:) adtibe (:) ioh(ann)e
comosisanu(m)comodotecu(m) (÷) magnoteamabiles (:) dilec
tusamicusetfratres (:) ind(omi)nodiligotibisalutem
Comosisanu(m)comodotecu(m) (÷) d(omi)n(us)d(eu)sq(uod)tefaciasanu

5 senp(er)etsalbu (:) binnemiepistula (:) tuadetuasani
tated(omi)ne (:) tibi (:) gratiiaquatusisanu(m) (.) uebamiṇ
ci (:) eahi (:) uctubuli (:) bihabarị (:) elbida (:) sellimu (:) alla
bira miti (:) emin (:) ual (·) misec . n . minu (:) sadica (:) insalla
ubihabar (:) elmaracciba (:) u . ḥaḅaṛ (:) cụstantin (:) . (-)ff̣ .

10 u (:)'ụ' es . ala . ub . lạt . ạr . . . maḥ[. .]du (:) ucatạgamini (:) deli
cci (:) uç[. .]taraḍt . [. .] . . ạḍir (:) ịllecibi (:) liccu(m) (:) uhabirini
aurani (:) ujelicci (:) amụrun (:) bitiiti (:) utisati (:) illec . . ịlina
uḅisanicci (:) manadirtu (:) uạllimicciehi (:) atiimtuạ
illebitu (:) elmaga (:) dessi (:) insalla (:) iṇhairilla (:) lenạ

15 filejil (:)(:) insalla (:) lebudụmian. minjerusale(m) (:) ualli
mị (:) maciteb . tu (:) ilicci (:) f . ama . . . sara (:) utruba (:) ạjaba
sabiti (:) elcitan (:) ale (:) ebina (:) . ç . . . . ḅuicitebu (:) illecusta
ntin (:) umandaụli (:) allim . . . . . . uamili (:) bira . cçi (:) ubi
matirit . ḷ insalla . . . . ụhabar . . (:) ụbi

20 macitebi . tu (:) iliccụ . . . . . . essala (:) citirạ (:)
ucali (:) icr . . çi (:) essalạ . ụḥạịr . . . . essala (:) essala(m) ma
licci (:)

5 blank space after *binnemi* ‖ **8** after *misec*, perhaps an interpunction sign ‖ **9** after *custantin (:)*,
a letter resembling *q*, but which could be *ẓ* with abbreviation sign ‖ **12** *illec . . ịlina*: perhaps
illecịḅilina ‖ **15** *lebadụmian* . : perhaps *i* or an interpunction sign *(:)* follows ‖ **16** trace of ink af-
ter *maciteb*: probably an interpunction sign ⎟ *f . ama*: perhaps *fĵ ama* ‖ **18** after *bira*, perhaps *i* ‖
19 the traces after *ụhabar* could belong to *i* and *c* (*ụhabaric*) ‖ **20** after *macitebi* traces of a long
vertical stroke ‖ **21** *icr . . çi*: perhaps *icriççi*; after *essalạ*, perhaps an interpunction sign

Verso

1 ịllẹab . . . icciri (:) ạṭịualla (:)   (:) minsatimulea (:)
ioh(an)neibịli . . sabi (:) ibinbaba (:)   biti (:) ibinminsuru (:)

1 the line begins with a sign, composed by five dots arranged in cross shape ‖ **2** *ioh(an)neibịli*:
perhaps *u* follows

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[72] Those words for which it has been possible to give an equivalent in Arabic are highlighted in grey,
see below. In the transcription, the *j* reproduces the letter *i* in the long form. Accordingly, the use of *j* –
e.g. *jerusale(m)* (l. 15) – has been rendered in Arabic with a letter *jīm*, see below. Interpunction signs are
enclosed with round brackets, in order to avoid confusion with the dot which mark an uncertain letter.

Latin text and translation

[1] + *In nomine Domini iscribimus ista epistu-la, ego Sati ad tibe Iohanne.* │[2] *Como si sanum? Comodo tecum? Magno te amabiles, dilec*│[3]*tus amicus, et fratres in Domino diligo: tibi salutem.* │[4] *Como si sanum? Comodo tecum? Dominus Deus quod te facia sanu*│[5] *senper et salbu. Binne mi epistula tua de tua sani*│[6]*tate: Domine tibi gratia, qua tu si sanum.*	"+ In the name of the Lord, I, Sati, write this letter to you, Iohanne. How are you? How are you doing? I greet you, my dear friend, and your brothers[73] with friendship, in the name of the Lord. How are you? How are you doing? May God, our Lord, keep you safe and sound forever. A letter about your good health reached me: I thank God, because you are safe."

III-a. Suggested readings (Arianna D'Ottone Rambach)

Recto

l. 6	O brother	eahi (:)	ياخي
l. 7	write me	uctubuli (:)	اكتبوا لي
l. 7	with news of the merchandise	bihabarị (:) elbida (:)	بخبر البضاعة
l. 7	give my greetings to	sellimu (:) alla[74]	سلّموا على
l. 8	Amen	emin (:)	امين
l. 8	the poor ones	ual (·) misec . n	والمساكين
l. 8	if God wills	insalla	ان شاء الله
l. 9	and with news of the ships [?]	ubihabar (:) elmaracciba (:)	وبخبر المراكب [؟]
l. 9	And with news of Constantin	u . ḥabạr (:) cụstantin (:)	وبخبر قسطنطين
ll. 10-11	That	deli / cci (:)	ذلك
l. 11	inform me	uhabirini	وخبّريني
l. 12	you received an order	ụjelicci (:) amụrun (:)	وجاء لك أمر

[73] *fratres* could be also a scribal mistake: in this case, the proper meaning of the *iunctura* should be "my dear friend and brother". The formula with "brother" is indeed very frequent among Arabic letters: cf. Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business* cit.

[74] But an alternative reading of the sequence: *sellimu alla bira matihi* can be سلمه الله برحمته. In this case the assumption is made the like the letter *'ayn* also the other laringal letter *ḥā'* – was not noted.

l. 12	Sāṭiʿ	sati (:)	ساطع
l. 12	To us	ịlina	إلينا
l. 13	as for you	ụbisanicci (:)	وبشأنك
l. 13	and I inform you of it	uạllimicciehi (:)	اعلمك يا ها
l. 14	otherwise I sold	illebitu (:)	والا بعت
l. 14	this thing	Dessi	ذا الشيء
l. 14	if God wills	insalla (:)	إن شاء الله
l. 14	to us	lenạ	لنا
l. 15	to some of them, that is from Jerusalem	lebadụmian(i) minjerusale(m) (:)	لبعضهم يعني من جروسل
ll. 15-16	inform (of)	ualli / mị (:)	وعلم
l. 16	what I am writing you / what I wrote to you	maciteb . tu (:) ilicci (:)	ما كتبت إليك
l. 17	the linen	elcitan (:)	الكتان
l. 17	they write	uicitebu (:)	ويكتبوا
ll. 17-18	to Constantin	illecusta / ntin (:)	إلى قسطنطين
l. 18	Act according to your judgment	uamili (:) bira . cçi (:)	واعمل برأيك
ll. 18-19	And to your wish	ubi / matirit	وبما تريد/تريت[75]
ll. 19-20	With what I wrote you	ụbi / macitebi . tu (:)iliccụ	وبما كتبت إليكم
l. 20	many greetings	essala (:) citirạ (:)	السلام كثيرًا
ll. 21-22	Peace be upon you	essala (:) essala(m) ma licci (:)	السلام عليك

Verso

l. 1	From Sāṭiʿ	(:) minsati	من ساطع
l. 2	House of Ibn Manṣūr	biti (:) ibinminsuru (:)	بيت ابن منصور
l. 2	Son of	ibinbaba (:)	ابن بابا

[75] With *tā'* instead of *dāl*.