

BMCR 2022.05.07

Amministrare e comunicare nell'Egitto tolemaico: La funzione delle copie (antigrapha) nella documentazione papirologica

Giuditta Mirizio, *Amministrare e comunicare nell'Egitto tolemaico: La funzione delle copie (antigrapha) nella documentazione papirologica*. *Philippika*, 149. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021. Pp. x, 432. ISBN 9783447116152 €89,00.

Review by

Nicola Reggiani, University of Parma. nicola.reggiani@unipr.it

Moving from the papyrological occurrences of the term ἀντίγραφον (“copy”) and of the formulaic phrase ἀντίγραφον ὑπόκειται (“a copy is subjoined below”), this monograph thoroughly studies a particular written communication pattern that was commonly employed for the exchange of information between the public offices of Ptolemaic Egypt. The focus is on the typology of the so-called “cascade-letters,” which defines the writing mechanism of appending copies of letters within other letters, by reproducing them in the same sheet of papyrus, often in chronological order.

The introduction outlines the framework of the investigation. The author clarifies what concept of “copy” she is dealing with (the reproduction of a text written by a third person, different from e.g. the concept of “draft”) and which kinds of official documents she will be taking into consideration: letters – the typical communicative media of the Hellenistic rulers – but also letter-like products like petitions or legal documents, which show some similarities with the epistolary style. Appropriate statements about the state of the art on the discussed topic include references to the most recent studies on the material format of letters and letter-like documents, as well as a key reflection on the status of the “copy” in the papyrological field of studies (pp. 1-2). Indeed, while papyri almost always come to us as unique witnesses, one-shot instances of a scribal act, the existence of copies of the same text are most relevant from the philological viewpoint and deserves a particular attention.

The research is diplomatic and administrative at the same time: the writing template is investigated with a particular attention to stylistic, textual, visual, and material features as well as to its actual function in the complex management of Ptolemaic official bureaucracy, with the aim of retracing the intentions for the adoption of the model and the stages of its evolution from the III to the II century BC.

The III century BC is examined through the most relevant archive ever, that of Zenon (first part of the book), as well as through other homogeneous groups of documents of this period (second part): the archive of Kleon, the petitions, legal texts, smaller archives of local officers of the Arsinoites, the Oxyrhynchites, and the Herakleopolites. The third part of the volume is devoted to the II century BC through the analysis of petitions, legal documents, official letters among public functionaries, orders of payment, and the internal and external dynamics of the archives of the κάτοχοι of the Serapeum of Memphis and of Menches, village secretary of Kerkeosiris.

The conclusions resume the main points emerging from the philological and historical analysis and interpretation of documents characterized by a multi-layered transmission of notifications.

Far from being a mechanical reproduction of the texts, this scribal practice responded in a handy and effective way to four basic needs of the Ptolemaic administration: (1) the control of various administration sectors by explicating the chronological steps of an order or of a notification; (2) the legitimation of the official hierarchy by underlining the issuing authority; (3) the ethical responsibility of the officers, who needed to express their competence and efficiency; (4) last but not least, the authentication of the forwarded communication.

The thoroughness and the completeness of this study, which takes into consideration a very broad set of key documents from a new perspective, sheds new light on the complex mechanics of Ptolemaic administration and allows us to better understand the undeniable centrality of writing and of the written documents in the state management.