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Recognizing Greek Literacy in Early Roman Documents from the Judaean Desert

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Abstract

It is not possible to quantify Greek literacy in early Roman Palestine by counting the number of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek documents found in the Judaean desert. The three second-century archives of Babatha, Salome Komaise, and Bar Kokhba probably derive from a similar socio-economic level, and most of the documents they contain were written by scribes. What about individual Greek literacy and bilingualism? Someone who could understand, speak, read, and write a second language and someone who could only understand and speak it were both bilingual, but only one was literate. First-century texts from Masada written in Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew were produced and used for the same purposes, implying that two or three languages were spoken by many and read by some. Some witnesses in the second-century archives signed their names in Greek in practised hands. Some or even many who lacked literacy probably could understand and speak Greek. Law courts, dealings with Romans, and business activities required communication in Greek. But it seems that few or only some acquired Greek literacy.

Just under one-third of the documentary texts found in the Judaean desert were written in Greek. Such figures encourage the conclusion that Greek was actively used by those who deposited the texts. But as the archives of Babatha, Salome Komaise, and Bar Kokhba demonstrate, Greek documents were usually written by professional scribes. So the percentage of Greek documentary texts cannot provide an accurate indication of literacy (i.e., written ability). Instead, the papyrological evidence must be carefully sifted for indications of non-scribal literacy. In demonstrating how this might be done, it will be shown that Greek literacy was not limited to scribes and the elite. With the help of linguistic theory, the ancient possibilities inherent in the terms “bilingual” and
“bilingualism” will be discussed in relation to the persons and witnesses in the archives. While some of these were literate bilinguals, it will be found that the majority of people with ability in Greek were probably illiterates with a kind of aural/oral bilingualism – Greek could be understood, spoken, and perhaps read, but not written.

_Literacy by numbers?

Table 1 below is based on a survey by Cotton, Cockle, and Millar of documentary texts found at various locations along the eastern edge of the Judean desert/western side of the Dead Sea (nos. 174-374). They include the archive of Bar Kokhba, the charismatic leader of the Second Jewish Revolt (AD 132-135), and the archives of two women, Babatha and Salome Komaise, both from Mahōza at the southern end of the Dead Sea (dated AD 93/94-132 and 125-131 respectively). Mahoza was just inside the Nabataean kingdom (the Roman province of Arabia from AD 106), but this was an area where borders meant very little. Towards the end of the first century, Babatha’s birth family migrated from Ein Gedi, which was located about the middle of the Dead Sea on the Judean side, to Mahoza. Likewise, her second husband Judah came from Ein Gedi, where the other members of his birth family continued to live during the period of the archive. A few documents from Arabia are also included in Table 1 because they were probably found in Judaea. In addition, Table 1 includes ostraca and papyri discovered during the excavation of Herod the Great’s fortified palace and other buildings on top of the rock of Masada. It was at Masada that the last of the Jewish rebels (the Zealots whom Josephus called Sicarii) held out against the Romans until the end of the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66-73[74]). Thus, 73(74) is the _terminus ante quem_ for the papyrus documents, while the ostraca, since “they were all written on the spot,” can be dated to 66-73(74). Some homogeneous groups of ostraca from Masada, however, have not been

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3 Cotton, Cockle, and Millar (n. 1), nos. 174-175, 177-179.
4 Y. Yadin, “The Excavation of Masada – 1963/64: Preliminary Report,” _IEJ_ 15 (1965) 1-120 at 103. There were no finds from the Bar Kokhba period. It appears that Bar Kokhba and his men did not use Masada during the Second Revolt, perhaps because the demise of the rebels in 73(74) was “still fresh in their memories” (119).
Greek Literacy in Early Roman Documents

included in the table. They are listed here with the assigned numbers (in bold) and descriptions taken from Cotton, Cockle, and Millar.

230. 301 ostraca tags with one, two, or more characters written in Jewish script (nos. 1-281) and palaeo-Hebrew with some Greek characters (nos. 282-301). Most were discovered near the storehouses and seem to have been used for rationing food during the siege.5

231. 79 ostraca tags with names in Jewish script written above two large, single characters, one in palaeo-Hebrew and the other in Greek (nos. 302-359), or one in Jewish script and the other in palaeo-Hebrew (nos. 360-380). Perhaps token substitutes for money used in rationing food.6

232. 39 ostraca tags with single names in Jewish script (nos. 381-419). Lots or tokens denoting ownership.7

234. 12 ostraca lots in Jewish script, perhaps those mentioned by Josephus in BJ 7.395?8

240. 26 ostraca with scribbles (probably resulting from scribes testing the pen).9

241. 4 ostraca in Syriac, 1 in Palmyrene(?), and 1 that may be a forgery.10

264. 22 ostraca tags with Roman names in Latin. Lots for assigning duties? Dated after Spring 73(74).

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6 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 17-19. The combinations are Yehoḥananan with alpha and yod in palaeo-Hebrew (nos. 302-350), Yehudah with beta written right to left and samekh in palaeo-Hebrew (nos. 351-359), and Simeon with gimel in Jewish script and dalet in palaeo-Hebrew (nos. 360-380).

7 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 3, 20-23.

8 Naveh (in Yadin and Naveh [n. 5] 28-31) questions Yadin’s suggestion (in Yadin [n. 5] 197, 201), following Josephus, that these were the lots drawn by the ten men who were, when all hope had been lost at the end of the siege, to kill their fellow Zealots.

9 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 63-64 (nos. 616-641). A further 10 ostraca with writing exercises in Jewish script, which Cotton, Cockle, and Millar (n. 1; see Yadin and Naveh [n. 5] 61-63, nos. 606-615) assign to the same number, are included in Table 1.

10 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 66-67, nos. 678-681, 682, and 667 respectively. A further 54 ostraca (varia written in Jewish script), which Cotton, Cockle, and Millar (n. 1; see Yadin and Naveh [n. 5] 65-68, nos. 642-666, 668-677, 683-701) assign to the same number, are included in Table 1.
After these texts are taken out of the picture, the remaining texts from Cotton, Cockle, and Millar’s survey can be quantified as follows. Bilingual texts are abbreviated as G/L when a text that is predominantly Greek also has some Latin, as G/H when a largely Greek text has some Hebrew, as A/G when Greek takes a back seat to Aramaic (A-H = Aramaic and Hebrew double document), and so on.

Table 1: Documentary papyri from Judaea/Syria Palaestina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Bilingual</th>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Aramaic</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Nabataean</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 66</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66-73(74)</td>
<td>A/G 2; L/G 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-131</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A?H? 22</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132-135</td>
<td>A-H 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A?H? 1; H? 4</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 135</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undated</td>
<td>G/H 1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A?H? 1</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It might be inferred that use of Greek was just ahead of Aramaic, but there are a number of complicating factors. The term “Jewish script” describes the square script used by Jews to write both (Jewish) Aramaic and Hebrew.11 The majority of texts from Masada were designated “Jewish script” because it was not possible to decide on the language of composition. According to Naveh, Hebrew was used “alongside Aramaic,” but the “main language used for writing” was Aramaic.12 Therefore, use of Aramaic would have been greater than the final percentage in the Aramaic column might suggest. The 64 documents dated 66-73(74) and written in Jewish script are all ostraca. They have been included here because they have Greek counterparts from the same location. But they are only the tip of the iceberg, as a glance back at the excluded numbers will confirm. However, if all of the tags, tokens, and lots written in Jewish script

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11 Cotton, Cockle, and Millar (n. 1) 226, n. 14. During the Second Temple period there was a gradual transition from the “early” Hebrew to the Aramaic script, “from which a script developed that is exclusive to the Jews and which could thus be called ‘Jewish script’ (thus many scholars) or the ‘square script’”: E. Tov, Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible (2nd ed.; Minneapolis 1992) 219.

12 Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 9.
had been included in Table 1, the result would have been an unrepresentative
distortion of the overall picture, as far as that can be ascertained (more will
be said below on both points). It should also be mentioned that a number of
documents dated 74-131 have signatures\textsuperscript{13} or subscriptions and signatures\textsuperscript{14} in
other languages. There are two Aramaic documents with at least one Greek sig-
nature, but the majority are predominantly Greek (14 of 32 Greek documents).
In a strict sense, these are bilingual documents which further complicate any
attempt to quantify literacy.

In a recent book Bagnall argues convincingly that papyrus finds must first
be contextualised before conclusions can be drawn about patterns in document-
tary evidence. Can observable patterns be attributed to (1) the “nature of the
sites from which papyri have been found in a particular period,” (2) the “types
of find spots” within those sites and the “specific nature of the finds, especially
archival masses,” and/or (3) changes in external circumstances (“government,
law, and custom”) that may have contributed to preservation or not\textsuperscript{15} All three
questions are applicable here. First, the ostraca tags and lots from Masada are
unusual in the sense that they appear to have served a unique purpose in a
time of war. As mentioned, the bulk of the ostraca tags (see no. 230 above)
“were found near storehouses, so perhaps they had something to do with the
rationing system of the Zealots during the siege.”\textsuperscript{16} Along similar lines, Yadin
wonders whether the names (see nos. 231, 232 above) were “of commanders, or
of brigades, and the troops of the particular unit were given these ‘chits’ to draw
their rations?”\textsuperscript{17} Second, the bulk of the papyrus finds come from troves that
were preserved because the documents were wrapped securely and secreted

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} The following are the numbers assigned by Cotton, Cockle, and Millar (n. 1): 271,
Aramaic with signatures in Aramaic and one in Greek; 286, Aramaic with signatures
in Aramaic and Greek; 175, Greek with four Nabataean and one Greek signature; 177
(\textit{P.Yadin} 1.16), Greek with Nabataean signatures; 193 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.14), 204, Greek with
Nabataean and Aramaic signatures; 198 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.31), 209 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.23), 212 (\textit{P.Yadin}
1.26), Greek with Aramaic signatures.
\item \textsuperscript{14} The following are the numbers assigned by Cotton, Cockle, and Millar (n. 1): 191,
Greek with Aramaic subscription; 194 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.15), 201 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.17), 202 (\textit{P.Yadin}
1.18), 203 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.19), 207 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.21), Greek with Aramaic subscriptions and
signatures; 206 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.20), Greek with Aramaic and Greek subscriptions and Ara-
maic signatures; 208 (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.22), Greek with Nabataean subscription and Aramaic
signatures.
\item \textsuperscript{15} R.S. Bagnall, \textit{Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East} (Berkeley and Los Ange-
les 2011) 73-74. He also recommends that scholars ask whether editorial choices might
have privileged the publication of certain kinds of texts over others.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Yadin (n. 5) 191.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Yadin (n. 5) 190. See also Yadin (n. 4) 112-113.
\end{itemize}
away, probably during the Second Revolt. In contrast, the number of preserved non-archival papyri is relatively small, simply because of the less advantageous circumstances of their deposition. Third, if the ostraca written in Jewish script are put aside, the use of Hebrew is low in comparison with Greek and Aramaic, with the majority of verifiably Hebrew texts dated to the Bar Kokhba revolt. If documentary use of Hebrew can be linked to revolutionary sentiment in the second century, then perhaps the first-century documents from Masada were similarly affected because they too were written in a time of revolt. The further implication is that both revolts might have affected the raw numbers and skewed the evidence in favour of Jewish script. For all of these reasons, the surviving evidence cannot be considered to be representative, and any effort to quantify Greek literacy via a simplistic comparison of numbers is flawed. That does not mean that general conclusions cannot be drawn. They will derive, however, from the specific socio-economic contexts suggested by the evidence.

**Masada**

Apart from the 64 ostraca written in Jewish script, there are a total of 59 Aramaic, 29 Greek, 21 Latin, and 6 bilingual texts from Masada (see Table 1). Most are ostraca, but there are also papyri. While the Aramaic may have had a similar purpose to those numbers excluded above, it has been included here because there are corresponding Greek documents.

**Aramaic and Jewish Script**

- **233.** 9 ostraca, Aramaic, lists of names.
- **235.** Ostracon, Aramaic, letter demanding payment.
- **236.** Ostracon, Aramaic, fragment of a letter.
- **237.** Ostracon, Aramaic, fragment of a letter.
- **238.** 28 ostraca, Aramaic, instructions for supplying bread. Perhaps connected with rationing.

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18 See Bagnall (n. 15) 29-32.
19 Cotton, Cockle, and Millar (n. 1) 214.
20 Contrast Naveh who thinks that even the use of palaeo-Hebrew “need not always be interpreted on nationalistic or religious grounds” (in Yadin and Naveh [n. 5] 7).
21 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 24-27 (nos. 420-428).
22 For nos. 235, 236, and 237 see Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 49-51 (nos. 554, 555, and 556 respectively).
23 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 52-57 (nos. 557-584).
239. 19 ostraca, Aramaic, amounts.24
240. 10 ostraca, Jewish script, writing exercises.25
241. 54 ostraca, Jewish script, varia (inscription is difficult or uncertain).26

Greek

248. 6 ostraca, delivery instructions (cf. 238).27
249. ostracon, instructions? (cf. 238).
250. ostracon, ledger with names and amounts in drachmas.28
251. ostracon, ledger with numbers (cf. 239).
252. ostracon, memorandum?
253. 2 ostraca, abecedaria (cf. 240).29
254. 7 ostraca, names.30
255. 2 ostraca, several characters, perhaps writing exercises (cf. 240).31

Greek papyri

242. letter from Abaskantos to Judah (cf. 235-237).32
243. three Greek characters written on wood (the only example from Masada).
244. list of names? (cf. 233).33
245. fragment of a letter (cf. 235-237).

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24 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 58-60 (nos. 585-594, 597-605).
25 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 61-63 (nos. 606-615). A further 26 ostraca with scribbles, which Cotton, Cockle, and Millar (n. 1; Yadin and Naveh [n. 5] 63-64, nos. 616-641) assign to the same number, are among the excluded texts in the section Literacy by numbers? above.
26 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 65-68 (nos. 642-666, 668-677, 683-701). For the excluded nos. 667 and 678-682 see 241 in Literacy by numbers?
28 For nos. 250, 251, and 252 see Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 119-122 (nos. 779, 780, and 781 respectively).
29 See Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 122-123 (nos. 782-783).
30 See Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 123-127 (nos. 784-790). No. 784 may have contained a longer list of names.
31 See Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 127 (nos. 791-792).
32 For nos. 242, 243, 245, and 246 see Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 85-88, 90-93 (nos. 741, 743, 745, 746 respectively).
33 See Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 90-91 (no. 744).
246. fragments of one or two letters (cf. 235-237).

Latin papyri

258-259, 261-263. 16 documents or parts of documents.34

Bilingual papyri

239. 2 ostraca, amounts in Aramaic and Greek (see the same no. above).35
247. list of names, Latin and Greek (cf. 233, 244).
260. beginning of a Latin letter, one word of Greek on the verso.

The notable thing about this list is that there are Greek counterparts for virtually every kind of text written in Aramaic and Jewish script.36 There are lists of names in Aramaic (233) and Greek (244; cf. 254). Writing exercises in Jewish script (240) are matched by two abecedaria written in Greek (253). Likewise, there are Aramaic (235-237) and Greek (242, 245-246) letters, and Aramaic (238) and Greek (248, 249) instructions. Although the Greek ledger 250 does not have a precise counterpart, 251 does have a parallel in amounts written in Aramaic (239). Cotton and Geiger argue that almost all of the Greek documents were written by Jews, and they are probably correct in saying that Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew were used indifferently and for the same purposes.37 The point is driven home by the use of Greek on tags (see 230 and 231 in Literacy by numbers? above), and the occurrence of Greek alongside Aramaic in two ostraca containing amounts (see 239).

The Greek papyri from Masada include: a literary fragment preserving a partial line of twelve characters, possibly from the LXX, written between two notional lines in a simple bookhand; a wooden tablet with three Greek characters (\. . . . κοι); two fragments possibly from a list of names written in “beautifully drawn” characters; and a scrap of papyrus with a few legible characters.38 There are also three letters, two of which are comprised of badly damaged fragments preserving scant remains written in cursive hands. In both cases they are recognizable as letters because the salutatory formula ἔρρωϲο is

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34 The provenance of the Latin letters and documents and probably the bilingual texts as well (247, 257, 260) was the Roman camps near Masada.
35 See Yadin and Naveh (n. 5) 59 (nos. 595 and 596).
36 So Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 9.
37 Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 9.
38 In order these are P.Masada 739, 743, 744, 747 in Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 81-93.
preserved. In the third letter (*P. Masada* 741), Abaskantos writes to his brother Judah (Ἰούδα τῷ ἀδελφῷ) about the delivery of lettuce. The *ed.pr.* notes that the letter could come from any of the three periods of occupation, the time of Herod, Herod’s death to 66, or 66-73(74). The hand is upright and ornamented with half-serifs, loops, and hooks; but it looks more occasional than practised, perhaps the product of a private writer rather than a scribe. While a rough bilinearity is maintained, a number of characters in addition to χ, φ, and ρ extend below the line. Very similar things can be said of *P. Masada* 740, a thin strip of parchment which preserves parts of fourteen lines. The *ed.pr.* describes the hand as “neat and practised” and generally bilinear, while noting that it is uneven with several letters written in two or three different ways. Again, the contraindications make the hand look more occasional and private than scribal and practised. The eleventh line ετουσπθ ᾄ appears to mark the text as documentary and points to a date between AD 25 and 35 (depending on the era). The indentation of the twelfth line may have signalled the start of the next document on the same page.

In the introduction to their volume, Cotton and Geiger suggest that the Masada evidence “may provide at least part of the long sought-for missing link” in the discussion of how much Greek was spoken in first-century Palestine.

One should not attach too much importance to quantity: the greater amount of material written by Jews in Semitic languages rather than in Greek may not reflect their relative prevalence. It is possible that the balance is tipped in favour of the Semitic languages only because most of the finds date from the last period of Jewish occupation of Masada, when users of Aramaic and Hebrew prevailed.

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39 *P. Masada* 745, 746 in Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 91-92.
41 See Cotton and Geiger (n. 27), pl. 8. There is no digital image in the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library and none is available for purchase from the Israel Antiquities Authority.
42 Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 82-85.
43 See Cotton and Geiger (n. 27), pl. 8. There is no digital image in the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library and none is available for purchase from the Israel Antiquities Authority.
44 Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 9.
45 See Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 2-3, 9-10, esp. 9.
They think that Jewish script may have greater representation because “the majority of the sicarii, and perhaps the other refugees, belonged to the poorer classes of society,” while the use of Greek was probably greater among persons of “relatively high economic status.”46 While this is reasonable, certainty one way or the other is difficult. Greek letters written in cursive hands were probably produced by scribes, and other papyri are too fragmentary to be assessed properly. As for the ostraca in particular, Cotton and Geiger are of the opinion that “Greek replaced Aramaic only occasionally, or possibly only with a small minority of Jews. It seems that Greek was used for writing names, for writing abecedaria, and rarely for longer instructions and letters.”47 While the latter statement may be true as far as the ostraca are concerned, it does not take into account papyrus letters, the vagaries of preservation, or the possible linguistic implications of the highly nationalistic context. If any of the apparent preference for Jewish script (20 [21?] Aramaic and 17 [18?] Hebrew texts) as against Greek (4 texts) during the Second Revolt was operative in 66-73(74), it would skew the figures in Table 1 in favour of Jewish script (again, certainty either way is difficult).48 It should not be forgotten, as well, that Greek delivery instructions and ledgers were meant to be read, which would seem to indicate that (1) ability in Greek was not limited to persons of higher economic status, and (2) that Greek had penetrated everyday life in the second half of the first century. The same inferences will come to the fore in relation to documents dated to the second century. But before moving to the three archives and bilingual documents they contain, a brief examination of bilingualism will be helpful.

Aural literacy and bilingualism

In a study of graffiti from the Syro-Arabian desert, Macdonald shows that some members of oral societies were able to acquire literacy apart from formal schooling. This is a notable omission in many discussions of literacy which assume that formal education was essential for acquisition of even very basic literacy. Ancient nomadic societies learnt to read and write Safaitic and cut tens of thousands of graffiti into the stones of the Syro-Arabian desert between the first century BC and fourth century AD. Learning to read and write Safaitic was of no apparent use for nomads, not least because “both the language

46 Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 10.
47 Cotton and Geiger (n. 27) 113.
and script would have been incomprehensible to their Aramaic- and Greek-speaking settled neighbours.” Moreover, “the script would have confused their literate nomadic neighbours further south, since they used several of the same or similar signs for different sounds.”49 There are also bilingual Safaitic-Greek and Greek-only graffiti. So as these desert nomads moved around and interacted with their Greek-speaking neighbours, some also learned how to read and write Greek. Macdonald describes a personal experience as a hypothetical explanation of how this may have occurred.

If, for instance, a nomad in Arabia was guarding a caravan or visiting an oasis and saw someone writing a letter or doing his accounts, he may well have said “teach me to do that,” simply out of curiosity. I and others have had just this experience with Bedouins on excavations. Because the nomad comes from an oral culture he has a highly developed memory and so learns the skill very quickly. In my case, I wrote the unjoined forms of the letters of the Arabic alphabet on the Bedouin’s hand and the next day he was writing his name and mine, still in the rather wobbly unjoined forms of the Arabic letters I had written on his palm.50

After citing a similar example, he asserts that it is easy “for someone with a well-trained memory to pick up not merely the letter forms, but the concept of dividing units of sense (that is words) into sounds, and expressing each of these by a particular sign.”51 Having learnt the alphabet and the sounds of individual letters, an individual could have acquired written literacy aurally by sounding out words. That is, rudimentary Greek literacy might follow on from spoken ability without formal schooling.52 Linguists refer to such people as primary bilinguals, defined as those who have “picked up two languages by force of circumstances” without receiving systematic instruction in either language. In contrast, secondary bilingualism involves the addition of a second language via formal instruction.53

50 Macdonald (n. 49) 78-79.
51 Macdonald (n. 49) 96.
52 For more on alternative routes to literacy apart from formal schooling see N. Horsfall, “Statistics or States of Mind,” in J.H. Humphrey (ed.), Literacy in the Roman World (Ann Arbor 1991) 59-76.
In order to understand the complexity of the possibilities inherent in bilingualism, the idea of functional bilingualism is also useful. At the minimalist end of a spectrum of ability, a person is functionally bilingual if s/he is able “to accomplish a restricted set of activities in a second language,” perhaps by using a small number of grammatical rules and a limited lexis. At the maximalist end of the spectrum, a person is able to conduct a wide range of activities in a dual linguistic environment. Although s/he “may not possess sufficient command of nuanced expression in the second language to operate in the same way that a monoglot would, they nevertheless succeed in understanding almost everything they read and hear, and speak and write sufficiently coherently for their interlocutors to appreciate their message.” In these terms, the number of secondary and maximally functional bilinguals in first- and second-century Judaea/Syria Palaestina and Arabia would have been small. But the number of primary and minimally functional bilinguals was probably much greater.

A range of bilingual abilities is also implied in the distinction between receptive (or passive) and productive (or active) bilingualism. Receptive bilinguals can understand a second language, in either spoken or written form, but cannot speak or write it, while productive bilinguals can both understand and speak and/or write a second language. Using these terms, a range of bilingual abilities in two languages (L1, L2) and four language skills can be charted (see Table 2). A type 1 productive bilingual can “manipulate the four basic language skills in two languages,” while a type 5 productive bilingual “would be illiterate but could understand and speak two languages”; and there are a range of other productive possibilities in between. Human infants have natural capacity and are “eminently capable of acquiring two languages simultaneously.” But the number of infants in areas adjacent to the Judaean desert who were well placed to do so – that is, in constant interaction with Greek-speakers – may not have

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54 Baetens Beardsmore (n. 53) 15-16.
55 Baetens Beardsmore (n. 53) 16, 18; J. Edwards, “Foundations of Bilingualism,” in T.K. Bhatia and W.C. Ritchie (eds.), The Handbook of Bilingualism (Oxford 2006) 7-31 at 10. “Receptive bilingualism is relatively easy to acquire … and is a less time-consuming learning task in that it does not involve the laborious acquisition of language patterns that must be at ready command for fruitful conversation or written communication with a speaker of another language” (Baetens Beardsmore [n. 53] 16).
56 Adapted from Baetens Beardsmore [n. 53] 20.
57 Baetens Beardsmore (n. 53) 19. The patterns in Table 3 do not exhaust the range of possibilities.
been high. It is more likely, perhaps, that some/many children and adults became productive bilinguals via less consistent contact.\footnote{Simultaneous second-language acquisition “describes exposure to more than one variety [of language] from the onset of speech or, at least, from a very young age (some commentators have suggested age three or four as a rather arbitrary cut-off ),” while successive second-language acquisition “refers to the addition, at a later age, of a new variety to an existing maternal one”: Edwards (n. 55) 11-12. Successive second-language acquisition can also be divided into early (older children) and later (adult) forms. See also J.M. Meisel, “The Bilingual Child,” in Bahtia and Ritchie (n. 55) 91-113.}

Table 2: Patterns of Individual Bilingualism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Skills</th>
<th>Productive Bilingualism</th>
<th>Receptive Bilingualism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>Type 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening comprehension</td>
<td>L1, L2</td>
<td>L1, L2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td>L1, L2</td>
<td>L1, L2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral production</td>
<td>L1, L2</td>
<td>L1, L2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written production</td>
<td>L1, L2</td>
<td>L1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Receptive bilinguals do not progress to oral or written production of Greek because circumstances do not require it.\footnote{Affective or social inhibitions may also prevent productive output (Baetens Beardsmore [n. 53] 147, 150).} Receptive bilingualism could develop, in the ancient context, when a person was in contact with Greek but did not have to speak it in order to maintain an adequate income or the necessities of life. On the productive side, most Jews who learnt to speak Greek would have done so only because of circumstances. As for the literate, some must have learnt to read and write Greek through systematic instruction, whether at school or at home.\footnote{Under the Principate some children (mainly boys) were taught to read and write at home or through an extended kinship connection. In the Latin world, the duty was...
reading comprehension and/or basic Greek literacy in the manner described by Macdonald. However, a qualification may be in order. Some or many of those Jews who learnt to read and/or write Greek via aural means may have stopped at reading comprehension, meaning they did not take the next step and learn, by the same means, to write Greek. That would seem to be the more likely scenario in a literate society because, in contrast to an oral society like that of the Bedouin, people in Judaea/Syria Palaestina and Arabia could turn to a scribe when a document needed to be written.62 However, as Bagnall points out, there was still plenty of room for “private, informal, spontaneous, and ephemeral communications, writing for which one did not need to spend the time and money to go to a professional scribe.”63 So it would be wrong to conclude that reading comprehension acquired by phonetic means only seldom progressed to writing ability acquired by the same means.

The Babatha and Salome Komaiise archives

Both archives were found in the Cave of Letters at Nahal Hever, a wadi located about 4.5 km south of Ein Gedi. Of the 35 documents in the Babatha archive (dated AD 93/94-132), 6 are in Nabataean, 3 in Aramaic, 17 in Greek only, and 9 are in Greek with subscriptions or signatures in Aramaic or Nabataean or both.64 The smaller archive of Salome Komaiise (dated 125-131), who

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62 Macdonald (n. 49) 49 defines an oral or non-literate society as “one in which literacy is not essential to any of its activities, and memory and oral communication perform the functions which reading and writing have within a literate society.” In contrast, a “literate society” is “one in which reading and writing have become essential to its functioning, either throughout the society (as in the modern West) or in certain vital aspects, such as the bureaucracy, economic and commercial activities, or religious life.” Thus, a predominantly oral society in which the majority of people are illiterate can be designated “literate” because its administrative, commercial, and/or religious functions depend on literacy. Therefore, both Judaea/Syria Palaestina and Arabia were literate provinces. This definition has the advantage of recognizing that literate individuals were always close at hand.

63 Bagnall (n. 15) 142.

64 See N. Lewis, The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri, with Aramaic and Nabataean signatures and subscriptions edited by Y. Yadin and J.C. Greenfield (Jerusalem 1989) = P.Yadin 1. The Greek texts of Babatha’s
was also from the village of Mahoza, contains 7 documents, 6 of which are in Greek. This suggests that both women moved in the same well-to-do circles. Despite this, Babatha always has others sign for her διὰ τὸ αὐτῆς μὴ εὐδέναι ὑγράμματα, which in this case seems to mean “that she was illiterate [i.e., unable to write] in any language.” As Cotton points out, a Greek subscription was not required, since Babatha’s husband Judah (יהודה) wrote his own subscription in Aramaic. Thus, it appears that Babatha was incapable of writing either language. Before 106, when the Nabataean kingdom became part of the Roman province of Arabia, legal documents were written


66 Cotton (n. 65) 172. E.g., Yohesaf Hananiah, who signs one of the Greek documents in Aramaic (XHev/Se Gr. 1 = P. Hever 64), also signs in Aramaic five documents in the Babatha archive.

67 Cotton and Yardeni (n. 65) 145. For the text see Lewis (n. 64) 58-64 (P. Yadin 1.15).

in Nabataean. After that time, there are 32 documents in Greek, 4 in (Jewish) Aramaic, and 2 in Nabataean.70 “Thus, the intimate connection between provincialisation and the use of Greek in legal documents … is firmly established,” at least as far as Nabataea/Arabia is concerned.71 Despite the presence of a small number of documents in other languages, Greek seems to have been required for the main body of legal documents, while Aramaic and Nabataean were acceptable for subscriptions.72 Aramaic and Nabataean were also the signature languages of most of the witnesses. P. Yadin 1.5 and 1.11, in which all of the signatures are in Greek, are the exceptions. This means that a minority of witnesses had, at the very least, Greek “signature literacy” (see below).

One of the Greek documents in the Salome archive is the conclusion to a land declaration that was written by a Nabataean scribe Onainos son of Sa’adalos (ἐγράφη διὰ τοῦ χειροχρήστου Οναινοῦ Σααδαλλου).73 There were also several Jewish scribes: X son of Simon who wrote P. Yadin 1.19; Theé纳斯 son of Simon who wrote P. Yadin 1.13, 14, 15, 17, and 18 (Θεενας Σίμωνος λιβράριος ἔγραψα);74 and Germanus son of Judah who wrote P. Yadin 1.20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 34 (ἐγράφη διὰ Γερμανοῦ λιβραριοῦ /Ἰούδου).75 The

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69 XHev/Se Gr. 3, if it is from Arabia and if it is dated to 99 rather than 109, may be the only Greek document dated before 106: see H.M. Cotton, “Loan with Hypothec: Another Papyrus from the Cave of Letters,” ZPE 101 (1994) 53-59.

70 Lewis (n. 64) 6, 13-19. Jewish Aramaic and Greek appear in Nabataean legal documents only after 106: Cotton (n. 48) 226. Jewish Aramaic was probably a recent acquisition, perhaps brought by Jews after AD 70: M.C.A. Macdonald “Languages, Script, and the Uses of Writing among the Nabataeans,” in G. Marcoe (ed.), Petra Rediscovered: Lost City of the Nabataeans (New York 2003) 37-56 at 47.

71 Cotton (n. 48) 227. In contrast, the annexation of Judaea in AD 6 did not induce a general shift to the use of Greek in legal documents. The first securely dated Greek legal document from Judaea (P. Yadin 1.11) may not have been written until 124 (Cotton [n. 48] 228). However, there are many other kinds of first-century Greek documents, not to mention quite a number of undated Greek documents.

72 Cf. J.G. Oudshoorn, The Relationship between Roman and Local Law in the Babatha and Salome Komaïse Archives: General Analysis and Three Case Studies on Law of Succession, Guardianship, and Marriage (Leiden 2007) 63-92, who shows that Aramaic subscriptions were an integral part of the legal documents in the archives.

73 Cotton (n. 65) 176 (XHev/Se Gr. 5 = Cotton, no. II); cf. Cotton (n. 68) 29-40. If this is a copy, the original subscription may have been written in Nabataean: Cotton (n. 48) 228.

74 Lewis (n. 64) 235. The papyrus reads λิβλαριος.

75 Cf. P. Yadin 1.27 which has Γερμανοῦ ἔγραψε. Lewis thinks that the term librarius means military clerk (citing BGU 423, P. Mich. 166, and SB 10530) and, therefore, that Germanus (and by implication, Theé纳斯 as well), had been temporarily employed as a military clerk by the Roman army (Lewis [n. 63] 88). In contrast, B. Isaac
latter was a type 1 productive bilingual. After he had written the Greek text of *P. Yadin* 1.27, a receipt dated 19 August 132, Babatha’s guardian appended a subscription in Aramaic which Germanus then translated literally into Greek beginning with the word ἑρμηνεία.

Greek was not the mother tongue of any of the parties in the Babatha archive. The absence of ligature, incorrect syllabification, Semitisms, and Latinisms show that this also applies to the scribes. While opportunities to become literate were limited in rural areas, some Jews obviously managed to do so, including some who were not scribes. Since the majority of Jewish witnesses sign their names in Jewish script, signatures written in Greek may also be indicators of written literacy. Six of seven witnesses to *P. Yadin* 1.5 were Jews (probably from Ein Gedi) who signed in Greek. If the first word on the papyrus was ἑρμηνεία, the document was a translation. In any case, the witnesses signed in Greek in competent cursive hands. The seven witnesses to *P. Yadin* 1.11 also sign in Greek. The first is Gaius Iulius Proclus, a Roman soldier, whose hand is halting and unpractised. The other six witnesses are Jews. The first three have practised cursive hands, the fourth is competent, and the sixth appears to be unpractised. The fifth hand, that of Σίμων Σίμωνος, is poorly preserved. But if it is the same Simon son of Simon who signed

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76 Lewis (n. 64) 13-19. Cf. R.S. Bagnall, review of Cotton and Yardeni (n. 65), BASP 36 (1999) 134-135, who has reservations about some of the Latinisms identified by Lewis. For a recent discussion of phonological, morphosyntactic (use of cases), and syntactic transfer from Demotic to Greek see M. Vierros, *Bilingual Notaries in Hellenistic Egypt: A Study of Greek as a Second Language* (Brussels 2012).

77 Harris (n. 68) 91.


79 There is room for 5-6 letters before ρ and no traces remain of the τ in Lewis’ transcription: [m]υ[]ι[], Frag. a, col. i, l. 1 (Lewis [n. 63] 37; ερμηνεία[|a], Lewis [n. 63] 39, fr. a, col. i, l. 1). For a digital image see http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-300434. See also Lewis (n. 64), pl. 1.

80 The signatures of the μαρτυρε[ς] are on the last two strips on the right-hand side of frag. b: see Lewis (n. 64), pl. 2. There is no image of frag. b in the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library and none is available for purchase from the Israel Antiquities Authority.

81 See http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-299448 for a digital image. See also Lewis (n. 64), pl. 4.
1.5, then the hand was competent. Lewis argues that the papyrus is a copy of the original which, in this case, was held by the lender.\textsuperscript{82} The Greek translation of an Aramaic subscription adds weight to that suggestion (ll. 30-1). But, again, the witnesses still authenticate the copy by signing in Greek.\textsuperscript{83} Most of the thirteen Jewish witnesses to these two documents were used to writing more than just their names. Therefore, they were very likely type 1 productive bilinguals. Although one practised signature is probably evidence enough, signing more than once in Greek, as in the case of Σίμων Σίμωνος, increases the likelihood of non-scribal literacy (cf. Θαδαῖος Θαδαίου who signed his name in Greek to \textit{P.Yadin} 1.14, 15, 20, and 23).\textsuperscript{84} Only the hands of the Roman soldier and the final signatory to \textit{P.Yadin} 1.11 bear some of the hallmarks of the hesitant, awkward “signature literacy” of the (otherwise) illiterate,\textsuperscript{85} but even they are slightly more “accomplished” than that. These men may have been type 2 or type 3 productive bilinguals.

Some/many who lacked written literacy probably had spoken ability in Greek, as Sevenster has shown in his discussion of specific documents.\textsuperscript{86} About the time that he became Babatha’s second husband, Judah borrowed 60 silver denarii from Magonius Valens, a centurion of a Thracian cohort stationed at Ein Gedi (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.11). The surety for the loan was a courtyard, connected with his father Eleazar’s house, that Judah had the legal right to mortgage or lease. The house itself was situated across the road from the Roman military post (πραισίδιον). Negotiations over this loan were probably conducted in Greek. Comparison has been made with a document from Murabbaʿ at which

\textsuperscript{82} Lewis (n. 64) 42. It should be noted in passing that Greek copies of documents confirm that Greek was the language of the Roman administration and judiciary.

\textsuperscript{83} So H.M. Cotton as reported in Oudshoorn (n. 72) 157. Cotton had previously argued that \textit{P.Yadin} 1.11 was not a copy because there is no sign that the document is a certified copy and the loan appears to have been paid back since Judah, Babatha’s husband, later gave the courtyard mentioned in the document to his daughter (see \textit{P.Yadin} 19). Therefore, one would “expect the original to be returned (perhaps cancelled) to Judah, rather than that he should keep a copy”: see Cotton (n. 48) 228-229, n. 69; H. Cotton, “Courtyard(s) in Ein-gedi: \textit{P.Yadin} 11, 9 and 20 of the Babatha Archive,” \textit{ZPE} 112 (1996) 197-201.

\textsuperscript{84} See Lewis (n. 64), pls. 9, 12, 24, and 31.


\textsuperscript{86} J.N. Sevenster, \textit{Do You Know Greek? How Much Greek Could the Early Christians Have Known?} (Leiden 1968) 161-165.
also involves borrowed money and a Roman soldier (\textit{P.Mur.} 114).\footnote{H.J. Polotsky, “The Greek Papyri from the Cave of Letters,” \textit{IEJ} 12 (1962) 258-262 at 259. For the text see P. Benoit, J.T. Milik, and R. de Vaux, \textit{Les grottes de Murabba’at} (Oxford 1961) 1:240-243, no. 114.} In another document Babatha sends a summons to guardians of her son to appear before the Roman legate, Iulius Iulianus, at Petra (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.14). Legal proceedings like this were usually conducted in Greek, perhaps with an interpreter on hand.\footnote{C.M. Kreinecker, “How Power and Province Communicate: Some Remarks on the Language of the (Non-)Conversation between Pilate and Jesus,” in P. Arzt-Grabner and C.M. Kreinecker (eds.), \textit{Light from the East: Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament. Akten des internationalen Symposions vom 3.-4. Dezember 2009 am Fachbereich Bibelwissenschaft und Kirchengeschichte der Universität Salzburg} (Wiesbaden 2010) 169-183 at 177-178. According to Hezser (n. 78) 317, one can “assume that a Roman court ‘would prefer, or even insist on, the use of the Greek language’ as the \textit{lingua franca} of all government and legal proceedings in the East,” citing A. Wasserstein, “A Marriage Contract from the Province of Arabia Nova: Notes on Papyrus Yadin 18,” \textit{JQR} 80 (1989) 93-130 at 118, n. 70. See also n. 82.} But as Sevenster observes, it “would have simplified the proceedings” had the parties themselves spoken Greek.\footnote{Sevenster (n. 86) 163.} On this occasion, Judah wrote an Aramaic subscription in his own hand. He also wrote in Aramaic his \textit{ketubba} or marriage contract with Babatha (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.10). There are “mistakes and repetitions,”\footnote{Y. Yadin, J.C. Greenfield, and A. Yardeni, “Babatha’s \textit{Ketubba},” \textit{IEJ} 44 (1994) 75-101 at 76-77.} but the hand is cursive and practised. However, the ability to write Aramaic should not be equated with a lack of ability in other languages, specifically spoken ability in Greek. Since he was able to write Aramaic and negotiate with a Roman centurion in Greek, Judah was probably a type 3 productive bilingual.

Several other papyri suggest communication in Greek.\footnote{The following points are also made by Sevenster (n. 86) 163-165.} When Babatha and Judah appeared before a census official to declare her land (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.16), she confirmed the declaration by an oath to the \textit{genius} (τύχη) of the Lord Caesar (δύναμι τύχην κυρίου Καίσαρος καλή πίστει ἀπογέφαθαι). The possibility that the oath was made verbally is heightened because this is an official declaration rather than a record of a legal act or transaction.\footnote{The translation of the Latin subscription of the cavalry prefect Priscus (ll. 36-8) may mean that \textit{P.Yadin} 16 is a Greek copy of the original declaration made for Babatha.} There are also summons and counter-summons by Babatha and a Roman woman, Iulia Crispina, to appear in legal proceedings before the Roman governor (\textit{P.Yadin} 1.25). This is the same Iulia Crispina who wrote and signed a Greek subscription at the
She seems to have had some kind of association with Judah’s family in Ein Gedi. A couple of things stand out here, one following on from the other: Jews, Romans, and Nabataeans were involved in relationships of various kinds without regard to borders; and Jews and Nabataeans probably used Greek, the common language of the empire, when communicating with Romans. Since she could write neither Aramaic nor Greek but could, it appears, confirm her land declaration by an oath in Greek, Babatha may have been a type 4 or 5 productive bilingual, i.e., a functional bilingual with a productive ability located somewhere along the minimal-maximal spectrum.

Finally, there appears to be evidence of accommodation of Graeco-Roman culture in two of the marriage contracts in the archives. In his Aramaic ketubba Judah promises to provide for Babatha “[according to the] law of Moses and the Judeans” (דָּיָא [אוֹתָה] וַיְהִי [מָשָׁא] לְּיהוָה הַרְשָׁעָה). In contrast, in his Greek marriage contract Judah Cimber son of Ananias promises to provide for Shelamzion (Judah’s daughter by his first wife Miriam) and their children ἑλληνικῷ νόμῳ, “in accordance with Greek law” (P.Yadin 1.18). The formula is expanded in Salome’s marriage contract. The groom, Joshua son of Menahem, “undertakes to follow Greek law and custom” in providing for both her and the children to come (αὐτῆς τε καὶ τῶν {καὶ τῶν} μελλόντων τάξιν νόμῳ ἑλληνικῷ καὶ ἑλληνικῷ τρόπῳ). As far as Cotton is concerned, these are not Jewish documents – “not only the Greek language but the entire ethos and diplomatics of the Greek marriage contract have been adopted by the contracting parties.”

Greek might have been used for legal documents in order to make them enforceable in Roman courts or to register them in the archives. But cultural accommodation would seem to be the best explanation for the fact that Greek custom was to govern the obligations of the Jewish husband to his wife and future children. This has caused some consternation among Jewish scholars.

93 Yadin, Greenfield, and Yardeni (n. 90) 79.
94 P.Yadin 37: Cotton (n. 65) 206.
95 Cotton (n. 65) 207.
who seem loath to accept that Jews could have been so Hellenized. Katzoff argues that while the Roman and Greek elements in P.Yadin 1.18 “are the most obvious superficially, the Jewish elements are in some respects the most fundamental.”98 This view was vigorously rejected by Wasserstein who asserted that in every respect P.Yadin 1.18 is a Greek document.99 Cotton then demonstrated that Jewish marriage contracts written in Greek are strikingly similar to their Egyptian counterparts.100 Yet both Wasserstein and Cotton argue that the Jews in the Babatha archive were not Hellenized. For Cotton, this is because “most of them do not know Greek.”101 But, as we have seen, Greek might have been spoken and perhaps read by some/many, even if written by only a few/some. Even with his strong view that P.Yadin 1.18 is a Greek document, Wasserstein is at pains to distance Jews from the spectre of Hellenization. He refers to assimilation and integration rather than Hellenization. The environment to which Jews are assimilated, “in spite of using Hellenic elements, is

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not by virtue of that use to be thought of as Hellenized.”¹⁰² Yet the “remarkable degree of assimilation” evident in P.Yadin 1.18 forces him to concede that that same environment was “partly but not completely Hellenized.”¹⁰³ Babatha and Salome may not have had a Greek education, but they were Hellenized in some degree because they were willing to accommodate not insignificant aspects of Graeco-Roman culture.¹⁰⁴ Babatha was not averse, after all, from swearing to the τύχη of the emperor.

The Bar Kokhba archive

Most other published documents from the Judaean desert are very fragmentary.¹⁰⁵ But there is another archive, that of Bar Kokhba, which is significant for the letters it contains: one bundle of fifteen letters found in the so-called Cave of Letters at Nahal Hever;¹⁰⁶ and another 11 letters from Murabba’at.¹⁰⁷ Although Bar Kokhba signed only one,¹⁰⁸ most of the letters were written by

¹⁰² Wasserstein (n. 88) 125. The “assimilation noticed here is not necessarily an assimilation to Hellenism tout court but an assimilation to an environment that in spite of not being Hellenized uses Hellenic elements; and conversely, to an environment that in spite of using Hellenic elements, is not by virtue of that use to be thought of as Hellenized.” See the same tension in Wasserstein (n. 101).

¹⁰³ Wasserstein (n. 88) 125, 129. Cf. Lewis (n. 64) 130, who refers to “the Hellenizing tendencies of the younger generation of Jewish families in the area.”

¹⁰⁴ Hellenization, defined as the common Graeco-Roman culture of the eastern Mediterranean, involved various levels of assimilation, acculturation, and accommodation. Barclay defines assimilation as the degree of social integration with non-Jews (in social interaction and social practices), acculturation as the extent of familiarity with Greek paideia (education, language, and ideology), and accommodation as the reaction to acculturation (whether in the direction of embracing or opposing Greek culture): J.M.G. Barclay, Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE) (Berkeley 1996) 92-98. The benefit of these terms is that they allow for flexible Jewish responses to Hellenism as it was taken over and modified by the Romans (in the early Roman period, 63 BC – AD 135).

¹⁰⁵ See the discussion of Hezser (n. 78) 320-327.

¹⁰⁶ Yadin et al. (n. 64), nos. 49-51, 53-58, 60-63 (Hebrew and Aramaic letters), and nos. 52 and 59 (Greek letters). Nos. 8 (Greek subscription) and 64 (Greek text) are illegible. Bar Kokhba’s followers may have hidden in the cave from the approaching Roman army in the winter of 134/135: Y. Yadin, Bar-Kokhba, the Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Last Jewish Revolt against Imperial Rome (London 1971) 34. See also Y. Yadin, “Expedition D,” IEJ 11 (1961) 36-52.

¹⁰⁷ See J.T. Milik, “Textes hébreux et araméens,” in Benoît et al. (n. 87), nos. 42-52; for the plates see vol. 2, pls. xlv-xlvi.

¹⁰⁸ P.Mur. 43: see Benoît et al. (n. 87) 159-161.
scribes in his name. As well, most of the letters were sent to one or both of two military leaders in Ein Gedi, Yonathes (Yehonathan) son of Beianos (בעין or בעיה) and Masabala son of Shim’on (Shimeon). The Murabba’at letters are written in Hebrew, the “revolutionary” language in which Bar Kokhba’s coins were inscribed. Those from the Cave of Letters are written in Aramaic (8), Hebrew (3-5), and Greek (2). That some of the letters were written in Aramaic and Greek shows, according to Hezser, “that his followers’ familiarity with these everyday languages often prevailed over ideological concerns.”

This is certainly true, except that Aramaic may also have had revolutionary “credentials” because it was written in the same Jewish script as Hebrew.

One of the Greek letters (P.Yadin 2.52, see below, Plate 2) may imply that Greek was used in preference to Hebrew which Bar Kokhba promoted for nationalistic reasons – ἐγράφη δὲ Ἑληνιστὶ διὰ τὸ ὁρμάν μὴ εὑρηθὲν Ἑβαεστὶ γράψαται, “it [scil. the letter] was written in Greek because the effort/desire to write in Hebrew was not to be found” (see Plate 1).

Plate 1: P.Yadin 2.52 ll. 11-15 (courtesy Israel Antiquities Authority; photo Clare Amit)

But the reconstruction τὸ ὁρμάν of Lifshitz has come in for some criticism. Given the nationalistic context, Howard and Shelton argue that (1) lack of motivation would not be an acceptable excuse, and (2) the Doric ὁμῶς is

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109 Yadin (n. 106, Bar Kokhba) 124.
110 For the Greek letters see Yadin (n. 106, “Expedition D”) 42, 44 (nos. 3 and 6); B. Lifshitz, “Papyrus grecs du désert de Juda,” Aegyptus 42 (1962) 240-256; Cotton (n. 78) 351-366.
111 Hezser (n. 78) 283-284. Yadin (n. 106, Bar-Kokhba) 124 suggests “Hebrew had just lately been revived by a Bar-Kokhba decree.”
not used in Classical and koine Greek (ὁρμή).\textsuperscript{113} They suggest a name such as Ἐρμᾶς, i.e., it was written in Greek because Ἐρμᾶν “could not be found to write in Hebrew or Aramaic.”\textsuperscript{114} But, as Obbink observes, Ἐρμᾶς appears to fit the ink traces better than Ἐρμᾶν.\textsuperscript{115} Cotton follows Yadin with διὰ τὸ ἡμᾶς, but reads μὴ εὑρηκέναι Ἑβαεσθαι | ἐγγράψασθαι instead of εὑρήκεναι | γράψασθαι. This reconstruction gains support from the fact that the passive εὑρήκεναι Ἑβαεσθαι would normally require “a purpose clause or an object clause of effort” rather than the infinitive alone. Citing a number of examples, she argues convincingly that εὑρίσκειν followed by an infinitive can mean “to be able” and so translates “because of our inability (= we are unable) to write Hebrew (or Aramaic).”\textsuperscript{116}

Written by a scribe, the letter is signed in Greek by its author Soumaios. He is almost certainly Nabataean\textsuperscript{117} like two witnesses of the same name in the Babatha archive: Σουμαίος Καβαευς (P. Yadin 1.19.34) and Ἀβδερέις Σουμαίος (P. Yadin 1.12, ll. 16-17).\textsuperscript{118} The reference to the “camp of the Jews” (παρεμβολὴ Ἰουδαίων, P. Yadin 2.52, ll. 9-10) is


\textsuperscript{114} According to Howard and Shelton (n. 113) 102, n. 6, “any name which will suit the space and traces will do.”

\textsuperscript{115} D. Obbink, “Bilingual Literacy and Syrian Greek,” BASP 28 (1991) 51-57 at 52, 54. He suggests διὰ τὸ ἡμᾶς in the sense of “opportunity, chance, or means” of doing something, i.e., it “has been written in Greek on account of no opportunity having been found of having it written in Hebrew.” There is, however, no space for five letters between τ and the first μ.


\textsuperscript{117} Obbink (n. 115) 57; see also Lapin (n. 116) 115-116. This rules out Lifshitz’s suggestion ([n. 110] 287) that Sou[mai]os is a Greek transliteration of Shimeon (ben Kosiba). See also H.W. Cotton, “The Bar Kokhba Revolt and the Documents from the Judaean Desert: Nabataean Participation in the Revolt (P. Yadin 52),” in P. Schäfer, The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome (Tübingen 2003) 133-52.

\textsuperscript{118} Cotton (n. 78) 361, n. 24, citing E. Puech, “Présence Arabe dans le manuscrits de “la Grotte aux Lettres” du Wadi Khabra,” in H. Lozachmeur (ed.), Actes de la table ronde internationale organisée par L’Unité de recherche associée 1062 du CRNS, Études sémitiques, au Collège de France, le 13 novembre 1993 (Paris 1995) 39, n. 8, prefers the reconstruction ᾿Αβδαρέις to ᾿Αβδερέις (that of Lewis).
probably another indication of non-Jewish origins. Therefore, as far as Soumaios is concerned, Ἑβραεστί probably refers to Jewish script in general rather than Hebrew or Aramaic specifically. As a Nabataean, Soumaios “would have no problem with [Jewish] Aramaic except for the script,” which is different from that used for Nabataean Aramaic. But Soumaios is not the scribe. The pronoun ἡμᾶς indicates that both the author, Soumaios, and the scribe were unable to write Jewish script.

The letter with its abrupt and commanding style is characteristic of Bar Kokhba, but most of the other letters begin with the name “Shimeon ben/bar Kosiba.” Yadin suggests a connection with P.Yadin 2.57, an Aramaic letter sent to a certain Yehudah at Qiryat Ἄραβαγγα, which was somewhere between Bar Kokhba’s camp and Ein Gedi. The letter orders Yehudah to send two men and two donkeys to the military commanders at Ein Gedi. The donkeys were to be brought back loaded with palm branches and citrons (for the feast of Succoth or Tabernacles). Yadin argues that Yehudah may not have been there when the letter arrived, so Soumaios, a member of his staff, hastily forwarded the letter with a covering note (i.e., P.Yadin 2.52). This would explain why the tone is reminiscent of Bar Kokhba. Soumaios has the scribe write:

m. 1 Σουμαίος Ἰωναθήνει

Βειανού καὶ Ἡμᾶς

ἔπιθαι ἐπεμείβα τρὸς

5 ὑμᾶς Ἀγρίππαν σπουδάσατε πέμσε μοι

ὑρσους καὶ κίτρια,

ὅσον δυνασθήσεται,

ἰς ἱππείβολην Ἰου-

119 Contra Obbink ([n. 115] 56, n. 18), the cultural distancing from Jews used by Christian writers in the NT – e.g., τὸ πάσχα τῶν Ἰουδαίων (John 11:55) – would not apply here.

120 Cotton (n. 78) 359.

121 Yadin (n. 106, Bar-Kokhba) 124.

122 “Shim’on to Yehudah son of Menasheh at Qiryath Ἄραβαγγα (or Ἄραβαγγα): I have delivered to you two donkeys (in order) that you dispatch along with them two men to Yehonathan son of Ba’yan and to Masbalah (in order) that they pack up and deliver to the camp, to you, palm branches and citrons. And you are to send additional persons from your place and let them bring you myrtle branches and willows. And prepare them, and deliver them to the camp (ῥημῶν), because the (or: its) population is large. Farewell” (transl. in Cotton [n. 78] 357).

123 Yadin (n. 106, Bar-Kokhba) 132.
10 δ[α]ϊ[ω]ν καὶ μὴ ἡλ[ω]ς
π[οι]ήσται. ἐγράφη
d[ε]’ Ἐληνιστὶ διὰ
t[ὸ ν] µ[ᾶς] μὴ εὐρή-
k[ε]ναι Ἐβραῖστι
15 ἐ[γγ]ρ[ά]ψασθαι. αὐτὸν
ἀπ[ό]λυσαι τάχιον
d[ὰ τ]ὴν ἑορτὴν
cαι μὴ ἄλλως ποιή-

m.2 Σουμαιος
ἐρρωσο

4 ἐπειδὴ ἔπεμψα 6 πέμψαι 7 κίτρεια 8 δυνασθήσετε 9 εἰς 10 ἄλλως
11, 18-19 ποιήσητε 12 Ἑλληνιστὶ 14 Ἑβραῖστι

"(First hand) Soumaios to Yonathes son of Beianos and to Masabala, greetings. Since I have sent to you Agrippa, hurry to send me wands and citrons, as much as you will be able, for the camp of the Jews, and do not do otherwise. It (scil. the letter) was written in Greek because of our inability to write Jewish script. Release him (i.e., Agrippa) more quickly on account of the festival, and do not do otherwise. (Second hand) Soumaios, farewell."

The military leaders at Ein Gedi, Yonathes and Masabala, seem to have been slow to respond to the request. Another Greek letter (P. Yadin 2.59), which was also sent to Yonathes and which contains no apology for the use of Greek, may refer to their tardiness in the same matter. The first three lines of the letter read:

[Ἀ]ννανος(?) Ιωναθῃ τῶι ἀδελφ
ἐπεὶ Σιμων Χωσιβα αὖθι ἔγραψεν πέμψαι traces
[πρός] χείαν τῶν ἄδελφων ήµῶν

"Annanos (or Aelianus?) to Yonathes his brother, greetings. Since Simon son of Koziba wrote again to send … for the need of our brothers."
(so Yadin [n. 106, Bar-Kokhba] 132). “The cognomen Aelianus is attested even before the Hadrianic period” (Cotton [n. 78] 365 with n. 30).
Yadin describes the military leaders as “people of the land,” a term used “to designate unlearned people not to be relied upon to keep the letter of the law.” But they cannot have been quite so rustic, since the two letters strongly imply that they were able, at the very least, to read Greek. Yadin assumes that Yonathes (Yehonathan) was the brother of Miriam, the first wife of Babatha’s husband Judah. If so, brother and sister, both from Ein Gedi, may have moved in the same socio-economic circles as Judah and Babatha. As for Bar Kokhba himself, two Greek loan-words in his Aramaic letters probably connote an ability to speak Greek. One of the words is found only once in rabbinical literature. This means that the Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Nahal Hever (dated 50 BC - AD 50) could very well have been used by the rebel leader and his men. It provides further evidence for the picture that has emerged of Bar Kokhba and his military leaders as, at a minimum, type 2 or 3 productive bilinguals.

Conclusion

Any attempt to quantify the amount of Greek literacy on display in documents recovered from the Judaean desert is hampered by the unique nature of many of the ostraca, the small number of non-archival papyri, and a preference for Hebrew/Jewish script during the Second and perhaps the First Revolt. Generalizations are, however, still possible. From Masada, a small number of papyri and many more ostraca are probably traceable to private writers (type 1 productive bilinguals) and there are Greek counterparts and more for virtually every kind of text written in Aramaic and Jewish script. The implication is that type 2 productive bilinguals were not wanting. Although the language of the excluded tags, tokens, and lots can only be described as Jewish script, Naveh reaches the conclusion that Aramaic was the main language of spoken

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127 Yadin (n. 106, Bar-Kokhba) 129.
129 Yadin (n. 106, Bar-Kokhba) 233-234. Cf. Lewis (n. 64) 25; Cotton (n. 78) 355.
and written communication. But epithets and nicknames, in particular, demonstrate that Hebrew was also spoken. Therefore, he draws the further justifiable conclusion that “there was a mixture of languages – Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek – and many inhabitants of [first-century] Judaea were bilingual or even trilingual.”

Although scribes wrote the documents in the second-century archives, a minority of witnesses had degrees of Greek literacy, and quite a number of these were probably type 1 productive bilinguals. Despite the nationalistic fervour of the times, indications of cultural accommodation in the women’s archives suggest that Jews outside the Greek cities were not so resistant to Hellenization as to cling to Aramaic like a tenet of faith. Jewish script may have been preferred, but the written use of Greek continued during the Second Revolt. The witnesses who signed in Greek and the two military leaders at Ein Gedi probably had moderate surplus resources like Babatha, Judah, and their extended families. Law courts, general dealings with Romans, and some business activities required communication, whether acquired by primary or secondary means, in Greek. But it appears that few/only some of those with moderate surplus resources went on to become maximally functional bilinguals, or at least that is the impression that the consistent employment of scribes conveys (for the same reason, the number may have been higher). At higher socio-economic levels, secondary and maximally functional (type 1 productive) bilingualism can be assumed, while at lesser levels primary and minimally functional bilingualism was probably quite common. No doubt receptive bilingualism also existed among those who had contact with Greek but did not need to speak or read it.

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133 Yadin and Naveh (n. 65) 8-9. “Hebrew was the language of the priests in the Temple, in particular, and the tongue used to describe religious rites, in general.”

134 This is the whole tendency of Wasserstein’s argument in (n. 101) 118-131.

135 I would like to thank the three anonymous readers whose comments led to improvements in this article.
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