

# Ancient Greek as a Fragmentary Language: What Is ‘Alexandrian Greek’?

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## 1 Introduction: ‘Alexandrian Greek’ as a ‘Restsprache’?

In Chapter 52 of Book 17 of his *Library of History*, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus narrates the foundation of Alexandria in Egypt (331 BCE). The chapter concludes with a description of the city’s size and wealth in Diodorus’ time (1st century BCE), highlighting the extent of its cultural and political influence across the entire ancient Mediterranean

On the whole, the city has grown so much in later times that many rank it first in the civilized world. In beauty, size, abundance of revenue, and goods for luxurious living it is very different from all the rest. The number of its inhabitants surpasses that of those in other cities. (D.S. 17.52.5).<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we shall examine Alexandria both as a real place and as a symbol of an idealized Greek linguistic identity by focusing on the notion of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ that surfaces in Greek erudite sources. In discussing the problems inherent in linguistic investigations of this ancient concept, we also approach ‘Alexandrian Greek’ as exemplary of the ideological connections between several iconic locations, their languages, and individuals’ self-perception. This research was undertaken under the aegis of the European Research Council (ERC) project ‘Purism in Antiquity’ (PURA), which is devoted to Greek lexis and their purist theorization: it is in these lexis in particular that the category of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ acquires metalinguistic significance.

1 We have placed any contextual information provided in round parentheses to make the text easier to follow. Angular brackets indicate supplements to the Greek text adopted by the editors. We are grateful to two anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. Sections 1–3 are by Olga Tribulato, section 4 is by Federico Favi, while section 5 is by both authors. This paper is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, grant agreement no. 865817.

In sections 2 and 3 of this paper, Olga Tribulato discusses the paucity of direct sources, which prohibits any rigorous linguistic analysis of the Greek spoken in Alexandria or its distinction from the more robust linguistic varieties that subsume it, namely the diachronic macro-category of Hellenistic Greek and the diatopic variety of Egyptian Greek that it encompasses, both of which are characterized by their respective diastratic and diamesic variations. Hence, 'Alexandrian Greek' may indeed qualify as a 'Restsprache' of sorts, or perhaps—if we may be permitted the neologism—as a 'Restvarietät': a particular form of post-Classical Greek spoken in one of the Hellenistic Greek world's most significant cultural centres.<sup>2</sup> However, the picture is complicated by ancient testimonies of 'Alexandrian Greek': as Federico Favi demonstrates in sections 4 and 5, certain Greek erudite sources employ the notion of 'Alexandrian Greek' partly as a scholarly artefact and partly as a means by which to identify certain post-Classical developments that belong not to the koine as a whole, but rather to some of its lower registers. 'Alexandrian Greek' is thus not a real 'Restsprache', but a sociolinguistic category that constitutes a diastratic and diaphasic rather than diatopic variety within post-Classical Greek.

## 2 Alexandria and Egypt: A Linguistic and Cultural Melting Pot

Language played a central role in ancient perceptions of Alexandria from its earliest existence. As a powerful political centre under the Ptolemaic dynasty (305–30 BCE), the city was home to important cultural institutions that took centre stage alongside those of Athens—the Greek world's 'cultural capital' from the late 5th century BCE—and of other prominent cities of the Hellenistic world, such as Syracuse and Pergamum. The city's linguistic and cultural amalgamation, spatial extension, high consumption of goods, and an ethnically mixed population made Alexandria a forerunner of later (in some ways 'modern') forms of urbanism (see Fraser 1972: 1, 38–75; Krasilnikoff 2009). Recent studies have overtly defined Alexandria as a cultural melting pot (Hinge & Krasilnikoff 2009: 9), highlighting its propensity (within the broader Egyptian context) to develop a new identity facilitated by the merging of multiple cultures and languages, beginning with Egyptian (see Fraser 1972: 1, 61–62; Bowman & Crowther 2020: 4, the latter focuses on epigraphy, and speaks of 'dual

2 We use the term 'Restsprache' in its technical meaning of 'a language fragmentarily attested' (see Baglioni & Rigobianco in this volume). In this respect, 'Alexandrian Greek' may qualify as what Loporcaro (this volume) calls 'a Restsprache post rem', i.e. a language whose fragmentary status results from external factors.

identities'). This interpretative lens may be fruitfully applied to the linguistic investigation of 'Alexandrian Greek'—in particular with regard to its ancient *perception*.

From a historical linguistic perspective, the Greek spoken in Alexandria must initially have constituted an amalgam of the late-Classical dialects brought to Africa by colonists hailing from different parts of continental Greece, by Macedonians, and by the Doric-speaking inhabitants of Cyrene. Indirect evidence provided by a notorious passage from Theocritus' *Idyll* 15 suggests that Alexandria was a crucible of different linguistic varieties, in addition to demonstrating how dialectal differences were integral to the representation of multiple identities in a shared colonial context. A religious festival at the royal palace serves as meeting place for two Syracusan women, probably residents of Alexandria and 'of respectable status' (Dover 1971: 197). An anonymous man scolds them for their incessant blabber and their 'broad' pronunciation:

(Anonymous passer-by) Stop it, you idiots, chattering all the time, like doves: they'll kill me with all their broad vowels everywhere.

(Praxagora, one of the Syracusan women) Hell, where's that guy from? What's our chattering got to do with you? You better give orders only when you're the master. You're trying to order around Syracusans! And just to make that clear: we are Corinthians originally, just like Bellerophon. We speak Peloponnesian—surely it's alright to speak Dorian if you're a Dorian!? (Theoc. 15.84–93; translation Willi 2012: 265–266)

Greek philologists continue to debate precisely which accent Theocritus intended to represent, but this detail need not concern us here.<sup>3</sup> The passer-by evidently refers to the Doric dialect in its Syracusan variety, whose broad pro-

3 The linguistic interpretation of the scene is complicated by the fact that the Syracusan women, the passer-by, and the other characters in *Idyll* 15 apparently speak the same language, a form of literary Doric that occurs regularly in Theocritus (hence, Dover 1971: 207 wonders whether Theocritus might not have preferred 'consistency to realism'). Magnien's foundational study (1920) perceives a faithful representation of Syracusan (Theocritus' own dialect) in *Idyll* 15. This thesis clashes with the fact that the language of *Idyll* 15 (and generally Theocritus' Doric) exhibits traits that are alien to Syracusan. Ruijgh (1984) later argued that Theocritus' Doric was based on a post-Classical, 'koineized' form of the Doric dialect of Cyrene (in North Africa and under Alexandrian control). Both theses seek an actual model for what is, instead, a *literary* and artificial version of Doric (cf. also Hinge 2009: 73). Willi's (2012) bolder hypothesis proposes that the passer-by's reaction would not be directed against Doric [a:] for koine [ɛ:] (an interpretation already in Hermogenes and the Theocritean scholia: cf. Hinge 2009: 71), but that it may be an observation that Doric was less advanced than the koine with respect to the closing of vowels (see Willi 2012: 276–278).

nunciation he judges to be annoying and coarse. Piqued, the two Syracusans allusively respond that it is normal for *Corinthians* to speak Doric. Syracuse had been founded in early antiquity by Corinth; the implication is thus that the language of those whose roots lie in the Greek mainland is superior to that which has flourished in the more recent colonial context of Ptolemaic Alexandria.

The dialogue implicitly presents two antithetical views of the relationship between dialects and the koine and between the notions of standard and substandard. The two women deem their local dialect to be superior to the shared language that at the time represented the high register on a diglossic continuum (Consani 1991: 16). The passer-by, by contrast, regards dialect as substandard in relation to the koine, the ‘lingua franca’ of official communication in Hellenistic Greece that had developed from a (written) variety of a Classical dialect—Attic. The Alexandrian setting thus inherits linguistic and cultural tensions that have long histories: the very notions of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ are at stake, and Syracuse reclaims a greater centrality than Alexandria as the cultural boundaries of the Greek world are redefined.<sup>4</sup>

Koine has its roots in Classical Attic, a regional dialect that rose to the role of a supraregional variety at the height of Athenian political power by eliminating local and conservative traits (this is the so-called ‘Great Attic’ or ‘Großattisch’ of Thumb’s original formulation (1906); cf. López Eire 1993; Crespo 2006; Crespo 2010; Horrocks 2010: 73–84).<sup>5</sup> In a matter of decades, Attic gradually converged towards Ionic, its closest relative, incorporating several features also shared by the other dialects and thus becoming a truly ‘koinized’ variety (Bubenik 1993; Thumb 1901: 58 already spoke of ‘Koenisierung’).<sup>6</sup> Owing to its swift and pervasive diffusion beyond Greece, koine Greek embodied a standard that included a vast range of diatopic variations and regional standards, the best known of which are those of Attica, Asia Minor, and Egypt (Bubenik 1989: 175–255).<sup>7</sup> At least two diamesic/diastratic varieties can also be distinguished:

4 See Willi (2012) for a discussion of the ‘post-colonial’ tensions discernible in *Idyll* 15.

5 The term is absent in Thumb’s earlier (1901) study, in which he terms ‘Great Attic’ a ‘Verkehrssprache’ (Thumb 1901: 54).

6 Of course, the birth and evolution of the koine are not linear events. One of the thorniest issues in the debate concerns its debt to the Ionic and Doric dialects, particularly with respect to the lexicon: see Cassio (1998: 993) and, previously, Thumb (1901: 53–78).

7 Foundational studies of the koine are also those collected in Brixhe (1993); Brixhe (1996); Brixhe (2001); Hodot (2004). For the coexistence between the koine as a supradialectal standard and local dialects, see Consani (1998) and the recent appraisal of García Ramón (2020). A comparable situation—though obviously produced by completely different socio-historical conditions—is represented by modern Italian, whereby the creation of standard

high-register koine, documented in official inscriptions and literary prose (e.g., Polybius, Diodorus), and low-register koine, evidenced across a broad typological range of texts, including private inscriptions, documentary papyri, technical prose, and the Old and New Testaments (for an overview, see Cassio 1998: 994–999).

Egyptian koine, which has been the focus of several important contributions on the Hellenistic and Roman koine,<sup>8</sup> is unique insofar that it can be studied not only through inscriptions (the language of the urban elites), but also through an imposing collection of papyri, whose authors are not always native hellenophones and which thus may abound in low-register features (Mayser & Schmoll 1970; Gignac 1976–1981; Teodorsson 1977; Horrocks 2010: 111–112, 165–188; and most lately Leiwo 2021). Egyptian koine is distinguished by the frequency of contact phenomena, primarily with Egyptian (late Classical and Demotic) and later with Coptic (Dahlgren 2016; Dahlgren 2017), but also with languages that were introduced to Egypt from the vast Hellenistic world: Persian, Aramaic, Hebrew, and later Latin (Bubenik 1989: 257–281). Errors written into the papyri allow us to identify some traits of spoken/substandard Egyptian koine that result from Egyptian/Coptic, including vocabulary (Torallas Tovar 2014; Torallas Tovar 2017).

Space constraints do not allow us to delve into an in-depth analysis of Egyptian Greek, which would also go beyond the intended readership of the present volume. The following examples are meant to provide readers with a bird's eye view of the range of phonetic and morphological issues that distinguish Egyptian Greek vis-à-vis other varieties of the koine and highlight its precocity with respect to some later developments of Greek. For example, the exchange between the graphemes  $\sigma$  and  $\zeta$ , which reflects the Coptic lack of a phonemic distinction between /s/ and /z/ and between  $\alpha/\varepsilon/\alpha\iota$  and  $o/\omega$  in unstressed syllables.<sup>9</sup> On the whole, this could reflect the assimilation of the low/mid vowels of Greek to the Coptic /ə/ (which in unstressed syllables may have a neutral pronunciation: see Horrocks 2010: 112; for further elements, see Bubenik 1989: 222–225). The papyri also contain several precocious instances of phenomena that would go on to become routine in Medieval Greek. Examples of this include the monophthongization of i-diphthongs and the onset of fricativization of u-diphthongs; the loss of vowel length distinction; the simplification of double consonants; the extension of the third-declension plural marker (-εξ)

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Italian (which has largely supplanted dialectal varieties) has led to the creation of new forms of 'regional standards': see Telmon (1990).

8 See Torallas Tovar (2010) for an overview and the reference cited in this section.

9 For other features, see Dahlgren (2016: 93–101); Dahlgren (2017); Fewster (2002: 235).

from the nominative to the accusative; the gradual replacement of synthetic futures with periphrastic formations; the merging of the aorist and perfect tenses; and the gradual restriction and subsequent loss of the dative (see Horrocks 2010: 111–112, 165–188).

### 3 Describing ‘Alexandrian Greek’: Some Problems

Within the relatively well-documented Egyptian koine, there is a possibility of distinguishing local varieties where a large number of papyri survives (see e.g. Leiwo 2021). Crucially, this is not the case for Alexandria, from where we have no papyri (Torallas Tovar 2021: 153): direct documentation is found exclusively in inscriptions. These have now been collected in the new *Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions* (*CPI*). Its first volume, devoted to Alexandria and the Delta, was published in 2021, replacing Bernard’s 2001 catalogue. A total of 83 inscriptions from Alexandria survive from the Ptolemaic period, out of a total of approximately 650 from Ptolemaic Egypt overall. These can be subdivided into the following categories: decrees (2), civic institutions (5), dedications by and for the royal house (21), dedications to the royal house (10), dedications to deities by individuals (15), honorifics (7), selected funerary texts (4; for the ratio, see *CPI*), and miscellaneous items (e.g., lists of names, 11). All are highly standardized textual typologies, and religious texts predominate.<sup>10</sup> For example, dedications to the royal house consistently begin with the opening formula ὑπὲρ βασιλέως (‘in favour of the king’), whereas dedications to gods and royal personages often consist merely of the divine or royal name in the dative case.<sup>11</sup> Of the two decrees, one (*CPI* no. 1, ca. 290–247 BCE) is very short and fragmentary, whereas the other (*CPI* no. 2, 112 BCE) is highly formulaic.

Only rarely does the lexicon exhibit traits that may have flourished at Alexandria prior to their dissemination elsewhere (a recent analysis of the issue re. Egyptian Greek as a whole is Torallas Tovar 2021). By way of example, out of some other interesting forms, we may consider the term μέλλαξ (‘young boy’), a synonym of μεράκιον, which is used to denote boys who have reached puberty. Epigraphically, μέλλαξ is attested only in Egypt, occurring first at Alexandria (*CPI* no. 49, 134/3 BCE). It is later attested in three late-Imperial inscriptions, in a formula used in papyri containing magical texts and in lexicography. Its dimin-

10 For the centrality of religion in Alexandria, see Fraser (1972: 1, 189–301) and Krasilnikoff (2009: 32–38).

11 The formulaic language of Egyptian dedications is discussed in Baralay (2020).

utive *μελλάκιον* also occurs first in a mid-3rd century BCE funerary inscription from Alexandria (Breccia 1911, no. 192; not included in *CPI*) and then later in only a few Byzantine religious texts. The etymology of *μέλλαξ* is uncertain; it was initially hypothesized as a hypochoristic form derived from the verb-first compound *μελλέφηβος* (meaning ‘one who is about to become an ephebe’), which is a similarly rare word (Baunack 1911: 461). Beekes (2010: 927) includes *μέλλαξ* among pre-Greek words. Alternatively, one might wonder whether the word was influenced by Egyptian: this question lies beyond the scope of this paper, but it merits further analysis.

The second term is *βασίλισσα* (‘queen’). This term occurs frequently in Egyptian koine, replacing the Classical *βασίλεια* (an evolution witnessed by its persistence into Modern Greek), and is most frequently attested in inscriptions from Egypt, Nubia, and Cyrenaica. As ancient Greek lexicography attests, *βασίλισσα* is not unknown to Classical literature: it was used by both the Syracusan playwright Epicharmus and by the Attic playwright Alcaeus Comicus (both 5th century BCE). However, its frequent occurrence in koine Greek as a title for ‘Asian’ kings explains why the strictly purist 2nd-century CE lexicographer Phrynichus condemns the term (*Ecloga* 197; see also § 4). It was the opinion of Phrynichus that Epicharmus, Alcaeus Comicus, or even late-Attic authors such as Xenophon—who also uses *βασίλισσα*—were insufficiently robust models to support the admissibility of the word.

In spite of their differences—*μέλλαξ* is rare and of obscure origin, while *βασίλισσα* is a clear derivation that becomes common in Greek—both terms were objects of interest for ancient lexicographers, who afforded great attention to the lexical developments of post-Classical Greek. Ancient testimonies are crucial in understanding how research on ‘Alexandrian Greek’ has progressed and developed (see the succinct overviews in Fraser 1972: vol. 1, 64, with Fraser 1972: vol. 2, n. 197; Fournet 2009: 4–5; Torallas Tovar 2021: 153–157). Fournet’s (2009) recent study of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ omits any discussion of inscriptions, and devotes only a single page to papyri (Fournet 2009: 6). Aside from a brief sketch of phonology and morphology (Fournet 2009: 13–17), most of Fournet’s analysis focuses on vocabulary—particularly on terms for objects, plants, fish, and food that were discussed in ancient sources (Fournet 2009: 19–67). It is plausible that many of these words were actually in use in Alexandria and its environs (and arguably beyond it), even if, being single lexemes and attested in sources that are chronologically distant from one another, they do not allow us to reconstruct a unified image of the Alexandrian variety.

However, several erudite sources do prove valuable for the linguist as they preserve the views that the ancients themselves had of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ as a linguistic category. This notion conceals a problem that was profoundly recog-

nized among ancient scholars. Speaking ‘good Greek’ (*hellēnizein*) served as a marker of identity and social standing; modelled as it was on Classical literature, it could not be represented by the koine as a whole. Paradoxically, while Alexandria and her cultural institutions contributed to shaping the canons of Greek *paideia* (‘culture, education’), by virtue of the fact that it did not belong within the geographical and chronological confines of Classical Greece, ‘Alexandrian Greek’ was not regarded as a model for aspiring masters of good speech (see Thumb 1901: 170–174). Rather, the categorization of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ was used to indicate unapproved usage.

#### 4 ‘Alexandrian Greek’ in the Erudite Sources: A Scholarly Artefact and What Lies behind It

Thirteen passages in the writings of ancient grammarians and lexicographers discuss forms that qualify as ‘Alexandrian Greek’.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the other ancient sources, which are solely antiquarian in interest (see above), these passages focus on real linguistic issues, ranging from phonology to morphology and semantics. Despite the broad chronological distribution of sources, which ranges from the 2nd century CE (although the ultimate origin of some doctrines is significantly earlier) to the latest phases of the Byzantine Millennium, they all depend—to varying degrees—on scholarly materials and doctrines that may be traced back to the cultural milieu of early Imperial times, particularly the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE.<sup>13</sup> This allows us to examine these sources as a self-contained group, owing to the consistency of the terminology used. Because of spatial limitations, it will not be possible to discuss all thirteen passages and the numerous issues arising from their analysis in this paper. We offer instead a general treatment of a representative selection of these forms to situate the notion of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ within the context of the sociolinguistic terminology of Ancient Greek. We shall also refrain from any investigation of how the notion of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ developed (however, important observations are available in Thumb 1901: 171).

Scholars generally agree that when the ancient sources qualify a form as ‘Alexandrian Greek’, they are actually referring to koine Greek more generally

12 Torallas Tovar (2021, 155–157) deals with further lexicographical passages that refer to ‘Egyptian Greek’.

13 The earliest interest in ‘Alexandrian Greek’ may be traced back to Hellenistic philology (see Ascheri 2010).



and not the local variety spoken in Alexandria (see Fournet 2009: 17). The following example, an entry from the late 2nd-century Atticist lexicon known as the *Antiatticist*, illustrates this point:<sup>14</sup>

Alexandrian Greeks say ἐλέγασαν ('they said'), ἐγράφοσαν ('they wrote'), and the like. (So does also) Lycophron in (his poem) *Alexandra* (line 21): 'The sailors were releasing (the cables) and loosing (ἐσχάζοσαν) (the starting-machines) away from the land' (*Antiatticist* ε 1 Valente).

The *Antiatticist* attempted to mount a programmatic defence of the admissibility of several post-Classical features in the speech of those who wished to speak correct and elegant Greek. The lexicon's typical argumentative strategy is to find parallels in Classical sources that demonstrate that some linguistic features regarded as post-Classical are, in fact, of considerable antiquity and thus prestigious and not to be summarily rejected. The issue with the above entry is that the indicative imperfect 3rd-person plural forms ἐλέγασαν and ἐγράφοσαν have the analogical ending -σαν imported from the sigmatic aorist (see, e.g., ἔλυσαν; the expected forms would have been ἔλεγον and ἔγραφον: in -οσαν of course -ο- is the thematic vowel), a development that is well known from the post-Classical period (Schwyzer 1939: 665–666; Blass & Debrunner 1976: 64 [§ 82]; Gignac 1981: 331–332). The *Antiatticist* illustrates that although forms such as ἐλέγασαν and ἐγράφοσαν were criticized as 'Alexandrian Greek', they actually had a 'nobler' pedigree, as evidenced by the Hellenistic poet Lycophron's use of the imperfect ἐσχάζοσαν in place of the expected ἔσχαζον. We know from other erudite sources that Lycophron's use of this ending was regarded as a feature of his (allegedly) native Ionic dialect (of the Chalcidian variety). This implies that the analogical ending is not a recent development; rather, it is ancient, prestigious, and therefore worthy of later imitation (on these other sources and the conceptual framework, which may certainly be traced back to the Hellenistic philologist Aristophanes of Byzantium, see Slater 1986 *ad* Aristophanes of Byzantium fr. 19A–D).

14 The *Antiatticist*, like Phrynichus' *Ecloga* (see below), is one of the ancient Atticist lexica, only some of which are (more or less) completely preserved. Atticist lexica are typically products of the rhetorical education of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. They played an important part in establishing the archaizing taste which identified Attic literature of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE as the gold standard of correct Greek. Therefore, the principal aim of these lexica was to provide those who aspired to speak and write in an elegant and polished fashion with a selection of forms and expressions taken from the most illustrious writers of Classical Athens.

Given that the analogical ending  $-(\omicron)\sigma\alpha\nu$  is abundant in koine texts that originated outside Alexandria, previous scholarship concluded that a form's qualification as an element of 'Alexandrian Greek' essentially denoted that it was a koine form in opposition to Classical Attic (see Fournet 2009: 15 and 17). This conclusion is certainly sound on a general level, but it warrants further refinement. First, it is unclear why only thirteen sources would label some koine forms as 'Alexandrian Greek', rather than adopting the more common designations, such as  $\sigma\nu\nu\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$  ('the habit'),  $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$  ('the usage'),  $\text{Ἑλληνικόν}$  ('[common, standard, accustomed] Greek'), and  $\tau\omicron$   $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\omicron\nu$  ('common [Greek]'). Moreover, although it is true that forms qualified as 'Alexandrian Greek' may be koine forms in opposition to Classical Attic, it is worth noting that in several sources, 'Alexandrian Greek' forms are also explicitly contrasted with their equivalents in the high koine (the standard post-Classical language used by educated Greeks and accepted by ancient grammarians). Indeed, the analogical ending  $-(\omicron)\sigma\alpha\nu$ , discussed by the *Antiatticist*, is entirely foreign to texts written in high koine, and is confined to documentary sources and to literary texts written in a lower form of koine. These include the Septuagint and the New Testament (see the discussion in § 2 and the bibliography quoted there). Therefore, the qualification of the ending as 'Alexandrian Greek' must indicate that it belongs to the category of low koine.

Evidence in support of this interpretation may be sought in sources that correlate 'Alexandrian Greek' forms with those in popular usage. The most important of these is a grammatical doctrine that may ultimately be traced back to Herodian, the 2nd-century CE grammarian, but that is preserved in the Byzantine grammatical and lexicographical compilations known as *Etymologica* (see Dickey 2007: 91–92):

$\acute{\alpha}\nu\eta\gamma\kappa\alpha\kappa\alpha$  ('I have forced'): One must know that (this form) is barbaric (and is) not found in use among the Greeks ( $\pi\alpha\rho'$   $\text{Ἑλλήσιν ἐν χρήσει}$ ), as Herodian says. In fact, it is only found in the popular usage of the Alexandrians ( $\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu\eta\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \text{Ἀλεξανδρέων}\ \delta\eta\mu\acute{\omega}\delta\epsilon\iota\ \sigma\nu\nu\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\acute{\alpha}\ \epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\sigma\kappa\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ ) (*Etymologicum Genuinum* α 868 Lasserre–Livadaras, see also *Etymologicum Symeonis* α 1027 Lasserre–Livadaras and *Etymologicum Magnum* α 1376 Lasserre–Livadaras).

The term discussed here is the perfect form  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\eta\gamma\kappa\alpha\kappa\alpha$ , from  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\gamma\kappa\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$  ('to force'). The regular perfect of  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\gamma\kappa\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$  is  $\eta\nu\acute{\alpha}\gamma\kappa\alpha\kappa\alpha$ , whereas  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\eta\gamma\kappa\alpha\kappa\alpha$  is the result of a false segmentation. Although  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\gamma\kappa\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$  is a simple verb, it was erroneously interpreted at some point as a prefixed verb (i.e.,  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}$  +  $\text{**}\acute{\alpha}\gamma\kappa\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ ), which led to the creation of a secondary perfect form  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\eta\gamma\kappa\alpha\kappa\alpha$ . The innov-

ative ἀνήγκακα is attested exclusively in Egyptian documentary papyri (see Mandilaras 1973: § 268; Gignac 1981, 252–253).

On the one hand, this confirms that the ‘Alexandrian Greek’ form ἀνήγκακα was a feature of low-register Greek. All papyri in which it occurs are characterized by a linguistic informality, and so ἀνήγκακα must count as an element of everyday koine. We should add that no single occurrence of ἀνήγκακα is found in Greek literary texts, nor does the form appear in documentary texts of a more formal nature and content, such as official inscriptions written in high koine. On the other hand, ἀνήγκακα appears only in Egypt because this is (almost) the only area of the ancient world in which documentary papyri have been found. Therefore, we should not be too hasty in our inference that this corresponds to Herodian’s ascription of ἀνήγκακα to the ‘popular usage of the Alexandrians’, as though this were a diatopic indication—namely, that ἀνήγκακα belonged to the local variety of Greek.

Herodian’s assertion that ἀνήγκακα was ‘barbaric’ and not in use among the Greeks but rather belonged to the popular usage of the Alexandrians requires some clarification insofar as the terminology is concerned. The qualification ‘barbaric’ clearly indicates that ἀνήγκακα is a feature of the low language, but not necessarily that it was confined to speakers of Greek as a second language. More importantly, it does not necessarily follow, based on the mention of the ‘Greeks’ (Ἕλληνες), that native hellenophones would not use this form; rather, the category Ἕλληνες indicates the high koine used by all Greeks in formal texts and speech—the kind of language that ancient grammarians sought to define as the standard (see Swain 1996: 51–52). In light of these clarifications, Herodian’s final remark that ἀνήγκακα was in popular use only among the Alexandrians strengthens the hypothesis that this form is part of the lower diatopic registers of the koine as a whole (i.e., in opposition to the language of the Ἕλληνες and not only to Egyptian Greek). Therefore, the category of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ must surely represent the substandard variety of the koine (see Cassio 1998: 995 n. 22; Ascheri 2010: 142).

Herodian’s passage provides the crucial confirmation that the notion of ‘Alexandrian Greek’, while certainly belonging within the broader category of koine Greek, specifically applies only to select levels of the koine—those that are lower and less formal. This interpretation is corroborated by the comparison of evaluative statements provided by different sources. A particularly relevant example comes from the rich ancient discussion of βετάνιον (‘dish’):

βετάνια: (Meaning) ‘dishes’, as the Alexandrians (say). (This form is already used by) <Alexis (fr. 24.3, 178.9, 178.18 K.–A.)> and Antiphanes in *The Wedding* (fr. 71.1 K.–A.) (*Antiatticist* β 7 Valente).

(Among the names of kitchen utensils are) *πατάνη* and *πατάνιον*, which is a small flat dish [...]. They say that *βατάνιον*, a form which belongs to the usage of the laymen (*ιδιώται*), (occurs) in the *Pannychides* of Hipparchus (fr. 5 K.–A.) (Pollux, *Onomasticon* 10.107–108 Bethe).

Several erudite sources exemplify the interest of ancient scholarship in this word (see also Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 4.169d–f; Hesychius β 318 Latte–Cunningham; Hesychius π 1095 Latte–Cunningham; Photius β 93 Theodoridis). The issue concerns the coexistence of two competing phonetic variants in post-Classical Greek: *πατάνιον* and *βατάνιον*. Most (but not all) ancient scholars held that *πατάνιον* was the correct form, while *βατάνιον* was variously criticized as a late borrowing from Sicilian Greek. Some modern scholars are inclined to agree with the view that *βατάνιον* is a later and possibly vernacular variant of the word (see further Arnott 1996: 117–118), while others explain this oscillation as a reflection of its pre-Greek origin (see Beekes 2010: 1157).

In this context, the *Antiatticist* sought to contest the view that *βατάνιον* ought to be dismissed as ‘Alexandrian Greek’. In support of this argument, the lexicon cites evidence from two famous 4th-century BCE Attic comic poets, Alexis (whose name is restored by the editors) and Antiphanes, who used *βατάνιον* rather than *πατάνιον*. In line with the customary strategy of the *Antiatticist* (see the above discussion of the analogical ending *-(ο)σαν*), these comparisons prove that both forms are ‘good’ Greek and that *βατάνιον* should not be dismissed. The passage in Pollux offers an intriguing parallel to the mention of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ in the entry in the *Antiatticist*. Pollux is aware that *βατάνιον* is occasionally used in Attic comedy, and mentions its occurrence in a comedy by yet another 4th-century BCE comic poet, Hipparchus. He also adds the important remark that *βατάνιον* was regarded as a form that belonged to the usage of the *ιδιώται* (‘unskilled people, laymen, common men’). These constitute a sociolinguistic category that is invoked in lexicographical discourse to represent colloquial or vernacular usage (Matthaios 2013: 107 provides ample documentation for the use of this terminology in Pollux). This parallel strongly reinforces the conclusion that the notion of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ indicates a low, non-literary koine.

As noted above in relation to *ἀνήγκακα*, ‘Alexandrian’ forms were condemned not only by purists, who attempted an archaistic operation, seeking to imitate and revive the type of Greek that had been spoken in Classical Athens, but also by grammarians such as Herodian, who aimed to define the grammatically correct and more stylistically formal koine Greek. As further evidence of this, we cite a passage of Sextus Empiricus’ *Against the Grammarians*, wherein

the sceptic philosopher criticizes attempts to find a rationale for the division of grammatically correct and incorrect Greek:

So it has just been deduced from the consequences of the grammarians' own argument that analogy is superfluous, while the observation of common usage is most useful (εὐχρηστεῖν δὲ τὴν τῆς συνηθείας παρατήρησιν). [...] For they (i.e. the grammarians) define barbarism and solecism by saying that 'barbarism is a mistake against accustomed usage (παρὰ τὴν κοινὴν συνήθειαν) in a single word', and 'solecism is an unaccustomed (ἀσυνήθης) and incongruent mistake in the whole construction'. Against these arguments we can immediately say: but if barbarism occurs in a single word and solecism in the combination of words, and it has been shown earlier that neither a single word nor a combination of words exists, then neither barbarism nor solecism exists. Again, if barbarism is conceived in one word and solecism in a combination of words, but not in the states of affairs underlying these words, then what error have I committed in saying 'he' (οὗτος) while pointing at a woman, or 'she' while indicating a young man? I have not committed a solecism, since I have not uttered a combination of a number of words which do not fit together, but merely the single word 'he' or 'she'. Nor have I committed a barbarism, for the word 'he' (οὗτος) is at all unusual (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀσυνήθης εἶχεν), unlike the forms ἐλήλυθαν and ἀπελήλυθαν used by the Alexandrians. (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians* 209–213, translation Blank 1996: 42–43 with modifications)

In line with sceptical views, Sextus Empiricus highlights the incongruities inherent in the grammarians' reasoning, and aims to demonstrate that a unified theory of correct language is out of reach. His target in this passage is the concept of *συνήθεια*—that is, the accustomed use that coincides with the standard, high koine (see Versteegh 1987: 261). Sextus Empiricus argues against the existence of the concept of 'barbarism', which was defined by grammarians as a mistake in a single word. Sextus Empiricus adopts the argument that the use of a masculine demonstrative pronoun to indicate a woman is obviously incorrect, but that the demonstrative pronoun is not grammatically incorrect *per se*—that is, it does not qualify as barbarism according to the criteria specified by ancient grammarians because it does not violate any norm of correct Greek.

By way of comparison, Sextus Empiricus mentions 'Alexandrian' forms, such as ἐλήλυθαν and ἀπελήλυθαν. These are indicative perfect 3rd-person plural forms which have the analogical ending -αν in place of the expected -ασ(ν); like the ending -(ο)σαν in the imperfect discussed above, these forms were also

created under the influence of the sigmatic aorist (e.g., ἔλυσαν). The use of this analogical ending is a low-koine feature (see Schwyzer 1939: 666; Gignac 1981: 354–355). The only uses of ἐλήλυθαι and its compounds in ancient literary texts are found in a passage from the hexametrical Sibylline Oracles (1.212), in which the analogical ending is a metrically useful variant of the regular ending normally adopted elsewhere, and a passage from the New Testament (*Epistle of James* 5.4), in which it represents a slip into the vernacular language (see Dibelius 1975: 36). Perfect endings of this type occasionally re-emerge in Byzantine literary sources, but even though the perfect ἐλήλυθα is still a relatively high-frequency form, ἐλήλυθαι and its compounds appear a mere four times in total. At this later stage too, ἐλήλυθαι continues to represent an element of the low language that was not normally permitted into the high language during the Byzantine era.<sup>15</sup>

Sextus Empiricus' implication in mentioning ἐλήλυθαι and ἀπελήλυθαι in this context is that while these two forms are grammatically incorrect, οὗτος is most certainly not, even when it is used in the wrong pragmatic context. Sextus Empiricus is correct in citing ἐλήλυθαι and ἀπελήλυθαι as examples of barbarism, given that this type of analogical perfect attracted the criticism of ancient grammarians, who described it as such (see Polybius *De barbarismo et soloecismo* 1 Sandri: '[the barbarism may consist] in the lack [of a syllable], as if one said [...] γέγραφαν and πεποίηκαν instead of γεγράφασι and πεποίηκασι'). Reflection on the terminology adopted by Sextus Empiricus throughout this passage reveals that the notion of correctness exemplified by the συνήθεια is here opposed to ἐλήλυθαι and ἀπελήλυθαι. This observation is relevant to our discussion here: as in the case of ἀνήγκαα, forms that are qualified as 'Alexandrian Greek' are not simply koine forms, but, more specifically, are koine forms that do not belong to the standard high-level koine; rather, they are confined to the lower registers.

## 5 Conclusion

Defining the features of the Greek spoken in Alexandria based on the extant direct sources remains difficult. As a goal, the identification of any kind of 'Alexandrian Greek' as a diatopic variety is less unattainable as it is ill-defined. This negative conclusion is plausible in light of Alexandria's highly varied and

<sup>15</sup> The analogical ending of the perfect also appears occasionally in medieval vernacular texts, in which the perfect is, however, moribund (see *CGMEMG*: 1766).

dynamic society, in which multiple influences co-existed—influences exerted not only by the dialects spoken by the Greek colonists, but also by the various other languages that were spoken in Graeco-Roman Egypt over the course of several centuries. Although the direct evidence remains unsatisfactory, the contribution of ancient erudition is forcefully brought to light. Ancient literary and para-literary sources collect a host of forms that they claim were used in ‘Alexandrian Greek’. Although the majority of these forms are of little or no linguistic interest, a restricted group of thirteen sources warrants closer examination. What this select group of sources refers to when they ascribe a given form to ‘Alexandrian Greek’ is not so much a diatopic variety, such as the Greek spoken in Alexandria, but, rather, a notion of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ to qualify the lower registers of the post-Classical koine as antithetical to both Classical Attic and the high-level koine that was used in literary texts and that represented the linguistic standard of the educated Greeks. This allows us to reflect not only on another important fragmentary variety of Greek—the colloquial and informal language used in everyday conversation and for informal writing—but also on its metalinguistic perception. It is also likely that, in Imperial times, low-register forms were also associated with ‘Alexandrian Greek’ because Alexandria represented the archetype of the Hellenistic metropolis as open, multi-cultural, and multilingual, and thriving both economically and socially. On the one hand, ‘Alexandrian Greek’ is opposed to the idea of linguistic purity, which is connected to the idea that language must be immutable and untouched by external influences; in Greek culture, this idea is typical of the Imperial attempts to revive Classical Attic. On the other hand, ‘Alexandrian Greek’ is also opposed to the idea of linguistic correctness embodied by the standard language—the literary koine used by the educated Greeks—which the ancient grammarians sought to define (see Swain 1996: 20).

Despite some obvious differences, we may cite as a modern comparison the many Italian words, idioms, and colourful—often vulgar—expressions of everyday speech that are presented as examples of the Roman vernacular, as evidenced by the language used in newspapers and other media.<sup>16</sup> These are typically introduced with the formulaic phrase ‘as they say in Rome’. The Italian linguist Pietro Trifone investigated the extent to which the use of this formula reflects the actual linguistic reality (Trifone 2013). Trifone demonstrated that virtually all expressions introduced by this formula are simply colloquialisms not specifically associated with the variety of the Italian language spoken in

16 One may think of words such as *darsi* (literally ‘to give oneself’, meaning ‘to sneak away’) and *impunito* (literally ‘unpunished’, to indicate a rascal).

Rome or with any other local variety. Rather, these expressions are characterized by their ironic, sarcastic, or sneering tone and, more generally, by their tendency towards impolite expression. As such, they are perceived as reflecting the national stereotype of the modern Roman character and the clichés with which it is associated. Trifone concludes that one should take the expression ‘as they say in Rome’ not as the indication of a perceived diatopic variety of Italian, but rather as a reflection of Rome’s symbolic place in the national imagination. The widespread use of ‘as they say in Rome’ in modern Italian shares several key similarities with the way in which some ancient Greek sources employ the notion of ‘Alexandrian Greek’ in reference to elements of the Greek low koine.

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