

INTRODUCTION

This volume arose out of two different but complementary initiatives: the on-line panel *Layout and Materiality of Writing in Ancient Documents from the Archaic Period to Late Antiquity: A Comparative Approach*, held at the Conference in Classics and Ancient History at the University of Coimbra (June 22nd–25th, 2021), and the workshop *Documenti, supporti, layout. Giornata fiorentina fra papirologia ed epigrafia*, organized by the Istituto Papirologico “Girolamo Vitelli” (University of Florence) on May 27th, 2022. The chapters collected here are revised versions of some of the papers given on those occasions.

The motivation behind these initiatives was the need to analyze at a deeper level the interplay between text, layout, and medium in ancient documents, bridging the traditional boundaries between papyrology and epigraphy and fostering a fruitful interdisciplinary approach to the subject. We therefore brought together contributors from different scholarly traditions in order to shed light from various angles on issues of layout, scribal and inscriptional practices and conventions, and document types.

This approach accords with a renewed interest in the materiality of writing in documents from the Greco–Roman past. Papyrology has progressively developed an attention to the material and formal aspects of writing and their interplay with the content of texts,¹ but in the field of epigraphy scholars have only recently begun to consider how these aspects contribute to a deeper understanding of inscribed documents and their context. To name only a few examples, the recent book by Irene Berti and others (2017)² examines how the presence and materiality of written documents interacted with their spatial context, while the volume edited by Andrej and Ivana Petrovic, together with Edmund Thomas (2018),³ highlights the materiality of

¹ For a concise survey of this aspect, see F. Maltomini and S. Perrone, “Greek Literary Papyri in Context: Methodological Issues and Research Perspectives”, in F. Maltomini and S. Perrone (eds.), *Greek Literary Papyri in Context* (TiC 15, 2023), 245–251.

² I. Berti, K. Bolle, F. Opdenhoff, and F. Stroth (eds.), *Writing Matters: Presenting and Perceiving Monumental Inscriptions in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Berlin – Boston 2017; the volume arose out of the research project *Materiale Textkulturen* conducted at the University of Heidelberg from 2011 to 2023 (<<https://www.materiale-textkulturen.org/index.php>>), which resulted in more than thirty volumes about a large variety of text-bearing artifacts across various disciplines and cultures.

³ A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic, and E. Thomas (eds.), *The Materiality of Text: Placement, Perception, and Presence of Inscribed Texts in Classical Antiquity*, Leiden – Boston 2018.

epigraphic texts and how it impacted on their audiences. The very recent collection edited by Erica Angliker and Ilaria Bultrighini (2023)⁴ applies a similar approach to a wide variety of inscribed artifacts, including small portable objects.

This increased focus on the materiality of texts has created fertile ground for cross-disciplinary study of the mutual influence of ancient writing practices, as shown, for instance, by the contributions of Lucio Del Corso and Michele Faraguna on the interplay between documents on perishable and durable materials.⁵ In the same spirit, contributors to this volume were asked to engage with some general issues, such as: the relationship between document types, format, and media; the degree of format standardization in specific categories of documents; what strategies, if any, were adopted by ancient scribes and letter-cutters to improve documents' legibility; cases in which epigraphic documents and texts on perishable media influenced each other in their writing and layout; whether and to what extent inscriptions allow us to gauge the nature of archival records and preservation practices; in what ways did the occurrence of abbreviations, symbols, and lectional signs relate to document types and media, and what was their function within the different contexts.

The chapters span from the Archaic Age to Late Antiquity, and are arranged in two thematic sections that nonetheless engage in dialogue with each other.

The chapters in the first part, titled "Document Types and their Layout", address the topic of layout in relation to different categories of documents, in both public and private spheres.

Examining the inscribed building accounts of classical Athens, Cristina Carusi shows that their epigraphic layout, while clearly influenced by contemporary uses of writing on non-stone media, nonetheless differs from them in significant respects. Their layout was not derived directly from the actual administrative accounts, but was expressly designed for financial documents inscribed on stone, with the goal of maximizing their visual impact on viewers. Visual devices to aid readability were initially prominent features of this layout; over the course of the Classical Age, however, these seem to have gradually lost their importance relative to other considerations; this development went hand in hand with a change in the way the polis

⁴ E. Angliker and I. Bultrighini (eds.), *New Approaches to the Materiality of Text in the Ancient Mediterranean. From Monuments and Buildings to Small Portable Objects*, Turnhout 2023.

⁵ L. Del Corso, "I documenti nella Grecia classica tra produzione e conservazione", *QS* 56, 2002, 155-189; L. Del Corso, "Scritture epigrafiche e scritture su papiro in età ellenistico-romana. Spunti per un confronto", in A.B. García and I. Pérez Martín (eds.), *The Legacy of Bernard de Montfaucon: Three Hundred Years of Studies on Greek Handwriting*, Turnhout 2010, 3-16; L. Del Corso, "Segni e layout delle iscrizioni greche in Egitto. Un sondaggio sui testi esposti in prosa", in G. Nocchi Macedo and M.C. Scappaticcio (eds.), *Signes dans les textes, textes sur les signes. Érudition, lecture et écriture dans le monde gréco-romain*, Liège 2017, 43-59; M. Faraguna, "Interplay between Documents on Different Writing Materials in Classical Greece: *Paragraphoi* and Columnar Formatting", *ZPE* 214, 2020, 115-128.

celebrated its building initiatives. Nonetheless, a multicolumn format remained an inextricable aspect of building accounts inscribed on stone.

The so-called “family-tree stelae” from Classical Athens show how hard it could be to adapt to new circumstances an epigraphic layout originally devised for a different type of genealogical gravestone, one characterized by monolinear, ascending catalogues of ancestors. As Daniela Marchiandi demonstrates, the list-like format was so ingrained in Greek genealogical thinking that it was maintained also for funerary inscriptions on family tombs that emphasized descent rather than ancestry. Stonecutters were forced to come up with new strategies – not always successful – to accommodate possible collateral branches as well as the names of family members who did not die in the same order as they were born.

For the accounts of the Cyrenaean *damiergoi*, Emilio Rosamilia’s analysis reveals that these documents, due to their selectivity, were clearly designed for publication, and, as such, differed significantly from their administrative counterparts. In layout, there is an evolution from an early phase with continuous text, with only a few examples that attempt to isolate some elements in the headings and make them more visible, to the adoption, in the final phase, of the two-sub-column format, which made the structure of the document more discernable and the crop lists more intelligible. The shift from the local acrophonic numeral system to the Milesian numerals in the 260s BCE and the swift abandonment of abbreviations for crop names (which were probably implemented originally under Ptolemaic influence) also suggest an effort to make the text comprehensible to a local audience.

Focusing on Hellenistic royal correspondence inscribed on stone, Alice Ben-civenni presents a glaring case in which it was not the author but the recipients of a text who took the initiative to monumentalize it on stone and design its layout in the new medium, often in conjunction and in dialogue with other documents inscribed on the same stone, such as letters from officials, petitions from individuals or groups, and civic decrees. Recipients appropriated the king’s words and reframed them in line with local epigraphic habits and, most importantly, according to their own needs and goals, often absorbing them into the civic sphere. In some cases, layout devices appear to have been adopted with a view to epigraphic publication of the royal letters, while in others they seem to have belonged to the original letters on perishable material. Moreover, some features of the epigraphic format (e.g., headings, dating formulae, annotations) may shed light on local archival practices. These observations may pave the way for a closer comparative study, in Ptolemaic Egypt, of royal letters on stone and royal epistles and ordinances on perishable material.

The field of correspondence is tackled also by Yasmine Amory, who treats the phenomenon of multiple private letters penned on a single writing medium. Her analysis reveals that, within the standard layout adopted for letters in the Roman and Byzantine periods, there were variants that could accommodate the case of an individual addressing a group of closely related people, or a group of closely related

people addressing the same individual, using the same sheet of papyrus, ostrakon, or wooden tablet. Most of the layout arrangements adopted for this practice seem to have had a functional role specific to the selected medium and the expected modes of reading, and allowed the recipient(s) to grasp at first sight that there were different letters on the same carrier. A more intriguing case is when multiple letters were combined into what appeared, visually, to be a single text, in a type of layout – the “shell letter” – that seems to reflect the close familial and social bond shared by the correspondents. Strategies to guide the recipient through the structure of the document and aid legibility (i.e., the use of *ekthesis*, *eisthesis*, *paragraphoi*, and blank spaces) were nonetheless used. In recent decades, the corpus of private letters on lead and ceramics from the rest of the Greek world has been steadily growing, so the comparative study of layout in letters written on different materials may be pursued further.⁶

A different topic, Roman wills from Egypt, provides a welcome opportunity to consider documents from different stages of a single procedure, from templates and preliminary drafts, to original wills written on wax tablets, to papyrus records of opening of wills, as well as copies and translations of them. Lucia Colella’s survey allows us to appreciate how analysis of material features, paleography, and *mise en page* is crucial for understanding the nature of each of the documents involved. Layout devices seem to have featured in the templates that *nomikoi* likely used to draft wills in Latin in accordance with the requirements of Roman law, of which testators, heirs, legatees, and witnesses were often ignorant; scribes often reproduced them in the original wills and in the opening records and translations. Interestingly, after 235 CE, when a constitution of Severus Alexander permitted Roman citizens to write their wills in Greek, documents seem to make less use of layout strategies, as if the abandonment of Latin templates made them become less standardized, or, in our view, a more familiar language made the use of legibility aids unnecessary. Along the same lines, abbreviations are mostly used in Latin texts for formulaic phrases and technical terms, whereas they are usually resolved both in Greek translations and in post-235 wills, since Greek speakers would hardly have understood them.

Finally, Francesca Maltomini and Francesca Murano show us that in the earliest examples of Greek texts of applied magic, layout strategies, when present, follow basic criteria of textual arrangement – such as the columnar format of lists of names – rather than specifically “magical” criteria, which probably indicates that magical knowledge had not yet been codified and systematized. On the other hand, magical handbooks from the well-established Greco-Egyptian tradition, in

⁶ Important insights can be found in M. Dana’s book, *La correspondance grecque privée sur plomb et sur tesson: corpus épigraphique et commentaire historique*, Munich 2021. See also A. Sarri, *Material Aspects of Letter Writing in the Graeco-Roman World: c. 500 BC – c. AD 200*, Berlin – Boston 2018. The comparative analysis is complex because the use of different material media and the layout choices that inevitably followed do not directly overlap in their chronology.

which the use of semantically non-specific elements such as *voces magicae*, vowel sequences, and *charakteres* became standard features, did prescribe layout strategies, often figurative ones, precisely for these semantically non-specific elements of the spells. Clearly, the use of layout strategies was not aimed at readability but at enhancing the effectiveness of spells, in which the semantically non-specific elements were believed to be the actual carriers of magical power. Interestingly, however, in the few cases where it is possible to compare different renditions of the same magical text, often involving the transition from one material medium to another, it appears that practitioners could choose not to comply entirely with the handbooks' instructions, especially when faced with practical obstacles such as a lack of space on the writing surface.

This group of case studies show that there was often a close link between the type of document and the format adopted, and between the format and the medium employed. On the one hand, samples of accounting documents from Athens and Cyrene as well as royal epistles and related documents on stone feature some layout elements and lectional signs that appear to persist within the same type of document from one medium to another. But, on the other hand, quite often epigraphic versions have their own specific characteristics expressly designed for the stone medium and with a view to their publication. Similarly, the *mise en page* of multiple letters and Roman wills changes according to the material aspects of the chosen medium. The physical constraints of different media may also explain to a certain extent why, in the case of magical texts, the use of layout strategies often varies between handbooks on papyrus and actual magical objects.

Despite the specificities just noted, an interaction between documents written on perishable and durable materials remains significant in several cases, and for certain types of documents it may contribute to our knowledge of archival practices.

There is usually a high degree of standardization within each category of documents, so much so that, in the case of the family-tree stelae, the traditional "genealogical" format is not abandoned even when it proves less effective and needs to be reworked. Similarly, in the Athenian building accounts, the columnar arrangement remains an essential element even when the format has evolved relative to the original purpose. The "shell letter" itself reproduces the format of individual letters from the Roman and Byzantine periods. Likewise, once magical knowledge was systematized in handbooks from the Greco-Egyptian tradition and reliance on semantically non-specific elements became a standard feature of spells, the use of layout strategies spread as a common technique to increase the efficacy of the parts of the text that were believed to have the greatest magical power. When we can follow the trajectory of a type of epigraphic document over a long period, such as the more than two-hundred years of the Cyrenaean *damiergoi's* accounts, we see an interesting evolution in the layout, but it still seems to be characterized, in its various stages, by a standardization in format.

Readability is always a crucial factor in shaping layout, though admittedly this takes different forms depending on the medium and the intended audience. While in some instances there is an effort to make documents more intelligible in their political and cultural context – as in the case of the Cyrenaean *damiergoi*'s accounts – in others readability may take second place behind other needs – as in the case of later Athenian building accounts and of multiple letters combined in a “shell letter” – or may lose its importance when cultural barriers are removed – as in the case of Roman wills from Egypt after 235 CE. In magical texts, where efficacy trumps readability, its importance may yield to practical needs.

Ultimately, it appears that the authors of written documents had a clear awareness of the different recipients implied by different types of documents, intended for different media, in a constant tension between adherence to standard formats and the need to modify them according to circumstance, due to cultural as well as social and political factors.

The chapters of the second part of the volume, titled “Trends, Habits, and Strategies”, deal with the way that layout choices, including the use of lectional signs and abbreviations, affected the processes of writing, inscribing, or re-inscribing documents across time, space, and genres.

Davide Amendola's extensive analysis of *paragraphoi* in inscriptions from the Archaic Age to the late Hellenistic period throughout the Greek world reveals that their occurrence in epigraphic documents, starting as early as the late sixth century, is neither isolated nor sporadic. Moreover, *paragraphoi* are not redundant or superfluous elements preserved only residually in the transition from perishable to durable media, since they tend to crop up systematically in certain types of documents, especially those composed of several clauses. Rather, *paragraphoi* are often conceived as functional signs that helped readers or viewers to navigate the epigraphic text (at times in conjunction with other layout devices such as various types of dots and indentations), and some of their graphic variants seem to have been expressly designed for epigraphic use. These observations prompt reflections on the identity of those who designed the layout of epigraphic texts, but also lead to a reconsideration of the relationship between documents on perishable media and inscriptions, which did not necessarily run in only one direction.

The layout strategies adopted in the *Leukophryena* epigraphic dossier from the agora of Magnesia on the Maeander are explored by Flavio Santini. The spatial setting of the dossier in Magnesia's public landscape, its overall design, and the presence of visual devices (*ekthesis*, vacats, long dashes) all converge to indicate not simply that the layout of the dossier was carefully planned, but more importantly that all these aspects were intended to improve its readability, probably with a view to public readings that took place in a cultic context. In this case too, lectional signs seem not to have been residual (i.e., carried over from documents on perishable materi-

als) but to be consistently and inherently functional for the epigraphic rendering of the dossier. In general, the meticulous planning of the dossier by the Magnesians was not determined by the political actors who recognized the new Panhellenic games for Artemis and the inviolability of the city, but served the celebratory goals of the local community, and may have been related to the redesign and monumentalization of Magnesia's civic center at a crucial moment in the city's history.

To investigate layout choices, Leon Battista Borsano focuses on the phenomenon of re-engraving older dedicatory inscriptions at a later point in time. He shows that, even when the production of a new epigraphic version of the same text was motivated by the need to replace the original inscription and re-enact its function and content, there was a general departure from the initial layout. In particular, features that were perceived as outdated in a new or different cultural context were abandoned. Cases where the new version acknowledges the existence of the previous one and explicitly quotes it – mostly belonging to the religious sphere (e.g., hymns, ritual norms, lists of priests) – are rarer and harder to evaluate. Most importantly, when there was a significant spatial distance between the original and its subsequent version(s), the text was likely transmitted via perishable media; as a result, it is impossible to determine to what extent subsequent versions retained the features of the original epigraphic layout. At any rate, when stonecutters were able to interact with the previous text that they had to reproduce in a new version, they – unsurprisingly – show a keen awareness of the ways layout choices would affect their audiences' perception of the monument. Future research should investigate, where possible, the relationship between the type of document and the ways its layout and other features may have been readjusted when it was re-engraved.

Still on the topic of re-engraving older inscriptions, Abigail Graham discusses the two epigraphic versions of Hadrian's letter to Aphrodisias on exemption from nail taxes, inscribed in two different locations in the city some fifty or a hundred years apart. Her analysis allows us to assess how far stonecutters and/or the commissioners of monumental inscriptions were guided by the context, location, and purpose of the monument as well as by the expectations of the intended audience when they reshaped the visual arrangement of a text. The earlier version of the letter is part of a small epigraphic dossier that probably attested the emperor's continued support for the city while at the same time honoring prominent local figures; the later version, in contrast, is part of a massive dossier of imperial correspondence from over three-hundred years, inscribed in one of the most prominent places in the urban space, as a kind of giant manifesto attesting the city's special status. Differences in layout and letterform, the choice of visual devices, such as blank spaces, lectional signs, *hederae distinguentes*, and *litterae notabiliores*, and even editing of the text all reflect the function and meaning of each version: they set different emphases as they make the writing visually engaging and accessible. Just as importantly, this case study shows how far the attitudes of epigraphists have changed: discrepancies

and changes from one text to another that in the past used to be labeled as accidental mistakes or inaccuracies are now recognized as deliberate choices determined by the medium, context, and function of each version of the text.

On a different note, Bianca Borrelli treats examples of publicly displayed writing on perishable materials, which have survived only from ancient Egypt, namely some papyri written for temporary display or as exercises by scribes training to write documents for display. Direct and indirect evidence for the use of large letters in displayed writing on perishable media confirms that it was a graphic choice determined by the need to make the text as visible as possible even at a distance. Not unexpectedly, the types of documents in which large letters were used (or for which their use was prescribed) were tax-farming laws and royal ordinances meant for temporary display and placards for temporary notices and dedications. In addition to other devices for improving the visibility of the text (e.g., the *chiaroscuro* effect, wider spacing between letters and lines, and, in one case, the reproduction of a *tabula ansata*), the typically epigraphic form of some letters reveals that the format of these documents was influenced by that of inscriptions displayed on durable media.

Moving to Late Antiquity, Nicola Reggiani's treatment of abbreviations shows, from the evidence of Greek post-Constantinian documentary papyri from Egypt, that the Christian use of the monogram *chi-rho* (Ϡ) was rather limited, and that the name Χριστός was usually abbreviated according to the rules of *nomina sacra*. Byzantine documents, too, feature the simple cross (*stauros*, †), or the staurogram (‡) rather than the *chi-rho*. The well-established secular use of the *chi-rho* in the documentary evidence may have prevented its Christian meaning from being applied in non-literary papyri. In Ptolemaic papyri, it was frequently, though not systematically used to abbreviate common words beginning with χρ-; in Roman papyri its use appears to decrease before and particularly after 313 CE, but it persists as an abbreviation for some new words and technical terms. Clearly there was no fixed rule, and personal habits and local administrative customs played the main role. Only in medical papyri does the monogram appear frequently, mostly in the second and third centuries CE, to express the term χρῶ, the imperative "use", in prescriptions and recipes, where it gradually lost its syntactic function and became a semiotic device. Given the widespread use of monograms with both symbolic and aesthetic value in late antique epigraphy, intersections between documents on different kinds of media in the use of this feature are certainly worth further study.

About Greek documents inscribed on architecture, Anna Sitz observes that from the Archaic to the Roman imperial period lengthy documents or dossiers of documents carved on walls were usually arranged in columns in a neat and orderly layout, often featuring reading aids. Yet case studies from Asia Minor show that in Late Antiquity this layout was abandoned in favor of continuous, elongated texts that occupied all the available wall space. Epigraphic documents thus created a new relationship with their writing medium, in which the ornamental function of writing became

prominent and the synergy of text and architecture – planned for by architects and stonecutters in the design of buildings – obviously aimed at aesthetic effects. Some paleographical elements that were clearly derived from the papyrus drafts of the inscriptions also seem to have been employed not just for functional purposes but also for decorative ones. In the same way, monograms integrated into the decorative apparatus of churches conveyed messages that went beyond their textual content.

Finally, Lucio Del Corso shows how a different perception of writing across the late antique Greek East, in which script and letters came to be regarded primarily as images of symbolic value, can be traced in both public and private uses of epigraphy in Egypt. In public epigraphy, the need for self-representation by the local elites who gained prominence through the Severan reforms produced inscriptions in which, despite local variations in script and lettering, the layout was generally designed to communicate all relevant information to a public with differing levels of literacy. From the Tetrarchic period onward, by contrast, visual devices to aid legibility were abandoned, and writing seems to have been conceived primarily as a decorative element, in which the geometrical arrangement of the letters was emphasized and lectional signs were employed for ornamental purposes. It seems that the authorities no longer felt the need to disseminate relevant information to a wider audience and were instead using writing as a self-celebratory manifestation of power. Similarly, in funerary epigraphy, the neatly arranged writing and lectional signs that oriented readers gave way to a deconstruction of the layout, aiming to display the script as a mere sequence of strokes and signs. The erection of funerary inscriptions no longer signaled adherence to a social and a cultural milieu, but became a purely symbolic gesture, in which writing expressed a message beyond its literal meaning.

This group of case studies shows that, when creating a written document on perishable or durable material, scribes and stonecutters took into account the type of document, its context, purpose, and intended recipients in the design of its layout and visual features. Adaptations and changes, be they detectable or reasonably assumed, concerned not only the transfer from a perishable medium to a durable one, but also different versions made for the same or a similar type of medium, as the instances of re-inscribed dedicatory inscriptions and Hadrian's letters to Aphrodisias reveal.

Lectional signs, such as *paragraphoi*, and other visual devices attested in the epigraphic evidence may, up to a point, serve as clues to help us visualize the formatting of original records written on perishable media. Yet the deeper we delve into the analysis, the more we discover that their epigraphic renderings are not necessarily residual elements carried over in the transition from one medium to the other, but rather have their own function and sometimes even a specific graphic shape. In fact, the way the interaction between perishable media, particularly papyri, and durable media has traditionally been perceived should sometimes be reversed: as the example of publicly displayed writing on perishable media from Egypt shows, significant influences between the two spheres could run both ways.

The case studies on public epigraphy in this volume prompt us to reflect more generally on the complexity of the process that led from written to inscribed texts. It becomes inevitable that we acknowledge the role played by the various documentary steps – not only the administrative records but also the preparatory drafts for the engraving – and the different writing materials involved in each stage, as well as that of the people who, in different capacities, authored the original records, compiled the drafts, and engraved the actual inscriptions.

As for layout strategies, if we take a broader spatial and temporal perspective it becomes even more evident that standard formats were usually bent, adapted, or outright abandoned according to cultural, social, and political circumstance. The case studies from Late Antiquity examined here are particularly instructive in this regard, and show how the altered function of writing in a completely changed cultural and political context brought with it not only an evolution from previous layout arrangements, but also an entirely different approach to the issue of readability. Against this background, the analysis of monograms conducted here reveals that abbreviations could lose their textual content, which was superseded by the symbolic value they expressed as images. Similarly, paleographical elements and lectional signs in epigraphic contexts appear to have been repurposed for decorative rather than practical needs.

From these observations it is clear to us that each document, regardless of its medium and writing technique, needs to be investigated as an object in its own right, that is, as a product of the specific cultural, political, and social dynamics within which it was conceived. As the chapters collected in this volume show, the conventional but constraining boundaries between papyrology and epigraphy need to be overcome. Only by doing so can we effectively investigate the interplay between text, layout, and medium in ancient documents.

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