A general definition of the ancient letter would be a message written on a transferable medium to be carried by a third person to the addressee for the purpose of communication between sender(s) and addressee(s), who are separated by distance. Essential elements of a letter are the sender, the addressee, the message, the medium, and the carrier. However, if one looks at the surviving corpus of letters from Graeco-Roman times, one realises that this general definition covers only partly the scope of letter writing. Besides ordinary letters that functioned as messages for the communication between two parties, letters were also used in official life for administrative purposes or as an outer format for many other types of texts, such as contracts or literary treatises.

The list of types of letters that existed according to their content and function can become long, depending on the degree of detail with which one wishes to analyse the categories. Since Hellenistic and Roman times there have been several treatises on epistolary theory that have tried to distinguish types of letters. Each theorist, according to his perspective and cultural background, has presented a different number and classification of the types of letters. For example Cicero distinguished between two types of letters, public and private, and different styles of letters, of which he mentioned two, the serious and the intimate or humorous. Ps.-Demetrius categorised letters according to their style into twenty-one types, while a treatise attributed to the rhetor Libanius or Proclus mentions forty-one types according to their style.

In modern times, Sykutris made a typological categorisation of ancient letters according to their content, distinguishing them as private, as literary (recognising that the borders between literary and private letters can be blurred), as forms of public speech, as moral teachings or literature, as pseudepigrapha letters, as official
letters.\textsuperscript{12} In the papyrological database of \textit{HGV}, which contains records for almost all published letters surviving on their original materials, mainly from Egypt but also from other places in the Graeco-Roman world, letters have been divided into three types: official, business and private (some, especially fragmentary ones, are uncategorised), although as explained below, it may be preferable to divide them into two types, official and private.\textsuperscript{13}

It is clear from the above that the definition of ancient letters is complicated, not only due to the great differentiation between the types of letters, the blurred borders between and the mixing of some categories, but also because of the broad applicability of the epistolary form for other types of texts. The boundaries that distinguish letters from other types of texts are not always clear, a difficulty that was already recognised by ancient epistolary theorists.\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, neither the use nor the format of ancient letters was stable, but it developed over time, according to the socio-political context and the communicational needs of each period, parallel to development in the meaning of the Greek term “ἐπιστολή” (epistle, letter) and the gradual establishment of letter writing in the Graeco-Roman world. It has therefore seemed preferable to define ancient letters by giving a brief description of the evolution of the function and applicability of letters, as well as of the sense of the term ἐπιστολή from the earliest surviving evidence in archaic times to the end of the Roman period, by which time the definition of the term “letter” had clearly stabilised.

1.1 The Use of Letters in Official Life

Letter writing was used in the ancient Near East long before the earliest attestations of Greek letters.\textsuperscript{15} In the Greek world the earliest references to letters begin in archaic literature with the letter mentioned in the story of Bellerophontes, which contained a malign message instructing the addressee to kill the letter carrier (Homer, \textit{Iliad} VI 118). In classical times, and especially in the last half of the fifth century, references to letters in literature multiply in a way that shows that people were familiar with letter writing in their private life. For example, letters were presented in drama to

\textsuperscript{12} Sykutris 1931.
\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden Ägyptens (HGV)} database is available at http://aquila.zaw.uni-heidelberg.de/start (last accessed: 1.11.2014). For the typological categorization of letters see also the discussion below p. 65ff.
\textsuperscript{14} For example Demetrius, while commenting on the proper length of a letter, states that “the length of a letter, no less than its range of style, should be restricted. Those that are too long, not to mention too inflated in style, are not in any true sense letters at all but treatises with the heading, ‘Dear Sir’. This is true of many of Platos’, and of that of Thucydides.” (\textit{De elocutione} 228, transl. Innes 1999\textsuperscript{2}).
\textsuperscript{15} For letter writing in Pharaonic Egypt see Bakir 1970; Meltzer 1990. For the ancient Near Eastern kingdoms see Bryce 2003; Cancik/Kirschbaum 1996; Eidem/Læssøe 2001.
advance the plot, such as the letter of Iphigenia in Euripides’ *Iphigenia Taurica*, which propels the plot to the recognition between Iphigenia and Orestes. It has been stated that in many cases the letters that appear in archaic and classical literature were used to convey secretive, suspicious, deceptive messages, as in the letter of Phaedra in Euripides *Hippolytus*, which leads to the death of Hippolytus, and in the letter of Agamemnon in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, which leads to the death of Iphigenia, suggesting that letter writing may have had negative connotations in classical times.\(^{16}\) A relevant statement of Aeschylus in the *Supplices* that oral speech guarantees the truth of the words seems to reflect this view.\(^{17}\) Along the same lines is a joke in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazousae*, ταῦτ’ἐγὼ φανερῶς λέγω· τὰ δ’ἄλλα μετὰ τῆς γραμματέως συγγράψομαι (“That is what I announce publicly; as to certain other points I will record them in the secretary’s minutes”).\(^{18}\)

It has been suggested that the negative connotations that letters appear to have in sixth and fifth century literature and the respective trust in the oral word may be related to the political conditions that applied in the societies where the literature was created.\(^{19}\) In democratic Athens, where all public matters used to be discussed openly in the assembly, letters with private messages could have been regarded as suspicious. For this reason, in democratic cities like Athens, communication between the city and its delegates, ambassadors or generals, used to be carried out by heralds. Since anything related to public matters did not need to be kept secret from the citizens, messages did not have to be kept secret from the heralds. For official dealings with other states, ambassadors (πρέσβεις) were usually sent, who represented the city as its delegates. Official messages between cities used to be delivered orally by messengers (ἄγγελοι) or heralds (κήρυκες).\(^{20}\) For longer distances or at war campaigns fast-runners were preferred as messengers; these were called day-runners (ἡμεροδρόμοι) or runner-heralds (δρομοκήρυκες).\(^{21}\) The advantage of oral messages was that messages had better chances to survive, if heralds encountered hard conditions or even enemies.\(^{22}\) This is the reason given by Euripides in *Iphigenia Taurica*

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16 Harris 1989, 88; Rosenmeyer 2001, 61–97, esp. 71.
17 Aeschylus, *Supplices* 946–949 ταῦτ’οὐ πίναξίν ἐστιν ἐγγεγραμμένα οὐδ’ἐν πτυχαῖς βύβλων κατεσφραγισμένα, σαφῆ δ’ἀκούεις ἐξ ἐλευθεροστόμου γλώσσης, “these words are not written on tablets, nor sealed up in a folded sheet of papyrus: you hear them plainly from the lips and tongue of a free man.” (Transl. Sommerstein 2008).
20 For the delivery of messages in archaic and classical Greece see Lewis 1996, 142–153.
21 Famous is the ἡμεροδρόμης Φιλιππίδης, who ran from Athens to Sparta in two days (Herodotus 6.105). See also Aeschines, *De falsa legatione* 130 for the δρομοκήρυκες of Phalaecus, the Phocian tyrant.
22 Heralds were sacred in antiquity and, even if enemies captured them, they would not be tortured to reveal the message (Lewis 1996, 148); whereas a letter could be lost or caught by an enemy on the
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when Iphigenia disclosed the content of her letter in order to enhance the chances of its secure delivery. However, messengers carried mostly oral messages, they also carried letters if required. The carrier of a letter usually knew the information written in the message and could give additional information and clarification if necessary.

Contrary to Athens, in monarchic and oligarchic regimes letters were common for official communications, because private dealings were part of the way of ruling, and messages needed to be carried for that reason in secrecy. There are several examples of letters in the Histories of Herodotus that were delivered secretly; these mostly relate to Persian kings or Greek tyrants and elites. Both Herodotus and Xenophon describe the efficiency of the Persian postal system, which enabled the speediest possible delivery of messages in antiquity and enabled the control and administration of the vast Persian Empire. The postal system consisted of a network of roads, with post stations on the way, placed at a distance equal to one-day journey-by-horse from each other. The letter carriers (called ἄγαροι) carried the messages in relay, each carrier being responsible to carry the message for a fixed distance and deliver it to the post station, from where the next letter carrier would carry it further. The relay post system required a trustworthy way to guarantee the authenticity of the messages, and it has been suggested that this was perhaps managed by equipping the royal messengers and envoys with a royal seal. In oligarchic Sparta, letters were used in official communications for the transfer of messages between the ephors and generals who had been sent to war campaigns, and they were written with the cryptographic method of the scytale.

The above views about the use of letters in official life, however, need not imply that letters were not common in the private life of Athens and other cities of the classical Greek world. As the evidence of lead letters shows, letter writing must have been

way. For example, Thucydides (4,50) reports that the Athenians caught a carrier and confiscated a letter that he was carrying from Artaphernes to the Spartans.

23 Euripides, Iphigenia Taurica 727–787.
25 Herodotus focuses on the ways that were devised for the delivery of letters; for example the letter from Harpagus to Cyrus was transferred in a hare (Herodotus 1.123); the letter from Histiaeus to Aristogoras was tattooed on the head of a slave (Herodotus 5.35); the letter from Demaratos to the Spartans was hidden under the wax layer on a wooden tablet (Herodotus 7.239). See further Rosenmeyer 2001, 45–60; Ceccarelli 2013, 113–130; Sickinger 2013, 126–127.
26 Herodotus 8.98; Xenophon, Cyropaedia 8.6.17–18.
28 A stick of wood with a strip of leather wound around it, on which the sender wrote the message. The recipient had a stick of the same diameter as the sender, so when he received the strip, he wrapped it around his stick to read the message.
29 The view of Lewis 1996, 142 and Harris 1989, 88 that personal communication through letters was not common in Classical Greece may be explained by the fact that relatively few letters on lead had
common for communications related to private life in the whole archaic and classical Greek world. Although lead is not mentioned as a writing material in any of the classical literary sources, thanks to their durable material, letters on lead sheets have survived from various places of the ancient world, including Athens. These letters are representative of the private correspondence that circulated in archaic and classical times, while those written on perishable materials (e.g. wood) have been much more poorly preserved. The content of the surviving letters on lead shows that they were used for private communications, such as sending information, instructions, requests or other messages to relatives, friends or business associates. They were exchanged among ordinary people, including traders, women, slaves.

The linguistic style of the surviving letters on lead sheets and in contemporary literature shows that the basic epistolary formulas in the opening address and perhaps in the farewell greeting probably got standardised around the early fourth century BC. This suggests that by that time letter writing had been common and probably began to enter the public life of Athens too, since from about this time the use of official letters begins to be attested in Athens. According to the sophist Lucianus, the demagogue Kleon sent a letter to the Athenians from Sphakteria and in the lexicon of Moeris it is reported that Kleon was the first to use the epistolary opening χαίρειν, despite the sad news that he included in his letter.32 Nikias’ letter in Thucydides is the earliest surviving letter from an Athenian general to the assembly.33 Thucydides explains Nikias’ reasons for preferring a letter over an oral message delivered by heralds, emphasising that Nikias wanted his words to be transferred exactly to the assembly, and he did not trust that the heralds would describe the situation accurately.34 Nikias’ view of the letter as an accurate means for direct communication is an aspect of letter writing which will be emphatically expressed by epistolary theorists in later times.35 The written message was useful as a carrier of the exact words of the sender, and the deliverer was supposed to provide some extra information. The letter from Nikias to the Athenians was read to the Athenians in the assembly and the letter carriers announced additionally what Nikias had told them. The case of Nikias’ letter indicates that in the fifth century written messages were thought as useful for the delivery of the exact words of the sender, however oral messages had not yet been replaced by letters.

been published by the early 1990s. Since then, the evidence has greatly increased, revealing that letters were extensively used in private life.

30 For the letters from archaic and classical times see below p. 40ff. and 53ff.
31 Lucianus, Pro lapsu inter salutandum 3.
32 Aelius Moeris Atticista, Lexicon atticum, letter χι 37.
33 Thucydides 7.10–14.
34 Thucydides 7.8.2.
35 For example, according to Demetrius’ De elocutione 223, 227, letters functioned like speech in a written medium, like half of a dialogue, expressing exactly the mind of the author.
In the course of the fourth century the use of letters was gradually established in the official life of cities. Xenophon reveals that by his time letters were commonly used for official communications between generals and their cities in both Sparta and Athens. The gradual change in the way that letters were used may be viewed as part of the overall tendency to replace oral speech with the written word in the end of the fifth century. This, for example, can be clearly observed in Athenian courts, where witness statements used to be presented orally and decrees to be read aloud by clerks in the courts, but from about 380 BC testimonies were deposited in writing by the litigant to the court. The change from the oral to the written word was slow, since the belief that oral speech was more trustworthy than written did not cease to exist. As Isocrates comments, oral advice is preferable to advice through letters, because everyone believes the oral word more than the written one.

Later, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, this attitude changed and letters were used as a way to authorise official communications between cities or between generals and their cities and/or other generals. A characteristic example that illustrates the change in the way that letters were regarded in the Greek world is the story of Amasis and Polykrates, as narrated both by Herodotus and the Hellenistic historian Diodorus Siculus. According to Herodotus (3.40–42), Amasis sent a letter to his friend Polykrates, and the latter replied with a letter. After receiving Polykrates’ reply, Amasis decided to officially end his relationship with Polykrates and sent a herald to announce it. However, in the account of Diodorus (1.95), the means of communications are inverted: Amasis sent first heralds to Polykrates to advise him to change his way of life, and when Polykrates refused to follow his advice, he sent a letter to officially end their relationship. The difference in the means of communication is indicative of the different role that letters played in official communications in Hellenistic times.

In Greece, letter writing was consolidated in the official life during the rule of Philip II and his son Alexander. A trustworthy and efficient system of letter writers and carriers was essential for monarchic regimes, in order to send messages confidentially, to communicate information between the ruler and remote regions of the Empire, and to manage any other administrative requirements. Such systems had already been developed in the ancient Near Eastern kingdoms, and Philip and Alexander used them, too, for the administration of their kingdoms and for official communications with the cities. Philip is reported as the founder of the royal chancery in Greece and of the introduction of the post of γραμματεύς (secretary) the official letter writer. Demosthenes and Aeschines refer to various letters from Greek kings and tyrants, but

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36 Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.7.4 and 1.7.17, from Athenian generals to Athens; *Hellenica* 1.1.23 from a Spartan general to Sparta (caught on the way by the Athenians).
37 Todd 1993, 96 n. 20.
mostly to letters from Philip.³⁹ It seems that this way of communication through letters had also an impact on how letters were used by democratic states. Thus, in Athens decisions continued to be discussed in the assembly and published as decrees, but letters were also common for official communications and were received in a formal way by the city: as Aristotle described, heralds or ambassadors would go to the prytaneis to announce their messages and letters had to be delivered to the prytaneis, too.⁴⁰ A public hearing of the letters in the ἐκκλησία followed, which is reminiscent of the reading of the letter of Nikias mentioned above.⁴¹ Communications of Athens with generals who were on campaign or with other cities continued to be made through heralds and ambassadors, respectively, but communications from Athenian envoys to Athens were accomplished through letters.⁴²

In Hellenistic kingdoms, the letters of kings acquired an official character, and many of them were published on stone like decrees in earlier times. The publication of kings’ letters on stone began under Alexander and increased under the rule of his successors.⁴³ These letters had legislative power, replacing the decrees that democratic cities used to issue in the past. The publication was occasionally instructed by the kings, but in most cases it was decided upon by the recipient cities as an indication of loyalty to the king.⁴⁴ The cities usually rushed to publish centrally and thus “petrify” especially those letters that carried favourable decisions for them, while they were reluctant to publish those letters that were not favourable to them.⁴⁵

A large number of official letters from Hellenistic times have survived thanks to their publication on stone.⁴⁶ However, the volume of letters used in the administration can be viewed most clearly in Egypt. There, the attested official correspondence is not limited to the types of letters that we know of from inscriptions, but includes all kinds of letters that were used for official communications at all levels, such as orders, instructions, requests, exchange of information between officials etc. Soil conditions have not permitted the survival of letters in Alexandria, where the Ptolemaic court was located, but many letters have been found in the Fayum or along the Nile valley,

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³⁹ Letters from Thracian kings to Athens are referred to in Demosthenes, In Aristocratem 151. Letters from Philip are mentioned, e.g., in Demosthenes Olynthiaca 6; De Halonneso 1; De Chersoneso 17; In epistulam Philippi; De corona 39, 77, 166, 221; De falsa legatione 38, 40, 51, 161. See further examples in Sickinger 2013, 129–130, and Ceccarelli 2013, 266.
⁴⁰ Aristotle, Ἀθηναίων πολιτεία 43.6.
⁴² E.g. Demosthenes, De falsa legatione 174. See also Ceccarelli 2013, 275.
⁴⁴ This was part of a mutual relationship of euergetism and loyalty between kings and cities, which is also evident in the language of the letters. See Ma 1999, 179–242.
⁴⁵ Welles 1934, xi–xli.
⁴⁶ See Welles 1934; Bencivenni 2014, 165–171 with a list of letters from the Seleukid and Attalid kingdoms.
in archives of minor officials. In other regions of the Graeco-Roman world the volume of epistolography must have been equally large, but original letters written on perishable materials have not survived.

An effective system of official communications requires a trustworthy postal service. In Greece, the postal service of official letters was probably systematised under Alexander, who adopted the system of the Persian Empire, and his successors continued and advanced it. Direct evidence about the postal system of the Hellenistic kingdoms is relatively little, because letters and documents recording the deliveries of letters used to be written on perishable materials. For the Seleucid Empire it is known that a satrapal system existed, which was responsible for the copying and forwarding of letters at the local level. Diodorus reports that Antigonos Monophthalmos controlled Asia Minor through fire-signalers (πυρσοί) and letter carriers (βιβλιαφόροι).

More details are known about the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt, where surviving papyrus documents provide information about the function of a relay postal service. P.Hib. I 110 (259–253 BC), a daybook of a Ptolemaic postal station in the north of the Herakleopolite nome, records items received and dispatched from a station. The postal service staff were Greeks, perhaps cavalry men who were detached for this service. A clerk in the post station, called the ὤρογράφος, wrote in a daybook the hours when the post was received and dispatched. Each carrier was appointed for a specific distance to deliver the items to the next post station, which, as it appears from the records in the papyrus, was at about six hours distance on horse-back. The service was intended exclusively for the king, but high officials may have benefited from it, too, such as Apollonios, the finance minister of Ptolemy II, who sent frequently letters to his agent Zenon, although there is no evidence either way.

The Romans adopted and advanced further the Hellenistic postal systems. Although during the Roman republic, there was no public postal service and the delivery of both private and official letters letters was done by slaves or freedmen called tabellarii, after the conquest of Egypt, Augustus established a public postal service, the so-called cursus publicus. This was based on the already existing relay system of couriers, which Augustus later reformed with a relay of post stations, where the courier could find accommodation and provisions, but also could change his horse or wagon. In comparison to the earlier relay systems, the Roman system offered enhanced security for the delivery of the letters, because it was the same letter carrier who took the letter from the sender and delivered it to the addressee.

### Notes

48 Diodorus Siculus, 19.57.5.
49 Llewelyn 1994 revised earlier interpretations of P.Hib. I 110, especially Preisigke 1907.
50 For the postal system in Ptolemaic Egypt see Remijsen 2007, 131–135.
51 For the postal service in Hellenistic and Roman times see Llewelyn 1994; Kolb 2000, and especially for Egypt Kolb 1997; Kovarik 2010.
52 Suetonius, Augustus 49.
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The cursus publicus were maintained by locals as a liturgy, and official couriers were supplied with diplomata (authorising letters by the emperor or the governor of a province) which entitled them to use the staging posts and provisions for free. The cursus publicus could also be used by other individuals, but with compensation; however, there is evidence that the system was sometimes abused, especially by official and military personnel. More specifically, an edict by the prefect L. Aemilius Rectus, dated to AD 42, warned those who abused the cursus publicus, referring especially to military (στρατευομένων), police (μαχαιροφόρων) and other public service personnel (τῶν ὑπηρετῶν τῶ[ν] ἐπί τι[α]ς δημοσ[ίας] χρήαις (l. χρείαις)).

The praefect’s edict may partly explain the disproportionally large number of private letters from Roman soldiers and high state officials within the corpus of extant letters from Roman Egypt. Although Romans did not overwhelm the local population, Roman soldiers or other military and administrative officials may be overrepresented, thanks to their access to the official postal service for their private letters. Soldiers’ letters could also be carried by fellow soldiers who happened to travel in the right direction or sent to a central office to be forwarded to the family of the soldier in the Egyptian chora; for example, there is a letter from Apion, a recruit in the Roman army, to his father in Philadelphiea in Egypt, which, as it appears from the two addresses on the back, was first sent to a secretary of the army in Alexandria, who then forwarded it to the father of Apion in Philadelphiea.

The sophisticated system of official letters that was developed in Hellenistic and Roman times can also be demonstrated by the variety in the typology of letters that were used according to specific situations. Although the standard epistolary format was employed for any type of official communication, a detailed formalisation and categorisation of letters was gradually established, to distinguish between the different types that were appropriate for particular purposes. Thus, in Hellenistic times, royal ordinances and decisions to subject cities were written in epistolary format, identified as προστάγματα or διαγράμματα; circular letters to officials were iden-

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53 P.Lond. III 1171 v (c).
54 For example P.Mich. VIII 465 (AD 108) is a letter from a soldier to his mother, in which he asked her to send to him some linens through a friend of his located at Alexandria. Similarly, in P.Mich. VIII 490 (2nd c. AD) a soldier asked his mother to write back, mentioning that, if she could not find anyone to carry the letter, she should send it to Sokrates (probably a fellow soldier) who could send it over to him.
56 E.g. UPZ I 112.7 (204 BC). The distinction between the διάγραμμα and the letter is not always clear
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tified as ἐντολαί (commands);\(^{57}\) petitions to the kings were called ἐντεύξεις;\(^{58}\) and reports or petitions to officials were called υπομνήματα (memoranda).\(^{59}\) Epistolary format was also adopted for private documents or contracts; for example the so-called χειρόγραφον (autograph contract) is a contract introduced like a letter, which in Hellenistic times replaced earlier types of contracts.\(^{60}\) Receipts too were often styled like letters.\(^{61}\)

In Roman times, the categorisation of epistolary documents appears to have become even more precise, with the employment of special secretaries for the composition of each type of letter or document; for example the secretaries who were responsible for Latin and Greek letters were the so-called ab epistulis and ab epistulis Graecis respectively; the so-called a libellis dealt with petitions, the so-called a memoria were probably responsible for keeping records, etc.\(^{62}\) The main types of official letters that were issued by emperors were three: γράμματα or ἐπιστολαί (letters), προστάγματα (edicta), which were ordinances to the people of the whole Empire or of a city or province and opened with the phrase “the emperor says” (λέγει or dicit), and ἐντολαί (mandata) which were instructions to officials, especially governors. Petitions to emperors were named βιβλίδια (libelli), and the answers to the petitions were called ἀντιγραφαί (rescriptα) or υπογραφαί (subscriptiones), because they used to be written either at the bottom of the sheet of the petition or in a separate sheet.\(^{63}\)

All the above categories of documents have the basic external characteristics of letters, but each type has further special characteristics, being structurally specialised according to its function and purpose. The formalisation of the characteristics of each type of “epistolary” document was a gradual process. The terminology that was used to describe each particular type of “epistolary” document was gradually defined, too, in parallel to the structural formalisation of each type of document. The terminology used for the different types of epistolary documents in papyrological evidence shows that in the Roman period a document in epistolary format was distinct from a letter. For example, in a private letter of the early second century (P.Brem. 51)

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\(^{57}\) E.g. UPZ I 106 (99 BC).
\(^{58}\) E.g. UPZ I 41 (161/160 BC).
\(^{59}\) E.g. P.Köln V 223 (145 BC).
\(^{60}\) For the χειρόγραφον in Hellenistic and Roman times see Yiftach-Firanko 2008a and 2008b; Vandorpe 2013.
\(^{61}\) E.g. P.Cair.Zen. III 59345 (245 BC) is a receipt in the form of a letter.
\(^{62}\) See further Corcoran 2014, 187–190.
\(^{63}\) See further Jördens 1997, 326–331, with further bibliography provided therein.
the author states: (3–5) συνήλιξα ἐ

[ ] τῇ ἐπιστολῇ χειρόγραφα (“I have attached contracts to the letter”) and (11–13) ἐπιστολὴν ἔπεμψα Διοσκόρου τοῦ Οὐαμβ̣ᾶθ̣ι, ἐν ὡ

(l. ᾗ) συνήλιξα αὐτοῦ διαγραφήν (“I sent the letter of Dioskoros son of Ouambathes, in which I attached his contract”). Similarly, a petition was defined as a βιβλίδιον and was distinguished from an ἐπιστολή, despite the fact that a petition is very close in format and function to a letter.

In parallel to the terminological specification of the different categories of documents in epistolary format, the sense of the term ἐπιστολή got narrower too. The broader the epistolary format was applied for other types of texts the narrower the sense of the term ἐπιστολή itself became, until it described specifically “a written message from one person (or set of people) to another, requiring to be set down in a tangible medium, which itself is to be physically conveyed from sender(s) to recipient(s).” This development and stabilisation was gradual, but it seems that by the end of the third century AD the term ἐπιστολὴ specified a letter. However, the correct use of the terminology was not consistent, since it depended on how precisely any given writer employed the terms. Roman officials were very accurate with the terminology of documents, but ordinary people in the provinces, such as the Egyptian chora, were not always equally precise. People often used ἐπιστολή for any document that was sent like a letter. For example the papyrus BGU IV 1199 (4 BC) contains a copy of an edict from the praefect C. Turannius, which is referred to as copy of a letter (ἀντίγραφον ἐπιστολῆς). Similarly, the “prefectorial letters” mentioned in P.Worp. 51 (3 ἐπιστολῶν ἡγεμονικῶν) and P.Sarap. 84 a ii (6–7 ἐπιστολὴν ἡγεμονικῆν) could refer to letters or other documents sent by the prefect of Egypt.

In modern scholarship, there is occasionally disagreement about the definition of documents in epistolary format, with some scholars naming every document that has the external characteristics of a letter a “letter” and others preferring to define each epistolary document according to its particular typological category. However, if basic epistolary formulaic elements, such as the opening address, are regarded as

64 Other examples are PSI IX 1042.10 (3rd c. AD) and P.Oxy. XXXIV 2728.29 (AD 312–318), where there are references to orders (ἐντολικά).
65 For the formulaic and structural elements of petitions see White 1972a.
66 Definition of the letter by Trapp 2003, 1.
67 See Jördens 2009, 339 with n. 38.
68 Although it cannot be excluded that the ἐπιστολὴ ἡγεμονικῆ could refer to a letter or petition addressing the praefect, as explained by Cuvigny (P.Worp. 51.3n.), it seems more likely that it was a letter or document sent from the prefect.
69 For example P.Bad. IV 73 (2nd c. AD) begins as a letter but in fact it is an order to pay: Gonis 1998, 190 with n. 17; Papathomas 2010b, 208. Other examples are the letters/orders of the Heroninus archive, which are written in epistolary format; many of them close with the epistolary farewell greeting ἔρρωσθαι σε εὐχομαι (“I pray for your health”) while others close with the documentary signature σεσημείωμαι (“I have signed”) (cf. the examples in P.Flor. II), but despite this external differentiation, they are similar in content.
the basis for the definition of a document as a letter, then every document or text in epistolary format would qualify to be a letter. On the other hand, if one defines as a letter only what was called ἐπιστολή in ancient times, the boundaries become gradually narrower, since over time the terminology became more detailed and specific, in parallel to the expansion of the applicability of the epistolary format for administrative and other types of texts. Although the latter definition is preferable from a scholarly point of view, it requires specialist knowledge of the development and use of the terms over time.

1.2 Greek Terminology of Letters

1.2.1 Ἐπιστολή, ἐπιστολογράφος, ἐπιστολαφόρος

The word ἐπιστολή is the standard Greek term for a letter, however it did not have this narrow sense in archaic and classical times. As already stated, this sense developed gradually, in parallel to the establishment of letter writing in the Greek world.70 In archaic and early classical Greek literature (6th–early 5th c. BC) the term ἐπιστολή was used to refer to orders or instructions or to a message transferred orally or in written form.71 The specification that a message was in written form was indicated either by an additional reference to the writing, usually by the plural γράμματα or any other derivative of γράφω, or by reference to the physical medium on which a letter was written, with βύβλος for papyrus, πίναξ or δέλτος for a wooden tablet, and μολύβδιον for a lead sheet.72 Each of the terms, according to its inherent meaning,
focuses on a different aspect of the letter: the ἐπιστολή to the message, the materials (βύβλος, πίναξ, δέλτος) to the medium, the γράμματα to the writing, the πτυχαί to the folds and, by extension, to the privacy of a folded letter. Diminutive forms of the above terms were also used metonymically to refer to a letter or to another piece of writing written on them. For example in SEG XXVI 845, which is a lead letter, the author refers to the letter as μολίβδιον. In Ionian areas, where skin (διφθέρα) was the common writing material, διφθέρια used to refer metonymically to documents. In Aristophanes’ Frogs the βιβλίον refers to a literary work written on a papyrus roll.

From about the last decades of the fifth century BC, the term ἐπιστολή started to be used on its own, without being accompanied by a reference to the writing or to the material, in order to specify that the letter was in written form; however, at the same time, it did not cease to be used to refer to oral messages as well. Two characteristic examples, both dating to the last decades of the fifth century, are Nikias’ letter in Thucydides and Euripides’ Andromache and Iphigenia Aulidensis. In Nikias’ letter to the Athenians, the word ἐπιστολή alone is used to refer to a written letter without any additional reference to the material or to the writing, but a few lines later the same word is used to refer to verbal messages. Similarly, in Euripides’ Andromache, the word ἐπιστολή refers to oral instructions, but in Iphigenia Aulidensis, the last of Euripides’ tragedies, the old servant of Agamemnon used the word ἐπιστολή to refer to Agamemnon’s letter, which Menelaus had taken from his hands.

By the early fourth century, ἐπιστολή was used almost exclusively for a written letter. In Isocrates, the noun ἐπιστολή and the verb ἐπιστέλλω mean almost everywhere “letter” and “send a letter,” respectively. In Xenophon, ἐπιστολή always
The establishment of the word ἐπιστολή as the standard term for a written letter can be further confirmed by the formation of derivatives related to letter writing from the fourth century BC onwards, such as ἐπιστολιμαῖος (in or of letters), ἐπιστολικός (suited to a letter, in the style of letters), ἐπιστολεύς (admiral second in command), ἐπιστολαφόρος (letter carrier), ἐπιστολογράφος (letter writer). However, careful attention to the derivatives of ἐπιστολή suggests that in the fourth century BC the term did not refer to the letter as a whole, but focused mostly on the written message. This appears most clearly from an examination of the development and use of the derivative ἐπιστολ(ι)αφόρος (letter carrier). The word ἐπιστολαφόρος is used by Xenophon to refer to Hypermenes, who was ἐπιστολεύς, a title in the Spartan navy referring to the vice admiral, the second in command below the ναύαρχος. Elsewhere Xenophon mentions that Hippocrates, ἐπιστολεύς of the Spartan navy, was carrying a letter to Sparta, when he was caught on the way by the Athenians, which may suggest that one of the main duties of an ἐπιστολεύς was the transfer of messages. However, after this single instance in Xenophon, the word ἐπιστολ(ι)αφόρος/ἐπιστολοφόρος does not appear in any other literary text of the Hellenistic period or in any of the documentary papyri or inscriptions of the same period, which suggests that the ἐπιστολαφόρος, though introduced by Xenophon, did not get established in Hellenistic times.

The standard term for the letter carrier until the end of the Hellenistic period is βυβλιαφόρος (or βιβλιαφόρος), which literally means “papyrus-roll carrier.” This is confirmed by numerous instances of βυβλιαφόρος in papyri of Ptolemaic Egypt, and literary sources of the same period. The term βυβλιαφόρος (or βιβλιαφόρος) continued to be used until early Roman times, when it was replaced by the ἐπιστολοφόρος/ἐπιστολαφόρος. The earliest certainly dated instance of ἐπιστολαφόρος in papyri

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81 ἐπιστολή in the singular for one letter and in the plural for more letters, is attested twenty one times in Xenophon’s works, and in all these cases it refers to written letters. Ceccarelli 2013, 18 with n. 68.

82 LSJ s.v.: e.g., Demosthenes, Philippiica 1.19 ἐπιστολιμαίους ταύτας δυνάμεις (“those forces sent by letter”) refers to military forces promised by letter and decreed, but never sent.

83 LSJ s.v.: e.g. ps.-Demetrius, Τύποι ἐπιστολικοί (Epistolary Types).

84 Xenophon, Hellenica 2.1.7; 4.8.11; 5.1.5–6; 6.2.25; Plutarch, Lysandrus 7.2; Pollux I 96.

85 Xenophon, Hellenica 1.1.23. Pritchett 1974, 45–46 with n. 64.

86 A search for ἐπιστολαφ-/ἐπιστολαφ- in the papyri.info and The Packard Humanities Institute online database did not return any results from the Hellenistic period (search conducted in July 2014).

87 Search in papyri.info returned seven instances of βυβλιαφ-, all of them dating to Hellenistic times; e.g. P.Hal. 76 (232 BC); BGU VI 1232.2, 8 (111/110 BC); P.Oxy. IV 710.2 (111 BC). Search for the spelling βιβλιαφ- did not return any instances (search conducted in August 2014).

88 E.g. in Diodorus Siculus 2.26.8; 11.21.4; 11.28.5; 11.45.2; 13.54.3; 14.101.2; 19.11.1; 19.13.5; 19.13.7; 19.14.4; 19.57.5; 19.85.5; 19.100.3; 20.18.1; in the Septuaginta translation of Esther 3.13; 8.10; in Polybius 4.22.2; Fragment 138.
Greek Terminology of Letters

appears in AD 136 (P.Berl. Leihg. II 46.14) and after that it is well attested until late Roman times. Unlike the word ἐπιστολοφόρος/ἐπιστολαφόρος (letter carrier), which was not common before Roman times, the word ἐπιστολογράφος (letter writer) was established very early. Characteristic is a papyrus of the third century BC, where both words are used in parallel, βυβλιαφόρος to refer to a letter carrier and ἐπιστολογράφος to refer to a letter writer. The delay in the establishment of ἐπιστολοφόρος indicates that although the term ἐπιστολή was used to refer to a letter since early Hellenistic times, it focused on the message and not on the physical object of the letter, while in Roman times it referred to the letter as a whole, including both its content and its material aspects.

In the Roman period the words βύβλος and βιβλίον (papyrus roll) ceased to be used for reference to the papyrus material, and metonymically to anything written in a papyrus roll, being replaced by the χάρτης and χαρτίον (papyrus sheet). Thus, a sheet that was intended to be used for letter writing would be specified as χάρτης ἐπιστολικός in Roman times. The term βιβλίον got limited to its metonymic use for a book, containing literature or documents, in which sense it continues to be used in Greek today. The diminutive, βιβλίδιον, which in Hellenistic times had the same sense as βιβλίον, in Roman times referred specifically to a petition, translating the Latin term *libellus*.

1.2.2 Ἐπιστόλιον

In Hellenistic texts the ἐπιστόλιον is used as a diminutive form of the word ἐπιστολή, without any apparent semantic difference. In texts of the Roman period, however, ἐπιστόλιον sometimes reveals a difference in sense from ἐπιστολή, focusing mostly on material aspects of the letter and denoting a compact physical object. This slight difference between ἐπιστόλιον and ἐπιστολή becomes more evident when both words are used in the same text.

From the Hellenistic period there are four papyri where both ἐπιστολή and ἐπιστόλιον are used in the same text, and as it appears from the context the two

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89 There are currently sixteen instances in the papyri of the word ἐπιστολοφ- and two instances of the form ἐπιστολοφ-, all of them dating to Roman times; e.g. P.Ryl. II 78.24–25 (157 BC); P.Petaus 84.3 (AD 185); SB XII 10941.9–10 (AD 217/218); P.Flor. II 154.13 (AD 267); P.Oxy. XII 1587.6 (AD 276–300); P.Mich. III 217.21 (AD 297).

90 P.Ryl. IV 555 (257 BC). For other instances of ἐπιστολογράφος in papyri of the 3rd c. BC see e.g. P.Col. IV 63.26 (257 BC); P.Hamb. II 176.1 (241 BC); P.Ryl. IV 555.15 (257 BC).

91 E.g. SB VI 9017 no 15 (14/22nd c. AD) 5–6 χάρτην ἐπιστολικόν.

92 E.g. in IG XI 4, 1299.25 (Delos, ca. 200 BC) βιβλίδιον means the same as βιβλίον, but in P.Oxy. VII 1070.32 (3rd c. AD) it refers to the petition. For the sense of βιβλίδιον in Roman times see also Wilcken (1920, 10 n. 3).
words are virtually synonymous. Either word is accompanied by verbs that refer to the content of the message, such as γράφω, or to the physical object, such as κομίζω, ἀποδίδωμι, without any discernible preference of one word over the other for a particular context.93

In the Roman period there are many cases where both ἐπιστολή and ἐπιστόλιον appear.94 In some, ἐπιστόλιον is used as a diminutive form of ἐπιστολή without any significant difference in sense, but in most cases the ἐπιστόλιον appears to focus primarily on the material object of the letter as a compact and transferable artifact. The difference between ἐπιστόλιον and ἐπιστολή becomes clear from the verbs that are usually employed with either word. In letters where both ἐπιστολή and ἐπιστόλιον appear, ἐπιστολή tends to be governed by verbs that refer to the content, such as γράφω, while ἐπιστόλιον often goes with verbs meaning to “transfer” or “deliver”, focusing on the medium, such as (ἀνα)δίδωμι, (δια)πέμπω, κομίζω/κομίζομαι.

Although there are some instances of ἐπιστολή with γράφω or with ἀναγιγνώσκω, these are relatively few. More specifically, in cases where both ἐπιστολή and ἐπιστόλιον are attested in the same text, the verb κομίζω is employed five times with ἐπιστόλιον (or ἐπιστολίδιον) and twice with ἐπιστολή;95 (δια)πέμπω appears six times with ἐπιστόλιον and twice with ἐπιστολή;96 (ἀνα)δίδωμι is used three times with

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93 P.Cair.Zen. I 59044.1–2 ἀποδοῦναι αὐτῶι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον (“deliver the letter to him”), 12–13 ἐν τῇ παρ᾽ Ἰκε[σίο]υ ἐπιστολῆι (“in the letter from Hikesios”) (257 BC); PSI IV 425.19 τὰ ἐπιστόλια μεταγράψαι (“transcribe the letters”), 23–24 ἐν ἐνίοις (i.e. ἐπιστολίοις) γὰρ γέγραπται διὰ τῆς παρὰ τοῦ δεῖνος ἐπιστολῆς (“for in some letters it is written ‘through the letter from X’”) (mid 3rd c. BC); SB X 10272.10–11 παρὰ Θρασέου ἐπιστολήν μοι ἐκομισάμην τὸ παρὰ σοῦ γρ(αφὲν) ἐπ(τόλιον) (“I have received the letter that you have written”) (118 BC).

94 BGU III 811 (AD 98–102); P.Giss. I 73 (AD 113–120); P.Giss. Univ. III 20 (AD 113–117); P.Oxy. XIV 1757 (post AD 138); P.Oxy. XII 1481 (early 2nd c. AD); P.Strasb. VII 606 (early 2nd c. AD); P.Hamb. I 88 (mid 2nd c. AD); SB XVIII 13867 (mid 2nd c. AD); P.Mil. Vogl. II 61 (2nd c. AD); P.Mich. XV 751 (late 2nd c. AD); P.Mich. XV 752 (late 2nd c. AD); SB XVI 12579 (late 2nd c. AD); P.Mich. VIII 508 (2nd/3rd c. AD); P.Oxy. XLI 2983 (2nd/3rd c. AD); P.Meyer 20 (first half of 3rd c. AD); BGU III 814 (3rd c. AD; P.Merton I 28 (late 3rd c. AD); P.Prag. I 108 (AD 258–266); SB XII 11153 (3rd/4th c. AD).

95 BGU III 811.6 δυς (l. δῷς) τ[ῷ] κομίζο̣ντί σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον (“give to the man who is bringing you this letter”) (AD 98–102); P.Mil.Vogl. II 61.19 κόμισα ... καὶ Δημητρίου ἐπιστολ[ί]διον (“bring also a letter from Demetrios”) (2nd c. AD); P.Mich. XV 751.7 σοῦ ἐκομισάμην (l. ἐκομισάμην) μου (l. μου) ἐπιστόλιον (“they did not bring a letter for me”) (late 2nd c. AD); P.Mich. XV 752.29–30 ἐκσκομισάμην (l. ἐκομισάμην) σοῦ ἐπιστόλιον (“I have I have received a letter from you”) (late 2nd c. AD); BGU III 814.34 καλώς [ποιήσεις κ]ομισάμενος (l. κομισαμένη?) σοῦ τὸ ἐπιστόλιον (“you will do well to bring me the letter”) (3rd c. AD); P.Giss. I 73.3–4 ἐκομισάμην (or ἐκ[δεξά]μην) σοῦ τὴν ἐπιστολήν (“I received your letter”) (AD 113–120); P.Oxy. XII 1481.9 τῆν ἐπιστολὴν [σου] ἐκομισάμην (“I received your letter”) this case is uncertain and it has not been counted (2nd c. AD); P.Meyer 20.43–44 μίαν σου ἐ[π]ὶ [ο]λὴν ἐκομισάμην μόνην (“I received only one letter from you”) (3rd c. AD).

96 P.Giss. I 73.5 δρέφος ἐπιστολ[ί]διον πεπομφὼς (“I ought to have sent a letter”) (AD 113–120); P.Giss.
The term ἐπιστόλιον is sometimes used to refer to a letter on an ostracon, but these cases are limited.\(^{101}\) The word was mostly used for references to letters on papyrus, while ὀστράκον or its diminutive ὀστράκιον are more often attested for letters on ostraca.\(^{102}\) This difference appears clearly in O.Claud. I 174 (early 2nd c. AD), where there is a reference to a past letter on an ostracon: ἔγραψα υμῖν δι’ ἑτέρου ὀστρακίου (“I have written to you in another letter”); and a few lines below the sender asks the addressee to send over any letters that have been sent to him from Egypt: πέμψατε ὅσα ποτὲ ἦνέχθη μοι ἐπιστολῶν ἀπὸ Αἰγύπτου (“send any letters that have been sent to me from

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97 P.Oxy. XIV 1757.21 διὰ τοῦ ἀναδιδόντος σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον (“through the man who is delivering this letter to you”) (post AD 138); P.Merton I 28.9–11 δύνῃ δῶναι (l. δοῦναι) Διδύματι ἢ τῷ συνερχομένῳ αὐτῷ ἐπιστόλιον (“you might give a letter to Didymas or to his companion”) (late 3rd c. AD); SB XII 11153.6–8 δότε τὸ ἐπιστόλιον (l. ἐπιστόλιον) Τρυφωνίδι (“give the letter to Tryphon”) (3rd c. AD).

98 P.Strasb. VII 606.24 ἵππαξ ἐπιστόλον (“receive a letter”) (early 2nd c. AD); P.Hamb. I 88.3 ἔχαρην αὐτῶν σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον (“I was glad to receive your letter”) (mid 2nd c. AD).

99 P.Oxy. XIV 1757.19 γράφων μοι ἐπιστολὴν (“write to me a letter”) (post AD 138); SB XVIII 13867.3–4 τὸ γεγραμμένον ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ τούτῃ (“what is written in this letter”) (mid 2nd c. AD); P.Mil. Vogl. II 61.15–19 ἐπιστολὴν γραφεῖσαν (“a written letter”) (2nd c. AD); P.Mich. XV 751.25–26 ἔγραψας περὶ τῶν τούτων ἡμῶν ἐπιστολῆν (“you wrote your second letter to us about these matters”) (late 2nd c. AD); SB XVI 12759.12–13 ἀντιγράφῃν θέλομεν τῆς (l. τῆς) ἐπιστολῆς (“we want an answer to the letter”) (late 2nd c. AD); SB XII 11153.2 ὡς ἔγραψές μοι ὀπίσω τῆς ἐπιστολῆς Τρυφωνίδος (“as you wrote back to me after the letter of Tryphon”) (3rd/4th c. AD).

100 BGU III 811.3–4 δι’ ἐπιστολῆς σε ἀσπάσεσθαι (“to greet you with a letter”) (AD 98–102); P.Giss. Univ. III 20.29–30 τὴν περὶ Σαράπιωνος ἐπιστολήν (“the letter about Sarapion”) (AD 113–117); P.Mich. XV 752.8 δι’ ἐπιστολῆς ἀσπάσασθαι (“to greet you with a letter”) (late 2nd c. AD); P.Prag. I 108.6 δι’ ἐπιστολῆς (“by letter”) (AD 258–266).

101 Although there are cases where ἐπιστολεῖς (or ἐπιστολίδιος) is used to describe a letter on an ostracon these are few: O.Claud. I 149 (AD 100–120) and O.Claud. II 299 (mid 2nd c. AD). In O.Claud. IV 867 (AD 98–117) and SB VI 9549 (1) (second half of 3rd c. AD) it is not clear whether the references are about letters on ostraca or on papyrus.

102 O.Claud. I 1145.3–4 τρίτον τούτο, ὅπως ὁ Διδύμας ἐγράψα τὸ ὄστρακον γράφω (“I have written a letter to you”) (AD 100–120); O.Claud. I 174.2 ἔγραφα ὑμῖν (l. ὑμῖν) δι’ ἑτέρου ὀστρακίου (“I have written to you in another ostracon”) (AD 100–120); O.Claud. IV 870.3–4 ἐκ οὔτως ὁ ὀστρακὸν ἐν τῷ ὑμῶν γράφω (“I have received your ostracon, in which you point out to me...”) (AD 138–161).
Egypt”—i.e. the Nile valley). The author is probably referring to letters on papyrus, since that was generally the material used for letters in the Nile valley area where papyrus was abundantly available.\(^\text{103}\) In another ostracon, O.Claud. II 250 (mid 2\(^{nd}\) c. AD), the author asks the addressee to send him two letters, which he describes as “tied”, presumably referring to letters on papyrus, which are mentioned as ἐπιστόλια: κόμισον παρὰ Ἡραϊσκο[υ] ἐπιστόλια δύο [. . .] δὲ[ξ]ε[μέ]να (“bring from Heraiskos two tied letters”).

Combining the evidence for ἐπιστόλιον with that for βυβλιαφόρος, it can be concluded that although in early Hellenistic times the term ἐπιστολή became the standard term for the letter, it was not until the Roman imperial period that the ἐπιστολή was used for all the aspects of a letter, including both its content and the physical object, thus replacing earlier metonymic references to the material and to the physical aspects of a letter, such as βιβλίον. When speakers wanted to distinguish between the message and the physical object of a letter, the latter was specified with the diminutive ἐπιστόλιον, which designated generally a papyrus letter, while ὀστρακον or ὀστράκιον was used for a letter on a potsherd. Awareness of such semantic differences grants more nuanced understanding of epistolary practices, especially since it appears that the establishment of the term ἐπιστολή for the letter as a whole, including both the message and its material aspects, took place in early imperial times, when the ἐπιστολή genre was first established and developed as a literary genre with distinct generic characteristics.

1.2.3 Γράμμα–γράμματα

In this section, focus will be placed on the development of the sense and use of the word γράμμα as a synonym for ἐπιστολή. The basic meaning of γράμμα is “letter of the alphabet” or “written character”, but the plural form was used metonymically to refer to the learning of Greek letters and literature.\(^\text{104}\) Moreover, in the classical period the plural, γράμματα, refers to a written text of any kind, such as a letter, document, contract or literary text.\(^\text{105}\) The diminutive γραμματείδιον is also attested with reference to a piece of writing, possibly a letter or a message.\(^\text{106}\)

During the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods, γράμματα (in the plural) continued to be used for an epistolary letter (or letters) or other kinds of written

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\(^{103}\) See below p. 74.

\(^{104}\) See e.g. the illiteracy formula ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ γράμματα μὴ εἰδότος (“I wrote on his behalf because he does not know letters”), used in documents to refer to illiterate people or to people who did not have good knowledge of Greek or Greek literature. See also Youtie 1975.

\(^{105}\) Examples of the use of γράμματα in classical times are listed in LSJ\(^\text{9}\) s.v. γράμμα III. and Ceccarelli 2013, 14–15.

\(^{106}\) In Antiphon 5.53–56.
document. There are numerous examples of the term γράμματα being assigned to a letter, and from some of them it appears that γράμματα was used as a synonym for ἐπιστολή. Examples of the use of γράμματα for other written documents, such as receipts of transactions, are also abundant, especially in papyri of imperial times. Until the end of the imperial period, the singular form γράμμα occasionally refers to a letter, but mostly to written contracts in formulaic phrases, such as τὸ γράμμα κύριον καὶ βέβαιον (“the contract is valid and secure”). The diminutive γραμμάτιον had the same meaning as γράμμα and was occasionally used for letters. The derivative γραμματεῖον was used only for contracts, not for letters, and respectively γραμματειοφύλαξ (like ἀρχειοφύλαξ) was the notary. From about the fourth century AD onwards, the singular γράμμα gradually becomes the standard term for the letter, first being used synonymously with ἐπιστολή, and finally replacing it. The word γραμματοφόρος/γραμματηφόρος (letter carrier) is attested in Polybius, Plutarch

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107 Some characteristic examples are PSI XIV 1440.5–7 τῷ δὲ ἀναδ[ιδόντι σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον ἀντίγραφον γρα[ -ca.?- ] ἵνα καὶ γώ (l. ἐγώ) σου τὰ γράμματα π[ροσδεχόμενος εὐτυχήσω (?)] (“to the man who is delivering you this letter [ - - - ] a response, so that I, [receiving] your letter, [be delighted?]”) (2nd/3rd c. AD) and P.Haun. II 2110–14 το[ρχύτερον μοι διάπεμψα ἐπιστολὴν ἓνά καί ἀμερίμνως διάγω, πάση γάρ ὑπέρ ἑτομ[ος] εἴμι προσδοκόμονσας σου γραμμαματα (l. γράμματα) (“quickly send me a letter, so that I become relieved, for every time I am ready expecting your letter(s)”) (3rd/4th c. AD). Other examples where γράμματα refers to a letter: e.g. P.Cair. Zen. I 59016.3 (259 BC); PSI VI 570.2 (252 BC); BGU IV 1204.3 (28 BC); Pyffe I 83.4 (ca. AD 200); BGU II 615.9 (2nd c. AD); BGU VII 1676.12 (2nd c. AD); P.Gen. III 144.3 (2nd c. AD); PSI XII 1261.10–12 (AD 212–217) 10–12; BGU I 332.6 (2nd/3rd c. AD); PSI XII 1261.12 (AD 212–217).

108 E.g. P.Sarap. 975–7 (AD 90–133); P.Strab. IV 1875–6 (AD 113–120); P.Lond. III 899.11 (p. 208) (2nd c. AD); P.Flor. II 240.14 (AD 252); P.Coll. Youtie II 72 (AD 281); P.Oxy. L 3570.9 (ca. AD 285); P.Haun. II 2110 (3rd/4th c. AD).

109 There are a few cases such as BGU IV 1209 (23 BC); BGU VII 1669 (1st c. BC/1st c. AD) and BGU XVI 2665 (28/27 BC).

110 Cases where γράμμα refers to a document are e.g. O.Claud. III 622.7–10 (AD 139–160); P.Warr. 14 (2nd c. AD); P.Coll. Youtie II 72 (AD 281); P.Oxy. XIV 1666.17–18 (3rd c. AD); BGU XII 2140.15–16 (AD 432); BGU XII 2152.4 (AD 481).

111 Cf. P.Strab. IV 260.1–4 τὸ γραμμάτιον ὃ διεπέμψατέ (l. διεπέμψατε) μοι δι’ Ἀλεξάνδρο[ῦ] τοῦ καψαρίου ὑπόβροχον ἠνέχθ̣η̣ ὥστε μηδὲ εἰδέναι μηδὲν (“the letter(?) that you sent me through Alexandros the satchel-maker was brought wet, so that I cannot see anything”) and 5–7 ἐὰν ἔχῃς γραμμάτιον τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σεο̣ς ή ἄλλου τινὸς διαπέμψαι μοι αὐτά (“and if you have a letter from my brother (…) or anyone else send them over to me”) (AD 161).

112 The spelling of γραμμάτιον and γραμματεῖον were often confused in Hellenistic and Roman times due to iotacism. The rhetor and grammarian Aelius Herodianus (2nd c. AD) in his work Περὶ ὀρθογραφίας 3.2 458 clarified the correct spelling of each word, explaining that, since γραμματεῖον is a derivative of γράμμα, it should be spelled with -ει-, while γραμμάτιον, as a diminutive of γράμμα, should be spelled with -ι-.

113 E.g. P.Kellis I 71.28–32 (mid 4th c. AD); P.Ross.Georg. III 13.10 (6th c. AD); CPR XIV 54.4 (7th/8th c. AD); CPR XXX 21.10–11 (AD 640–700); CPR XXV 21.8 (second half of 6th c. AD); P.Apoll. 11.7 (AD 660 or 675); P.Apoll. 34.3 (second half of 7th c. AD); P.Apoll. 36.4 (second half of 7th c. AD).
and other authors of the imperial period, but does not appear in papyri before the late third century AD, when it gradually replaced the word ἐπιστολοφόρος. 114 In the fourth century the γραμματηφόρος, like the earlier ἐπιστολοφόρος, referred to the professional liturgical post of the messenger, but gradually lost this meaning. From the beginning of the fifth century γραμματηφόρος refers in papyri to the bearer of the letter, not as a professional messenger but as the person who carried the message and whom the letter might concern (as, e.g., with letters of recommendation).115 The word ταχυδρόμος started being used from about the sixth century AD to refer to the professional messenger, translating the Latin term cursor.116

1.3 Literary and Non-Literary Letters

Literary letters, as a category, did not exist in ancient times, since no distinction was made between literary and non-literary letters. The category “literary letters” is a modern classification introduced by modern philologists for those letters that were collected and copied in antiquity as pieces of literature and transmitted to us through medieval anthologies. Letters that have survived on their original materials, such as papyrus or ostraca, are defined as “non-literary” (or “documentary”). Below, surviving literary letters will be briefly described, with focus on their relationship to non-literary letters.

Around the beginning of the fourth century BC, the increasing use of letters in private and public life and the parallel standardisation of the basic epistolary formulas encouraged the adoption of the epistolary form as a vehicle for literary treatises. It is not certain when exactly the epistolary format started being used for literary treatises, and the genre has had a complicated history. Because of the existence of pseudepigrapha (i.e. pseudonymous) letters in Roman and Byzantine times (see below) attributed to famous personalities of classical Greece, the authenticity of many of the letters that have been handed down through medieval anthologies has been debated. In fact, after the publication of Bentley’s dissertation in 1697–1699, all letters included in medieval corpora of classical Greek authors were condemned as forgeries. More recently, however, scholars have tended to agree that many of the letters attributed to authors of the fourth century BC may be genuine.117 More specifically, the nine

114 Γραμματηφόρος is first attested in Polybius (e.g. 4.9.9) and after that appears in other authors of the Roman period, such as Plutarch (e.g. Vita Demetrii 22.2), Dio Cassius (63.11.4), Fl. Philostratus (e.g. Vita Philosorhorum 2 Olearius p. 562) and others (see Ceccarelli 2013, 168). Search in papyri.info (in August 2014) returned 72 instances of γραμματηφ-, the earliest appearing in P. Panop. Beat. 1.61, which dates to AD 298.
116 P.Oxy. LVIII 3934.9n.; Kolb 2000, 278–280.
letters that are attributed to Isocrates, which were thought spurious in the past, are regarded as authentic by scholars today. The authenticity of thirteen letters attributed to Plato has been debated, however the recent publication of a third century BC papyrus with part of Epistula VIII may support the authenticity of at least some of Plato’s letters. Four of the six letters that are attributed to Demosthenes have been deemed genuine. Aristotle wrote letters, which were collected by his student Artemon, but none of them has survived. It is known that Epicurus wrote many of his philosophical doctrines in epistolary form, three of which survive in full and fragments of others are considered to be probably authentic.

Early literary letters were probably collected and edited by students or readers after the death of their authors. The main common characteristic of these letters is that they bear only the external characteristics of letters; in fact, they are rhetorical or philosophical treatises, and can only be placed at the borderline of the epistolary genre. The letters of Plato and the letter of Thucydides are rather συγγράμματα (treatises), in accordance with Demetrius’s understanding of the proper style of a letter. In imperial Roman and late antique times, philosophical doctrines continue to be written in epistolary form, in the style of the Epicurean letter. Such are, for example, the didactic letters of Seneca, the Stoic letters of Musonius Rufus (1st c. AD), and the philosophical letters of the neopythagorian Apollonius of Tyana (1st c. AD). To the same type may be classified the letters of Saint Paul, although the latter were sent not only for the purpose of teaching, but also for the spiritual support and practical organisation of newly-established churches. In Late Antiquity, letters that include philosophical doctrines are those of the emperor Julian the Apostate and the church fathers, especially the Cappadocians Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus;

118 The authenticity of the letters of Isocrates was debated in earlier scholarship, but it has recently been supported by Ceccarelli 2013, 286–292, Sullivan 2007, 7–20 and Too 1995, 195–199.
119 Diogenes Laertius, Vitae philosophorum III 61. The authenticity of the Platonic epistles is doubted by Gulley 1972, but Morrow 1935 has supported it for the bulk of them and especially for epistles VII and VIII.
121 Goldstein 1968 supported the authenticity of the first four, while the others remain doubtful.
122 Demetrius, De elocutione 223. Four letters attributed to Aristotle are considered as products of later authors. For the letters attributed to Aristotle see Plezia 1961; for another letter attributed to Aristotle in an Arabic manuscript see Bielawski/Plezia 1970.
123 The three complete letters are preserved in Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers X. Fragments of other letters of Epicurus have been preserved as quotations in later authors, in the papyri from the library at Herculaneum of the Epicurean Philodemus, and on the Oinoanda inscription (Lycia). See Klauck 2006, 149–155.
124 Demetrius, De elocutione 228.
125 The letters of Seneca are addressed to an imaginary friend, Lucilius, and contain philosophical advice in a lively epistolary format.
also, a large collection of letters (about 1600), including correspondence with Saint Basil, has survived from the teacher of rhetoric, Libanius (AD 314–393).

In imperial Roman and late antique times, the increasing interest in letter writing can also be observed in the composition of fictional letters, a popular kind of literature. The composition of such letters was part of the educational programme in schools of rhetoric, in the exercises of προσωποποιεία (personification) and ἠθοποιεία (imitation of character), which combined historical information and anecdotal short stories or sayings (χρεῖαι) with information about the circumstances, environment and life of classical Greek figures. The students tried to impersonate the ancient personality and write imaginary speeches or letters that could have been written/spoken by the ancient men themselves.¹²⁶ The purpose of these exercises was to develop eloquence in writing and speaking in different styles. Since the letter was regarded as a reflection of the personality of the writer,¹²⁷ the main characteristic of the fictitious letters is the painstaking attention to stylistic detail, matching as closely as possible the character, circumstances and language of the personality to whom the letter was attributed.

Depending on the ability of Roman or late antique anonymous writers to imitate the style of an ancient Greek author, distinguishing pseudepigrapha letters from genuine ones may be challenging. However, this is not the only difficulty. Although most of the pseudepigrapha letters were created in the Roman period, it cannot be excluded that some were created around the time of the ancient Greek authors to whom they are attributed. Especially in the case of letters attributed to famous philosophers, letters may have been created during or shortly after their lifetime and distributed under their names as to promote their philosophy.¹²⁸ Therefore, it is difficult and not always possible to recognise a fake letter from a real one on stylistic grounds.¹²⁹

Novels with fictitious letters were also created, the most famous being the Alexander Romance (3rd c. AD), which consists of fictitious letters to and from Alexander the Great depicting his life and deeds. Besides the letters that impersonated mythical or famous historical personalities, fictitious letters were composed for ordinary people

¹²⁶ For rhetorical prose composition textbooks (προγυμνάσματα) by Aelius Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius the sophist, and Nicolaus the sophist, see Kennedy 2003. See also below p. 47 with n. 206.
¹²⁷ As mentioned in the De elocutione 227 “the letter, like the dialogue, should abound in glimpses of character. It may be said that everybody reveals his own soul in his letters. In every other form of composition it is possible to discern the writer’s character, but none so clearly as in the epistolary.” Transl. Malherbe 1988, 19, see also 12.
¹²⁸ I thank A. Morrison and J. Bryan for discussion on pseudepigrapha and philosophical letters.
¹²⁹ Hercher 1873, which did not distinguish between pseudonymous and genuine letters, remains the most inclusive publication of Greek literary letters. In modern times scholarly interest in fictional letters has been revived, and pseudepigrapha letters are studied both as biographic sources about their (fake) writers and as testimonies of the use of the letter in antiquity. For recent studies on pseudepigrapha letters see Costa 2001; Trapp 2003, 27–31; Rosenmeyer 2001, 193–233; Hodkinson/Rosenmeyer 2013, 1–36.
of classical antiquity, too; for example Aelian (2nd/3rd c. AD) produced a collection of fictitious letters attributed to Greek farmers, Alciphron (2nd c. AD) wrote fictitious letters of simple people of classical Athens, such as fishermen, farmers and *hetaerae*, and Philostratus (2nd c. AD) wrote love letters.

### 1.3.1 Private Letters

Until the end of the Hellenistic period, even though the epistolary form had been used for literary texts, private letters were not regarded as pieces of literature. This can be inferred from the absence of any literary collections of private letters until the first century BC. The earliest known private letters that have been collected and published as literature are the letters of Cicero. Unlike the literary letters of classical Greek authors, which are philosophical or rhetorical treatises in epistolary form, Cicero’s letters are real private letters, sent for the purpose of communication. It is not clear if Cicero wrote his letters with view to publication; in one of his letters to Atticus, he revealed that he intended to collect, revise and publish his letters, but eventually these were probably collected and published after his death by his secretary, Marcus Tullius Tiro. After Cicero, more collections of private letters from the political and intellectual elite of Rome and other metropolitan cities of the Empire were published. Pliny the Younger published his private correspondence with the emperor Trajan, as well as letters with family, friends, and social acquaintances. Another example is the collection of letters of the second-century Roman orator and grammarian Fronto, which includes private letters exchanged between him and influential personalities of his time, especially the emperors Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. Collections of letters, especially those of famous personalities, orators, and emperors, were popular reading in antiquity. They were copied and transmitted as literature by subsequent generations, not only because their writers were famous figures in their day, but also because the letters were of interest for their artful style. Although the letters provided important information about their authors and the historical background of their times, ancient readers collected them mostly as model letters and sources of ideas for the writing of their own letters. This has been recently shown by R. Gibson’s study of the arrangement of letters in their ancient collections: instead of being arranged in chronological order according to the historical sequence

130 Cicero, *Atticus* XVI 5.5.
131 For an overview of Cicero’s letters see Klauck 2006, 156–165.
132 Pliny’s correspondence was published in nine books during his lifetime and one more book was published after his death. For an introduction to the letters of Pliny see Gibson/Morello 2012.
133 E.g. Quintilianus X 1.107 referred to the literary worth of Cicero’s letters with admiration; see also Hutchinson 1998, 4–5 n. 4.
of the events, they were arranged by thematic categories or by addressee, which suggests that the compilers and readers of the collections were interested in the style of private letters rather than in the historical sequence of events and the lives of the authors.134

Care for epistolary style and interest in practical advice on how to write a nice letter are also suggested by the content of the epistolary treatises, especially those produced in imperial and later times. Although the earliest surviving treatise, the De elocutione, attributed to Demetrius Phalereus (mid 2nd c. BC),135 contains only theoretical descriptions of epistolary style without model letters, later treatises provide sample letters for each occasion. Cicero classified letters as public or private, but also remarks that there are different styles of letters, mentioning the serious and the intimate or humorous, however without proceeding to an analytical discussion of the styles.136 The epistolary treatises that have been dated to the imperial and late antique periods provide, in addition to a theoretical description of the epistolary genre, sample letters that could be used as models for social occasions in which letters could be sent. More specifically, the treatise Epistolary Types (200 BC–AD 300)137 categorises letters according to their style into 21 types, providing a sample letter for each type: friendly, commensatory, blaming, reproachful, consoling, censorious, admonishing, threatening, vituperative, praising, advisory, supplicatory, inquiring, responding, allegorical, accounting, accusing, apologetic, congratulatory, ironic, thankful.138 The treatise Epistolary Styles (4th–6th c. AD)139 includes forty-one types of letters with practical examples, distinguishing them according to their style as paraenetic, blaming, requesting, commending, ironic, thankful, friendly, praying, threatening, denying, commanding, repenting, reproaching, sympathetic, conciliatory, congratulatory, contemptuous, counter-accusing, replying, provoking, consoling, insulting, reporting, angry, diplomatic, praising, didactic, reproving, maligning, censorious, inquiring, encouraging, consulting, declaratory, mocking, submissive, enigmatic, suggestive, grieving, erotic, and mixed.140 Similarly, the fragmentary papyri P.Bon. 5 (3rd/4th

134 Gibson 2012.
135 The authorship and dating of the De elocutione has been doubted. In the manuscript tradition it is attributed to Demetrius Phalereus and most scholars date it to the 2nd c. BC; see Trapp 2003, 43.
136 Cicero, Pro Flacco 37 (types of letters); Ad Familiares 2.4.1 (styles of letters).
137 For the dating see Trapp 2003, 45.
139 The work Ἐπιστολιμαῖοι Χαρακτῆρες (Epistolary Styles) has been transmitted in two manuscript traditions which differ; the one attributes it to Libanius and the other to Proclus. It is dated between the 4th and the 6th c. AD.
140 Ps.-Libanius, Ἐπιστολιμαῖοι Χαρακτῆρες (Epistolary Styles): Εἰσὶ δὲ πᾶσαι αἱ προσηγορίαι αἱ ὁ ἑπιστολιμαῖος ὑποβάλλεται χαρακτήρ, αἴδη· α´ παραινετική, β´ μεμπτική, γ´ παρακλητική, δ´ συστατική,
c. AD) and BKT IX 94 (6th c. AD) preserve parts of letter-writing manuals with model letters. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that such samples of letters as those included in the epistolary treatises offered not only advice for the proper style of a letter for each occasion, but indeed ideas for potential occasions in which one could send a letter to a friend or social acquaintance.

The linguistic style of the model letters is elegant, adorned with polite expressions and phrases appropriate for the occasion and the personality of the addressee. The popularity of the epistolary treatises shows that letter writing formed an important part of social communication, and the ability to express in a proper style according to the occasion and addressee was highly esteemed and appreciated. Most types of letters that were proposed in the epistolary treatises belonged to an epistolographic style that was not informative in content, but mostly a means for cultivating and maintaining personal relationships in a polite manner. Letter writing manuals suggested a proper style of written communication according to a socialising etiquette that was popular in aristocratic circles. The letter was used as a means to contact a friend, even if one had nothing new to announce to him.

This sort of epistolography is attested for the first time in republican Rome, and the letters of Cicero are characteristic in this regard. For example, in a letter to Atticus, Cicero explained that although he had already sent him a letter on the previous day and had nothing new to add, he wrote the letter because he did not want to let the carrier leave without a letter. It is not clear if this type of epistolography was practiced already among elite networks related to the courts of Hellenistic kings, but the surviving evidence of private letters suggests that in Hellenistic times although private letters were sent, their purpose was primarily informative. They were not sent for courtesy, but with the purpose of passing on some information, news or requests. For example, BGU XIV 2417 (258/257 BC) is a private letter from Philotas to Epistratos, written in a polite linguistic style, apparently from a sender of Greek origin with an advanced socio-cultural background. Despite the letter’s elegant language,
purpose was primarily informative: it let Epistratos know that his son Pleistarchos had been received well by the king. Like the son of Epistratos, those people who had access to the court of a Hellenistic king could benefit from his favours, but, as the letter suggests, personal contacts used to be made directly by accessing the king in person not in writing. The same is suggested by another letter, from Polykrates to his father Kleon, asking him to come to the festival of Arsinoeia and on that occasion to introduce Polykrates to the king. A different, but still comparable example is a letter that makes arrangements for the delivery of gifts to a newborn baby; although the sender sent the letter to organise the delivery of the gifts to the baby, these would be given in person, not sent through a third person and accompanied by a letter.

It seems that Romans brought a small revolution in private epistolography, transforming it from its informative function to a literary genre. The major known personality who initiated this genre of writing was Cicero; but Cicero is representative of his contemporary society and the people of his class, the Roman aristocracy. It was the socio-political and cultural environment of republican Rome that encouraged the flourishing of a courteous type of epistolography and the circulation of private letters for communication and socialising purposes. In republican Rome it was not audience with a king, but political alliances among prominent individuals that secured one’s social and political emergence. A factor that encouraged the flourishing of written communications must have been Rome’s contact with Greek culture, which inspired intellectual and cultural interests, and reading and writing became highly esteemed among the social and political elites at Rome. In this political and socio-cultural context, writing frequently nice letters to friends and social acquaintances became a prestigious act. It became a means to conduct diplomatic and social interactions with other elites and, as such, it became an indispensable part, along with face-to-face contact, of an aristocrat’s daily routine. Elegant and polite epistolary exchanges, confirming friendship and goodwill, was a means to show one’s upper-

144 BGU XIV 2417,3–6 υγιαίνει δὲ καὶ Πλείσταρχος, καὶ ἡδέως προσεδέξατο αὐτὸν ὁ βασιλεύς (“Pleistarchos is also well and was gladly received by the king.”). Transl. Llewelyn 1994a, 26.
145 P .Petrie III 42 H (1).2–5 πολλάκις μὲν γέγραφά σοι παραγενέσθαι καὶ συστήσαί με ὅπως τῆς ἐπί τοῦ παρόντος σχολῆς ἀπολυθῶ, καὶ νῦν δὲ εἰ δυνατόν ἐστίν καὶ μηθέν σε τῶν ἐργῶν κωλύει πειράθη ἐλθεῖν εἰς τὰ Ἀρσινοεῖα. ἐὰν γὰρ σὺ παραγένητε πεπέσουσαν ῥαδίως με τῶι βασιλεύι συσταθήσεσθαι. (“I have often written to you to come over and introduce me, so that I may be relieved from my present unemployement. And now, if it is possible and nothing of the works hinders you, try to come for the Arsinoeia; I am convinced that if you come, I will be easily introduced to the king.”) (mid 3rd c. BC); transl. van Beek 2006, no 13.
146 P.Köl n IX 364 (272 or 230 BC).
147 White 2010.
148 For the flourishing of reading and writing and the construction of an intellectual elite in the Roman Empire see Johnson 2010.
class breed, intellectual interests, and, at the same time, to cultivate relationships with political friends.

As Rome gradually expanded its Empire, the long absences of emperors on military campaigns necessitated that communications between emperors, generals, senators and other important personalities were made in writing; thus, letter writing gained further esteem. Although those who could have direct audience with a Roman emperor or could access elites in Rome must have benefited from personal meetings, letters could connect people over long distances. During his appointment as governor of the province of Bithynia, Pliny the younger sent frequently letters to the emperor Trajan, asking him about various matters, even small ones, and the Emperor replied to all these, encouraging this personal communication through writing.

The vastness of the Empire gradually led to the rise of local elites in the provinces. The kind of courteous epistolography that began and became popular among the aristocracy of Rome spread to the rest of the Empire and influenced the mentality of provincial elites, especially in cosmopolitan centres like Alexandria. Roman aristocratic manners were adopted especially by those coming from prominent families, who aspired to ascend the social ladder and perhaps take positions in the central administration. The epistolary conventions that had been developed by the Roman aristocracy influenced and brought a “fresh mentality” to the style of letters exchanged among elite circles in the provinces. This can be confirmed by a large number of courteous socialising letters that begin to be attested in early imperial times in Egypt among the thousands of papyrus letters that have been found there, and by chance finds at other places, such as Vindolanda in England. Although the identity of the senders of most of these letters is unknown, their linguistic style and content suggest that polite, courteous letters became a popular exchange, especially among people of means, who had both the time and education to appreciate cultured activities of this sort. In cases where the social background of the senders can be identified, they tend to be people with Roman or Greek names, thus probably Romans, Greeks or Hellenised Egyptians, with an upper-class social background and Greek education. The letter of Philosarapis, *hieropoios* (sacrificial magistrate) at Antaeopolis, to the gymnasiarct Apion provides such an example (P.Oxy XIV 1664, ca. AD 200; fig. 1). The purpose of the letter was neither to send information nor to ask for anything, but it was merely a polite gesture to an absent friend.
Χαίρε, κύριέ μου Απίων, Φιλοσάραπις σε προσαγορεύω εὐχόμενός σε σώζεσθαι πανοικησίᾳ καὶ εὖ διάγειν. οὐ μόνοι ήμων οἱ πάτριοι θεοὶ, τοῦτο δῆλον ἅπασιν, πᾶσα (corr. ex [α] πασα) γάρ ἡμῶν ἡ ἡλικία ἐν τοῖς στέρνοις σε περιφέρει, με-μνημένη τῆς ἀγαθῆς σου προαιρεσεως. περὶ τῶν ἀπὸ πατρίδος σοι χρεω-δῶν, κύριέ μου, ἐπίστελλέ μοι ἡδέ-ως ἔχοντι, τὰς γὰρ ἐντολὰς σου ἡδίστα ἔχουν ὡς χάριτας λήμψομαι. προσαγο-ρεύω τὸν ἀξιολογώτατον γυμνασίαρ-
Greetings, my lord Apion; I, Philosarapis, salute you, praying for the welfare and prosperity of you and all your household. That not only we but also our ancestral gods themselves remember you is clear to all; for all our young men carry you in their hearts, remembering your goodwill. Send to me about anything that you need from home, my lord, and it will be a pleasure; for I shall be most pleased to accept your commands as favours. I salute the most estimable gymnasiarch Horion. I pray for your health, my kind and most noble lord Apion, and your lifelong prosperity with those with whom it pleases you to live.

Back (address): To Apion, gymnasiarch and ex-strategos of the Antaeopolite nome, from Philosarapis, sacrificial magistrate in office of Antaeopolis.150

Such a polite and friendly manner in letters was called φιλικός (friendly) or φιλοφρονητικός (friendly, courteous, kind), from the noun φιλοφρόνησις (kind treatment, courtesy).151 This kind of letter contained expressions of care, good wishes, greetings and compliments, and they used to be sent as an attentive gesture to an absent friend, who was thus felt like being present and conversing through writing.152 References to φιλία (love, friendship) and φίλος (friend) were very common φιλοφρόνησις in letters. A characteristic example is SB XIV 11584 (late 2nd c. AD; fig. 2), a private letter in which the sender says “I received your letters, through which I got the feeling of seeing you. I therefore beseech you to do the same constantly, for in this way our friendship (φιλία) will be increased.” The author added the request to the addressee to write back and ask for anything he might need, which the author would happily do without delay, expressing his readiness by applying the elegant and rarely used adverb ἀνυπερθέτως.

149 In the ed.pr. there is an uncertain handshift marked before l. 19, indicating a change of hand before the part of the external address that contains the author’s own details. Comparison with similar cases (see e.g. P.Brem. 6 below, p. 356) suggests that there is probably no change of hand in this position, but I have not been able to consult an image of the back of P.Oxy. XIV 1664 to confirm it.

150 Transl. Grenfell/Hunt, P.Oxy. XIV 1664.

151 See LSJ s.v. φιλοφρόνησις.

152 For “philophronetic” letters see Koskenniemi 1956 and Kreuzsaler 2010.
 Ionó τῶι ἀδελφῶι
 χαίρειν.
 [εὐθύς ἐλθὼν εἰς] τὴν Αντίνου (I. Ἀντινόου) ἐκομί-
 [σάμην σου] τὰ γράμματα δι᾿ ὧν ἔδοξά
 [σε θεωρεῖν] διὸ παρακαλῶ τὸ αὐτὸ
 συνεχῶς, οὕτως γὰρ αὐξηθή-
 [σεται ἡμῖν ἡ φιλία. ὅταν δὲ σοι βραδέως
 γράφω, διὰ τὸ μὴ εὑρίσκειν μηδένα
 πρὸς σὲ ἐρχόμενον ῥαδίως τοῦτο γίνε-
 ται. περὶ οὗ σοι χρεία ἐστὶν ἐπιστελλέ μοι
 [εἰδὼς ὅτι ποιήσω ἀνυπερθέτως.
 [εἰ] ἐπιστο[λήν γ]ράφεις μοι, Ἐρμήτι τῶι
 φίλῳ παρὰ Αρτεμίαν πέμπε ἵνα μοι
 ἀναδῷ. [ἀ]σπάζεται σε πολλά αὐτὸς Ἐρμή[ς]
 καὶ Ταυσ[πίς] ἢ ἀδελφή.
 ἔρρωσο.
Back

[ἀπόδος τῷ] φίλῳ Ἰσιδώρῳ ἐμ (l. ἐν) Φιλαδελφ(είᾳ) παρὰ . . . 153

Translation:

N.N. to Isidoros, his brother, greetings. As soon as I reached Antinoopolis, I received your letter, through which I got the feeling of seeing you. I therefore beseech you to do the same constantly, for in this way our friendship will be increased. Whenever I am slow to write to you, this happens easily because I find no one going your way. If you have need of anything, send me word since you know that I will do it without delay. If you write me a letter, send it to my friend Hermes at the house of Artemas so that he may deliver it to me. Hermes himself and his sister Tausiris greet you heartily. Farewell.

Back (address): Deliver to my dear Isidoros in Philadelphiea from . . .154

The persuasiveness of a letter depended not so much on rhetorical language and persuasive argumentation, but on the emphatic confirmation of friendly relationships with the addressee. It was expected that the addressee would appreciate the sender’s polite and friendly feelings and would return these feelings of friendship and favouritism. For example, in the archive of Isidoros of Psophthis, there are several letters from Isidoros’ protector, Proklos, to various addressees concerning a lawsuit that he had against the strategos Tryphon (early 1st c. AD). Proklos, in order to enhance his persuasiveness emphasised the mutual friendship that he had with the addressees and promised to return the favour that he asked on behalf of Isidoros.155 The emphatic reference to friendship as a rhetoric strategy in order to secure a favour from an addressee is novel in letters. In Hellenistic times, although personal relationships were helpful for access to favours, there was no direct reference to them in letters.156

Philophronetic letters were often accompanied by gifts. For instance, P.Oxy. LV 3806 (AD 15; fig. 3) was accompanied by a woollen cloth as a gift to a woman named Philous. The author’s motive for writing the letter was that someone from his vicinity was travelling upstream to where the addressee was.157 In this letter the author asked

153 In the ed.pr. there is a handshift before l. 17, indicating a change of hand before the external address. Comparison with similar cases suggests that there is probably no change of hand in this position, but I have not been able to consult an image of the back of the papyrus. See the relevant discussion below, pp. 122ff.
155 See e.g. the postscript of the letter P.Lond.inv. 2553 + P.Col. VIII 211 in Sarri 2014a, 37–44.
156 See, for example, below pp. 98ff., the letters of Pyron, the secretary of Zenon (mid 3rd c. BC).
157 Since there was no postal service, apart from that for official correspondence, the chance of finding someone travelling in the direction of a friend’s residence could be an impetus for sending a letter. The contrary, i.e. to find someone to carry a letter but not send one, would be regarded as impolite even if one had nothing new to say. See also above the letter of Cicero to Atticus XV 1a with n. 142.
if Philous likes the cloth, and encouraged Isidoros to write back and request anything that he might need, which the author promised to oblige with great pleasure. The letter was found at Oxyrhynchos, so the sender may have been located anywhere to the north, perhaps in Alexandria.

![Image of P.Oxy LV 3806, letter from N.N. to N.N., AD 15, W: 22.5 x h: 29 cm © Egypt Exploration Society, London.](image)

Fig. 3: P.Oxy LV 3806, letter from N.N. to N.N., AD 15, w: 22.5 × h: 29 cm © Egypt Exploration Society, London.

Front (recto along the fibres)

[..][..][..][..] [- ca.12 -][..][..]
χαίρειν καὶ ὑγιαίνειν.
[..][..], ὁνίου ἀναπλέοντος ἀναγκαῖον ἐγγων ὁ[σπ]ᾶ[σα]θαι σε διὰ γραπτοῦ καὶ παρακάλεσθαι σε γράφειν
5 μοι περί ὅν εὰν θέλης, ἥδιστα γὰρ ποιήσω(ί), τῶι ἀδελ(φῷ) σου κατὰ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν παρεδρεύω(ί),
μὴ θέλει ἐπιστολάς σοι πέμψαι. τὸ δ<ε>ῖγμα του ἐριδίου δ<ε>ῖξον Φιλοῦτι καὶ γράψον μοι ἢ (l. εἰ) ἀρέσκει αὐτῇ ἢ οὔ. πείθομαι δὲ μᾶλλον ἀρέσ{σ}ειν.
10 ἡπάσαν γάρ ἐργασίαν ἐδώκα κτὸ καὶ ξενικὸν δείγμα δεδώκε ναι τῶι βαφεῖ, καὶ ὅμως κάλλιον τούτο ἐξεβη{ι}. τὰ ἄλλα σε α<υ>τοῦ ἐπιμελοῦ ἵνα ὑγιαίν/. καὶ/ γράψο  μοι ἀντιφωνήσει τῶν πρώτων. ὑγιαίνε μοι ψυχήι. ἔρρωσο.
15 (Ἔτους) α Τιβερίου Καῖσαρος Σεβαστοῦ. Παχὼν κς.

Back (verso)

[ ·10-15· ] vac.? [ · . · · · . · · · · · γραμ(ατ ) Κορράγου.

Translation:

“(A to B) greeting and good health! Since . . . is going upstream I judged it necessary to salute you by letter and invite you to write to me about whatever you may want. I shall do it with great pleasure. I attend on our brother every day in case he wants to send letters to you. Show the sample of wool to Philous, and write me if it pleases her or not. I believe that it will rather please her, for I gave (it) every attention, besides having given the dyer an imported sample as well, and even so this one turned out nicer. For the rest, look after yourself so as to keep well, and write me answers to (my) first (letters). Keep well in spirit! Farewell!

Year 1 of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Pachon 26.”

Back (address): … secretary of Korragos.158

Reciprocity was an important part of Graeco-Roman social convention and the receipt of gifts and favours carried an obligation to respond in kind. A proper response to gifts from a friend was to reply with a polite letter of thanks, thereby confirming the mutual friendship and fulfilling the obligation to reciprocate. As an expression of extreme politeness, one might express an inability to respond with a gift of equal value, being able to return only one’s friendship, but this need not always be taken literally.159

Other types of letters were sent for very special purposes, such as letters of condolence, which had a more-or-less standard content and style and were sent mostly among people of an upper social and educational background.160 Another special type of letter that flourished in Roman times was the invitation. While invitations to social or religious events are attested in the Hellenistic period, these were not sent as

158 Transl. Rea/Parsons, P.Oxy. LV 3806.
159 E.g. P.Merton I 12 (AD 59); P.Oxy. XLII 3057 (1st/2nd c. AD). For the importance of gift reciprocity in the Graeco-Roman world, with further examples from papyrus letters, see Peterman 1997, 51–89.
160 For the formulas and style of the letters of condolence see Chapa 1998; for the social background of the senders of such letters see Tost 2010.
separate letters on their own. For example, P.Paris 43 (=UPZ I 66, dated to 153 BC), which is a private letter from Sarapion to Apollonios and Ptolemaios, was sent in order to inform the addressees about Sarapion’s upcoming wedding and to ask them to bring some oil. Only at the end of the letter did Sarapion add a short invitation to Apollonios: παραγενομένου δὲ εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν, Ἀπολλώνιος (“Be here for that day, Apollonios.”). In Roman times, however, invitations acquired a formal style, resembling that of modern formal invitations to social events, which could be repeated in more copies. A characteristic example is P.Oxy. LXXV 5057 (2nd/3rd c. AD), which contains two identical copies of the same invitation to a wedding dinner: ἐρωτᾷ σε Ἡραῖς δειπνῆσαι εἰς γάμου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ μεγάλῳ θοηρείῳ αὔριον ἡτίς ἐστίν καὶ ἀπὸ ἀρχὰς θ. (“Herais asks you to dine on the occasion of the wedding of her son, in the Great Thoereum, tomorrow, which is the 26th, from the 9th hour on.”). The sheet would be cut in the middle so that the invitations could be sent to two different persons.

To addressees who were close friends a personalised invitation may have seemed a more courteous choice, but the content of the invitation remained of a formal and typical style. Such an example is T.Vindol. II 291 (late 1st/2nd c. AD, fig. 4), a Latin letter on wooden leaf, found at the Roman military camp of Vindolanda in England. It was sent from Claudia Severa, wife of Aelius Brocchus, to Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of the prefect of the Ninth Cohort of Batavians, Flavius Cerialis, inviting her to her birthday party, with greetings added from herself and her husband to Flavius Cerialis.

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161 Image: http://papyri.info/ddbdp/upz;1;66.

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Fig. 4: T.Vindol. II 291, letter from Claudia to Severa, late 1st/2nd c. AD, w: 23.4 x h: 5.0 cm © The British Museum, London
Col. i

Claudia · Seuerá Lepidinae [suae]

[iii Idus Septembr(e)s soror ad diem
sollemnem natalem meum rogo]

libenter facías ut uenias
ad nos iucundiorem mihi

Col. ii

[diem] interuentú tuo facturá si
[. . .] . [ca. 3]s
Cerial[em t]uum salutá Aelius meus .

et filiolus salutant

(hand 2) sperabo te soror

vale soror anima
mea ita valeam
karissima et have

Back

(hand 1) Sulpiciae Lepidinae

Cerialis
a Severa

Translation

Claudia Severa to her Lepidina greetings. On 11 September, sister, for the day of the celebration of my birthday, I give you a warm invitation to make sure that you come to us, to make the day more enjoyable for me by your arrival, if you are present (?). Give my greetings to your Cerialis. My Aelius and my little son send him (?) their greetings. (hand 2) I shall expect you, sister. Farewell, sister, my dearest soul, as I hope to prosper, and hail.

Back address: (hand 1) To Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Cerialis, from Severa.164

Although there are many courteous letters, such as those described above, that survive from Roman Egypt and other regions of the Empire, most extant letters are informative in content, sent for the purpose of passing on news, instructions or requests about business or personal matters. Yet, even in informative letters one observes that beginning in the Roman imperial period there is an increased tendency to add long greetings and wishes to the addressee and/or to third persons, to express eloquently one’s sentiments, feelings and compliments, as well as a tendency for longer descriptions of the sender’s own feelings and health. As a result of this, there is a general

increase in the length of letters. Although epistolary theorists advised letter writers to keep their letters concise, letters of the Roman imperial and later periods, especially private ones, are often longer than the author had planned before cutting off the papyrus sheet, with the result that even the margins were filled with writing. The length of a letter plus its “richness” of expression showed one’s care for the addressee and a desire to keep the conversation long.

1.4 The Linguistic Style of Letters

1.4.1 Archaic and Classical Times

The developing use of letters in archaic and classical times can be observed in the evolution of epistolary expressions in this period. In most of the surviving fifth-century letters the prescript is formulated in either of two ways, both attested in letters included in Herodotus, too. The first type, which seems to be the earlier, is similar to an oral address, with the name of the addressee in the vocative, often followed by the sender in the nominative and the verb ἐπιστέλλει. For example, a letter from a certain Aristokrates to Kledikos (Hermonassa, Black Sea, 5th c. BC) begins as Ὦριστόκρατες ἐπιστέλλει τοι Κλέδικος (“Aristokrates sends you these instructions”). The second type of prescript has the addressee in the dative, the sender in the nominative and the verb ἐπιστέλλω/ἐπιστέλλε(ι) is sometimes added. Thus, a letter on lead found in the Black Sea area (Olbia, ca. 500 BC) begins with Λήνακτι Ἀπατόριος (“to Leanax, Apatorios”), and a letter on an ostracon found in Athens (425–400 BC) begins with Σοσίνεο<ς> ἐπέστελε Γλαύκοι (“Sosineos sent to Glaukos”). There are also a few cases that differ slightly from the two styles above, suggesting that the epistolary prescript had not been stabilised until the end of the

165 For the expression of feelings and sentiments in letters see Kovel'man 1985 and Clarysse 2010.
166 Demetrius, De elocutione 228.
167 For writing in the margin see below p. 133.
168 Similar characteristics can be observed in Latin literary letters; see Cugusi 1983, 68.
169 The opening address with the vocative is attested in, e.g., Herodotus I 124 τα δὲ γράμματα ἐλεγε τάδε· Ὠ παὶ Καμβύσεω... (“The writing was saying the following: Son of Kambyses...”) and VIII 22 τα δὲ γράμματα τάδε ἐλεγε· ἄνδρες Ἴωνες... (The writing was saying the following: “Men of Ionia...”). The opening with the dative can be found in, e.g., III 40 γράφες ἐς βυβλίον τάδε ἐπέστειλε ἐς Σάμον Ἀμάσις Πολυκράτει ὦδε λέγει. (“He wrote in a papyrus roll and sent the following to Samos: Amasis is saying the following to Polykrates.”).
170 Belousov/Saprykin 2013, 153–160.
171 SEG LIV 694.
fifth century.\textsuperscript{173} By the early fourth century, the opening in the vocative is no longer attested. The prescript with the name of the addressee in the dative had prevailed.\textsuperscript{174} Another peculiarity in letters of archaic and early classical times is the inconsistency of the “persona” of verbs, which is either in the third or in the first person singular.\textsuperscript{175} Although the use of the third person singular could be taken as an indication that a third person penned the letter by dictation, it seems more likely that it was an early convention to style letters as if they were oral messages transferred by a third person. The latter can be confirmed by SEG L 276, a letter on lead found in Athens and dated to the early fourth century, which opens with the verb in the third person singular and changes to the first person singular in the body of the letter.\textsuperscript{176} The absence of any change of hand in the letter suggests that the change in person was most probably the result of increased emotional intensity rather than dictation. The letters of the fifth and early fourth centuries BC reveal the stages that led to the formation of the formulaic epistolary opening \textit{ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν}. Most characteristic is the \textit{ἐπιστέλλει} in the opening address, which apparently gave the name to the genre \textit{ἐπιστολή}. The verb means “I send a message” or “I command”\textsuperscript{177} and is related to the purpose and content of letters, which in those times were instructive or informative, i.e., they were not sent simply to communicate greetings, but they conveyed requests or instructions to the addressee to accomplish some kind of (pressing) work. A style of prescript that takes us closer to the formulaic epistolary openings of later times is seen in SIG\textsuperscript{1} 1259 (Athens, 400–350 BC), \textit{Μνησίεργος ἐπέστειλε} τοῖς οἴκοι χαίρεν (l. χαίρειν) καὶ ὑγιαίνεν (l. ὑγιαίνειν) (“Mnesiergos bids greetings and good health to the people at home”).\textsuperscript{178} The greeting \textit{χαίρειν} is a development of the oral greeting \textit{χαίρε}, which was the conventional oral greeting in classical times. The

\textsuperscript{173} E.g., SEG XLVIII 1029 (Zhivakhov Hill, Black Sea, 450–400 BC) opens with the name Πρωταγόρης only. Since it is in the nominative, it is likely that it is the name of the sender.
\textsuperscript{174} The openings of the Isocratic epistolary treatises have survived in two different versions in the two main manuscript families, which are equally strong in the tradition. In the first family the letters begin with the sender in the nominative and the addressee in the dative, but in the other the letters begin with the addressee in the dative and omit the sender. Comparison with the surviving contemporary letters suggests that the first version might be the one that Isocrates wrote. For the epistolary treatises of Isocrates see Sullivan 2007, 9.
\textsuperscript{175} E.g. SEG XXVI 845 (Berezan, ca. 500 BC) is in the third person throughout, Ὄ Πρωταγόρη, ὁ πατήρ τοι ἐπιστέλλει (l. ἐπιστέλλει) διδάσκει (l. διδάσκει) ὑπὸ Ματάσυος…. (“Protagoras, your father sends you these instructions. He is being wronged by Matasys…”); SEG LIV 694 (Olbia, Black Sea, ca. 500 BC) is in the first person singular throughout, Λήνακτι Ἀπατόριος : τὰ χρήματα σισύλημαι ὑπ’ Ἡρακλείδου τοῦ (l. τοῦ) Εὐθήριος : κατὰ δύναμιν τὴν σὴν : μὴ ἀπολέσω τὰ χρήματα… (“To Leanax Apatorios. I have had my goods confiscated by Herakleides, son of Eutherios… by your influence I will not lose the goods”).
\textsuperscript{176} See p. 88 with fig. 8.
\textsuperscript{177} LSJ\textsuperscript{9} s.v.
\textsuperscript{178} Transl. Trapp 2003, 51.
The Development of Ancient Letters

infinitival form of χαίρειν shows that a governing verb was initially implied.\(^{179}\) In the Roman writer Lucianus, the χαίρειν depends on κελεύειν,\(^{180}\) but since in SIG\(^3\) 1259 χαίρειν depends on ἐπέστειλε, it seems likely that a transitional stage in the formation of the opening address ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν was ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι ἐπιστέλλει χαίρειν.\(^{181}\)

The use of a closing formula was not common in ancient letters. Most of the surviving letters from this period end abruptly without any closing greeting, but there are some exceptions: SEG LIII 1153.15, a letter on a lead sheet found at Emporion in Southern France and dated to 530–500 BC, ends with χαῖρε, and SEG L 704, a fragmentary letter on a lead sheet, found at Pantikapaion in the Black Sea and dated to the first half of the fourth century BC, seems to end with the farewell ἔρρω[σο].\(^{182}\) Letters embedded in early fifth century literature support the idea that the use of farewell greetings was not standard in the fifth century.\(^{183}\) In the early fourth century, the Isocratic discourses in epistolary form end without any closing formulas, apart from the letter To Timotheus, which has ἔρρωσο in the closing lines.\(^{184}\)

1.4.2 Hellenistic Times

The socio-political developments in the Greek world during the fourth century BC, and more specifically the transition of the political power play from democratic Athens to despotic Macedonia, are reflected in the style of linguistic conventions in letters. This is observable especially in the opening addresses, in which, until the end of the classical period, the order of the names of sender and addressee was not related to the status of, and relationship between, the correspondents.\(^{185}\) However,

\(^{179}\) An alternative explanation might be that χαίρειν is an infinitive of command, but this explanation is less likely, because such a use of the infinitive is common in poetry but not in prose (see Smyth 1920, § 2013).

\(^{180}\) Lucianus, Pro lapsu inter salutandum 1 δέον τὴν συνήθη ταύτην φωνήν ἀφεῖναι καὶ χαίρειν κελεύειν, ἐγώ δὲ ὁ χρυσοῦς ἐπιλαθόμενος ὑγιαίνειν σε ἠξίουν (“I ought to have used the usual expression “joy to you,” but like a golden ass I blundered and said “Health to you”; Transl. Kilburn, Loeb 1959).

\(^{181}\) Other proposed (restored) opening addresses seem to be uncertain or unlikely: In SEG XLVIII 988 (Berezan, 540–535 BC) the restored opening is Παρὰ̣ [τοῦ δεῖνος or τὸν δεῖνα - -]Α Ι [τί?] which is unlikely, because such an opening address is not attested in letters before the third century AD. In SEG XXXVII 838 (= SEG LIII 1153) (Emporion, 530–500 BC) the restored opening address [- - - -] oφ[σ - - - χαίρε]l[y [- - - -?] is uncertain (cf. Wilson 1997–1998, 46–47).

\(^{182}\) An uncertainly restored ἔρρω[σο] may be attested also in SEG XLIII 488.7 (350–325 BC).

\(^{183}\) E.g. Herodotus I 124 letter to Kambyses; III 40 letter to Amasis.

\(^{184}\) Sullivan 2007, 10.

\(^{185}\) For example, in SEG L 276 (Athens, Agora, 400–350 BC), which is a letter from a slave/son to his mistress/mother, the sender placed his own name first (see p. 88 with fig. 8). For SEG LIII 256
in papyrus letters from Ptolemaic Egypt, the names of the sender and addressee are ordered in the opening address according to the hierarchic relationship between the correspondents. An extreme version of this custom is to find the sender’s name not only after the addressee’s, but even after the greeting χαίρειν. Thus, it is not by chance that letters that open with τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν ὁ δεῖνα have an elegant linguistic style, sent from people who had an evidently advanced literacy background to addressees with equal or higher social status. 186

In the Hellenistic period, the name of the addressee in the opening address used to be bare. Titles next to the name of the addressee were normally skipped. 187 This should not be confused with official letters from lower-ranking officials to their superiors, in which the “office” of the sender was sometimes added in the opening address, functioning as an identification marker, to help the addressee recognise who the sender was, not an expression of respect; in letters from senior officials to lower-ranking ones no functions were mentioned. 188 Kinship terms, if added in the opening address, used to be meant literally, indicating blood relationships, such as τῷ ἀδελφῷ, τῷ πατρί, τῇ μητρί. 189 Few are the cases in which kinship terms were used metaphorically, such as P. Phur. Diosk. 15 (158 or 155 BC) which opens with an elaborated address, Σῶσος Διοσκουρίδη τῷ ἀδελφῷ τῷ φίλῳ πατρὶ τῇ ἐλπίδι τῇ ἐμῇ χαίρεν (“Sosos to Dioskourides, my brother, my dear father, my hope, greetings”). Characteristic in this letter is that Sosos appears to be in a very difficult situation and asks for a favour from Dioskourides, which may explain his use of kinship terms as an exaggerated expression of politeness and respect.

The body of the letter usually opened with a polite expression about the health of the addressee, and the confirmation that the sender was also well. These expressions are attested not only in letters found in Egypt, but also in letters from other places, as

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186 E.g. the letters from Pyron to Zenon (see below pp. 98ff.), and PSI VI 51 (mid 3rd c. BC) Ζήνωνι χαίρεν Μάσσιχος.
187 However, in petitions to kings/queens, the relevant titles were never omitted. See the relevant discussion in Dickey 2004b, 500.
188 See Verhoogt 1998, 71, who observes that in the archive of Menches only in official letters from lower-ranking officers to their seniors did the senders add their function after their names.
189 With the exception of husband-wife relationships, who often called each other brother-sister. For the addressing system of Greek and the changes that took effect in the post-classical period see Dickey 1996 and a summary in Dickey 2010a, 327–337.
shown by a 3rd century lead tablet discovered at the harbour of Massalia. The letter is one of very few from Hellenistic times found outside of Egypt. It was sent to Leukon, probably a ship captain, from Megistes, probably the ship-owner or representative of the ship-owner Oulis, asking him to move the ship by the month Apatourion (October/November).

Front

Μεγιστῆς Λεύκωνι χαίρειν· εἰ υγιαίνεις, καλῶς ποεῖς· υγιαίνομεν δὲ κ[α]ὶ ἡμεῖς. Οὐλίς μοι ἐνέτυχεν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀνκύρης (Ἰ. ἀγκύρης) ἄξιῶν ζητεῖν ἐκ παντός τρόπου ὅπως ἀν λυθείη· ὁ χρόνος ἔστω ὁ Ἀπατουριών· καὶ αὐτὸς ἔφη προστ[…] 5 προστ[…]σε[ca.1-2]σι λατινικά
ατικα [ca.3]σταρε[ca.3]ατικα [ca.1-2]ι(- -)· εὐτύχει

Back

Λεύκωνι

Translation

Megistes to Leukon, greetings. If you are in good health, you do well; we are in good health as well. Oulis has contacted me, asking, concerning the anchor, to try in any way to leave. The time let it be Apatourion. And he himself said [...] Farewell.

Back address: “To Leukon.”

Regarding the farewell greetings, by the middle of the third century BC the greeting ἔρρωσο is conventional. There were also more elegant alternatives, such as εὐτύχει or other similar verbs (e.g. υγίαινε). In petitions the conventional closing farewell was εὐτύχει. Unlike ἔρρωσο, which was usually followed by the date, εὐτύχει and υγίαινε were not followed by the date.

1.4.3 Roman Times

From about the late first century BC and through the Roman period, the linguistic style of letters gradually developed and became more sophisticated than in earlier times, but not overly refined. As epistolary theorists suggested, the language of letters, though more formal than everyday speech, should be charming, avoiding excessive
A sublime style with archaisms and bold rhetorical language would sound too pompous and artificial. Although classicism was at a peak and knowledge of classical Greek literature was a sign of prestige, the use of archaistic and literary linguistic elements is rare in letters. Allusions to knowledge of classical literature tend to be subtly expressed, in a way that would be recognised and appreciated mainly by people with an equally advanced cultural background and literary interest.

Cicero, for example, avoided excessive rhetorical devices and literary language in letters, preferring to make allusions to Greek literature than to appear pompous and impolite to the addressee. He tended to include Greek literary phrases in letters to those addressees who had a high educational background and could appreciate such elements. In this way, literary elements enhanced the elegance of his letters and at the same time flattered the addressees. The language of papyrus letters is, of course, not as advanced and sophisticated as that of the letters of Cicero—not every man had such an advanced level of literacy; however, there are letters with an elegant linguistic style that reveal good knowledge of the Attic Greek language. In these letters, the use of archaistic elements remained moderate, and, although in some cases it is evident that the writers had literary knowledge, they deliberately avoided heavy use of literary language. A subtle way of demonstrating one’s learning in a letter could be, for example, to use the optative case instead of the commonplace indicative or

192 For the proper epistolary style according to ancient epistolary theorists see Malherbe 1988, 13–14, and Luiselli 1999, 83–104.
193 For the atticistic movement, which was initiated in Rome and spread to the Greek East, where it flourished, see Wisse 1995, with the bibliography included there.
194 For the archaistic tendencies of the second sophistic see the classic article of Bowie 1970.
195 Hall 2009.
196 For papyrus letters that have an evidently advanced linguistic style with literary elements or allusions to literature see Döllstadt 1934.
197 Luiselli 1999, 142–143. Although letters of the late antique period are beyond the scope of this work, it may be parenthetically added here that the epistolary conventions that began in Roman times continued more intensively in late antique times. Politeness and respect formulas became longer and much more intense, resulting in a style that in some cases has been described as “servile” (Zilliacus 1953). However, the excessive politeness in late antique letters should be explained in the context of Christian spirituality and ideology, that one should have humility and serve the others (Matthew 20.26–28; Marcus 10.44–45; see Papathomas 2007 and Papathomas 2010a). Another linguistic phenomenon in some late antique letters is a heavier use of poetic elements, which aimed at adding elegance. This phenomenon can be related to the poetry of the time, which imitated the style of epic poetry. For elegant late antique letters that contain poetic elements see the archive of Dioskoros, in Fournet 1999 and 2008, with Agosti 2008, 33–54, and Schwendner 2008, 55–66.
imperative moods. Or one might employ the rhetorical figure of *parechysis* by duplicating similar-sounding words.

Another characteristic phenomenon of the epistolary language of the Roman period is the increased conventionalisation. This does not imply that the use of formulaic phrases in letters was a novelty, since conventional epistolary formulas, especially in the opening address and the farewell greeting, are among the standard characteristic elements that differentiate letters from other types of texts. Nor does this imply that polite expressions were not used in letters of earlier times. However, under the Romans the conventionalisation of epistolary language became more extensive, with the introduction of a new repertoire of phrases that expressed friendship, intimacy and care more intensely than in earlier times. While in the Hellenistic period, epistolary formulas were used in opening addresses, in initial questions about the addressee’s health (the so-called *formula valetudinis*), and sometimes in polite requests and closing farewells, in Roman times, there is even greater use of flattering adjectives and expressions of friendship and intimacy, establishing a new repertoire of formulaic epistolary expressions.

Unlike in Hellenistic letters, in which the name of the addressee was usually bare and if any kinship terms were added, they were in most cases used literally, in Roman letters, writing only the name of the addressee in the opening address would appear impolite. The opening address was expected to include flattering adjectives or kinship terms, such as ἀδελφός (“brother”) or πατήρ (“father”), which did not necessarily designate blood ties, but rather a close friendly relationship: “brother” was preferred for correspondents of equal status, while “father” was used to express respect to addressees of higher status or older age. A respectful term in the opening address was κύριος (“lord”), and its more formal variant was δέσποτα (“master”, “lord”). In official or formal letters, the title of the addressee was normally added, too, and the adjectives that accompanied his name were carefully selected, according to social status and the relationship between the correspondents. A very common adjective in the opening address was φίλτατος (“dearest”), which implied friendly relationship but in a formal way. More remote was τιμιώτατος (“most honourable, most esteemed”), and there were also other alternatives, such as ἀγαθώτατος (“most noble, excellent”).

Each letter-writer used the epistolary expressions that were familiar to him and seemed to be appropriate for the addressee. Thus, the linguistic style of each letter reveals the ability and level of literacy of its writer, his circumstances and socio-

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198 The optative case had been mostly abandoned by the Roman period but was revived in some letters of the 2nd and 3rd cent. AD. See for example the opening address χαίροις, as an alternative to the imperative χαίρε, discussed below p. 50 with n. 217.

199 E.g. P.Heid. III 234.3 πάντι πάντιν χαίρεται and 4–5 πραχθέντων καὶ πρασομένων (see edition and image below p. 119 fig. 22); PSI XII 1246.6 φιλάτε, φιλήτα σοι φίλα.

200 For the literary and extended use of kinship terms in papyrus letters see Dickey 2004a.
cultural background. The use of standardised expressions gradually led to increased conventionalisation in the linguistic style of letters. The use of conventional polite phrases has been discussed in recent studies about the epistolography of Cicero, where it has been shown that Cicero used them especially in his formal correspondence, while letters to his trusted friends and close family did not stick strictly to typical politeness rituals of formal relationships.201 In papyrus letters, too, an etiquette can be observed in conventional formulas especially in letters addressing social acquaintances, while in letters to family members, to very close friends or to business partners of lower social status, formalities were often skipped. For example, in the archive of the strategos Apollonios, the letters that he received from officials, social acquaintances or business partners have a relatively formal linguistic style and proper use of the adjectives φίλτατος and τιμιώτατος, while the letters from his mother, wife and other members of the household show more intimate, personal language.202

Epistolary formulas have been the subject of many studies.203 Their development and use has often been attributed to schooling or to thinking in clichés.204 However, the great spread and uniformity of the formulas found in papyrus letters can hardly be explained by schooling, and the explanation “thinking in clichés” needs to be substantiated. Surviving school exercises from Roman Egypt reveal that epistolary formulas were not taught at ordinary grammar schools.205 Letter writing was practiced only at high educational levels in schools of rhetoric as part of the exercises προσωποποιεία (“personification”) and ἠθοποιεία (“imitation of character”),206 but at this level stu-

201 For the politeness strategies in the epistolography of republican Rome, reflected in the letters of Cicero, see Hall 2009.
202 For the letters sent to Apollonios from his family see P.Giss. Apoll. pp. 61–190 and for letters sent to him from official and business partners or other acquaintances see P.Giss. Apoll. pp. 192–305.
203 For formulaic epistolary expressions of the Ptolemaic period see Buzón 1984; for an anthology of Ptolemaic papyrus letters see Witkowski 1911. For the Roman period see e.g. Exler 1923; Steen 1938; Koskenniemi 1956; White 1972a, 1–41; White 1981; Ziemann 1910; for anthologies of letters that include comprehensive introductory discussions see e.g. Bagnall/Cribiore 2006 for women’s letters; Ghedini 1923, Naldini 1998 and Tibiletti 1979 for Christian letters; Olsson 1925; Trapp 2003 for both literary and non-literary letters; White 1986.
204 Parsons 1980, 7–8; Trapp 2003, 39–40.
205 For the content of the exercises at different educational levels see Cribiore 1996, 31.
206 For these exercises the students combined historical information, anecdotal short stories or sayings (ῥητά), with information about the circumstances, environment and life of classical Greek figures and tried to impersonate the ancient personality by writing imaginary speeches or letters that could have been spoken/written by the ancient men themselves. As mentioned in the treatise De elocutione 227 (Malherbe 1988, 19), letters should reflect the personality of the writer, and fictitious letters were composed with painstaking attention to stylistic detail, matching as closely as possible the character, circumstances and language of the personality to whom the letter was attributed. Rhetorical prose composition textbooks (προγυμνασματα) with rhetorical exercises were written by Aelius Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius the sophist, and Nicolaus the sophist (Kennedy 2003). See also above p. 26 with n. 126.
dents were already familiar with conventional epistolary phraseology. There was another type of “school exercise” that incorporated epistolary formulas, so-called “copying exercises”, but their number is relatively small and they are usually written in skilled hands, attributed to apprentice scribes, even though surviving papyrus letters were not written exclusively by scribes. It seems more likely, therefore, that people learned conventional epistolary formulas by reading other letters, received by themselves or by other members of the household. Those with a more advanced educational background might also have consulted collections of model letters in circulation at the time. By using standard epistolary expressions, letter writers were able to express themselves in a “proper” style that would be recognised and appreciated by the addressee. This was important, especially because the ability to use language that was appropriate for each addressee and occasion was an indication of one’s educational background and familiarity with elegant social manners.

As shown by Dickey, a common characteristic of the epistolary formulas that were introduced in the Roman period is that they were influenced by Latin. This is suggested by comparison of new formulas attested in Greek papyrus letters from Roman Egypt with contemporary or earlier Latin letters written in Rome, such as the letters of Cicero, or in other Latin-speaking regions of the Roman Empire, such as Vindolanda (England). Greek adopted a number of conventional terms from Latin; for example, the metaphorical use of kinship terms, such as ἀδελφός (“brother”) or πατήρ (“father”), to express intimacy, or of flattering adjectives, such as κύριος (“lord”), in opening addresses seems to have come from Latin. Similarly, the word ἴδιος, which was used in the opening of some letters as an expression of polite intimacy, is a translation of Latin suus (cf. “my dear”). A common characteristic of these epistolary adjectives is that they are usually in the superlative, such as τιμιώτατος, ἀγαθώτατος, φίλτατος etc., translating into Greek the Latin tendency to place the adjectives that referred to the addressee in the superlative. The same applies to adverbs expressing sentiments, feelings and wishes, which tend to be in the superlative, such as the intensifying πλεῖστα (“most”) frequently attested with the greeting χαίρειν in the opening address in the Roman period. In the farewell greeting, the imperative ἔρρωσο continued to be used, but from about the first century AD on, another formula, ἐρρῶσθαι σε εὐχομαι,

207 Exercises of this kind have been collected in MPER N.S. XV and XVIII.
208 The question “who wrote ancient letters” is discussed below in the chapter pp. 125ff. Authentication.
209 See e.g. the collections mentioned above, p. 28.
210 For the transfer of epistolary formulas from Latin to Greek see Adams 2003, 76–84; Dickey 2001; 2003; 2004 a and b; Dickey 2010b, 208–220.
211 For the addressing system in Greek non-literary letters and the influence of Latin see Dickey 2004b. For the address κύριε and its relationship to the Latin domine see Dickey 2001.
212 For discussion of this, see Cuvigny 2002.
was introduced and gradually prevailed. It was influenced by the Latin epistolary closing phrase *bene valere te opto.*

Other polite, Latin-inspired formulas are attested in the body of the letter. Characteristic are prayers to the gods, and more specifically, the προσκύνημα formula. This was an expression of a religious act of adoration to deities, such as the local deities (τοῖς ἐνθάδε θεοῖς) or deities of the home (τοῖς πατρώοις θεοῖς), to whom the sender prayed on behalf of the addressee. At religious sites, such religious acts could be commemorated with an inscription made on the foot of the statue of a god, or at the entrance of a temple or other religious site, in order to record an act of adoration, often with a name. Προσκυνήματα are attested only in Egypt, because this was an Egyptian religious practice, which was adopted by the Greek and Hellenised inhabitants who coined the term προσκύνημα, attested from the mid-second century BC to the Roman period. From the names attested in inscriptions on gods’ statues it appears that many προσκυνήματα were written by Roman soldiers. Many letters mentioning προσκυνήματα have been found in the Roman military camps in the Eastern Desert, revealing the popularity of the practice among the Romans.

In the second and third centuries AD a new style of prescript came into fashion, as an alternative to the standard ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι or τῷ δεῖνι ὁ δεῖνα χαίρειν. The new prescript was formed by the imperative χαίρε (or the optative χαίροιϲ) and the name of the addressee in the vocative. The name of the sender followed in a prepositional clause (παρὰ τοῦ δεῖνος) or, more often, in a new sentence (ὁ δεῖνα σε προσαγορεύω/ἀσπάζομαι). This new formula was influenced by the Latin epistolary opening (salve + vocative), which is attested in contemporary Latin letters from senders of very high status, such as the emperor Marcus Aurelius. The formation of this opening address with the name of the addressee in the vocative, as in an oral address, is reminiscent of the type of opening address attested in letters of the early classical period. The revival of the vocative in the Roman imperial period may have been inspired by the general cultural tendency to imitate the style of Classical Greece. It is certainly not by chance that this opening address is attested in letters that are elegant and formal in content, from senders who evidently had an advanced education, as in the above

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213 The earliest known certainly dated Greek letter with such a farewell is P.Princ. III 162 (AD 89) which ends with ἐρρῶσθαι [εὔχομαι. As Parsons has shown, the new form of the closing farewell was introduced to Greek by Latin influence, on the model of the formula *bene valere te opto* which is already used in Latin letters in the first century BC (Parsons, *P.Rain.Cent.* 164.15n).


216 See above pp. 40ff.
cited philophronetic letter P.Oxy. XIV 1664 (with fig. 1).\textsuperscript{217} The epistolary opening with χαίρε/χαίροιϲ never became as widespread as the standard ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι or τῷ δεῖνι ὁ δεῖνα χαίρειν, and discontinued after the fourth century.

An unusual phenomenon associated with the formulaic expressions that were introduced from Latin to Greek in the Roman period is that these expressions were not translated from one language to the other only once and subsequently developed independently in each language. Rather, linguistic developments in Latin continued to be imported into Greek.\textsuperscript{218} This reveals constant contact and exchange between the two languages. Another peculiarity is that some of the syntactical structures that were introduced into Greek must have initially sounded unusual to native Greek speakers, such as the request constructions with the verb παρακαλῶ (“I beg”) or ἐρωτῶ (“I ask”), from the respective Latin contructions with orō and rogo.\textsuperscript{219} This phenomenon cannot be explained simply as an imitation of the language of the Latin-speaking conquerors by Greeks. If these loan words and phrases had been imported by Greek speakers, they would not have been syntactical, but rather lexical and adapted to the syntactical structures of Greek. However, until the late third century AD, loans from Latin were exclusively loan translations, i.e. expressions adopted from Latin and translated into Greek literally word for word, creating new constructions which would sound unusual to Greek native speakers. Direct lexical loans or phonetical loans from Latin do not appear in Greek before the fourth century AD, when a large number of direct lexical imports from Latin entered Greek vocabulary (and continue to be imported from Romance languages in modern times).\textsuperscript{220} This linguistic phenomenon observed in the Roman period is unusual and it may suggest that the influence from Latin was not due to direct imitation and adoption of the Latin language by Greeks, but indirect: It seems probable that these loan translations were not made by Greek speakers, but by Latin speakers as they tried to speak and write in Greek, and, thus, unconsciously introduced syntactical constructions from their mother tongue into their Greek texts. Subsequently, Greek speakers adopted these new grammatical constructions imported by Latin speakers and used them themselves.

The reason for this complicated development would be that, unlike in the Western provinces of the Roman Empire, where the Roman conquest established Latin as the dominant language, in the Eastern provinces Greek remained dominant and the use of Latin remained limited, used mostly in military contexts and high administrative levels, such as the office of the Prefect of Egypt in Alexandria. Although Romans had the military and administrative power, Greek was the language of ordinary

\textsuperscript{217} A list of papyrus letters with the opening χαίρε/χαίροιϲ is presented by Hagedorn in P.Hamb. IV 256.1n.

\textsuperscript{218} Dickey 2004b, 516.

\textsuperscript{219} For novelties in the construction of παρακαλῶ and ἐρωτῶ under influence of Latin, see Dickey 2010b, 208–220.

\textsuperscript{220} Dickey 2003.
daily administration. This was due to the long establishment of Greek as the *lingua franca* in the region since Ptolemaic times. Learning Greek was indispensable for the management and administration of these areas, but, besides this, it seems that Latin immigrants used Greek not only in public administration but in their private life, too. This is suggested, for example, by scratched inscriptions on gods’ statues (προσκυνήματα), many of which were written in Greek, by Roman soldiers who were native Latin speakers, as evidenced by grammatical errors in the inscriptions.\textsuperscript{221} Similarly, for their private communications with native Latin speakers, they often used Greek. This can be observed in archives of private letters of Roman soldiers, such as the archive of Tiberianus, a Roman veteran in the village Karanis, including letters from his “son”, Terentianus.\textsuperscript{222} Both Tiberianus and Terentianus were bilingual in Greek and Latin and could understand both languages, so some of the letters from Terentianus to Tiberianus are in Greek and some in Latin. Comparable examples can be found among other private letters from Roman soldiers, such as O.Claud. 366 and 367, two letters on ostraca excavated at a Roman military camp in the Eastern Desert of Egypt: They were both written by the same sender to the same addressee, the first in Greek and the second in Latin.\textsuperscript{223}

Thus, it seems that the Romans who immigrated to the Eastern provinces, despite using Latin in high military and state administration, used Greek in their everyday life and often in their private correspondence. The obvious reason for this preference is that Greek was regarded as culturally prestigious by high-class Romans, including emperors and orators, who wrote literature and elegant private letters in Greek.\textsuperscript{224} The attitude of Roman immigrant soldiers in the Eastern provinces of the Empire was not different from the attitude of the aristocracy at Rome. Since the Roman immigrants in the Eastern provinces were regarded as politically and socially superior to Greeks, their linguistic and epistolary style was soon imitated by the latter, especially by those who aspired to ascend socially and enter Roman elite circles. Thus, formulaic constructions, which were imported unconsciously into Greek by Latin native speakers who tried to speak and write in Greek, got established in Greek by being imitated by Greek native speakers.

Roman influence is evident not only in the formulaic expressions of letters, but also in their content and ideology. To this cultural influence is owed the courteous epistolographic style that flourished in Roman Egypt, producing the new epistolographic style of polite philophronetic letters, invitations to social events,

\textsuperscript{221} Adams 2003, 579–589.
\textsuperscript{222} Strassi 2008.
\textsuperscript{223} For further examples and discussion of the use of Latin in Egypt and its interference with Greek see Adams 2003, 527–641.
\textsuperscript{224} See e.g. the Greek letters between Marcus Aurelius and Fronto. For upper-class Romans who learned Greek see Adams 2003, 9–14 and 308–347.
letters of condolence and thanksgiving letters. This peculiar type of fertilisation, which, in fact, represented an import of mentality without direct linguistic influence, is owed to the unique relationship that Greek and Latin culture had in the Roman Empire. Similarly, Roman influence has also motivated a revival of classicising and atticistic cultural and linguistic trends in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, being inspired by the mentality of Rome, usually described broadly as the cultural movement of the Second Sophistic. Romans’ admiration of classical Greek literature and culture inspired Greeks’ re-appreciation and admiration of their own past and culture. The influence of Roman mentality in Greek letters is also evident in the layout and authentication patterns of letters, which will be analysed in the following chapters.

225 As Swain 1996, 28 commented “Rome was not a source of inspiration; but she may well have been a source of reaction.”