Introduction

The essays collected in this volume are the result of several years of research into formal Greek and Coptic majuscules and were originally published in Italian.[1] The present English translation, which will make these researches more widely available, has also enabled me to make some changes and updates, made necessary both by the progress of research and the requirements of editorial uniformity. However, the principal purpose of the publication is to provide a critical survey of some of the unresolved problems in the study of Greek and Coptic majuscules. I was trained as a palaeographer within the Italian tradition, which—in the specific field of Greek majuscules—founded the modern approach to their study, introducing methods of analysis, terminology and historical interpretative paradigms. Before the publication of Guglielmo Cavallo's *Ricerche sulla maiuscola biblica* (1967) the study of Greek majuscules was largely based on impressionistic judgements and on the analysis of individual letter forms; Cavallo's study introduced the methodology which Latin palaeography had elaborated in the 1950s and 1960s, which brought together a consideration of the material, structural and formal components of a given script with the historical and dynamic reconstruction of the graphic signs as they evolved. In short, scholars of Greek palaeography began to ask themselves the same questions which Armando Petrucci[2] had said were essential for anyone who undertakes the study of written documents: What is this document? When was it written? Where was it written? How was it written and by whom? And why? The immediate objectives of palaeographical study are undoubtedly to read and decodify the signs on the page, and to date and place the production of written documents, yet it must also take into account the historical dimension of graphic forms. And when we do, then alongside the standard components of palaeographical analysis (structure, *ductus*, form, module, writing angle, angle of writing slope) and the criteria for classifying scripts (everyday, formal and informal, stylistic class, style, canon)[3], the historical and social aspects of written documents must also be examined (the makers and those for whom they were

1 Orsini 2008b; Orsini 2015b; Orsini 2005a, 165–211; Orsini 2008a; Orsini 2016; Orsini 2013 (revised and adapted); Orsini 2010.

2 Petrucci 1989, 18–21; Petrucci 2002, VI–VII.

3 Crisci / Degni (eds) 2011, 19–29. It should be noted that this book uses palaeographical terminology employed in the Italian school of Greek palaeography studies, which differs in some respects from English and French usage: see *Glossary of Palaeographical Terms employed in the Text*.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110575446-000

writing, the social spheres in which the documents circulated, the purpose of the documents in terms of the periods, places and social contexts in which they were produced).

This complex approach has led to the history of all the formal Greek majuscules being redefined and rewritten: round majuscule (Cavallo 1967b), Biblical majuscule (Cavallo 1967a; Orsini 2005a), Alexandrian majuscule (Cavallo 1975; Bastianini / Cavallo 2011), upright pointed majuscule (Cavallo 1977a; Crisci 1985), sloping pointed majuscule (Cavallo 1977a; Orsini 2016), liturgical majuscule (Cavallo 1977a; Orsini 2013). Between the late 1960s and the 1980s this approach, even though certain concepts and principles were at times applied too rigidly,[4] undoubtedly produced results of incomparable value for the history of writing between late Antiquity and early Byzantine humanism. However, more recently some of the underlying assumptions of this methodological approach have been called into question, taking the criticisms of it which had been made since the 1970s, with the initial attempts to make the study of Greek majuscules more *scientific*, to their ultimate conclusions.[5]

This *revisionist* debate focused on the conceptual categories of 'stylistic class', 'style', and 'canon'.[6] It is obvious that such categories are heuristic rather than ontological, as certain scholars have asserted: the scribes themselves did not define the different stages of writing in these terms.[7] When one speaks, for example, of 'canonical Biblical majuscule', a modern category is being retrospectively applied to designate and describe and identify majuscule scripts which reflect various structural and formal *rules* which serve to distinguish it from other scripts. We do not know how the Greeks themselves described their

4 Crisci 2016.

5 See for instance the critical reviews to Cavallo 1967a: O'Callaghan 1968; Parsons 1970; Irigoin 1970; Wilson 1971a.

6 See *Glossary of Palaeographical Terms employed in the Text*.

7 See in particular Turner 1987, 20; Parsons 1990, 22–23; Nongbri 2014, 16, 19–20. Of relevance is Cavallo's recent renunciation of the concept of 'canon' for the following reasons: 'for scripts which are repeated in numerous manuscripts and often over a more or less extended period of time, the term "normative scripts" has been used in preference to "canon" or "canonical scripts" since this expression is too rigid to be applied to graphic forms which lacked a theoretical basis of unchanging rules which had to be adhered to and which even less constituted obligatory models but were instead simply one choice among a range of choices [...] The term "normative scripts" refers to those scripts the characteristics of which create a recognisable imprint over a more or less extended period of time, without, however, confining them within a canon of fixed unchanging rules (it is not by chance that, in order to explain certain variations in a script, scholars are obliged to resort to a sleight of hand in admitting that an evolution takes place within a canon—in effect a contradiction in terms' (Cavallo 2008, 15).

scripts, although we are able to study their writing exercises, which show us that scribes were perfectly capable of making informed choices among a variety of scripts in use at the time. One example is P. Köln IV 175 (LDAB 3239), attributable to a period between the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth century: the same scribe uses a Biblical majuscule on the recto and a sloping pointed majuscule on the verso.

It must be acknowledged that in applying the above-mentioned categories there has been a prevailing assumption that scripts undergo a linear and *evolutionary* development, progressing from simpler to more complex forms, in which manifestations which are more basic in structure and poorer in decorative elements should be assigned to the initial phases of a given script while more complex structures and richer decoration indicate the phase of maturity and decline. In reality, the history of majuscule scripts is more complicated and needs to be related to multiple phenomena: apart from the sheer chronological range of production, the different localities of production and the interpretations adopted by individual scribes must also be taken into account.[8] But information on these matters is often missing: there are no explicitly dated and localised manuscripts—in the Greek and Coptic world—before the ninth century, and only a very few can be dated and assigned to a place of production with any degree of plausibility. Connected to this problem is the phenomenon of so-called 'graphic mimesis', the imitation of earlier and older scripts,[9] which it is not always easy to recognise as such and to value correctly in all the implications of such imitation.

Furthermore, on the issue of individual scribal interpretations of scripts, it must be borne in mind that we know very little about the professional training and subsequent activity of scribes. There are examples of scribes who practised their profession for over forty years. One example is Hermas the son of Ptolemaios (Bacchias, 35–121 CE),[10] whose subscriptions are found essentially unchanged in five documents (dated between 78 CE, when Hermias was 44 years of age, and 120 CE, when he was 85). Another example, mentioned by Revel A. Coles,[11] concerns a scribe of documents whose work can be identified in parts of P. Oxy. LXIV 4441 (coll. IX–X; 315–316 CE; TM 23667), P. Oxy. LIV 3746 (319 CE;

8 Crisci 2016, 139–142.

9 Cavallo 2005, 80–81. See also Nongbri 2014, 19, who records the example of P. Oxy. L 3529, copied in a typical book hand of the first century CE, but including the *Passio* of Saint Dioscorus and not datable, therefore, before 307 CE.

10 Daniel 2008.

11 P. Oxy. LXVII 4608 and 4611; Nongbri 2014, 20.

TM 12252–12254), P. Oxy. LXVII 4608 (*ll.* 1–11; 362 CE; TM 78650) and P. Oxy. LXVII 4611 (col. I; 363 CE; TM 78653), and whose writing shows barely any variation in more or less forty-eight years of activity. In such cases a script learnt in youth has been used for a very long time, indeed during the whole professional career of an individual; we can deduce from this phenomenon that formal changes were introduced very slowly, over more than one generation. These are examples of scribes who worked on documents: it is not possible to state with any degree of certainty that the same applies to those scribes who produced books. What can be said with confidence is that the style and canon of majuscule bookhands are syntheses of the rules followed by scriptoria and stable forms (stable in the sense they do not change quickly) and that the internal changes which occur are nothing more than transformations which gradually come about in everyday writing. In other words there is a process of being open to innovative forms.

From this point of view the phenomenon of the interaction between different styles and canons, whether these are contemporary with each other or not, becomes significant. Two examples examined in the present study can be singled out here: the so-called 'mixed style' (or 'hybrid script' to use the expression in Cavallo / Maehler 1987, 5, 84) and liturgical majuscule. The first is the result of a mingling of characteristic letters from both canonical Biblical majuscule and canonical unimodular Alexandrian majuscule, found in both Greek and Coptic centres of copy and book production, though it was used and developed more extensively in Coptic book production. The second is the result of a deliberate process of elaboration which involved grafting the canons of upright pointed majuscule and Biblical majuscule with the particular style of rounded decorated lettering found in publically displayed and monumental scripts. These two examples serve to show that what today are conventionally termed 'styles' or 'canons' were not in fact sealed compartments but came into contact with each other, both in the person of the individual scribe and within a specific centre of copy and book production, and could be combined to form a new graphic style.

Bearing in mind the problems and the limitations we have described,[12] the fundamentals of palaeographical methodology remain efficacious for the study of majuscule scripts, just as the categories of 'stylistic class', 'style' and 'canon' retain their usefulness, heuristically, in developing a scientific description of the continuum of a given graphic production. There is in any case no real alter-

12 On this matter, see the positions taken by Cavallo / Canart / Wilson / Gamillscheg / Irigoin / Prato 2000 and Crisci 2016, 133–146.

native at present to this approach, unless we accept proposals to return to past models of investigation as new theories for consideration.

In palaeographical methodology, the dating of a bookhand majuscule[13]—in the absence of an explicit date or chronological guide-elements[14]—depends on comparison with other examples of the script which are either dated or can be dated. The comparison must be based on similarities found in the following elements:

1. the general graphic organization (formal and informal script, stylistic class, style, canon);[15]
2. structural characteristics (structure, *ductus*, module, writing angle, angle of slope);
3. individual forms and structures.

It is not correct in methodological terms to compare, merely on the basis of appearance, scripts belonging to different graphic types, because this would ignore the need for there to be some kind of formal relationship linking the scripts which are being investigated. Any comparisons made must therefore be *appropriate*: *similes cum similibus*.

On a theoretical level, there are two kinds of comparison which can be made between the majuscules found in two or more manuscripts: 1) between an undated manuscript and one or more explicitly dated manuscripts; 2) between an undated manuscript and one or more datable manuscripts.

These types of comparison can produce different results:

1. the assignation of an undated majuscule script to the same general graphic environment in which one or more dated or datable manuscripts have been produced;
2. the assignation of an undated majuscule script to a stylistic class for which it is possible to reconstruct in approximate terms the dates when it came into being and when it ended;

13 The situation is different for majuscules used in archival documents, as such texts usually offer precise chronological data.

14 Such as, for example, archaeological data, or the criterion of *rectus* and *versus* for papyrus rolls (a document on the verso provides a *terminus ante quem* for the text copied on the recto; vice versa, a document on the recto is a *terminus post quem* for the text added on the verso), the textual contents, the use of particular diacritical marks, various technical bibliographical data: see Roberts 1956, xiii–xiv; Turner 1987, 18–19; Crisci / Degni (eds) 2011, 17–18.

15 Barker 2011.

3. the assignation of an undated majuscule script to a particular style for which it is possible to reconstruct both the history and the main distinguishing features;
4. the assignation of an undated majuscule script to a canonical or normative script, for which it is possible to reconstruct the system of internal rules and its history;
5. the assignation of an undated majuscule script to a specific scribe whose hand has been identified in other dated and datable manuscripts.

Turning from what is theoretically possible to the reality of graphic production, it has already been mentioned that there are no Greek and Coptic manuscripts (containing literary texts) earlier than the ninth century which are explicitly dated, only ones which are datable. Consequently the history of canonical Greek majuscules has to be constructed on the basis of a few datable manuscripts and a handful of dated manuscripts (for the period from the ninth to the tenth century).[16] In these cases, therefore, it is the historical paradigm which has been reconstructed for each of these majuscules which allows us to insert an undated example of a script into a more or less plausible diachronic sequence. Even more complex is the dating of a manuscript by including it in a 'stylistic class', since this can contain 'expressions which, apart from certain analogous structural elements which justify bringing these expressions together as a single class, can also show differences'.[17] In such cases, it becomes more difficult to reconstruct a coherent chronological sequence; the affinities which can help us to date an undated manuscript have to be sought mainly among the dated or datable documentary material, of whatever kind, which has been assigned to the same 'stylistic class'.

However, it is possible to find oneself in a situation where there is a total absence of certain chronological references: this is the case, for example, with liturgical majuscule. How can palaeographical methodology then proceed, in the absence of dated or datable manuscripts? One can resign oneself to Wittgenstein's conclusion that the historical representation of a phenomenon (in the sense of diachronic evolutionary development) is merely one of many possible

16 Crisci 2016, 145 remarks: 'the study of the late canonical majuscules (from the ninth and tenth centuries and the early eleventh century) should not place much reliance on schematic models for the interpretation of graphic phenomena. By this period we are in a context in which the traditional majuscule bookhands are imitative and adapt with difficulty (and with results which cannot always be compared, even within the same context, and/or different contexts) to graphic schemes which are in a sense "atemporal"'.

17 Cavallo 2005, 75.

ways of compiling and organising observable data.[18] Yet it is equally possible to consider the reciprocal *formal* relations of such data, gathering together their connections, in the search for intermediate links. Here the formal and structural similarities and links can constitute the framework of a particular, largely morphological, representation of a given graphic phenomenon. But this does not imply that we must give up the attempt to reconstruct an historical dimension: a graphic style is after all always a historical phenomenon, tied to a particular moment and context in time. In Carlo Ginzburg's words, 'in history [...] formal connections can be treated as evolutionary or rather genetic hypotheses, just formulated in a different way'.[19] Morphology and history do not necessarily exclude each other but constitute 'deux servantes maîtresses'[20], each ready to put itself at the service of the other in a relationship of reciprocal support and help. In this way palaeographical methodology transforms itself into *historical morphology*.

It is also true however that the way palaeography methodology operates or should operate, as described here, has also been criticised. The principal accusation is that it is 'subjective,'[21] based on natural inclination or the so-called 'palaeographical eye', in other words the individual capacity to recognise and identify scripts and scribal hands. It is of course undoubtedly the case that experience plays an important role in palaeography as in the majority of the human sciences. But it is methodology—an ordered process of actions, procedures, conventions, ensuring the observed data is recurrent and verified—which determines the outcome of reliable and credible results, even when they are not the ones which the researcher expects. In short, palaeographical skill in judgement must be founded on a knowledge of the history of writing, must adhere to precise, describable and repeatable methodological procedures, and must be based on reliable evidence. With these requirements subjectivity is not an equivalent of arbitrariness.

Nonetheless, there are examples where the results obtained by palaeographical methods of analysis contradict the historical, archaeological and scientific data relating to a certain manuscript or script. Cases in point are P. Kellis Lit. II 97 and the Codex Tchacos.[22] P. Kellis Lit. II 97 (LDAB 5667) comes

18 Wittgenstein 2006, 28–30, 50.

19 Ginzburg 1989, XXX.

20 An expression used by Irigoin 2000 to describe the relationship between palaeography and philology.

21 For example Turner 1987, 20.

22 Orsini 2018.

from Ismant el-Kharab, the ancient village Kellis, in the oasis of Dakhleh, and was dated by its editors to the beginning of the fourth century on the basis of various archaeological findings (pottery, coins, and papyri documentary texts).[23] But the script of the papyrus is a canonical bimodular Alexandrian majuscule, which can be compared with P. Grenf. II 112 (LDAB 6291, datable to 577 CE), P. Berol. 13418 (LDAB 983, middle of fifth century), P. Berol. 13262 + 21228 (LDAB 2198, second half of sixth century, although its editors proposed the fifth century), and P. Oxy. XX 2258 (LDAB 523, sixth century). Thus palaeographical methodology dates P. Kellis Lit. II 97 to either the fifth or sixth centuries while archaeological evidence suggests it was produced at the beginning of the fourth century.

The Codex Tchacos[24], the celebrated *Gospel of Judas*, has been examined with radiocarbon analysis, the results of which have dated the manuscript to between 230 and 340 CE. However, this Coptic codex was written in a Biblical majuscule which can be compared with Leid. Voss. Gr. Q. 8 + Paris. gr. 17 + Petropol. RNB gr. 3 (LDAB 3202, fourth-fifth centuries)[25] and P. Amh. I 1 (LDAB 5989, first half of fifth century)[26]. So the palaeographical information suggests a dating to between the end of the fourth century and the first half of the fifth century, while the radiocarbon analysis suggests an earlier dating to between 230 and 340 CE.

With these examples in mind, we must admit that the scientific efficacy of the method of formal comparison on occasion appears to be diminished or even nonexistent. As a result, the formal similarity between the script found in an undated manuscript and one found in a datable manuscript does not necessarily imply that we can establish a chronological relationship between the two: rather than being the only possible result of a unilinear diachronic process, certain structures and forms used in a graphic type could reflect the specific skills and choices of the scribes involved.[27]

Yet there are other examples in addition to the two examples just mentioned. There have been conflicting results from the use of radiocarbon analysis in the dating of manuscripts. The most significant application of the technique—in the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls—confirmed the datings resulting from

23 Gardner / Worp 1997, 141; Gardner (ed.) 2007, 95: Greek documents belong to the late third century and the fourth century (273/274 CE or 279/280 CE, P. Kell. I 61 [TM 33316]; 389 CE, P. Kell. I 26 [TM 20290]); the coins belong to the period of Licinius (308–324 CE) and Constantine II (347–358 CE).

24 For further information on this manuscript, see paragraph 4.5 of the *Coptic Biblical Majuscule* chapter.

25 Omont 1897; Cavallo 1967a, pl. 50.

26 Cavallo 1967a, pl. 53.

27 Crisci 2016, 138–139.

palaeographical analysis.[28] In other instances, the radiocarbon method has been less accommodating: as in the case of the three Coptic codices recently discussed by Karlheinz Schüssler[29], where the difference between the results obtained by radiocarbon analysis and those reached through palaeographical methods (albeit not consistently applied with the necessary rigour) varied between one and two centuries. We can conclude that, in order to test more accurately the efficacy of palaeographical methods, more opportunities need to be created for greater interaction between palaeographers and other scientific disciplines, in particular encouraging the further use of non-destructive radiocarbon analysis.[30]

The seven essays collected in the present volume tackle, either directly or indirectly, the problems and limits of palaeographical methodology as discussed in this introduction. In the two studies of the Nag Hammadi *Codices* and the Bodmer Papyri these two ancient book collections have been examined from a strictly palaeographical point of view, an approach which has been comparatively overlooked in previous work on these papyri. In comparing Greek and Coptic scripts I have tried to identify the homogeneities or the lack of them found in these two collections, which have often been seen—and not always justifiably—as single 'libraries' organised according to unified editorial programmes.

In the two essays dedicated to Biblical majuscule—in both Greek and Coptic spheres of production—I have confirmed the conclusions Guglielmo Cavallo reached in 1967, but I have also proposed, on the basis of quantitative analyses, some different historical interpretations of this graphic phenomenon. I have also looked again at the question of the geographical areas where this script was produced.

In connection with this issue, I have widened Cavallo's exploration of the question to include Coptic manuscripts written in Biblical majuscule, with the aim of identifying distinctive characteristics which could be used to suggest, on firmer grounds than hitherto, places of production in Egypt.

In the study of sloping pointed majuscule I have re-examined the findings of earlier scholars as well as forming a corpus of dated and datable manuscripts of fundamental importance for establishing the history of this script, which has

28 Bonani / Ivy / Wölfli / Broshi / Carmi / Strugnell 1992, 845 (table); Jull / Donahue / Broshi / Tov 1995, 14 (table 2), 15 (fig. 1); Carmi 2000. A criticism of the method used in this analysis for dating was made by Atwill / Braunheim / Eisenman 2004, 146–147 (table), 150 (table); however, van der Plicht 2007, drew attention to certain misinterpretations in Atwill and Braunheim and reconfirmed the previously established dating.

29 Schüssler 2016.

30 Steelman / Rowe 2002; Steelman / Rowe / Turpin / Guidelson / Nightengale 2004.

been the script less studied from this point of view among the 'canonical' Greco-Byzantine majuscules. I have also confronted the thorny problem of the localisation of manuscripts written in sloping pointed majuscule using the criterion of the 'angle of slope', applying what is essentially a quantitative analysis in order to show the substantial unreliability of this criterion for this task.

Two essays on liturgical majuscule conclude the volume. The first brings together the various work I have done on this script, in which a new approach is taken to the study of a majuscule script, taking into consideration not only books but also other media or objects in which writing appears (mosaics, icons, frescoes, liturgical objects), for a wider understanding of this idiosyncratic script, which emerged from a fusion of different graphic forms and traditions. The second essay is on a specific use of liturgical majuscule, the *Auszeichnungsmajuskel* found in Byzantine manuscripts from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, with sporadic revivals in subsequent centuries.

In conclusion, I should like to thank all those people who have supported and encouraged my researches. In particular, I should like to thank those colleagues with whom I have at various times discussed the questions examined in this book: Marilena Maniaci, Edoardo Crisci, Guglielmo Cavallo, Willy Clarysse.

My gratitude goes to the editors of the series *Studies in Manuscript Cultures* for having made it possible for me to conceive and publish this book as a volume in their series.[31]

Rome, 27 August 2018

31 The following points should be noted: 1. The images reproduced in this book are all taken from earlier publications and/or websites; 2. The quotations from texts in languages other than English have all been translated for the sake of uniformity; 3. The websites cited in the notes were all last verified on 18 September 2018.