"I used to think your administration was better and more successful"

Case marking and scribal practice in the early Arabic documentary papyri (7th-9th century AD)

The Arabic documentary papyri (7th-9th centuries CE) are precious witnesses to the day-to-day written Arabic of their time. These texts exhibit considerable variation in grammar and orthography. Classical Arabic and the prescriptive attitudes of the Arabic grammarians traditionally provided the lens through which the earliest documents of the Islamic period have been read. Since Classical Arabic was only fully canonized in the 10th century CE, approaching the early Arabic papyri, and the variation attested in them, through this standard is anachronistic.

This paper seeks to understand the language of these documents on their own terms. It employs a quantitative approach to investigate the nominal case system, producing a fine-grained analysis of how inflection operated in early documentary Arabic. It will pay special attention to variation within the corpus, which will be approached through a historical, and sociolinguistic framework.