

Βραδέως γράφων: Between Literacy and Illiteracy

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SOUTH of the old Egyptian city of Memphis, and separated from it by some thirty-five miles of desert, lies the great depression known to the ancient Greeks as the Lake (λίμνη), or administratively since the Ptolemies as the Arsinoite nome, and now called the Fayum. Along its northern edge were the flourishing towns of Bacchias and Karanis. The desert road entered the Fayum at Bacchias, and some seven miles to the west the traveler came to Karanis. If he then turned south again and moved gradually eastward for another four miles, he reached a village which had the Egyptian name of Tamais.¹ This was a place in no way remarkable, simply another rural community which one might pass on the way to the metropolis.

It happens, however, that during the reign of Commodus a certain Ischyriion served at Tamais in the capacity of town clerk (κωμογραμματοεύς).² He had been sent there from his home in Ptolemais Hormou, a harbor town at the southern entrance to the Fayum, where ships came in from the Nile.³ At some time before May 184, Ischyriion had the embarrassing experience of being denounced to the chief finance officer of Egypt (διοικητής),⁴ either by a professional informer or a disgruntled villager, as being a man encumbered with debt, not meeting the property qualification, and illiterate (ἀγράμματος).⁵ These charges were transmitted for investigation to the governor of the

¹ Or Tamauis; cf. *PTebt.* II, p.403. For the relative positions of Memphis, Bacchias, Karanis and Tamauis, see the map at the back of *PTebt.* II; cf. the brief remarks in *HThR* 41 (1948) 15 n.36; *PMich.* VIII 496, 22–23 n.

² For the qualifications and duties of this functionary, see F. Oertel, *Die Liturgie* (Leipzig 1917) 157ff; cf. *Cd'E* 81 (1966) 132.

³ Cf. *PPetaus* pp.22f; *PFayum* pp.12–14.

⁴ For a brief summary of his functions see J. Lallemand, *L'administration civile de l'Égypte* (*MémAcadBelg* 57.2, 1964) 81f; cf. Wilcken, *Grundz.* 156.

⁵ On the ἀγράμματοι see E. Majer-Leonhard, *ΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΙ* (Frankfurt 1913); R. Calderini, "Gli ἀγράμματοι nell' Egitto greco-romano," *Aegyptus* 30 (1950) 14–41; H. C. Youtie, "ΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ: An Aspect of Greek Society in Egypt," *HSCP* 75 (1971) 161–76.

Fayum (στρατηγός),⁶ who in turn sent them on to Petaus, at that time town clerk of Ptolemais Hormou.⁷ When Petaus reported back to the governor, he stated categorically that Ischyriion was not illiterate but in fact signed all papers which were sent from his bureau to the governor and other officials.⁸

The signatures written by Ischyriion were thus proffered as conclusive evidence that he was literate. What lends a special tang to Petaus's refutation of the charge of illiteracy brought against Ischyriion is that it describes perfectly the practice followed by Petaus himself. He was in effect offering a defence not only of Ischyriion, against whom the accusation had been directed, but also of himself and his own procedure.

We have from his hand seven signatures appended to documents which contain nominations to village liturgies. In four of them he writes Πεταῦς κωμογρα(μματεὺς) ἐπιδέδωκα, i.e. "I, Petaus, town clerk, have submitted (this nomination)." The other three have the same form but lack the title.⁹ The writing in all of them is stiff, awkward, uneven, kept on the line with obvious effort. Petaus is totally without skill as a writer. He is indeed not a writer at all in any proper sense, but a man copying a model or repeating it from memory. The proof of this curious situation is a sheet of papyrus which he used for learning to write his signature. Starting with a form prepared by someone for his guidance, he produced in four successive lines reasonably correct if rough copies. In the fifth line he overlooked the initial vowel of the verb, and from that point through seven more copies of the signature he invariably omitted the vowel.¹⁰ The error was repeated so often because from line 5 on he was using his own copy as a model.

⁶ N. Hohlwein, *Le stratège du nome* (*Papyrologica Bruxellensia* 9, 1969); cf. Wilcken, *Grundz.* 37f.

⁷ *PPetaus* pp.22–30.

⁸ *PPetaus* 11, 35–37 (pl.IV); cf. the note to line 35. The edition wavers between acceptance and rejection of μή with ἀγράμματον. After repeated palaeographic and logical examination of the text, I have settled on the following as inescapable: μή εἶναι δὲ καὶ ἀγράμματον αὐτόν. For postponement of δέ after a negative, see J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*² (Oxford 1954) 186f; on the force of ἀλλά in the concluding clause, pp.16ff, or more briefly H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (New York 1920) § 2776. The passage has been correctly interpreted by E. G. Turner, *Greek Papyri, An Introduction* (Princeton 1968) 83: "... when he (i.e. Petaus) was asked whether a colleague, another village secretary, was illiterate, he reported 'No, since he can countersign'."

⁹ For a list of these texts see *PPetaus* p.36.

¹⁰ *PPetaus* 121. The papyrus is reproduced on pl.xix (a) at the end of the volume.

He was unable to introduce a correction at any point because he could not read what he wrote, and we understand in consequence why his papers have nothing from his hand except the one formula.¹¹

But there is more to be said about Petaus and his attempt to pass himself off as literate. Sometime in the 24th year of the reign of Commodus, *i.e.* the year 183/4, he and his brother Theon borrowed a hundred drachmas from a certain Heron. The acknowledgement of debt was written by Theon, who at the end of the chirograph, just before the date, made the following statement:

*Θέων ἔγραψα καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ Πεταῦτος τὰ πλείστα,*¹²

i.e. "I, Theon, wrote the greater part (of this document) also on behalf of Petaus."

This is a formula which recurs in a number of other texts where a common obligation undertaken by two or more persons is recorded.¹³ One example will be enough to give us the pattern of its use. A papyrus at Berlin preserves three subscriptions which were appended to a loan of money sometime in the second century. The recipients of the loan were four in number and bore the Egyptian names Pammes, Apynchis, Satabous and Pakysis. Pammes wrote the principal subscription in the names of all four, with a final statement describing his contribution to the document:

*Παμμῆς ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ Ἀπύγχεως καὶ Πακύσεως τὰ πλείστα,
ὑπὲρ δὲ τοῦ Σαταβοῦς¹⁴ ἀγρ[α]μμάτου καθὼς πρόκειται.*

"I, Pammes, wrote the greater part (of the subscription also) on behalf of Apynchis and Pakysis, and I wrote on behalf of Satabous because he is illiterate, as aforesaid."

Apynchis and Pakysis then added briefer subscriptions of their own, so validating the longer subscription written by Pammes. Satabous of course wrote nothing since he was illiterate.¹⁵

This is substantially the pattern of all the documents which contain the expression *ἔγραψα τὰ πλείστα*, "I wrote the greater part," or, in its

¹¹ Cf. *PPetaus* p.36. For more detailed description and discussion see *Cd'E* 81 (1966) 133–37; cf. Youtie, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 171f.

¹² Read *πλείστα*.

¹³ E.g. *BGU* XI 2032 (A.D. 113); *PSI* X 1143 (A.D. 164); *Sammelbuch* VI 9618 (A.D. 192); *BGU* III 853 recto (2nd cent.); *PAbinn.* 64 (= *PLond.* II 251, p.317 = *Mitteis Chrest.* 270; *ca.* A.D. 350).

¹⁴ Read *Σαταβοῦτος*.

¹⁵ *BGU* III 853 recto; cf. *BL* I p.73.

longer form, *ἔγραψα καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ δεῖνα τὰ πλείστα*, “I wrote the greater part also on behalf of so-and-so.” When the body of the agreement was the work of a professional scribe, one of the parties produced a standard subscription including the clause in question, his colleague or colleagues added each a few words.¹⁶

Variants of this situation also occur, but the pattern remains the same. For example, a papyrus in Berlin preserves a document submitted to a governor of the Fayum in A.D. 144 by Menekleia, daughter of Kallias. The first twenty-five lines, written by a professional scribe, present a sworn undertaking by Menekleia to sail down to Alexandria and attend the court of the prefect of Egypt. Immediately below, in lines 26–32, Philadelphos, son of Menekleia, acting as his mother’s *kyrios*, or officially approved adviser in legal actions, but not strictly a party to the undertaking, wrote a subscription in his mother’s name. He used the formula which now concerns us: *ἔγραψα καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς μητρὸς [τὰ] πλείστα*,¹⁷ “I wrote the greater part (of the subscription) also on behalf of my mother.” At the end Menekleia wrote her name and a few words intended to summarize her obligation.¹⁸

Just so, in the acknowledgement of loan written by Theon for himself and his brother Petaus, Theon wrote the body of the document, added the statement that he “wrote the greater part (of the text) also on behalf of Petaus,” and concluded with the date of the loan. There should have come next, following the pattern seen in the undertaking of Menekleia, a subscription from the hand of Petaus, but no subscription is given in the edition. The editors have, however, made a pertinent comment on the condition of the papyrus below the Greek

¹⁶ *PFay.* 35 is an exception. Two deputy tax-collectors, Mystes and Harpalos, acknowledge receipt of wages and undertake to fulfil certain duties. The entire document of 12 lines was written by Mystes (*cf.* the editors’ note to line 1). At the end (11–12) he writes *Μύστης ἔγραψα τὰ πλείστα*. This clause implies that Harpalos was expected to add his subscription, but the subscription was never written.

¹⁷ Read *πλείστα*.

¹⁸ *BGU* III 891 *recto* (A.D. 144); see *BL* I p.78. *BGU* I 300 *recto* (= *Mitteis, Chrest.* 345; A.D. 148) is an *ἐπιτροπικὴ κύστασις*, by which one veteran authorizes another to undertake the management of his properties in the Fayum. The body of the document was written by a third veteran, who states: *ἔγραψα τὰ πλ[εῖς]τα*. Both parties sign at the bottom. In *PThead.* 2 (A.D. 305) Aurelius Sarapion sells a house which he owns in Arsinoë. A subscription is written for him by Aurelius Ploutammon, who asserts in the usual form: *ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τὰ π[λίς]τ[α]* (= *πλείστα*; π[άν]τ[α] ed.). Sarapion adds his name and a few appropriate words. In *BGU* IV 1049 (A.D. 342) Hesyhion, with her husband Athanasios as *κύριος*, sells land which she has at Philadelphia. Her subscription is written for her by Athanasios, who adds *ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ τῆς συμβίω* (= *-βίου*) *μου τὰ πλίστα* (= *πλείστα*), and Hesyhion writes a brief confirmation.

text: “. . . the surface of the papyrus is almost entirely stripped away. Nevertheless, scattered traces of several lines are visible, but these are wholly illegible and in no case can individual letters be recognized.”¹⁹ Still, in view of what we have learned about the phrase τὰ πλεῖστα and its implications, we can reasonably regard the few traces which can be discerned below the legible portion of the text as the remnants of a subscription written by Petaus.

If this is true, as it ought to be in the light of all the available evidence, we have in Petaus a man of many devices. We know that he was illiterate and not prepared to write a subscription, even though he would have claimed to be literate because he signed the papers that were sent out from his office, precisely as did Ischyron at Tamais. Town clerks were expected to be literate, and Petaus, in commenting on the charge levelled at Ischyron, made the point that a man who signed papers could not be called illiterate. But it now appears that Petaus may have gone much further in the attempt to maintain his status as a literate clerk. Since he was able to produce a signature only by keeping in practice, indeed by imitating a model, a subscription to a loan would have left him helpless unless again he had a model to copy, doubtless a model traced by his brother Theon.

There is reason to believe that Petaus was not alone in resorting to this practice as a cover for a meager achievement in the arts of reading and writing. We find others proceeding in much the same way, and seemingly without the excuse of having an official status to maintain. In a cession drawn up in the metropolis of the Fayum in A.D. 192,²⁰ a parcel of catoecic land was transferred to a woman named Isarion *alias* Sarapias by two men whose names were Apollodoros and Ptolemaios *alias* Zosimos. The body of the cession, written by a professional scribe, runs for twenty lines. Ptolemaios then took 4½ lines to write an acknowledgement for himself as well as for Apollodoros. His last words are: [Πτολεμαῖος ὁ καὶ Ζώσιμος ἔγραψα καὶ ὑπὲρ τ]οῦ Ἀπολλοδώρου τὰ πλεῖστα.²¹ “I, Ptolemaios *alias* Zosimos, wrote the greater part (of the subscription) also on behalf of Apollodoros.”

We have here again the conventional expression with which Theon

¹⁹ *PPetaus* p.158: “Unterhalb des von uns wiedergegebenen Textes ist die Oberfläche des Papyrus fast gänzlich abgeblättert; dennoch lassen sich vereinzelt Tintenspuren mehrerer Zeilen erkennen, die aber völlig unleserlich sind und nicht einmal einzelne Buchstaben deutlich werden lassen.”

²⁰ *Sammelbuch* VI 9618.

²¹ Read πλεῖστα.

concluded the chirograph of loan that he wrote for himself and Petaus. What Petaus may have written at the bottom of the loan is now lost, but in the cession of catocic land two lines survive from the hand of Apollodoros, written below the subscription appended by his partner Ptolemaios for them both. The editor of the document has noted that Apollodoros has a clumsy hand, almost like a school-boy's.²² This description suggests some resemblance to the signatures produced by Petaus both on his practice-sheets and below the lists of nominations intended for the governor. The chances are small that Apollodoros was to any degree more accomplished than Petaus, and we know that Petaus was in no real sense literate since he could not even read what he himself wrote. Apollodoros may also have drawn his letters after a model, but to all appearances he passed as literate.

Apollodoros has a counterpart in a certain Panesis, who joined his brother Psyphis in a lease of land at Tebtunis in A.D. 164. The brothers were priests in the temple of the god Soknebtunis, which held in permanent lease from the Roman government extensive areas of royal land. This concession went back to the time of Augustus, and the priests of the temple are found leasing this land back and forth among themselves. On this occasion the brothers gave in lease to two other priests $3\frac{3}{4}$ arouras of royal land. The agreement to lease, written by a professional scribe, occupies the first twenty-five lines of the document. Below it, in lines 26–30, is a subscription written by Psyphis for himself and his brother Panesis. His concluding words are *Ψύφισ ἔγραψα τὰ πλεῖστα*,²³ i.e. "I, Psyphis, wrote the greater part (of the subscription)." Then Panesis added two lines as his contribution. He wrote in large capitals, and his hand may also be likened to that of a still unformed schoolboy.²⁴

It is true that the formula *ἔγραψα τὰ πλεῖστα*, "I wrote the greater part," does not necessarily imply that the subscription which follows is from an unpractised hand. When two or more persons participated in a contract as joint lessors or lessees, joint sellers or buyers, it was entirely natural that one of them compose a detailed subscription for

²² H. Gerstinger, in *Studi Calderini e Paribeni* II (Milan 1956–57) 287: "Apollodoros, dessen ungelenke Hand fast schülerhaft anmutet."

²³ Read *πλεῖστα*.

²⁴ PSI X 1143. Manfredo Manfredi (letter of 27 Nov. 1970, in reply to a query of mine): "La scrittura delle righe 31–32 è del tipo 'large capitals' piuttosto 'schülerhaft', ma non direi 'stentata' veramente."

all, then each of the others briefly indicate his agreement.²⁵ They might all be fully literate. Nevertheless, as we have seen, this procedure suited very well those whose capacity to write might be severely limited.²⁶

The same may be said for the alternative formula *ἔγραψα τὸ σῶμα* "I wrote the body (of the document)." This expression is synonymous with *ἔγραψα τὰ πλεῖστα*, and it is brought into play in equally varied circumstances. Out of twenty-two texts in which it is found, sixteen are not useful for our purpose.²⁷ For most of the remaining six,

²⁵ See n.13 *supra*. For *PAbinn.* 64 we are fortunate enough to have the assessment of E. G. Turner (letter of 24 Nov. 1970): "In *PAbinn.* 64 I should say the subscription of Aurelius Zenon was that of a very practised and quick writer indeed, and the places where it appears otherwise are due to the fact that he has not lifted his pen from the papyrus and some extra strokes appear." Irrelevant to our problem is *BGU XI 2032* (*cf.* pl.iii in that volume), which is written by a single hand throughout.

²⁶ For *Sammelbuch VI 9618* and *PSI X 1143* we have the palaeographic comments of Gerstinger and Manfredi (see nn.22 and 24 *supra*). I am now able, thanks to the kindness of Wolfgang Müller (letter of 2 Dec. 1970) to add his descriptions of the hands in two of the Berlin texts. *BGU III 891 recto* (see above, p.242): "Die Unterschrift der Menekleia (Z.32f) ist von dem Text ihres Sohnes (Z.26–32) nur wenig verschieden. Menekleia schreibt etwas ungelenkt, ohne Ligaturen, vielleicht sogar etwas zittrig; so gelingt es ihr z.B. nicht im π von *πρόκειται* die obere Querhasta in einem geraden Strich durchzuziehen. Ihr Sohn Philadelphos schreibt flüssiger und zuweilen mit Ligaturen. Beide haben denselben Stilus und dieselbe Tinte verwendet. Der Vertrag selbst (Z.1–25) ist viel dünner und flüchtiger geschrieben." *BGU IV 1049* (see n.18 *supra*): "Aurelia Hesychion setzt in ihrer Unterschrift ebenfalls die Buchstaben gleichmässig, aber unverbunden, zuweilen mit deutlichen Spatien nebeneinander. Ihre Schrift ist nicht schülerhaft und entspricht dem Duktus der Zeit, was bei einem Vergleich mit den anderen Händen ganz deutlich wird. Aurelius Athanasios, ihr Mann, schreibt flüssig, etwas nach rechts geneigt. Falls er auch den Vertragstext geschrieben haben sollte, dann hat er sich bemüht, sehr leserlich und deutlich zu schreiben, und das gibt dem Schriftbild einen uneleganten Zug."

²⁷ *PRyl.* II 153 (A.D. 138–161) is a will; the testator appoints a friend to write *τῆς ὑπογραφῆς τὸ σῶμα* because he himself is ill; but in the will as we have it, the subscription was not included. Each of the following texts was written by a single hand throughout; in each the writer indicates that he is responsible for the *σῶμα*, and he also writes the subscription, either for himself or for others: *PTebt.* II 375 (A.D. 140); *PSI IX 1030* (A.D. 109); 1065 (A.D. 156/7); *PStrasb.* 137 (= *SB V 8019*; A.D. 325); 256 (A.D. 132); *PFay.* 34 (A.D. 161); *BGU XI 2048* (pl.iii; A.D. 217); *POxy.* XVII 2120 (A.D. 221). In *PLips.* 10 (A.D. 240) and *PGrenf.* II 71 (A.D. 244–248), both of which contain copies of earlier documents, *σῶμα* again designates the body of the text as opposed to the subscriptions. For *POslo.* II 45 (A.D. 135) I am able to quote a comment from Leiv Amundsen (letter of 5 Jan. 1971): "The writing of lines 1–6 is of an extremely common character, very fluent and 'ausgeschrieben'. The hand of lines 6ff is by no means unskilled. It reminds me—which is natural enough—of the type used by so many private letter writers, combining elements from majuscules with cursive forms and convenient ligatures. The writer must have had a good deal of practice since he learnt to write." In *PHamb.* I 69 (A.D. 146) one party wrote *τὸ σῶμα*, and his statement to this effect serves also as his subscription; a second party indicated his approval with *εσχημέωμαι*. The

editors have supplied palaeographic notices which make it evident that this formula also provided an effective shield for barely literate writers. The tone of editorial comment is remarkably uniform. One subscription is said to be written in “upright capitals,” not the more or less rapid cursive one might expect of a normal documentary hand;²⁸ another is described as “very clumsy”;²⁹ a third is said to reflect very little experience in the art of writing.³⁰

For the remaining three texts somewhat fuller illustration is needed because they are linked to a considerably larger dossier of pertinent materials. One of them records the sale of a camel by Kasios, son of Kasios;³¹ it was written by Philadelphos, perhaps the brother of Kasios.³² His personal statement comes at the end, just before the date:

ἔγραψα τὸ σῶμα, σοῦ τὸ ὄνομα ὑπογράφοντος,

“I wrote the body (of the sale) and you wrote your name below.”³³

After the date Kasios did write his name, the verb *πέπρακα*, “I have sold,” and the standard clause *καθὼς πρόκειται*, “as stated above.” Eric Turner has said that Kasios is “a slow writer and not at ease in forming his letters . . .”³⁴ The words chosen by Turner for his estimate of Kasios merit close attention. They correspond precisely to an observation made by Girolamo Vitelli more than sixty years ago about another subscriber, who was writing on behalf of his illiterate daughter.³⁵

situation is much the same in *PGen.* 42 (A.D. 224); *PRoss.Georg.* III 26 (A.D. 233/4). *BGU* I 187 (A.D. 159) is a short text written for a woman by her *kyrios* because she is illiterate. At the end he writes, according to the published text: *Μελανᾶς ὁ προκίμενος [πέπ]ραχα τὸ σῶμα.*

²⁸ H. Maehler *BGU* XI 2085 (A.D. 119): “Die 2. Hand schreibt aufrechte Majuskeln.” The subscriber is one of three *πρεσβύτεροι*, who writes also for the others because they are illiterate.

²⁹ J. Schwartz, *PSarap.* 12 (A.D. 131): “La seconde main est très maladroite.”

³⁰ P. M. Meyer, *PHamb.* I 39, no.34 (pp.161, 163; A.D. 179): “die eigenhändige Subscriptio des Schreibungewandten.”

³¹ *PLond.* III 1132b (pp.141f; A.D. 142).

³² The name of Philadelphos’ father was given in line 11; only *K* now remains.

³³ See *BL* I p.282.

³⁴ Letter of 24 Nov. 1970. Turner adds what I have omitted above: “but I have seen far less well formed hands.”

³⁵ *PFlor.* I 1 (=Meyer, *Jur.Pap.* 68; A.D. 153). This papyrus preserves two documents, which the editor labels A and B. A is a loan of money, for which land is offered as security; B is a bank *διαγραφή* by which the loan is made operative. The papyrus is reproduced on pl.I in the edition (opp. p.64). Since the same hands appear in both A and B, I shall confine my remarks to A.

The daughter's name was Ptolema *alias* Tthesis, and she was borrowing money from a woman named Hermione. She was assisted in this transaction by her father Horion, who acted as her *kyrios*. The text of the loan was produced by a professional scribe, and a second professional added signalments of the parties. A subscription was written for the borrower, Ptolema *alias* Tthesis, by a certain Hermeinos, who marked his contribution with the words *ἔγραψα τὸ σῶμα τῆς ὑπογραφῆς*, "I wrote the body of the subscription." Ordinarily Ptolema would have added a few words of her own, but since she was illiterate, her father wrote them for her. It is his hand that drew from Vitelli a comment practically identical with Turner's remark about Kasios in the London papyrus. Kasios, we were told, was a "slow writer," and according to Vitelli, Horion was a *βραδέως γράφων*, a man who wrote "slowly."³⁶ In order to place Horion as an unpractised writer, Vitelli borrowed from other Greek papyri a technical term which was used to describe an entire class of writers. It is therefore of more than casual interest that the next and last item in our list of documents with the *σῶμα* formula concerns a subscriber whom the Greek text specifically puts among the "slow writers."

This is an agreement by which Philantinoos cedes to Hermias a share of a house inherited by him from a paternal cousin, in order to cover a debt incurred by the latter.³⁷ A subscription was added by Apollonios, son of Barbillos, in the name of Philantinoos. Apollonios ends with the *σῶμα* formula:

*ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ὑπογραφῆς, αὐτοῦ ὕστερον
ὑπογράφοντος βραδέως,*

"I wrote for him the body of the subscription, and he then wrote slowly below." The editor of this text, Frederic Kenyon, did not comment on the hand, but he printed the words written by Philantinoos in capitals. What the capitals were likely to mean to Kenyon is revealed in his appraisal of the hand of a certain Cornelius in another document on the same papyrus.³⁸ Cornelius is not described in the

³⁶ G. Vitelli, note to line 14: "Ora il padre Horion, che la assiste come *kyrios*, era bensì in grado di apporre una semplice firma, ma, come si vede dagli stentati suoi caratteri, era un *βραδέως γράφων* evidentemente incapace di scrivere lunghe proposizioni, perciò fa scrivere il testo della dichiarazione, *τὸ σῶμα* . . ., da persona del mestiere, ed egli aggiunge di propria mano la sola indispensabile sottoscrizione vera e propria."

³⁷ *PLond.* III 1164k (p.167; A.D. 212).

³⁸ *PLond.* III 1164f (p.162; A.D. 212). Cf. *Facs.* III, pl.48.

text as a “slow writer,” but he was nevertheless not up to writing a full subscription for himself. The document is a bank *διαγραφή*, and this was written by a certain Harpalos, son of Nemesion, who also wrote a subscription for Cornelius. Directly after the subscription, Cornelius wrote his name and three more words. Kenyon printed these in capitals also and added a terse comment: “The hand of Cornelius is a most illiterate scrawl.”³⁹

Our survey of the formulas *ἔγραψα τὰ πλείεστα* and *ἔγραψα τὸ σῶμα* has now brought us to a third and much more widely used formula—*βραδέως γράφων*. This appears to be a device for maintaining status as a literate person while openly admitting that one writes “slowly.” We shall soon see how much or how little is implied by this tag.⁴⁰

The entire corpus of papyri as it now stands presents us with forty-eight texts in which forty-six persons are described as slow writers.⁴¹ Only two of these belong to the Ptolemaic period; the others range from the time of Augustus to the seventh century. For as many as twenty-eight of the total number we unfortunately lack the palaeographic information that would make them useful to our purpose. Sometimes the editors of these documents did not describe the hands, and facsimiles are not available. In other cases, subscriptions were for one reason or another not written, or they have been lost in damage suffered by the papyrus.⁴² But we are not too badly off on that ac-

³⁹ J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, who register *PLond.* III 1164k for *ὑπογράφων βραδέως* in *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London 1914–29) s.v. *βραδύς*, speak of “the painful uncials of Philantinos.” (Since no facsimile of this part of the roll was published, they may themselves have seen the papyrus in the British Museum.) Certainly the uncials set down by Cornelius are painfully drawn.

⁴⁰ The variants of the formula are not significant: *βραδέως (-έα) γράφων*, *βραδέως ὑπογράφων*, *διὰ τὸ βραδύτερον (-ρα, -δέα) γράφειν*.

⁴¹ Majer-Leonhard, writing in 1913 (*supra* n.5), listed 30 persons under the rubric “qui homines in Aegypto aegre tantum scripserint.” R. Calderini in 1950 (*supra* n.5), starting with Majer-Leonhard’s list, raised the number to 51. But not all of these are called “slow writers” in the texts. *BGU* III 891 *recto* and *PThead.* 2 have the *τὰ πλείεστα* formula; see above, pp. 241–42 and n.18. *PHamb.* 39, no. 34 has the *τὸ σῶμα* formula; see n.30. The soldier for whom *PHamb.* 39, no.32 was written is described by the editor as “Schreibungewandt,” but the text is not given. Two men in *PLond.* III 1164f (p.162) [see above, pp.247f and n.38] wrote in large, extremely unskilled capitals, and another in *POxy.* I 138 wrote only his name. None of these is specifically stated to be a “slow writer,” although their hands may well justify such an inference. The description, however, is not justified when applied to the persons in *POxy.* VI 911 and *Stud.Pal.* XX 128; see below, pp.251f.

⁴² Wilcken, *Ostr.* 1027 (Ptol.); *PRyl.* II 173 (A.D. 34); *PSI* VII 802 (A.D. 85/6); *PTebt.* II 316 (= Wilcken, *Chrest.* 148; A.D. 99); *PRyl.* II 156 (1st cent.); *POxy.* III 497 (early 2nd cent.); *BGU* I 69 (= Mitteis, *Chrest.* 142; A.D. 120); *PLond.* II 298 (p.206; A.D. 124); *PTebt.* II 311 (A.D. 134);

count. We are left with twenty pieces of writing as a guide to judgement. For many of these we have the comments of the editors, and luckily these are aimed directly at the point that interests us. A few can be inspected on published facsimiles, and I have myself seen the seven that are in the Michigan collection.⁴³

The participation of slow writers in the documents follows closely the pattern we have already observed in texts which use the *τὰ πλείεστα* and *τὸ σῶμα* formulas. One example will suffice. In a text from Euhemeria, a village in the west of the Fayum, a certain Maron acknowledges to his brother Onnophris that he has received 20 drachmas as his share of an inheritance from their father. Since Maron is a slow writer, someone named Pappion writes for him a subscription of ten lines; Maron himself adds three lines.⁴⁴

Grenfell and Hunt, who published this text, observe that the slow writer Maron produced his three lines in “rude uncials.” In another text, also edited by Grenfell and Hunt, a woman named Thases sells a camel and her husband acts as her *kyrios*. Since she does not know how to write and he is a slow writer, a third person writes the subscription (lines 19–24) for her. Just before the subscription, however, the husband has identified himself in his own hand (line 18): *Στοτοῆτις ἐ[πιγ]έγραμμε κύρις*,⁴⁵ “I, Stotoetis, am authorized to act as her *kyrios*.” He employs “rough uncials,” as the editors say on this occasion.⁴⁶ Grenfell and Hunt did not use these phrases lightly. They again resort to “rude uncials” to describe the hand of another slow writer, who

PGiss. 29 (A.D. 150); *BGU* II 446 (A.D. 158/9); XI 2055 (2nd cent.); *PHamb.* I 39, no.33 (p.164; A.D. 179); Wilcken, *Chrest.* 434 (A.D. 390); *Stud.Pal.* I p.7 (A.D. 454); *PLond.* III 1023 (p.267; 5th–6th cent.); *PCair.Masp.* III 67306 (A.D. 515); 67297 (A.D. 535); *PErl.* 75 (p.84; A.D. 535–537); *PFlor.* III 283 (A.D. 536); *SB* V 8029 (A.D. 538); *PLond.* III 1006 (p.261; A.D. 556); 1007b+c (p.264; A.D. 558); *SB* I 6000 (6th cent.); *PRoss.Georg.* V 34 (ca. A.D. 600); *SB* I 4669 (A.D. 614); VI 9595 (7th cent.).

⁴³ Wilcken, *Ostr.* 757 (106/5 B.C.); *BGU* II 543 (27 B.C.); *PRyl.* II 183a (pl.4; A.D. 16); *BGU* XI 2116 (pl.viii; A.D. 25/6); *SB* VI 9110 (A.D. 26); *PMich.* V 252 (= *PSI* VIII 905; A.D. 26/7); 336 (A.D. 27); 278 (ca. A.D. 30); 273 (= *PSI* VIII 906; A.D. 46); 305 (1st cent.); *PMich.* inv. 90 (unpubl., transcr. by P. J. Parsons; A.D. 74); *PFay.* 97 (A.D. 78); *CPR* 1 (= *Stud.Pal.* XX 1; *Führer durch d. Ausstellung* pl.ix; A.D. 83/4); *PRoss.Georg.* II 15 (A.D. 98–102); *PREin.* 44 (pl.vii= *Mitteis, Chrest.* 82; Hadrian); *PStrassb.* 19 (pl.iv; A.D. 105); *PMich.* VI 428 (A.D. 154); *PAmh.* II 102 (A.D. 180); *PLond.* III 1164k (p.167; A.D. 212); *PSI* IX 1037 (A.D. 301); *PMichael.* 43 (pl.ii; A.D. 526).

⁴⁴ *PFay.* 97.

⁴⁵ Read *ἐπιγράμμαι κύριος*.

⁴⁶ *PAmh.* II 102.

put his name and the appropriate verb at the bottom of a receipt for hay. His letters can be seen on the published facsimile; they are broad, squat, and altogether ugly.⁴⁷

A papyrus in the Michigan collection presents Valeria Diodora, who is assisted by her husband in the sale of a house at Karanis. Diodora is a slow writer, and her husband writes the subscription for her. To this Diodora adds one sentence of respectable length in her own hand; but, in the words of the editors, “each letter was laboriously formed, and the writer was unable to maintain a straight line; . . . the alphabet is largely majuscule.”⁴⁸ Another Michigan papyrus documents the repayment of a loan. The acknowledgement was written for Dieuches, son of Kephalon, by a professional scribe. A subscription was added by Sarapion, another son of Kephalon, in the name of his brother Dieuches, because the latter “writes slowly.” Dieuches then wrote his name and the verb *ἄπέχω*, “I have received (the money).” His hand has been described by P. J. Parsons as “a spindly, tottering capital script.”⁴⁹

The reaction of editors to slow writing is virtually predictable. Ulrich Wilcken speaks of “large letters unskilfully made”;⁵⁰ Girolamo Vitelli, of “big, clumsy letters.”⁵¹ Preisigke says of one slow writer that he draws the letters one by one as if for an inscription on stone.⁵² Krüger notes that the lines of a certain Mareinos look “drawn” rather than written, the letters are “uncouth, stiff, each isolated from its fellows, like those of a schoolboy” who has only begun to learn.⁵³ When I myself looked at the Michigan examples, the descriptive terms that came most often to mind were “large, awkward, uneven.” My notes show that in one instance I supplemented “awkward” with “very unpretty”; in another, with the remark that the “writing goes up and down hill.”

It is evident that the people called slow writers did in fact write

⁴⁷ *PRyl.* II 183a (pl.4).

⁴⁸ *PMich.* VI 428.

⁴⁹ *PMich.inv.* 90 (unpubl.).

⁵⁰ *Ostr.* 757, note to 10–11: “in grossen, ungeschickten Buchstaben geschrieben”; cf. Fr. Krebs, *BGU* II 543, note to 19–22: “mit Uncialbuchstaben ungeschickt geschrieben.”

⁵¹ *PSI* IX 1037 (p.67): “grossi e rozzi caratteri.”

⁵² *PStrassb.* 19 (p.65): “Die 3. Hand malt Buchstaben für Buchstaben in der Form der Steininschriften; man nannte das *βραδέως γράφων* (Z.19).”

⁵³ *PRoss.Georg.* II 15, introd.: “Die vom *βραδέως γράφων* *Μαρείνος* hingemalten Zeilen sind ungeschlachte isoliert stehende steife Schulbuchstaben.”

slowly, but they also wrote badly,⁵⁴ many incompetently.⁵⁵ They all wrote with difficulty;⁵⁶ they concentrated with painful intensity as they put down their names and a few words. In these conditions legibility was a high goal.⁵⁷ Vitelli gave a perfectly accurate account of the slow writer as long ago as 1906, when he said of a father who wrote for his daughter, that he “was indeed able to append a simple signature, but as may be seen from his labored script, he was a *βραδέως γράφων* clearly incapable of writing long sentences; he therefore has the text of the declaration, *τὸ σῶμα . . .*, written by a professional scribe, and he adds in his own hand the one indispensable subscription . . .”⁵⁸

This is a familiar picture, but it must still occasionally be defended against accretions which are not justified by the sources. It is tempting, but not permissible to confuse the slow writer, as has been done recently, with the schoolboy,⁵⁹ just because the stumbling and sometimes messy writing of youngsters furnishes an illuminating standard of comparison. Slow writers are not school children, still in process of learning to write. Slow writers are grown men, sometimes women, who are using their meager attainments to carry out the business transactions which provide their livelihood. Some progress is expected of children still at school. The slow writer will not improve; he will always be a slow writer.

Equally unsustainable by the evidence is the view that places among the slow writers those who are prevented by some physical defect or illness from writing at their usual speed and with their normal com-

⁵⁴ Cf. F. von Woess, *Untersuchungen über d. Urkundenwesen* (Münch. Beitr. 6, 1924) 299: “Nun können die Leute häufig nicht schreiben (*ἀγράμματοι*) oder sie schreiben schlecht (*βραδέως*) und müssen sich eines anderen als *ὑπογραφεύς* bedienen . . .”; W. Schubart, *PErl.* 75 (p.85): “dem schwerfällig unterschreibenden Bauern.”

⁵⁵ Some of these slow writers do not deserve so severe a judgement. One might feel, for example, that an exception ought to be made of Didymos in *PMich.* V 252 (= *PSI* VIII 905) line 9, but a careful study of his hand reveals constant awkwardness in his formation of letters. It is not hard to guess how closely he applied himself to the task before him in order to achieve a result which is truly superior among slow hands.

⁵⁶ Cf. Turner, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.8) 88: “. . . ‘slow writers’, who form their letters with difficulty.”

⁵⁷ And not always achieved, as witness Zenon in *PMich.* V 252 (= *PSI* VIII 905) lines 9f. He is not called a slow writer, although his hand is undeniably inferior to that of Didymos, of whom it is stated that he writes *βραδύτερον*. According to the editor of the Michigan copy, Zenon’s “letters are so curiously made that it is impossible to read them with certainty.” One need not be clever to guess that Zenon was a brash individual, convinced that he wrote as well as the best.

⁵⁸ See above, pp. 246f and n.36.

⁵⁹ So Turner, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.8) 88f.

petence. This is the interpretation that was put on two texts by Majer-Leonhard in his list of slow writers,⁶⁰ and it was borrowed and repeated as recently as 1950.⁶¹ These texts are worth another look. One is the lease of a house drawn up in the third century. The lessee is Aurelius Theogenes, who suffers from an eye ailment and consequently has a *hypographeus* assigned to him by the governor. Theogenes is not described as *βραδέως γράφων*, or “slow writer,” and since the papyrus is torn away at the bottom, no subscriptions have been preserved. Theogenes could have been an ordinarily literate person, but so inconvenienced by his eye troubles that writing had become impossible for him.⁶² In the other text, dated in A.D. 487, Aurelius Sambas offers himself as surety for Aurelius Petrus, who will be involved in the collection of the grain taxes of the following year. Since Sambas is afflicted with a painful arm, he has a subscription written for him by his nephew Nilus, but not before he has read the document and approved it. His own words, even though they are written for him by Nilus, are decisive: *ἀναγνοὺς ἐξ ὠλωκλήρου καὶ ἀρεσθής*, “having read (the document) clear through and having found it satisfactory.”⁶³ There is no question that he is literate even though he writes nothing because he is hindered by the condition of his arm, and he is nowhere described as *βραδέως γράφων*, a slow writer.

The slow writers are persons of very limited education. They may as children have spent a year or two with a teacher. Some of them may have learned to read, but most would have lost this acquisition through the many subsequent years in which they read nothing. None stayed at school long enough to develop firm habits of writing, and what little progress they may have made was dimmed through lack of use.⁶⁴ They write slowly and they write poorly⁶⁵ because they

⁶⁰ Majer-Leonhard, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 68, nos. 513 and 514.

⁶¹ Calderini, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 36: “. . . oppure anche, come vedemmo, impediti a scribere speditamente da qualche difetto fisico.”

⁶² POxy. VI 911.

⁶³ *Stud.Pal.* XX 128, 18. Read *ὀλωκλήρου, ἀρεσθείς*.

⁶⁴ Cf. Youtie, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 173.

⁶⁵ Interesting in this connection is the use made of *βραδυγράφος* by George of Pisidia (7th cent.) in his *Heraclias* 2.153 (Migne, PG 92, 1327A; Pertusi, *StPatrByz* 7 [1959] 258): *ἐβουλόμην δέ, καίπερ ὦν βραδυγράφος, | τὴν συλλογὴν σου τῶν στρατευμάτων γράφειν*, “I wish I could, poor (inadequate) writer that I am, describe your levy of the armies.” The compound *βραδυγράφος* occurs only here (cf. Pertusi, p.314). Pertusi’s translation: ‘benché io ami indugiare’, and Lampe, *PGL s.v.*: ‘slow at writing’, miss the point. The true bearing of the word is conveyed by the Latin translation in Migne: ‘rudis scriptor’. George is self-deprecating: he is not equal to the task.

lack both training and practice. They were, as we might say, under-educated.

And this is how they are described in a constitution issued in the sixth century by Justinian, who links the *ἀγράμματος*, the totally unlettered, with the *ὀλιγογράμματος*, who can manage a few words. Justinian presents them as two types of the illiterate (*οἱ γράμματα οὐκ ἐπιστάμενοι*): the *ἀγράμματος* can write nothing at all, the *ὀλιγογράμματος* can generally write his name and perhaps something more. They both need someone to write for them, and Justinian makes this need the basis of a requirement. Five witnesses must be present when contracts are prepared for such persons, so that the genuineness of the contract may be guaranteed. Among them must be one who writes a complete subscription for the *ἀγράμματος*, who himself writes nothing, and supplements the few words of the *ὀλιγογράμματος* with a fuller statement of his obligations.

This is precisely the situation of the *βραδέως γράφων*, the slow writer of the papyri. Neither his early training nor his later experience took him out beyond the limits of an *ὀλιγογράμματος*. The slow writer, who has become familiar to us from the papyri, is Justinian's *ὀλιγογράμματος*. He also has only a few words, and he lacks the capacity to write easily or at length.⁶⁶

Justinian's *novella* was aimed at controlling the reliability of contracts. His feeling that official supervision was needed is confirmed by a number of papyrus texts. We have several in which the slow writer has a subscription written for him but himself writes nothing. One of these is a receipt for rent issued in the Ptolemaic period; two others belong to the second century of the present era.⁶⁷ From the fourth century on, and especially in the sixth, we find slow writers who write their own subscriptions as best they can, but dispense with the services of a *hypographeus*.⁶⁸ They call themselves slow writers, but they do not follow the convention that Justinian reasserts in his *novella*.

When the slow writer writes nothing, he assimilates himself to the *ἀγράμματος*, the wholly illiterate, of whom no writing is expected.

⁶⁶ Nov. 73, 8. Cf. Lampe, *PGL s.v. ὀλιγογράμματος*: 'of little education'; the word is cited from Nov. 73 as transmitted by Athanasius Scholasticus, *Collectio novellarum constitutionum* 14.3 (Heimbach, p.151). The equivalence of *βραδέως γράφων* and *ὀλιγογράμματος* was noted by E. Rabel, *PBas.* 2, introd. (pp.19f).

⁶⁷ Wilcken, *Ostr.* 1027 (Ptol.); *PLond.* II 298 (p.206; A.D. 124); *PGiss.* 29 (A.D. 150).

⁶⁸ *PSI* IX 1037 (A.D. 301); *Stud.Pal.* I p.7 (A.D. 454); *PLond.* III 1023 (p.267; 5th-6th cent.); *PCair.Masp.* III 67306 (A.D. 515); *PMichael.* 43 (A.D. 526); *SB* V 8029 (A.D. 538).

Justinian was aware of this resemblance and thought of the non-writer (*ἀγράμματος*) and the writer of a few words (*ὀλιγογράμματος*) as merely occupying two levels of illiteracy: the complete illiterate and the almost illiterate. And all that we have said up to this point tends in the same direction. The slow writer must frequently have been on the verge of illiteracy, and only nominally literate. In a long roll of bank documents compiled at Antinoöpolis in A.D. 212, there are two which show that the slow writer not only could write very little but also generally could not read. In a cession of a share of a house, a subscription was written for the slow writer Philantinoos, who himself added a brief subscription in large capitals. A certain Harpalos then appended the statement that he had read out the text of the cession to Philantinoos. He did this simply because Philantinoos was unable to read.⁶⁹ In another transaction in the same roll, the contract is read out in the same way to a man who has declared that he “does not know letters,” that is, he is *ἀγράμματος* and he neither reads nor writes.⁷⁰

Most striking is a lease of land drawn up at Oxyrhynchus in the middle of the second century. Toward the end of the document, the lessee, Amoitias, son of Dionysios, wrote “in messy and uncertain letters,” first his name, then the significant verb *ἐπιδέχομαι*, which indicated his willingness to undertake the lease. From this point, his *hypographeus* took up the subscription, not even breaking the construction, and concluded: “I wrote for him because he is illiterate.”⁷¹ When the lessee wrote his few words, was he attempting to function after the manner of a slow writer? If so, his *hypographeus* brushed the effort aside. For him, Amoitias was illiterate. So thin could be the line between the slow writer and the man who could not write at all.

On the other hand, when the slow writer is content with his own short subscription and sees no reason to have it expanded into a full-bodied statement by someone writing in his name, he is imitating writers whose literacy is obvious. Justinian regarded this practice as a grave abuse because it endangered the status of contracts as reliable evidence of the transactions embodied in them. But this abuse could be carried far beyond the limits implied in Justinian’s regulation.

⁶⁹ *PLond.* III 1164k (pp.166f); cf. above, p.247.

⁷⁰ *PLond.* III 1164i (pp.165f). For formulas marking illiteracy, see Calderini, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 17f.

⁷¹ *POxy.* XXXIII 2676.

Slow writers are not always so described, and they appear sometimes to act as if the designation were not obligatory.

A somewhat startling compromise was reached in another papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, a contract of apprenticeship executed in A.D. 253. By its terms Aurelius Hermias entrusts his son to the master weaver Aurelius Dioscorus for a training period of five years. At the close of the agreement is a subscription of almost four lines composed in the name of the master. The first two lines were written by someone acting on behalf of Dioscorus, the last two by Dioscorus himself, who takes up the sentence in the middle of a clause and brings it to an end with four words. Peter Parsons, who has edited the text, guides us to the meaning of this astounding performance. He calls it "a signature written half by proxy before Dioscorus plucked up courage to exercise his spindly capitals." If anyone ever deserved to be called a slow writer, that man was surely Dioscorus. But nothing is said of his ability to write, and no one is named as assisting him.⁷²

Perhaps even more interesting are texts which exhibit the slow writer sometimes creating a suspicion that he cannot write at all, sometimes playing at total literacy. In A.D. 150 a woman living in the Fayum, Didyme *alias* Matrona, acting with her maternal cousin Heron as her *kyrios*, issued a receipt for rent to one of the tenants who cultivated her land at Philadelphia. The receipt was written by Heron in her name. At the end of the text he set out the usual formula: "I wrote for Didyme *alias* Matrona because she writes slowly." Didyme wrote nothing in her own hand, as if she were *ἀγράμματος* and had not learned how to write.⁷³ Nine years later she issued a receipt to another of her tenants. It is not here said that anyone wrote for her, there is no reference to her limitations as a writer, and she has not appended a subscription. Anyone who was not familiar with the situation, might suppose that she had herself written the receipt.⁷⁴ Nothing could be further from the truth. The hand is, as Grenfell and Hunt have noted, a "good-sized cursive," hence not at all like the hands of slow writers as we have come to know them.⁷⁵

At a much later time, in the year 526, a soldier named Samuel acts

⁷² POxy. XXXI 2586. For the cultural status of master weavers cf. A. Zambon, *Aegyptus* 15 (1935) 29 n.1.

⁷³ PGiss. 29.

⁷⁴ PFay. 99.

⁷⁵ PCair. 10792.

for his daughters in arranging a lease of farm land, in consideration of which the lessee grants certain loans in money and kind. Samuel is said, in the body of the receipt, to be a slow writer, and he adds his subscription, which runs to about one line of text (lines 21f), in a slow and awkward hand, although it is a hand adapted throughout to the contemporary style. If he were not described as a slow writer, we might have thought him to be an old man who had to control a trembling hand.⁷⁶ A year later he acknowledges a further loan from the lessee, and now he is not called a slow writer either in the agreement itself or in the subscription which he puts below it. The lines are here much shorter than in the earlier contract, and Samuel takes about two and a half lines to say what he needs to say. In neither agreement did he think it necessary to employ someone to write a full-length subscription on his behalf.⁷⁷

Our exhibit of slow writers might end here, if it were not for another class of writers who are not called slow but have hands that are equally labored and ill-formed. In a cursory survey of papyrus texts I turned up some thirty in which short subscriptions were written by persons supposedly fully literate, whose handwriting is at least as deficient as what we see in subscriptions composed by slow writers.⁷⁸ Here are some typical comments from editors of such documents: “rude uncials,”⁷⁹ “a large clumsy ‘uncial’ hand,”⁸⁰ the hand of “an illiterate, writing in uncials very clumsily drawn,”⁸¹ “letters as on

⁷⁶ *PMichael.* 43 (pl.ii).

⁷⁷ *PMichael.* 44.

⁷⁸ Such hands must be distinguished from what may be called ‘retarded’ hands, although it is doubtful that the separation of slow hands from those here called ‘retarded’ can always be carried through successfully. The latter are hands which became stabilized at an early stage of development and so resemble slow hands in their awkward appearance, but are used freely and for compositions of any length. I cite as partly sure, partly possible examples: *PPetaus* 117 (pl.xviii; cf. Ursula Hagedorn’s careful description on p.37: “Aber dieser Mann konnte zweifellos lesen und schreiben, wenn auch seine Orthographie unsicher und seine Scheibweise unbeholfen ist”); *PLond.* II 172 (pp.xvi, 205; 8-line receipt in a “rough uneducated uncial hand”); *PRyl.* II 161, 31f (pl.10; large letters, taking up much space, somewhat awkwardly formed; but this man, subscribing for an illiterate, writes better than many others); *BGU* XI 2044 (“unbeholfene Majuskeln,” 10 lines, printed by editor in capitals; same hand in *PRyl.* II 160d, 25–36); *POxy.* X 1276 (subscriptions of 5 and 6 lines written for illiterates “in rude uncials”). Cf. W. Schubart, *Griechische Palaeographie* (Munich 1925) 146–48.

⁷⁹ *POxy.* VII 1028 (A.D. 86), 41 note; XIV 1707 (A.D. 204).

⁸⁰ *PAnt.* I 37 (A.D. 209/210), 11 note.

⁸¹ *PPhil.* 13 (A.D. 155), introd.: “La deuxième main est d’un illettré écrivant en onciales très gauchement tracées.”

an inscription, in a fumbling hand which leaves no illusion about the cultural attainments” of the writer,⁸² a “crabbed and irregular” hand, “using the large letter forms usually found in the subscriptions of barely literate writers,”⁸³ “square letters, laboriously traced,”⁸⁴ “a most illiterate scrawl.”⁸⁵ We are thus given a picture of unattractive hands, and the remarks closely resemble those made about slow writers.⁸⁶

A few of these people fix our attention through their obvious inadequacy. They write only their names, and only one name at that, since their competence does not extend to adding their fathers’ names in the customary way. Typical is the Egyptian camel-driver Peis, who in the year 190 joined his father Pakysis, also a camel-driver, and two other men in an agreement to deliver three camels to a destination of which the name has been lost. A common subscription was written for Peis and his father by a certain Sarapion, whose formal statement of responsibility is couched as follows (lines 17–18):

ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ μὲν τοῦ Πακοῦσις μὴ εἰδότης γράμματα, τοῦ Πείς
τὸ ὄνομα ὑπογράφοντος⁸⁷

“I wrote for Pakysis since he cannot write, and for Peis who writes his name below.” And immediately under the subscription, in a line reserved for his use, Peis wrote his name, and nothing more, four large letters standing well separated and trembling with the writer’s uncertainties.⁸⁸

A completely parallel situation is depicted in a document of the early sixth century. Abraham and his father Apphouas lease a mill and bakery from a woman of Oxyrhynchus. The lease itself was drawn up by a professional scribe; it almost fills the first seventeen lines. At the end of line 17 Abraham wrote his name, five letters only,

⁸² *PFuad* 37 (A.D. 48), 12 note: “La signature (cf. Planche II) est tracée en caractères épigraphiques, d’une main maladroite qui ne laisse pas d’illusion sur le degré de culture de Ménodoros . . .” The subscription is printed in capitals in the text.

⁸³ *PMich.inv.* 4731a (A.D. 147) = *Cd’E* 56 (1953) 336.

⁸⁴ *PMich.inv.* 4731b (A.D. 161) = *Cd’E* 56 (1953) 344.

⁸⁵ *PLond.* III 1164f (p.162; A.D. 212), 32 note. The subscription is printed in capitals in the text. Cf. above, pp.247f.

⁸⁶ Cf. above, pp. 249–51.

⁸⁷ Read Πακούσιος, τοῦ δὲ Πείς (indecl.).

⁸⁸ *PBas.* 2. The editor, E. Rabel, p.19: “. . . kann der Sohn schon glücklich seinen Namen schreiben, den er nun in zitterigen Buchstaben, Z.19 hinkritzelt.” Cf. Calderini, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 35: “Alcuni, anzi, non sanno scrivere altro che il proprio nome e per di più in caratteri grossi e incerti . . .”

nothing more. His hand is characteristic. The letters are “rude uncials, the alphas having the strange form of a vertical stroke with a half circle on the right side, like ρ . . .” The name is followed by a subscription written for both the father and the son by Aurelius Serenus, for the father because he was illiterate, and for the son, who, as Serenus is careful to say, had written his name above.⁸⁹ In spite of the absurdities which characterize Abraham’s script, it appears that he is not to be thought illiterate or even “slow.”⁹⁰

Equally tantalizing are texts in which a slow writer, while not exceeding the level of performance expected of him, nevertheless surpasses the efforts of another not so described, whose hand makes an even less favorable impression. An outstanding example is a cession of catocic land made in the early first century by the brothers Apollonios and Didymos to Zenon. A long subscription was written for the brothers by a professional scribe, for Apollonios because he was illiterate, for Didymos because he “wrote rather slowly.” Didymos added his own short subscription in a somewhat awkward hand, using capital letters which are not too badly formed. There are a few but quite common misspellings, and the construction of the sentence is kept simple and conventional. Below this, Zenon wrote an acknowledgment of about the same length. He has a hand much inferior to that of Didymos; it comes close to being ugly. There are atrocious errors in spelling, and before the sentence is finished, it becomes completely unintelligible. But Zenon makes no excuses for himself, and he is not identified in the document as a slow writer.⁹¹

Now, we are faced with a seeming confusion of categories which it would have been advantageous, we might suppose, for administrative supervision to have kept distinct. What could Peis and Abraham have hoped to gain by writing their names with an expenditure of much effort and a most unimpressive result? Why did Zenon not seek cover under the convenient devices used by slow writers? Their hands could deceive no one, and doubtless they were not trying to deceive anyone. We get the impression rather that there could be uncertainty about the status of slow writers.

⁸⁹ Cf. Rabel, *PBas.* 2, introd. (p.20).

⁹⁰ *POxy.* XVI 1890 (A.D. 508). Cf. *POxy.* I 138 (A.D. 610/611), where John, the lessee of the local race-course, writes only his name and his employee Phoibammon writes the subscription at his order; *PAbinn.* 6, 26 (*Br.Mus.Facs.* 105); 8, 29 (*Br.Mus.Facs.* 104).

⁹¹ *PMich.* V 252= *PSI VIII* 905; see *supra* n.57. Cf. *PMich.* VI 428, introd. (p.137).

Justinian associated them closely with the *ἀγράμματοι*, who could not write at all, as if their capacity to put a few words together did not change their basic status as illiterates; they could not be trusted to act independently any more than could the completely illiterate.⁹² But the papyri suggest a different approach. Slow writers seem to have been accepted in Egypt as literate persons who needed assistance when the writing task became arduous. And for this reason, because they were placed at the lowest level of literacy rather than the top-most level of illiteracy, they might be described as slow, and, when that view was taken, they employed someone to help them with a long subscription, themselves adding a brief one, but it was not felt that they had to be so described or had to use such assistance.

If we interpret the evidence in this way, some order can be imposed on apparent chaos. We begin to understand certain curious phenomena that can be observed in a number of texts: The slow writer giving a better performance than someone who is not called a slow writer;⁹³ someone who undertakes to produce a subscription for an illiterate person, although he himself is hardly more than a slow writer;⁹⁴ an illiterate making a stab at writing, finding the material resistant, turning to someone else to complete the subscription for him;⁹⁵ another illiterate, or perhaps a slow writer, hesitating, then finishing a short subscription begun for him by a scribe;⁹⁶ the slow writer properly so described in one text and using a *hypographeus*, but functioning independently in another as if he were fully literate.⁹⁷

Clearly we have much to account for, from the illiterate who tries for literate status, even if he fails, to the slow writer who sees himself primarily as a man able to write. With these people we move through a vague area between literacy and illiteracy, a rough frontier obscured by contradictions and evasions. And in the hope of finding some sure guide through the seemingly conflicting purposes of so many individuals, we return to Petaus, with whom we began. He at least is a man whose situation is known to us in some detail, and he made a definite statement about illiteracy.

⁹² See above, pp.253f and n.66.

⁹³ See *supra*, n.91.

⁹⁴ E.g. *PFlor.* I 1; see above, pp.246f and nn.35 and 36.

⁹⁵ See *supra* n.71.

⁹⁶ See *supra* n.72.

⁹⁷ See *supra* nn.73–77.

Petaus was town clerk at Ptolemais Hormou, and in this position he was expected to be literate; but although he wrote his signature when necessary, he was able to do so only by virtue of unremitting practice, and could otherwise neither read nor write. His own estimate of his qualifications was decidedly more optimistic, as we have learned from his defence of his colleague Ischyriion. When the latter was charged with being illiterate, Petaus reported that this was not true: Ischyriion was not ἀγράμματος but signed all the papers that he submitted to higher officials. Petaus meant that since Ischyriion put his signature at the bottom of these documents, he was obviously not ἀγράμματος, i.e. not a person unable to write.⁹⁸

Petaus thus insisted on the narrowest possible definition of the word, one that would cover both Ischyriion and himself, as it would cover also a great many others, who at best could write their names and perhaps a few words in addition.⁹⁹ Petaus declared himself and Ischyriion to be writers, hence not illiterate. On these terms a slow writer was clearly among the literate portion of the population; you might call him, as Justinian did, ὀλιγογράμματος, but certainly not ἀγράμματος.

Another pertinent example is provided by a Tebtunis papyrus which preserves three declarations submitted in A.D. 99 by young men who had been enrolled as *epheboi* of Alexandria sixteen years earlier. These declarations have the purpose of maintaining the persons concerned as members in good standing. The first report was presented by two brothers, Demetrios and Heliodoros, scribes by trade, the elder of whom wrote the body of the document, the younger the subscription. The second report was written and submitted by a certain Sarapion, whose trade was gold inlay. And the same Sarapion wrote the third report for his friend Ammonios, a fisherman, because the latter wrote slowly; Ammonios added a short subscription. The formulation of these declarations implies that men of the gymnasium class were expected to be literate. If Ammonios was permitted to qualify on the basis of a minimum performance, we are tempted to conclude that the requirement of literacy was being liberally inter-

⁹⁸ See above, pp.239–41. For ἀγράμματος as “unable to write Greek,” cf. Youtie, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 162f.

⁹⁹ Out of 86 soldiers named in *PHamb.* 39 (cf. introd., p.169), 25 are normal writers, 58 are ἀγράμματοι, 1 is definitely a slow writer, 2 others are almost certainly so. As P. Meyer says, “3 schreiben mangelhaft.”

preted, doubtless to avoid the threat of a reduction in numbers at the upper levels of Greek society.¹⁰⁰

With these examples before us, we need no longer be surprised that a slow writer on occasion discarded this designation, refrained from using the services of a *hypographeus*, and aped the procedures normally employed by literate persons; nor that others obviously illiterate traced out a name, their own, as if some victory had thereby been sought and won.¹⁰¹ We know why Petaus did this and how he justified his action: he could remain a town clerk only if he were literate. We know why Ammonios did something similar; fisherman as he was, he was eager to retain his place in a class that conferred prestige. We do not know what economic or occupational motivations led so many others to follow the same pattern, but we may be sure that these existed. It is not likely that the driving force for very many was cultural pride or vanity, since illiteracy carried no stigma in the conditions of middle-class life in Graeco-Roman Egypt.^{102, 103}

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¹⁰⁰ *PTebt.* II 316= Wilcken, *Chrest.* 148. Cf. Youtie, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 174f.

¹⁰¹ For more optimistic views of the ability to sign as evidence of literacy in more recent times, see R. S. Schofield, "Measurement of Literacy," in J. R. Goody, *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge 1968) 319ff.

¹⁰² Youtie, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 168ff.

¹⁰³ This paper was presented as a lecture at Brown University on 1 March 1971, in memory of Charles Alexander Robinson, the distinguished historian of Alexander the Great.