

## CHAPTER 3

### FIRST-CENTURY LETTER WRITING

#### 1. Writing and Letters in the Greco-Roman World

A wide time gap between the first and twenty first century has marked tremendous cultural and technological innovations which, naturally, result in conceptual differences. In this regard it is anachronistic to compare the concept of literacy in ancient times with contemporary ideas of literacy using the same criteria.

On this issue, Millard's investigation deserves mention:

Reading and writing are almost indivisible to us, but in many societies they are separate; people who read do not necessarily have the ability to write, their lives do not lead them into situations where writing is required, occasionally they may need, or want to read, but that need may never arise. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world the distinction prevailed in that there were educated people who were proficient readers and writers, less educated ones who could read but hardly write, some who were readers alone, some of them able to read only slowly or with difficulty and some who were illiterate.<sup>1</sup>

Criboire expresses an opinion similar to Millard when he notes:

Literacy and writing were not indispensable skills in the ancient Mediterranean world, and they neither determined nor limited socio-economic success. Writing was rather a useful, enabling technology that people cared to exhibit even when they possessed it only to a limited degree. Greek Roman men and women were proud to be numbered among the literates, but esteem for writing was not enough to spread the skill itself to the mass of the population. Writing depended on need, but those who lacked the skill could resort to various strategies to cope with the demands that need imposed on them.<sup>2</sup>

As pointed out by Millard and Criboire, it is fallacious to posit that any literate

---

<sup>1</sup> Allan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 154.

<sup>2</sup> Raffaella Criboire, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, *American Studies in Papyrology* no. 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 1.

individual in the Greco-Roman world could also write. In Greco-Roman antiquity, literacy basically was not treated as the ability to both read and write.<sup>3</sup>

Writing rather was a rather professional skill, mainly connected with scribes who were identified as expert writers in Greco-Roman society. Also, writing frequently signified “dictating a text to a scribe rather than handwriting it oneself.”<sup>4</sup> If one required letters or documents, then, one employed scribes.<sup>5</sup> Most of the writing in the first century had been produced by those who “earned their living through clerical tasks, in administrative offices or on the street.”<sup>6</sup> Millard notes that “letters, proceedings in councils and debates in law courts all required clerks able to write fast and accurately, raising the question of the use of shorthand.”<sup>7</sup> He also indicates that “commerce, legal matters and family affairs all called for secretarial skills.”<sup>8</sup>

Letters in the ancient world could be treated as “a substitute for being there in person” and “brought assurance in a world filled with disease and calamity.”<sup>9</sup> In his monograph, *Light from the Ancient East*, Deissmann who pioneered the field of study of the recently excavated papyri from Egypt, distinguishes between letters and epistles. According to Deissmann, letters are unliterary and personal, whereas epistles are public; intended for publication or a wider audience.<sup>10</sup> Deissmann defines a letter as “something non-literary, a means of communication between persons who are separated from each other,” while identifying an epistle as “an

---

<sup>3</sup> See Eric A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 40-59; William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3-24; Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum* 81 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2001), 18-26.

<sup>4</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, 474.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, 168.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>9</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> See Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Lionel R. M. Strachen (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927), 228-29.

artistic literary form, a species of literature, just like the dialogue, the oration, or the drama.”<sup>11</sup> Thus he argues that “the letter is a piece of life, the epistle is a product of literary art.”<sup>12</sup>

However, Deissmann has been criticized by some scholars for his insistence on the distinction between letters and epistles. White clearly discerns that a fundamental difficulty in any study of letter writing is “the ambiguity of the category.”<sup>13</sup> A number of letters in antiquity are obviously situational and pragmatic in purpose, that is, intended for a private audience; whereas others by the same author are apparently intended for publication. Letters in Greco-Roman society frequently mix genres, combine stylistic and rhetorical tools, resulting in a blend.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Witherington comments that the differentiation between private and public is a rather modern device, whereas a more hybrid use existed in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>15</sup> Richards also notes that many public issues were executed by private ways; equally, private letters were treated as “an item or two of business.”<sup>16</sup>

Stowers also maintains that the division of epistles and letters into public and personal categories is irrelevant for the Greco-Roman world.<sup>17</sup> Stowers elaborates on this point:

Politics, for example, was based on the institutions of friendship and family. It is characteristic for moderns to think of politics as the epitome of the public sphere in contrast to friendship and family, which constitute the private sphere. The distinction between private friendly letters and public political letters is thus a

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 230. On the grounds of this analysis, Deissmann, *Ibid.*, 234, also indicates that Paul’s writings are unliterary, making them letters rather than epistles. Many inaccuracies occurring in the investigation of Paul’s life and work have originated from a disregard of this fact.

<sup>13</sup> John L. White, “The Ancient Epistolography Group in Retrospect,” *Semeia* 22 (1981): 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 480-86.

<sup>16</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 19

distinction more appropriate to modernity than antiquity. Furthermore, many correspondences in antiquity that were either originally written or later edited with an eye toward publication have what we would call a private character: for example, Cicero, Ruricius, Seneca.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, Stowers points to the theorists' broad consent in the field of literature and culture that all human activities have a conventional aspect, and contends that "all letters are literature in the very broadest sense."<sup>19</sup>

As a type of letters in the Greco-Roman world, the letters of Paul cannot be simply categorized, as Deissmann argued.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Paul's letters, they seem to be private, but, in fact, were intended for a particular community and consequently they were circulated to another community, even probably duplicated.<sup>21</sup> To this end, Richards states that "in a sense Paul's letters were no less public than Cicero's were originally intended to be."<sup>22</sup> In this regard, Deissmann's argument is quite unconvincing.

## 2. The Practice of Using an Amanuensis

The practice of employing an amanuensis in the Greco-Roman world can be explored within two realms of official correspondence, including business and private correspondence. The private category is generally composed of two different socio-economic classes, namely, the upper ranks and the lower ranks in society.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.1. Official (Business) Letters

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 234, contends that "the letters of Paul are not literary; they are real letters, not epistles; they were written by Paul not for the public and posterity, but for the persons to whom they are addressed."

<sup>21</sup> See Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 60; Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> See Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 15-23; *Idem*, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 60-64.

Amanuenses were employed in various public activities in the Greco-Roman world, at the royal courts and in the marketplaces. They played a crucial role in the administrative organization of Greco-Roman society.<sup>24</sup> For instance, numerous amanuenses who kept official records and accounts were employed at “the central administration” in Alexandria, the centre of Roman Egypt to help cope with the immense bureaucracy of Roman government.<sup>25</sup>

Many extant papyri show a prevalent use of amanuenses in business. Generally, few people in Greco-Roman antiquity were capable of penning professional correspondence. By forwarding a letter with the aid of an amanuensis, they could not end the letter in their own handwriting. Because no section of a document was actually penned in the sender’s own hand, since the individual who authorized it was illiterate, there would be an “illiteracy formula,” a short statement indicating that an amanuensis wrote the letter, at the end of business and legal letters.<sup>26</sup> Examples, specifically from the first century, include<sup>27</sup>:

Qe,wn Paah,ioj ge,grafa	“Theon Paaeis wrote for him
u`pe.r auvtou/ mh. ivdo,toj	because he did not know letters.” <sup>28</sup>
gra,mmata.	

<sup>24</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 60.

<sup>25</sup> See Rogers S. Bagnall and Peter Derow, *Greek Historical Documents: The Hellenistic Period*, Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study no. 16 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 253-54; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> See Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, 50-51; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 60; John L. White, “The Greek Documentary Letter Tradition Third Century B.C.E to Third Century C.E.,” *Semeia* 22 (1981): 95; Bahr, “The Subscriptions in Pauline Letters,” 28-29; Francis Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter of the Epistolary Papyri: A Study in Greek Epistolography* (Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc., 1923), 124-27.

<sup>27</sup> For more of discussions and examples, see Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter of the Epistolary Papyri: A Study in Greek Epistolography*, 124-27; Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, 50-51.

<sup>28</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 267, ed. and trans. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1899). This document dates from A.D.36.

`Hraklei, dhj D[ion]usi, u "Heraclides Dionysius wrote for him  
e;graya u`pe.r auvtou/ mh. because he did not know letters."<sup>29</sup>  
eivdo, toj gra, mmata.

e;grayen u`pe.r auvtw/n "Psoiphis Onnophris wrote for them  
Yoi/fij VOnnw, f[r]ioj mh. because they did not know letters."<sup>30</sup>  
eivdo, ton gra, m(m)ata.

e;grayen u`pe.r [a]uvtw/n "Lysas Didymus wrote for them  
Lusa/j Didu/mou dia, to. because they did not know letters."<sup>31</sup>  
mh. eivd[e,]ne auvtou.j  
gra, mmata.

Other reasons why amanuenses were frequently used in the Greco-Roman world include both the technical trouble of penning on papyrus, and the difficulty of access to writing equipment.<sup>32</sup> A shift in script, the autograph, at the end of business correspondences among extant papyri also shows the prevalent employment of amanuenses.<sup>33</sup> For example:

1<sup>st</sup> hand: su[g]grafofu, lax "The keeper of the contract is  
Timo, stratoj. Timostratus."  
2<sup>nd</sup> hand: [Pt]olemai/oj oj "I, Ptolemaeus also called  
kai. Petesou/coj Petesuchus, son of Apollonius also  
called Haruotes, Persian of the

<sup>29</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 264. This papyrus dates back to A.D.54.

<sup>30</sup> *The Tebtunis Papyri* 383, ed. Bernard P. Grenfell, Arthur S. Hunt, and Edgar J. Goodspeed (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1907). This papyrus dates back to A.D.46.

<sup>31</sup> *Select Papyri* 54, ed. A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 1: 165. This papyrus dates back to A.D.67.

<sup>32</sup> Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 60. For more examples, especially see Bahr, "The Subscriptions in Pauline Letters," 29. See also Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, 45-50; Harry Gamble, *The Textual History of the Letter to Romans*, Studies and Documents 42 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 62-64; Longenecker, "Ancient Amanuenses and the Pauline Epistles," 282-88; Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 166-67.

vApollwni,ou tou/ kai.  
`Aruw,tou Pe,rshj th/j  
evpi(g)on[h/]j o`mologw/

Epigone agree that.”<sup>34</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> hand: (e;touj) ia  
Auvtokra,toroj Kai,saroj  
Ouves[pa]sianou/ `Adrianou/  
Sebastou/, Famenw,q.

“The 11<sup>th</sup> year of the Emperor  
Caesar Vespasian Augutus,  
Phamenoth.”

“Chaeremon, authorized.”<sup>35</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> hand: Cairh,(,mwn),  
Crh(ma,tison).

1<sup>st</sup> hand: u`pografh. ivdi,a  
tw/n triw/n gegramme,nw/n`

“Autograph subscription of three  
persons mentioned :”

2<sup>nd</sup> hand: `Aruw,thj  
`Hrwdi,wnoj sundii,rhme  
evpi. tou/ parw,ntoj kai.  
le,lnwca eivj to. auvto.  
e,piba,llwn moi me,roj th.n  
progegramme,nhn dou,lnh  
Sambou/n kai. e[kasta  
poh,swi kaqw.j pro,kitai.

“I, Haruotes son of Herodian, am a  
party to the division made at this  
present time and have obtained for  
the portion falling to me the  
aforesaid slave Sambous and I will  
do everything as stated above.”<sup>36</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> hand: (e;touj) iz  
Auvtokra,toroj Kai,saroj  
Traianou/ `Adrianou/  
Sebastou/ `Aq.u.r kq.

“The 17<sup>th</sup> year of the Emperor  
Caesar Trajanus Hadrianus  
Augustus, Athur 29.”

2<sup>nd</sup> hand: Cairh,mwn  
Cairh,monoj evpide,dwka  
kai, ovnw,moka to.n o[rkon.

“I, Chaeremon son of Chaeremon,  
have presented the return and  
sworn the oath.”<sup>37</sup>

As shown above, it seems likely that the use of amanuenses in official or business

<sup>34</sup> *The Tebtunis Papyri* 105. This papyrus dates from B.C.103.

<sup>35</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 243. This papyrus dates from A.D. 79.

<sup>36</sup> *Select Papyri* 51. This papyrus dates from A.D. 47.

<sup>37</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 480. This papyrus dates from A.D. 132.



letters was a widespread phenomenon in the Greco-Roman world, regardless of whether the author was literate or illiterate.

## 2.2. Private Letters

The circumstances under which private letters were written among the lower ranks is rather complicated. Although it is frequently supposed that they were uneducated and illiterate, it does seem that literacy levels were generally higher than was formerly assumed.<sup>38</sup> As Exler says, “The papyri discovered in Egypt have shown that the art of writing was more widely, and more popularly, known in the past, than some scholars had been inclined to think.”<sup>39</sup> For instance, among the Michigan Collection, a papyrus, which dates from the second century, can be identified as a typical example of literacy among the poor. According to Winter, this papyrus letter was penned by a daughter to her mother. Winter comments that this letter must have been written in her own hand, since its spelling and grammar are very poor.<sup>40</sup> Another example is a papyrus letter of the second century written by a son to his mother.<sup>41</sup> Winter indicates that the mother was illiterate and the writer thus expected that his brother would read it to her. Evidence for this is that the letter includes an additional note to the writer’s brother at the bottom<sup>42</sup>:

Semprw,nioj Satourni,la th/                    “Sempronius to Saturnila his mother

<sup>38</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter of the Epistolary Papyri: A Study in Greek Epistolography*, 126. See especially, Zenon Papyri 6, ed. Campbell Cowan Edgar (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1931); *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 113, 294, 528, 530, 531, and 3057.

<sup>40</sup> John Winter, *Life and letters in the Papyri* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1933), 90-91. This papyrus (Inventory No. 188, unpublished), *Ibid.*, 90, has been known as “the most illiterate letter” in the collection. This papyrus letter is also mentioned by Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 62.

<sup>41</sup> Winter, *Life and letters in the Papyri*, 48-49. See also Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 192-95.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* This papyrus letter is also mentioned by Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 62.



mhtrei.	kai.	kuri,a	and lady many greetings.
plei/sta	cai,rein.		...
...			
e;rrwso,	moi, h`	kuri,a mou,	Fare me well, my lady, continually.
diapanto,j.			Sempronius to Maximus his brother
Semprw,nioj	Maxi,mwi	tw/	many greetings.
avdelfw/		pl[e]i/sta	...
cai,pein.			Fare me well, brother." <sup>43</sup>
...			
e;rrwso,	moi, avdelfe,.		

Although some of the lower ranks were rather more literate than has been posited, the predominance of examples among the ancient papyri sufficiently shows that most poor people were “functionally illiterate.”<sup>44</sup> In practice, this meant that they employed amanuenses when they needed to send a private letter. For example, especially, P. Oxy. 1484 through 1487, one finds very brief invitations. In these cases, if the senders were capable of penning in any way, these invitations would be written in their own hands. Nonetheless, one of these brief letters was penned by an amanuensis.<sup>45</sup> P. Oxy. 1487 reads as follows: *Kali/ se Qe,wn ui`o.j vWrige,nouj eivj tou.j ga,mouj th/j avdelfh/j e`autou/ evn th|/ au;rion h[ti]j evstei.n Tu/bi q avpo. w[r(a)j] h* (“Theon son of Origenes invites you to the wedding of his sister tomorrow, which is Tubi 9, at the 8th hour”). At the end of the letter, a second hand had corrected *h* by replacing it with *q*.

Furthermore, it seems that the lower ranks also employed an amanuensis

<sup>43</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 192-95. This papyrus letter was originally published in H. I. Bell, “Some Private letters of the Roman Period from the London Collection,” *Revue Égyptologique, Nouvelle Serie*, I (1919): 203-06.

<sup>44</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 62.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

in cases of more crucial and longer letters. Several examples follow<sup>46</sup>:

1<sup>st</sup> hand: w-| dhlw,sei  
po,teron avrseniko.n  
qe,leij [.....] avnti. tw/n  
avrs[e,nwn qhluco.n .o... on  
de. qhluco/ crei,an ec.[...  
evla,ssona

2<sup>nd</sup> hand: evkomisa,mhn de [...  
To. kera,mion th/j evlai,j  
ta. de. a;lla [... ge,gr[a]fa,  
fu,lasse e[wj a;n pa[r]a.  
soi. ge,nwmai. e;rrwso  
fi,ltate vApolloge,ne.

“You will inform him whether you want a male ... a female instead of the males. I must tell you that ... has(?) less need of the female.”

“I received the jar of oil. The other things I’ve written about, keep them until I join you. Good health, my dear friend Apollogenes.”<sup>47</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> hand: marturh,sei soi  
Sarapa/j peri. tw/n r`o,dwn  
o[ti pa,nta pepoi,hka eivj  
to. o[sa h;qelej pe,myai  
soi,avlla. ouvc eu[romen.

2<sup>nd</sup> hand: evrrw/sqai, se  
euvco,meqa, kuri,a.

“Sarapas will tell you about the roses—that I have made every effort to send you as many as you wanted, but we could not find them.”

“We pray for your health, lady.”<sup>48</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> hand: evrrw/sqai se  
eu;comai,avdelfe.

2<sup>nd</sup> hand: evrrw/sqai se  
eu;comai,avdelfe.

“I pray for your health, brother.”

“I pray for your health, brother.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> See also Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 62-63; Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, 46-47.

<sup>47</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 3063. Second century.

<sup>48</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 3313. Second century. See also E. A. Judge, *Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and St. Paul* (Christchurch, New Zealand: University of Canterbury, 1982), 24-26.

<sup>49</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 1491. Early fourth century. See also P. Oxy. 118, 1664, 1665, 1676, 2152, 2192, 2862, 3066, 3067, 3124, 3129, and 3182.

Among the examples mentioned above, P. Oxy. 1491, in particular, contains repetition in the autograph's closing section. This indicates that the sender was functionally illiterate, and thus, used an amanuensis to forward the letter. It appears that the purpose of the author in copying a customary closing section is to prove its authenticity.<sup>50</sup>

It is obvious that the upper ranks in society could afford to employ amanuenses. But there still remain the issues as to whether they favored the use of amanuenses and the prevalence of their use.<sup>51</sup> With regard to a historical event; after being elected tribune, Clodius desired to expel Cato the Younger from Rome so as to assume his political authority. Clodius and Caesar were Cato the Younger's rivals.<sup>52</sup> Plutarch writes about their intrigue:

evxio,nti de. ouv nau/n,  
ouv stratiw,thn, ouvc  
u`pere,thn e;dwke plh.n h'  
du,o grammatei/j mo,non, w-  
n o` me.n kle,pthj kai.  
pampo,nhroj, a[teroj de.  
klwdi,ou pela,thj.

"Moreover, when Cato set out, Clodius gave him neither ship, soldier, nor assistant, except two clerks, of whom one was a thief and a rascal, and the other a client of Clodius."<sup>53</sup>

Plutarch's reference certainly seems to imply that the upper classes, including Cato the Younger, made broad use of amanuenses.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast, the following statement by Cicero has been treated as evidence that the upper ranks did not favour the employment of an amanuensis:

<sup>50</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 63; Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, 48; Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 166-67.

<sup>51</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 61.

<sup>52</sup> Plutarch *Cato the Younger* 24.1; 33.1-4; 34.1-2, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 8: 291, 315, 317, 319.

<sup>53</sup> Plutarch *Cato the Younger* 34.3. This example is also cited by Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 61.

<sup>54</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 61.



*Numquam ante arbitror te epistulam meam legisse nisi mea manu scriptam. ex eo colligere poteris quanta occupatione distinear. nam cum vacui temporis nihil haberem et cum recreandae voculae causa necesse esset mihi ambulare, haec dictavi ambulans.*

“I believe you have never before read a letter of mine not in my own handwriting. You may gather from that how desperately busy I am. Not having a minute to spare and being obliged to take a walk to refresh my poor voice, I am dictating this while walking.”<sup>55</sup>

However, among Cicero’s correspondences, at least fourteen epistles plainly indicate that he has dictated them. These correspondences are identified as private, and their addressees are his brother, Quintus, and his friend Atticus.<sup>56</sup> Physical disabilities and illness were also reasons for employing an amanuensis.<sup>57</sup> Cicero frequently says that the inflammation of his eyes compelled him to use an amanuensis. “*Lipitudinis meae signum tibi sit librarii manus . . .*” (My clerk’s hand will serve as an indication of my ophthalmia. . . .)<sup>58</sup> A number of other examples support that the argument that employment of an amanuensis prevailed among the elite.<sup>59</sup> Notably, Quintilian

---

<sup>55</sup> Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 2.23.1, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1: 209.

<sup>56</sup> Bahr, “Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century,” 469. These letters are the following: Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 2.23.1; 4.16.1; 5.17.1; 7.13a.3; 8.12.1; 8.13.1; 10.3a.1; 13.25.3; 14.21.4; 16.15.1; *Idem, Letters to Quintus* 2.2.1; 3.1.19; 3.3.1, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Specifically, in *Letters to Atticus* 10.3a.1 Cicero writes that he dictated two letters in a day. Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 62, notes that at times, however, particularly in case of a quite personal correspondence the elite also penned in their own hand.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* See also Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 6.9.1; 7.2.3.

<sup>58</sup> Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 8.13.1; 7.13a.3; 8.12.1; 10.14.1; 10.17.2. See also *Idem, Letters to Quintus* 2.2.1. In the case of Cicero, it seems that his dependence on an amanuensis in his later letters was greater than in his earlier letters. This would give a likely explanation for the reason why Paul could not help using an amanuensis in composing his epistles, specifically, considering his physical illness, ophthalmia (Acts 9:8; 2 Cor 12:7; Gal 6:11). Probably, in Peter’s case, his physical circumstances were the same as Cicero’s when he wrote his epistles, namely, that he was in the evening of his life.

<sup>59</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 61. Richards, *Ibid.*, points out that the prevalent employment of amanuenses is shown by the products of Plinys, Cicero, Atticus, Seneca, and Cato.

criticizes the fashionable employment of an amanuensis.<sup>60</sup> Thus, Cicero's statement seems to be clearly "a point of pride,"<sup>61</sup> and, most likely, he commonly used his amanuensis, Tiro.<sup>62</sup>

P. Oxy. 3314 apparently shows that the sender of the letter was supposed to be from the upper ranks and that he employed an amanuensis:

kuri,w| mou patri. vIwsh|/  
kai. th|/ sumbi,w| mou  
Mari,a| vIou,daj.  
prohgoume,nwj eu;comai  
th|// qi,a| pronoi,,a|  
peri. th/j u`mw/n  
o`loklhri,aj i;na kai.  
u`giai,nontaj u`ma/j  
avpola,bw. pa/n ou=n  
poi,hson, kuri,a mou  
avdelfh,, pe,myon moi to.n  
avdelfo,n sou, evpidh. eivj  
no,son perie,pesa avpo.  
ptw,matoj i[ppou.  
me,llontoj mou ga.r  
strafh/nai eivj a;llo  
me,roj, ouv du,namai avf v  
evmautou/, eiv mh. a;lloi  
du,o a;nqrwpoi  
avntistre,ywsi,n me kai.  
me,crij pothri,ou u[dat[o]j  
ouvk e;cw to.n  
evpididou/nta, moi.  
boh,qhson ou=n, kuri,a mou

"To my lord father, Joses, and to my wife, Maria, Judas. To begin with I pray to the divine providence for the full health of you (both), that I find you well. Make every effort, my lady sister, send me your brother, since I have fallen into sickness as the result of a riding accident. For when I want to turn on to my other side, I cannot do it by myself, unless two other persons turn me over, and I have no one to give me so much as a cup of water. So help me, my lady sister. Let it be your earnest endeavour to send your brother to me quickly, as I said before. For in emergencies of this kind a man's true friends are discovered. So please come yourself as well and help me, since I am truly in a strange place and sick. I searched for a ship to board, but I could not find anyone to search on my behalf. For I am in Babylon. I greet my daughter and all who love us by name. And if you have need of cash,

<sup>60</sup> Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 10.3.19, trans. H. E. Butler, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 4: 101.

<sup>61</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 61

<sup>62</sup> Bahr, "Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century," 469.



avdelfh,. spoudai/o,n soi  
gene,sqw o[puj to. ta,coj  
pe,myh|j moi, w`j proei/pon,  
to.n avdelfo,n sou. eivj  
ta.j toiau,taj ga.r  
avna,gkaj eu`ri,skontai oi`  
i;dioi tou/ avnqrw,pou.  
i[na ou=n kai. soi.  
Parabohqh,sh|j moi tw/|  
o;nti evpi. xe,nhj kai. evn  
no,sw| o;nti. kai. ploi/on  
evpezh,,thsa evnbh/nai kai.  
ouvk eu-ron to.n  
evpezhtou/nta, moi. evn  
th|/ ga.r Babulw/nei,  
eivmei. prosagoreu,w th.n  
qugate,ra mou kai. pa,ntaj  
tou.j filou/ntaj h`ma/j kat  
v o;noma. kai. eva.n cri.an  
e;ch|j ke,rmatoj, labe  
para. vIsa.k to.n kolobo,n,  
to.n e;ngista, soi  
me,non[t]a. (m. 2) evrrw/sqai  
u`ma/j eu;comai polloi/j  
cro,noij.

get it from Isaac, the cripple, who  
lodges very close to you. (2<sup>nd</sup> hand)  
I pray for the health of you both for  
many years.”<sup>63</sup>

The author of P. Oxy 3314 was most likely from the upper ranks as revealed by his fall from a horse and the discussion of the expenses for the travel. Although it is possible to assume that the sender would have used an amanuensis as a result of the accident, he never actually mentions the reason why he employed an amanuensis. Although he used an amanuensis, the sender’s closing farewell was in

---

<sup>63</sup> Fourth century. See also Judge, *Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and St. Paul*, 28-32.

his own hand. In this respect, it seems likely that the author normally employed an amanuensis while writing letters.<sup>64</sup>

It is obvious that the employment of amanuenses was widespread among the people of all ranks and classes in Greco-Roman antiquity, especially in the writing of official (business) correspondences. Even though on occasion both the lower and upper ranks would write private correspondences personally, they still usually employed amanuenses to pen them.<sup>65</sup>

### 3. The Role of an Amanuensis

Because the author could have flexibility of roles, the employment of an amanuensis is an intricate subject. According to Richards, the role of an amanuensis is classified as a transcriber, composer, and contributor. An amanuensis as a transcriber would copy dictation word for word of the sender. In the case of an amanuensis as a composer, the sender guided him in forwarding correspondence while not indicating the accuracy of the content. This was feasible since most correspondences, including individual ones, in Greco-Roman antiquity were very stereotyped. As a contributor, an amanuensis edited the sender's drafts to match epistolary form under the precise instructions of the sender's written or verbal notes.<sup>66</sup> Richards describes the role of an amanuensis, among other things, as the following:

Figure 2. The Amanuensis' Role

---

<sup>64</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 61.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.



	<----->
The amanuensis' role	Transcriber. . . . . Contributor . . . . . Composer
Who had the most control	Author . . . . . Amanuensis
The quality of the notes	More Detailed. . . . . More Sketchy
The influence of the amanuensis	More Unintentional . . . . . More Intentional

(Source: Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 64 with modifications.)

### 3.1. The Reasons for Using Amanuenses

As mentioned earlier, illiterate and semi-literate individuals engaged amanuenses for writing letters since they did not have the ability to pen and since there remained the technical trouble of penning on papyrus and the difficulty of access to writing equipment.<sup>67</sup> However, the reason why literate persons employed amanuenses when composing correspondences is not straightforward. Usually when an author was ill, an amanuensis would pen a letter on his behalf.<sup>68</sup> Also, a writer could get on with doing other work while using an amanuensis for correspondence.<sup>69</sup> Cicero says to Quintus, his brother.

<p><i>Occupationem mearum tibi signum sit library manus. Diem scitp esse nullum, quo die non dicam pro reo. Ita, quidquid conficio aut cogito, in</i></p>	<p>“You may take my clerk’s handwriting as a sign of how busy I am. I tell you, there is not a day on which I don’t make a speech for the</p>
---	---

<sup>67</sup> See Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, 46, 50-51; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 60; White, “The Greek Documentary Letter Tradition Third Century B.C.E to Third Century C.E.,” 95; Bahr, “The Subscriptions in Pauline Letters,” 28-29; Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter of the Epistolary Papyri: A Study in Greek Epistolography*, 124-27.

<sup>68</sup> See Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 8.13.1; 7.13a.3; 8.12.1; 10.14.1; 10.17.2; *Letters to Quintus* 2.2.1.

<sup>69</sup> Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 62.

*ambulationis fere tempus confero.*

defence. So practically everything I do or think about I put into my walking time.<sup>70</sup>

Interestingly, indolence was also one of the reasons for employing amanuenses. Dictating a plain correspondence would be rather more convenient for the author than composing it by his own hand.<sup>71</sup> Cicero acknowledges this in his letter to Atticus, when he says “. . . *nam illam nomaharia me excusationem ne acceperis.*” (“. . . I was not so well—don’t accept the excuse of [my laziness].”)<sup>72</sup> Cicero goes on to say:

*Noli putare pigritia me facere, quod non mea manu scribam, sed mehercule pigritia. Nihil enim habeo aliud, quod dicam. Et tamen in tuis quoque epistulis Alexim videor agnoscere.*

“You must not suppose it is out of laziness that I do not write in my own hand—and yet upon my word that is exactly what it is. I can’t call it anything else. And after all I seem to detect Alexis in your letters too.”<sup>73</sup>

In this vein, an individual relationship between the authors and their private amanuenses should also be considered, since there remain the renowned relationships of Cicero and Tiro, Atticus and Alexis; Quintus and Staius; and Alexander the Great and Eumenes, respectively.<sup>74</sup> Where the writer possesses an expert amanuensis, an intimate and individual relationship between them was possible. The amanuensis could even be the author’s colleague. This kind of relationship could not be established between an author and an unnamed

<sup>70</sup> Cicero *Letters to Quintus* 3.3.1. See also Cicero *Letters to Quintus* 2.2.1; 2.16.1; Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 2.23.1; 4.16.1.

<sup>71</sup> Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 62-63.

<sup>72</sup> Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 5.11.7.

<sup>73</sup> Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 16.15.1.

<sup>74</sup> See Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 5.20.9; 7.2.3; 12.10; Cicero *Letters to Quintus* 1.2.8; Plutarch *Eumenes* 1.2. See also Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 63-67.

amanuensis engaged in the market.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.2. Amanuensis as a Transcriber

In Greco-Roman antiquity, individuals who attended school were taught to write and were trained to take dictation.<sup>76</sup> Robinson notes, “Schooling began when a boy was six, and its elementary stage lasted until he was fourteen. In the grammar-school he would learn to write with a metal instrument on a tablet of soft wax. Lessons in dictation followed.”<sup>77</sup> Based on this fact, it seems likely that most educated individuals in Greco-Roman antiquity could take dictation syllable by syllable slowly.<sup>78</sup>

Mckenzie comments that “dictation . . . was the normal means of producing letters. Many of the ancient letters which have been preserved were letters of the poor, so dictation was not the luxury which it is in modern times.”<sup>79</sup> In relation to dictation, there remains the question about its characteristic speed, namely, slow or fast. For example, the statements of Cicero, Seneca, and Pliny the elder show that dictation could be slow. Cicero writes, “*Ego ne Tironi quidem dictavi, qui totas periochas persequi solet, sed Spintharo syllabatim.*” (“Therefore I did not even dictate it to Tiro, who is accustomed to following whole sections, but to Spintharus syllable by syllable.”)<sup>80</sup> Also, Seneca says, “*Aliquis tam insulsus intervenit quam qui illi singula verba vellenti, tanquam dicaret, non diceret, ait, ‘Dic, numquid dicas.’*” (“Though of

---

<sup>75</sup> Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 63.

<sup>76</sup> C. E. Robinson, *Everyday Life in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 139.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 8. Nevertheless, one must consider Richards’ contention, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 66: “However, most also had little or no practice doing this after finishing school. Therefore, while in theory most could take dictation, in practice, most were not proficient enough to take down a letter of any length.”

<sup>79</sup> John Mckenzie, *Light on the Epistles: A Reader’s Guide* (Chicago: Thomas More, 1975), 13-14.

<sup>80</sup> Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 13.25.3. See also Bahr, “Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century,” 469-70; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 66.

course some way may cross your path, like the person who said, when Vinicius [the stammerer] was dragging out his words one by one, as if he were dictating and not speaking. ‘Say, haven’t you anything to say?’.”<sup>81</sup> Pliny the elder describes the exceptional ability of Julius Caesar. He states, “*scribere aut legere, simul dictare aut audire solitum accepimus, epistulas vero tantarum rerum quaternas partier dictare libraries aut, si nihil aliud ageret, septenas.*” (“We are told that he [Julius Caesar] used to write or read and dictate or listen simultaneously, and to dictate to his secretaries four letters at once on his important affairs—or, if otherwise unoccupied, seven letters at once.”)<sup>82</sup> With regard to Pliny the elder’s statement, Bahr persuasively contends that Caesar’s dictation means slow dictation, since Caesar “obviously could not have been dictating fluently as we are accustomed to doing it; but if he did it word for word, or syllable by syllable, then a man of Caesar’s ability would be able to dictate several letters at once.”<sup>83</sup>

On the contrary, rapid dictation was also possible since there was a shorthand system by the first century A.D..<sup>84</sup> For instance, Seneca says, “*Quid verborum notas quibus quamvis citata excipitur oratio et celeritatem linguae manus sequitur?*” (“Or our signs for whole words, which enable us to take down a speech, however rapidly uttered, matching speed of the tongue by speed of hand?”)<sup>85</sup> Also, Seneca recalls, “*quae notarius persequi non potuit*” (“the shorthand secretary could not keep up with him”), when Janus delivered a speech which was so long and

---

<sup>81</sup> Seneca *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales* 40.10, trans. Richard M. Gummere, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 1: 269. See also Bahr, “Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century,” 470; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 66.

<sup>82</sup> Pliny the elder *Natural History* 7.25.91, trans. H. Rackham, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 2: 565.

<sup>83</sup> Bahr, “Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century,” 471.

<sup>84</sup> See Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 67-73; Quint. Inst. 10.3.19.

<sup>85</sup> Seneca *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales* 90.25.

eloquent in the senate.<sup>86</sup> However, Seneca's depiction simply emphasizes Janus' oratorical ability, thus an amanuensis could keep up with a normal address.<sup>87</sup> Before the first century A.D., a shorthand system was strongly connected to Cicero. Because his private amanuensis, Tiro, introduced a shorthand system to Rome, Tironian Notes came to represent the Latin shorthand system.<sup>88</sup> Also, a Greek shorthand system existed at least by the first century B.C..<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, it should also be mentioned that only some amanuenses were able to take shorthand, indicating that shorthand was not prevalent in Greco-Roman antiquity.<sup>90</sup>

### 3.3. Amanuensis as a Composer

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, since business and official correspondences were much more conventional and delineate a set phrase, letter writers could request an amanuensis to compose them. In this case, even though the mentioned sender was entirely in charge of the letter, the amanuensis was the real composer of the correspondence.<sup>91</sup>

Private correspondences also used conventional phrases for "health-wishes, affirmations of prayers and offerings to the gods on the recipient's behalf, and assurances of well being and concern/love" of the author.<sup>92</sup> P Mich. 477 and 478 which date back to the early part of the second century A.D. show this stereotyped

---

<sup>86</sup> Seneca *Apocolocyntosis* 9.2, trans. P. T. Eden, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 45.

<sup>87</sup> Bahr, "Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century," 473; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 67.

<sup>88</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 68.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 69; Bahr, "Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century," 473-74; H. J. M. Milne, *Greek Shorthand Manuals: Syllabary and Commentary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 4-5.

<sup>90</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 74.

<sup>91</sup> Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, 29-55; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 8-16; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 77.

<sup>92</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 78.

phrase.

[Klau,d[i]o]j T [erentiano.j  
Klaudi,,w|] T[ib ]er[i]anw/i  
t,w|/ p[atri.] kai. kuri,,[w|  
plei/sta cai,rein]. pro.  
me.n p[a,]ntwn e[u;com]ai, se  
[u`]gia[i,nein kai.  
euvtupei/n, o[] moi  
euvk[t]ai/o,n evvstin, to.  
p[ros]ku,n[h]ma, [sou ±II  
po]io[u,m]enoj kaqv  
e`ka,sth[n h`[me,r]an para.  
[t,w|/ kuri,,w| Sara,pidi  
k]a[i. t]oi/j sunna,oij  
[q]eo[i/]j.

“Claudius Terentianus to Claudius Tiberianus, his father and lord, very many greetings. Before all else I pray for your health and success, which are my wish, and I make obeisance for you daily . . . in the presence of our lord Sarapis and the gods who share his temple.”<sup>93</sup>

[Klau,dio]j Terentiano.j  
Klaudi,,w|] Tiberianw|/  
[t,w|/ patri. kai. kuri,,w|  
plei/sta] cai,re[in]. pro.  
m[e.n pa,nt]w[n eu;comai, se  
u`giai,nei[n, [o[] moi euv-  
ktai/o,n ev[vsti]n,  
u`[gi]ai,[nw de, kai.  
auv]to.j t[o.] pro[sku,-]  
n[h]ma, sou poiou,m [enoj  
kaqv e`ka,st]hn h`m[e,r]an  
par[a.] t,w|/ kuri,,w|  
Sara,p[idi kai. toi/j  
sun]na,oij q[eo]i/j.

“Claudius Terentianus to Claudius Tiberianus, his father and lord, very many greetings. Before all else I pray for your health, which is my wish. I myself am in good health and make obeisance for you daily in the presence of our lord Sarapis and the gods who share his temple.”<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> P. Mich. 477.

<sup>94</sup> P. Mich. 478.

Likewise, educated persons employed an amanuensis to sketch correspondence at times. It is likely that literate individuals did desire their addressees not to discern that an amanuensis penned the correspondence. Thus, remarks on employing an amanuensis in the correspondences are infrequent; however, some instances still remain. Clearly, Quintus, Cicero's brother, possessed several amanuenses and engaged them as composers while writing official letters.<sup>95</sup>

Cicero advised Quintus on this issue:

*In litteris mittendis (saepe ad te scripsi) nimium te exorabilem praebuisti. tolle omnis, si potes, iniquas, tolle inusitatas, tolle contrarias. Staius mihi narravit scriptas ad te solere adferri, a se legi, et si iniquae sint fieri te certiores; ante quam vero ipse ad te venisset, nullum delectum litterarum fuisse, ex eo esse volumina selectarum epistularum quae reprehendi solerent.*

"In sending out official letters (I have often written to you about this) you have been too ready to accommodate. Destroy, if you can, any that are inequitable or contrary to usage or contradictory. Staius has told me that they used to be brought to you already drafted, and that he would read them and inform you if they were inequitable, but that before he joined your letters were dispatched indiscriminately. And so, he said, there are collections of selected letters and these are adversely criticized."<sup>96</sup>

Staius seems to be Quintus' head amanuensis. Cicero appears to criticize Quintus for not *confirming* the correspondences because Quintus was ultimately liable for the contents.<sup>97</sup>

When Cicero was expelled from Rome, his friend Caelius Rufus sent a

<sup>95</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 78-79.

<sup>96</sup> Cicero *Letters to Quintus* 1.2.8.

<sup>97</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 79.



letter to inform him of even trifling events in Rome. Actually, he employed an amanuensis as the real composer of letters on his behalf.<sup>98</sup>

*Quod tibi decedens pollicitus sum me omnis res urbanas diligentissime tibi perscripturum, data opera paravi qui sic omnia persequeretur ut verear ne tibi nimium arguta haec sedulitas videatur . . . . si quid in re publica maius actum erit, quod isti operarii minus commode persequi possint, et quem ad modum actum sit et quae existimatio secuta quaeque de eo spes sit diligenter tibi perscribemus.*

“Redeeming the promise I made as I took my leave of you to write you all the news of Rome in the fullest detail, I have been at pains to find a person [amanuensis] to cover the whole ground so meticulously that I am afraid you may find the result too wordy. . . . If there is any major political event which these hirelings [amanuenses] could not cover satisfactorily, I shall be careful to write you a full account of the manner of it and of consequent views and expectations.”<sup>99</sup>

Apparently, Rufus used an amanuensis to save time.<sup>100</sup>

In a somewhat different case, Cicero habitually requested Atticus to write to their acquaintances in his name.<sup>101</sup> Cicero writes, “*quibus tibi videbitur velim des litteras meo nomine. nosti meos familiaris. <si> signum requirent aut manum, dices iis me propter custodias ea vitasse.*” (“Please send letters in my name to such persons as you think proper—you know my friends. If they wonder about the seal or handwriting, you will tell them that I avoided these on account of the watch.”)<sup>102</sup>

Similarly, a few months later, in another letter to Atticus, Cicero says:

<sup>98</sup> See also Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 16; Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 51-52.

<sup>99</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 8.1.1, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 343-45.

<sup>100</sup> Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 16; Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 51-52.

<sup>101</sup> The following examples imply that in practice, Cicero used his amanuensis as composer while writing letters.

<sup>102</sup> Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 11.2.4.

*Ego propter incredibilem et animi et corporis molestiam conficere pluris litteras non potui; iis tantum rescripsi a quibus acceperam. tu velim et Basilo, et quibus praeterea videbitur, etiam Servilio conscribes, ut tibi videbitur, meo nomine.*

“Mental and physical discomfort passing belief have made it impossible for me to compose many letters. I have only answered people from whom I have received them. I should be glad if you would write to Basilus and anyone else you think fit, including Servilius, as you think fit, in my name.”<sup>103</sup>

Cicero seems to have as his objective that the addressees would trust the correspondences as if they originated from him.<sup>104</sup> Cicero fulfilled a similar duty for his close associate, Valerius. In his letter to L. Valerius, Cicero mentions, “*Lentulo nostro egi per litteras tuo nomine gratias diligenter.*” (“I have written to thank our friend Lentulus *on your behalf* in suitable terms.”)<sup>105</sup> Although Cicero’s reference does not necessarily signify that he wrote the correspondence as Valerius’ amanuensis, it does nonetheless, significantly infer that Cicero performed the task.<sup>106</sup>

### 3.4. Amanuensis as a Contributor

An amanuensis as a contributor might be regarded as a mediate role between two extremes, transcriber and composer. Contributing means not only

<sup>103</sup> Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 11.5.3. See also 3.15.8: “*si qui erunt quibus putes opus esse meo nomine litteras dari, velim conscribas curesque dandas*” (“I should be grateful if you would write letters and arrange for their dispatch to any persons you think ought to be written to in my name.”); 11.3: “*Tu, ut antea fecisti, velim, si qui erunt ad quos aliquid scribendum a me existimes, ipse conficias.*” (If there is anyone you think ought to get a letter from me, please do it yourself, *as you have before.*); 11.7.7: “*Quod litteras quibus putas opus esse curas dandas, facis commode*” (“It is kind of you to see that letters are sent to those whom you think proper.”)

<sup>104</sup> See Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 15; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 78.

<sup>105</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 1.10.

<sup>106</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 79.

making trivial modification but also momentous contributions.<sup>107</sup> According to Richards, “selecting the proper genre for the letter, the proper way to broach the topic (introductory formulae), the appropriate stereotyped phrases, and even the names and titles of the appropriate people to greet” were included as a secretary’s contributions.<sup>108</sup>

In the case that a sender wanted his content correctly expressed, he could dictate word by word or pen it himself, because shorthand was not widely used in antiquity. Conversely, provided an author was not fussy, then an experienced amanuensis would be satisfactory if dictating at the rate of deliberate speaking. Unfortunately, it seems likely that most authors would not be in contact with a practiced amanuensis in Greco-Roman society.<sup>109</sup> In cases where an amanuensis was unable to keep up perfectly with the sender’s words, the amanuensis broadly noted down the contents to reproduce them afterwards. Consequently, it is clear that the amanuensis made slight editorial revisions including phraseology, syntax, and language regardless of the letters’ length.<sup>110</sup> In this regard, Richard’s two observations deserve mention:

First, formal education included training in the art of paraphrase. Theon, a teacher of rhetoric from roughly the time of Paul, described a school exercise where a student ‘who has read a passage reflects upon the sense and then seeks to reproduce the passage, in so far as possible keeping the words of the original in the original order.’ It was not a verbatim reproduction but a paraphrase, and was valued as a sign of rhetorical skill.

Second, most typical letter writers from Paul’s day did not have the educational training to compose a pleasing letter. These less literate writers likely wanted the secretary to improve the grammar, etc. Such improvements were perhaps one of the perks of hiring a secretary.<sup>111</sup>

There remains sufficient proof for this practice. The following statement

---

<sup>107</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 74.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> See Bahr, “Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century,” 475-76; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 74.

<sup>111</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 74-75.

made to Tiro, (Cicero's private amanuensis who was recovering his health in a different place) by Cicero shows the importance of a competent amanuensis: "*Innumerabilia tua sunt in me official, domestica, forensia, urbana, provincialia; in reprivita, in publica, in studiis, in litteris nostris.*" ("Your services to me are beyond count—in my home and out of it, in Rome and abroad, in private affairs and public, in my studies and literary work.")<sup>112</sup> According to Plutarch, since Cicero employed some stenographers, Tiro's services in this regard seem to mean his editorial ability.<sup>113</sup> Plutarch clearly writes:

Tou/ton mo,non w-n Ka,twn  
ei=pe diasw,zesqai, fasi  
to.n lo,gon, Kike,rwnoj  
tou/ u`pa,tou tou.j  
diafe,rontaj ovxu,thti tw/n  
grafe,wn shmei/a  
prodida,xantoj evn mikroi/j  
kai. brace,si tu,poij  
pollw/n gramma,twn e;conto  
du,naming, ei/ta a;llon  
avllaco,se tou/  
bouleuthri,ou spora,dhn  
evmba,lontoj.

"This is the only speech of Cato which has been preserved, we are told, and its preservation was due to Cicero the consul, who had previously given to those clerks who excelled in rapid writing instruction in the use of signs, which, in small and short figures, comprised the force of many letters; these clerks he had then distributed in various parts of the senate-house."<sup>114</sup>

Referring to a different instance, Cicero announces to Tiro:

*Litterulae meae, sive nostrae, tuui desiderio oblanguerunt. . . . Pompeius erat apud me, cum haec scribebam, . . . Et cupienti audire nostra dixi sine te omnia mea muta esse. Tu Misis nostris para ut*

"My (or our) literary brain children have drooping their heads missing you. . . . Pomponius is staying with me as I write. . . . He wanted to hear my compositions, but I told him that in your absence my tongue of

<sup>112</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 16.4.3.

<sup>113</sup> See Bahr, "Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century," 470; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 75.

<sup>114</sup> Plut. Cato Ygr. 23.3-4.

*operas reddas.*

authorship is tied completely. You must get ready to restore your service to my Muses.”<sup>115</sup>

To read a work which had just been finalized was a practice for amusement in antiquity. It is obvious that Cicero had not recently penned anything acceptable that could be introduced to a companion such as Pomponius. Considering Cicero’s statements, “our” and “my Muses,” it seems to strongly imply that Tiro had been checking and editing his works for style, accuracy and appearance.<sup>116</sup>

In a later correspondence to Tiro, Cicero scolds Tiro for his inappropriate employment of the terminology “*fideliter* (faithfully).” Cicero says, “*Sed hues tu, qui kanw, n esse meorum scriptorum soles, unde illud tam a; kuron, valetudini fideliter inserviendo?*” (“But just a moment, you yardstick of my literary style, where did you come by so bizarre a phrase as ‘faithfully studying my health?’”)<sup>117</sup> Really, Cicero’s reproach in which he corrects Tiro, paradoxically, is a vindication, because the word *kanw, n* (yardstick) certainly shows that Tiro’s function was as an editor for Cicero.<sup>118</sup>

One might say that the relationship between Cicero and Tiro is singular. However, it should be noted that Cicero says that their relationship corresponds not only with that of Atticus and Alexis, his amanuensis, but also that of Quintus and Statius.<sup>119</sup> Also, Plutarch states a similar relationship existed between Alexander the Great and

<sup>115</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 16.10.2.

<sup>116</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 76; Bahr, “Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century,” 470; Otto Roller, *Das Formular der paulischen Briefe* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933), 307-08.

<sup>117</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 16.17.1.

<sup>118</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 75.

<sup>119</sup> Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 5.20.9: “*Alexis quod mihi totiens salutem adscribit est gratum; sed cur non suis litteris idem facit quod meus ad te Alexis facit?*” (“I am obliged to Alexis for so often adding his salutations, but why does he not do it in a letter of his own, as my Alexis [Tiro] does to you?”); 7.2.3: “*cuius quoniam mention facta est, Tironem Patris aegrum reliqui . . .*” (“Apropos of him, I have left Tiro at Patrae sick . . .”); 12.10: “*Alexim vero curemus, imaginem Tironis, quem aegrum roman remisit . . .*” (“But let us take care of Tiro’s counterpart (Tiro is unwell, and I am sending him back to Rome) Alexis . . .”) See also Cicero *Letters to Quintus* 1.2.8.

Eumenes, his amanuensis.<sup>120</sup>

Amanuenses in Greco-Roman antiquity, including Tiro, were evidently involved, at least, in making slight editorial revisions to correspondences. As examined earlier, the extant papyri sent by illiterate or marginally literate authors disclose the characteristic feature of revision, namely, a well-rounded document with appropriate style and words, because correspondences in antiquity held to a fairly inflexible format, which included conventional phrases and a preset arrangement of the text. Unsurprisingly, this leads one to see that the ancient amanuenses' role was beyond simply revising words and style.<sup>121</sup>

This convention, of course, was not restricted to unlearned individuals. Literate authors frequently authorized an amanuensis to prepare the uninteresting parts of an epistle. A Greco-Roman recommendation letter might be presented as a

---

<sup>120</sup> Plutarch *Eumenes* 12.1-2:

“ouvde.n e;ti mikro.n  
evlpi,zwn, avlla. th|/ gnw,mh|  
th.n o[lhn periballo,menoj  
h`gemoni,an, evbou,leto to.n  
Euvme,nh fi,lon e;cein kai.  
sunergo.n evpi. ta.j pra,xeij.  
dio. pe,myaj I`erw,numon  
evspe,ndeto tw/| Euvme,nei,  
protei,naj o[rkon, o]n o`  
Euvme,nhj diorqw,saj  
evpe,treyen evpikri/nai toi/j  
poliorkou/sin auvto.n  
Makedo,si, po,teroj ei;h  
dikaio,teroj.”

“He [Antigonus] therefore cherished no longer an inferior hope, but embraced the whole empire in his scheme, and desired to have Eumenes as friend and helper in his undertakings. Accordingly, he sent Hieronymus to make a treaty with Eumenes, and proposed an oath for him to take. This oath Eumenes corrected and then submitted it to the Macedonians who were besieging him, requesting them to decide which was the juster form.”

<sup>121</sup> Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 11-17. See also Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 17-26; White, “The Ancient Epistolography Group in Retrospect,” 10; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 76.

typical instance.<sup>122</sup> Actually, Cicero, as a renowned individual, also composed a number of recommendation epistles. Among his collected correspondences, a whole book is composed completely of them, except for one letter.<sup>123</sup> One of Cicero's recommendation letters follows:

*Licet eodem exemplo saepius tibi huius generis litteras mittam, cum gratias agam quod meas commendationes tam diligenter observes, quod feci in aliis et faciam, ut video, saepius; sed tamen non parcam operae et, ut vo<ss>letis in formulis, sic ego in epistulis 'de eadem re alio modo.'*

"I might legitimately send you many letters of this kind in identical terms, thanking you for paying such careful attention to my recommendations, as I have done in other cases and shall clearly often be doing. None the less I shall not spare my pains. Like you jurists in your formulae I shall treat in my letters 'of the same matter in another way.'"<sup>124</sup>

Cicero seems to discern the danger of uniformity as he writes another correspondence of commendation to his companion who has received such epistles from him. Cicero struggled to vary his recommendation epistles, because the expression was so conventional that it was difficult to influence or make an impression upon the addressee.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 76. See also White, "The Greek Documentary Letter Tradition, Third Century B.C.E. to Third Century C.E.," 95-97.

<sup>123</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 13. See also Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 76.

<sup>124</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 13.27.1.

<sup>125</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 13.69.1-2:



### 3.5. Liability for the Contents

In connection with the practice of employing amanuenses, it is reasonable to scrutinize the matter concerning final liability for the contents of correspondences.

For a discussion of this issue, Cicero's disclamation of his letter deserves mention:

*Stomachosiores meas litteras quas dicas esse, non intelligio. bis ad te scripsi, me purgans diligentur, te leniter accusans in eo quod de me cito credidisses. quod genus querelae mihi quidem videbatur esse amici; sin tibi displicet, non utar eo posthac. sed si, ut scribes, eae litterae non fuerunt disertae, scito meas non fuisse.*

"I am at a loss to know which letter of mine you have in mind when you refer to 'a rather irritable letter.' I wrote to you twice exculpating myself in detail and mildly reproaching you because you had been quick to believe what you heard about me—a friendly sort of expostulation, so I thought; but if it displease you, I shall eschew it in future. But if the letter was, as you

---

*C. Curtius Mithres est ille quidem, ut scis, libertus Postumi, familiarissimi mei, sed me colit et observat aequae atque illum ipsum patronum suum. apud eum ego sic Ephesi fui, quotienscumque fui, tamquam domi meae, multaque acciderunt in quibus et benevolentiam eius erga me experirer et fidem. itaque si quid aut mihi aut meorum cuiquam in Asia opus est, ad hunc scribere consuevi, huius cum opera et fide tum domo et re uti tamquam mea. Haec ad te eo pluribus scripsi ut intellegeres me non vulgare nec ambitiose sed ut pro homine intimo ac mihi pernecessario scribere.*

"C. Curtius Mithres is, as you know, the freedman of my very good friend Postumus, but he pays as much respect and attention to me as to his own ex-master. At Ephesus, whenever I was there, I stayed in his house as though it was my home, and many incidents arose to give me proof of his good will and loyalty to me. If I or someone close to me want anything done in Asia I am in the habit of writing to Mithres and of using his faithful service, and even his house and purse, as though they were my own. I have told you this at some length to let you understand that I am not writing conventionally or from a self-regarding motive, but on behalf of a really intimate personal connection."

See also Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 77.

say, not well expressed, you may be sure I did not write it.”<sup>126</sup>

In fact, while desiring to disclaim some comments in his correspondence, Cicero was apparently expected to disclaim the whole correspondence. Although Cicero seems to employ the chance to restate the purport of his earlier remarks, even so, he did not scold his amanuensis as he knew he must take ultimate responsibility himself.<sup>127</sup>

Cicero’s letter to Appius Claudius shows a similar situation. While replying to a correspondence from him, Cicero writes, “*Vix tandem legi litteras dignas Ap. Clodio, plenas humanitatis, officie, diligentiae. . . nam . . . ad me litteras misisti, . . . legi pirinivitus.*” (“Well, at long last I have read a letter worthy of Appius Claudius, full of courtesy, friendliness, and consideration! . . . For I was very sorry to read the letters you sent me en route . . .”) <sup>128</sup> It seems that Claudius had forwarded some correspondences which contained several words unfavourable to Cicero. However, Cicero did not rebuke Claudius’ amanuensis for using those words since Claudius was finally liable for all language and nuances held in his correspondence.<sup>129</sup>

Similarly, in responding to correspondence sent by Pompey, Cicero appears affronted since Pompey hardly expressed friendliness to Cicero.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, to justify his behavior, Cicero says, “*quam ego abs te praetermissam esse arbitror quod verere<re> ne cuius animum offenders.*” (“I imagine you omitted anything of the sort for fear of giving offence in any quarter.”)<sup>131</sup> Cicero does not impute the omissions to Pompey’s amanuensis since even the omissions are regarded as the writer’s

<sup>126</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 3.11.5.

<sup>127</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 82.

<sup>128</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 3.9.1.

<sup>129</sup> See Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 81-82.

<sup>130</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 5.7.2: “*Ad me autem litteras quas misisti, quamquam exiguam significationem tuae erga me voluntatis habebant, . . .*” (“Your personal letter to me evinces but little of your friendly sentiments towards me, . . .”)

<sup>131</sup> Cicero *Letters to Friends* 5.7.3.

purport.<sup>132</sup>

Another significant instance concerns Cicero and Quintus who were expected to take over some part of Felix's lands. Regrettably, Felix appears to seal a copy of his former testament which excluded them.<sup>133</sup>

*De Felicis testamento tum magis querare, si scias. quas enim tabulas se putavit obsignare, in quibus in unciis firmissimum <locum> tenes, vero (lapsus est per errorem et suum et Scurrae servi) non obsignavit; quas noluit, eas obsignavit. Vall v oivmwze, tw, nos modo valeamus.*

“You would be more indignant about Felix' will than you are if you know. The document which he thought he signed, in which you were firmly down for a twelfth share, he did not in fact sign, being misled by an error of his own and his slave Scurra's; the one he signed was contrary to his wishes. But to the devil with him! So long as we stay healthy! “<sup>134</sup>

Even though Felix's slave (amanuensis), Scurra, would have been mildly reprimanded, Felix was ultimately liable for his own will, and it was dealt with as authentic.<sup>135</sup>

As a matter of fact, in both cases of official and private letters, the writer needed to proofread the final copy of the amanuensis.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that regardless of whether a letter is an official or a private one, the writer assumes full responsibility for the contents of the letter, since he was expected to *confirm* the ultimate draft of the secretary.

<sup>132</sup> See Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 82.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>134</sup> Cicero *Letters to Quintus* 3.7.8.

<sup>135</sup> See Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 83.

<sup>136</sup> Concerning this custom for official letters, as demonstrated by Cicero and Suetonius' statements, see Cicero *Letters to Quintus* 1.2.8; Suetonius *Vespasian* 21, trans. J. C. Rolfe The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 2: 315: “*dein perlectis epistulis officiorumque omnium breviaribus, amicos admittebat, . . .*” (“then after reading his letters and the reports of all the officials, he admitted his friends, . . .”) P. Oxy 1487 is representative for this practice for private ones.

#### 4. Conclusion

Reading and writing were different abilities in Greco-Roman antiquity. Writing was largely a professional skill, mainly connected with amanuenses (secretaries or scribes) owing to the technical trouble of penning on papyrus and the difficulty of access to writing equipment. As shown by quite a number of extant papyri, many in the lower ranks in Greco-Roman antiquity did not possess the ability to pen by their own hands, although some of them were partially literate, they were still functionally illiterate. Thus, there is the illiteracy formula in the extant papyri.

Apparently, in Greco-Roman antiquity the employment of amanuenses, especially in the writing of official (business) correspondences, was a widespread phenomenon among people of all ranks and classes, regardless of whether the author was literate or illiterate. On the other hand, although occasionally both lower and upper ranks would compose private correspondences personally, they still engaged amanuenses to pen them. Particularly, when an author was ill, an amanuensis actually penned a letter on his behalf. Also, business and laziness of the author were reasons for using an amanuensis. Significantly, there is a companionship between the authors and their private amanuenses.

Finally, it should be underlined that no matter what the amanuensis' role—transcriber or contributor or composer— or whether a letter was an official or a private one, the writer assumed full liability for the contents of the letter, since he was responsible for checking the ultimate draft of the amanuensis.