

Graphic Skills and Literacy in Greek in Sixth-Century Aphrodito: The Issuers of Contracts and Petitions

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DOCUMENTS such as contracts and petitions are rich sources of information about the lifestyle, economy, and culture of the communities in Late Antique Egypt. However, they provide insight not only through their content (i.e., their text) but also through their external features, specifically the handwriting.¹ In fact, the study of handwritings has recently been identified as a key component in prosopographical studies and research on literacy in Late Antiquity.² Considering all the individuals who could be involved in drafting a document,

¹ Twenty years ago Jean-Luc Fournet proposed a new approach, called “paléographie signifiante,” in the study of documentary papyri. This approach involves considering documents not only as vehicles of textual content but also as cultural objects with specific external features, such as format, *mise en page*, and handwriting, which can provide valuable information for reconstructing the social and cultural context in which each document was produced: J.-L. Fournet, “Disposition et réalisation graphique des lettres et des pétitions protobyzantines: pour une paléographie ‘signifiante’ des papyrus documentaires,” *Pap. Congr. XXIV* (Helsinki 2007) 353–367, “Beyond the Text or the Contribution of ‘Paléographie signifiante’ in Documentary Papyrology. The Example of Formats in Late Antiquity,” in K. Bentein et al. (eds.), *Novel Perspectives on Communication Practices in Antiquity* (Leiden 2023) 17–28, and “La ‘paléographie signifiante’ 20 ans après,” in A. Ghignoli et al. (eds.), *Written Culture in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Signs Texts Data* (Rome, in press).

² See R. Ast, “Telling Them by Their Hands. What Palaeography Has to Offer Prosopography,” in F. A. J. Hoogendijk et al. (eds.), *The Materiality of Texts from Ancient Egypt. New Approaches to the Study of Textual Material from the Early Pharaonic to the Late Antique Period* (Leiden 2018) 27–34, at 27.

issuers differ from notaries and witnesses, in that their participation is not due to their ability to write.³ Indeed, contract signatories were often ordinary people who did not use writing in their everyday life or at most could use it sporadically for private, work-related or financial, purposes. Therefore, it is to be expected that a certain number of issuers were illiterate, at least in Greek.⁴ Given the bilingual context of Late Antique Egypt, some individuals who were unable to write in Greek may nonetheless have been literate in Coptic.

The subscriptions of the parties involved in a document served, then as now, as evidence of their full consent to the content of the text. It seems very likely that they were perceived as indispensable elements for its validity, long before Justinian's law (*Cod.Iust.* 4.21.17) established that they were mandatory. Therefore, we can infer that the issue of having illiterates as contracting parties was already addressed before the promulgation of the *Code*, and that a solution was found in practice. This is shown by the fact that some documents from before Justinian's time already show the involvement of someone who could write, acting to assist the illiterate party (presumably the weaker one) by signing on their behalf.⁵ This practice, which had emerged in

³ For such a study on the Dioskoros archive see K. A. Worp, "Witness Subscriptions in Documents from the Dioscorus Archive," in J.-L. Fournet (ed.), *Les archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte* (Paris 2008) 143–153.

⁴ This scenario is not expected, however, for witnesses, who appear to be involved in contracts or receipts because they are capable of writing. Yet that is not always the case: a few, very interesting documents show us that witnesses too could be replaced by a *hypographeus*. It is our intention to consider these few cases in a future study.

⁵ On this figure see R. Calderini, "Gli ἀγράμματοι nell' Egitto greco-romano," *Aegyptus* 30 (1950) 14–41, at 27–32; H. C. Youtie, "Because They Do Not Know Letters," *ZPE* 19 (1975) 101–108, and "Υπογραφεύς. The Social Impact of Illiteracy in Graeco-Roman Egypt," *ZPE* 17 (1975) 201–221. More recently see A. Monte, "Firmare un documento quando non si può scrivere: le croci come sostitute di 'firme' autografe nei documenti greci

concrete circumstances, was given legal status in *Novel 73*, issued by Justinian in 538, which regulated the drafting of contracts in cases involving illiterate issuers.⁶

This article investigates literacy rate by focusing on issuers' subscriptions on private documents in sixth-century Aphrodito in order to analyse the social meaning of handwriting outside of the official or elite modes of cultural transmission.⁷ The overall outcome of this study is that the level of literacy in sixth-century Aphrodito is not as low as might have been expected.

1. *The evidence base*

For the present study, just over 180 Greek contracts written in Aphrodito were considered (listed in the Appendix). Contracts that lack subscriptions by the issuers or preserve them in very bad condition were excluded.⁸ The only exception made is for

su papiro dell'Egitto bizantino," *Scrineum* 20 (2023) 29–53, and L. Briasco, "Should We Always Trust *hypographeis*? When Palaeography Contradicts the Text: The Case of P.Cair.Masp. III 67296," *Scrineum* 21 (2024) 7–22, for interesting anomalies in some *hypographai* from Dioskoros' archive.

⁶ For a recent translation of the *Novel* in English with comments see D. J. D. Miller and P. Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation* (Cambridge 2018) I 515–521.

⁷ On the usefulness of studying this graphic substratum made by ordinary handwritings, not only in investigating the various functions historically performed by writing but also in studying graphic systems and types themselves, both Greek and Latin, see A. Petrucci, "Funzione della scrittura e terminologia paleografica," in *Palaeographica, diplomatica et archivistica: studi in onore di Giulio Battelli* (Rome 1979) 3–30. It should further be noted, more generally, that studies on the role and social impact of writing and the modes and characteristics of writing in daily life, which have flourished in the field of papyrology in recent decades, were preceded by a long tradition in the field of palaeography, with Armando Petrucci, along with others (such as Giorgio Cencetti and Guglielmo Cavallo, to name just a few), being among its leading figures in the second half of the last century.

⁸ The following documents have been excluded because they lack subscriptions: *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67089A, 67097r, 67098, 67099, 67101, 67102, 67107, 67108, 67111, 67113, 67118, 67123, *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67125, 67130,

documents that, although lacking subscriptions, contain clear information about the issuer's literacy in the body of the text.⁹ And lastly, of the remaining documents written in Aphrodito during the sixth century, issuers from places other than the one in which they acted as contracting parties (i.e. Aphrodito) have also been excluded.¹⁰ As is well known, contracts from Aphrodito are preserved in two archives: those of Flavius Dioskoros, son of Apollos (TM Arch 72), and Phoibammon, son of Triadelphos (TM Arch 193).

With regard to petitions, which are preserved only in the Dioskoros archive, three were considered alongside the contracts, while the others are fragmentary and lack subscriptions. In addition to contracts and petitions, another type of document

67232 descr., 67235, 67239 descr., 67243^v descr., 67244 descr., 67245 descr., 67246 descr., 67247^r descr., 67248 descr., 67255 descr., 67257 descr., 67265 descr., 67266 descr., 67269 descr., 67270 descr., 67297 + *P.Flor.* III 287, *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67332, 67333, 67334, *P.Flor.* III 282, 285, 294, 342, *P.Lond.* V 1699, 1706, 1841 descr., 1842 descr., 1843 descr., *P.Hamb.* I 23, *P.Hamb.* III 233, *P.Heid.* V 347, *P.Michael.* 41, 47, 49, 50, 56^r, 56^v descr., 57^r, 60, *P.Palau.Rib.* 20, 23, 24, *PSI* IV 283, *PSI* VIII 931, *P.Vat.Aphrod.* 3 A+C, 3 B+D, 6, 19B, 25, 26, *SB* III 6704, 7201, *SB* XVI 12256, *SB* XXII 15633, *SB* XXIV 16125.

⁹ This is the case of *P.Flor.* III 283, the upper fragment of a *misthosis* contract written in 536, whose issuer, the farmer Ioannes, son of Dorotheos (no. 88), is described as a slow writer. It is also the case of *P.Vat.Aphrod.* 14, a contract of uncertain nature written in 524, whose issuer, the anonymous daughter of Isidoros and Antonia (no. 23), is qualified as a slow writer in the *praescriptio*. Despite Jean-Luc Fournet's suggestion to reunite this fragment with *P.Vat.Aphrod.* 19C, this latter fragment contains only a few traces of the subscription by one witness and the *completio* by the notary Aurelius Apa Victor, on which see J. M. Diethart and K. A. Worp, *Notarsunterschriften im byzantinischen Ägypten* (Vienna 1986) 29–30, no. 15.1.

¹⁰ They are: Aurelius Psais, son of Horos, a farmer from the plain of Phthla, who issued an acknowledgment of a debt in 545 (*P.Ross.Georg.* III 37); the soldier Samouel, from the village of Tanyaithis, issuer of three contracts drafted in 526 and 527 (*P.Michael.* 43, 44, *P.Mich.* XIII 670); and Aurelius Abamos, from the hamlet of Psinsou, issuer of a sublease in 522 (*P.Ross.Georg.* III 33).

from the Byzantine period requires subscriptions by the issuing party: receipts. However, receipts from Aphrodito are excluded from this study because they are generally signed by officials or agents representing the issuing party, and therefore do not represent private citizens.

2. *Quantifying and qualifying literacy*

The aim of this study is not only to quantify but also to qualify the literacy of documents' issuers in sixth-century Aphrodito. This means that we not only estimated, based on the surviving documents with subscriptions of the issuer, how many of these could write, but also who they were and how they wrote.¹¹ These aspects have not yet been fully elucidated in studies on literacy in ancient or Late Antique Egypt.¹²

To quantify and qualify literacy, we decided to use three levels, with the third level divided into further sub-levels (see the Tables, 530 *infra*). The *illiteracy* level is coded as A; this category also includes individuals who could eventually sign using their *semeia*.¹³ By examining the documents we can, at least in theory, distinguish between those who could not write and those who

¹¹ In a few cases, the poor quality of the digital reproduction of a document and/or the scarcity of preserved letters from the subscription does not allow for the handwriting to be analysed in a way that is sufficient for it to be classified at a specific level of execution and complexity.

¹² On the ancient period see J. Baines, "Literacy and Ancient Egyptian Society," *Man* 18 (1983) 572–599; on the Greco-Roman period see Calderini, *Aegyptus* 30 (1950) 14–41; H. C. Youtie, "βραδέως γράφων: Between Literacy and Illiteracy," *GRBS* 12 (1971) 239–261, and *ZPE* 17 (1975) 201–221; U. Yiftach, "Quantifying Literacy in the Early Roman Arsinoitês: The Case of the *Graphieion* Document," in D. M. Schaps et al. (eds.), *When West Met East: The Encounter of Greece and Rome with the Jews, Egyptians, and Others. Studies Presented to Ranon Katzoff* (Trieste 2016) 269–280. On the Byzantine period see E. Wipszycka, "Le degré d'alphabétisation en Égypte byzantine," *REA* 30 (1984) 279–296.

¹³ This is not the case for any of the issuers attested in documents written in Aphrodito: see Monte, *Scrineum* 20 (2023) 33–34.

could sign their names.¹⁴ To qualify the level of writing ability, however, an examination of each handwriting is necessary.

We identified a *semi-literacy* level, coded as B, characterized by poor, trembling, and slow execution of handwriting. In the majority of cases, individuals who could write Greek letters did so hesitantly, as beginners, using the bilinear system and tracing large, spaced capital letters.¹⁵ They typically wrote only a few words: those necessary, in the case of contract issuers, to express their free consent to the transaction. In some instances, a scribe or *hypographeus* intervened to complete the sentence.¹⁶ However, as we shall see, there are a few exceptions to this scenario.

In some cases, those who wrote slowly are presented in the text as βραδέως ὑπογράφοντες (slow subscribers).¹⁷ Nevertheless, other

¹⁴ For an exception to this theoretical assumption see Briasco, *Scrineum* 21 (2024) 7–22.

¹⁵ The expression “bilinear system” refers to a type of script in which the letters are of roughly uniform height and the graphic chain is confined between two parallel lines; those lines coincide with the ruling, if present. This system is characteristic of majuscule handwritings. In contrast, the “quadri-linear system”—to which frequent reference will be made below—is defined by the presence of four ideal horizontal lines: the two central lines enclose the main body of the letters, while the upper and lower lines indicate the possible extensions of ascenders and descenders. This system is typical of minuscule handwritings, in which the form of various letters includes upward and downward strokes. In the specific case of Greek script, especially during the transitional phase from majuscule to minuscule, one may observe hybrid forms as well as majuscule handwritings executed in a manner that does not strictly adhere to the bilinear system, showing a certain tendency toward vertical extension beyond the central writing zone defined by the ruling.

¹⁶ In our evidence base, see for example the subscriptions of Aurelius Mathias, son of Ponnis (no. 121), and Aurelius Phibis, son of Apollos (no. 139), issuers of a *misthosis* contract written in 547 (*SB* XIV 11855.32–38), where the words πρὸς τὰ ὄρια are added by the *nomikos* Kyros. We will mention below another example of this behaviour.

¹⁷ On this category of writers see in particular H. C. Youtie, “Pétaus, fils de Pétaus, ou le scribe qui ne savait pas écrire,” *ChrÉg* 41 (1966) 127–143, and *ZPE* 19 (1975) 201–221; T. Kraus, “‘Slow Writers’—βραδέως γράφον-

subscribers—especially issuers—wrote in the same slow and insecure manner, even though their difficulties are not stated in the text. We have decided to classify these individuals in the same category. The same shaky and clumsy handwriting is also found in those who wrote very long sentences. These writers have been referred to in the literature as “retarded hands,” but the boundaries between these two types of writing are often subtle, as the results are nearly identical.¹⁸

Furthermore, it seems that only we, as modern scholars, have considered the extent of writing, as well as the use of majuscule or minuscule forms, as parameters for distinguishing semi-literacy from full literacy. On the other hand, from the perspective of the ancients, it appears that the mode of execution was the first—and seemingly the only—marker of semi-literacy. That is why we can also find individuals explicitly described as slow writers who wrote long subscriptions or, in rarer cases, used minuscule forms and ligatures, without this altering their status.¹⁹

The *full literacy* level is labelled C, This is divided into three sub-levels, while acknowledging that boundaries can be fluid, especially when it comes to classifying handwriting, particularly cursives. The first sub-level (C1) is basic skills, resulting in clear and smooth capital letters, with few simple ligatures or none. The second (C2) represents good graphic skills, demonstrated by individuals who have mastered the quadrilinear system and use minuscule forms (sometimes mixed with majuscule) with fre-

τες: What, How Much, and How Did They Write?” *Eranos* 97 (1999) 86–97. Moreover, on the phenomenon of slow writers within the wider picture of illiteracy levels in Late-Antique Egypt see Calderini, *Aegyptus* 30 (1950) 34–36; H. C. Youtie “ΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ. An Aspect of Greek Society in Egypt,” *HSCP* 75 (1971) 161–176; T. Kraus, “(II)Literacy in Non-Literary Papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt: Further Aspects of the Educational Ideal in Ancient Literary Sources and Modern Times,” *Mnemosyne* 53 (2000) 322–342.

¹⁸ Cf. Youtie, *GRBS* 12 (1971) 256 n.78.

¹⁹ This is the case, for example, of Aurelius Besarion, son of Mousaios (no. 46).

quent and elaborated ligatures. The highest sub-level (C3) is that of professional scribes, who use formalized and stylized scripts often employed for writing entire documents.

The identity and number of literates and illiterates, along with the characteristics of literates' handwriting, are analysed here from the perspectives of gender, status, and profession. Tables 1–6 illustrate the literacy rate of sixth-century Aphrodito as further measured by these variables. For our model, we used the charts provided in a recent study by Uri Yiftach on literacy in the Early Roman Arsinoites.²⁰

	Number of issuers (despite gender)	Rate on the subtotal
Illiterates	91	47: 15%
Literates	102	52: 85%
Total	193	

TABLE 1: Literacy rate disregarding gender and status

	Literates	Illiterates	Total	Literacy rate
Men	99	81	180	55%
Women	3	10	13	23%
Total	102	91	193	52.8%

TABLE 2: Literate/illiterate issuers and literary rate by gender

	Illiterates (A)	Semi-literates (B)	Fully literates (C)	Total	Literacy rate
Civil Flavii	–	–	3	3	100%
Military Flavii	1	–	1	2	50%
Aurelii/Aureliae	65	13	34	112	41.9%

TABLE 3: Literacy rate by “Aureliate” and “Flaviate” status

	Literates	Illiterates	Total	Literacy rate
Deacons	2	1	3	67%
Monks	1	–	1	100%
Presbyters	15	3	18	83%
of which also <i>oikonomoi</i>	1	1	2	50%
Total of clergymen	18	4	22	81%

TABLE 4: Clergymen

²⁰ Yiftach, in *When West Met East* 278.

	Literates	Illiterates	Total	Literacy rate
Landowners	18	6	24	75%
Tenants	9	15	24	37.5%
Shepherds	4	24	28	14%
of which also <i>agrophylakes</i>	3	14	17	17%

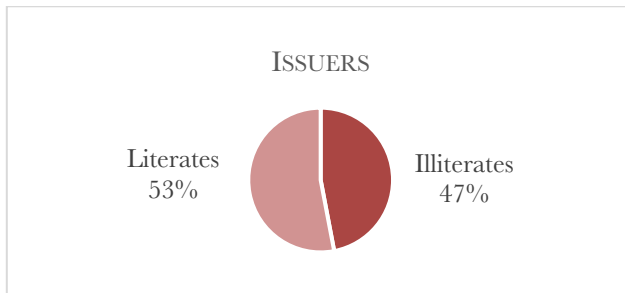
TABLE 5: Tenants, landowners, and shepherds

	Literate	Illiterate	Total	Literacy rate
Manufacturers	2	11	13	15%
Merchants	1	1	2	50%

TABLE 6: Craftsmen and merchants

3. *Analysis of the data*

Considering the full range of information that we can derive from this evidence base, it emerges that the level of literacy in sixth-century Aphrodito was not very low. As shown in Table 1 and below, out of a total of 193 issuers, 102 were capable of writing, i.e. a solid 53%.²¹ As expected, the proportion is heavily skewed toward male issuers, but we will revisit this aspect below to quantify the impact of gender on literacy in this case study.



Among the 102 issuers who were able to write, 25 are classified as semi-literate (Table 1); for two of them, this condition is known from the text of the contracts in which they were issuers, but it cannot be confirmed through an analysis of their handwriting, as their signatures are lost.²² Among these, we also find

²¹ Percentages will be rounded down if there are numbers from 1 to 4 after the decimal point, and rounded up if the numbers are 6 to 9.

²² See n.9 above.

all three literate women so identified in our evidence base, who will be discussed below.

Most of the literate issuers thus exhibited basic or strong writing skills. Twelve issuers were able to write as proficiently as notaries or professional scribes, using different styles within the category of formalized cursives (C3). The combination of elements emerging from the analysis of their handwriting and the prosopographical information provided by the text of their subscriptions reveals an interesting picture, which will be presented in its main aspects in §3.3.

3.1 *The impact of gender*

As expected, the ability to write in sixth-century Aphrodito, as elsewhere in Egypt, seems to be a prerogative of men.²³ It is important to note, however, that the presence of women as issuers of contracts or signatories of petitions is very rare. Of the 193 issuers considered in this study, only 13 are women. As shown in Table 2, three of these women are known to be literate, although at a semi-literate level. The anonymous daughter of Isidoros and Antonia (no. 23) is attested as an issuer—apparently not under the guardianship of a man—of a contract of uncertain content, written in 524. We know from the *praescriptio* (*P. Vat. Aphrod.* 14.4–5) that she was a slow writer. Unfortunately, her signature is lost, hence we cannot analyse her handwriting. Aurelia Tsyros,²⁴ daughter of Phoibammon (no. 175), is the seller in a contract for the sale of a house written in the second half of the sixth century

²³ On female literacy in Greco-Roman and Byzantine Egypt see J. A. Sheridan, “Not at a Loss for Words: The Economic Power of Literate Women in Late Antique Egypt,” *TAPA* 128 (1998) 189–203; E. Salmenkivi, “Some Remarks on Literate Women from Roman Egypt,” in U. Tervahauta et al. (eds.), *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity* (Leiden 2017) 62–72; S. R. Hübner, “Frauen und Schriftlichkeit im römischen Ägypten,” in A. Kolb (ed.), *Literacy in Ancient Everyday Life* (Berlin 2018) 163–178.

²⁴ On the reading of this name see J.-L. Fournet, “Sur les premiers documents juridiques coptes (2): les archives de Phoibammon et de Kollouthos,” in A. Boud’hors et al. (eds.), *Études coptes XIV* (Paris 2016) 115–141, at 119 n.31, and *The Rise of Coptic* (Princeton 2020) 21 n.59.

(*P.Vat.Aphrod.* 4). Not only did she act without the guardianship of a man, but she also demonstrated her literacy by signing the document in her own hand (15–17). The text of her signature presented some reading difficulties, which have been explained by the editor Rosario Pintaudi.²⁵ In any case, Tsyros' handwriting (*fig.* 1) is an almost unimodular majuscule (except for omicron, written in smaller dimensions), slow and elementary but not particularly shaky or messy.

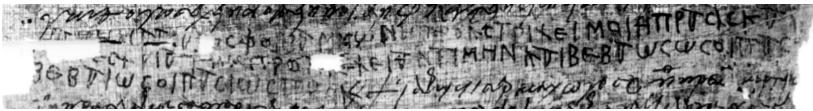


Figure 1: Tsyros' handwriting, *P.Vat.Aphrod.* 4.15–17

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As noted, another woman can be considered semi-literate, although with some uncertainties. The anonymous Aurelia (no. 17), who acts as the seller under the guardianship of a man along with another illiterate woman, also anonymous (no. 18), in the contract for sale *Vat.Aphrod.* 5, seems to have signed on her own, apparently without the intervention of an *hypographeus*. The papyrus is quite damaged, so one cannot be completely certain, but there appears to be no space for the signature of the *hypographeus* between the end of the first Aurelia's signature and the beginning of her guardian's, Aurelius Paulus. The lines containing her subscription (15–18), reconstructed in this manner by the editors, show very little handwriting—a well-formed majuscule, potentially more precise than Tsyros' script, which could indicate a basic level (C1).

Given that 3 of the 13 women attested as issuers were able to write, the literacy rate among women is 23%. The other 10 women attested as issuers but not able to write were all

²⁵ R. Pintaudi, *I Papiri Vaticani di Aphrodito* (Rome 1980) 25, on lines 15 and 29.

Aureliae.²⁶ Given, however, the total number of literate individuals (193), women's literacy is quantified at 1.5%.

3.2 *Literacy and status*

This leads to another aspect to consider in a study of literacy: the status of the issuers, specifically their belonging to the "Aureliate" or the "Flaviate" group, to use James Keenan's terminology.²⁷ Among the 193 issuers considered, only 5 are Flavii, and there are no Flaviae.²⁸ This data aligns with prosopographical studies of Aphrodito society, which suggest that it was primarily composed of Aurelii, with the Flavii being somewhat 'outsiders' in this context.²⁹ However, a preliminary distinction must be made between those who derive their status as Flavii from holding the highest positions in civil society and those who, on the other hand, derive it from holding the highest ranks in the military, in other words, between a "civil Flaviate" and a

²⁶ They are Eirene, daughter of Besarion (no. 55), Eirene, daughter of Ioannes (no. 56), Elisabeth, daughter of Triadelphos (no. 57), Eudoxia, daughter of Georgios (no. 59), Eudoxia, daughter of Triadelphos (no. 60), Judith, daughter of Ioannes (no. 106), Maria, daughter of Papnouthis (no. 119), Sophia, daughter of Ioannes (no. 170), and two anonymous (nos. 18 and 171).

²⁷ On these concepts and on the names Flavius and Aurelius see J. Keenan, "The Names Flavius and Aurelius as Status Designations in Later Roman Egypt," *ZPE* 11 (1973) 33–63; "The Names Flavius and Aurelius as Status Designations in Later Roman Egypt," *ZPE* 13 (1974) 283–304; "An Afterthought on the Names Flavius and Aurelius," *ZPE* 53 (1983) 245–250; "On the Aureliate of Clergy and Monks," *ZPE* 151 (2005) 145–152.

²⁸ The number refers to the Flavii from Aphrodito. One Flavius, Samuel, son of Kollouthes (TM Per 410293), a soldier of the *numerus* of the Ptolemaites *nomos*, is attested as an issuer in three contracts between 526 and 527, two of which were written in Aphrodito. But he specifies his origin as the village of Tanyaithis. He is described as a "slow writer" (C. Balamoshev, "Notes, New Readings and Corrections to Papyri from the Archive of Dioskoros of Aphrodite," *Tyche* 38 [2023] 221–233, at 229), but is excluded from the present research because of his provenance.

²⁹ See Keenan, *ZPE* 53 (1983) 249, quoting from the *Prosopografia* written by Victor Antoun Girgis in 1938 on the "Aureliate" composition of Aphrodito society.

“military Flaviate.”³⁰ Under this distinction, civil Flavii show a 100% literacy rate, 3 literate out of 3 (nos. 47, 53, 107); the military Flavii, on the other hand, exhibit a 50% literacy rate, with 1 of 2 being literate in Greek. Flavius Anoubis, son of Abramos (no. 27), who issued with the presbyter Anoubis, son of Psentaesis (no. 34) a contract of surety in 535 (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67296) as former *praipositos* of a *castrum* P[...] in the Antaiopolite nome, was unable to sign by his own hand in Greek. Involved as his *hypographeus* in the same document we find the other military Flavius of our evidence base: the former *praipositos* Theoteknos, son of Psais (no. 173). He acted as a subscriber on behalf of other illiterate issuers in other contracts, but he is also attested as the issuer of a petition sent by the inhabitants of Aphrodito to Empress Theodora (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.3 line 9) in 547. From this subscription as an issuer, we discover that he was also a landowner.

Among the three literate Flavii issuers, we find a professional scribe (C3): Flavius Dioskoros, son of Apollos, the famous landowner and notary, whose handwriting in various styles is particularly recognizable and well known to scholars.³¹ The two other civil Flavii attested as issuers show a basic level of graphic competence (C1); one, a landowner, is left anonymous due to the poor condition of the papyrus (no. 97). In the following discussion, dedicated to literacy and professions, we will return to both categories of landowners and notaries.

Turning to the Aurelii and Aureliae issuers—who as mentioned are significantly more numerous—the literacy rate is lower. Out of 112 Aurelii, 47 are capable of writing (42%) and include 13 semi-literate and 34 fully literate. This rate is lower

³⁰ I would like to thank Prof. Fournet for suggesting that I emphasize this aspect.

³¹ On Dioskoros’ scripts see J.-L. Fournet, *Hellénisme dans l’Égypte du VI^e siècle. La bibliothèque et l’oeuvre de Dioscore d’Aphrodité* (Cairo 1999) 245–248, and L. Del Corso, “Le scritture di Dioscoro,” in *Les archives de Dioscore* 89–115.

not only compared to the Flavii but also in comparison to the overall literacy rate of 53%, as we saw above, irrespective of gender and status. Some of the Aurelii demonstrate very good writing skills, which likely stem from their professions or employment rather than their status—an aspect we analyse in what follows.

3.3 *Literacy and employment or offices*

We will now quantify and qualify literacy in sixth-century Aphrodito from the perspective of professions and employment. In this analysis, we should first isolate clergymen, distinguishing them from all who are laypeople.

3.3.1 *Clergymen*

Among the 193 issuers examined, 22 are clergymen. This is not a large group, but it is characterized by a very high literacy rate: as shown in Table 4, 18 out of 22 clergymen are able to write, 81%.³² When considering only the presbyters, the rate slightly increases: 15 out of 18 presbyters from Aphrodito who are attested as issuers can write (83%). Yet an upgrade in rank does not appear to necessarily have a positive impact on literacy. This is evident in the case of Psais, son of Basis (no. 159), the issuer of two loan contracts written in 547 and 549. In the first he is a deacon while two years later he is a presbyter; but in both documents he is presented as illiterate. Regarding church offices, two presbyters who are issuers also present themselves as *oikonomoi*. This additional role does not necessarily entail writing competence, as one of them, Palos, the *oikonomos* of Apa Hermauos (no. 131), is attested as illiterate.

Another interesting finding is that among the 25 individuals attested as semi-literate, 6 are clergymen. One of them, Ioseph son of Iakob (no. 94), presbyter of the Holy Oratory of the Archangel Michael, is presented as a slow writer in the *praescriptio* of a surety contract written in 535 (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67297 +

³² This confirms the conclusions reached by Ewa Wipszycka, which opposed the widely-held claim of illiteracy among clerks and monks: *REAug* 30 (1984) 288–295.

P.Flor. III 287), which he subscribed in a spaced and elementary majuscule (fig. 2). The other semi-literates are not explicitly labelled as slow writers by notaries, but their graphic execution does not exceed that level. These include the presbyters Eulogios (no. 61), Iakob, son of Abramios (no. 72), Petros (no. 137), Psais (no. 158), and the *monazon* Aurelius Isak, son of Victor (no. 103), whom we will revisit below.

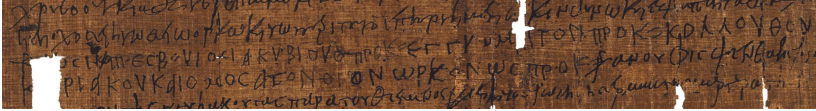


Figure 2: Ioseph son of Iakob's handwriting (*P.Flor.* II 287.5–6)
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Promaos, son of Ioannes (no. 157), presbyter of the holy place of Apa Promaos *martyros*, subscribed the petition to the Empress (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 2) in a clear and well-executed majuscule, with some refined elements such as small hoops in the form of *alpha*, *my*, and *omega* (fig. 3), of the type used for copying books.³³ Apparently, he did not master the quadrilinear system, but he stands out from the other basic writers (C1) for his graphic execution, made more sophisticated also by the slight inclination toward the right of the axis.

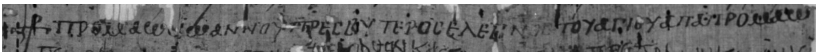


Figure 3: Promaos' handwriting (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 2)
 © Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Association Internationale de Papyrologues
 Photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

Among the clerics of Aphrodito, there are a few very skilled writers who reach the level of professional scribes. One of these is Victor, presbyter of the Holy Church of Aphrodito (no. 176), who is recorded as one of the issuers of the petition to the Empress, signing in a highly stylized, sloping quadrilinear cursive. On this individual and his particular handwriting see §4.

³³ For his handwriting see Fournet, in *Written Culture*.

3.3.2 Landowners

As is well known, rent contracts drafted in sixth-century Aphrodito are primarily designated as *misthosis* or *misthothike homologia*, and more rarely *antimisthosis*.³⁴ *Misthosis* contracts are written from the perspective of the lessee, who is the issuer of the document addressed to the lessor, the landowner. Conversely, *antimisthosis* contracts are written from the perspective of the lessor. These latter contracts are less common than *misthoseis*. Nevertheless, landowners are key figures in the petition addressed by the inhabitants of Aphrodito to Empress Theodora. Thus we have information on the literacy of both groups.

The landowners (*ktetores*) attested as issuers in our sample are 24, of whom 18 are literate, a high literacy rate of 75%. Almost all of the literate landowners have at least a basic level of literacy (C1). Only one, Kallinikos, son of Hermauos (no. 109), who subscribed the aforementioned petition (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.3 lines 20–21), did so in a clumsy majuscule resembling the handwriting of slow writers.

It is likely that some of these landowners combined their status with other roles, including ecclesiastical ones. For one individual, Georgios, son of Psenpnouthes (no. 65), we know for sure that he held both titles: he signed the petition as διὰκ(ονος) καὶ κτ[ή]τορ (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 23). His handwriting, a quadrilinear cursive with long vertical strokes, many ligatures from bottom-up, small hoops in some letter forms (such as *alpha*), and a pleasant contrast between wide and small letters, brings him close to professional scribes, although his graphic skills do not fully match theirs (*fig.* 4).



Figure 4: Georgios' handwriting (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, pg. 2 line 23)

© Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Association Internationale de Papyrologues
photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

³⁴ On *antimisthosis* contracts see F. Lemaire, "Antimisthosis in the Dioscorus Archive," *Pap.Congr.* XXV (Ann Arbor 2010) 397–408.

Among the literate landowners, we also find the owners of both archives known from late antique Aphrodito. We will return to Flavius Dioskoros, son of Apollos (no. 53), at §3.3.5, as his profession as a notary surpasses his role as a landowner as regards graphic expertise. Let us here discuss Phoibammon, son of Triadelphos (no. 150), the issuer of several documents preserved in his archive. To judge from the few clear graphic signs still visible in the subscription of issuer 14 of the long petition to the Empress (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 14), this *ktetor* Phoibammon should be identified as the son of Triadelphos, as has been suggested by Giovanni Ruffini.³⁵ Phoibammon's handwriting is a majuscule with many ligatures, achieved by prolonging the horizontal stroke of one letter into the following vertical stroke (e.g. in the sequence πρ) or extending the last stroke of one letter from bottom up to form the vertical stroke of the following letter with a thickening (e.g. in the sequence δι). The use of ligatures indicates good graphic competence, though the execution is not always consistent.

3.3.3 *Tenants*

Our evidence base includes 24 tenants, who, as lessees, are issuers of land contracts in the form of *misthosis*. Like the landowners, some of these tenants combined their status with other roles or titles. Four such cases are in our evidence: a *monazon* (no. 103), a copper craftsman (no. 110), a *syntelestes* (no. 121), and a shepherd (no. 184). Some tenants are explicitly qualified as farmers. Among the tenants, only nine are literate, a literacy rate of 37.5%, half that of the landowners. Seven are fully literate, including the copper craftsman (whom we will revisit in §3.3.6 on manufacturers) and the *syntelestes*, both demonstrating good or basic graphic competence, respectively. It is unclear whether the good graphic skills exhibited by some tenants were the result of their other employment or roles. The tenant who was also a shepherd, however, is among the illiterates, which is not surprising, as we will see that the literacy rate among shepherds was

³⁵ G. Ruffini, *A Prosopography of Byzantine Aphrodito* (Durham 2011) 465.

particularly low.

The tenant and *monazon* Isak, son of Victor (no. 103), mentioned above (537), subscribed a *misthosis* contract in 514 (*P.Flor.* III 279.20–21 and 23–24) by his own hand. He is not described in the *praescriptio* as a slow writer; however, his uncertain and coarse graphic execution qualifies him as one. He was also unable to write the entire sentence that would have expressed his full consent to the contract, which led the notary to intervene and complete it himself. Isak then resumed his writing tool, the calamus, and reaffirmed his identity (*fig.* 5).

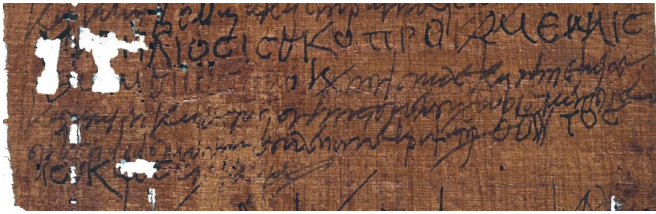


Figure 5: Isak's handwriting in *P.Flor.* III 279.20–24

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3.3.4 *Syntelestai*

The term *syntelestes*, which appears frequently in the papyri from Aphrodito, has been subject to debate by scholars. Jean Gascou, who did not believe that the term referred to 'mere' tax payers/contributors, suggested that it indicated also a role as intermediaries with local authorities for the collection of these taxes.³⁶ Following the definition in the Preisigke *Wörterbuch*, he also emphasized the collegial nature of the term, considering the *syntelestai* as a *consortium* and comparing that of the *protokometai* and *ktetores*, the two other categories of inhabitants in the village of Aphrodito who are attested as acting as a group, that is, collegially. However, according to Avshalom Laniado, unlike the *protokometai* and *ktetores*, there is insufficient evidence in the papyri

³⁶ J. Gascou, *Les grandes domaines, la cité et l'état en Égypte byzantine* (Paris 1985) 49–52.

to support the idea of collegial action by the *syntelestai*, who in the majority of the documents from Aphrodito act as individuals.³⁷

The aspect that seems to emerge from the documents of Aphrodito, however, is a ‘notable’ status of the *syntelestai* in this community.³⁸ Laniado (37–48) provided a list of all the *syntelestai* and *syntelestriai* that he was able to trace in the papyri from Aphrodito. Many of these—the majority of whom are included in the Appendix below—in fact hold other honorary titles or are prominent figures in the village, including the two already-mentioned owners of the archives through which we know so much about the history of Aphrodito: Dioskoros, the son of Apollos, and Phoibammon, the son of Triadelphos. Of these two, it is interesting to note that they both never identify themselves as *syntelestes* in their own signatures as senders of documents; rather, they are presented as such in, for example, the *praescriptio* of the documents they are sending.

Regardless of the various interpretations offered for this term, the fact remains that, if we limit ourselves to considering only the *syntelestai*—that is, the male individuals bearing this title—their literacy rate appears to be the highest possible: 10 out of 10 *syntelestai* are capable of writing, with only one, Ioannes, son of Constantinus (no. 81), being semi-literate. The two *syntelestriai* attested as issuers in our evidence base, on the other hand, are both illiterate.

3.3.5 *Shepherds and agrophylakes*

Among the contracting parties and issuers of contracts and petitions in Aphrodito are a significant number of shepherds. Their literacy rate is quite low: of the 28, only 4 are able to write (14%). The majority, 17, are also attested as field guardians

³⁷ A. Laniado, “Συντελεστής: Note sur un terme fiscal surinterprété,” *JJP* 26 (1996) 23–51, at 32–33 and 47.

³⁸ It should also be noted that the situation is different for other locations: see the considerations put forward based on a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus in Laniado, *JJP* 26 (1996) 48–50.

(*agrophylakes*).³⁹ This dual function is well attested in papyri from Aphrodito, and we know that it was regulated by a contract concluded in late 514 between the community of shepherds and field guardians and the communities of *protokometai*, *syntelestai*, and *ktetores* of Aphrodito (*P.Cair.Masp.* I 67001), representing the written formulation of a pre-existing custom.⁴⁰ Considering only those who were both shepherds and field guardians, the literacy rate rises slightly to 17%, with 3 out of 17 literates. Among these, the brothers Aurelius Kollouthes (no. 111) and Aurelius Victor (no. 189), sons of Phoibammon, issuers of a land sale contract in 540 (*P.Michael.gr.* 45), are slow writers, with handwriting that shows this qualification.

The third literate shepherd, however, demonstrates very good writing skills (C2/C3). Aurelius Phoibammon, son of Hermauos (no. 141), one of the 13 shepherds and *agrophylakes* involved in the aforementioned contract to represent their community, is the only one who can sign his name (*P.Cair.Masp.* I 67001.35).⁴¹ His small cursive, with many ligatures from bottom up, involving vertical strokes of letters such as *eta* and *iota*, is almost equivalent to certain handwritings used to draft entire documents (*fig.* 6):

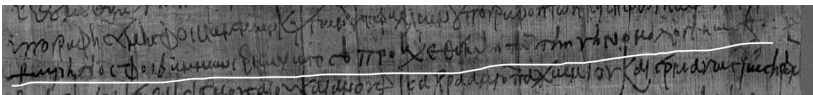


Figure 6: Phoibammon's handwriting in *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67001.35

© Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Association Internationale de Papyrologues
photo: A. Bülow-Jacobsen

³⁹ On this figure see D. Bonneau, “Ἀγροφύλαξ (*agrophylax*),” in *Pap. Congr. XVIII* (Athens 1988) II 303–315.

⁴⁰ For a commentary on this important document in the context of the tensions attested in Aphrodito see J. Keenan, “Village Shepherds and Social Tension in Byzantine Egypt,” *JCS* 28 (1985) 245–259, at 254–256.

⁴¹ Interestingly enough, the other 12 are divided into two groups, with two individuals intervening as subscribers on behalf of each group. This is not the only instance of multiple illiterate issuers with several *hypographeis*, which may suggest that there was a sort of maximum number of individuals who could be substituted in the act of writing.

3.3.6 *Manufacturers and merchants*

Among the issuers of contracts and petitions from Aphrodito we find 13 manufacturers and 2 wine merchants (Table 6). The literacy rate among manufacturers is very low: all are illiterate except for Aurelius Kyriakos, son of Andreas (no. 113), a copper craftsman (*chalkotypos*) and tenant, and Aurelius Victor (no. 179), a wine dresser (*ampelourgos*), who represent 15% of the sample. Among the illiterate manufacturers are a tailor, a washerman, a potter, and a linen weaver, as well as headmen of specific trades (e.g. copperworkers, carpenters, weavers).

Merchants show a higher literacy rate (50%), although the sample is not large enough to draw firm conclusions. Ezechiel, son of Victor (no. 62), headman of the wine merchants, subscribed the petition to the Empress (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.3 line 14) with his own hand, while Dorantinoos, son of Ioseph, an ordinary wine merchant,⁴² is attested as illiterate in the same document (p.2 line 15).

3.3.7 *Military officers*

As we saw concerning literacy rate among the Flavii, two soldiers are attested as issuers in our evidence base. It should be noted that, since the age of Augustus, there had been an increase in the level of literacy among soldiers and a significant demand for *litterati milites*, for whose recruitment both proficiency in writing and arithmetic skills were considered.⁴³ In some Byzantine communities, soldiers were even involved as drafters of private contracts, effectively replacing professional notaries: the most evident example of this practice is provided by the archive of Patermouthis (TM Arch 37), documents primarily related to the economic interests of a soldier in the *numerus* of Syene and

⁴² He is part of a group of six illiterates, all manufacturers, and all substituted in the act of writing by the same *hypographeus*: the *tabellio* Ieremias, who also subscribed for himself, a point we will return to.

⁴³ See W. V. H. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (London 1989) 253–255, 293–294, and S. E. Phang, “Military Documents, Languages, and Literacy,” in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Malden 2007) 286–305.

his family. Military officers and soldiers known as “occasional scribes”⁴⁴ in Syene used informal, non-stylized cursives, immediately distinguishable from the writings of professional notaries and scribes.⁴⁵ Similarly, the only literate soldier in our evidence base, the aforementioned Flavius Theoteknos, son of Psais (no. 173), despite being often involved as subscriber on behalf of others or as a witness—as if he served as a point of reference, in this regard, for the community of Aphrodito—used a sloping rightward and highly ligatured quadrilinear cursive, inelegant, sometimes imprecise, with no attempt at stylization (C2).⁴⁶

3.3.8 *Civil officials*

Officials of various kinds are attested as parties in contracts and issuers of petitions. There are six in our evidence base, almost all of whom are literate. One can expect that the *protokometai*, headmen of the village, were able to write, since their main duty was the collection of taxes. It is therefore not surprising to find that all four of these (one of whom is attested as *apoprotokometes*) subscribed to four contracts by their own hand. One of the *protokometai*, Aurelius Senouthios, son of Apollos (no. 169), also appears as one of the issuers of the petition to the Empress (*P. Cair. Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 21). Another is Aurelius Apollos, son of Dioskoros (no. 38), father of the famous notary, landowner, and archive owner, Dioskoros. The literacy of other officers tasked with local tax duties is also assumed: *boethoi* and (*chrys*)*hypodektai* were frequently intermediary signatories of receipts issued by the pagarchs to individual taxpayers. As already

⁴⁴ For this expression see S. Richter, “Byzantine Sales: Some Aspects of the Development of Legal Instruments in the Later Roman and Byzantine Period,” in J. G. Keenan et al. (eds.), *Law and Legal Practice in Egypt from Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Cambridge 2014) 83–95, at 87.

⁴⁵ On their handwritings see L. Briasco and A. Skalec, *L’archivio di Patermouthis* (Rome 2024) 16–29.

⁴⁶ James Keenan called him an “amateur writer”: “On Languages and Literacy in Byzantine Aphrodito,” *Pap. Congr. XVIII* II 161–167. On his handwriting see also Briasco, *Scrineum* 21 (2024) 7–22.

mentioned, we did not consider receipts in the present study because they are typically signed by officers. However, we find one *boethos* and one *chrysyppodektes* among the signatories of the petition to the Empress.

Let us now examine how these different officers wrote. Three *protokometai*, including Apollos,⁴⁷ used informal quadrilinear cursive with ligatures (C2). The only one to stand out is the previously mentioned Senouthios, whose stylized quadrilinear cursive (*fig. 8*) places him at a highest level of literacy (C3).



Figure 8: Senouthios' handwriting in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 21
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photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

This high level of literacy is also evident in the handwritings of other officers. The *boethos* Hermauos (no. 66) and the *chrysyppodektes* Apollos, son of Ioseph (no. 41), used an upright and rounded quadrilinear script with features typically associated with a bureaucratic or chancellery context: the contrast between wide and narrow letters, the evident prolongation of the vertical ascendant and descendant strokes (sometimes ending in small hooks), the presence of loops in single letters (e.g. minuscule *alpha*), and the creation of stretched and narrowed loops on vertical strokes involved in counterclockwise ligatures (*figs. 9 and 10*).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ On Apollos' Greek handwriting see J. Keenan, *Pap. Congr. XVIII* II 165; on his Coptic handwriting see L. Vanderheiden, "The Figure of Apollos, Father of Dioscorus, in the Light of Coptic Letters From Sixth-Century Aphrodito," in S. R. Huebner et al. (eds.), *Living the End of Antiquity* (Berlin 2020) 119–128, at 124–125.

⁴⁸ On features of bureaucratic/chancellery style of Greek quadrilinear cursives see G. Cavallo, *Il calamo e il papiro. La scrittura greca dall'età ellenistica ai primi secoli di Bisanzio* (Florence 2005) 59–66, and Briasco and Skalec, *L'archivio di Paternouthis* 17–18.



Figure 9: Hermauos' handwriting in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 24

© Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Association Internationale de Papyrologues
photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

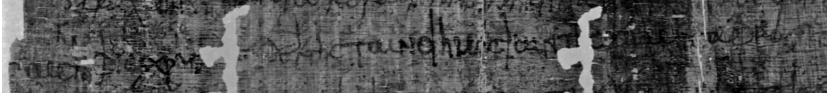


Figure 10: Apollos' handwriting in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 22

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photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

3.3.9 *Notaries*

The last category to be examined here is that of notaries. As we observed of tax officers, this is not a question of literacy rate, which is of course 100% for these persons who made writing their profession. Four professional scribes are attested as issuers in our evidence base, all subscribing to the petition sent by the inhabitants of Aphrodito to the Empress before 547. Two of them, Pilatus, son of Apollos (no. 149), and Ieremias, son of Victor (no. 78), described themselves with two of the numerous terms used in Late Antique Egypt to qualify notaries (*tabellio* and *nomikos*).⁴⁹ The other two signed the petition as landowners but are known as having drafted documents: Flavius Dioskoros, the most famous notary of Aphrodito and drafter of many documents, including this petition itself; and Amais, son of Apollos (no. 4), identified on palaeographic grounds as the drafter of a loan contract in 544 (*P.Cair.Masp.* II 67127).⁵⁰ As expected, their level of literacy is the highest possible. We wish to draw attention to their graphic choices when they acted as issuers, i.e. when they wrote not as professionals but as private citizens. The interesting point is that some notaries use the exact same handwriting when subscribing as issuers and when drafting

⁴⁹ On these terms see Diethart and Worp, *Notarsunterschriften* 9–10, 13.

⁵⁰ The identification was first suggested by the editor J. Maspero.

entire documents, while others alter the graphic execution or even the graphic system depending on the role in which they are called to write.⁵¹

Consider the notary Pilatus, for example. When subscribing to the petition (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 lines 19–21) for himself and on behalf of three individuals, he used the same inclined quadrilinear cursive that he used in drafting many contracts as a *nomikos*.⁵² His handwriting is typical of notarial contracts drafted in Aphrodito.⁵³

Amais, son of Abramós (no. 4), used a slightly sloping to the right quadrilinear cursive with few ligatures while subscribing as issuer (*fig.* 11). While drafting a contract as notary, instead, he wrote more quickly, tracing many clockwise ligatures, and with a strong inclination to the right (*fig.* 12).

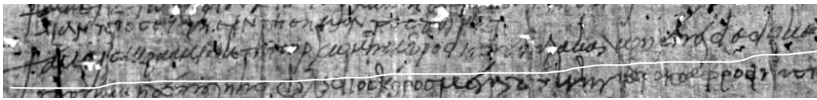


Figure 11: Amais' handwriting as issuer, *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.3 line 6

© Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Association Internationale de Papyrologues
photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

⁵¹ On his habit of handwritings used for different purposes see L. Briasco, “Scelte grafiche e uso dei simboli nelle sottoscrizioni finali dei contratti dall’Egitto tardoantico (Provincia di Tebaide, secoli V–VII),” in M. Boccuzzi (ed.), *Mani e scritture, simboli e testi. Ricerche su fonti documentarie ed epigrafiche tardoantiche* (Rome 2024) 23–70, at 39–42.

⁵² For a list of contracts drafted by Pilatus see Diethart and Worp, *Notarsunterschriften* 30–31, no. 16.1. In the subscription as issuer and *hypographeus* in the petition *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, Pilatus presented himself first as *tabellio* (p.2 line 19), followed by two individuals who were incapable of writing, and then, in the last part of the subscription reserved for the *hypographeus*, as *nomikos* (line 21). The same lexical choice with the same order, which indicates the same *ratio*, is displayed in the subscription as issuer and *hypographeus* by Jeremias, discussed below.

⁵³ Briasco and Skalec, *L’archivio di Paternouthis* 30–31.

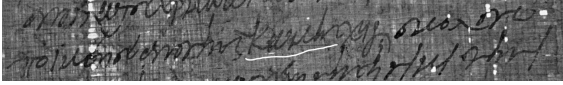


Figure 12: Amais' handwriting as notary, *P.Cair.Masp.* 1 67127.9
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 photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

Consider now the case of the notary Ieremias. He subscribed to the petition as issuer and on behalf of six other individuals (*P.Cair.Masp.* 3 67283, p.2 lines 15–19)⁵⁴ using an inclined and neat majuscule with elongated and thin vertical strokes and horizontal strokes systematically prolonged to connect letters to one another, as a chain. However, in the only surviving document that was drafted by Ieremias as a notary, in 541 (*P.Bingen* 132), a different picture emerges: he used a sloping to right quadrilinear cursive, of the type frequently seen in notarial contracts, rich in clockwise ligatures.

Besides Ieremias, Dioskoros also alters graphic system depending on his role and even within the same document. He wrote the body of our repeatedly-cited petition in his upright and wide majuscule (p.1 line 9: *fig.* 13), but chose his slightly inclined quadrilinear script for his subscription as *megaloktetor* (p.3 lines 7–8: *fig.* 14). Dioskoros is known for his ability to modulate his handwriting, while keeping it absolutely personal and recognizable, which demonstrates his high level of literacy and graphic expertise.⁵⁵

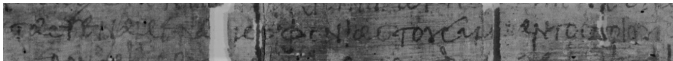


Figure 13: Dioskoros' handwriting for the body of the petition
 (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.1 line 9)

© Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Association Internationale de Papyrologues
 photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

⁵⁴ At the beginning of the subscription, in his own name and on behalf of the illiterates, he, like Pilatus, presented himself as *tabellio*, and then closed the *hypographeus* formula by repeating his name and qualifying himself as *nomikos*. On this matter see Ruffini, *Prosopography* 241–242 (Ieremias 16, Ieremias 20).

⁵⁵ Del Corso, in *Les archives de Dioscore* 89–115, and Briasco and Skalec, *L'archivio di Paternouthis* 18.

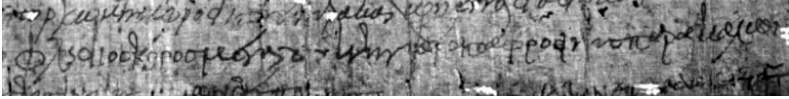


Figure 14: Dioskoros' handwriting for the subscription as issuer in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, pg. 3, lines 7–8

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photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

4. *Doubtful cases*

Most of the problems in literacy studies arise from homonymy. To resolve these, Ruffini's prosopography was used, along with the re-edition of some documents and new palaeographic identifications made by members of the NOTAE team, which are reported in the entries available on the public database of the project. We will here discuss a few cases of particular interest.

In our evidence base, a Ioannes, son of Hermias, appears twice as an issuer: once as the issuer of a lease contract written in 530 (*P.Cair.Masp.* I 67104.18–19), and once as the issuer of a deposit contract, fragmentary and without a precise date (*P.Mich.* XIII 671.22–23). Ruffini, listing different individuals bearing the name Hermias, suggested a match between the father of Ioannes 123 and Ioannes 174, although he chose to keep them as distinct individuals. Upon examining the handwritings, we can confirm the match (*figs.* 15 and 16): there is only one Ioannes, son of Hermias, who wrote long subscriptions in a clumsy majuscule with spaced letters and irregularities in some forms, qualifying him as a semi-literate (B).

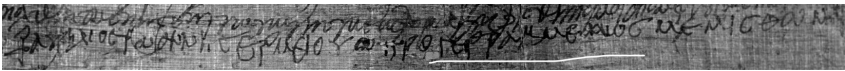


Figure 15: Ioannes' subscription in *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67104.17–18

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photo: A. Bülow-Jacobsen

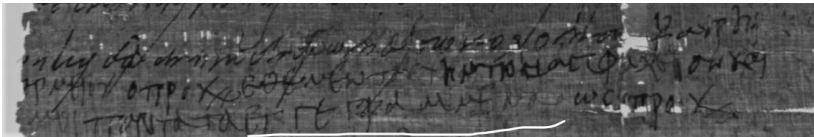


Figure 16: Ioannes' subscription in *P.Mich.* XIII 671.22–24

© Image courtesy of the University of Michigan Library Digital Collections

Similarly, analysis of the handwritings leads to the identification of Anoubis, son of Psentaesis (no. 34), presbyter of the Apa Mousaios church, who issued a surety contract in 535 (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67296.16–17), with Anoubis presbyter of the same foundation who signed, without a patronymic, the petition to the Empress.⁵⁶ His handwriting, a quadrilinear cursive with some counterclockwise ligatures, qualifies him as a good writer (C2).

In our evidence base the name Victor is very frequent; in particular, we find several presbyters Victor as issuers. Alia Hanafi suggested that Aurelius Victor, son of Besarion (no. 182), who subscribed as issuer a deed of exchange between 514 and 535 (*P.Thomas* 28.23–24) and then, as presbyter, a loan contract in 544 (*P.Mich.* XIII 669.18–20), should be identified with one of the presbyters named Victor who signed the petition to the Empress (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 lines 1, 7, 9).⁵⁷ Unfortunately, in the latter's subscription, Victor did not specify his affiliation to a church or a monastery. Based on their handwriting, we can exclude a match with the second Victor (no. 177) and the third (no. 178) in the petition, as they show lower skills—they are both basic writers (C1)—than the homonymous subscriber of the deed of exchange *P.Thomas* 28. As mentioned in the discussion on clerks, the first presbyter Victor (no. 176) in the petition, by contrast, had very good writing skills. He wrote his subscription in a stylized way: his quadrilinear cursive is decidedly inclined to the right, with ascendant strokes that are prolonged in the blank upper margin and sometimes doubled (*fig.* 17). This kind of stylization is often used by skilled writers at the beginning of a document or a block of text, made possible by the availability of more space. This Victor is the only one who could be matched with the issuer of *P.Thomas* 28, who did not describe himself as a presbyter but as Aurelius. His handwriting qualifies him as a

⁵⁶ For this identification see Briasco, *Scrineum* 21 (2024) 15.

⁵⁷ A. Hanafi, "Two Documents from the Archive of Dioscorus," *Bulletin of the Center for Papyrological Studies* 1 (1985) 57–70.

good writer (C2), though it is not as stylized, and more rounded (fig. 18). Even assuming a stylistic change in execution, in examining the shapes of the letters and ligatures we do not find a convincing match.



Figure 17: Victor's subscription in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 lines 1–2
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photo: Mohammed Ibrahim

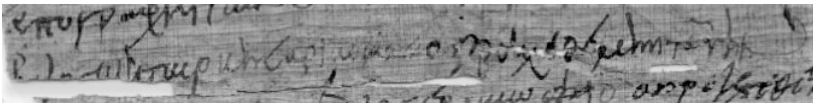


Figure 18: Victor son of Besarion's subscription in *P.Thomas* 28.23–24
© Cambridge University Library

Some homonymy exists between two or more individuals attested as both illiterates and literates. This is the case with Aurelius Phoibammon, son of Psentaesis (no. 148), an illiterate issuer of the petition, substituted by a *hypographeus* (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, p.2 line 23); the homonymous illiterate (no. 147) issuer of a fragmentary surety contract written between 527 and 552 (*P.Flor.* III 288.12–14); and the homonymous issuer (no. 149) of a loan contract written before 540 (*P.Lond.* V 1844 descr. 12–13), who seems to be literate. The sheet of papyrus is very dark where Phoibammon should have signed, such that we cannot conclusively determine his literacy level. Nevertheless, judging by the space occupied by his subscription, it seems that no *hypographeus* was involved on his behalf. In that case, we are forced to consider them as three distinct individuals, as we lack handwritings on which to base identification.⁵⁸ The situation is com-

⁵⁸ Ruffini distinguished the two illiterate Phoibammons as Phoibammon 114 (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283) and Phoibammon 39 (*P.Flor.* III 288), but suggested that the latter may be identified with the literate subscriber in *P.Lond.* V 1844 descr., based on the fact that they seem to have been involved in

parable with Sansneus, son of Isak, who is attested as illiterate (no. 167) in a loan contract drafted in 526 or 541 (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67308.5) and as literate (no. 168) in a lease contract drafted in 524 or 542 (*P.Flor.* III 342 + *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67259 descr., fr.B.3–4).

6. *Closing remarks*

We now can offer some final considerations. First, in general, half of the issuers of contracts and petitions drafted in Aphrodito during the sixth century were able to write and signed without the intervention of an *hypographeus*. This is not the worst-case scenario.

Second, belonging to the “Flaviate” did not entail literacy, as the presence of one illiterate Flavius confirms. Literacy surely came with social, economic, and political connections in Aphrodito society, which was still, as noted by scholars, dominated by the “Aureliate.”

As far as women are concerned, they were rarely involved as issuers of contracts and petitions in the first place. This means that the number of literate women is very low in absolute terms, with only three known to be able to write in the entire evidence base over a span of one century. In relative terms, their literacy rate remains low (23%), but is still slightly higher than the literacy rates of shepherds (14%) or manufacturers (15%). This is consistent with the fact that two of the women attested as capable of writing are property owners, as they are both involved in house sales. We can therefore infer that they came from a higher social background than shepherds or manufacturers.

Regarding clergymen, it must be noted that they were generally able to write. However, they rarely reached a high level of graphic skills. Another category that stands out for its literacy rate is landowners, who evidently needed to write to manage their properties.

Officers like *boethoi* or *hypodektai* show handwritings with chan-

similar business. Nevertheless, we prefer to keep them separate, as the issuer of *P.Lond.*, unlike Ruffini’s Phoibammon 39, seems able to write.

cellery elements. Lower officers, such as village headmen, surely knew how to write, but used more informal and less elegant cursives. Predictably, the highest skills were found among notaries as professional scribes, some of whom chose to use different styles depending on the type of graphic intervention.

Those with good or great graphic skills are often found in other roles within the documentary practice of the village. This is why we find skilled writers not only among the issuers but also in the roles of scribes, *hypographeis*, and/or witnesses. These individuals seem to have shared their skills with the Aphrodito community, as its prominent inhabitants.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ The research lying at the core of this article was carried out within the framework of the ERC-2017 Advanced Grant project NOTAE (“*Notae: not a written word but graphic symbols*,” Principal Investigator Antonella Ghignoli), funded by the European Research Council under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 786572). I am deeply grateful to Jean-Luc Fournet for having generously devoted his time to reading this article; his insightful comments and suggestions have significantly enriched its content. I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to Antonella Ghignoli, Daniele Bianconi, and Aneta Skalec for the fruitful exchange of ideas and discussions on these subjects.

APPENDIX: The Evidence Base

The Evidence Base lists all individuals considered in the present study. For each individual, we provide *praenomen* (if reported), name, patronymic, the date(s) or date range(s) in which they are attested as issuers of contracts and petitions, any prosopographical information regarding profession or employment, and all identifiers up to a maximum of three: the Trismegistos identifier (TM Per), Ruffini's prosopographical identifier (Name + number), and the NOTAE Per identifier, which groups together only the documents in which the same individual graphically intervened. The NOTAE Per identifier can be consulted on the Notae Public website at link <https://notae-erc.eu/>. Names are given in the form preferred by Trismegistos People. All cited papyri are reproduced at least in the image bank bipab.aphrodito (<http://bipab.aphrodito.info/>), and sometimes also in the digital libraries of their respective places of conservation.

In the absence of a digital identifier, a footnote will indicate the document in which the individual acted as issuer. In all other cases, the identifier(s) will be sufficient to identify that particular individual and, if necessary, with the help of the date, the document(s) to which we are referring. The professions, employments, and titles in the fifth column are those by which an individual is identified in the document(s) issued by him/her in the signature or in the *praescriptio*. In many cases, we are aware of other professions, employments, or titles of an individual from other documents in which he/she appears as recipient, witness, *hypographeus*, or notary, or even simply where he/she is mentioned, as in the tax register of Aphrodito. This is why Flavius Dioskoros son of Apollon, to name the most famous example, is listed here as landowner only, and not as notary and owner of the archive; nonetheless, of course, we had to take into account his profession in this research.

No.	Prae-nomen	Name and patronymic	Date(s) or range of activity as issuer	Profession, employment, title	TM Per	Ruffini's identifier	NOTAE Per	Literacy level
1		Abramos	<i>ante</i> 547	Presbyter of the Holy Church of Apa Romanos	TM Per 406713	Abraam 49	–	A
2		Abramos son of Anoubis	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406767	Abraam 48	–	A
3	Aurelius	Abramos son of Victor	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 135677	Abraam 3	NOTAE Per 137	C3 ⁶⁰
4		Amais son of Abramos	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>) ⁶¹	TM Per 406776	Amais 1	NOTAE Per 773	C3

⁶⁰ Even if the subscription is barely legible, one can see some hoops on top of the letters *kappa* and *eta* in *κώμης*, which are stylized elements typical of chancery cursives.

⁶¹ We know him as *ktetor* from his only subscription as issuer, which appears in the petition from the inhabitants of Aphrodito to the Empress. Nevertheless, he has been identified on palaeographical grounds with the Amais who drafted and completed, with his final subscription, a contract from the same Dioskoros archive, thereby acting as a notary even though he did not present himself as one. On this matter see 547 above.

5		Andreas	534–535	tenant	TM Per 406251	Andreas 9	–	A
6		Anonymous	<i>ante</i> 540	–	–	–	NOTAE Per 3100	C2
7		Anonymous	<i>ante</i> 540	–	–	–	NOTAE Per 4441	C1
8		Anonymous	<i>ante</i> 540	–	–	–	NOTAE Per 3101	C1
9		Anonymous	<i>ante</i> 540	–	–	–	NOTAE Per 3105	B ⁶²
10		Anonymous	<i>ante</i> 540	–	–	–	NOTAE Per 3107	B
11		Anonymous	<i>ante</i> 540	–	–	–	NOTAE Per 3108	B

⁶²The ink has partly vanished on the fifth issuer's subscription, but traces of wide, spaced, and uncertain majuscule forms can still be seen.

12		Anonymous	<i>ante</i> 540	–	–	–	NOTAE Per 3111	B ⁶³
13		Anonymous ⁶⁴	547–559	–	–	–	–	A
14		Anonymous ⁶⁵	500–599	tenant	–]ios 2	–	A
15		Anonymous	500–599	–	–	–	NOTAE Per 2187	C2
16		Anonymous	500–599	–	TM Per 412534	–	NOTAE Per 2015	C3
17	Aurelia	Anonymous	500–599	–	TM Per 412709	Anonymous 32	–	B? ⁶⁶

⁶³ Traces of clumsy majuscule forms.

⁶⁴ Issuer of *P. Vat. Aphrod.* 3 B+D.

⁶⁵ Issuer of *P. Palau Rib.* 22.

⁶⁶ Even though the papyrus is quite damaged, there is a clear change of hand between the subscriptions of the anonymous Aurelia on one side and her guardian Paulus on the other. Therefore, despite the fragmentary state of the document, it seems that there is not enough space for the name of a literate *hypographeus* between these two subscriptions, which, by contrast, is present in the subscription of the second anonymous female issuer, written by Triadelphos.

18	Aurelia	Anonymous	500–599	–	TM Per 412714	Anonymous 33	–	A
19	Aurelius	Anonymous	518–527	–	TM Per 261780	[—].ou 1	NOTAE Per 1942	C1
20	Aurelius	Anonymous	547–559	–	TM Per 415689	–	–	C ⁶⁷
21		Anonymous	547	<i>koursor</i>	–	Koursor 2 ⁶⁸	NOTAE Per 3122	C1
22	Aurelius	Anonymous brother of Makarios (no. 117) ⁶⁹	525–575	–	–	–	–	A

⁶⁷ His subscription is in poor condition, which makes it difficult to define his graphic skills more precisely. From the few visible signs, we can say that he is fully literate.

⁶⁸ Cf. *BL* 9.44.

⁶⁹ One of *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67122 issuers.

23		Anonymous daughter of Isidoros and Antonia	524	–	–	Anonymous 49	–	B ⁷⁰
24	Aurelius	[...]os son of Hermauos	500–599	tenant	TM Per 414378	Anonymous 95	NOTAE Per 2185	C1
25		Anonymous son of Roup ⁷¹	525–575	–	–	–	–	A
26	Aurelius	Anonymous son of Senouthes	575–625	tailor	TM Per 387092	Anonymous 100	–	A
27	Flavius	Anoubis son of Abramos	535	<i>apopraepositus</i> of the <i>castrum</i> P[...] in the Antaiopolite <i>nome</i>	TM Per 406827	Anouphi(o)s 26	–	A

⁷⁰ Presented in the text as slow writer: see Balamoshev, *Tyche* 38 (2023) 229. Unfortunately her subscription is lost, so we do not have a specimen of her handwriting.

⁷¹ One of *P.Cair.Masp.* 1 67122 issuers.

28	Aurelius	Anoubis son of Abramos	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 182721	Anouphi(o)s 11	–	A
29	Aurelius	Anoubis son of Bottos	521	–	TM Per 407042	Anouphi(o)s 12	NOTAE Per 3187	C1
30	Aurelius	Anoubis son of Hermauos	521	–	TM Per 407065	Anouphi(o)s 13	–	A
31	Aurelius	Anoubis son of Horos	523	–	TM Per 408381	Anouphi(o)s 14	–	A
32	Aurelius	Anoubis son of Isakios	615 or 645	<i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 138045	–	–	C1
33	Aurelius	Anoubis son of Palos	572	shepherd	TM Per 138091	Anouphi(o)s 34	–	A
34		Anoubis son of Psentaesis	535 and ante 547	presbyter of the Holy Church of Apa Mousaios	TM Per 406825 + 406774	Anouphi(o)s 25 + Anouphi(o)s 28	NOTAE Per 847	C2
35		Apollos	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (ktetor)	TM Per 406717	Apollos 116	NOTAE Per 2059	C1

36	Aurelius	Apollos son of Abramos	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 135270	Apollos 38	–	A
37	Aurelius	Apollos son of Constantius, brother of Ioannes no. 81 and Victor no. 183	511/2, 526/7, or 541/2	–	TM Per 414515	Apollos 41	–	A
38	Aurelius	Apollos son of Dioskoros and father of Dioskoros no. 53	<i>ante</i> 540 and 544	<i>protokometes</i> and <i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 131663	Apollos 2	NOTAE Per 1548	C2
39	Aurelius	Apollos son of Hermauos	544	shepherd	TM Per 407195	Apollos 125	–	A
40	Aurelius	Apollos son of Hermias	521	<i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 406977	Apollos 44	NOTAE Per 3201	C1/C2
41		Apollos son of Ioseph	<i>ante</i> 547	<i>chrysoypodektes</i>	TM Per 406750	Apollos 120	NOTAE Per 2066	C3

42	Aurelius	Apollos son of Kyros	539	shepherd	TM Per 135723	Apollos 101	–	A
43		Apollos son of Pi[...]	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406748	Apollos 119	NOTAE Per 2065	C3
44	Aurelius	Besis son of Phoibammon	559	shepherd	TM Per 410301	Besis 16	–	A
45	Aurelius	Besarion son of Dioskoros	511/2 or 526/7 or 541/2	<i>protokometes</i>	TM Per 135751	Besarion 1	NOTAE Per 1706	C2
46	Aurelius	Besarion son of Mousaios	515	–	TM Per 453658	Besarion 2	NOTAE Per 2981	B ⁷²
47	Flavius	Bessourous	<i>ante</i> 547	–	TM Per 406793	Bessourous 10	NOTAE Per 2081	C1
48	Aurelius	Charisios son of Hermauos	524 and <i>ante</i> 540	<i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 138073	Charisios 4	NOTAE Per 534	C2

⁷² Presented in the text as slow writer: Balamoshev, *Tyche* 38 (2023) 229.

49		Chrystes	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406794	Chrestes 7	NOTAE Per 2082	C2
50	Aurelius	Constantinus	631–632	–	TM Per 415675	Ko(n)stantinos 4	–	C2
51		Constantinus son of Hermauos	<i>ante</i> 547	headman of the copper workers	TM Per 406723	Ko(n)stantinos 9	–	A
52	Aurelius	David son of Victor	514	<i>apoprotokometes</i>	TM Per 186866	Dau(e)id 4	NOTAE Per 882	C2
53	Flavius	Dioskoros son of Apollos no. 38	565	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 135684	Dioskoros 3	NOTAE Per 6	C3
54		Dorantinoos son of Ioseph	<i>ante</i> 547	wine merchant	TM Per 406725	Dorantinoos 4	–	A
55	Aurelia	Eirene daughter of Besarion	566	<i>syntelestria</i>	–	Eirene 7	–	A

56	Aurelia	Eirene daughter of Ioannes and Thetous	553	–	TM Per 407922	Eirene 4	–	A
57	Aurelia	Elisabeth daughter of Triadelphos (?), sister of Eudoxia no. 60	520–545	–	TM Per 425882	Elisabet 3	–	A
58		Enoch son of Hermauos	521 and <i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406789	Enoch 7	NOTAE Per 2079	C1
59	Aurelia	Eudoxia daughter of Georgios	615 or 630 or 645	–	TM Per 138035	Eudoxia 9	–	A
60	Aurelia	Eudoxia daughter of Triadelphos(?) sister of Elisabeth no. 57	520–545	–	TM Per 425883	Eudoxia 5	–	A

61		Eulogios	<i>ante</i> 547	presbyter of the Holy Church of the martyr Apa Biktor	TM Per 406711	Eulogios 7	NOTAE Per 2056	B
62		Ezechiel son of Victor	<i>ante</i> 547	headman of the wine merchant	TM Per 406787	Iezekiel 1A+1	NOTAE Per 2078	C ⁷³
63	Aurelius	Georgios son of Ioannes	525–575	–	TM Per 413169	Georgios 16	NOTAE Per 2040	C1
64	Aurelius	Georgios son of Psaios	555	shepherd	TM Per 183156	Georgios 17	–	A
65		Georgios son of Psenpnouthes	<i>ante</i> 547	deacon and landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406752	Georgios 13	NOTAE Per 2067	C2/C3
66		Hermauos	<i>ante</i> 547	<i>boethos</i>	TM Per 406761	Herma(o)(u)os 92	NOTAE Per 2069	C3

⁷³ His subscription is in a bad state of preservation, which makes it difficult to define his graphic skills more precisely. From the few visible signs, we can say that he is fully literate.

67	Aurelius	Hermauos son of Bottos	518–527	–	TM Per 182725	Herma(o)(u)os 17	NOTAE Per 140	C2 ⁷⁴
68	Aurelius	Hermauos son of Ioseph	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 182708	Herma(o)(u)os 19	–	A
69	Aurelius	Hermauos son of Psenthaesios	541	–	TM Per 427184	Herma(o)(u)os 88	–	A
70	Aurelius	Hermauos son of Psentouoris	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 182709	Herma(o)(u)os 20	–	A
71		Horouonchis son of Mathias	<i>ante</i> 547	head of the weavers	TM Per 406732	Horouogchi(o)s 6	–	A
72		Iakob son of Abramos	549	presbyter	TM Per 407620	Iakob 27	NOTAE Per 734	B

⁷⁴ Even though his subscription as issuer in *PSI VIII 932* is incomplete, we know that he was capable of writing from his intervention as a witness in *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67001 (Aphrodito, 514). Therefore, we can say with good certainty that nobody was involved on his behalf in subscribing *PSI VIII 932*.

73	Aurelius	Iakob son of David	548–549 or 563–564	tenant	TM Per 137544	Iakob 28	–	A
74	Aurelius	Iakob son of Phoibammon	ante 547 and 566	<i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 406762	Iakob 26	NOTAE Per 2071	C1
75	Aurelius	Ieremias son of Apollos	525–575	–	–	Ieremias 24	–	A
76		Ieremias son of Phibis	ante 547	head of the <i>paktonopoioi</i>	TM Per 406734	Ieremias 21	–	A
77	Aurelius	Ieremias son of Ponnis	527–533	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	–	Ieremias 11	–	A
78		Ieremias son of Victor	ante 547	<i>tabellio/nomikos</i>	TM Per 406736 = TM Per 406721	Ieremias 16	NOTAE Per 2063	C3
79	Aurelius	Ioannes	500–550	–	TM Per 381385	Ioannes 49	NOTAE Per 3428	B
80	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Beskouis	521 and ante 540	deacon	TM Per 182720	Ioannes 58	NOTAE Per 136	C2

81		Ioannes son of Constantius, brother of Apollos no. 37 and Victor no. 183	511/2 or 526/7 or 541/2 and 521	<i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 407084 + 414514	Ioannes 53	NOTAE PER 3200	B
82	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Cornelius	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 201023	Ioannes 31	NOTAE Per 60	C1
83	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Dorotheos	536	farmer (<i>georgos</i>) and tenant	TM Per 408230	Ioannes 127	–	B ⁷⁵
84	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Hermias and Rachel	530 and mid 6 th cent.	tenant	TM Per 408030 + 415586	Ioannes 123 + Ioannes 174	NOTAE Per 4204	B
85	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Hermauos	552	tenant	TM Per 408249	Ioannes 186	–	A

⁷⁵ Presented in the text as slow writer: Balamoshev, *Tyche* 38 (2023) 229. Unfortunately his subscription is lost, so we do not have a specimen of his handwriting.

86	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Isakios	559?	—	—	Ioannes 154	—	C ⁷⁶
87	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Kyriakos	552	—	TM Per 135737	Ioannes 175	—	A
88	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Psais	538	—	TM Per 408236	Ioannes 130	—	A ⁷⁷
89	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Psentaesis	552	—	TM Per 407945	Ioannes 199	—	A
90		Ioannes son of Samuel	565	monk, presbyter, and <i>diouketes</i> of the monastery of Apa Souroutos	TM Per 146913	Ioannes 176	NOTAE Per 4255	C1
91	Aurelius	Ioannes son of Victor	521	farmer (<i>georgos</i>) and tenant	TM Per 407017	Ioannes 62	—	A

⁷⁶ His subscription is in a bad state of preservation, which makes it difficult to define more precisely his graphic skills. From the few signs visible we can say that he is fully literate.

⁷⁷ At the beginning of *P.Flor.* III 284.16 we read ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ α[ὐτο(ῦ)], which is absent from the edition, indicating that a literate individual was involved to subscribe on his behalf.

92		Ioseph son of Apollos	<i>ante</i> 547	washerman	TM Per 406727	Ioseph(i)(o)s 57	–	A
93	Aurelius	Ioseph son of Daniel	582–602	–	TM Per 410316	Ioseph(i)(o)s 73	–	A
94		Ioseph son of Iakob	535	presbyter of the Holy <i>euktêrion</i> (oratory) of the Archangel Michael	TM Per 453649 ⁷⁸	Ioseph(i)(o)s 32	NOTAE Per 846	B ⁷⁹
95		Ioseph son of Ioannes	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406743	Ioseph(i)(o)s 59	–	A
96	Aurelius	Ioseph son of Phios	538	–	TM Per 408242	Ioseph(i)(o)s 40	NOTAE Per 1913	B
97	Aurelius	Isak son of Apollos	521	farmer (<i>georgos</i>) and tenant	TM PER 406990	Isak(i)(os) 19	–	A

⁷⁸ With the name of the oratory incorrectly given as the patronymic, the upper part (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67297) of the surety contract issued by Ioseph in 535 and its lower part (*P.Flor.* III 287), which contains the subscriptions, are not joined yet in Trismegistos.

⁷⁹ Presented in the text as slow writer: Balamoshev, *Tyche* 38 (2023) 229.

98	Aurelius	Isak	500–599		TM Per 412536	Isak(i)(os) 12	NOTAE Per 2016	C3
99		Isak son of Ioannes	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406765	Isak(i)(os) 40	NOTAE Per 2072	C1
100		Isak son of Mousaios	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406755	Isak(i)(os) 47	–	A
101		Isak son of Onophrios	500–526	tenant	TM Per 414658	Isak(i)(os) 14	NOTAE Per 3286	C1
102	Aurelius	Isak son of Psentaeisis	527	shepherd	TM Per 408398	Isak(i)(os) 18	–	A
103	Aurelius	Isak son of Victor	514	<i>monazon</i> and tenant	TM Per 186864	Isak(i)(os) 16	NOTAE Per 886	B
104	Aurelius	Isi[...i[...] ⁸⁰	500–599	tenant	–	Isi[...i... 1	–	A
105	Aurelius	Isidoros	550–625	–	–	Isidoros 1	NOTAE Per 3447	B

⁸⁰ Issuer of *P.Palau Rib.* 22.

106	Aurelia	Iudith daughter of Ioannes	584/5 or 590/1	<i>syntelestria</i>	TM Per 448931	Ioudith 1	–	A
107	Flavius	K[...]	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	–	K[.....] 1	NOTAE Per 2080	C ⁸¹
108		Kallinikos	<i>ante</i> 547	presbyter of the Holy Church of Ama Maria	TM Per 406792	Kallinikos 13	NOTAE Per 2054	C ²⁸²
109		Kallinikos son of Hermauos	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406795	Kallinikos 14	NOTAE Per 1375	B ⁸³
110	Aurelius	Kallinikos son of Victor	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406715	Kallinikos 6	NOTAE Per 736	C1

⁸¹ His subscription is in a bad state of preservation, which makes it difficult to define more precisely his graphic skills. From the few signs visible we can say that he is fully literate.

⁸² Even though his handwriting is shaky, clumsy, and imprecise, many minuscule forms are used, frequently in ligatures traced from bottom to top or formed by prolonging the horizontal strokes, which would indicate a good level of graphic education. The execution style, in this case, could be explained by hypothesizing the writer's old age.

⁸³ His subscription is in a bad state of preservation, but we can see a few letters written in a unsure and shaky way.

111		Kollouthes son of Phoibammon, brother of Victor no. 189	540	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 138084	Kollouthos 28	NOTAE Per 4373	B ⁸⁴
112	Aurelius	Kollouthes son of Triadelphos, brother of Phoibammon no. 150	520–545	–	TM Per 415703	Kollouthos 16	NOTAE Per 4168	C1
113	Aurelius	Kyriakos son of Andreas	532	copper craftsman (<i>chalkotypos</i>) and tenant	TM Per 408412	Kuriakos 10	NOTAE Per 73	C2
114	Aurelius	Kyriakos son of Menas	600–650	tenant	TM Per 425984	Kuriakos 1	–	A
115		Kyros son of Victor	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406782	Kuros 19	NOTAE Per 2077	C2

⁸⁴ Presented in the text as slow writer: Balamoshev, *Tyche* 38 (2023) 229.

116		Lucanus	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406718	Loukanos 6	NOTAE Per 2061	C2
117	Aurelius	Makarios	525–575	–	–	Makarios 47	–	A
118		Makarios son of Ioseph	<i>ante</i> 547	headman of the [...]oi	TM Per 406740	Makarios 45	–	A
119	Aurelia	Maria daughter of Papnouthis	575–650	–	TM Per 146892	Maria 1	–	A
120		Mathias son of Ioseph	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406773	Math(e)ias 22	NOTAE Per 2076	C1
121	Aurelius	Mathias son of Ponnis	516/7 or 531/2	tenant	TM Per 408439	Math(e)ias 7	NOTAE Per 80	B
122	Aurelius	Menas	557?	–	TM Per 410251	Menas 52	NOTAE Per 4214	C1

123	Aurelius	Menas son of Phoibammon	547–559	–	TM Per 415691	Menas 1	NOTAE Per	C ⁸⁵
124		Menas son of Psatis	631 or 646	<i>syntelestes</i> and tenant	TM Per 138056	Menas 72	NOTAE Per 4282	C1
125	Aurelius	Mousaios	563–572	tenant	TM Per 415704	Mousaios 1	–	A
126	Aurelius	Mousaios son of Martes	521	cumminseller (<i>kyminopoles</i>)	TM Per 406946	Mousaios 12	NOTAE Per 3199	C1
127	Aurelius	Mouses son of Psais	500–550	<i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 184111	Mouses 1	NOTAE Per 2017	C2
128	Aurelius	Nikantinoos son of Isidoros	537	<i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 184104	Nikantinoos 1	NOTAE Per 4286	C1/C2

⁸⁵ His subscription is in a bad state of preservation, which makes it difficult to define more precisely his graphic skills. From the few signs visible we can say that he is fully literate.

129	Aurelius	Orsenouphis alias Pnote son of Hera- kleios	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 182718	Oursenouphios / Ouersenouphios 1	—	A
130	Aurelius	Pakouis son of Ieremias	572	shepherd	TM Per 138101	Pakou(i)s 5	—	A
131		Palos	<i>ante</i> 547	monk, presbyter and <i>oikonomos</i> of Abba Hermauos monastery	TM Per 406797	Palos 19	—	A
132	Aurelius	Palos son of Papeus	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 182717	Palos 3	—	A
133	Aurelius	Panoupis son of Hermauos	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 182711	Panoube 1	—	A

134		Papnoutis son of Beskouis	587/8	shepherd	–	Papnouthis 21	NOTAE Per 3338	C ⁸⁶
135	Aurelius	Paulos son of Psais	524	<i>syntelestes</i>	TM Per 408085	Paulos 12	NOTAE Per 1717	C2
136	Aurelius	Pekysis son of Hermauos	539	shepherd	TM Per 135725	Pekusis 12	–	A
137		Petros	<i>ante</i> 547	presbyter of the Holy Catholic Church of the Apostles	TM Per 406763	Petros 13	NOTAE Per 2049	B
138		Petros son of Apollos	552	<i>hypodiakonos</i> of the Holy <i>topos</i> of the martyr Apa Horouonchis	TM Per 407960	Petros 18	–	A

⁸⁶ A bad state of preservation, and thus difficult to define more precisely his graphic skills. From the few signs visible we can say that he is fully literate.

139	Aurelius	Phibis son of Apollos	516/7 or 531/2 and 547(?)	–	TM Per 408435 + TM Per 361234	Hibeis 1 + Phibeas 1 ⁸⁷	NOTAE Per 1392	B
140	Aurelius	Phibis son of Harauos	552	furrier? (<i>kaunakoplokos</i>)	TM Per 407941	Phib 19	–	A
141		Phoibammon son of Hermauos	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 182707	Phoibammon 43	NOTAE Per 135	C2/C3
142	Aurelius	Phoibammon son of Hermauos	521		TM Per 406961	Phoibammon 45	NOTAE Per 3204	C1
143		Phoibammon son of Pappoutis	<i>ante</i> 547	head of the carpenters	TM Per 406729	Phoibammon 116	–	A
144		Phoibammon son of Phibis	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406771	Phoibammon 78	NOTAE Per 2075	C2

⁸⁷ Identification by J.-L. Fournet, who suggested to correct Hibeis to <Ph>ibeis in *P.Lond.* V 1694.

145		Phoibammon son of Psais	521	presbyter of the Holy <i>topos</i> of Apa Pinoution	TM Per 406975	Phoibammon 46	NOTAE Per 3203	C1
146	Aurelius	Phoibammon son of Psais	526	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 261778	Phoibammon 50	–	A
147	Aurelius	Phoibammon son of PSENTAESIS	527–552	–	TM Per 414592	Phoibammon 39 ⁸⁸	–	A
148		Phoibammon son of PSENTAESIS	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>)	TM Per 406757	Phoibammon 114	–	A

⁸⁸ This individual may be identified with the following, as both are illiterate. Unfortunately, the beginning of *P.Flor.* III 288 is lost, and so we do not have more prosopographical information on the issuer, nor do we know whether or not he was a *ktetor*, like the homonymous individual in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283 (no. 148).

149		Phoibammon son of Psentaesis	<i>ante</i> 540	–	TM Per 414866	Phoibammon 39 ⁸⁹	NOTAE Per 3109	B or C ⁹⁰
150		Phoibammon son of Triadelphos, brother of Kollouthes no. 112	520–545, <i>ante</i> 547 and 565	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>) and owner of the archive	TM Per 138089	Phoibammon 1	NOTAE Per 3977	C1/C2
151		Phoibammon son of Victor	544–545	shepherd	TM Per 408074	Phoibammon 79	–	A
152		Pilatus son of Apollos	<i>ante</i> 547	<i>tabellio/nomikos</i>	TM Per 147006	Pilatos 1	NOTAE Per 5	C3
153	Aurelius	Ponnis son of Hatres	521	–	TM Per 406935	Pon(n)is 8	–	A

⁸⁹ I am not persuaded that one can identify an individual explicitly presented as illiterate with another who has basic or even good writing skills “on the grounds that they are engaged in comparable activities” as suggested by Ruffini.

⁹⁰ The bad state of preservation of the papyrus makes it not clear whether his level was that of semi-literacy or full literacy.

154	Aurelius	Pouoris son of Makarios	500–599	tenant	TM Per 449046	–	–	A
155	Aurelius	Promaos son of Pabesios	506	farmer and tenant	TM Per 407998	Proma(u)os 6	–	A
156		Promaos son of Apollos	<i>ante</i> 547	–	TM Per 406738	Proma(u)os 35	–	A
157		Promaos son of Ioannes	<i>ante</i> 547	presbyter of the Holy <i>topos</i> of the martyr Apa Promaos	TM Per 406742	Proma(u)os 36	NOTAE Per 2047	C1
158		Psais	<i>ante</i> 547	presbyter of the southern Holy Catholic Church	TM Per 406783	Psai(o)s 71	NOTAE Per 2053	B
159		Psais son of Besis and Tasais	547 and 549	deacon (547) and presbyter (549)	TM Per 135673 + 407204	Psai(o)s 72	–	A
160		Psais son of Ieremias	565	potter (<i>keramoplastes</i>)	TM Per 408058	Psai(o)s 79	–	A

161	Aurelius	Psais son of Ioannes	598?	tenant	TM Per 405606	Psai(o)s 82	–	A
162	Aurelius	Psais son of Pouonsis	537	tenant	TM Per 406493	Psai(o)s 56	–	A
163		Psais son of Victor	563–572	tenant	TM Per 415706	Psai(o)s 3	–	A
164	Aurelius	Psenpnouthes alias Lilos son of Hermauos	565	<i>mechanicos</i>	TM Per 135743	Psempnouthi(o)s 16	–	A
165	Aurelius	Psenthaesis son of Mousaios	514	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 182719	Psenthaesis 4	–	A
166	Aurelius	Romanus son of Isak	<i>ante</i> 540	–	TM Per 414862	Romanos 5	NOTAE Per 3106	C2

167	Aurelius	Sansneus son of Isak	526 or 541	–	TM Per 406880	Sansneus 1 ⁹¹	–	A
168	Aurelius	Sansneus son of Isak and Herais	524	tenant	TM Per 408278	Sansneus 1	NOTAE Per 2147	C2 ⁹²
169	Aurelius	Senouthios son of Apollos	544 and <i>ante</i> 547	headman of the village (<i>protokometes</i>)	TM Per 183699	Senouthes 1	NOTAE Per 3975	C3
170	Aurelia	Sophia daughter of Ioannes	587–588	<i>syntelestria</i>	TM Per 459636	Sophia 13	–	A
171	Aurelia	T[...]	631–632	–	TM Per 415676	–	–	A

⁹¹ It seems unlikely that this individual should be identified with the following homonymous one, as suggested by Ruffini, because in one instance Sansneus is attested as illiterate, while in the other, not only does he subscribe in his own hand, but he also shows a good level of graphic competence.

⁹² Even though the fragment bearing the subscription is in poor condition, we can observe minuscule forms involved in ligatures; therefore, the choice of level C2 is justified.

172		Theodoros	524	presbyter of the Holy <i>topos</i> of Apa Dios	TM Per 408090	Theodoros 4	NOTAE Per 1715	C2
173	Flavius	Theoteknos son of Psais	<i>ante</i> 547	landowner (<i>ktetor</i>) and <i>apopraepositus</i>	TM Per 135675	Theoteknos 1	NOTAE Per 62	C2
174		Triadelphos son of Constantinus	<i>ante</i> 547	–	TM Per 406759	Triadelphos 7	NOTAE Per 2068	C2/C3
175	Aurelia	Tsyros daughter of Phoibammon	500–599	–	TM Per 412682	Tirenat 1 (= Tsural?)	–	B
176		Victor	<i>ante</i> 547	presbyter of the Holy Church of Aphrodito	TM Per 406731	Biktor 180	NOTAE Per 2045	C3
177		Victor	<i>ante</i> 547	presbyter of the Holy Church of Apa Menas martyr	TM Per 406710	Biktor 181	NOTAE Per 2055	C1
178		Victor	<i>ante</i> 547	presbyter of the new Holy Church of Aphrodito	TM Per 406712	Biktor 182	NOTAE Per 2057	C1

179	Aurelius	Victor	500–599	wine dresser (<i>amplourgos</i>)	TM Per 414678	Biktor 1	NOTAE Per 86	C2
180	Aurelius	Victor son of Anoubis	582–602	–	TM Per 410328	Biktor 224	–	A
181		Victor son of Apollos	548	linen weaver	TM Per 408079	Biktor 187	–	A
182	Aurelius (in 514– 535)	Victor son of Besarion	514–535 and 544	presbyter in 544	TM Per 135657	Biktor 8	NOTAE Per 3973	C2/C3
183	Aurelius	Victor son of Constantius, brother of Apollos no. 37 and Ioannes no. 81	511/2, 526/7, or 541/2	–	TM Per 414512	Biktor 42	–	A
184	Aurelius	Victor son of Hermauos	514, 523/4, and 526	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 261776	Biktor 46	–	A
185	Aurelius	Victor son of Ioannes	553	farmer (<i>georgos</i>)	TM Per 407935	Biktor 196	–	A

186	Aurelius	Victor son of Makarios	521 and 522–553	shepherd and tenant	TM Per 186862	Biktor 54 + Biktor 55	–	A
187	Aurelius	Victor son of Makarios	514–527	tenant	–	Biktor 233	NOTAE Per 3080	C1
188		Victor son of Papnoutis	527	tenant	TM Per 135263	Biktor 74	–	A
189	Aurelius	Victor son of Phoibammon, brother of Kollouthes no. 111	540	shepherd and guardian of the fields (<i>agrophylax</i>)	TM Per 138070	Biktor 150	NOTAE Per 3416	B ⁹³
190	Aurelius	Victor son of Promaos	514	shepherd and <i>agrophylax</i>	TM Per 182715	Biktor 47	–	A
191	Aurelius	Victor son of Psais	514	shepherd and <i>agrophylax</i>	TM Per 182710	Biktor 43	–	A

⁹³ Presented in the text as slow writer: Balamoshev, *Tyche* 38 (2023) 229.

192	Aurelius	Victor son of Psais son of Simous	514	shepherd and <i>agrophylox</i>	TM Per 182712	Biktor 45	—	A
193	Aurelius	Victor son of Psenpnouthes	526	shepherd and <i>agrophylox</i>	TM Per 261777	Biktor 58	—	A