

Monastic Education in Late Antiquity

The Transformation of Classical *Paideia*

Edited by

LILLIAN I. LARSEN

University of Redlands, California

SAMUEL RUBENSON

Lunds Universitet, Sweden

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Contributors

- Bagnall, Roger, Professor Emeritus of Ancient History and Director of the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University
- Dahlman, Britt, Researcher in Church History at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University
- Gemeinhardt, Peter, Professor of Church History in the Faculty of Theology, Georg August University, Göttingen
- Jenott, Lance, Lecturer, Department of Classics, University of Washington in St. Louis
- Larsen, Lillian, Professor of Early Christianity in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Redlands
- Lundhaug, Hugo, Professor of Biblical Reception and Early Christian Literature in the Faculty of Theology, Oslo University
- Maravela, Anastasia, Professor of Ancient Greek in the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas, University of Oslo
- Muehlberger, Ellen, Associate Professor in the Departments of Near Eastern Studies and History, University of Michigan
- Pevarello, Daniele, Assistant Professor in Early Christianity in the Department of Religions and Theology, Trinity College, Dublin
- Rubenson, Samuel, Professor of Church History at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University
- Rydell Johnsen, Henrik, Lecturer, Department of Religion, Stockholm University
- Sheridan, Mark, Benedictine friar at Dormition Abbey, Jerusalem, and Professor Emeritus of Pontificio Ateneo Sant'Anselmo, Rome
- Stefaniw, Blossom, Heisenberg fellow, Faculty of Theology, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg
- Urbano, Arthur, Associate Professor in the Department of Theology, Providence College
- Westergren, Andreas, Lecturer in Church and Mission Studies at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University
- Zaborowski, Jason, Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Bradley University

4 | The Educational and Cultural Background of Egyptian Monks

ROGER BAGNALL

My perhaps rashly broad subject is hardly new. Controversy about the educational background, learning, and intellectualism of the monks of Egypt may be nearly as old as monasticism itself. There was certainly much ambivalence expressed in Late Antiquity about whether *paideia* in the Classical sense played any legitimate role in the formation of a monk, a point Henrik Rydell Johnsen's paper in this volume treats in more detail. But even in matters of Christian theology it was far from clear to everyone that a little learning was a positive thing. In ancient accounts of the Origenist controversy, for example, we find, to quote Susan Wessel, that "Socrates plainly associated simplicity with ecclesiastical unity and correct understanding, while he understood intellectualism to be the source of doctrinal confusion and theological dispute. Sozomen, in contrast, did not hesitate to criticize the simple, anti-intellectual monks in *his* account of the Origenist affair."¹

Context: Background of Issue

If this is an old subject, however, it is also one renewed within the past few decades by fundamental discoveries and new approaches. Some of these come from within the study of monasticism and its literature. As I am an interloper in that field, I shall cite only an idiosyncratic sampling of works that have had an important impact on my own thinking. Two of these concern a couple of the most emblematic figures of early Egyptian asceticism. In the first place, naturally, is the decisive study of Antony by Samuel Rubenson, in which he concluded that "the letters must be attributed to an educated monastic leader of importance, acquainted with the philosophical ideas of his time, as well as with the Arian heresy." There is no reason not to accept the identification of this monastic leader with Antony, and thus to recognize that he had a good education in Greek to a high level.² In the

¹ Wessel 2004: 77; see Westergren's contribution to this volume, Chapter 3 above, for an alternate reading of Socrates' understanding of the relationship between intellectual and monastic virtue.

² Rubenson 1995: 42; Wipszycka 2009: 235-7, admits the force of Rubenson's arguments but is unwilling to discard the tradition that makes Antony a non-hellenophone.

course of the discussion leading up to this conclusion, Rubenson points out the weak supports for any view founded on the literary sources that sees the early monks as both uneducated and rejecting education.³

The greatest of all writers in Coptic, Shenoute, has undergone a no less fundamental re-evaluation in the last quarter century. Far from being a representative of an anti-Greek nationalist Coptic culture, he was, as Stephen Emmel has said, "well educated in Greek."⁴ Emmel regards this view as now "generally accepted among scholars" and argues that he was educated in Panopolis itself. Similarly, Tito Orlandi has noted that not only Greek culture but specifically Greek rhetorical training is clearly visible in Shenoute's works.⁵

Finally, I would observe that the rhetoric about monastic educational simplicity is of a piece with that concerning poverty; indeed, the two were obviously closely linked in ancient society. In this respect, the remarks of James Goehring are worth quoting: "As the monastic movement became more complex and wealthier, its literary memory fashioned its past as simpler and more austere. As the later basilicas became in fact more ornate, the earlier basilica became in the imagination more primitive."⁶ At a broader level of description, Ewa Wipszycka has insisted in several works on the presence of a high level of literacy among monks.⁷

But all of these developments in the scholarship of monasticism either concern towering and thus exceptional figures or leave us at a level of generality, where we can have little tangible sense of what ordinary monks brought to their communities in the way of educational background. It thus seems worth asking if we can get closer to the quotidian reality of the monks by looking at the documentary sources.⁸ I shall attempt to do this at a level of granularity that may require patience from some readers, but that I believe will lead to a rather coherent picture of some interest and significance.

Indeed, no less fundamental than the new directions in thinking about monasticism have been the developments in papyrology and the study of Graeco-Roman Egypt in the same decades. These have transformed many aspects of our understanding of the culture of this society and the ways by which individuals were educated within it. These years have also brought a substantial increase in the amount of documentary

³ See also Gemeinhardt's contribution to this volume, Chapter 2 above. ⁴ Emmel 2002: 99.

⁵ Orlandi 1997: 76. ⁶ Goehring 2007: 405.

⁷ Wipszycka 2009: 361–5, with citations of earlier work.

⁸ On the shift in studies of Egyptian monasticism to take documentary sources into account, see Wipszycka 2004: 834; See also Larsen and Maravela's contributions to this volume.

material available for the study of Christianity (and Manicheism) in the period from Diocletian to the Council of Ephesos and the Council of Chalcedon. From these years have come the editing of the archive of Nephros,⁹ the publication of the Manichaean literary and documentary texts from Kellis,¹⁰ and the identification and preliminary study of the archive of the holy man John – whether of Lykopolis or of the Hermopolite is debated, but relatively unimportant for our purposes.¹¹

No less important from the point of view of the subject that I shall be considering is the explosion in our ability to look at papyrus texts as physical objects. This was brought about first by the lowering of the cost of printing illustrations in books, which led to a great growth in the visual content of printed editions from the 1970s on. It has been accelerated still more by the digital revolution and the widespread availability of images of papyri: a process still under way, as many critical collections are almost wholly undigitized even now, and some impose onerous conditions and costs on scholars using digital images. (The British Library and the Bodleian are particular laggards in both respects.)¹²

The most fundamental contributions to rethinking ancient education and culture have been those of Raffaella Cribiore and Jean-Luc Fournet. Many readers will be familiar with Cribiore's two books and numerous articles on education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, which have for the first time given us a coherent and convincing picture of the stages by which young pupils learned first to write, as it seems, and then to read; we can now use a well-developed typology of handwritings.¹³ At the same time, the contents of education with the grammarian and then the rhetorician have become clearer. The discovery of a classroom for the teaching of rhetorical verse composition in our excavations at Amheida (in the Dakhla oasis) has given a wholly unexpected gift to our ability to visualize the environment of education at the most advanced levels found in provincial towns (Figure 4.1).¹⁴

Fournet's work, in turn, has centered on the archive of Dioskoros, the notary, village notable, and poet, active in the Antaiopolite village of Aphrodite and, for one stretch, in the provincial capital Antinoopolis,

⁹ Kramer and Shelton 1987.

¹⁰ Worp 1995; Gardner 1996; Gardner, Alcock, and Funk 1999; see also Stefaniw's contribution to this volume.

¹¹ Zuckerman 1994; van Minnen 1994.

¹² The most important finding tool for these images is www.papyri.info.

¹³ Cribiore 1996; Cribiore 2001.

¹⁴ Cribiore, Davoli, and Ratzan 2008; Cribiore and Davoli 2013; Davoli and Cribiore 2010.

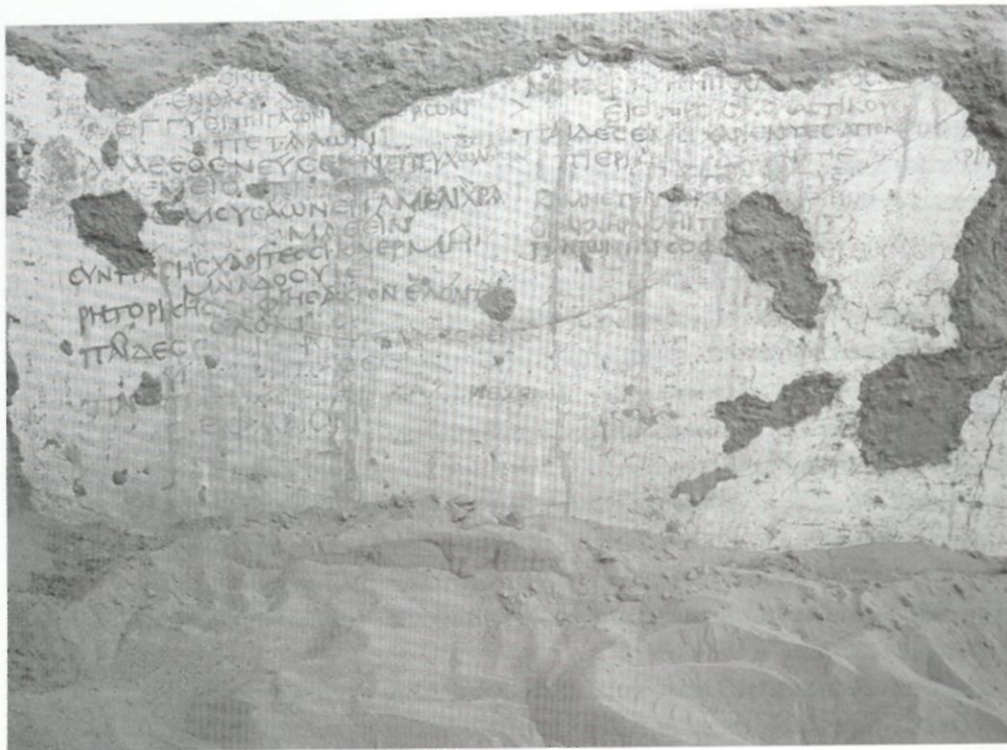


Figure 4.1 Classroom wall excavated at Amheida. © Roger Bagnall

during the middle years of the sixth century.¹⁵ Fournet has also looked at many of the broader issues raised by the Dioskoros archive. At the International Congress of Papyrology in Warsaw (August 2013), he gave a magisterial summation of his thinking, delineating what he calls a documentarist approach to literary culture, or *paideia*. At the same time, it represents the identification and study of a “literarization” of documentary practice that begins to be visible in the third century.¹⁶ He calls for documentary editors to be more alert to signs of *paideia*, of this literarization, in the texts they edit. Broadly speaking, he divides the signs of this literary flavor into three: content, language, and format. These have numerous subdivisions, but they include the use of literary (especially poetic) words, the presence of citations, Atticism, the layout on the papyrus sheet, the use of diacritics, and a variety of other less common factors. Private letters and petitions are the locus of choice for these phenomena, although they are not limited to these document types.

¹⁵ Particularly his monumental work of 1999.

¹⁶ See already Fournet 1992.

In Fournet's thinking, what we see in the flowering of these literary traits in documents reflects the educational experiences of the urban elite, especially of the bouletic class, the group of city councilors. As I have argued in an earlier paper,¹⁷ this *paideia* was not limited to that high elite but reached as well some members of a stratum of society that has yet to be adequately defined by historians of Roman Egypt, but which I call the manager class. In this I include the collectors who managed the taxation system for the elite who held liturgical positions, the representatives of landlords who dealt with their tenants in leasing and collecting rents, and a variety of business agents of other types. Already in early Roman times we can see indications that these men were sometimes recipients of a literary education and continued to prize their learning throughout their careers.

We have at our disposal, then, a rich array of recently published texts, newly available images, and conceptual resources with which to look at the environment in which the early Egyptian monks were formed. From our knowledge of the society of late Roman Egypt, we should anticipate a high level of differentiation. Society was highly stratified, with educational opportunities very unequally available in a range of organizational and physical settings.¹⁸ It has come to be recognized that monasticism shared generally in this stratification and differentiation: we cannot expect uniform patterns of housing, eating, drinking, and clothing among the more independent ascetics, the members of small urban communities, the occupants of the *lauras*, and the rank and file of larger cenobitic establishments. The same, one may assume, was true of their educational and cultural backgrounds.

To try to bring these sweeping generalizations into better focus, I shall look at a number of the Christian letters of the fourth century through the lens of the toolkits I have described, applying what one might call a Fournet grid. Some of the letters are by monks, some are addressed to monks, some are of indeterminate origin. I shall try to determine to what extent one may find the traits that Fournet has enumerated and what we can learn from these about the individual letter writers. Because persons writing to monks must have been assuming that what they did would be intelligible to their addressees, I have included them as revelatory of the cultural world of the monks. Wipszycka has remarked on the high volume of correspondence to and from monks, and at the same time she has observed that the quality of

¹⁷ Bagnall 2011a. The "further" in the title refers to my earlier remarks on this subject in Bagnall 2009.

¹⁸ See generally Bagnall 1993, esp. 208–29.

the letters suggests that the level of education of their authors was not high.¹⁹

Examples

Anyone familiar with the work that Cribiore and I did on women's letters²⁰ will know that it is generally difficult to be sure who actually wrote a letter on papyrus. It could be the nominal author himself or herself, it could be another family member with greater skills, or it could be an employee or slave with such skills. Letters could be written autograph, dictated, or composed by an amanuensis from sketchy instructions. I shall take these difficulties into account in this discussion, but it should be stated that it is only rarely possible to be sure that our letters are autographs of monks. From my perspective, however, this does not matter very much. For one thing, any amanuensis of a monk was probably also a monk. For another, there are clear signs in the papyri that the cultures of those writing in monasteries and those writing to monasteries shared many characteristics and are indeed hardly to be distinguished with any clarity.

To help clarify the approach that I will be taking, I present one of Fournet's examples for the use of a literary hand in correspondence, *P. Herm.* 5 (Figure 4.2). You can see not only that it has an elegant detached script readily paralleled in book hands of the late third and early fourth century, but that the writer has used high dots for punctuating clauses, rough breathing in a couple of cases where the word might potentially be ambiguous, and even an acute accent on εὐθύμει (be of good cheer) in line 15, to make it clear that we are dealing with the imperative rather than the third person indicative, which would have had a circumflex over the ultima. Even though, as Fournet observes, this is the work of a secretary rather than of the nominal author, the impression to be made is clear. The writer's plane is distinctly superior.

We will look at a number of examples in order to begin to tease out what can be learned by applying the Fournet grid to monastic letters. *P. Nag Hamm.* 69 (Figure 4.3) is a letter written by, or in the name of, the monk Sansnos. The hand is not very attractive, an experienced but somewhat ungainly semi-cursive letter hand, and the editor notes that it is "written with such indifferent use of spelling and grammar that the sense of some

¹⁹ Wipszycka 2009: 364. ²⁰ Bagnall and Cribiore 2006: esp. 41–55.

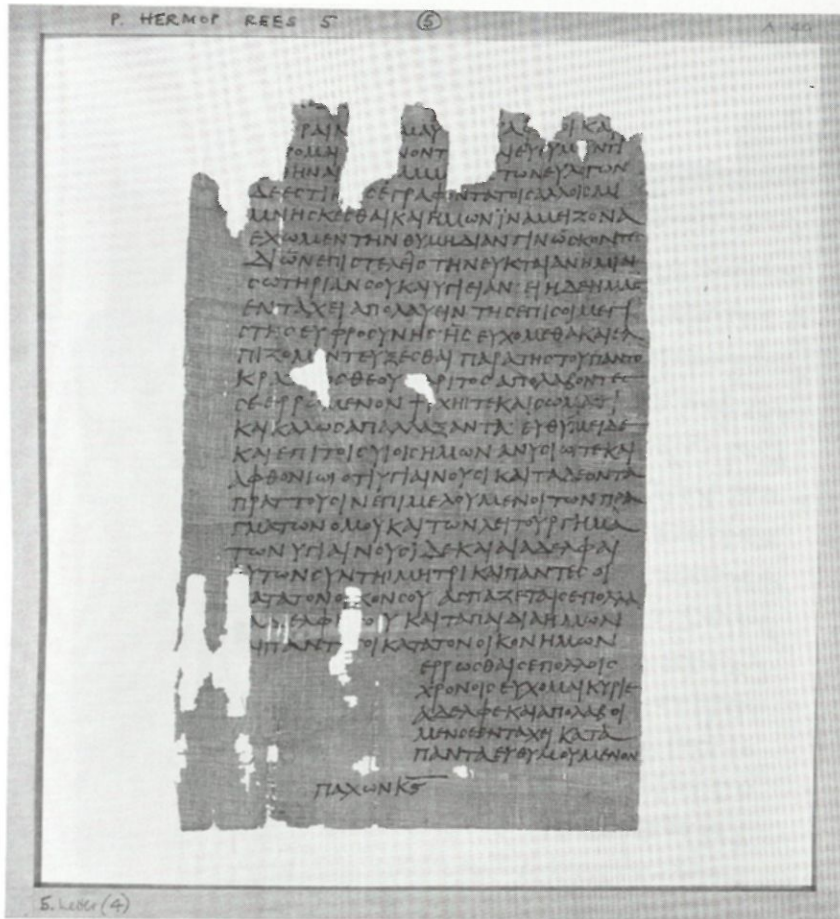


Figure 4.2 *P.Herm. 5*. The John Rylands Library (JRL1201518). Copyright of the University of Manchester

passages is doubtful.” The layout shows no customization, except that the largely lost salutations at the end were placed flush right. There are no *nomina sacra* preserved (*ἐν κυρίῳ* [in the Lord] is written in full in line 2), and no other diacritics are visible. No vocabulary of particular interest appears. As the editor’s complaint suggests, the spelling is highly phonetic, and there are omissions, insertions, and a weak command of syntax. In sum, this text checks none of the boxes and makes a poor impression of the writer’s education. Nonetheless, the hand is practiced enough and the prose brisk and tolerably fluent.

The immediately preceding text in this volume, *P.Nag Hamm. 68* (Figure 4.4), written to Sansnos by a Harpokration who may also be a monk, provides

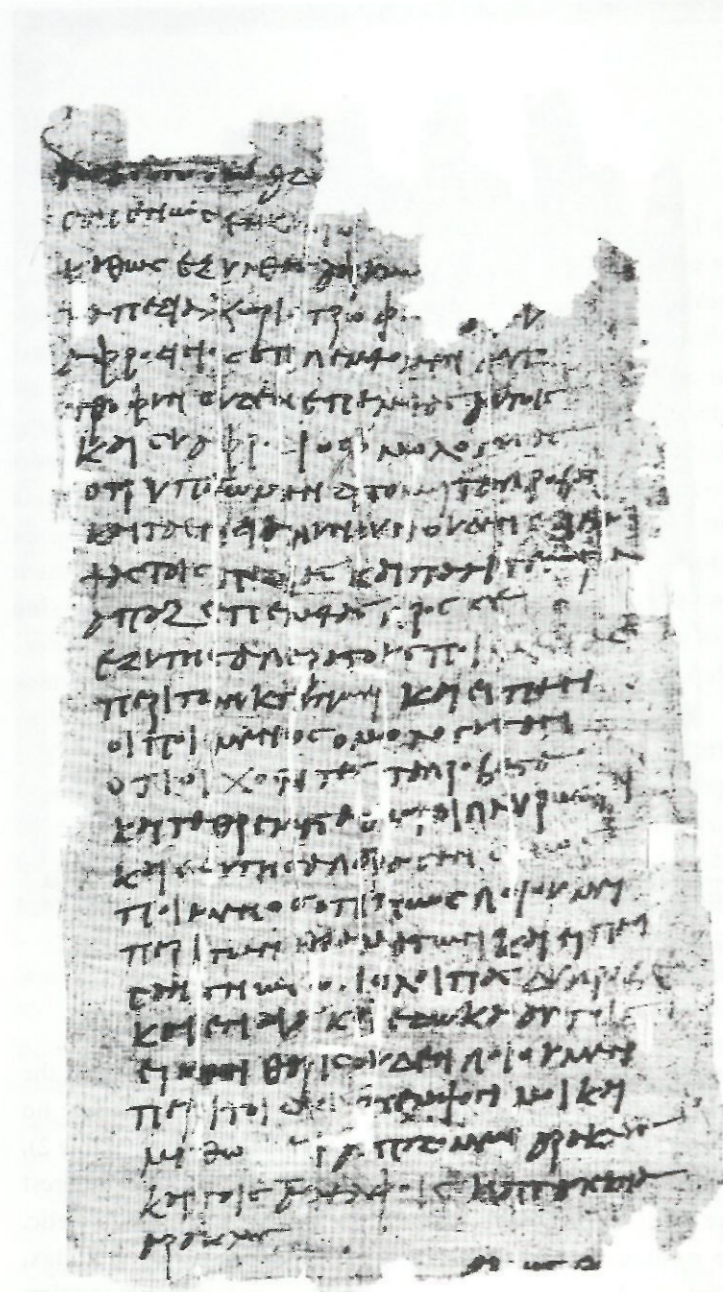


Figure 4.3 P.Nag Hamm. 69

VII, 8^v →

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Figure 4.4 P.Nag Hamm. 68

an interesting contrast. The hand is businesslike, but it has far more style than that of Sansnos's letter, including a capital omega at one sentence beginning. The salutation is again flush right. This writer uses the *nomen sacrum* correctly in line 2 for κύριος (lord), although in invoking Christ

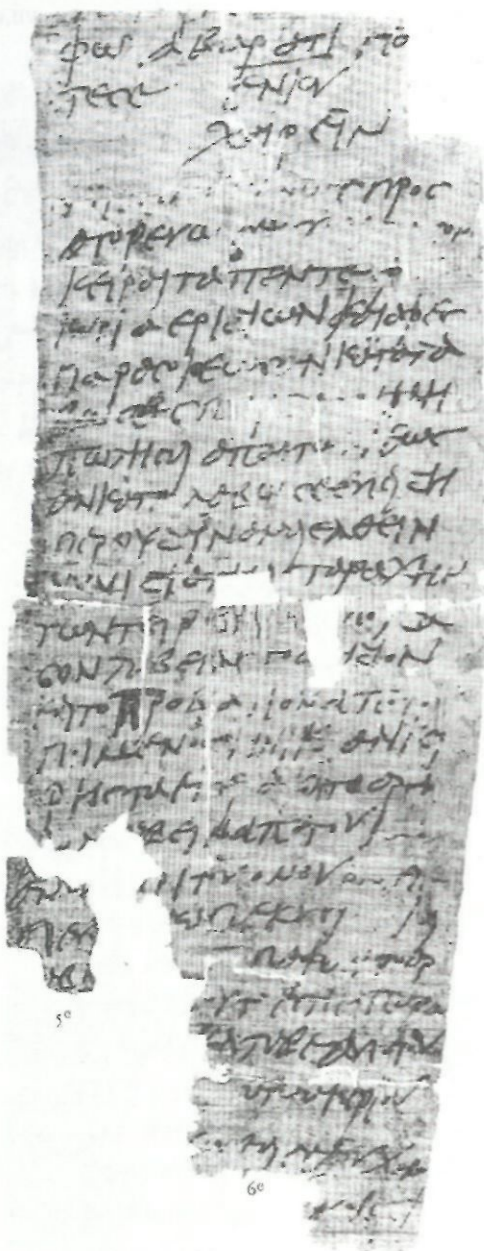


Figure 4.5 P.Nag Hamm. 66

later in the letter he writes the name in full. The Greek is good, with a well-constructed subjunctive clause and the definite article τῶν written in the margin at one point, suggesting that the writer reread the letter and sought to improve it. The vocabulary is that of business, apart from specifically Christian references. As AnneMarie Luijendijk has shown, the use of abbreviated *nomina sacra* shows that the writer had received a Christian education, but it appears that the practice was taught at a fairly elementary level.²¹ Errors in its usage probably also reflect the fact that it was not an advanced skill. For example, we find the abbreviated form ΕΥΚΥ (in the lord) in *P.Nag Hamm.* 66 (Figure 4.5), written in a decent, rapid business hand, with the greeting in line 2 centered on its own line, and “reasonably good Greek” (in the editor’s words), mostly correct even if not very stylish.

In general, the Nag Hammadi letters fit within the spectrum of those I have described. The hands range from good business with the occasional flourish to more uneven variants. Centering or more often flush-right location of the closing salutations is normal. Diacritics are rare apart from *nomina sacra* and an isolated diaeresis in *P.Nag Hamm.* 70. Spelling and grammar vary from weak to fairly good. Vocabulary is almost without exception pedestrian, although πάντολλα (*pánpolla*) in *P.Nag Hamm.* 67 suggests aspirations, and in *P.Nag Hamm.* 70 we find the hapax θαλίζω (*thalízō*). There are a couple of abbreviation strokes that belong to a business rather than literary milieu. Nothing suggests that any of the writers had gone beyond an elementary education to study with a grammarian. On the other hand, the handwriting is in general fluent and experienced; these were not people who wrote rarely.²²

When we turn to the Nephros archive, from the monastery of Phathor in the Herakleopolite nome, we see a slightly different picture. *P.Neph.* 11 (Figure 4.6) comes from the monk Kapitón. It is written in a well-formed letter hand of some clarity; its layout is simple except that χάρειν (greetings) in line 5 is spaced out to fill the line, allowing the body to start on a new line. *Nomina sacra* are handled correctly; diaeresis is used; and a line is placed over an undeclinable name to mark it as Egyptian. The vocabulary is unremarkable, but there are citations of 1 and 2 Timothy in the course of the letter. The overall impression is of a somewhat higher degree of ability than in the Nag Hammadi letters, but there are no signs of higher literary formation.

²¹ Luijendijk 2008: 67–9; As Larsen has repeatedly argued (see Larsen 2006a, 2013a and 2013b) and the present volume suggests, this raises the question of whether such elementary education occurred in the monastery.

²² See also Lundhaug and Jenott’s contributions to this volume.

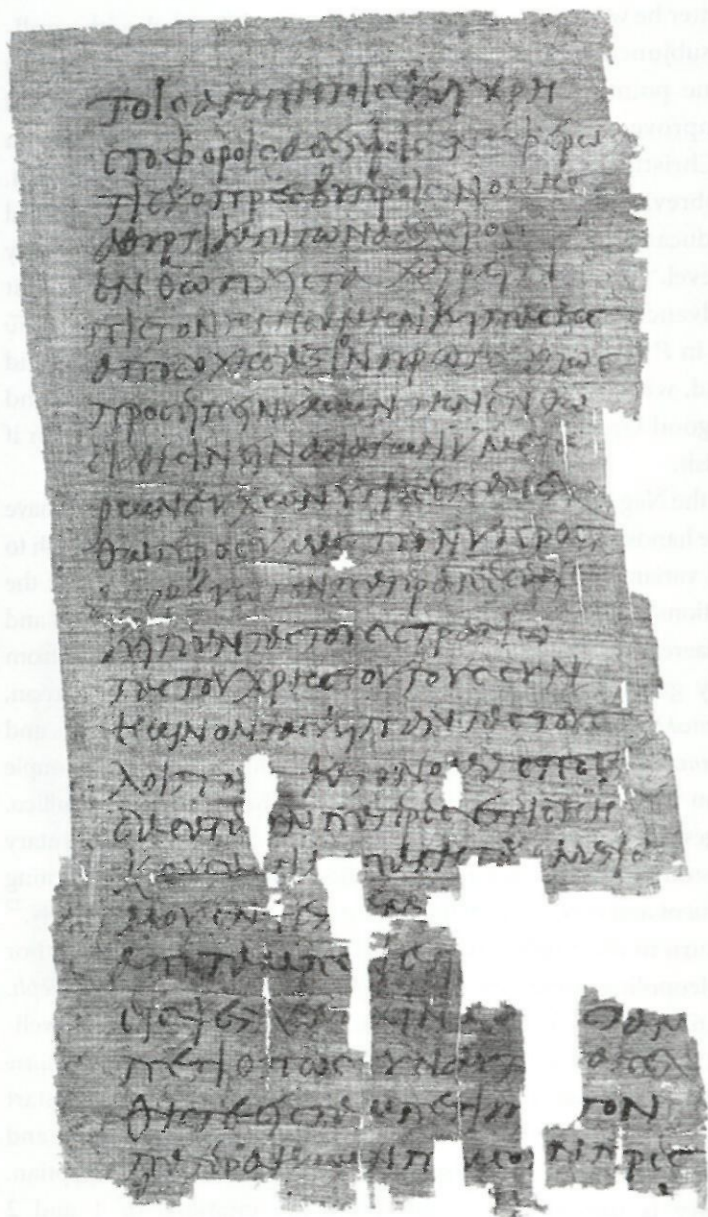


Figure 4.6 *P.Neph. 11*. © Institut für Papyrologie, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

P.Neph. 12 (Figure 4.7) is also from a monk, Serapion. It is written in a fast cursive, very practiced but not very attractive. The greetings at the end are indented. *Nomina sacra* are present, along with the high apostrophe dividing double consonants and the use of a high dot after a name to

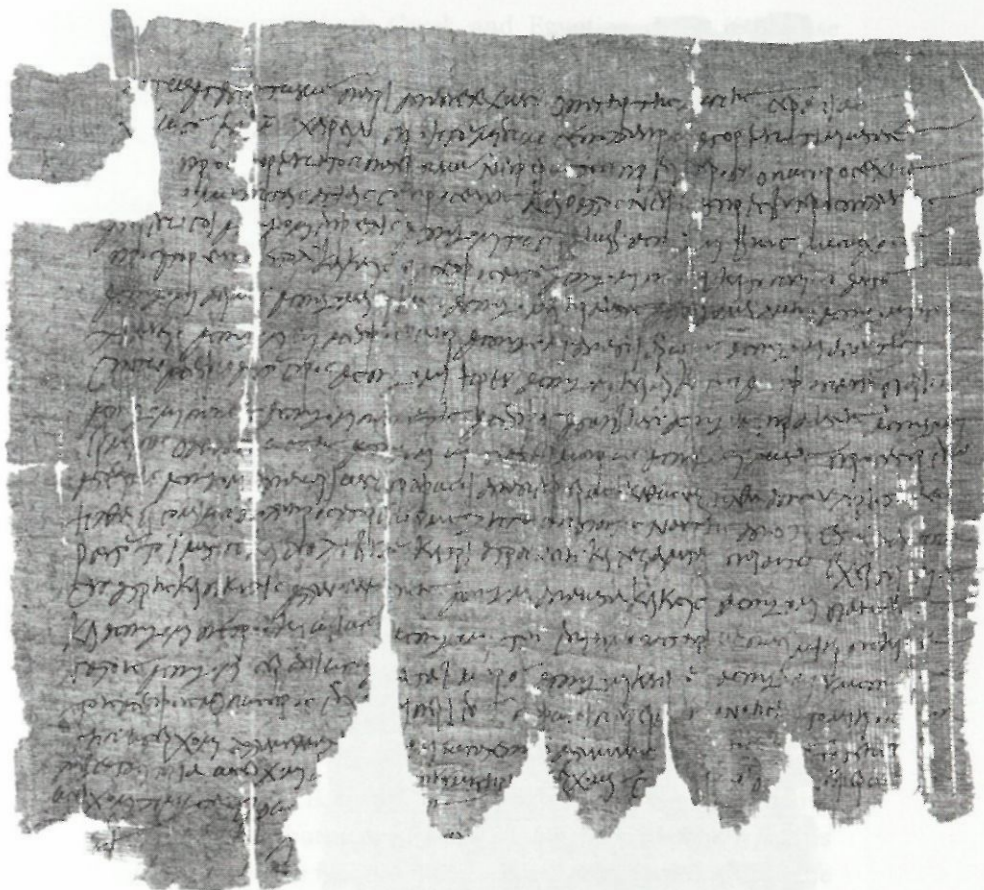


Figure 4.7 P.Neph. 12. © Institut für Papyrologie, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

indicate breaks in the series of greetings. An apostrophe after undeclined Iakob is also present.²³ To offset these signs of learning, the spelling is often wrong and the writer seems to have little idea of case endings. The vocabulary is pedestrian. The writer twice uses a Coptic *hori* in the place name Tahmouro, which he does not spell the same way in the two occurrences. More interestingly, the name Hor is written without termination but with $\pi\alpha$ (*pa*) between it and the place name, to indicate “the man of.”²⁴ The writer is thus capable of a bit of code-switching and was

²³ See *P.Kell. IV*, p. 21 on these marks (in the Kellis Agricultural Account Book) as intended “to represent the writer’s indication that the name is Egyptian and lacking in Greek declensional terminations.” Obviously a Biblical name derived from Hebrew could be given the same treatment.

²⁴ This possessive is found in early Ptolemaic texts to indicate filiation (“the son of”); see Muhs 2010: 191–5.

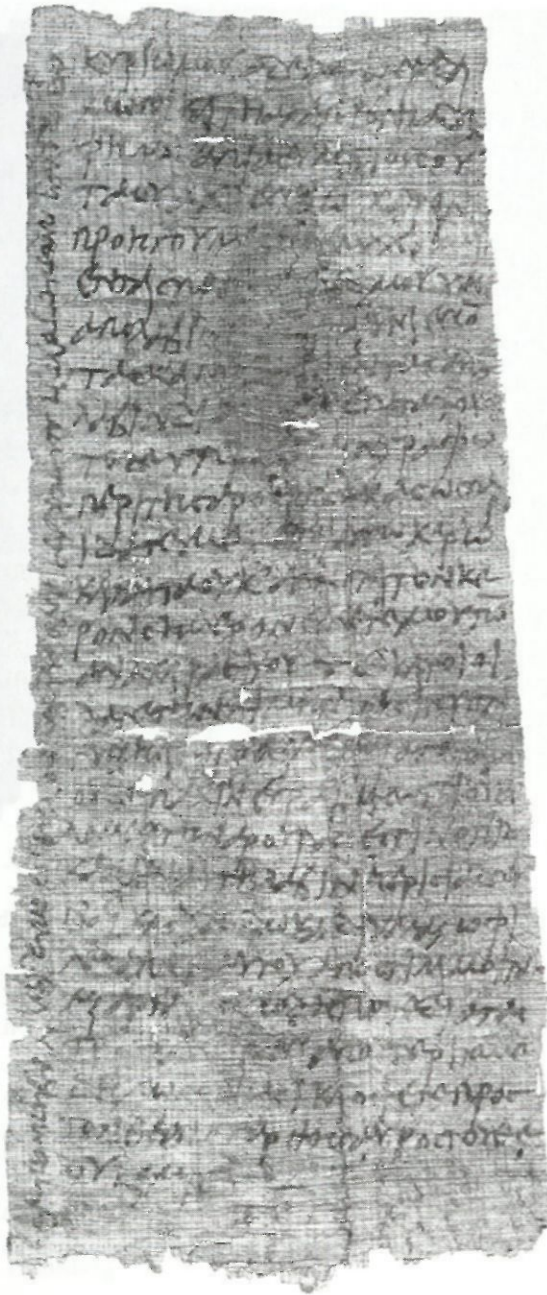


Figure 4.8 *P.Neph.* 18. With the permission of Universitätsbibliothek Trier

probably comfortable in both Greek and Egyptian. Even if his use of diacritical marks suggests a bit more education than Kapitón had, it does not seem likely that this came from the grammarian's classroom, from which he would have acquired a better command of Greek accidence.

A third likely religious, a woman named Taouak, is the author of *P.Neph.* 18 (Figure 4.8). It is written in a business cursive (called "unbeautiful" by the editor, who thinks it much worse than the letters written by men: not entirely justifiably, in my view), with no interesting spacing practices. *Nomina sacra* and medial apostrophe are found. The vocabulary is unremarkable. The grain measure artaba is abbreviated, suggesting documentary experience. An active form is used in place of the middle in one instance, and the editor's judgment of the language is unfavorable: "volkstümlich, manchmal fehlerhaft."

It is interesting to compare the group of letters written by Paulos to the monastery with the texts above. He was clearly a layman and spent considerable time in Alexandria. His letters are full of requests to the monks for their prayers, from which his lay status is obvious, but also of business matters. His letters are not all in the same hand.²⁵ Indeed, of the eight well-preserved letters, I am not certain that any two are in the same hand. Paulos clearly had access to a fairly numerous range of secretaries.

P.Neph. 1 (Figure 4.9) is written in a rapid, official-looking, cursive hand, somewhat stylish but deteriorating in the last part. The layout is crowded, and two lines are written in the left margin perpendicular to the main text. We should subtract points for this. *Nomina sacra* are present, and the apostrophe is used to mark both undeclined names and between double consonants. The Greek is largely correct, although the article is used in place of the relative in one instance. The letter begins with an elaborate, rhetorical prooemium but is not otherwise marked by literary vocabulary. Terminal nu is replaced a number of times by a supralinear stroke, a documentary habit.

P.Neph. 2 (Figure 4.10) is written in a similar hand, but a more careful version with better spacing, until line 8, when the hand becomes markedly more rapid and cursive. It is hard to say for sure if this is the same writer changing styles or a different writer, but I think the latter. This is thus likely to be Paulos' own hand. Apart from the centering of the concluding salutations to the right, there is nothing remarkable about layout or vocabulary, although the Greek is correct; no diacritics are used.

²⁵ Kramer and Shelton (1987), p. 24.

The fragment contains approximately 25 lines of Greek text in a cursive script. The text is arranged in approximately 25 horizontal lines. On the left side, there are several vertical lines of text, likely serving as a margin or a list of items. The papyrus fragment is irregularly shaped with some missing parts at the top and bottom edges.

Figure 4.9 P.Neph. 1. With the permission of Universitätsbibliothek Trier

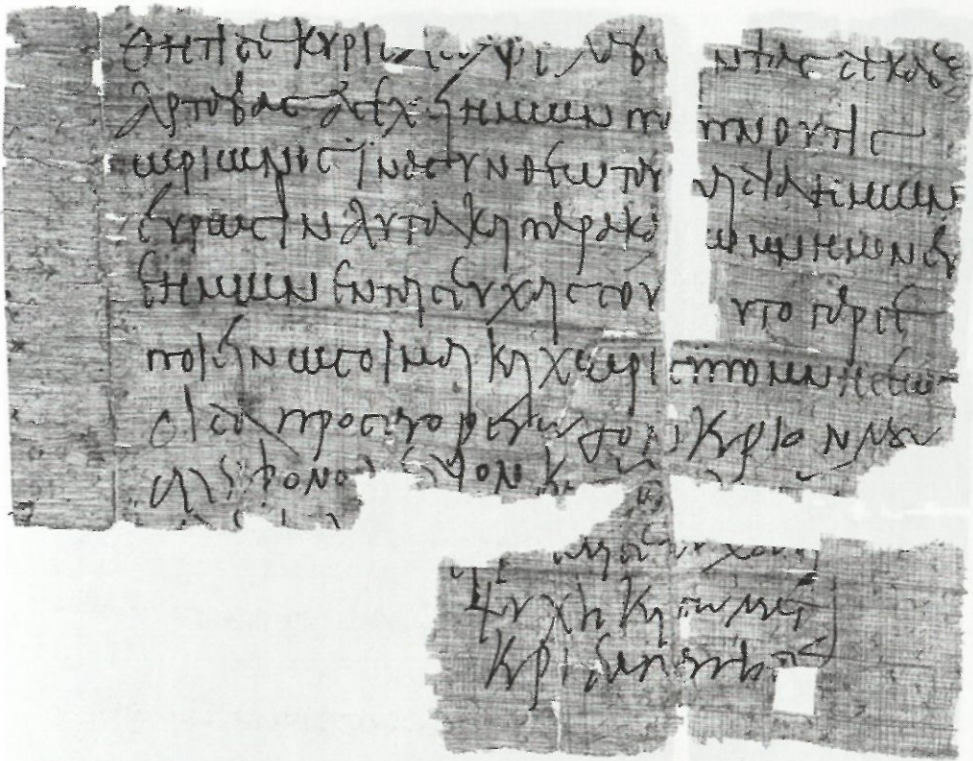


Figure 4.10 *P.Neph. 2*. With the permission of Universitätsbibliothek Trier

P.Neph. 3 (Figure 4.11) is written in a professional and very latinate hand that one might well assign to the fifth century or even the early sixth if one were deprived of context. In line 2, the names of recipient and sender are artistically spaced. The vocabulary is normal, polite business-speak, without elaborate Christian greetings; there are no diacritics, and no *nomina sacra*.

With *P.Neph. 4* (Figure 4.12) we once again have *nomina sacra* and an elaborate and rather stylish prooemium. On the other hand, the hand is a rapid business cursive with no pretense to style, the vocabulary is standard, and the left margin is used for overflow. Line 2 does, however, indent for the greetings.

P.Neph. 5 (Figure 4.13) is yet another distinctive hand, an upright cursive less rapid than *P.Neph. 4*. The writer has taken some care with layout, putting Paulos' name in line 2 to the right and similarly right-siding the concluding greetings. The adjective *μεστόν* (full) is divided between lines 11 and 12, with the division marked by an apostrophe;

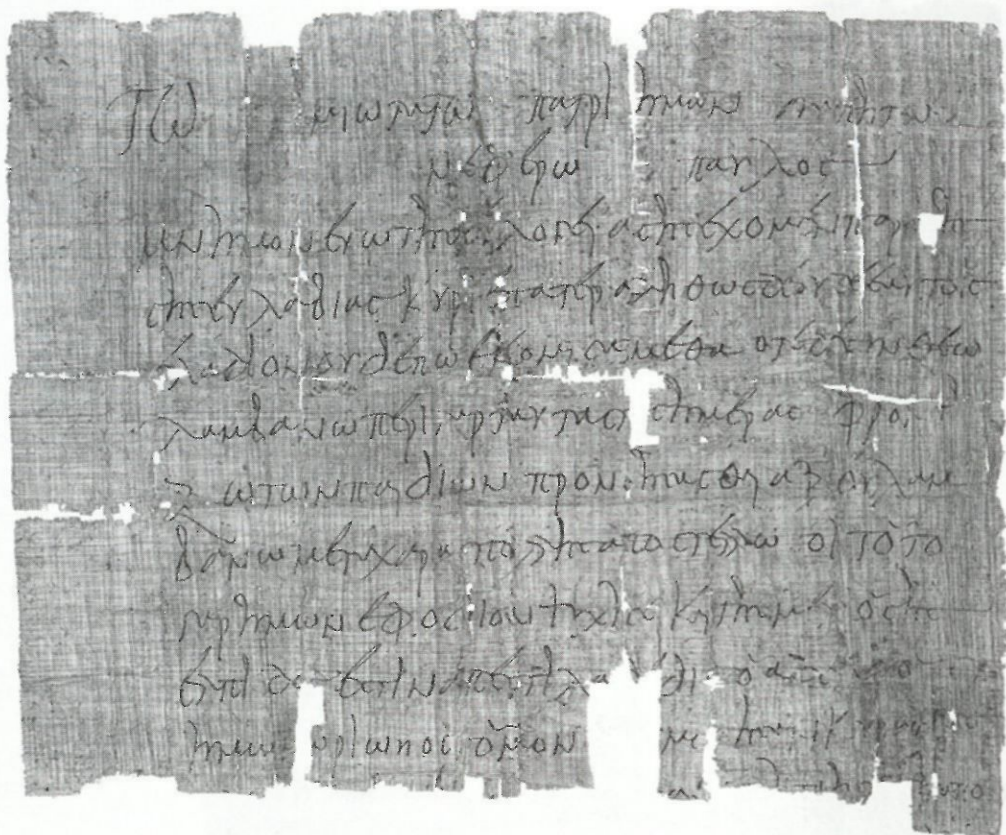


Figure 4.11 *P.Neph. 3*. © Institut für Papyrologie, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

the initially written feminine form with eta is corrected. Perhaps more interesting is that someone has corrected the initial iotacism throughout, turning iota into $\epsilon\iota$ by adding a supralinear epsilon to what was previously iota with diaeresis.

In *P.Neph. 6* (Figure 4.14) we again find a mixture of traits: a well-made hand with flourishes, especially with epsilon and lambda, and spacing in line 2; crasis occurs once. There is even a rather rare word, $\delta\upsilon\sigma\omega\pi\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ (to be importunate). Set against this there are many phonetic spellings, corrections, no diacritics, and text in the left margin.

The remaining texts of the group offer only minor variations on the emerging picture. Some of the writers clearly have the Christian education that allows them to use *nomina sacra* correctly; some employ a few diacritics. The quality of the Greek varies: only a few uncommon words are found. Handwriting ranges from what one would expect of the

Fragment of a papyrus scroll containing Greek text. The text is written in a cursive hand and is arranged in approximately 20 horizontal lines. On the left side, there is a vertical column of text written in a different script, likely Coptic. The papyrus fragment is irregularly shaped with some missing sections.

Figure 4.12 P.Neph. 4. © Institut für Papyrologie, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

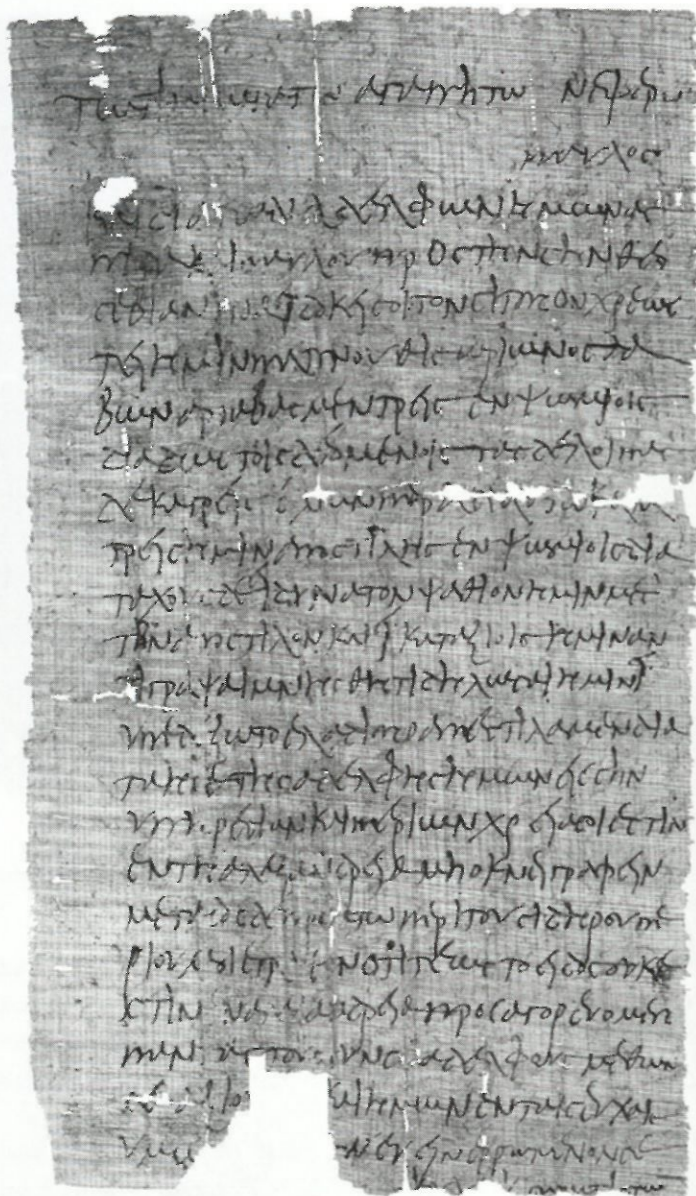


Figure 4.13 *P.Neph. 5*. © Institut für Papyrologie, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

secretary to a high government official writing competent but style-free business cursive. There are a few attempts at elegance in layout, but they are sometimes subverted by a failure to plan ahead and a consequent need to use the left margin.

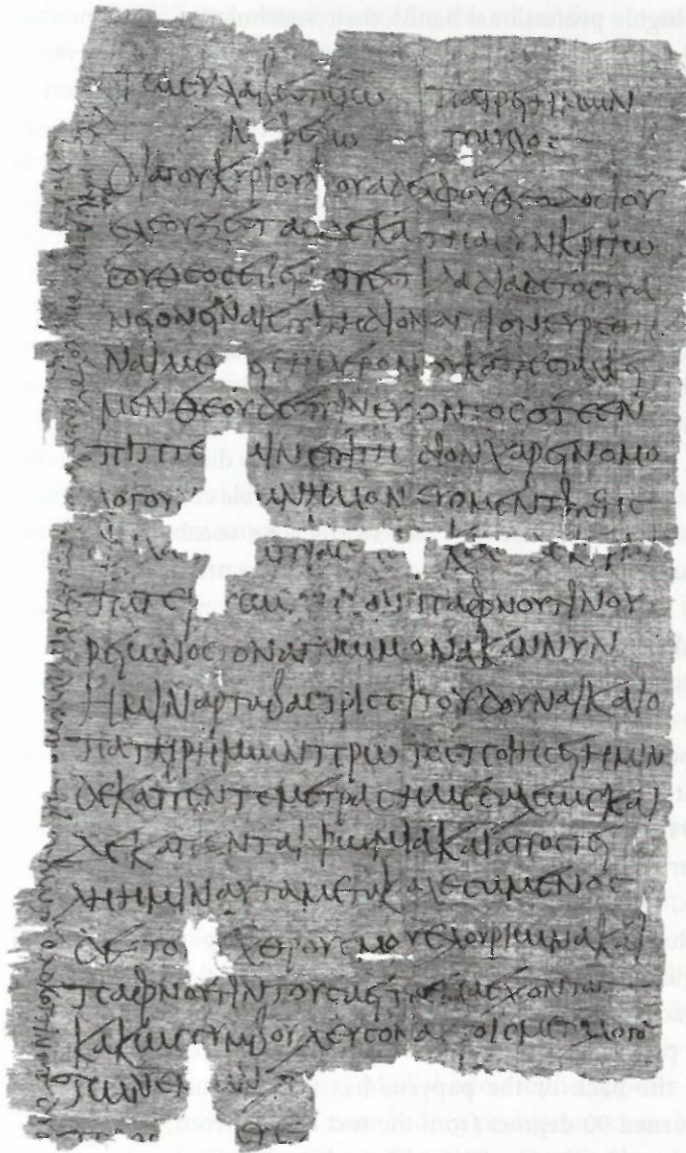


Figure 4.14 P.Neph. 6. With the permission of Universitätsbibliothek Trier

As a general judgment, one might say that Paulos' secretaries, and even the monks of the archive, seem to come from a background with more pretensions than the Sansnos dossier, whatever its origin.²⁶ They are more

²⁶ See Wipszycka 2000; Her concern is with the (in her view, little) likelihood that the religious texts in the codices are to be connected with the monastic setting from which the letters come.

likely to have highly professional hands, their vocabularies are somewhat more extensive, and they are more familiar with diacritic marks, even if these have a documentary rather than literary flair. That judgment is confirmed by an analysis of vocabulary and forms by Raffaele Luiselli, who concludes that puristic forms in Paulos' correspondence are fairly rare, and non-puristic ones more common.²⁷ Even the puristic items he cites are not particularly distinctive, and I would not be confident that the writers were at all conscious that these words had a higher status in epistolary diction.

Closely related to the Nepheros dossier, but slightly earlier, are the papyri published in *P.Lond.* VI. *P.Lond.* 1914 is written in a good, even stylish, bureaucratic cursive. As in many of the Nepheros papyri, line 2 is nicely spaced, but the left margin is used. Quite a few diacritics are found: *nomina sacra* abbreviation, apostrophe between double consonants, diaeresis, and one apostrophe between two words. The vocabulary is rather military in nature, rich but prosy and official. There are lots of irregular spellings and some corrections. Overall, the prose is not very graceful. There is one documentary-type abbreviation, for talents. Despite the high volume of diacritics, in sum, the character is much what we have seen with Nepheros.

The other papyri from the dossiers published in this volume have neither published plates nor online images. But I shall describe them briefly.

P.Lond. 1915, a letter to Paieous, is written in a neat, clear cursive, rather bilinear and very competent, but not at all stylish. It originally had neat margins, but a line in the left margin has spoiled the effect. Its diacritics include *nomina sacra*, apostrophes between gamma and kappa in $\delta\gamma'κον$ (*og'kon*) and $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\gamma'κασθῆναι$ (*anag'kasthēnai*), diaeresis, overlining to replace final nu in genitive plural endings, and one place where the writer, or perhaps a corrector, has replaced $\nu\kappa$ (*nk*) with $\gamma'κ$ (*g'k*). It is striking that the back of the papyrus has five additional lines at an orientation turned 90 degrees from the text on the front, and then two lines of problematic Coptic. The address is written in a more stylish fashion and with documentary-style abbreviation of a couple of words. The vocabulary is relatively ambitious, and there is a citation from Titus. The critical apparatus, however, is rich in corrections of spellings and forms: once again, not the harvest one would expect from someone with a grammarian's training.

²⁷ Luiselli 1999: 161–2.

P.Lond. 1917 was already noted by the editor for a number of exceptional features such as the great width of its single-column format, about 46 cm. The top margin slopes down to the right, but the end of line 1 is written above the end of the line. The left margin is preserved; there is no indentation. The hand is good-sized and only semi-cursive, a letter hand with many detached letters. The editor notes that *nomina sacra* appear written in full but overlined, very unusually, suggesting imperfect understanding of the habit. Diaeresis is used. The writer is very experienced and uses an extensive vocabulary in a vivid composition, but he has a very poor command of orthography and conventions. He appears to be far better trained in handwriting than in the Greek language, a characteristic found in some of the other letters of this dossier. Quite possibly we are dealing with dictation.

P.Lond. 1918 is also addressed to Paieous. The hand is a neat, well-made semi-cursive, very much a letter hand. The layout includes neat margins, but no other features of note as far as it is preserved. Diacritics include diaeresis and a *nomen sacrum*. The writer has little grasp of the use of the Greek cases or even gender, and his spelling has typical Egyptian interchanges like delta for tau and kappa for gamma. The language is that of a relatively pedestrian business letter, and in general one would call this a business-style letter with a minimum of ornament and distinctly second-rate Greek.²⁸

P.Lond. 1919, unusually in two columns, has large margins at top, left, and bottom, and a very regular intercolumniation; below the second column, there is a good deal of empty space. The right margin was occupied with line-fillers where needed. The hand, as the editor says, is extremely fluent and in an official vein, a practiced, slanting cursive. The editor describes the style as being "of the usual wordy and empty kind," but that is a matter of taste. *Nomina sacra* are fairly consistently executed, with one exception. Medial apostrophe appears in one case; there is no diaeresis. Some case-ending problems occur, but there are few corrections. One imagines that the writer is the secretary to a high-ranking cleric.

Even bearing in mind that we are obviously operating at a humbler level than in the case of the elite letter style represented by *P.Herm.* 5, the letters from monastic milieus do not impress by their literary character. Consider this short order in letter form on an ostrakon from Trimithis, *O.Trim.* 2.532 (Figure 4.15), datable to the sixth indiction, almost certainly December 3, 362.

²⁸ In line 6, for the editor's unknown Πετρίσιος read the commonplace Πετρίσιος.

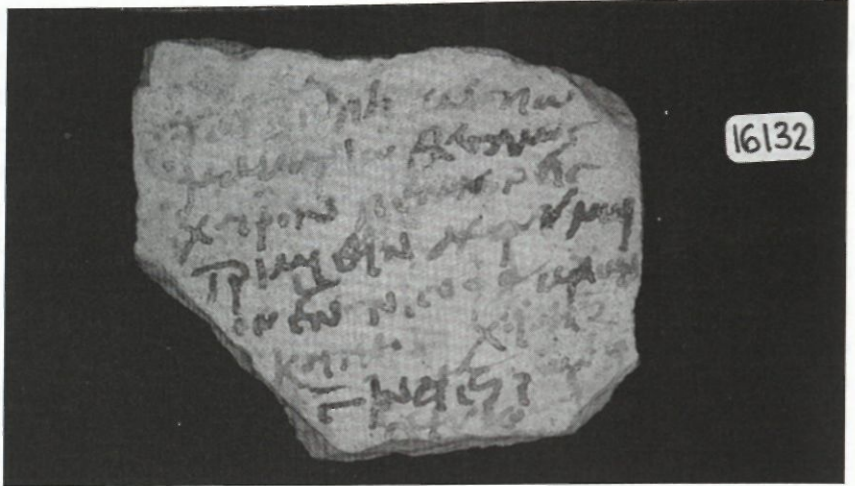


Figure 4.15 *O.Trim.* 2.532. © Roger Bagnall

Although resolutely documentary in its use of abbreviations in lines 5 and 7, it uses not only *diaeresis* but a rough breathing on $\epsilon\nu$ (*hén*) “one,” to distinguish it from the preposition $\epsilon\nu$ (*en*), “in.” The vocabulary and names indicate strongly that the writer and recipient are Christians, but the writer has evidently had enough literary training in his education that even in a purely business context and using a rapid business cursive, he can show off his knowledge. His Greek is more correct than the average, properly spelled and with endings throughout. He is not the equal of the secretary of the letter from Hermopolis, but he is probably to be seen as a cut above most or even all of the secretaries and perhaps authors of the monastic dossiers we have looked at.

Summary: Analysis of Examples

To summarize and generalize: the hands of these letters range from ordinary semi-cursive letter hands to more rapid cursives that would be at home in business documents, to rapid and even stylish handwritings characteristic of upper bureaucratic milieus. The official hands are not limited to the secretaries of Paulos in the Nephros archive: they occur even in the Paieous dossier. As I have noted, we can only rarely be sure if a letter is autograph or dictated; but just as we find writing styles strongly marked by book hands produced by secretaries to the Hermopolite educated elite, so the secretaries available to those of monastic circles seem to

have qualities broadly consistent with those the monks themselves display. That is, employer and secretary seem not to come in either case from greatly different backgrounds as far as their script goes.

With layout, although there is some variation, we also find considerable consistency. Most letters were laid out with proper margins; some but not all used indentation or intralinear spacing in the opening greetings; most placed the concluding wishes for health in a narrower block beginning to the right of the center of the lines and running up against the right edge. Writers did not hesitate to invade their carefully established left margins to place a concluding line or two, even though they could perfectly well have placed that on the back. All of these traits are widely found in letters of the period and require no very advanced education.

With diacritics we find again variety within a definable range. Most writers use correct forms of abbreviated *nomina sacra*, for which some Christian element in the training was requisite; but the monk Sansnos did not, one of Paieous' correspondents tried but failed to get it right, and Paulos' secretaries were inconsistent. Most but not all of the writers used diaeresis, mainly inorganic, and a fair number but far from all used medial apostrophe at times to separate double consonants or gamma from a following consonant. Occasionally we find an apostrophe to mark an undeclined word. Abbreviations belonging to documentary practice turn up frequently. Most curious is Serapion in *P.Neph.* 12, who uses the high dot to separate clauses in his series of greetings. This is the single diacritic with some literary flavor in all of these letters – and yet Sarapion also uses a Coptic letter in the middle of a name and employs one Coptic expression. His Greek in general is not very good.

It is perhaps in vocabulary and diction that we find the broadest range, from extremely pedestrian business style to a few letters indulging in rhetoric, generally of a specifically Christian epistolary type; a couple of letters have allusions to New Testament passages. None of this particularly bespeaks a literary education, rather perhaps specific training in writing Christian letters with flowery and complimentary introductions. Although vocabulary is an area to which I have not yet devoted as much detailed study as it would repay, it does not in general seem very puristic or high register.

Overall, there is practically no hint here that any of our writers went on from elementary education to the grammarian where they would have become intimately familiar with Greek prose and poetry, learning to imitate the classic exemplars and acquiring a taste for elegant book hands

while picking up rare words and the theory and practice of accentuation and aspiration, as the elite increasingly did from the third century on. And yet they had an education beyond the elementary. To explore this subject properly would require a monograph complementary to Cribiore's study and perhaps modifying some of its conclusions about some of the school exercises listed there. Included in such a study would also be a consideration of the important codex containing mainly geometry problems, metrological texts, and sample documents, which was seemingly found as part of the same discovery as the codex that included the Gospel of Judas. This mathematical codex,²⁹ which my colleague Alexander Jones and I are editing, belongs in my view to the world of practical or business education. This as yet insufficiently studied alternative (and more common) track to the literary one afforded business managers and tax collectors the training necessary to let them administer Egypt on behalf of the elite, allowing the latter to indulge their passion for rough breathings.

It is to this world that I think the monks and their friends and secretaries should be ascribed. Of course, the monastic movement did have some leaders with the higher education that we find with Antony or Shenoute.³⁰ Presumably many of the identifiable authors we find in Coptic literature did have a literary and even rhetorical education.³¹ And at the other end of the scale, surely there were plenty of monks who had no more than elementary education, even if Wipszycka is right about the drive for widespread literacy in the monastic world. But I would suggest that the core of those who wrote, at least, consisted of this stratum of people who when they came to the fork in the educational road took the direction leading to business management, not to elite leisure activities. This is a stratum located above the median in Egyptian society – they were not peasants – but it is not the stratum from which the governing class came. Some of its members did have literary interests; most, we must imagine, did not. As we can see, many of them had Egyptian as their first language and struggled to produce correct Greek. But they had aspirations.

²⁹ Part is housed in the Cotsen collection of the Princeton University Library, and part belongs to a private collector.

³⁰ See Muehlberger's contribution to this volume.

³¹ See Sheridan's contribution to this volume.