

# SCRIBES AND ANCIENT LETTERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PAULINE EPISTLES

*Lincoln H. Blumell*

*I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.*

—Romans 16:22

Of the twenty-seven books that make up the New Testament, thirteen directly bear the name of the Apostle Paul.<sup>1</sup> While Paul is the sender of these letters, and by implication the author, upon close examination it appears that Paul did not actually write some of these epistles. This is not a matter of pseudonymity, where someone else composed certain epistles and fraudulently passed them off as the Apostle's, and does not necessarily imply that it is inappropriate to call Paul the "author" of the thirteen epistles bearing his name. Rather, it has to do with issues directly related to their original writing and composition. With some of Paul's epistles, we can be certain that he did not actually sit down with a *calamus* (reed pen) and *charta* (parchment sheets) or papyrus and write them out. This can be established fairly easily from the reference, cited above, to Romans 16:22. At the end of this letter,

---

*Lincoln H. Blumell is a PhD student at the Centre for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto.*

we are informed that it was Tertius, not Paul, who actually wrote the main body of the letter, even though Paul claims at the beginning of the letter that he is the one sending it (see Romans 1:1–7). This suggests that Paul used a scribe, either lay or professional, to pen this letter.<sup>2</sup>

This insight has potentially far-reaching consequences for the way we ought to understand the processes that went into the writing of Romans and likely Paul's other letters. There are a number of possible scenarios for how Paul could have employed scribes given what we know about scribes and how they functioned in letter-writing capacities in antiquity. For example, Paul could have verbally dictated certain letters to a scribe, by either spelling out exactly what he wanted in a given letter or by merely providing the scribe with a general outline to follow. Or he could have provided the scribe with a written rough draft that was to be subsequently polished into a final draft to be sent.

The fact that Paul employed scribes is significant because it could help to resolve some of the tension that currently exists in contemporary scholarship over the "genuine" and "pseudonymous" Pauline epistles. For some time, scholars have been divided over the status of certain of Paul's letters, namely Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and the Pastorals (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), with the consensus being that these are not genuinely Pauline. The greater part of scholarship holds that these six letters were likely written sometime after Paul's death by a group of Paul's followers who presumed to write in his name. This assessment is based on a number of factors, such as the letters' distinctive vocabulary and literary style when compared with the seven "genuine" Pauline epistles (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon). Nevertheless, if scribes were used extensively in the original writing process of Paul's letters—a fact that many still fail to fully acknowledge—then such differences among the Pauline letters do not necessarily imply that they were not authored by Paul. In most cases, an individual scribe could imprint a distinct literary style on any document he or she wrote, which would greatly affect its form, vocabulary, and perhaps even content.

### SCRIBES AND LETTER WRITING

Before the age of movable type, printing presses, photocopiers, and word processors, all documents were written by hand. In the

Greco-Roman world, the class of people who were largely responsible for writing and preserving documents were most commonly referred to as “scribes.”<sup>3</sup> While their various tasks might often have been menial and tedious, especially if they were merely recopying decrees or tax receipts, their role was vital. They were largely responsible for producing and reproducing much of the written material that existed in ancient society. Scribes were used to copy and recopy certain texts, both literary and bureaucratic, to document registries or transactions, and to do a host of other literary activities, including recording speeches, taking dictation, and making notes. In most cases, the qualifications for a scribe were not extremely rigorous, as a basic education afforded the essential skills of the trade—aural comprehension, reading, and writing.<sup>4</sup>

In antiquity, scribes were an integral component of society and were employed by people from all social strata, from the emperor and wealthy aristocrat right down to the plebeian. Because even in the most ideal circumstances the literacy rate was not more than 10–15 percent of the population (including women and slaves), scribes were used extensively by the lower classes who could not write or read.<sup>5</sup> People would go to the local *agora* (marketplace) and hire a scribe to write such things as a business transaction, a will, a letter, or just about any other personal document they required.<sup>6</sup> Even those in the highest positions of government—an emperor, a senator, or a consul—employed the services of scribes in order to adequately deal with matters of business.<sup>7</sup> It is reported that Julius Caesar frequently employed scribes in his administration because it gave him the ability to “multitask” and deal with the all-pressing business required of him: “We are told that he used to write or read and dictate or listen simultaneously, and to dictate to his secretaries [scribes] four letters at once on his important affairs—or, if otherwise unoccupied, seven letters at once.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the hyperbole, it is clear that Caesar regularly, and perhaps somewhat proficiently, employed scribes in the letter-writing process.

Aside from both the government and the illiterate segments of society, who were largely compelled out of necessity to employ scribes, rich aristocrats commonly used them. However, in their case it was not always out of necessity but rather out of simple luxury and convenience because they had the means to do so.<sup>9</sup> Cicero, one of the most

accomplished and prolific writers of ancient Rome, details how he frequently used scribes when making notes, both composing and copying literature, or when he was too busy to write or was simply too lazy and not in the mood to pick up the pen.<sup>10</sup> With respect to the employment of scribes for the specific purpose of letter writing, Cicero is extremely illuminating, because many of his letters survive and because he periodically informs the addressee of a given letter that a scribe was employed to write it:<sup>11</sup> “I don’t think you ever before read a letter of mine which I had not written myself”; “The bare fact that my letter is by the hand of [an amanuensis (scribe)] will show you how busy I am”; “This letter is dictated as I sit in my carriage on my road to the camp.”<sup>12</sup>

For letter writing, a scribe could be used in a variety of ways, but three appear most prominent from the source material: recorder, editor, or substitute author.<sup>13</sup> At the most basic level, a scribe could simply serve as a kind of recorder. Either the author would provide the scribe with a written draft of a letter that was to be recopied in a neat hand or would dictate the letter verbally to the scribe. In the latter case, the scribe would be equivalent to a stenographer and would simply write out verbatim the *ipsissima verba* (very words themselves) of the speaker. This might sometimes mean that the speaker would have to slow down his or her speech in order for the scribe to accurately follow. Cicero once reported that when he was writing a letter to his friend Varro, he had to slow down his speech to the point of dictating “syllable by syllable” because he was employing an inexperienced scribe to write the letter.<sup>14</sup> While this slow dictation might ensure that everything in the letter was written exactly as the author intended, it also was very tedious and sometimes caused the speaker to lose his train of thought or grow excessively weary.<sup>15</sup>

However, evidence does exist that some scribes, those who were very skilled in their trade, could write at the normal speed of speech, *vive voce*, through the use of a kind of shorthand. Tachygraphy, shorthand where symbols were used in place of words, dates from the first century BC, and by the first century AD it seems to have been more widespread in society.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, it was still quite rare, and scribes possessing the ability to write shorthand, whether Latin or Greek, were few.

While the skill allowed one to record at the normal speed of speech, it too had its drawbacks as it did not allow the author, speaking orally, enough time to adequately ponder over what he had said.<sup>17</sup> In the cases where a scribe had recorded a dictated letter in shorthand, it would then be the scribe's responsibility to convert the shorthand rough draft into a final polished version that was devoid of symbols and employed normal spelling. Following the conversion, the scribe would present this draft to the author, who would then look it over to make sure that it accurately represented what he had said, or at least thought he said, when he originally dictated the letter. Depending on its length, it might take more than a day to complete the conversion and present it back to the author.

Another role a scribe could play in the writing of a letter was that of editor. However, depending on the skill of the scribe and the relationship between the author and scribe, the editorial responsibilities invested in the scribe might vary substantially. In the writing of the final draft, some scribes were permitted to make only minor changes to the author's rough draft, whether it was a written rough draft presented to the scribe or whether it had been a dictated rough draft from the author.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, some scribes were given slightly more power over the final draft of a letter, being permitted to tinker with its vocabulary, style, and form. Cicero repeatedly praises his trusted assistant and scribe Tiro because of his ability as a proficient editor—not only did he correct Cicero's mistakes in the final drafts he furnished, but he also provided him with many editorial improvements.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Cicero was delighted when he once found in a letter from Tiro that he had incorrectly used an adverb, because he could now boast that he was correcting his corrector.<sup>20</sup>

The last way in which a scribe could function in the letter-writing process was in the role of substitute author. Here the scribe was given considerable, and in a few rare cases total, control over the final draft of the letter. While the author would inform the scribe of the occasion or purpose of the letter and might possibly give him a general outline to follow, the actual writing of the letter was done by the scribe, and consequently the vocabulary, style, form, and even certain parts of the letter's content would have been solely the scribe's. Yet for all intents

and purposes, the letter was still considered to be authentically the sender's, as he was always expected to read over the final draft and ensure that it accurately conveyed what he intended.<sup>21</sup>

With certain types of letters—namely, business or official correspondence—it would have been common for scribes to exercise considerable control over their composition, given that they had a set form, vocabulary, and style. In these cases, the author might do no more than merely inform the scribe of the general purpose of the letter and leave everything else up to the scribe. This kind of procedure is illustrated in Cicero's letter to his brother Quintus, who was on his first Roman government appointment. Here Cicero reveals how Quintus had employed his trusted scribe Statius to check over his outgoing letters: "Statius has told me that they [letters] used to be brought to you [Quintus] already drafted, and that he would read them and inform you if they were inequitable, but that before he joined you letters were dispatched indiscriminately. And so, he said, there are collections of selected letters and these are adversely criticized."<sup>22</sup> Cicero reveals that Quintus had invested various scribes with total power over the composition of certain letters and that before Statius had come along, likely in the role of chief scribe to check for errors or inconsistencies, no one had apparently done this.<sup>23</sup>

In two rare examples from Cicero, we have him giving a scribe complete control over every aspect of the letter, not just its form or style but even its content. In 58 BC, when Cicero was banished from Rome, he wrote to his close friend and confidant Atticus and asked him to compose and send letters in his name to anyone he thought necessary so that he would not be forgotten during his banishment.<sup>24</sup> Ten years later, Cicero repeated the request and asked Atticus to write more letters: "I am so fearfully upset both in mind and body that I have not been able to write many letters; I have only answered those who have written to me. I should like you to write in my name to Basilus and to anyone else you like, even to Servilius, and say whatever you think fit."<sup>25</sup> What makes these examples so noteworthy, and in fact unusual, is that Cicero gives Atticus no guidelines whatsoever for the letters, nor does he intend to look them over before they are sent. It is usual, even when scribes were given considerable or almost total control over the

production of a letter, for scribes to be informed of the purpose or occasion of the letter and to have the final draft checked over and approved by the sender. While these last two examples from Cicero are exceptional, they do highlight the potential control that a scribe, or someone acting in the capacity of a scribe, could be given over the production of a letter in another's name.

Before moving on to the scribes in Paul's letters, one other important issue deserves brief treatment. How do we know when a scribe has been employed to write a letter? In certain of Cicero's letters, he directly informs the addressee that he was using a scribe because he was either busy, sick, traveling, or simply not in the mood to pick up the pen and write.<sup>26</sup> In some cases, scribes themselves would directly inform the addressee(s), as is the case with Tertius and Romans, that they were the ones actually writing the letter. This could be done in one of two ways. Periodically scribes would insert a set phrase at the end of a letter or business document to indicate that they had written the document on behalf of an illiterate person.<sup>27</sup> The other way scribes could make their presence known was through scribal remarks within the body of the text. For example, Cicero informs his friend Atticus that if Cicero's scribe Alexis wished to send Atticus greetings, then he really should put them in a letter of his own, instead of continually putting them in Cicero's letters to Atticus.<sup>28</sup>

Another way to determine the presence of a scribe in a letter is a change in handwriting. If the body of the letter was written in one hand and the signature of the author or either the conclusion or the postscript in another hand, then it can be safely assumed that a scribe was employed to write the main body of the text. It was common in letters written by scribes to have the sender sign the letter at the end and even add a few closing remarks or a postscript in his own hand.<sup>29</sup> There are a number of letters preserved in the Greek papyri from Egypt where this is the very case; the main body of the text is written in one hand and the signature at the end is written in a very different one.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, there are also examples of letters preserved among the Greek papyri where multiple letters exist from a single sender but are all written in a different hand, establishing the use of a scribe.<sup>31</sup> However, there is a significant problem with this approach. With most texts from antiquity,

we do not possess the autograph editions but only much later copies of the originals, making handwriting analysis impossible. This is certainly the case with all the texts of the New Testament. While Paul's letters were written in the mid-first century, we do not possess any of the autograph copies, and the earliest surviving collection we have is the Chester Beatty Papyrus (P<sup>46</sup>) that dates to about AD 200, which includes at best copies of copies of copies.<sup>32</sup>

Though all of the evidence surveyed in this section has been drawn from the Greco-Roman world, it should not be supposed therefore that Jews living in Judea employed markedly different writing habits or did not use scribes. There is considerable evidence that Jews had been employing scribes in letter-writing processes for some time.

The prophet Jeremiah on multiple occasions employed a scribe by the name of Baruch to compose various letters and oracles as he dictated them to him (see Jeremiah 36:4, 32; 45:1). Closer to the time of the New Testament, there is direct evidence in Judea for the employment of scribes in letter writing. The Bar-Kokhba letters that date to the early second century AD, discovered in the famous "Cave of Letters" along the Nahal Hever west of the Dead Sea in the early 1960s, establish this. Of the fifteen surviving letters sent by Bar-Kokhba, no two contain the same handwriting, establishing the use of a scribe, and some even mention the name of the scribe who wrote the letter on Bar-Kokhba's behalf.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, it is likely that Jews living in Judea in the first and subsequent centuries AD employed scribes when writing letters, or perhaps other documents, and like their Greek or Roman counterparts were probably able to go to the local village market and hire out a scribe to do so.<sup>34</sup>

### SCRIBAL EVIDENCES IN PAUL'S LETTERS

Though Paul never directly informs his addressees that he was employing a scribe for the writing of any of his letters, six of the thirteen letters bearing his name clearly indicate that a scribe was used to write a considerable part of the letter. As mentioned earlier, Romans 16:22 demonstrates that a scribe actually wrote that epistle: "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord."<sup>35</sup> Rather surprisingly, it is the scribe, and not Paul, who informs the Romans that he is the one



who actually wrote the main body of the letter.<sup>36</sup> What this strongly suggests is that Tertius was a close associate of Paul's, since a hired scribe, one who was simply procured for the sole purpose of penning the letter, would have scarcely taken such liberties. This may also suggest, given the close relationship between Paul and Tertius, that Tertius was not a professional scribe.<sup>37</sup> In all likelihood, given what we generally know about early Christian scribes, Tertius was not a professional but rather a Christian who had the necessary literary skills—he was well educated and could write.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, we are not able to determine precisely in what specific capacity Tertius functioned in writing Romans, whether he merely acted as a recorder or played a more significant role in the composition of the epistle. If he only served as a recorder, then it is very doubtful that he recorded Romans *viva voce*, as Paul dictated it or gave it in a liturgical setting. To do so would have required the expertise of a highly skilled professional scribe, one who was well trained in tachygraphy, and the literary sophistication of Romans strongly suggests against it originally being given as an extemporaneous dictation. Given that Tertius could exercise authority in Romans to introduce himself and greet the Romans, it is likely that he probably had a more significant role in the letter than merely a recorder and was almost certainly invested with some editorial responsibilities.

In none of Paul's other letters do any of his scribes intervene and directly identify themselves. Nevertheless, there is still clear evidence that scribes wrote considerable portions of other letters. In the letter to the Galatians, it is clear that Paul had a scribe write the body of the text while he wrote with his own hand only the last few verses. This can be shown from Galatians 6:11, "See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!" (New Revised Standard Version, hereafter cited as NRSV).<sup>39</sup> This refers to the fact that Paul has now picked up the pen to write the last few verses of the letter. Paul is explaining to the Galatians why a shift in handwriting has occurred, from smaller letters, written by a scribe, to larger letters, written by himself. The Galatian recipients would have noticed the change in handwriting, and Paul here is simply informing them why the change has occurred.

Not much, if anything, can be said concretely about the scribe employed to write the body of the letter to the Galatians. He does not identify himself, nor can it be determined in what capacity he functioned, whether as recorder or editor. However, a possible clue for Paul's employment of a scribe in this epistle might be found in Galatians 4:15. Here Paul seems to imply that he had some sort of eye problem that was bothering him when he visited the Galatians and may still have been troubling him when he wrote his letter to them, preventing him from writing himself. In a similar case, Cicero specifically reports in one of his letters that he was forced to dictate it to a scribe because his eyes were inflamed and he was unable to write.<sup>40</sup> If this is the case, this may also make further sense of Paul's remark that he wrote excessively "large letters."<sup>41</sup>

In four more of Paul's letters, he betrays the definite use of a scribe. At the very end of I Corinthians, Paul adds a postscript to the letter and tells the Corinthians that he is now writing in his own hand, clearly indicating the employment of a scribe for the main body of the letter: "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus" (NRSV, I Corinthians 16:21–24).

In verse 21, Paul makes it clear that he is now writing for himself, and the ensuing three verses work well as a postscript since the letter effectively ends in verse 20. In the postscript Paul signs the letter, signifying approval of its content and adding a few last words of exhortation. While it is virtually impossible to determine the exact role of the scribe in I Corinthians, it may be possible, given that I Corinthians was joint-authored by a certain Sosthenes, that Sosthenes was the one who actually wrote the body of the letter from I Corinthians 1:1 to 16:20.

In the letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, it is clear that Paul had employed a scribe to write the body of both epistles. In the very last verse of Colossians, Paul writes with his own hand in order to greet and admonish the Colossian Saints: "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you" (NRSV, Colossians 4:18). Likewise, in verse 19 of the letter to Philemon, Paul picks up the pen and adds the concluding remarks:

I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self.

Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ.

Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,

and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.  
(NRSV, Philemon 1:19)

An important similarity exists at this point between Colossians and Philemon; in both references, Paul makes it clear that he is sending the letter from prison. This might explain why Paul was employing a scribe—environmental factors necessitated it.

One other explicit reference exists within Paul's letters that establishes the use of a scribe; however, this is not as straightforward as the previous references, as it contains certain difficulties. At the conclusion of 2 Thessalonians, Paul writes: "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you" (NRSV, 2 Thessalonians 3:17–18).

In verse 17, Paul characteristically points out that he is the one actually writing the postscript, but then he follows up by somewhat enigmatically reporting that "this is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write." This last statement is to be understood in light of the forged letters that were circulating, presumably in Paul's name, that he warns the Thessalonians about earlier in the letter (2:2). But even in this context, it is still somewhat unclear exactly what Paul is saying. If Paul intended it to mean that he always added an explicit autographed postscript with a subscription to his letters in order to show their genuine authenticity, then what about the six letters that lack such an

explicit postscript with a subscription? Likewise, if he is simply telling the Thessalonians that all letters written specifically to them contain an explicit postscript, then why does 1 Thessalonians not contain one? Possibly the best way to understand this remark is that Paul may have always written the concluding remarks of each letter with his own hand, but he did not always explicitly point this out.<sup>42</sup> That is, he did not always leave his subscription, or signature, at the end of a letter or directly inform his addressee(s) that he was now picking up the pen to write either the conclusion or postscript. Surely the change in handwriting in the autograph version would signal to the recipient(s) that Paul was now writing, especially if they were aware of standard epistolary conventions.<sup>43</sup> If this interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 3:17 is correct, then Paul may well have employed a scribe for all of his letters.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PAULINE EPISTLES

While Paul's use of scribes for the composition of various epistles provides an important insight into the ways some or even all of his letters were written, it is more than a point of mere historical interest. As mentioned at the start of this paper, Paul's use of scribes has the potential to resolve much of the tension that exists in contemporary scholarship over the debate surrounding the "genuine" and "pseudonymous" Pauline epistles. For quite a while it has been argued in certain quarters of scholarship that some of Paul's letters were not actually written by him but rather by later Christians writing in his name.<sup>44</sup> Central to the argument that certain of Paul's are actually pseudonymous is the claim that these letters are stylistically different and tend to employ a different vocabulary than the seven undisputed letters bearing Paul's name.

On stylistic grounds, the argument most often marshaled against their authenticity has to do with their unique sentence structure. In these letters, sentences tend to be very long, complicated, and are marked with a lot of hypotaxis (the frequent use of subordinate clauses), whereas in the "genuine" letters the sentences tend to be quite short and are very concise and succinct. For example, the letter to the Colossians and the letter to the Ephesians are both marked with a number of long, complicated, hypotactic sentences. The first sentence in the

letter to the Colossians, after the introductory formula, covers five verses (see Colossians 1:3–8) and is made up of eighty-three Greek words.<sup>45</sup> In the epistle to the Ephesians, which contains about one hundred sentences in total, nine contain more than fifty words.<sup>46</sup> When these statistics are compared with those of the undisputed letters, a stark difference emerges. In the first four chapters of the epistle to the Romans, roughly commensurate in length to the epistle to the Ephesians, there are 481 sentences and only three longer than fifty words, and in the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians there are 621 sentences and only one longer than fifty words.<sup>47</sup>

The other kind of argument typically marshaled to support the claim that some of Paul's letters are pseudonymous has to do with the allegedly different diction they employ when compared with the "genuine" letters.<sup>48</sup> It is commonly advocated that the use of unusual vocabulary in these letters can demonstrate that Paul did not actually write them because he does not employ such vocabulary in his undisputed letters. In the Pastorals, where some 848 words are employed (excluding proper names), 306 of these words are not found in the remainder of Paul's letters, including 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians, and 175 words do not appear anywhere else in the New Testament.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, it is often pointed out that the epistle to the Ephesians contains an extremely high number of unique words, 116 to be exact, that cannot be found in any other of Paul's undisputed letters.<sup>50</sup>

While such statistical studies are interesting in that they do highlight literary trends and differences among the various Pauline letters, much of the force of such arguments is completely blunted when one recognizes and acknowledges that Paul employed scribes frequently in his letter writing. Rather than assigning pseudonymity to certain letters, it becomes much more likely that the hand of an individual scribe is at play and ultimately responsible for the various literary differences. As this chapter has demonstrated, depending on how a scribe was used in the letter-writing process, he could have greatly affected the consequent style and vocabulary used in the final draft of a letter. Therefore, scholarly attempts to distinguish between "genuine" and "pseudonymous" Pauline letters based on criteria of vocabulary, style, or other statistical

data might prove very little about the actual authenticity of certain letters except the kind of Greek preferred by Paul's different scribes. Likewise, the presence of scribes in Paul's letters should also prevent us from reading too much into every linguistic variation in Paul, making it out to be some nuanced theological difference.

## CONCLUSION

In six of the thirteen epistles bearing Paul's name, there is explicit evidence that he employed the hand of a scribe to write the main body of the epistle: Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Thessalonians. It is also quite possible, given the evidence in 2 Thessalonians, that Paul employed scribes in the other letters bearing his name and that in these letters he left only an "unsigned postscript."<sup>51</sup> But to undertake an analysis of the possible scribal influences in these other letters where there is not explicit evidence for the use of scribes would unduly extend the scope of this chapter well beyond its present objectives and confines. The primary purpose of this analysis has only been to demonstrate that Paul did in fact use scribes and that their employment could have had a significant impact on the final form of certain epistles affecting their consequent vocabulary, style, and perhaps even content.

In light of how Cicero and others in antiquity employed scribes for the specific purpose of letter writing, a variety of possible scenarios exist for the ways in which Paul could have used his scribes. On one extreme, Paul could have dictated his letters to his scribes very meticulously, making sure that the *ipsissima verba* he spoke were written down carefully. On the other extreme, he could have given his scribes either a written or verbal outline of the main points he wished to express and expected them to flesh it out into the final form of the letter. Assuming that Paul's scribes were close friends and associates, as was the case with Tertius, it might not seem unreasonable that they were given substantial control over the final draft of the letter. But regardless of the capacity in which Tertius or any other of Paul's scribes functioned, Paul was ultimately responsible for the letters written in his name. He checked over the final draft, as can be seen from the presence of either his subscription or postscript at the end of each letter, and made sure that they

accurately conveyed what he intended. Therefore, despite Paul's rather extensive use of scribes, for all intents and purposes the letters bearing his name should be regarded as authentic Pauline letters.

---

## NOTES

1. Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. In the opening verse of each of these epistles, Paul is referred to as the sender. As for the Epistle to the Hebrews, strictly speaking, it is anonymous as no name, either that of the sender or the author, is given within the body of the work.

2. 1 Peter 5:12, like Romans 16:22, reveals that Peter used a scribe by the name of Silvanus to pen this letter. This is the only other instance besides Romans 16:22 in the New Testament where a scribe is specifically named as the writer of a letter.

3. While the Greek term *grammateus* is most often translated as "scribe," it can mean a number of different things, from a mere copyist of texts to a government official (see Acts 19:35). Latin is more technical with its vocabulary and employs three different words for "scribe," *scriba* (public or official secretary), *librarius* (a private secretary, also *amanuensis*), and *notarius* (a shorthand writer). No specific distinctions will be drawn in this paper between the different Latin terms for "scribe," because all refer to some literary aspect.

4. Plutarch, *Crassus*, 2.6; unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from ancient authors are from the English translation in the Loeb Classical Library. Raffaella Cribiore gives an excellent assessment of the objectives of an ancient education. She specifically states that she is principally interested in investigating the acquisition of writing by beginners and not scribes (Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996], 28). Nevertheless, this work is still very helpful for the kind of literary skills a scribe would naturally acquire through formal education (see also Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 53–75). P.Oxy. 724 (AD 155) shows how in some situations someone might take on an apprenticeship as a scribe to improve his or her literary abilities. For papyrological publications, I have followed the standard abbreviations given in J. F. Oates and others, *Checklist of Editions of Greek Papyri and Ostraca*, 2d ed., BASP Supplements, 1 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), and updated editions online at <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>.

5. William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Harris has combined literary, inscriptional, and papyrological evidence from the ancient world with modern anthropological and sociological studies to demonstrate that the necessary preconditions for mass literacy were not present in ancient society, even in the most ideal circumstances in classical Athens. For literacy rates among Jews, see Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2001).

6. The evidence for scribes' servicing the illiterate segments of society in this way is most abundant in Egypt, where the papyrological record preserves numerous examples. These texts can be identified because they contain illiteracy formulae that specifically point out that they were written by a scribe for someone who was illiterate (e.g., P.Oxy. 264 [AD 54]).

7. Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 21; *Titus*, 6.

8. Pliny, *Natural History*, 7.91.

9. Roger Bagnall states, "One might almost say that there was a direct correlation between the social standing that guaranteed literacy and the means to avoid writing. But this should not be taken to mean that men of this standing did not do a fair amount of writing all the same" (*Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* [London: Routledge, 1995], 25).

10. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 2.23, 5.12, 7.13a, 8.13, 8.15, 12.32.1, 13.32; *Letters to His Friends*, 11.32.2; *Letters to His Brother Quintus*, 2.2, 2.16, 3.3.

11. The following three references to Cicero are taken from Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 6.

12. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 2.23; 4.16.1; 5.17.1.

13. I have adapted and slightly modified the various scribal capacities in the letter-writing process from E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe, vol. 42 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), 23–53.

14. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 13.25.3. In this same passage, Cicero claims that his usual scribe, Tiro, "can follow whole sentences."

15. Quintilian, a professor of rhetoric in the late first century AD, sometimes complained that a slow scribe prevented him from attaining full concentration when dictating (*Institutio Oratoria*, 10.3.20).

16. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 26–43; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 9–11. Some important ancient references to shorthand include Plutarch, *Cato Minor*, 23.3–5; *Caesar*, 7.4–5; Seneca, *Epistles*, 14.208.

17. Quintilian complains that a scribe who is able to write at the speed of speech can sometimes cause the speaker to move along too hastily without giving necessary forethought for what he was saying (*Institutio Oratoria*, 10.3.19–20).

18. For a good example of a rough draft of an ancient letter, one that will have to be edited before it is sent, see P.Tebt. 13 (114 BC).

19. Cicero, *Letters to His Friends*, 16.4.3; 16.11.1.

20. Cicero, *Letters to His Friends*, 16.17.1. "But look you here, sir, you who love to be the 'rule' of my writings, where did you get such a solecism as 'faithfully ministering to your health'?"

21. It needs to be emphasized that even when scribes were given much control over the writing of a given letter, it was not the scribe that was considered the real author but rather the sender named in the letter. This was because it was that person's responsibility to read over the final draft. If there were any errors or inaccuracies, the sender was to catch them in the final reading and make sure that



they were corrected because he bore ultimate responsibility for the letter's content.

22. Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus*, 2.8.

23. Thus, one may rightly doubt whether certain routine correspondences from antiquity are in fact directly from the pen of the author.

24. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 3.15.8: "If there is anyone to whom you think a letter ought to be sent in my name, please write one and see that it is sent."

25. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 11.5.

26. Cicero, *Letters to His Friends*, 11.32.2; *Letters to Atticus*, 5.12, 7.13, 8.15, 12.32.1, 13.32; *Letters to His Brother Quintus*, 2.2.1, 2.16, 3.1.

27. P.Oxy. 264 (AD 54). This was done most often in legal documents or business transactions where it was necessary to specify that a scribe was employed. Although the illiteracy formulae hardly appear in private letters, there can be no doubt that scribes were sometimes used in the writing of these letters (see P. Lond. 948, 962, 968, 1122; P.Oxy. 3314). Herbert C. Youtie, "ΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΕΥΣ: The Social Impact of Illiteracy in Graeco-Roman Egypt," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 17 (1975): 209, points out that it was "common practice for professional scribes to remain anonymous."

28. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 5.20.

29. Gordon J. Bahr, "The Subscriptions in the Pauline Letters," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968): 27–41; Cicero, *Letters to His Friends*, 2.13.3, "The postscript in your own handwriting gave me a twinge of pain. What's this? 'Curio is now defending Caesar'"; *Letters to His Friends*, 8.1.1, where Cicero claims to have received a letter from Pompey where the postscript was in his own hand. P.Oxy. 3314 (fourth century AD) is a private letter written by a scribe but where the concluding remarks are in the hand of someone else, presumably the sender.

30. P.Rainer 215; P. Lond. 897 (AD 84); P. Lond. 1173 (AD 125); B.G.U. 37 (AD 50); S.B. 4639 (AD 209).

31. P. Lond. 948, 962, 968, 1122 are four letters written from a certain Heraclides to Hermonius during the mid-third century AD. Although they are all sent by Heraclides, each one is clearly written by a different hand. P. Amh. 131 and 132 are both letters from a certain Sarapion written during the reign of Hadrian at the beginning the second century AD. The first letter (131), to his wife, is written in a very nice hand, while the second letter (132), written to his son, is in a terrible hand. He likely had a scribe compose the letter to his wife and wrote the letter to his son by himself.

32. There are still other ways to detect the presence of a scribe within a letter, but these criteria are more difficult to gauge and yield less certain conclusions because they are often based on implicit indicators that cannot often yield very definite answers (see Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 80–97).

33. Yigael Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome* (New York: Random House, 1971), 124–28. P. Yadin 50 (Aramaic), P. Yadin 54 (Aramaic), P. Yadin 63 (Aramaic), all mention the name of the scribe who wrote on behalf of Bar-Kokhba. Likewise, in other letters from the Nahal Hever area that also date to the early second century, the presence of scribes

can be detected since the writing style of the valediction or subscription at the end of a letter differs markedly from the body of the letter. In P. Yadin 52 (Greek), the valediction is written in a hand that is clearly different from the body of the letter.

34. Martin Goodman, "Texts, Scribes and Power in Roman Judea," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. Alan K. Bowman and Greg D. Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 102, states, "It was assumed in rabbinic texts that scribes (*soferim*) could be found in village markets with blank forms to record loans and sales."

35. What Tertius exactly meant by the phrase "in the Lord" is somewhat unclear. Did he mean that he was writing as Paul's scribe? While "Lord" or "master" often refers to Christ in Paul's letter, here it seems to suggest Paul. Therefore the verse might best be rendered as "I, Tertius, who write the letter in the service of my master [Paul], greet you." On the other hand, "in the Lord" could mean he sends his greetings literally "in the Lord," which sounds more Pauline (see 1 Corinthians 1:31; 4:17; 7:22, 39; 9:1f; 11:11; 15:58; 16:19; 2 Corinthians 10:17; Ephesians 1:15; 2:21; 4:17; 5:8; 6:1, 10, 21; Philippians 1:14; 2:19, 24, 29; 3:1; 4:1f, 4, 10; Colossians 3:18; 4:7, 17; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:8; 5:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:4; Philemon 1:16, 20).

36. It would appear that Tertius ends at 16:24 and that Paul likely wrote 16:25–27 with his own hand.

37. By professional scribe, I mean one who was specifically trained in the vocation and was paid for his literary services.

38. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 71; Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, 16. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 170–73, believes that Tertius could have been a professional scribe who was trained in tachygraphy and that he might have recorded Romans *viva voce*. However, he also notes, "The odds are against such a luxury [professional scribe] for the majority of Paul's letters" (195). In his more recent work, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition, and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 77, 92, Richards still maintains the possibility that Tertius was a professional scribe but also acknowledges that they were rare, expensive, and even criticizes those scholars who argue that certain of Paul's letters were written *viva voce* (30–31, 92). Beyond Tertius's mere literary skills, Paul's choice to employ him as scribe for this particular epistle may also have had something to do with Tertius's relationship to the Romans, especially since at the time of the composition of Romans Paul had not yet been to Rome.

39. I have deliberately used the New Revised Standard Version rendering of Galatians 6:11 instead of the King James Version because it more accurately reflects the meaning of the Greek. The KJV reads, "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand," completely missing the real sense of the verse.

40. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 8.13.1.

41. Paul's reference to "large letters" might also refer to a sloppy, unprofessional hand.

42. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 112, believes that 1 Thessalonians 5:27–28 is an “unsigned” postscript.

43. Sometimes when a scribe was used for the composition of a letter, the sender would not sign his or her name at the end of a letter but only add a postscript or a few final words of exhortation. This is the case with P.NYU 25, a private Christian letter from the early fourth century, where the final farewell is written in the hand of the sender but unsigned. He writes in his own hand at the end of the letter, “Goodbye, I pray for you often.”

44. Considerable ink has been spilt over the authorship of the disputed letters. For a concise and up-to-date analysis of the various arguments, see Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapter 23, “In the Wake of the Apostle: The Deutro-Pauline and Pastoral Epistles,” 372–94.

45. I have not included definite articles in this number. Including definite articles, this sentence would be 102 words long.

46. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 383.

47. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 383.

48. For a concise chart laying out the percentages of different vocabulary employed by the various Pauline epistles, see John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), chart 11–9.

49. Norman Perrin, *The New Testament, an Introduction: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 264–65.

50. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 383.

51. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 112.