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ARTICLE

This Hand is Validation: Philemon as a Pauline Holograph

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Abstract

On five occasions in Pauline literature, the author claims to write in their own hand. In three of the five instances, the autograph is reserved for the final greeting and the greeting alone. In Galatians 6.11 and Philemon 19, however, Paul writes more than the letter's greeting in his own hand, as the comment about his autograph appears well before the closing salutations. This article engages one of these texts, Philemon, and argues that it was written entirely in Paul's hand. The letter was a Pauline holograph. To make this argument, the article first assesses the 'cheirographic rhetoric' of Philemon 19. Paul alludes to a type of documentary writing, the cheirograph, that recorded various sorts of financial proceedings. Paul's autographic guarantee recalls validation statements that were integral to this genre of text. Comparanda from the non-literary papyri show that when an author of a cheirograph called specific attention to their own handwriting, the entire document was customarily written in their own hand. The article then turns to the personal nature of Philemon and the abundance of second-person singular forms, arguing that there was a strong preference that personal letters like Philemon be handwritten in Paul's context. Taken together, these two arguments demonstrate that Paul's short letter to Philemon was more likely to be handwritten than dictated.

Keywords: Paul; Philemon; writing; composition; handwriting; dictation; autograph; cheirograph; holograph; documentary papyri; letters

1. Introduction

On five occasions in Pauline letters, the author claims to write in their own hand: 1 Cor 16.21, Col 4.18, 2 Thess 3.17, Gal 6.11, and Philemon 19. In the first three, the same verbless sentence is used to indicate that only the letter's final greeting is autographic: 'The greeting is in my hand: Paul's' (ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ Παύλου).[1] In Gal 6.11 and Philemon 19, Paul claims to have written in his own hand with the aorist verb ἔγραψα ('I wrote'). Paul writes more than the letter's greeting in his own hand in these cases, as the comment about his autograph appears well before the closing salutations. It is uncertain, however, whether or not Paul wrote more than Galatians' or Philemon's closing section in his own hand.

In this article, I argue that Philemon was written entirely in Paul's hand. The letter was a Pauline holograph.[2] Others have raised the possibility but only in passing. As early as

[1] In 2 Thess 3.17 a relative clause is added: 'which is a sign in every letter; I write this way' (ὅ ἐστιν σημεῖον ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ· οὕτως γράφω). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[2] As its etymology suggests, a holograph is a text written wholly in the hand of its named author. An allograph, in contrast, is a text physically inscribed by a person who is not the named author.

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1879, J. B. Lightfoot wrote that Philemon was 'quite exceptional' because Paul 'wrote the whole letter with his own hand'.[3] More recently, Peter Arzt-Grabner, states that it is 'entirely conceivable' that the entire letter is autographic.[4] Most scholars, however, presume that Paul physically inscribes, at most, only the last seven verses of the letter, Philemon 19–25. Remarking on Paul's guarantee, 'I, Paul, wrote in my hand: I will repay it' (ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρί, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω), they suggest that Paul puts reed pen to papyrus as a rhetorical flourish.[5] In contrast, I argue that writing the entire letter in his own hand would have been more rhetorically effective than dictating the majority of it and handwriting the final lines.

The argument proceeds in two steps. First, I engage the cheirographic rhetoric of Philemon 19. In this verse, Paul alludes to a type of documentary writing, the cheirograph, that recorded various sorts of financial proceedings. Paul's autographic guarantee recalls validation statements that were integral to this genre of text. When an author called specific attention to their own handwriting in a cheirograph, the entire document was usually written in their own hand. If Paul is evoking the cheirographic genre in Philemon, then writing the entire text in his own hand was the most potent way to do so.

Second, I demonstrate that there was a preference for personal letters in Greco-Roman antiquity to be written in the sender's own hand. This preference for autographic letters is found not only amongst the literary elites in Paul's context but also in fictional letters and everyday papyri letters. As a personal letter addressed to a specific named individual, the expectation would have been for Paul to write Philemon in his own hand.

2. This Hand is Validation: Cheirographs and Idiographs in the Papyri

Paul's handwriting in Philemon 19 is frequently labelled a 'promissory note' or 'cheirograph' (χειρόγραφον).[6] Cheirographs were financial guarantees of varying sorts similar to a receipt. They were a popular tool for documenting transactions from the second century BCE into the Byzantine period.[7] While cheirographs record many kinds of fiscal proceedings, their most common function was to confirm the reception of a loan.

Cheirographs possessed stable generic features. As with any genre, these elements were simultaneously fixed and flexible. Not all appear in every cheirograph in the same way, and conventions vary between documents. Nonetheless, the following seven are regular features found in extant papyri cheirographs.

1. **Names:** The document begins following the salutation conventions of letters with the name of the person receiving funds in the nominative case followed by the name of the person remitting the funds or goods in the dative.

[3] J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: Macmillan, 1879) 342.

[4] Peter Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) 242.

[5] F. F. Bruce writes, 'At this point, handcuffed though he was, Paul took the pen from the amanuensis and wrote out this promissory note, signing it with his name' (*The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 220). Similar claims are made by Scot McKnight, James D. G. Dunn, and G. K. Beale (McKnight, *The Letter to Philemon* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) 210; Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 339; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019) 426).

[6] Bruce, *Epistle to the Colossians*, 220; Murray J. Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Colossians and Philemon* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 237; McKnight, *Letter to Philemon*, 105; G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 426.

[7] Uri Yiftach-Firanko, 'The *Cheirographon* and the Privatization of Scribal Activity in Early Roman Oxyrhnchos' in *Symposion 2007. Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte* (ed. Edward Harris and Gerhard Thür; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008) 325.

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2. **Greeting:** A greeting appears after the names in the form of the infinitive χαίρειν ('greetings!') following letter-writing conventions.[8]
3. **Confirmation of Reception:** The debtor provides an account of what has been received. This statement typically begins with the phrase ὁμολογῶ ἔχειν παρὰ σοῦ ('I admit to having received from you').
4. **Guarantee of Repayment of Goods**: The debtor indicates that they will repay what has been lent within an established timeframe. The normal verb for repayment within the allotted period is ἀποδώσω ('I will repay').
5. **Guarantee of Repayment of Interest:** After stating that they will repay the initial loan in a prescribed amount of time, the debtor indicates what the penalty shall be if they fail to do so. They further guarantee that the penalty will be paid, usually with the verb ἐκτείσω ('I will pay in full'). As a rule, this verb is used for payment of interest and not for the initial sum that was loaned.
6. **Validation Statement:** The writer validates the document in its entirety with a flexible formula, the core of which is the phrase ἡ χεὶρ ἥδε κυρία ('this hand is validation'). The formula varies depending on whether the 'the hand' is the debtor's own or someone else's.
7. **Date:** Because cheirographs were legal documents, the specific date on which they were written is provided.

These seven elements are exemplified by P. Oxy. 33.2677.[9] The document is a cheirographic template, a plug-and-play model for creating cheirographs. The text does not date itself, but its features align with what was common in the first century BCE through the second century CE:[10]

> τίς τινος τοῦ τινος μητ(ρός) τινός ποθέν τινί τινος τοῦ τινος μητ(ρός) τινός ποθεν χαίρειν. ὁμολογῶ ἔχειν παρὰ σοῦ διὰ χ[ει]ρ[ὸ]ς ἐν παραθέσει ἀργ(υρίου) (δραχμὰς) ποσὰς γί(νονται) (δραχμαὶ) ποσαί· ἃς κ[α]ὶ [ἀ]ποδώσω σοι ὀπηνίκα ἐὰν αἱρῇ ἀνυπε[ρθ]έτως. εἰ δὲ μή, ἐκτείσω σοι κατὰ τὸν [τῶν] παραθηκῶν νόμον γεινομένης σοι τῆς πράξεως ἔκ τε ἐμοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων μοι πάντων καθάπερ ἐκ δίκης. κυρία ἡ χεὶρ τῆς παραθήκης οὖσά μου τοῦ τινος ἰδιόγραφος [δισ]σὴ γραφεῖσα πανταχῇ ἐπιφερομένη καὶ παντὶ τῷ ὑπὲρ σοῦ ἐπιφέροντι. (ἔτους)

> Someone, son of someone, son of someone whose mother is someone from somewhere. To someone, son of someone, son of someone whose mother is someone from somewhere. Greetings! I admit to having received from you through a hand in the registry such-and-such money which totals such-and-such an amount which I shall repay to you as soon as you should make the request. If I do not, I will pay in full in accordance with the deposit law, whatever the exaction of debt is, from my property and from all that I own, just as it is required. The hand, which is

[8] Yiftach-Firanko states that *cheirographs* use the greeting χαίρειν 'as a rule' ('*Cheirographon*', 325).

[9] Throughout this article, I have chosen not to normalise the Greek of the documentary papyri. Thus, non-standardised spellings appear regularly. Unless otherwise noted, Greek texts are from the Duke Database of Documentary Papyri and accessed via https://papyri.info. Square brackets indicate what has been constructed from a lacuna, and parentheses indicate the full word or phrase of abbreviations. In most cases, there are not published English translations of the Greek text, and the translations are my own.

[10] Accessed from https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;33;2677. As far as I know, there is no other complete English translation of the document, though Scott Bucking has re-presented the Greek text, translated the first two lines into English, and has offered a brief commentary on the orthography of the text in 'On the Training of Documentary Scribes in Roman, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Egypt: A Contextualized Assessment of the Greek Evidence', *ZPE* (2007) 234.

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> mine – the autograph of so-and-so – written twice over is validation of receipt in whatever place it might be brought and to anyone you might bring it. (Year)

All the cheirographic elements inventoried above are present in this template text, and each one uses the formulae and terms that commonly appear in other cheirographs. Especially relevant for Philemon is the emphasis on the debtor's handwriting in the validation statement. The 'hand' has several grammatical modifiers: 'which is mine' (οὗσά μου), 'that of so-and-so' (τοῦ τινος), 'an autograph' (ἰδιόγραφος).

This emphasis accords with the etymological sense of the word cheirograph: a hand-written document.[11] In theory, cheirographs were to be written by the debtor themself. This was not always the case in practice, however, especially as the form waxed in popularity. Cheirographs could be written by other individuals, often scribes. Uri Yiftach-Firanko names such documents 'allographic cheirographs'.[12] This class of cheirograph usually included below it, in the same document, a 'hypograph' (ὑπογραφή), which was an abbreviated account of the transaction. The hypograph was preferably written in the debtor's own hand. If the debtor was illiterate, another individual could write for them at their request. This person, however, was not the person who composed the cheirograph. Hypographs under cheirographs are characteristically written in a second hand.

In contrast to allographic cheirographs, Yiftach-Firanko calls cheirographs written wholly in the debtor's own hand 'holographs' or 'holographic cheirographs'.[13] The validation statement in the template above is only relevant for this type of cheirograph, and it was amended for allographic cheirographs. In extant cheirographs, there are validation statements that closely match the template from the text above, and there are validation statements that diverge from it. I offer examples of both, beginning with the former. The following three cheirographs are exemplary, but there are many other validation statements that include the phrase 'my autographic hand' (ἡ ἰδιόγραφος μου χείρ) or a similar locution.[14]

P. Oxy. 33.2677 (Template text)

κυρία ἡ χεὶρ τῆς παραθήκης οὗσά μου τοῦ τινος ἰδιόγραφος [δισ]σὴ γραφεῖσα πανταχῇ ἐπιφερομένη καὶ παντὶ τῷ ὑπὲρ σοῦ ἐπιφέροντι.
'The hand, which is mine – the autograph of so-and-so – written twice over is validation of receipt in whatever place it might be brought and to anyone you might bring it.'

P. Mert. 1.14, ll. 18–20 (103 CE):[15]

κυρία ἡ ἰδιόγραφός μου Διογένους τοῦ καὶ Σαραπίω(νος) χεὶρ πανταχῇ ἐπιφερομένη καὶ πάντι τῷ ἐπιφέρ[ο]ντι.
'My autographic hand, that of Diogenes, also called Sarapion, is valid in every place it is brought and to every person it is brought.'

[11] LSJ, s.v. χειρόγραφος, ον.
[12] Yiftach-Firanko, 'Cheirographon', 326–7.
[13] Yiftach-Firanko, 'Cheirographon', 326–7.
[14] These include P. IFAO 1.14 (140 CE), P. Oslo. 2.43 (141 CE), P. Oxy. 14. 1719 (204 CE), P. Oxy. 17.2134r (170 CE), and P. Oxy. 62.4335 (128 CE); P. Oslo. 2.40b (150 CE); P. Hamb. 1.70 (145 CE); P. Oxy. 49.3493 (175 CE), P. Oxy. 14.1710 (148 CE).
[15] Lines 18–20. Accessed from https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.mert;1;14.

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PSI. 12.1253, ll. 19–21 (186 CE):[16]

κυ[ρ]ία ἡ ἰδιόγραφός μου χεὶρ τοῦ Σπαρτᾶ δι[σ]σὴ γραφεῖσα παν[τ]αχῇ ἐπιφερομένη καὶ παντὶ τῷ ὑπὲρ σοῦ ἐπιφέροντι.
'My autographic hand, that of Sparta, written twice, is valid in every place it is brought and to every person you bring it.'

P. Hamb. 1.70, ll.24–29 (145 CE):[17]

τὸ δὲ χει[ρ]όγραφον τούτῳ εἰστιν ἐμὸν ἰδι[ό]γραφον, γεγραμμένον δισσόν, χωρὶς ἀλύφαδος καὶ ἐπιγραφῆς, ὃ καὶ κύριον [ἔ]στω πανταχοῦ καὶ παντὶ τῷ ἐπιφέροντι ὡς ἐν δημοσίῳ κατακεχωρισμένον.
'This cheirograph is my autograph, written twice, without erasure or addition, and let it stand as validation everywhere and to anyone whom it is brought just as if it were registered in a public office.'

Each of these three texts guarantees that it is written in the hand of the debtor with the term 'autograph' (ἰδιόγραφος or ἰδιόγραφον) and a first-person possessive (μου or ἐμόν). There is not a second hand present in any of them. The verso of the final text, P. Hamb. 1.70, is notable. It is written in the same hand as the body and reads, in part, '[A cheirograph that] I wrote for Sarapion' ([χειρόγραφον, ὃ ἔ]γραψα Σαραπίωνι). The validation statement in this cheirograph also self-declares that it is binding just as if it had been prepared officially. Following the validation statement, and this is not reproduced above, the author declares that if it is necessary, he is willing to register an official declaration through a public office.

This strikes at the heart of the popularity of cheirographs: they were convenient. Writing a cheirograph in one's own hand rendered an official, notarised document unnecessary. This begets a consistent pattern in the extant papyri: if the validation statement emphasises that the debtor wrote with their hand, there is, quite logically, neither a change in hand in the document nor an illiteracy formula indicating that someone else wrote for the debtor. The presence of the term 'autograph' or special attention paid to the author's hand implies that the entire document is holographic.

The opposite of this principle is operative when an illiteracy formula appears. Such a formula implies that a cheirograph was allographic. These formulae accompany various instances of the validation statement in cheirographs. I again offer three examples.

P. Dion 35 (111 BCE)[18]

Validation statement (ll. 24–26):

ἡ χεὶρ ἥδε κυρίον ἔστω πανταχῇ ἐπειφερομένη.
'Let this hand stand as validation in every place it is brought.'

Illiteracy formula (ll. 29–32):

Θόας Ἀπολλωνίου γέγραφα ὑπ[ὲρ] Ἐμσιγησις τῆς προγεγραμ[μένης] αὐτῇ μοι συνταξάσης διὰ τὸ [μὴ] εἰδέναι αὐτὴν γράμματα.

[16] Accessed from https://papyri.info/ddbdp/psi;12;1253.
[17] Accessed from https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.hamb;1;70. For the text and another English translation, see *Select Papyri, Volume I: Private Documents* (trans. A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar; LCL 266; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932) 178–81.
[18] Accessed from https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.dion;;35.

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'I, Thoas son of Apollonius, have written for the aforementioned Emsigesis at her direction because she does not know letters.'

P. Oxy. 2.264 (54 CE)[19]

Validation statement (l. 12):

κυρία ἡ χείρ.
'The hand is validation.'

Illiteracy Formula (ll. 17–19):

Ἡρακλείδης Δ[ιον]υσίου ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ μὴ εἰδότος γράμματα.
'I, Herakleides son of Dionysios, wrote for him who does not know letters.'

P. Oxy. 14.1639 (1st cent. BCE)[20]
Validation Statement (ll. 21–22):

κυρία [ἡ χ]εὶρ παντα[χῆ]ι ἐπιφερομένη καὶ παντὶ τῶι ἐπιφέ[ρο]ντι.
'The hand is validation in every place that it is brought and to everyone it is brought.'

Illiteracy formula (ll. 27–29):

Ἀμμώνιος Σ[ω]σιπάτρου γέγραφα ὑπὲρ αὐ[τ]ῶν ἀξιω[θ]εὶς διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐπίστασθα[ι α]ὐτοὺς γρ[ά]μματα
'I, Ammonios son of Sosipatros, have written for them, having been asked because they do not know letters.'

In the latter two texts, the hypographs and the illiteracy formulae attached to them are *not* written by the writer producing the cheirograph. They are endorsed by a third party the so-called 'hypographer' (ὑπογραφεύς). The hypographer is not usually a professional scribe. It is often the case that the third party who writes the hypograph and the illiteracy formula has a demonstrable familial relationship with the person for whom they write.

A particularly interesting case of this is P. Oxy. 49.3487, dated to 65 CE. This cheirograph confirms that Tausoreous, who is mentioned in the salutation with her 'custodian, the one related to her, Kephalas' (κυρίου τοῦ προσήκοντ[ο]ς αὐτῇ [Κ]εφαλᾶτος), has received partial repayment of a loan made to a certain Sarapion. The cheirograph is validated with the simple statement 'the hand is validation' (κυρία ἡ χείρ) followed by the date. All of this is in a first hand. The document then contains an abbreviated hypograph and illiteracy formula written in a second hand, Zoilus'. The date is repeated in Zoilus' hand. This is all standard. Immediately following the hypograph, however, the aforementioned Kephalas writes three words: Κεφαλᾶς ἐπιγέγραμμαι κύριος ('I the custodian Kephalas endorse').[21] Kephalas' writing stands out in the document. See Figure 1.[22]

[19] Accessed from https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;2;264.
[20] Accessed from http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;14;1639.
[21] On the role of custodians or guardians, see Youtie, 'ὑπογραφεύς' 212–13.
[22] Image courtesy of The Egypt Exploration Society and the Faculty of Classics, University of Oxford.

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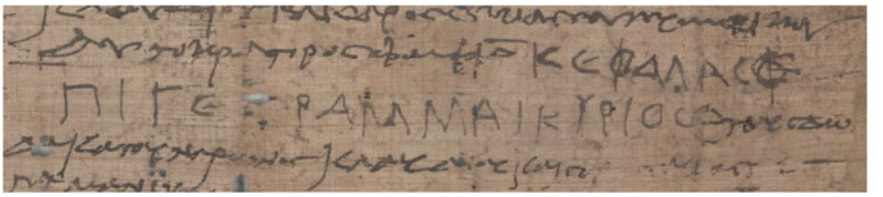


Figure 1. Cheirograph with Kephalas' handwriting.
Source: P. Oxy 49.3487. Image is courtesy of the Egyptian Exploration Society and the Faculty of Classics, University of Oxford.

Following Kephalas' signature, the date is repeated a fourth and final time, not in Kephalas' hand, but in the hand of the individual who registers the document. Kephalas is a slow writer (βραδέως γράφων).[23] He had enough skill to write his name and a few other words, though with much concentrated effort. This is why he endorses the document but does not write for Tausoreous, which presumably would have been beyond his abilities.

Kephalas' is a rare case. It was more common for the custodian of an illiterate individual to both endorse the document and to write for them. If a custodian authorises the document with the verb ἐπιγέγραμμαι ('I have endorsed'), then a first-person form of γράφω ('I write'), either γέγραφα ('I have written') or ἔγραψα ('I wrote'), generally follows.[24]

There are, however, rare occasions in which the custodian endorses the document but does not write their endorsement in their own hand. In these instances, the individual is mentioned as the custodian (κύριος), and the first-person form ἐπιγέγραμμαι is used, but an illiteracy formula follows for the custodian. It is clear in these occurrences that the verb ἐπιγέγραμμαι does not carry the sense of physically inscribing.[25] One example, P. Oxy. 2.267 (37 CE) shall suffice.[26] Onnophris endorses Saraeus as her custodian, and she, Saraeus, also confirms the document. There is an illiteracy formula for both Onnophris' endorsement and Saraeus' confirmation, written by two different individuals.

The ability to write, even if slowly and crudely, obviated the necessity of an additional witness writing on one's behalf. It was more convenient for Kephalas painstakingly to write three words than to have someone write the words for him. In contrast, Onnophris possessed neither the ability to write for Saraeus nor to pen a simple endorsement.

There is a pattern that emerges from the cheirographic validation formulae. When the formula emphasises that the author wrote with their own hand, the text was holographic. If the cheirograph is allographic, the writer's autograph is not emphasised. The formula in these cases is abbreviated to state that the hand, whosoever it might belong to, is validation. Yet an abbreviated formula that does not emphasise the author's hand does not necessarily imply that the text is allographic. Abbreviated formulae were also employed for holographic cheirographs. This is clear in P. Mich. 5.276, a contract dated to 47 CE in which five brothers sell a share of a family home that belonged to their recently deceased brother, who left no heir. The text contains five different hands for five different cheirographs, one for each of the brothers, and there is no illiteracy

[23] On slow writers and the most famous of them from antiquity, Petaus, see Herbert C. Youtie, 'Βραδέως Γράφων: Between Literacy and Illiteracy', *GRBS* 12 (1971) 239–61.

[24] There are many occasions of this in various kinds of documents. See, for example, P. Oxy. 2.251 (44 CE); P. Oxy. 1.106 (135 CE); P. Oxy. 1.76 (179 CE); P. Mich. 5.280 (first century CE); P. Mich. 5.284 (first century CE); P. Mich 5.339 (46 CE); P. Mich. 5.350 (37 CE); P. Mich. 5.351 (44 CE).

[25] LSJ, s.v. ἐπιγράφω.

[26] See also the following four instances in which the custodian endorses the document but does not also write in their own hand: SB 10.10222 (20 CE); P. Ryl. 178 (26 CE); P. Fouad. 33 (first century CE); P. Oxy. 12.1463 (215 CE).

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formula attached to any of them.[27] The validation statement is repeated in four of the five portions of the contract. It is only missing from the fifth, as the documents end before the validation statement:[28]

Hand 1 (Didymos): ἡ χειὶρ ἥδη κυρία ἔστωι πανταχῆι ἐπιφερομένηι καὶ παντὶ τῶι ἐπιφέροντι.
Hand 2 (Herodes): ἡ χειὶρ ἥδε κυρα ἔστωι πανταχῆι ἐπιφερομένηι καὶ παντὶ τῶι ἐπιφέροντι.
Hand 3 (Herakleides): ἡ χειὶρ ἡδηι κυρία ἔστωι πανταχῆι ἐπιφερομένηι καὶ παντὶ τῶι ἐπιφέροντι.
Hand 4 (Maron): ἡ θὲρ ἥδε κυρεία στο πανταχῆ ἐπειφερομένη καὶ παντεὶ τῶι ἐπ[ιφ]έρον[τι].
Hand 5: No validation statement.

The name of the writer is not mentioned in any of these validation formulae because each person writes an entire cheirograph, which includes their name in the salutation. It was not sufficient for a single cheirograph to be written, and five autographs or validation statements subscribed to it. Rather, the cheirograph was handwritten anew five times by each individual who acknowledged the sale.

This document and the foregoing survey demonstrate a strong preference for holographic cheirographs. Herber C. Youtie claims that, with respect to legal subscriptions, there was a general principle that if a person was literate, they were expected to write for themself.[29] Holographic cheirographs were more convenient and legally expedient than were allographic cheirographs. A text wholly written in a person's hand possessed more legal weight than a text confirmed with a signature or a three-word endorsement like Kephalas'[30].

3. Philemon and Cheirographic Rhetoric

Cheirographic preferences inform Paul's letter to Philemon, though I wish to be clear: Paul was not writing a cheirograph for Philemon. If he were, the emphasis on his hand in the validation statement would make it incontestable that the document was a Pauline holograph. A reading of any extant cheirograph from the period makes it clear that the letter to Philemon is not formally a cheirograph. It is doubtful that it would be legally binding.[31] Moreover, the phrase that Paul uses in Philemon 19 to indicate that he wrote in his own hand is not a validation formula: 'I, Paul, wrote in my hand: I will pay in full' (ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρί, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω). The most important and consistent term in cheirographic validation formulae, κυρία, is missing altogether, as is any reference to Paul's autograph (ἰδιόγραφος). Philemon 19 is not a validation statement, and the letter is not a cheirograph.

[27] There are other references to multiple hands serving as validation in the cheirographs. For example, P. NYU. 2.26 (103 CE) is a copy of a cheirograph that confirms three persons received repayment, and the loan they gave had thus been satisfied. The text states, 'The autographed hand of each one of us is validation' (κυρία ἡ ἰδιόγραφος ἑκάστου ἑνὸς ἡμῶν χείρ).

[28] Accessed from http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.mich;5;276.

[29] Herbert C. Youtie, 'ὑπογραφεύς. The Social Impact of Illiteracy in Graeco-Roman Egypt', *ZPE* 17 (1975) 215.

[30] Moreover, as Youtie demonstrates from papyrological examples, illiteracy could put a businessperson at risk of various forms of exploitation ('ὑπογραφεύς', 205–8.)

[31] As commentators sometimes suggest: Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 340; Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 482–3; Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Paul the Ancient Letter Writer: An Introduction to Epistolary Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016) 228. Notably, in *ad Familiares* 5.8.5, Cicero asks M. Licinius Crassus to consider the present missive to have the force of a contract and not merely a letter, implying that letters themselves were not legally binding.

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Yet, I maintain that Paul evokes the rhetoric of the cheirographic genre. There are three reasons for this. First, the future tense verb ἀποτίσω ('I will repay') and the emphasis on Paul's hand is a distinctive combination that recalls generic elements of cheirographs. The verb ἀποτίνω does not appear elsewhere in Pauline writings or the New Testament in any form. While it is not the standard verb used in cheirographs for either the repayment of the original debt or its interest, it is still used frequently for the latter.[32] It also resembles the two verbs commonly used for repayment guarantees in cheirographs, namely ἀποδώσω ('I will repay') and ἐκτείσω ('I will pay in full'). The combination of ἀποτίσω ('I will repay') and the emphasis on writing in Paul's own hand in Philemon 19 is best explained as a cheirographic allusion.

Second, the emphasis on Paul's hand appears before the final greetings in Philemon. In 1 Cor 16.21, Col 4.18, and 2 Thess 3.17, the autographic emphasis is reserved for the concluding salutation. In these three instances, the writer expressly states that the greeting (ὁ ἀσπασμός) is in their hand. The divergence in practice in Philemon begs explanation. The most likely reason that Paul calls attention to his own hand before the greeting begins is to evoke a cheirographic trope. But Paul does so in a non-formulaic manner because he is not writing a cheirograph. To write a full validation statement would have detracted from the letter's rhetoric. Instead, Paul allusively recalls cheirographic elements in Philemon 19.

Third, if Colossians was written by Paul, then Paul uses the term χειρόγραφον and rhetoric from this type of document in a letter written in close chronological proximity to Philemon. Colossians 2.14 states, '[God] crossed out the cheirograph and its clauses that stood against us, and God removed it, nailing it to the cross' (ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἦρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ). There are several extant cheirographs in which the text has been literally crossed out with Xs upon repayment, such as P.Duk.inv. 7, dated to 6 CE. See Figure 2.[33]

The participle ἐξαλείψας in Col 2.14 might refer to this practice, it might refer to washing off ink from a text or it might refer to the physical destruction of the entire document.[34] Whatever the case, this is the only occasion that the term cheirograph (χειρόγραφον) appears in Pauline literature or the New Testament at large. If Paul refers to a cheirograph in one text, it is not surprising to find a reference to the genre in another.[35] This is especially the case if the two letters are written at the same time, as is usually supposed by those who deem Colossians authentically Pauline.

In Philemon 19, Paul refers to cheirographic practices without actually writing a cheirograph. There are three possibilities regarding the extent of Paul's autograph: (1) he may have handwritten only a few words, either the last two or all eight in verse 19a; (2) he

[32] ἀποτίσω or ἀποτείσω is used to guarantee the repayment of interest in P. David 4 (second century BCE); P. Adler 4 (109 BCE); P. Grenf. 2.17 (136 BCE); P. Tebt. 3.1.821 (209 BCE); P. Adl. 10 (101 BCE); P. Amh. 2 32 V (114 BCE); P. Cair. Zen 3 59323 (249 BCE); P.Col. 4 76 (247 BCE); P. Dion. 32 (107 BCE); P. Erasm. 1 12 (152 BCE); P. Erasm. 1 13 (152 BCE); P. Erasm. 1 14 (2nd cent. BCE); P. Gurob 7 (212 BCE); P. Hamb. 2 183 (251 BCE); P. Hamb. 2 187 (246 BCE); P. Hib. 1 86 (248 BCE); P. Köln 5 220 (second century BCE); P. Köln 13 519 (158 BCE); P. Köln 16 644 (256 BCE); P. Petr. 1 16 (231 BCE); P. Tebt. 3.1.813 (186 BCE). ἀποτίσω or ἀποτείσω is used to guarantee the repayment of the initial sum in P. Cair. Zen. 3 59477 (third century BCE); P. Dion. 32 (107 BCE); P. Diog. 25 (132 CE).

[33] Image: https://library.duke.edu/papyrus/records/7.html (public domain). Other financial agreements that have been repaid or cancelled, as indicated by their contents being crossed out include Psi.8.961a (176 CE); P. Fouad 1 45 (153 CE); P. Duk.inv. 7 (6 CE); P. Fouad 1 49 (100 CE); P. Oxy. 1 144 (580); P. Wisc. 2 54 (116 CE); P. CtYBR inv. 543 (6–5 BCE); P. CtYBR inv. 4052 (second century CE); P. CtYBR inv. 4053 (first century BCE–third century CE); P. CtYBR inv. 4055(A) (first century BCE–third century CE).

[34] LSJ, s.v. ἐξαλείφω.

[35] This is similar to the intertextual criterion that Richard B. Hays calls 'recurrence' (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989)) 30.

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Figure 2. *Cheirograph P.Duk.inv. 7.*
Source: P.Deuk.inv.7. https://library.duke.edu/papyrus/records/7.html (public domain)

may have handwritten a portion but not the entire letter, similar to a hypograph; (3) he may have handwritten the entire document, aligning with cheirographic preferences.

The first option, writing a few words, is supported by precedents where a limited number of words were handwritten, typically by slow writers. However, it is unlikely that Paul was a slow writer based on his ability to write substantial portions in other texts, such as Gal 6.11–18 and the greetings in 1 Cor 16.21 and Col 4.18. Slow writers are often found in

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official documents rather than personal letters, and Paul's rhetoric would be more effective by avoiding his own clumsy handwriting altogether if he were a slow writer.[36]

The second option is that Paul mentions his own handwriting in a manner akin to a hypograph. In this scenario, the scribe pens approximately 70% of the document and Paul 30%.[37] There are occasions when a literate individual appends an autographic hypograph to a cheirograph. In these instances, however, the hand of the individual is by rule not emphasised in the validation statement. Because Philemon is not a cheirograph, Paul might diverge from this generic norm. In this scenario, Paul follows his practice of handwriting the final salutations but takes up the pen earlier to evoke the rhetoric of a cheirograph, specifically an allographic cheirograph with an appended hypograph.

The third option that Paul wrote the entire letter by hand aligns with the concept and rhetoric of holographic cheirographs. While Philemon is not a cheirograph, adhering to its norms strengthens the allusion to the genre and enhances the rhetoric of the letter. The allusion to the cheirographic genre and the emphasis on Paul's hand in Philemon 19 makes it likely, though not assured, that he wrote the entire document in his own hand. If Paul was following the norms of comparable guarantees in cheirographs, then he would necessarily have written holographically. However, because Philemon is not formally a cheirograph, Paul need not be closely adhering to its generic norms. The cheirographic rhetoric works best if Philemon is written entirely in Paul's hand, but it does not demand it. The case that Philemon was written entirely in Paul's hand cannot solely be made on his allusion to this type of document. We thus turn to additional holographic comparanda to Philemon, in the form of personal letters, to buttress the argument that Philemon was wholly written in Paul's hand.

4. Holographic Letters

Handwriting was a normal compositional mode in Greco-Roman antiquity. While dictation was utilised extensively and for various purposes, it was neither the sole nor even the standard manner of composition in this context.[38] The evidence for writing *sua manu* ('in one's own hand') is abundant for various kinds of texts across genres and time.

Porphyry claims that Plotinus hastily handwrote his first drafts and left it to others to polish them.[39] Horace proverbially states, 'Often you must flip your stylus to erase, if you hope to write something worth a second reading' (*Saepe stilum vertas, iterum quae digna legi sint scripturus*).[40] Marcus tells his tutor, Fronto, 'from half-past ten till now I have been writing and have also read a good deal of Cato, and I am writing this to you with the same pen'.[41] Plutarch states that Cato 'wrote out with his own hand and in large characters' (δίᾳ χειρὶ καὶ μεγάλοις γράμμασιν) his History of Rome for his son.[42] In another letter to Fronto, Marcus writes of taking 'pen in hand' (*stilus in manus venit)* when preparing to write a text.[43] Pliny the Younger found boar-hunting to be a positive stimulus for thought. He waited by his nets armed with 'stylus and notebook' (*stilus et pugillares)*, prepared to write notes.[44] The autographs of many eminent Greeks and Romans, including Gaius and

[36] Steve Reece, *Paul's Large Letters: Paul's Autographic Subscriptions in the Light of Ancient Epistolary Conventions* (LNTS; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016) 174.

[37] If Paul begins writing Philemon at v. 19, then he writes 84 words, and the scribe writes 250 words. For comparison, Galatians 6.11–18, which is the portion of the letter that Paul likely writes in his own hand, is 121 words.

[38] *Contra* Paul J. Achtemeier, who writes, 'The normal mode of any composition was to dictate it to a scribe' ('*Omne Verbum Sonat*: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity', *JBL* 109 (1990) 12).

[39] Porphyry, *Vit. Plot*. 8.1–13.

[40] Horace, *Sat.* 1.10.72; text and modified trans. (Fairclough, LCL).

[41] Marcus Aurelius, *Ad M. Caes.* 2.4 (trans. Haines, LCL).

[42] Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.* 20.4–5; text and trans. (Perrin, LCL).

[43] Marcus Aurelius, *Ad M. Caes.* 2.10; text and trans. (Haines, LCL).

[44] Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 1.6; text and trans. (Radice, LCL).

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Tiberius Gracchus, Cicero, Vergil, Augustus and Nero were well known in their time.[45] Quintilian champions writing all kinds of texts by hand, but especially personal letters written to friends.[46]

Quintilian's advice that personal letters be handwritten was actualised by many of his contemporaries. Elite writers regularly composed such letters in their own hands. Cicero handwrote hundreds of letters to Atticus. The first time that he dictated one was not until he was nearly fifty years old. He begins the first non-handwritten letter apologetically, stating, 'I believe you have never before read a letter of mine not in my own handwriting [*nisi mea manu scriptam*]. You may gather from that how desperately busy I am. Not having a minute to spare and being obliged to take a walk to refresh my poor voice, I am dictating this while walking [*haec dictavi ambulans*].'[47] After dictating this letter, Cicero utilised the compositional mode more frequently for personal letters written to Atticus and other friends. However, he continues to offer excuses and apologies when he does so.[48]

A partiality for handwritten missives is also operative in the correspondence between Marcus Aurelius and his tutor, Marcus Cornelius Fronto. Fronto clearly expresses this preference: 'I, indeed, dote on the very characters of your writing: wherefore, whenever you write to me, I would have you write with your own hand.'[49] The custom also ran the other way. Fronto excused his own dictated missives, usually on account of ill health. After dictating one letter because of joint pain, he apologises in a second letter for 'employing another hand' which is 'contrary to our custom'.[50] There were a variety of circumstances that drove ancient letter writers to dictate rather than handwrite personal letters, including illness, travel, convenience, confidentiality, laziness, or having just exited a bath.[51]

At the root of the preference for handwritten letters is the notion that handwriting is a representation of one's person. Annelise Freisenbruch writes, 'The handwritten, material status of letters has always been a jealously guarded signier of the person(ality) of the writer imprinted on the page, as though writing in one's own hand removed all possible barriers between the soul of the sender and of the recipient.'[52] Seneca writes that letters are preferable to images of a person because they bring 'real traces, real evidences of an absent friend' (*quae vera amici absentis vestigia, veras notas adferunt).*[53] The 'impress of a friend's hand upon his letter' affords representation and recognition of them.[54]

[45] Myles McDonnell, 'Writing, Copying, and Autograph Manuscripts in Ancient Rome', *CQ* 46 (1996) 473. Pliny the Elder mentions Gaius Gracchus, Tiberius, Cicero, Vergil, and Augustus (*Nat.* 13.83). Quintilian likewise notes that he has seen the handwriting of Cicero, Vergil and Augustus (*Inst.* 1.7.20–22). Suetonius saw documents in Augustus' and Nero's hand (*Aug.* 80.3; 87.1.3; 88; *Nero* 52.3).

[46] Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.3.19–27; *Inst.* 1.1.27–29.

[47] Cicero, *Att.* 43; text and trans. (Bailey, LCL).

[48] Cicero dictates *Att.* 40 and 212 for confidentiality. He dictates *Att.* 89 because he is busy. He dictates *Att.* 107 because he is in the middle of a move; *Att.* 110 because he is travelling. *Att.* 137 and 162 are dictated on account of eye trouble.

[49] (Trans. Haines, LCL).

[50] Both letters are in *Ad M. Caes* iv 9; (trans. Haines, LCL).

[51] Illness: Fronto, *Ad M. Caes.* iv 9; *Parth; Ant.* i 2; travel: Cicero, *Att.* 107; *Att.* 110; busyness: Cicero, *Att.* 43; *Att.* 89; *Quint. fratr.* 23; Marcus Aurelius, *Ad M. Caes.* 5.47; confidentiality: Cicero, *Att.* 40; bathing: Marcus Aurelius, *De nepote amisso* 1.2; laziness: Cicero, *Att.* 426.

[52] Annelise Freisenbruch, 'Back to Fronto: Doctor and Patient in His Correspondence with an Emperor' in *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (ed. Ruth Morello and A. D. Morrison; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 253.

[53] Seneca's statement reflects a sentiment similar to that in Palladas' epigram, written in the fourth century: 'Nature, loving the duties of friendship, invented instruments by which absent friends can converse: pens, paper, ink, handwriting (τὰ χαράγματα χειρός), tokens of the heart that mourns afar off' (Greek Anthology 9.41; text and trans. (Paton, LCL)).

[54] Seneca, *ad Lucilium* 40; texts and trans. (Gummere, LCL).

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This sentiment is reflected in handwritten letters in Greek romance novels. On two different occasions in *Callirhoe*, one of the protagonists handwrites a personal letter that has social and emotional import.[55] In the first, *Callirhoe* 4.4.5, Chaereas handwrites a letter to his wife. The two have been separated and each supposed the other dead, as the trope goes in the novels. Emotionally dishevelled upon learning that Callirhoe is alive and is remarried, Chaereas manages to write her in his own trembling hand through a flood of tears to inform her that he, too, is alive. After the couple reunite and begin their happily ever after, Callirhoe writes a handwritten letter to the individual to whom she was forcibly married. She uses a phrase in the letter that resembles Paul's in Philemon 19: ταῦτά σοι γέγραφα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρί ('I have written these things to you in my own hand').[56] The sentence makes clear to the reader that the letter was holographic, but is unnecessary for the recipient, as he immediately 'recognises Callirhoe's letters' (γνωρίσας τὰ Καλλιρόης γράμματα).[57] A nearly identical phrase appears in *Leucippe and Cleitophon* 5.18, wherein the male protagonist receives a handwritten letter from his wife whom he supposed was dead: 'I recognised Leucippe's letters' (ἐγνώρισα γὰρ Λευκίππης τὰ γράμματα). In both novels, the letters stand in for the writer's person, and the forms of the handwritten characters induce intense emotions.[58]

Sentimentalising a loved one's handwriting is imagined in the novels, but this imagination is rooted in reality. The same sentiment appears in papyri letters. The sender of SB 14 11584, whose name is lost in a lacuna, confirms that they have received letters from Isodoros and imagines to behold him through them: 'I received your letters, through which I seemed to behold you' (ἐκομι[σάμην σου] τὰ γράμματα δι' ὧν ἔδοξά [σ]ε θεω[ρ]εῖν).[59] Apion, the sender of BGU II 423, requests a handwritten letter from his father in order that he, Apion, can 'adore his hand' (ἵνα προσκυνήσω τὴν χεραν).[60] A child named Theon threatens his father that, unless he takes him to Alexandria, 'I will not write you a letter nor speak to you nor wish you good health … I will not take your hand nor ever greet you again' (οὐ μὴ γράψω σε ἐπιστολὴν οὔτε λαλῶ σε οὔτε υἱγένω σε … μὴ λάβω χεῖραν παρὰ [σ]οῦ οὔτε πάλι χαίρω σε λυπόν). The hand, infamous for its 'rudeness,' indicates that Theon himself penned this letter. His cantankerous threat implies that he considered letter-writing to be one regular, socially affective activity amongst others that cultivated his relationship with his father.

In different genres and in different social strata, personal letters were handwritten by their senders. This is not to claim that letters were never dictated nor written in a scribe's hand. They were. Mass-produced and copied letters were less likely to be written in the sender's hand than were personal letters. In *Fam.* 37, Cicero pokes fun at Trebatius, who had sent Cicero several letters with similar contents. He, Cicero, claims that the letters are all quite nice and then jokes, 'Is it not unusual to send several identical letters in one's own handwriting?' (*quis solet eodem exemplo pluris dare qui sua manu scribit?*)[61] Similarly, business or official correspondence was regularly dictated and copied by scribes. Handwriting a letter to Fronto, Marcus informs his teacher that

[55] While the novels, of course, do not feature real letters, they offer insight into the literary imaginations of their authors. In these cases, the novels reveal how their authors understood the practice and import of writing personal letters by hand.

[56] *Callirhoe* 8.4.6; text (Goold, LCL).

[57] *Callirhoe* 8.5.13; text (Goold, LCL).

[58] In *Callirhoe* 8.5.13, Callirhoe's now ex-husband kisses and hugs the letter 'as if [Callirhoe] were there' (ὡς ἐκείνην παροῦσαν). In *Leucippe and Cleitophon* 5.19, Cleitophon imagines seeing and recognising Leucippe through her letters (καὶ ἅμα αὖθις ἐντυγχάνων τοῖς γράμμασιν, ὡς ἐκείνην δι' αὐτῶν βλέπων καὶ ἀναγινώσκων) and tells her as much in his handwritten letter of response in 5.20: 'I find you present in your letter and yet still absent from me' (ὅτι σὲ παρὼν παροῦσαν ὡς ἀποδημοῦσαν ὁρῶ διὰ γραμμάτων). Text and trans. for *Leucippe and Cleitophon* (Gaselee, LCL).

[59] Accessed from https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;14;11584.

[60] Translation my own. It is likely that Apion wrote this letter himself, as there is another letter sent by him, BGU II 632, written years later that appears to be in the same hand.

[61] Text and trans. (Shackleton Bailey, LCL).

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he had just finished dictating thirty letters of business correspondence.[62] In *Att.* 151, Cicero writes about a letter from Pompey that was mass-produced but contained an addendum written in Pompey's own hand because it conveyed information particular to Cicero.[63] The more personal that a letter was, the more likely it was to be written in the sender's own hand.

5. Philemon: Public or Personal?

Philemon was a personal letter. Because it is addressed to three individuals, namely Philemon, Apphia and Archippus as well as the church in Philemon's house, it is sometimes considered a public letter.[64] For instance, on the basis of the second-person plural forms in the opening salutation, closing and benediction, Chris Frilingos claims, 'This epistle was read aloud to Philemon and the household ἐκκλησία.'[65] Scot McKnight goes so far as to propose a model for the performance of the letter, concluding, 'We are to think of this audience verbally and physically participating as this letter is read aloud.'[66] It is plausible that Philemon was read aloud to a gathered group, but it would have made for a very short reading event.[67] In my estimation, it is more likely that, despite the fact the letter is addressed to multiple recipients, it was primarily meant for an individual.

The overwhelming use of second-person singular forms in the body of Philemon suggests that Paul has in mind an individual reader for the letter. Philemon is exceptional within the Pauline corpus as a letter dominated by singular forms, with respect to both pronouns and verbal endings.

If Philemon is a personal letter, then the four second-person plural forms in the letter must be accounted for. The first occurs in the standard Pauline greeting in Philemon 3: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ('Grace to you all and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ'). Two more occur in Philemon 22, in which Paul gives Philemon instructions about preparing a guest room because he, Paul, hopes, 'through your (pl.) prayers I will be restored to you (pl.)'. The final second-person plural pronoun is in the benediction that concludes the letter: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your (pl.) spirit' (ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν).

All four instances can be explained as the result of Paul addressing an individual, namely Philemon, who is part of a group. There is precedent for this kind of letter in Paul's context. That is, there are letters in which multiple persons are addressed as a group, even in the salutations, but the writer is primarily addressing one individual personally. Three examples demonstrate the practice:[68]

- **P. Dryton. 1.36 (130 BCE)**: Esthladas writes his father and mother a letter consisting mostly of well wishes in the body of the letter. He addresses both parents in the opening words: 'Esthladas to his father and mother' (Ἐσθλάδας τῶι πατρὶ καὶ τῆι μητρί). In the body of the letter, however, Esthladas uses second-person singular pronouns (σοι, σαυτοῦ, σαυτόν) and one second-singular verbal form (ποιήσεις).[69]

[62] Marcus Aurelius, *Ad M. Caes.* 4.8.

[63] If Colossians is authentic and Philemon was delivered with it, then Cicero's letters from Pompey are quite similar to Paul's letters to Colossae: one is mass-produced and one is personal.

[64] Sara Winter, 'Paul's Letter to Philemon', *NTS* 33 (1987) 1–2; Chris Frilingos, '"For My Child, Onesimus": Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon', *JBL* 119 (2000) 99–100.

[65] Frilingos, 'For my Child, Onesimus', 99. Similarly, Dunn notes that the letter is addressed primarily to a single individual, Philemon, but then writes, 'Paul should expect the letter to be read to the church as a whole (note the plurals in vv. 3, 22, 25), a factor which influences the character of the whole appeal' (*Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 301).

[66] McKnight, *The Letter to Philemon*, 85.

[67] It takes me approximately three minutes to read the letter aloud in Greek.

[68] In addition, see O. Krok. 2.288 (first–second century CE) and P. Oxy. 14.1668 (second century CE).

[69] Accessed from http://papyri.info/ddbdp/bgu;16;2618.

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Table 1. *Pronouns*:

Letter	2nd singular	2nd plural
Philemon	21	4
Romans[70]	52	83
Galatians	7	47
1 Thessalonians	0	84
Philippians	1	51
1–2 Corinthians	11	299

Calculations my own on the basis of NA28 using Accordance Bible Software.

Table 2. *Verb*:

Letter	2nd singular	2nd plural
Philemon	9	0
Romans	70	73
Galatians	9	54
1 Thessalonians	0	52
Philippians	1	45
1–2 Corinthians	24	225

Calculations my own on the basis of NA28 using Accordance Bible Software.

- **BGU 16.2618 (10 BCE)**: Tryphas addresses both her son, Athenodoros, and her daughter, Artemis (Ἀθηνοδώρωι τῷ υἱῷ καὶ Ἀρτέμιτι τῇ θυγατρί). The body of the letter, which contains instructions about wheat and a reminder to care for some slaves who are in prison, contains the second-person imperative γείνωσκε, the second-person personal pronouns σοι and σε, and the indicative verb ποιήσεις.[71]
- **P. Oxy. 4.744 (1 BCE)**: Hilarion writes to his partner Alis, greets her, and then also addresses Berous and Apollonarion. It is clear from the letter, which is often cited as an example of the reality of child exposure in antiquity, that Hilarion is the only individual really being addressed, as second-person singular forms are used throughout.[72]

The delivery instructions on the verso of each letter provide further evidence that they are intended for single individuals:

- P. Dryton. 1.36: 'Deliver to Pathuris, my father' (ἀπόδος [ε]ἰς Παθῦρ(ιν) τῶι πατρί).
- BGU 16.2618: 'Deliver to Athenodoros, my son' (ἀπόδ(ος) Ἀθηνοδώρωι τῶι υἱῶι).
- P. Oxy. 4.744: 'Hilarion to Alis. Deliver.' (Ἱλαρίων Ἄλιτι ἀπόδος).

[70] Romans contains the second-highest proportion of second-person singular forms because Paul has constructed a rhetorical interlocutor with whom he engages at various points in the letter (Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); *The So-Called Jew in Paul's Letter to the Romans* (ed. Rafael Rodriguez and Matthew Thiessen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016)).

[71] Accessed from http://papyri.info/ddbdp/bgu;16;2618.

[72] Accessed from http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;4;744.

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Notably, the person to whom each letter is to be delivered is the first addressed in the respective salutations. In each of these three letters, multiple persons are addressed, but there is one primary reader. I suggest the same is true of Philemon. We can imagine delivery instructions for Paul's letter to Philemon that read similar to those above: 'Paul to Philemon, deliver' (Παῦλος Φιλήμονι ἀπόδος).

Multiple persons could be addressed in a letter's salutation, and the letter be intended to be read by or read to all of them. That is, there are extant letters with multiple recipients in which the author uses second-person plural forms throughout the letter's body. P. Oxy. 14.1681 and P. Nekr. 18 are two such cases.[73] In the former, Ammonius writes to Julius and Hilarus and exclusively uses second-person plural forms throughout the body of the letter. Both Julius and Hilarus are then mentioned in the delivery instructions on the verso: 'Deliver to the Julius and Hilarus, brothers, from Ammonius' (ἀπ(όδος) Ἰουλίῳ καὶ Ἱλάρῳ ἀδελφοῖς π(αρὰ) Ἀμμωνίου). In P. Nekr. 18, Melas addresses a certain Sarapion and a certain Silvanus, uses second-person plural forms in the body of the letter and instructs that the letter be delivered to both of them.

What this indicates is that Paul very well could have addressed the letter to multiple persons and continued to utilise plural forms in its body, as he did in most of his other letters. But he did not. Instead, Paul used singular forms because he understood himself to be writing a personal, individualised letter. Such letters were characteristically written in the sender's own hand.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the letter to Philemon was written entirely in Paul's own hand. While the prevailing assumption is that Paul only inscribed the closing section of the letter, I have challenged this by examining the use of autographic claims in other Pauline letters and the rhetorical effectiveness of a fully autographic letter in light of Philemon 19's cheirographic rhetoric. I argued that Philemon 19 alludes to a genre of documents that were preferably written entirely in the author's own hand. If Paul is alluding to this genre, then writing the entire letter to Philemon in Paul's own hand would have afforded the maximum rhetorical impact.

Furthermore, there was a prevalent preference for personal letters in Greco-Roman antiquity to be written by the sender themself. This preference was not limited to literary elites but extended to fictional and everyday correspondence as well. Given the personal nature of the letter to Philemon and its overwhelming use of second-person singular forms in comparison to other Pauline letters, it would have been most natural for Paul to write the entire letter in his own hand.

Philemon represents a unique case among Pauline letters, where Paul chose to write the entire letter in his own hand. This deliberate choice would have enhanced its persuasive force and personal nature. It also indicates that Paul utilised multiple, different modes of composition for different kinds of correspondence. This does not make Paul exceptional. Rather, it suggests that Paul worked within standard letter-writing and conventions in his Greco-Roman literary context.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

[73] In addition, see O. Claud. 2.240 (2nd cent. CE) and O. Claud. 2.260 (2nd cent. CE).

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