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Pauline Pseudepigrapha and Early Christian Literacy: Are the Clues Hidden Right in Front of US?

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Abstract: Within Biblical scholarship, there have been a limited number of studies which examine ancient literacy and education in relation to the production of the Deutero-Pauline letters. When such topics are addressed together, the discussions rarely go beyond some generalities, and this article seeks to partly address that gap. Literacy rates in the Greco-Roman world, of which the earliest Christians were a part, are universally agreed to be significantly lower than modern literacy rates, with most estimates being between 5 and 15%. This fact, coupled with the limited number of Christians by the end of the first and the beginning of the second century CE, should be taken more seriously when considering how the Deutero-Pauline literature came to be produced and, eventually, circulate with other authentic Pauline letters. In short, this article will argue that when the realities of the educational landscape of the New Testament world are taken in conjunction with what we know about textual production, early Christian communities and leadership structures, there is a plausible argument to be made that those who were responsible for at least some of the Deutero-Pauline letters may be hiding in plain sight.

Keywords: Pauline pseudepigrapha; pseudepigraphy; ancient literacy; early Christian literature; authorship

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1. Introduction

The topic of authorship is often a highly contested one within scholarly discussions of the Pauline epistles. The vast majority of modern scholars argue that at least some of the twelve letters in the New Testament that purport to be written by Paul were not actually written by the historical Paul, but by someone writing in Paul's name after his death. Among the Pauline documents in the New Testament, six are thought by many to be pseudonymous, i.e., documents falsely claiming to be written by Paul.[1] These six include: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus).

Within these discussions, the identity of the author (beyond some generalities) is frequently left unaddressed and thought to be lost to historical inquiry.[2] But such discussions have often neglected an overlooked aspect in relation to early Christianity and the production of the Deutero-Pauline letters[3]: the issue of literacy. The present discussion seeks to examine these topics from the standpoint of ancient literacy in an attempt to paint a plausible scenario for the production and dissemination of at least some of the Deutero-Pauline letters.

The argument will be presented in three main steps. I will first lay out a general overview of literacy and literary education in the Greco-Roman world by way of an introduction to these issues. Next, I will examine literacy and its potential implications in relation to power dynamics and textual production within early Christian groups[4] of the late first and early second century CE. Lastly, I will put forward potential implications and offer some concluding thoughts. In doing so, I will argue that, although there are undoubtedly speculative components, more credence should be given to the possibility

that the persons responsible for at least some of the Pauline pseudepigrapha may be hiding in plain sight and known to us by name.

2. Ancient Literacy in the Greco-Roman World

2.1. Literacy Rates and Defining 'Literacy'

Due mainly to a lack of evidence, it is impossible to arrive at exact numbers when trying to determine ancient literacy rates. However, some scholars have attempted to arrive at approximate ranges, with William Harris' study of the topic being one of the most influential Harris (1989). Harris concluded that literacy rates in most parts of the Roman empire were likely around ten percent for most of the empire's existence, although this estimate would differ depending on geographical location and moment in time (in some cases, it may have been closer to fifteen to twenty percent, particularly in urban areas).

More within the realm of biblical scholarship, Catherine Hezer's extensive study of literacy rates in Palestine from roughly the first century CE onward has also put forward a very low literacy rate.[5] She concludes that the Jewish literacy rate during that time was likely below Harris' estimate of 10–15%, possibly as low as 3% Hezser (2001). However, the effort to estimate literacy rates is further complicated because there is a lack of a standard definition for the term 'literacy'. As Hezer points out, the examination of literacy rates "naturally depends on what one understands by literacy".[6] There are undoubtedly various gradations of literacy, which immediately problematizes any general classification under the umbrella term 'literate'.[7]

First and foremost, the majority of people who might fall under this category only possessed the ability to read, not write Allen (2022). Within the realm of reading, there were various skill levels. Harris differentiates between those who were able to read signs and basic texts, whom he terms 'semi-literate', and those who could read (and write) lengthy and sophisticated texts.[8] But regardless of whether or not someone had the ability to read, most understood the role and importance of reading and the written word. Everyone in the Greco-Roman world would have encountered things such as inscriptions and public notices in their everyday lives, so to say that someone was illiterate and could not read does not mean that they did not participate in literate culture or understand the role and importance of reading and literacy more generally.[9]

Within the realm of writing, there were also various gradations of skill level. At the lower end of the spectrum, which Harris also categorizes as 'semi-literate', were those who possessed the ability to write their name or slowly copy something very basic.[10] An example of this comes from an archive of documents from a village scribe (γραμματεύς) named Petaus, who was active in Egypt during the late second century CE. Among the archive of his documents, there is a piece of papyrus that Petaus used to practice his signature and a formulaic ending (a total of twelve times), which are the only words found among the documents that Petaus actually wrote himself (*P.Petaus* 121).

What is most relevant for this discussion is that he made a mistake (he left a letter out of a verb) on line five and continued to repeat the mistake, demonstrating that he was simply copying the text without an ability to read or fully understand what he was copying.[11] Interestingly, Petaus had a brother named Theon, who was literate enough to be able to write out an entire contract that the two brothers shared (*P.Petaus* 31). Thus, this is also an example of how two brothers who came from the same family could exhibit very different educational outcomes. From this, Johnson concludes that "there seems to be not only a wide range in the goals and formality of instruction, but also considerably more dependence on individual persistence and motivation than on the state of societal pressures typical of our modern era".[12]

A similar example comes from the school papyri of Egypt during the Greco-Roman period. In her study of the papyri, Raffaella Cribiore argues that they show evidence of what she terms the 'copying method' and a 'passive dependence on a model'. This method, which was most likely practiced well before more advanced forms of education, required

students to manually copy texts over and over. These students, however, were not able to actually read or understand what they were copying, as demonstrated by the many uncorrected mistakes throughout the papyri.[13] This would seem to call into question ideas of a fixed sequence in conceptions of the educational journey of students throughout this period. It also suggests a parting between the goals and process of learning to read and write, i.e., "Penmanship and the simple ability to copy had considerable value in and of themselves".[14] Thus, as the evidence from these exercises supports, some students learned their letters and then proceeded to copy texts without actually having any comprehension of the material that they were copying.[15]

As these examples illustrate, the caution around using 'literate' as an umbrella term within scholarship is well founded. One must differentiate between the different gradations and goals of both reading and writing abilities rather than grouping everyone, ranging from those who possessed only basic reading skills to those who were highly educated and capable of writing narrative texts, under the same general classification of 'literate'.

2.2. Literary Education in Greco-Roman and Jewish Circles

This naturally leads to the topic of education and how people[16] in the Greco-Roman world would have actually learned to read and write. As is the case with literacy rates, the exact nature of this education would differ depending on time period and location, but space and scope allow for only a limited treatment here.

Certainly, there were more educational opportunities within cities and urban areas compared to small towns and rural areas Walsh (2021, p. 116). But a more decisive factor in determining the extent of someone's education was socio-economic status. Since there was no network of public or mandated education, it was left to parents to decide whether or not to educate their child and to what extent. Consequently, "although those with limited financial means would strive to provide some schooling", most advanced education was mainly within "the purview of men and of the elite".[17] Thus, because of the expense involved, "the majority of Romans were not instructed beyond a very basic literacy, if at all".[18] The ability to read and write was beyond the reach of most non-elite groups unless it was necessary for their occupation. Such occupational groups could include scribes, merchants and other specialized artisans. Nonetheless, being literate enough to read or write was not an economic nor a social advantage for the vast majority of people Dewey (1996, here 73).

Similarly, although the sources for Jewish education during this period are more limited, not many Jewish families would have deemed it necessary to give their children an advanced education, and the "Jewish elementary teachers of whom we know from rabbinic sources seems to have usually taught Torah-reading skills only".[19] There were certainly some Jews who went on to more advanced forms of learning, and scribal education and activity was "widespread in Jewish literary cultures of this period, witnessing a diversity of training practices, locations, and degrees of expertise".[20] However, this group "likely lacked sufficient training in the contours of Greco-Roman literature", and these scribal skills were utilized mainly for the copying of Biblical texts or other important documents, such as receipts and wills.[21]

For those who did attain more advanced forms of education, who were very few in number, the process and extent of this education naturally would have differed, as already touched upon briefly in the above section. A family might choose to hire private teachers or pay a local *litterator* to teach writing and calculating skills.[22] For example, tradesmen and artisans might have sent their children for advanced education only in order to gain the practical skills necessary for their presumptive occupation, at which point they would return to work in the family business.[23] William Johnson lays out the scenario as follows:

> "One can well imagine that these merchants as a matter of course began with traditional elementary reading and writing instruction before being trained to full "literacy" in the specialty task; and yet it is also probable that most . . . were not "literate" in the sense of being competent to read a book roll containing Plato or Sophocles, and perhaps not even so much as to be able to write and read a brief letter".[24]

A full examination of the educational process is beyond the scope of the present discussion.[25] The overarching point that is most relevant here is that, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus tells us, "It is only when a considerable lapse of time has implanted firmly in our minds the forms of the words that we execute them with the utmost ease . . . "[26] Ancient sources differ in their descriptions of how students learned to write, rejecting any attempt to boil down the process into a uniform series of steps. For example, Quintilian says that students should have letters carved into a wooden board, from which they can trace the outlines of the letters with their pen (*Inst.* 1.1.27). After this step, they can then start fully writing out words and copying small amounts of text (*Inst.* 1.1.34–35). Seneca lays out a slightly different series of steps. He says that students should learn to write by having their teacher guide their hands, after which they can copy verses (*Epist. Moral.* 94.51). Although no absolute conclusions can be drawn from this evidence, the process laid out by both of these writers corroborates Cribiore's study and her conclusions.

In other words, in order for someone to be able to compose their own text, they would have required extensive instruction well beyond the early stages of education that an already relatively small percentage of people had the means to achieve, regardless of what the exact steps were. Training in composition came only after these early stages, and most did not advance to that point. As Ehrman succinctly concludes, "It took years, plus a good deal of native talent, to become proficient [in writing]".[27] This extensive education, Walsh notes, "was dependent on financial means, proper social connections, and a considerable investment of time that would have been required to obtain and study literature and then learn to produce one's own writings".[28] Indeed, as Keith rightly observes, the ability to compose and copy complex texts was the rarest of all literary competencies.[29]

2.3. Literacy and Power

In sum, while much more could be said about education in the Greco-Roman world during this period, there are a few overarching points that are most relevant to the purposes of this discussion and that most scholars would agree upon. The first is that literacy rates (in this case, meaning those who could read somewhat fluently and maybe possessed very basic writing ability) in the ancient world were low and likely around 10% during the period that the New Testament was composed (~50 CE–~125 CE).[30] Although it is impossible to arrive at a precise percentage, the number of those who received a more advanced literary education and acquired the skills necessary to compose an original piece of writing would have been considerably smaller.

The second is that literacy was often intimately linked with power and prestige. Perhaps inevitably, gradations of literacy are related to other hierarchies within society, such as wealth, honor and occupation.[31] It would be too sweeping a statement to say that anyone with a high degree of literacy would have been prominent and successful both socially and economically, but "one may assume that the highly literate would be the people with the most power, authority, and prestige within the community".[32]

While the use of texts and writing was not the only foundation by which this power was supported, it helped to bolster their claims of authority and "enhanced their means of controlling and influencing others".[33] In these communities, in which, as Keith puts it, "individuals [were] willing to arrange (or even end) their lives around a physical text to which they had limited—if any—access", it was perhaps inevitable that those who could access such texts on behalf of these individuals would have obtained great authority.[34] And

with this authority came the power to influence identity and self-conception within these groups through the text itself.[35]

Generally speaking, literature and literacy were often symbols of social status within larger society. Reading and writing "functioned as an expression of being 'Greek'" and were a facet of being a part of a privileged class Botha (1992, here p. 205). As Allen succinctly puts it, "access to literature and literary composition played a prominent role in organizing high society, functioning as an exclusionary device, and internal ordering scheme, and an ideological and aesthetic statement about what epitomized Romanness".[36] In short, when examined within the social contexts in which they functioned, writing (and, by extension, literacy more generally) was connected with the execution of power and authority in various political, economic, social and religious arenas.[37] This will be a very important point to keep in mind when examining these dynamics in relation to early Christianity. It is to this area that the focus now turns.

3. Implications of Literacy and the Production of the Pauline Pseudepigrapha

The reality of mass illiteracy throughout Greco-Roman society also held true for early Christian groups. Gamble argues that, although we cannot know for sure, the makeup of early Christian groups in terms of social status most likely "had a pyramidal shape rather like that of society at large" Gamble (1995, p. 5). This is not because these communities were "unique but because they were in this respect typical"[38]. Consequently, high levels of literacy within these groups were very unlikely, even if there were a disproportionate number of merchants, traders and other specialized working professionals.[39]

Due to this reality, the vast majority of people relied on oral communication and transmission, including, in the context of early Christianity, having texts read aloud to them by someone within the community who had the skills to do so.[40] The number of community members with this ability would have been minimal given what we know about literacy and education more generally within the Greco-Roman world of which these early Christians were a part.

This is a point worth expanding upon in relation to the emergence of the pseudepigraphal works written in the name of Paul. Many scholarly treatments of these texts propose and analyze generalities about the people who may have been behind the production and dissemination of the works in question but do not get into many specifics regarding the actual background/identity of the author or the position that they may have held within the community.[41] As Gamble observes, "Little to no attention has been paid to literacy in considering who rose to leadership in Christian congregations and why"[42]. The rest of this discussion hopes to help remedy that situation and will explore the implications of low literacy rates, the dynamics of power and leadership within these groups, and the relatively small number of Christians in the late first and early second century CE in order to argue for a fresh approach to understanding the production and emergence of the Pauline pseudepigrapha.

3.1. The Number of Literate Christians with the Skills to Produce a Pseudonymous Text

Naturally, the first thing to establish is how many Christians[43] there were by the end of the first century. This, however, cannot be undertaken with any precision beyond some well-educated guesswork. Great work has been carried out in this area by scholars such as Keith Hopkins (1998), Rodney Stark (1996) and, more recently, Bart Ehrman (2018). Stark, using a growth rate of forty percent per decade up to the time of Constantine, estimates that there were about 7500 Christians by 100 CE.[44] Hopkins and Ehrman have more or less (with some revision) followed the numbers proposed by Stark, albeit with an acknowledgement of its speculative nature.[45] A full analysis of the methods employed to reach these numbers and the methodological dangers involved are beyond the scope of the present discussion.[46] Suffice it to say that those who approach this topic do so with an acknowledgement of the limits imposed, and the present discussion follows in these footsteps.

We can begin, then, with a rough estimate of 10,000 total Christians (the largest number proposed by Hopkins, Stark and Ehrman) by the end of the first century CE. If we apply a figure of twenty percent, which is the highest end of Harris' estimates for literacy rates during this period, then we are left with a total of 2000 Christians who could be considered 'literate' in some way, shape or form. However, as laid out above, there were many gradations of literacy, with the majority of those who were literate possessing the skills to only read or, in some cases, write in a limited capacity, thus shrinking the 2000 number significantly. Only those with a high degree of literary expertise and education would have the skills necessary to compose a sophisticated piece of writing such as Ephesians or the Pastoral Epistles. Such skills would have required significant training and education well beyond the means of the vast majority of the population.

It is worth pausing here to consider the possibility that someone without such an advanced education could have used a scribe or amanuensis to produce such a composition. There are certainly examples of people who used scribes to compose a letter because they did not have the necessary skills to do so. For example, among the many Egyptian papyri that have been found, there are letters where the scribes explicitly say that they are writing on someone's behalf because they are illiterate and even sign the sender's name.[47] However, it was rare for someone to employ an amanuensis as a composer for the kinds of letters in question here. The ability to employ an amanuensis for such a task was also likely limited to those who were very wealthy and had highly trained secretaries, who were often slaves.[48]

Furthermore, an explanation also must be offered to account for the linguistic and rhetorical quality of the Pauline pseudepigrapha.[49] As Walsh states, "While scribes . . . could be hired to write an inscription, send a letter, or use their access to literary materials to help copy or produce a piece of writing like a contract, they did not necessarily possess the training, skill, and literacy necessary to write an original composition . . . "[50] Thus it is not very plausible that someone with little or no educational background could produce a sophisticated piece of writing, even if they used an amanuensis or scribe to actually write the text in question.[51]

3.2. Access to/Deep Knowledge of the Pauline Letters

The question of access to and knowledge of the Pauline letters is relevant to the topic at hand because most (if not all) of the Deutero-Pauline letters exhibit a deep familiarity with Paul's thought and at least some of Paul's letters.[52] Indeed, in order for a pseudepigraphal text to be successful in gaining legitimate status, it depended, in part, upon the skillful imitation of the original Dobroruka (2014, p. 134). In some cases, such as 2 Thessalonians, the letters share significant literary similarities with one or more of the authentic Pauline letters to the extent that their author(s) must have had a physical copy of those letters or (less plausibly) possessed a very intimate knowledge of those texts such that they could reproduce them from memory. The Deutero-Paulines also exhibit a familiarity with the Pauline letter form. Since in many ways Paul's letters do not conform to standard Greco-Roman letter-writing practices, the authors of these texts must have been very familiar with the unique nature of Paul's letters.[53]

The question of who would have had access to Paul's letters during the late first century or early second century is obviously a speculative one. Those within Paul's inner circle, such as his co-workers, would certainly have been able to access the letters in some capacity. It is also possible that someone outside the Pauline inner circle would have had access, especially after Paul's letters started to be collected and disseminated to different communities. Scholarly opinion is fractured regarding the origins of the Pauline letter collection and subsequent circulation.[54] What is more relevant for the present discussion is the dating of that process and, in this regard, there is more scholarly agreement. Most would agree with Harry Gamble that at least some of Paul's letters would have already attained a "wide breadth" of circulation by the end of the first century.[55] This assertion is supported by the fact that some of the early Church Fathers who wrote in the late first and

early second century, such as Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, reference or allude to some of Paul's letters (e.g., *1 Clem.* 47:1 and *Ign. Eph.* 12:2), which indicates that there was some circulation of Pauline material before this time, though exactly how long before is unclear.[56]

3.3. Motive, Authority and Positions of Power

The link between literacy and positions of power within early Christianity has been noted by some, but few (if any) have framed this relationship in terms of what it could potentially tell us about the production of the Pauline pseudepigrapha. New Testament texts, such as the Pastorals, clearly link leadership functions with the ability to read. For example, in 1 Timothy 4:13, the writer encourages 'Timothy' to "give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching"[57]. From the much more abundant evidence of the second century, Gamble concludes that it is "scarcely accidental that from the second century onward Christian bishops appear to have been among the best-educated Christians, that well-educated converts tended to be quickly enrolled in the clerical orders, or that the vast bulk of early Christian literature was written by clerics"[58].

However, that is not to say that all early Christian leaders were literate or that literacy was confined to these circles. But in the late first and early second century, it is likely that only a very small percentage of Christians who were not clerics or in leadership positions were literate. Although literacy was by no means a qualification for membership in an early Christian community, "it was undoubtedly a primary desideratum of Christian leaders and teachers from the earliest days . . . Thus, in the early period, just as later on, it appears that those who exercised leadership usually possessed the skills of literacy".[59]

So, in early Christian communities, where texts played a crucial function and held a unique authority, "it was inevitable that those who were able to explicate texts would acquire authority for that reason alone"[60]. It is from this small group of authoritative figures that there emerged what Gamble terms the 'Christian literati' who "produced the greater part of the literature in the ancient church"[61]. And while these literary products were circulated and, to a degree, accessible to a wider number of members within the community, the actual production of such texts was still confined to the communal elite.[62] It is also probable that many of those who could be considered 'Christian literati' in this early period received their education within the Greco-Roman educational apparatus before they became 'Christians'. Thus, these individuals, who often rose to leadership positions in some capacity, brought "familiarity with and appreciation for Greco-Roman values, political processes and the cultural interests of the literate classes" Horsfield (2012, p. 8). How much this actually influenced the writings that these authors produced is impossible to say.

In sum, it can be reasonably assumed that some percentage of this small number of educated Christians not only possessed advanced literary skills, but also used these skills to help gain and/or support positions of leadership and/or power, which effectively allowed these individuals to have an outsized influence over the production and dissemination of information, especially in written form. This served, at least in part, as the basis for their power, helped support their authority claims and "enhanced their means of controlling and influencing others".[63]

Ultimately, these factors allowed them to act as, in the words of Goody, "gate-keepers of ideas". He argues that "If the teaching of the skills of reading and writing is an intrinsic part of religions of the Book, its specialists inevitably acquire control of the input and output of a considerable segment of available knowledge"[64]. This ultimately led to, as already touched on above, a leadership group that was increasingly restricted to those with elite education, i.e., a very small cohort of elite males who were the most likely group to have been responsible for authoring some (if not most) of the texts that eventually came to constitute the New Testament.[65] Indeed, as Norton hypothesizes, this authorial and exegetical work was most likely "conducted within, and at the behest of, the earliest

circles of Christian leadership".[66] This would certainly create a plausible scenario where pseudonymous works could be put into circulation or inserted into a collection at some point in time by a group of Paul's associates who "took up Paul's work after his death and sought all the more to preserve and extend his legacy" Gamble (1985, pp. 39–40).

4. Implications

It is ultimately the contention of this discussion that this small group of Paul's associates satisfies many of the criteria necessary in order to plausibly explain the production of the Pauline pseudepigrapha that eventually came to form part of the New Testament. As such, it is worth considering whether the identities of at least some of those responsible are actually hidden in plain sight and known to us.

Throughout all of the canonical Pauline literature and Acts, there are upwards of 20 named individuals who were either co-workers with Paul and/or largely associated with Paul. The most notable of these include: Timothy[67], Titus[68], Barnabas[69], Prisca and Aquila[70], Sosthenes[71], Onesimus[72], Luke[73], Tychicus[74], and John Mark.[75] Presumably, all of these named individuals fit most, if not all, of the necessary criteria.

For the sake of illustration, let us consider Timothy as an example.[76] It is most probable that Timothy was literate.[77] He is named in the opening of multiple Pauline letters (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Phlm. 1:1), indicating that he was a co-sender and, in some capacity, possibly co-author of these letters (Richards 2004, pp. 33–6; Murphy-O'Connor 1995, pp. 16–34). The practice of naming co-senders was rare, and there is some debate over whether these named co-senders had an active role in the composition of the letters[78], either by serving as scribes[79] or as active contributors to their contents.[80]

Another point in favor of advanced literacy/education is that some of these co-workers, such as Timothy and Titus, also served in some instances as letter carriers, in which capacity they would have been tasked with reading the letter out loud to the addressed community, as well as sharing additional news and context.[81] Thus, someone who served as a co-sender or letter carrier for Paul's letters must have been well educated and able to read, and probably write, at a relatively complex level.[82]

These named co-workers also would have likely had access to at least some of Paul's letters. It is plausible that, similar to other Greco-Roman authors of the period, such as Cicero (see *Att*. 1.17, 3:9; *Fam*. 7.18.2), Paul kept copies of his letters, which would have been accessible to this inner circle.[83] Even if Paul did not keep copies of his letters, it is also plausible that someone within the Pauline inner circle was involved in the collection of Paul's letters, either shortly before or after his death and, perhaps, also the assembling of a Pauline canon of sorts.

Indeed, various scholars have argued that specific individuals within this circle, such as Onesimus Knox (1935, p. 10), Luke Moule (1962, pp. 264–65) and Timothy Guthrie (1970, p. 653), were responsible for originally gathering Paul's letters together after his death. This proposed theory regarding the development of the Pauline canon, often termed the 'Personal Involvement' theory, presents another means by which someone within the Pauline circle could have gained access to the letters. This would have involved not only the collection and dissemination of Paul's letters, but also a continuing effort to "mediate Pauline tradition to new ecclesial situations, and thus composing the pseudepigraphic deuteron-Pauline letters" Porter (2011, p. 29). This would certainly have given any of Paul's named co-workers and associates a plausible motive to produce such a document in the first place.

5. Concluding Thoughts

Due to the sheer lack and brevity of the evidence that we have to work with, the above analysis could rightly be said to be mainly in the realm of speculation. However, the intended goal was not to lay out an air-tight argument based on established figures and data. Rather, the main goal here was to point out and expand upon some of the implications that low literacy, taken together with other considerations, such as the potential effect

of literacy upon the leadership makeup of early Christian communities and the overall limited number of Christians who existed by the late first and early second century, might have for our understanding of pseudonymous texts (in this case, the canonical Pauline pseudepigrapha) within early Christianity.

In pursuance of this, it has also been argued that the majority of scholarship has not fully accounted for just how small the number of Christians who could have actually had the means and ability to produce these texts was. Rather than simply dismissing a priori any possibility of identifying an individual or individuals who were responsible for the production and dissemination of a specific pseudo-Pauline text[84], future scholarship may find fruitful avenues to explore in taking into account a wider variety of issues and circumstances that would make for a plausible origin story for these important pieces of early Christian history.

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Notes

1 There is much debate about how to properly define what pseudonymity is and the motives that may underlie it. For a more extensive treatment of this subject, see Ehrman (2013). For a different viewpoint on the phenomenon of pseudepigraphy and how it effects the way we read texts, see Najman and Peirano (2019, pp. 331–58). Najman and Peirano argue that, rather than thinking of pseudepigraphy as a practice related to forgery, it should be viewed as an interpretive reading practice that extends and expands the thought of an earlier famed teacher. Such a practice, they argue, would not have been seen as a forgery in the way that we think about such things in modern times.

2 Donelson (1986, p. 7). Donelson states clearly his opinion on the matter: "Whoever the author was, he is not anyone we know, even though he pretended to be Paul". The term 'author' and 'authorship' are used with full recognition of the issues surrounding the modern conception and terminology of these concepts. These issues are too vast to fully consider here. A good overview of the problem is given by Botha (2012, pp. 113–34).

3 I use the term here to refer only to Pauline texts in the New Testament canon.

4 It should be noted that the term 'group' here is questionable, as most of these early Christian believers did not exist in homogenous and cohesive groups, especially during the first and second centuries. Thus, I use the terms here out of convenience and lack of alternative rather than for the sake of historical accuracy.

5 Another influential study in this area is Bar-Ilan (1992). Bar-Ilan also argues that literacy rates in Judea during this period would have been well below the estimates proposed by Harris, possibly as low as 1.5–2%.

6 Hezer, *Jewish*, pp. 496–97.

7 Keith (2008). Keith summarizes this by pointing out that "literacy is not a well-defined category but rather a spectrum (or spectrums), and thus it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of 'literate competency(ies)'" (47).

8 Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 5. Compared to most other written correspondence of the period, Paul's letters were sophisticated and would have required a highly literate person in order to be read properly. Additionally, if there was a performative aspect to the oration, then the person would also need to have some kind of rhetorical background/knowledge. See (Johnson 2017, esp. 64–72).

9 Nasrallah (2018); Kloppenborg (2014); Hezer, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 5.

10 Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 5.

11 Haines-Eitzen (2000); Keith (2009). There is another example within Petaus's archive where he defends a person named Ischyrion, who was a fellow village scribe who was accused of being illiterate (ἀγράμματος). In Ischyrion's defense, Petaus contests that he is able to sign his name on his documents, thus proving his literacy. In light of these comments, Keith rightly notes that, "Literacy, it seems, is in the eyes of the beholder" (59). For a more detailed analysis of the Petaus archive and its mistakes, see Kraus (2000, esp. 328–40).

12 Johnson (2015, here p. 147). Learning to Read and Write. In *A Companion to Ancient Education*.

13 Cribiore (2001, here p. 169). Keith also cites Quintilian (*Inst*. 1.1.27) and Seneca (*Ep*. 94.15) as evidence for the copying method. See Keith, "Grapho-Literacy", p. 50.

14 Johnson, "Learning to Read", p. 145.

15 Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, p. 62.

16 The term 'people' is used here to refer mainly to free males (and females) rather than male and female slaves. We know of many instances where masters educated their slaves in reading and writing, but that process was often differentiated from the schooling of free children.

17 Walsh, *The Origins*, p. 113.

18 Ibid, p. 115.

19 Hezer, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 474.

20 Allen, "Libraries", p. 188.

21 Ibid.

22 Walsh, *The Origins*, p. 113; Hezer, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 474.

23 Walsh, *The Origins*, p. 115.

24 Johnson, "Learning to Read", 147. Cited in Walsh, *The Origins*, p. 115.

25 For a fuller treatment of the subject, see Sandnes (2009, esp 3–39).

26 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Literary Composition*, 2.229. Text is from Henderson (1974). Quintilian's comments on learning to write are also informative. He writes, "No short-cut is possible with regard to the syllables. They must all be memorized thoroughly and there must be no putting off the most difficult of them, as is commonly done, since that leads to an unpleasant surprise when the student needs to spell the words" (*Inst. Or.* 1. 1. 30). Text and translation are from Johnson, "Learning to Read", 139. In relation to Jewish families, see Josephus' comments in *C. Ap.* 2.199–205.

27 Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, p. 247.

28 Walsh, *The Origins*, p. 118.

29 Keith, *The* Pericope Adulterae, p. 105.

30 It should be noted that not everyone agrees that literacy rates were low throughout the Greco-Roman period. For a more detailed argument in favor of higher literacy rates, as well as critiques of Harris and Hezer, see Wright (2015).

31 Messick (1983, here p. 46). Cited in Hezer, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 503.

32 Hezer, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 502.

33 Hezer, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 495.

34 Keith, *The* Pericope Adulterae, p. 98.

35 Ibid, pp. 101–2.

36 Allen, "Libraries", p. 192.

37 Hezer, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 489.

38 Ibid.

39 In fact, it could be argued that early Christian communities were less educated than the overall populace. One piece of evidence is the set of critiques from pagans about Christianity/Christians and their perceived ignorance. See, e.g., Origen's response to pagan arguments against Christians in this regard. See Chadwick (1965). One example from the mid-first century is Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:26 that not many of the Christians at Corinth "were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (Βλέπετε γὰρ τὴν κλῆσιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί, οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς; translation is from the NRSV). To want extent this is a reflection of other Christian communities is hard to tell.

40 One example of this comes from Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 67.3–4. Justin provides crucial insight into this practice during the middle of the second century. He writes, "And on the day called for the sun, there is a common gathering of all who live in cities or in the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time allows. Next, after the reader has stopped, the president admonishes and encourages with a speech to imitate these good things". Text and translation are from Kloppenborg, "Literate Media", 42. See Heilmann (2022, esp 123–24), for points arguing against the reading of New Testament texts out loud in certain communal gatherings.

41 E.g., *Ephesians: A Commentary* Fowl (2012, pp. 11–15); Huizenga (2013, pp. 215–20).

42 Gamble, *Books*, p. 9.

43 This term is used with full acknowledgement of its ill-defined nature and anachronism. Throughout the first and second centuries CE, religious identities were, in many cases, fluid. There were Jews who believed in Jesus as the messiah who still would have considered themselves thoroughly Jewish. Likewise, some pagan believers might not have identified themselves as Christian, at least not in the way that we define the term in modern times. So, the use of the word here is due more to convenience and lack of a better alternative than historical accuracy. This is another complicating factor in trying to estimate how many 'Christians' there were by the end of the first century.

44 Stark, *The Rise*, pp. 6–7.

45 Hopkins, "Christian Number"; Ehrman, *The Triumph*, 287–94. Ehrman revises Stark's numbers slightly and suggests that there were anywhere from 7000–10,000 Christians by 100 CE.

46 For a fuller treatment of this topic, see Robinson (2017, esp. 1–13 and 24–40).

47 One example is P.Oxy. 1636.45–46. It reads ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ [μὴ εἰδότος γ]ράμματα ("I wrote for him since he does not know letters"). Grenfell and Hunt, Oxyrhynchus Papyri III, 52. Cited in Keith, *The* Pericope Adulterae, 60–1. Other examples include: P.Oxy. 2.264; 12.1466; 10.1273; 34.2713; P.Lips. 1.27.

48 Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, pp. 218–19.

49 Fewster (2016, here pp. 401–2). Fewster deals with this issue in relation to James, but it would also hold true for the Pauline pseudepigrapha. He rightly points out that in cases where someone commissioned a letter from an amanuensis who was highly trained in composition, it also usually required "at least the author's detailed notes or a structural outline for the letter."

50 Walsh, *The Origins*, p. 98.

51 Cf. Lee (2021). Lee correctly observes that illiterate people could easily have used an amanuensis to write/author a letter "in a secondary manner". However, he goes on to assert that "If the author was illiterate or semi-literate, he would provide a rough draft to an amanuensis orally, conveying the general idea of the message he wished to deliver" (46). But this does not mean that most scribes had the ability and training to compose intricate and rhetorically skilled letters resembling Paul's.

52 For an overview of how the Pauline pseudepigrapha (the Pastorals in particular) used Paul's letters, see Merz (2006, pp. 113–32). For an overview of how Ephesians and Colossians know and use the Pauline letters, see Leppä (2003, esp. 9–45).

53 Paul's influence in this regard was not only limited to documents written in his name. Other NT letters, such as 1 and 2 Peter, were clearly influenced by the Pauline letter form, especially in their pre- and postscripts. See Adams (2010, pp. 33–55); Dormeyer (2004, pp. 59–94). There are countless scholarly studies regarding the extent to which the pseudo-Paulines use other Pauline letters. Perhaps the most obvious examples are 2 Thessalonians' use of 1 Thessalonians and Colossians' use of Philemon. If Colossians is authentically Pauline, then Ephesians' use of Colossians could also be included.

54 For an overview of the different theories of how the Pauline canon was compiled and developed, see Stanley Porter, "When and How was the Pauline Canon Developed? An Assessment of Theories", in Porter (2004, pp. 95–128).

55 Gamble, *Books and Readers*, pp. 100–01.

56 McDonald (2008, pp. 266–70); Nasrallah, "The Formation", pp. 286–88.

57 ἕως ἔρχομαι πρόσεχε τῇ ἀναγνώσει, τῇ παρακλήσει, τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ. Jonathan Norton correctly notes that this "text does not imply that a teacher was expected to train laity in rote book-memorization or exegetical techniques. Indeed, the emphasis on Timothy's life-long acquaintance with the texts implies that his book learning marks him off from the laity with respect to his ability to appeal to sacred writings". See Norton (2022, p. 125).

58 Gamble, *Books and Readers*, p. 10.

59 Ibid, 9.

60 Gamble, *Books and Readers*, pp. 9–10.

61 Ibid, p. 41.

62 Allen, "Libraries", p. 194.

63 See notes 33 above.

64 Goody (1986, pp. 17–18). Cited in Keith, *The* Pericope Adulterae, p. 99.

65 Dewey, "From Storytelling to Written Texts", p. 74.

66 Norton, "The Lone Genius", p. 118.

67 Acts 16; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Phlm.

68 2 Cor. 7; Gal 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:10.

69 Acts 4, 9, 11–15.

70 Acts 18; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19.

71 Acts 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:1.

72 Col. 4:9; Phlm 10.

73 Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phlm. 24.

74 Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 3:12.

75 Acts 12, 15; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm. 24.

76 It is worth noting that James Dunn (and a few others) has proposed Timothy as the author of some of the Pauline pseudepigrapha, most notably Colossians. See Dunn (1996, pp. 39–41).

77 Norton, "The Lone Genuis", p. 125.

78 Adams, "Paul's Letter Opening", 42–3. Adams states, "When evaluating Paul's letters it is clear that being included within the letter opening as co-senders does not necessarily mean that they were co-authors . . . In evaluating Paul's choice of co-sender it does appear that they were chosen specifically because of the relationship that that person had with the recipient".

[79] Fee (1999, p. 61). This possibility is also considered by Harris (2005, p. 131).

[80] Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 19; Richards (1991, p. 154). Richards argues that it is unlikely that "Paul's references to others by name in his address was intended to indicate anything less than an active role in the composition of the letter".

[81] Johnson, "Paul's Letters Reheard", 60–76; Cf. Wagner (2002, p. 38). Wagner argues that "it is quite likely that the bearers of Paul's letters were charged by the apostle with the further responsibility of helping to interpret them". For other responsibilities that these letter carriers may have had, including helping to manage a given community's relationship with Paul, see Mitchell (1992).

[82] If Timothy did indeed serve as a letter carrier for some of Paul's letters, which seems highly likely, then a high level of education would have been required in order to properly read the letter out loud to the addressed community. The fact that Timothy was a co-worker of Paul's for a long period of time and seems to have had a high degree of responsibility also testifies to the fact that he was an effective emissary for Paul and was highly qualified to convey Paul's correspondence and orate effectively.

[83] Porter, "When and How", p. 125; Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, pp. 156–60; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, p. 12. While there is no direct evidence from the Pauline letters themselves, given the importance of the correspondence, it is plausible that Paul would have kept personal copies for himself as well.

[84] E.g., Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument*, p. 7.

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