Copying Manuscripts:
Textual and Material Craftsmanship

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'Verified Exact Copy': Literacy, Scribes, and Copying
in Papyri from the Judaean Desert (First to Second Century CE)

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1. Introduction: The Texts from Naḥal Ḥever

Besides the well-known manuscripts from Qumran—both biblical as well as parabiblical and sectarian (by some accounts Essene) texts—there have also been non-literary texts found at sites in the Judaean Desert: chiefly, but not exclusively, documentary texts on papyrus. These documentary papyri, written in Nabataean, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek (and, to a minor extent, also Latin), are for the most part legal acts and letters belonging to Jews hiding from the Roman army during the repression of the Bar Kochba revolt (132–135 CE), and who met their fate in the caves along the wadis near the Dead Sea.[1]

Within this mass of texts, rather heterogeneous in topic, there are both smaller sets of documents—such as the Masada papyri or ostraca—and other, bigger and better-known collections, such as the papyri from the Wadi Murabbaʿat and those from Naḥal Ḥever.[2] At this latter site, which lies on the western shore of the Dead Sea, four kilometres south of ʿĒn Gedi, some archaeological expeditions were conducted between 1952 and 1962. Firstly, in the so-called 'Cave of Letters' in Naḥal Ḥever, part of the personal archive of Yehonathan ben Beʿayan, a Jewish rebel,

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[1] For a general overview of the available materials, see Fitzmyer 2008 and Hartman 2016, 13–15.

[2] The main editions of the Judaean Desert papyri can be found in Beyer 2004; Cotton and Yardeni 1997; Lewis 1989; Yadin et al. 2002.

was found, comprising fifteen letters: ten in Aramaic, three in Hebrew, and two in Greek. (The collection, however, is now better known as the 'Letters of Bar Kochba,' after the name of the leader of the revolt).[3]

A second archive, found in another spot in the same caves, belonged to a woman called Babatha, daughter of a certain Šim'on. Babatha was a Jewish landowner from the village of Maḥoz Eglatain—a still unidentified site, on the southern shore of the Dead Sea—who apparently died in the cave along with other refugees, who were either directly involved in the revolt or just connected to the rebels through family relations. The Babatha papyri (designated as 'P.Yadin'), still bound in a leather purse, consist of thirty-six documents ranging from 93 to 132 CE; these include eighteen texts exclusively in Greek, nine in Greek with Nabataean and/or Aramaic subscriptions, three in Aramaic, and six in Nabataean. Many bear witness signatures in various languages and scripts. Almost all the texts contain civil and legal content: deeds and contracts, a loan document, a marriage contract, various summons, and registration of land.[4]

A third archive, also found in the same caves (not during the official Israeli explorations, but in earlier times) and containing a second marriage contract in Greek (P.Ḥever 65), was attributed to another woman, Salome Komaise, according to Hannah Cotton's reconstruction, undertaken on the basis of scattered papyri and fragments previously conside-

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[3] In 132 CE, Yehonathan bar Be'ayan and Masabala were commanders of the revolt in 'Ēn Gedi, and they should have sent support to Bar Kochba, who was being pursued by the Romans. However, the inhabitants of 'Ēn Gedi were also in danger and had to seek refuge in the local caves. Yehonathan probably found shelter in a large cave, bringing letters from the leader and a group of his relatives along with him. To the same cave fled Babatha, who was connected with the family of Yehonathan bar Be'ayan, and who brought her most important documents with her.

[4] Hartman 2016, 13–66. On the topic of law as exemplified in the archives of Babatha and Salome Komaise, see Cotton 2002; Czajkowski 2017; Oudshoorn 2007.

red to be of uncertain origin. A total of six papyri in Greek (P.Ḥever 60–65) and one in Aramaic (P.Ḥever 12) have been attributed to this archive.[5] Finally, another six documents in Aramaic and Hebrew have been found, belonging to a certain Eliʿezer ben Šemuʾel of ʿĒn Gedi, plus other loose texts or fragments still to be collocated.[6]

It goes without saying that the Naḥal Ḥever papyri, in particular those of the Babatha archive, offer us a unique glance into the lives of the Jews and Nabataeans dwelling in the southern part of the Dead Sea in the years immediately preceding the Bar Kochba uprising. Moreover, they offer rare and important testimony on essential topics such as multilingualism and literacy, as well as the role of the scribes active in this peculiar geographical area, which included both southern Judaea and part of the Nabataean realm: a borderline area extending from the oasis of ʿĒn Gedi and Zohar in Judaea to Rabbath-Moab, Petra, and Maḥoza at the edge of northwest Arabia, where the settlement of Jewish communities dates back to at least the Hasmonaean period.[7]

Obviously, Judaea and Nabataea had a different heritage, culture, script, and languages; however, after they were both conquered by Rome (Judaea in the year 70; Nabataea in 106, after which it was converted into Provincia Arabia), they started sharing a common legal and administrative system: the Roman one, which required specific new skills in the field of scribal practice. In this paper, I will focus on the extent of literacy among Jews and Nabataeans as it can be deduced from the above-mentioned papyri, and I will elaborate on the identity and skills of the local scribes who produced the majority of those documents and the significance that the process of copying had for their work.

[5] P.Yadin 37. Later, the archive was expanded to include other documents from the Seiyâl (II) collection, among which the same names appeared. On the reconstruction of the archive, see Cotton 1995a.

[6] The documents of Eleʿazar ben Šemuʾel have been published in Yadin et al. 2002, 37–70, 142–168.

[7] Schiffman 2012, 185.

2. *Formal Aspects: 'Double' Documents*

Many of the Judaean Desert papyri are in the form of so-called 'double deeds' (also called 'double documents' or 'tied deeds') and they share the feature of repeating the text on the main side of the same document (see Plate LXV, Fig. 1). A careful analysis of this rather special category of document[8] reveals many features of the copying process carried out by the scribes working in this context.[9]

In a double document, once opened, two versions of the same text can be seen. The first one—the 'inner text'—is written on the upper part of the papyrus; the second one—the 'outer text'—is written on its lower part. The upper part of the sheet, however, is rolled up, tied closed, and signed backwards by the witnesses in order to preserve the text from potential alterations and modifications, while the lower part of the sheet was not tied shut and always remained readable and accessible. Both texts were supposed to be exactly the same, but their legal value was different, the inner (tied) text being a kind of a warranty, to be opened in case of doubt or dispute. Double deeds were usually written *transversa charta*.[10]

Given its evidential value, the inner text was the most important one, and one would expect that it was written first and in a careful manner. Quite the contrary: it is certain that it was written after, not before, the outer text, and usually—at least in our documents—it was written in a rather careless style. By comparing various papyri from Naḥal Ḥever, it

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[8] In the second century, while double documents were becoming increasingly rare in Roman Egypt, they were still widely used in the eastern provinces of the empire. There are fifteen double deeds among the Dura Europos papyri, and at least twenty more—in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew—from Judaea, mainly from Babatha's archive, but also from Wadi Murabba'at and other sites. The use of double documents in the Nabataean Kingdom indeed seems to have been a Nabataean custom, or at least one that preceded the Romans. See Cotton 2003b.

[9] Koffmann 1968; Wolff 1978, 78–90.

[10] I.e. across the fibres of the papyrus; see Lewis 1989, 6–10.

has been possible to ascertain that the outer text was indeed written first, in the lower part of the document, and that the scribe subsequently wrote the copy—often not an exact copy, but a slightly abridged text, in a smaller script—in the remaining, upper part of the papyrus, which was eventually rolled up and tied closed using thin cords.[11] At this point, the witnesses put their signatures on the verso of the inner, rolled part of the scroll, each one signing in his own script and language and adding a word for 'witness' after the name and patronymic according to his ethnicity and literacy: μάρτυς or שהד (Hebrew *śahed*).[12]

The Nabataean double documents from Naḥal Ḥever were sometimes compiled following a slightly different procedure, maybe due to a specific local tradition.[13] This can be seen, for instance, in P.Yadin 37 (formerly known as the 'Papyrus Starcky'), where the inner texts starts on the verso, continuing towards the bottom of the papyrus; then the papyrus is turned over, bottom to top (instead of the usual rotation from back to front). In this way, the two extremities of the inner text—the beginning on the verso, and the remaining part on the recto—were kept together on the same part of the papyrus and could be rolled and tied closed. Here, too, the procedure was meant to prevent subsequent modifications to the inner text, to which nothing could be added.[14] In this same manner, P.Yadin 2 and P.Yadin 3 (Nabataean) as well as P.Yadin 7 (Aramaic) were prepared.[15] A rare, almost unique case of a bilingual double deed can be detected in P.Ḥever 8 (year 135 CE), where the

[11] See in particular P.Dura 18, 20, and 24; Lewis 1989, 9; Oudshoorn 2007, 160 n. 1999.

[12] For the tied deeds, several witnesses (usually five or seven) were required (Schiffman 2003).

[13] P.Yadin 2, 3, and maybe also 9. The most ancient Nabataean document from Naḥal Ḥever, the so-called P.Starcky (P.Yadin 36, 58/67 CE), was written in this particular manner. On Nabataean double deeds, see Yardeni 2001, 124–126.

[14] Also P.Yadin 2, 3 (Nabataean), and 7 (Aramaic): Cotton 2003b, 11.

[15] Cotton 2003b, 11

inner text is in Aramaic and the outer one in Hebrew.[16] The more important text, from the legal point of view, remained the inner one, written in the usual language of public legal documents: in that period, it appears that Hebrew was no longer considered suitable for civil legal purposes, but it was nevertheless used in the outer text, maybe in connection with the Hebrew revival pursued during the Bar Kochba revolt.[17]

3. Languages

The most ancient papyri of the Babatha archive are those in Nabataean. It was in fact the Naḥal Ḥever documents that proved Nabataean to have effectively been a spoken language.[18] Later texts are in Aramaic,[19] or written in Aramaic language and script but showing strong Nabataean influence, such that they can possibly be labelled Judaeo-Nabataean. Finally, there are documents in Greek, occasionally with subscriptions in local languages (Aramaic and Nabataean; never in Hebrew), such as the witnesses' signatures.

It is known that, at least from the Hellenistic-Roman period, Greek was in widespread use throughout the entire Near East, though the evidence of its diffusion is better attested in Judaea than in the Arabian peninsula.[20] Among the biblical texts from Qumran, those in Greek are few (about twenty-seven texts, mainly from Cave 7, which account for only 3% of the Qumran texts in general). In the documentary materials, this percentage changes significantly, showing how Greek was wide-

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[16] Cotton 2003b, 8–9.

[17] Cotton 2003b, 9.

[18] Before the discovery of the Judaean Desert texts, the Nabataean language was known only from epigraphic sources and its status as a spoken language was disputed: see Morgenstern 1999. For its linguistic features, and especially on its Arabic loanwords, see Greenfield 1992.

[19] Fitzmyer 1970; Gzella 2006.

[20] Cotton and Yardeni 1997, 153–157; Hezser 2001; Wise 1992, 439–441. On the diffusion of Greek in the region, see Charlesworth 2014 and Hartman 2014.

spread for non-literary purposes in this area.[21] Indeed, the use of Greek in public documents became increasingly necessary, especially after the establishment of Provincia Arabia in 106: as has long been known, in Egypt as well as in the eastern provinces, the Romans preferred Greek as the language of legal proceedings and administrative acts, though Latin was not completely neglected.[22] Greek was necessary, however, not just for administrative purposes, but also in daily life, for instance as a medium of communication between Jews and Nabataeans. In the limited epistolary corpus that has come down to us from the Judaean Desert, it can be noted that ten letters are in Greek, and it appears that sometimes it was easier to find someone able to write in Greek than in the local languages.[23]

However, even after 106 CE, we find documents in local languages: e.g. P.Yadin 6, in Nabataean, from year 14 of the Provincia Arabia (119/120 CE). Documents in Hebrew are not unknown (e.g. P.Yadin 44–46), but it seems that writing Hebrew required specially educated scribes. Rural Jewish officers and non-professional scribes were certainly able to write in Aramaic, but competence in Hebrew could not be taken for granted, while Greek was required for everyday necessities.[24]

4. Literate Non-Professionals and the Practice of Copying

In the specific area under analysis, literate individuals sometimes produced documents for themselves or for their family circle. These cases

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[21] A few other Greek texts come from sites such as Wadi Daliyeh, Wadi Nar, Wadi Ghweir, Wadi Sdeir, and Naḥal Mishmar; see Tov 2014, 2–9.

[22] Fitzmyer 1970; Millard 1995.

[23] One of the Bar Kochba letters, P.Yadin 52, was written in Greek, and the sender, Soumaios, excuses himself for having written in Greek because nobody there was able to write ἑβραϊστί (i.e. in Hebrew or Aramaic): ἐγράφη δ[ὲ] ἑληνιστὶ διὰ τ[ὸ ὁρ]μὰν μὴ εὑρηθ[ῆ]ναι ἑβραεστὶ γ[ρά]ψασθαι. See Charlesworth 2014, 183–188; Cotton in Yadin et al. 2002, 357–359; ead. 2003b, 146–148; Doering 2012, 68–71; Martone 2013, 70–74; Wise 2015, 245–251.

[24] Wise 2015, 295–296.

of texts written by common people—not professional scribes—usually involved persons of high social status and of some wealth, mainly belonging to the class of local Jewish landowners. Often they had good knowledge of Aramaic, whereas knowledge of Greek was not as widespread as could be expected.

In legal deeds, all the involved parties had to sign and/or subscribe the documents, but this was not necessarily done by their own hand. If a party was unable to do it personally, someone else—technically called χειροχρήστης, literally, 'one who gives (his) hand'—would subscribe it for them, a function undertaken by the ὑπογραφεύς in the case of the Egyptian papyri.[25] On the other hand, even apparently literate people might be unable to write long or complex texts, and their skills might be limited to writing just a few words, and moreover to being slow writers (βραδέως γράφοντες).[26] Their capabilities were ultimately restricted to writing personal names, just enough to sign deeds and documents. Being far from real literacy even in Aramaic, the scarce knowledge of Greek and Hebrew on the part of such individuals can be better understood in this context.[27] P.Yadin 7, from the Babatha archive, shows clearly enough how a wealthy landowner coped with his limited writing skill in the multifaceted cultural environment he lived in. It is a deed of gift written in Aramaic, but in the manner of the Nabataean double deeds; thus the text begins on the verso, upside down. It was written in Maḥoza by Šim'on, Babatha's father, who subscribed it as follows: שמעון בר מנחם על נפשה כתבה ('Šim'on bar Menaḥem by himself wrote it'). Despite this statement, it is evident that Šim'on had scarce practice in writing: the text contains mistakes, and a large portion of it was omitted due to a ὁμοιοτέλευτον (which, moreover, has caused some confusion in correctly understanding this text).

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[25] Cotton 1995b. For the role of ὑπογραφεύς in Egyptian papyri, see Youtie 1975.

[26] For the use of the classification βραδέως γράφων, 'slow writer,' in non-literary papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt, see Kraus 2007 and Youtie 1971.

[27] Wise 2015, 321.

One who was a βραδέως γράφων could, with some effort, copy a legal document from a model: this was the case of Jewish marriage contracts, or *ketubboth.* In P.Mur 21, for instance, we see that a certain Lazar ben Yosef copied the *ketubbah* for his daughter. As already noted by J. T. Milik, the writing of this *ketubbah* is rather peculiar: the letters vary in thickness and size, and the lines are uneven; it is evident that Lazar encountered various difficulties in copying from the model.[28]

At a higher level of literacy, apparently, was Babatha's second husband, Yehudah bar Ele'azar Khthusion, a member of a wealthy Jewish family from 'Ēn Gedi. He was able to write fluently in Jewish Aramaic script and he also wrote the rather long Aramaic-language *ketubbah* of Babatha (P.Yadin 10), though the text shows some mistakes, repetitions, and an accidental eye-skip (παράβλεψις).[29] But Yehudah was not a professional scribe; thus the overall impression is that he was able to master Aramaic writing better than many others. His bride, Babatha, also signed the marriage contract in her name, but since in other documents it is clearly stated that she was illiterate, it is possible that she merely copied her signature.[30] Yehudah, however, was only able to write in his native language; he engaged a professional scribe—a certain Theenas, who signed various other documents—to write the Greek marriage contract of his daughter Šelamṣion (P.Yadin 18, April 128 CE); he only signed it, in Aramaic. It is worth noting that the groom, Yehudah Kimber,

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[28] Benoit et al. 1961, 114; Wise 2015, 90.

[29] In l.6, he skips something (we don't know what); in l.7, he uses the masculine imperfect instead of the feminine imperfect singular; in l.9, he repeats the text from the previous line. Lines 14 and 15 begin with the same word.

[30] In P.Yadin 15, Ele'azar son of Ele'azar served as her χειροχρήστης, adding 'because she doesn't know letters' (διὰ τὸ αὐτῆς μὴ εἰδέναι γράμματα): Cotton 1995b, 38; Hezser 2001, 314. Rabbinic sources mention a particular practice: when an illiterate person had to write his or her signature, someone else would lightly outline the letters, and the person who had to sign simply had to trace the letters based on this model; see Schiffman 2003, 184.

though not of low social status, may have been completely illiterate, because a ὑπογραφεύς subscribed in his stead.

Further hints of the general levels of literacy in this context can be drawn from the signatures of the witnesses. As mentioned above, all the double documents were signed on the verso by various witnesses: usually seven, sometimes five. Among them, the two parties to the transaction were included, a feature typical of documents from the Judaean Desert, as noted by L. Schiffman.[31] The involved parties signed, for instance, in P.Yadin 18, the Šelamṣion Greek marriage contract, the first two signatures on the back being those of the bride's father and of the groom, followed by the five signatures of the witnesses. In the Nabataean documents, we never find any more than five witnesses, and the subscriptions of the witnesses are almost always in Aramaic or Nabataean, rarely in Greek. In only one case each did the witnesses sign exclusively in Greek (P.Yadin 11) or in Nabataean (P.Yadin 16). A certain degree of linguistic adaptation appears in Greek papyri where we find some Nabataean witnesses signing in Greek, such as in P.Yadin 12 (Ἀβδερεὺς, or Σουμαίου μάρτυς) or P.Yadin 19 (Σουμαῖος Καβαίου μάρτυς). Greek signatures in non-Greek documents sometimes appear to be more or less explicitly connected with people who had more than one linguistic skill, and who had the tendency to prefer Greek in official acts. This is the case of Thaddaios son of Thaddaios, who signed in Greek on documents in Nabatean or Aramaic (maybe properly Judaeo-Nabataean), such as P.Yadin 8 (Θαδαῖος θαδαίου μάρτυς; see also P.Yadin 15, P.Yadin 20, and P.Yadin 23). However, Thaddaios could have been a public functionary.[32]

5. The Scribes and Their Greek in a Non-Greek Environment

As has been shown so far, a real literacy in one or more than one language, in this context, can be detected only in those cases involving public officials, scribes, and other persons openly engaged in public (Jewish, Nabataean, or Roman) administration or serving as 'freelance workers.'

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[31] Schiffman 2003, 178.
[32] Yadin et al. 2002, 108–111.

This probably happened especially in the villages, where their services could be retained periodically or occasionally; other professionals probably offered their services at the bureaus of local courts, temples, and so on. From our papyri, it is evident that the Jews felt more at ease in Aramaic than in Greek. In any case, in order to produce official documents in Greek—as usually required by the Roman administration—they needed to hire a professional scribe, since it was necessary to make use of specific terminology and technical or juridical formulas. For the writing of private letters, on the other hand, non-professional scribes could more easily be hired. This can be ascertained, for instance, from the correspondence between Bar Kochba and his soldiers and officers, as well as from other letters found in the Judaean Desert.[33]

The process of copying was mainly undertaken by professionals, who were also required to request or produce legal copies of documents deposited in public or temple archives. On this and other occasions, praxis compelled the scribe to add his complete and official signature at the end of the document. This practice, widely attested in the Babatha archive, allows us to take a closer look at the skills of each of these scribes, who identified themselves by name followed by the standardized form ἔγραψα (Aramaic, *ktbh*) 'he wrote (it)' in the third person.[34] Regrettably, the analysis and comparison of the scribal subscriptions is thwarted by the fact that, the papyri being for the most part double deeds, these subscriptions and signatures were usually written towards the extremity of the document, at the bottom of the outer text, which was more exposed and damaged, often leading to a complete loss of the scribal subscription. This happens in both Greek and Nabataean papyri, with the difference that, the Nabataean text usually being longer, the scribal subscription was sometimes placed not on the recto, but also on the verso of the papyrus.

The mother language of the scribes involved in the preparation of the Greek documents from the Judaean Desert was presumably Ara-

[33] Doering 2012.
[34] On Jewish scribes, see Hezser 2001, 313–320 and Schams 1998, 209–213.

maic. Perhaps they gained or refined their skills in Greek only after the Provincia Arabia was created, though it could perhaps be more reasonable to think that at least some of them started this training even earlier, the Roman administration in Judaea already having been active for decades (at least from the 6 CE, with the prefect Coponius). In any case, it is certain that someone had to learn how to copy and compile documents in Greek rather quickly, as it appears from P.Ḥever 64: the scribe of this papyrus—as noted by H. Cotton—created a very strange Greek text, often difficult to understand, with inconsistent case endings, revealing that he tried to adapt his Aramaic textual model to Greek.[35] Some telltale features of a novice or inexpert scribe are the separation of words (as is customary in Aramaic), the scarce use of ligatures, and the tendency towards a formal and conservative script, probably because he was trained on an outdated model.[36]

As for the identity of the scribes who wrote the Greek documents of the Babatha archive, something can be said at least for three of them. Two were certainly active in the village of Maḥoza, one in ʿĒn-Gedi; they were, respectively, Theenas son of Simon, Germanos son of Yehudah, and Justinus. Of a fourth scribe, we know only his patronymic: another ʿson of Simon.ʾ The names of the other scribes are lost.

Theenas

The scribe Theenas (Θεενας, possibly from the name Teḥinah) wrote P.Yadin 14, 15, 17, and 18 in the years 125 to 128, and P.Yadin 32, undated.[37] P.Yadin 13 seems to have been written by the same hand as all of these documents, but has no scribal subscription. In P.Yadin 14, Theenas's subscription is almost illegible, but N. Lewis recognized his hand

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[35] Cotton and Yardeni 1997, 203–221. S. Porter, however, argues that the reduction of the cases and simplified gender system can be explained as normal in a lower variety of language in a diglossic scenario (Porter 2000, 60).

[36] Cotton and Yardeni 1997, 137–149; Crisci 1991.

[37] Wise 2015, 3–5. According to Wise, the same Theenas/Teḥinah also appears as one of the parties in P.Yadin 44, written in Hebrew, which for some reason he did not sign, instead resorting to an ὑπογραφεύς.

and thus reconstructed his usual subscription, Θεενας Σίμονος λιβράιος, as in the fragment of P.Yadin 32. P.Yadin 15, written in 125, is a complaint of Babatha about the legal guardians of her son Jesus. The papyrus is written in Greek, with subscriptions in Aramaic, Nabatean, and Greek, and the following elaborate scribal subscription: ὁ δὲ γράψας τοῦτο Θεενας Σίμονος λιβλάριος. In P.Yadin 17 and 18, we find Θεενας Σίμονος λιβλάριος ἔγραψα. Theenas wrote a rather good Greek, even if, understandably, his script is far from perfection, with a limited use of ligatures. It may be added that, according to the prosopographical inquiry carried out by M. O. Wise, Theenas could have been a brother of Masabala, one of the commanders in charge during the Bar Kochba revolt, then a member of a scribal family possibly connected with the Minor Prophets scroll fragments found in the 'Cave of the Horrors' in Naḥal Ḥever.[38] This family background could explain the good multilingual education that Theenas had received. At any rate, Theenas was rather an exception: the other scribes appear just to have been low-level village scribes.

(?) son of Simon

The deed of gift P.Yadin 19, written in Maḥoza in 128, has some damages in the final part of the scroll. Of the scribal subscription, only a patronymic survives: [—]ας Σίμο[ν]ος ἔγραψα. Despite the similarities, the name cannot merely be reconstructed as [Theen]as and attributed to the previous scribe because of the different handwriting and the peculiar, confused orthography, interchanging alpha with epsilon and omicron, and a curious reading of the diphthongs. His Greek is barely comprehensible: the scribe was a native speaker of Aramaic or Nabataean, with little knowledge of Greek.

Germanos

Germanos son of Ioudas wrote P.Yadin 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27. He worked in Maḥoza and his name may be a Greek adaptation of a Nabataean name (*grmn*), unless the reverse is true. His script is plain,

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[38] Wise 2015, 295–296, 334, and elsewhere.

with a characteristic kappa with a semi-circle, but his Greek is not as correct as that of Theenas: Germanos had many problems with case endings, which he interchanged in a casual manner. In the first three documents written by him (P.Yadin 20, 21, and 22), Germanos subscribed his name using the formula ἐγράφη διὰ Γερμανοῦ λιβλαρίο. Later on, in P.Yadin 23, 25, and 26, he signed ἐγράφη διὰ Γερμανοῦ Ἰούδου,[39] and in P.Yadin 27, we find Γερμανοῦ Ἰούδου ἔγραψα.

Justinus/Ioustinos

The last scribe to leave a self-identification was Justinus, appearing in P.Yadin 11 (ἐγράφη διὰ Ἰουστείνου). Justinus had a small, round script, different from the other scribes, and used rather elongated letters. Evidently, he was trained abroad.

Summing it up, unlike the scribes mentioned at different times in the Hebrew Bible, in the New Testament, and in rabbinic literature, who belonged to well-organized social and/or religious groups, the scribes of the Judaean Desert documents were simply 'professionals of writing' who varied in status, depending on their working environment. Flavius Josephus makes reference to these local scribes when he mentions the κωμῶν γραμματεῖς in Herod's kingdom (*Jewish War* 1.479). Significantly, the Semitic word for 'scribe,' *spr'/spr* (Aramaic *safra*, Hebrew *sofer*) which—as in the Septuagint and the NT—is usually rendered with γραμματεύς in Greek, is always λιβλάριος, a loanword from Latin *librarius*, in the Babatha documents.[40] This detail is not without significance, and suggests that a local scribe who could call himself λιβλάριος was active in some official contexts, such as the military (as in the Egyptian papyri, where λιβλάριος refers to a clerk in the Roman army) or other branches of the Roman administration.[41] Both Theenas and Germanos used the title λιβλάριος in various documents. As local scribes sufficiently able to write in Greek, they could have been employed in

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[39] Compare with the similar expression δι᾿ ἐμοῦ ἐγράφη, known from Egyptian papyri of a later period (such as P.Lips. 13, 366); see Lewis 1989, 46.

[40] Gignac 1976, 103–104; Lewis 1989, 64.

[41] BGU II 423; P.Mich III 166.

writing official documents and hired to render their assistance at legal trials in which the involved parties spoke only the vernacular languages. That λιβλάριος was indeed an official title is demonstrated by the fact that Germanos identifies himself as a λιβλάριος only up to a specific time, September 130: later on, something changes, and from November of the same year he signs only with his name and patronymic. It seems that, for some unknown reason, he left his previous position. Other scribes—such as the anonymous 'son of Simon' in P.Yadin 19—did not use the title λιβλάριος and probably worked as private professionals.

Finally, there is the case of those scribes—hardly the majority—who, despite their Jewish identity and/or origins and the fact that their mother language was Aramaic, were able to write in Greek, but were not very skilled in the local languages and writing systems. This is the case of a subscriber of P.Yadin 18, who was fluent in Greek, but not in Aramaic.[42] This example suggests that by no means did the scribes receive an education in both Aramaic and Greek, but sometimes—maybe for economic reasons—they learned to write only in one language: preferably in Greek, as it seems in this case; being needed for any employment in Roman administration, Greek probably seemed more useful for job opportunities. Judging from the above-mentioned Nabataeans who regularly subscribed their names in Greek (P.Yadin 16, 1.16; P.Yadin 19, 1.34), it is possible that the same phenomenon also applied to the education of the Nabataeans.

6. Scribes of the Nabataean Papyri

Compared to the data we have for the Jewish scribes working with Judaeo-Aramaic and Greek, the position of the scribes of the Nabataean documents is more difficult to clarify. We do not have much evidence concerning scribal activity in the main centres of the Nabataean kingdom, though it is fairly certain that scribal activity was highly widespread, as demonstrated in part by the heavy influence of cursive script on all kinds of official Nabataean inscriptions, where a lapidary or formal

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[42] Wise 2015, 172–173.

script would be expected. Unfortunately, the Nabataean documents in the Babatha archive only shed some light on scribes working in a peripheral area, possibly all of whom were of low social status.

The seven Nabataean papyri in the Babatha archive appear to have been written by several individuals.[43] Two of them were probably brothers, as suggested by the presence of the same patronymic. The first one, *ḥwrw br ʿwtw* (Ḥūrū bar Ġawṯū, or ʿAwaṯū)[44] placed his subscription twice on the same double deed, written in 99 CE in a village named *dmwn* or *rmwn* (in the latter case, Rimmōn); see the signature in P.Yadin 1: '*ḥwrw br ʿwtw* the scribe (*spr*) wrote this.' The second one, *ʿzwr br ʿwtw* (? ʿAzwar bar ʿAwaṯū, or ʿAzūr bar Ġawṯū), signed three documents, P.Yadin 2 (Maḥoza), P.Yadin 3 (Maḥoza), and P.Yadin 4 (no place), as '*ʿzwr br ʿwtw* the scribe wrote this.' P.Yadin 9, from 122 CE, was written in a more cursive hand by another scribe, called Menaḥai (?), whose patronymic is lacking.

Only two Nabataean documents, P.Yadin 6 and 9, were composed after the inclusion of the Nabataean kingdom in the province of Arabia. The scribe of P.Yadin 6, Yoḥana bar Makuṯa, very fluent in Nabataean script and presumably a professional scribe, seems to have been a particularly interesting figure.[45] He appears not just as a scribe, but also as a subscriber in some documents, such as in P.Yadin 22, where Bar Makuṯa (Ἰοάνης Μαχχουθας in the Greek text) writes in a cursive Nabataean script: *ywḥnʾ br mkwtʾ ʾdwnh ktbt ʾl pwm bbtʾ* ('I, Yoḥana bar Makuṯa, as her *dominus*, wrote for Babatha'). He also appears as a witness in P.Yadin 16, surprisingly with a Nabataean patronymic (Yoḥana bar ʿAbdʿobodat Makuṯa), showing that *mkwtʾ* was a familiar nickname. As a witness, moreover, he subscribed his name on the recto of P.Yadin 9: *ywḥnʾ br mktwtʾ šhd ktb ydh* ('Yoḥana bar Makuṯa, witness, wrote it by his own hand'). He served as Babatha's guardian in the Roman court, where Babatha, as a

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[43] On the first four Nabataean documents from Babatha'a archive, P.Yadin 1–4, see Esler 2017.

[44] Negev 1991, 28.

[45] Ilan 2002.

woman, was expected to be accompanied by a male patron. But Yoḥana bar Makuṯa was also an experienced writer of Aramaic. In this language and script, he wrote P.Yadin 8, a contract for the purchase of a donkey. The document is written in an Aramaic script heavily influenced by a Nabataean ductus and bears a Nabataean dating. On the recto, after the names of the involved parties, our scribe signs with a typically Jewish version of his name, *ywḥnn* (Yoḥanan). This leads us to conclude that he perhaps had a mixed identity, both Jewish and Nabataean: only when he appears not as a scribe, but as a witness, does he use the Nabataean, even when the other subscribers sign in Aramaic or Greek (see, for example, P.Yadin 14 and 20).

7. *Making Copies*

7.1 *The Education of the Scribes*

It has frequently been pointed out that the focus of the education leading to the literacy of professional scribes, who were not experts in law and not supposed to read literary texts, was on their writing, not on their reading skills. The goal of the whole process was for them to be able to compose mainly legal documents, employing or adapting some fixed formulas. To do this, the scribal training was initially based on copying single letters, then single words, and eventually entire formulas necessary for the demands of their work. This process is illustrated in various finds from the Judaean Desert, such as abecedaries and lists of names.[46] This proves that the process was not very different from the education of scribes as observed elsewhere, for example in Graeco-Roman Egypt and Italy.

In Egypt and in the Near East, the scribes wrote their exercises mainly on ostraca: fragments of pottery, not as expensive as papyri.[47] M. O. Wise

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[46] Discussions of abecedaries can be found in Yadin et al. 1989, 44–45 and Hezser 2001, 85–88.

[47] Yadin et al. 1989, 23–24. A Hebrew-Aramaic abecedary from Qumran features a division of the alphabet into two halves, with the letter *lamed* in the

has pointed out that typical contractual formulas appear in two *tituli picti* on sherds from Masada (Mas514 and Mas515): gaining literacy and training in legal deeds were possibly connected in some measure.[48]

7.2 *Multiples of Legal Documents*

The prominence of the copying process as a duty of professional scribes in the historical, legal, and cultural setting of the Judaean Desert papyri cannot be underestimated, considering that, for the most part, what we have are not originals, but copies of legal deeds that were in the possession of the parties. Legal documents and contracts, for example, were issued in multiple copies so that each person involved could obtain proof of the transaction for his own archive. Sometimes two copies of what seems to be the same document show substantial differences on closer inspection: a clear example of this is P.Yadin 22 and 21, two almost identical papyri concerning the same transaction, the trade of a date crop belonging to Babatha. P.Yadin 21 records the purchase, P.Yadin 22 the sale: the two texts are almost identical, and exhibit changes only when they focalize on the seller or on the purchaser. The fact that both versions of the deed have been found among the documents of Babatha is somewhat puzzling in this case, and it has been suggested that sometimes the parties (or even just one party) retained both documents to keep a complete record of the transaction.

The production of copies could also be recorded in the text of the document, as in the case of P.Yadin 26, l.20: ἐγράφη ἀντίτυπα δύω, 'two copies were written.' The number of copies could depend on how many persons were involved in a transaction: P.Mur 24 (Greek, 134 CE) records eleven contracts of lease stipulated by Hillel bar Garis, who leased portions of agricultural land to tenant farmers. It seems that every lessee

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middle: the division after *l*, as demonstrated by Coogan, is also a common division in other abecedaries (Ugaritic, Greek, Latin), showing that the training of the scribes was, after all, very similar (Coogan 1974, 61–63). For a scribal exercise on a papyrus from Qumran (4Q431), see Naveh 1986 and Taylor 2017.

[48] Wise 2015, 58.

took a copy of the contract, and Hillel himself had eleven copies of the transaction. The transaction was done in Herodium, and the original was stored in the local archive.[49] It seems that the normal praxis implied that all the parties involved in a transaction received a copy of the deed or were permitted to commission one. In P.Yadin 23—a summons to the provincial governor court—it is stated: ἔχο[υ]σιν δὲ ἑκάτεροι ἀντίτυπον, 'both parties have a copy.'[50]

In a multilingual environment like this, it is not surprising that copies could be composed in different languages. The census declaration found in the archive of Salome Komaise (XḤev/Ṣe Gr 5) is certainly a copy because the subscription of the prefect, originally in Latin, appears here in Greek, and the entire document is in the same hand.[51] Elsewhere we find that the original contract kept in the local official archive had subscriptions in Aramaic, but in the copies, these subscriptions were translated into Greek. Sometimes we find rather strange situations, as in case of P.Yadin 11, a loan contract in Greek: the Greek copy of this contract went to the debtor, a Jew named Yehudah, who did not know Greek; the original, with an Aramaic subscription, ended up with the lender, a Roman centurion who probably did not know Aramaic.

P.Yadin 12, from 124 CE, is a copy of the acta regarding the appointment of two guardians of Jesus, Babatha's son from her first marriage, by the city council (βουλή) of Petra (see Plate LXV, Fig. 2). These minutes were displayed in the local temple of Aphrodite. The document, probably a translation from Latin, was written by an anonymous, skilled scribe, who started his copy with a declaration of his source and the place where it was kept:

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[49] Wise 2015, 111, 119–122.

[50] Lewis 1989, 103.

[51] On this document, see Cotton 1993 and ead. 1995b, 31. Other translations of subscriptions appear in P.Yadin 11 and P.Yadin 16 (see below).

ἐγγεγραμμένον καὶ ἀντιβεβλημένον κεφαλαίου ἑνὸς ἐπιτροπῆς ἀπὸ ἄκτων βουλῆς Πετραίων τῆς μητροπόλεως προκειμένων ἐν τῷ ἐν Πέτρᾳ Ἀφροδεισίῳ

Verified exact copy of one item from the minutes of the council of Petra the metropolis; minutes displayed in the temple of Aphrodite in Petra, and is as appended below in the outer text.

(P.Yadin 12, inner text; translation, Lewis 1989)

Not in Petra, but in Maḥoza, was P.Yadin 13 copied, a petition to the governor of Provincia Arabia. Unfortunately, the papyrus is heavily damaged, and it seems that the scribal signature is also lacking here.[52] In Rabbath-Moab, one of the main cities north of Petra, an anonymous scribe wrote P.Yadin 16, copying the text from Babatha's original declaration of ownership of some palm groves. In the first lines, there is a statement according to which what follows is an 'exact copy' of the original document, which itself was retained by the local authorities:

ἐγγεγραμμένον καὶ ἀντιβεβλημένον ἀντίγραφον πιτακίου(*) ἀπογραφῆς προκειμένης ἐν τῇ ἐνθάδε βασιλικῇ, καὶ ἔστιν ὡς ὑποτέτακται

Verified exact copy of a document of registration that is displayed in the basilica here, and is as appended below

(P.Yadin 16, inner text; translation, Lewis 1989)

The scribe did not place a subscription nor identify himself: he was certainly a professional clerk employed at the city office of Rabbath-Moab. The scribe wrote the document in a skilled Greek hand and in better language than other texts in the archive. He was also faster than his colleagues, as indicated by his cursive script. When Babatha went to release her land declaration, she was accompanied by her second husband Yehudah, who acted as her legal guardian. Knowing only Aramaic, Yehudah transcribed Babatha's subscription into that language; the scribe who made the copy of the document did not copy the original Aramaic

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[52] Lewis 1989, 51.

subscription, however, but gave an ἑρμηνεία ὑπογραφῆς, a 'translation of the subscription,' in Greek. Immediately below, in a second hand, there is a Greek translation of the original Latin subscription of the prefect. It appears that these translations of subscriptions originally written in languages other than Greek were inserted just because these scribes were either not able or not allowed to write in different languages. The probatory value of the original text was indeed considered a feature to be preserved if possible. We see this in P.Yadin 27—the latest dated document from Babatha's archive—where Babatha's subscription appears both in its original Aramaic form (as written by her new guardian, Babeli bar Menaḥem) and with its translation in Greek, provided by the scribe Germanos Babeli used the Jewish (Babylonian) names of the months, but Germanos used the Macedonian ones: this shows that the scribe did not simply translate from Aramaic to Greek, but also adapted the original text to make it more understandable:[53]

בבתיה ברת שמעון אתקבליה מן שמעון ג[בי]חיה בר [י]הוחנן בר [י]הוחנן אד[ון] ישוע ברי לכסוה
[ול[מ[ז]ון דישוע [כס]ף ד[י]נרן שתיה מחד 1 בבמז ועד<ת?> תלתין באלולא שנת
עשרין ושבע [די הוו י]רחין תל<תל>תיה בבלי בר מנחם כתביה על דברת די [י]כפר

ἑρμηνία<ς> Βαβαθας Σίμωνος ἀπέσχον παρὰ Σίμωνι κυρτῷ Ἰωάνου ἐπίτροπος Ἰησούου υἱῷ μου εἰς λ[ό]γον τ[ρο]φίων κ̣α̣ὶ ἀμφιαζμοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀργυρίου δηνάριων ἓξ ἀπὸ μηνὸς Πανήμου π̣ρώτης μέχρι Γορπιαίου τριακάδι ἔτους ἐβδόμου εἰκοστοῦ, αἵ εἰσιν μῆνες [τέλειοι τρ]ῖς. [διὰ ἐπιτ]ρ̣όπου αὐτῆς Βαβελις Μαναήμου
Γερμαν[ὸ]ς Ἰούδ[ο]υ ἔγραψα.

[Aramaic] Babatha daughter of Šimʿon: I have received from Šimʿon the hunchback, son of Yoḥanan, guardian of Yešuaʿ my son, six silver denars for clothing and food for Yešuaʿ my son, from the first of Tammuz to the thirtieth of Elul, year twenty-seven, which equals three months. This is what Babeli son of Menaḥem wrote.

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[53] Oudshoorn 2007, 371.

[Greek] translation of (the attestation of) Babatha daughter of Simon: I have received from Simon the hunchback son of Ioanes, guardian of Iesous my son, six denarii of silver towards the account of his maintenance and clothing from the first of the month Panemos up to thirtieth of Gorpaios of the twenty-seventh year, which is three full months. By her guardian Babelis son of Manaemos.

I, Germanos son of Ioudas wrote it.

(P.Yadin 27, lines 11–19; translation, Lewis 1989, slightly edited)

A case of special interest is that of P.Yadin 28–30, three copies of the same Roman formula for the *actio tutelae* translated into Greek.[54] The copies are very similar, though the wording is not identical. Furthermore, while P.Yadin 28 and 29 belong to the same hand, P.Yadin 30 was written by another person, who had problems with hyphenation. Since the text features a Greek translation of a legal formula containing technical terms—such as ξενοκρίται (for *recuperatores*)—it has been supposed that it could have originated from a Hellenistic textbook of legal formulas, from which it was copied by the scribe on this occasion.[55] Others believe that the formula has been translated directly from Latin here, but this presupposes a high level of competence and knowledge that may have been beyond the reach of local scribes.[56] For unknown reasons, Babatha kept all three copies of this text. It also is unclear why two copies were written by the same hand, and one was not.[57]

At any rate, it is evident from these examples that copying was necessary at various levels of scribal work, but it was not always a simple, automatic process. On the contrary, the scribes often had to deal with various languages, and sometimes it was necessary to adapt the text to be copied based on the circumstances.

[54] Czajkowski 2017, 93–105; Lewis 1989, 118–120.
[55] Biscardi 1972, 141–151.
[56] Nörr 1995, 89; Oudshoorn 2007, 272–273.
[57] Oudshoorn 2007, 232.

7.3 Epistles

Not only legal documents and public deeds, but also private letters were often the target of a copying process, and for multiple reasons. Firstly, there was a demand for them to be produced in multiple copies. Moreover, letters were usually written not by the sender himself, but by a secretary, who may or may not have been a professional scribe, as the correspondence among Bar Kochba's commanders attests. Dictating a letter to someone else, skilled in writing, was a normal practice; if the sender was a bit (or more) literate, his draft could also then be given to a scribe to be revised and copied in a better form.

As for its formal aspects, the epistolography of the Judaean Desert is a world apart in the realm of the documentary texts discovered in the area around the Dead Sea— because of the different way of arranging the papyri, the different formulas involved, the different layout, and so on. Moreover, short messages and communications need not necessarily be committed to papyri, but could also involve different materials and techniques. After all, the papyrus had to be imported, and at least for drafts, other materials such as pottery or wood could be used.

The actual feasibility of this option is proved by a unique finding among the Bar Kochba letters in the Cave of Letters: a thin wooden tablet (P.Yadin 54), very similar to some of the tablets of Vindolanda (Britain), originally folded in two, featuring two columns inside, the first one (on the right) wider than the second.[58] The text bears a harsh letter sent by Bar Kochba himself—obviously not written by him, the 'Chief of Israel' being illiterate—to the commanders Yehonathan and Masabala. It was written in Aramaic, in semi-cursive but somewhat crude letters, by a certain Šemu'el bar 'Ammi, who signed it at the bottom of the second column. According to M. O. Wise, the scribe produced just a draft of the letter on wooden leaves like this; it subsequently had to be reproduced in a better copy on papyrus.[59] This may be true, even though

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[58] Yadin 1961, 41–42; Martone 2012, 55–58, BK7; Wise 2015, 218–219.
[59] Wise 2015, 219.

drafts are usually incomplete in various details, such as addresses and signatures; in this case, however, all of these details are found in the document.[60] The fact that this particular letter was found among the delivered mail of the revolt leader, along with the fact that the text is complete, in my opinion shows that this letter was never copied and was sent directly as it was, maybe out of urgency.

On the other hand, there is evidence that letters originally written in two columns on wooden tablets were later copied on papyrus and sent: this is proved by P.Yadin 49, also among the bundle of the Bar Kochba letters.[61] It is another letter from the revolt leader, this time in Hebrew (the name of the scribe is lost). The papyrus shows the same two-column layout found on the wooden tablets, and it has been convincingly argued, on the basis of some specific technical features, that the letter was copied from a draft originally written on a wooden leaf.[62] Another example of a file copy is P.Mur. 48, which is likewise in Hebrew. P.Mur. 48 is the only one of the Murabbaʿat letters, composed in Herodium, that is written in a quick cursive hand and not in a careful book hand. However, according to Milik, despite the low quality of the script, a professional scribe was involved here, since all the necessary subscriptions are present—a fact that indicates that this is probably not a mere draft. Given the informal script used in this letter, Wise has suggested that this was not the version intended to be circulated, but to be retained locally as a record.[63]

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[60] On the missing elements in the drafts of epistles, see Wise 2015, 467 n. 74.

[61] Martone 2012, 48–50, BK3; Wise 2015, 219, 223–224.

[62] The fact that Hebrew was used here instead of Aramaic suggests that the copying process could also involve a translation, in this case from the vernacular language (Aramaic) to the official one (Hebrew), which was no longer so widespread in Judaea at that time, but chosen by Bar Kochba for ideological reasons, as a distinctive, 'national' feature.

[63] Wise 2015, 227.

8. Scribes: Copyists and Cultural Mediators

Observing the various roles and functions held by the scribes as represented by the documentary papyri from the Judaean Desert, it can be observed that very often their participation in the overall communication process went far beyond the mere act of writing and copying, and involved the knowledge and creative application of many variable elements. This occurred even in the case of scribes not particularly skilled or well trained in their work. For example, as shown above, even when village scribes were not able to translate from Semitic languages into Greek, they made efforts to adapt the texts to their target audience, applying modifications to facilitate the understanding of their contents.

Like the low-level Galilean scribes who were supposedly responsible for the redaction of the 'Q source' allegedly behind the Synoptic double tradition,[64] local scribes had the delicate role of mediators between the complex legal and bureaucratic system and the various, mostly illiterate strata of the rest of the society. Without them, in the earliest decades of the Romanization process of Judaea and Arabia, common people just could not cope with the sudden new reality of the Roman presence and administration in their territories; their role also extended to other matters, as seen in the exchange of letters. These scribes handled all kind of records and memories of people's daily lives in the towns and villages between the Dead Sea and Northern Arabia: growing plants, buying and selling goods, lending money, complaining, marrying, divorcing, etc. We know of their lives and their activities solely because a handful of these documents have outlived their owners—and only by chance have they been preserved, hidden in caves until their unexpected discovery.

[64] Kloppenborg 2015.

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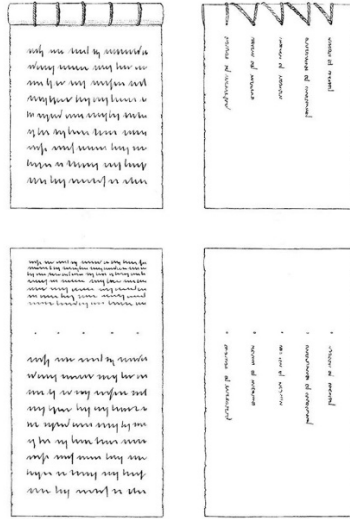
Fig. 1: Outline of a double deed. Above: Document with inner text still bound shut; recto with the outer text, verso with witnesses' signatures. Below: The same document untied, showing the text written inside (based on Yadin 1971, 231).
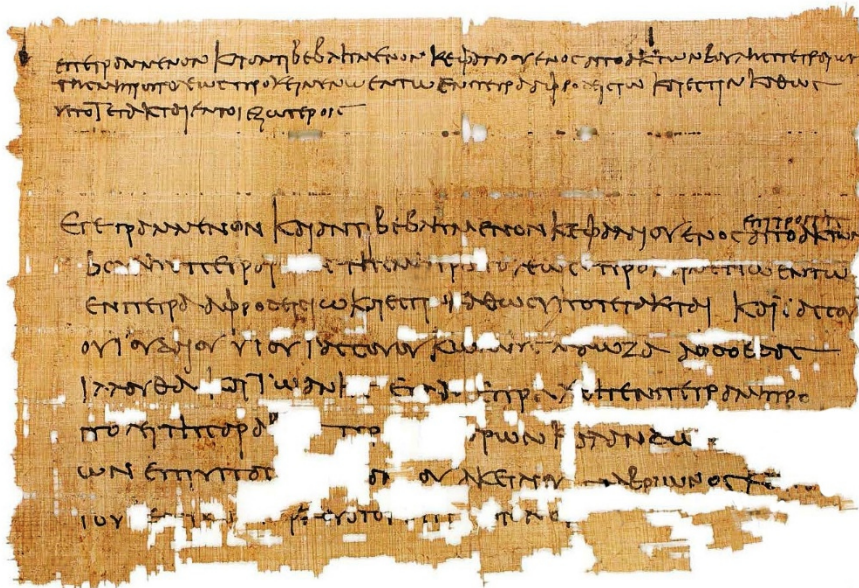

Fig. 2: P.Yadin 12, recto, upper section: abridged inner text and beginning of the outer text (Israel Museum, Jerusalem).

Plate LXV