

LARGE-LETTER DISPLAYED WRITINGS ON PORTABLE MEDIA: INDIRECT AND DIRECT EVIDENCE FROM GRAECO-ROMAN AND LATE ANTIQUE EGYPT

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The notion of displayed writing, as defined by A. Petrucci, refers to any type of writing on a surface exhibited in an open or even closed space, written in such a way as to be readable by several people and from a distance.¹ This definition includes both texts written on durable materials, such as marble, stone, and metals, and those written on perishable materials, such as papyri, whitewashed wooden tablets, textiles, and wall plaster. While the writings on durable materials have survived the centuries, those on perishable materials, which were conceived as temporary from the beginning, have been lost; one exception, however, is wall plaster² and, as far as Egypt is concerned, papyri. Indeed, in addition to several inscriptions as well as much indirect evidence of the practice of exhibiting different kinds of documents (such as official announcements, ordinances, decrees, responses to petitions, and so on), Egypt has given us a limited number of papyri written directly to be posted up or as drafts to be reproduced on other materials and then posted up.³

In this chapter, I will focus on a formal feature of displayed writings on portable media from Egypt, specifically whitewashed wooden tablets and papyri, namely, the use of large letters. I will discuss some case studies that provide both indirect and di-

¹ Petrucci 1985, 88; see also Susini 1989, 271–277, on the different kinds of displayed writings and their placement in public spaces.

² As noted by Fioretti 2012, 415–416, the only surviving *tabulae dealbatae* are, in fact, two wall writings from Pompeii and Herculaneum, painted within whitewashed lined squares in order to look like real tablets.

³ A quantitative and typological overview of Greek inscriptions from Egypt has recently been offered by Clarysse 2020, 159–165. On the publication of announcements, ordinances and edicts in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, see von Schwind 1940, 70–127; on the exhibiting of petitions, see Mascellari 2021, 1023–1024, with previous bibliography. A study on the posting of public notices in Graeco-Roman Egypt was recently conducted by Schubert 2022.

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rect evidence of this particular formal feature. Moreover, through comparison with displayed writings on durable materials, I will try to establish how the typology of document influenced the format choice and to what extent the use of large letters was aimed at improving the document's readability.⁴

1. LARGE LETTERS ON DISPLAYED WHITEWASHED WOODEN TABLETS: INDIRECT EVIDENCE

1.1 The *μεγάλοις γράμμασιν* Writing of the Tax-Farming Regulations: The Cases of P.Hib. I 29 and P.Rev.

In a recent contribution, E. Rosamilia has shown that few inscriptions contain provisions concerning the layout and characteristics of the letters employed in texts to be displayed in public; so far, P.Hib. I 29 has been considered the only papyrus providing prescriptions on writing a large-lettered document for public display.⁵ However, since the typology and content of this document have been matters of discussion among scholars and still need further investigation, I will examine the text of the papyrus in detail, in order to define exactly the type of document it mentions.

P.Hib. I 29 comes from the ancient Ankyron Polis in the Herakleopolite nome and is dated about 265 BCE; written on both sides, by the same hand, it bears the remains of regulations by Ptolemy II Philadelphus for the farming of taxes.⁶

The recto side (Fig. 67)⁷ contains part of a regulation dealing with a tax on slaves. Even though the poor state of preservation of the papyrus prevents its precise nature from being understood, what is clear is that the first lines of the text concern penalties provided for violations: anyone failing to register a slave through the offices of the *agoranomoi* or to pay taxes to the detriment of the tax-farmer will be deprived of the slave (ll. 2-4). In the event of a dispute, the appointed tribunal will pass judgement and the informer will obtain one third of the value of the slave when sold; if the informer is the slave himself, he will be freed after paying the due taxes (ll. 4-7). Thus far, the definition of the category to which the slaves mentioned in this section of the regulation belong has been based on the meaning attributed by scholars to the verb

⁴ Studies on the phenomena of interaction between writing on papyrus and writing on stone or marble have so far mostly focused on the influence of the former on the latter: see, for example, Del Corso 2010a; Crowther 2020, 227-230.

⁵ Rosamilia 2020, with a complete analysis of all the Greek decrees and official documents containing publication clauses on the characteristics of the letters to be employed, that is, depth of the engraving, letter size, and generic readability.

⁶ On the El Hibeh mummy *cartonnages* and their discovery in general, see P.Hib. I, at pp. 1-12: the dating of P.Hib. I 29 is based on the other documents extracted from the same mummy. A reprint of both sides of the papyrus, without any difference from the *editio princeps*, is in W.Chr. 259, while R. Scholl in C.Ptol.Sklav. 6 only republished the recto. I refer to the latter for a full discussion of the previous bibliography. On the tax-farming system in Ptolemaic Egypt, see Manning 2010, 152-157.

⁷ Digital reproduction of both sides of the papyrus available at the link: <<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/295e0e45-ea11-41eb-a36a-183940f66950/>>.

ὑποτίθημι, the scanty remains of which are perhaps to be read at ll. 2 and 6: while the editors, B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, interpreted it in the sense of “to assign” or “to make subject to”, other scholars have argued for the meaning of “to pledge”.⁸

The provision that the secretary of the *agoranomoi*, the *antigraphus*, and the tax-farmer write καὶ ταύτας τὰς ὑποθέσεις follows (ll. 7–8): its interpretation deserves more attention, since it affects the understanding of the following lines. For the main part, scholars have attributed a meaning to the phrase ταύτας τὰς ὑποθέσεις related to the verb ὑποτίθημι that occurs, as I said, a few lines before;⁹ however, based on the context of the ordinance described above, I think that here the word ὑπόθεσις must be taken in its sense of “Prozeßgrund, Streitanaß, Klagegegenstand”.¹⁰ If this is the case, this makes the three officials responsible for registering the lawsuits brought against the transgressors.

This acquisition has an impact on the understanding of the following provisions, which concern writing in large letters for a document to be displayed in public. The nature of this document is a matter of discussion since the term identifying it is partly in lacuna. Below I reproduce the text as published in the *editio princeps*. The only difference concerns the supplement of the lacuna in question:

ὁ δὲ τελώνης τὸ [διά-
 γραμμα τ[όδε] γράψας εἰς λεύκωμα μ[ε]γάλοις γράμμασιν ἐκτιθέτω πρὸ
 10 τοῦ ἀγοραγ[ομί]ου ἐκάτης ἡ[μ]έρας, ἧ δ' ἂν ἡμ[έ]ραι ἢ ἔκθ[ε]σις μὴ γίνηται
 ἀποτινέτω (δραχμὰς) . ἐπίτιμ[ο]ν, προκαποτινέτω δὲ κα[ὶ] ±11

“The tax-farmer shall write this ordinance on a whitewashed wooden tablet, in large letters, and exhibit it publicly before the office of the *agoranomos* every day;

⁸ In P.Hib. I 29, 2 comm., Grenfell and Hunt cautiously suggested supplementing εὐν δέ τις ἀλλάξ[η]ται τ[. . .] . ὑ[πο]τεθ[ε]ν, while they supplemented εὐν δὲ ὁ ὑ[πο]τεθ[ε]σις μνησ[η] at l. 6. For the meaning of “to pledge”, see Schönbauer 1924, 89, with a different supplement at l. 2 (εὐν δέ τις ἀλλαχ[η] ποιήσ[η]ται) ὑ[πο]θε[σ]ις, and W.L. Westermann in P.Col. I, at pp. 38–39, who followed the text of the *editio princeps*. On the other hand, thinking of misappropriated slaves, Scholl proposed supplementing εὐν δέ τις ἀλλα[.] . ὑ[φ]εὐ[λ]εν (*sic*) and εὐν δὲ ὁ ὑ[π]αρεθ[ε]σις (*l. ὑφαιρεθ[ε]σις*) μνησ[η], respectively; nevertheless, both supplements can be questioned: at l. 2 we would expect the subjunctive rather than the indicative, while Scholl’s supplement at l. 6 forces us to correct the text of the papyrus.

⁹ Grenfell and Hunt provided the translation “these assignments (?)”. However, besides being based on an otherwise unattested meaning of the term, in my opinion this translation makes no sense at this point in the regulation. Moreover, the term cannot designate the pledges of slaves, as Schönbauer 1924, 89 thought: the meaning of “hypothekarische Verpfändung (= ὑποθήκη)” recorded in *WB*, *s.v.* ὑπόθεσις, 4 was based on the presumed occurrence in SB I 5285 verso, which has proven to be wrong (cf. *BL* X 183, where the reading ὑποθήκ(η) is reported). As far as I know, there is no other attestation of this meaning of the word in the papyrus: in P.Flor. III 384, 112, the correct reading is probably ὑποθ[η]κή rather than ὑποθ[ε]σε[?]ωσ. On the other hand, it should be noted that although Westermann in P.Col. I, at p. 39 argued that the term applied to the mortgages of slaves, he translated the expression more literally as “cases under discussion”.

¹⁰ *WB*, *s.v.* ὑπόθεσις, 3; for the possibility of the term having this meaning in the papyrus, see Rosamilia 2020, 129 n. 1. Recently, Käppel 2021, 396 also considered the expression to be unconnected to the allegedly mortgaged slaves, translating it as “auch diese [*scil.* die zuvor aufgeführten] Regeln”.

on the day the exhibition [happens not to take place, he shall pay x] drachmae as a fine and pay in addition [...]”.

At ll. 8–9, Grenfell and Hunt supplemented τὸ[ὑτο τὸ] | γραμματ[εῖον], meaning that it was the aforementioned document, that is, the ὑποθέσεις, that had to be written in large letters and displayed publicly. On the other hand, A. Wilhelm proposed supplementing τὸ [διά]γραμμα τ[όδε], thus deeming the whole document in the papyrus to be a royal ordinance.¹¹

In my opinion, all the main objections that scholars have raised against Wilhelm’s proposal can be questioned: firstly, the text is perfectly consistent with a *diagramma*; secondly, although there is no other evidence that the tax-farmers were responsible for publicly displaying ordinances, there is no reason to say that they were not, as the *logontai* were;¹² finally, if my interpretation of the ὑποθέσεις is correct, it does not make any sense that they had to be exhibited every day, whereas it would be totally justified to assume the daily publication of an ordinance.¹³ As a matter of fact, the following sources give evidence of provisions for exhibiting law texts on a daily basis: 1) the passage from Demosthenes’ *Against Timocrates* (24.23) mentioning the so-called ἐπιχειροτονία τῶν νόμων, which prescribes that any Athenian proposing a new law must write it on a whitewashed wooden tablet and display it every day at the monument of the Eponymous Heroes (ἀναγράφας εἰς λεύκωμα ἐκτιθέτω πρόσθεν τῶν ἐπωνύμων ὀνημέραι) until the assembly meets;¹⁴ 2) an early second-century BCE decree from Halasarna, Kos (*IG XII.4* 103), concerning the creation of a list of participants in the cults of Apollo and Herakles, which states that the same decree, written on a whitewashed wooden tablet, is to be displayed every day (τὸ ψάφισμα τὸδε ἀναγράψαντες εἰς λεύκωμα ἐκτιθέντω πᾶσαν ἡμέραν), visible for whoever wishes to read it, for the entire duration of the registration (ll. 66–72); 3) a fairly recently published inscription from Limyra (Lycia), which contains a *prostagma* of a Ptolemy (who is more likely to be Ptolemy Philadelphus rather than Ptolemy Euergetes). This third document is of particular interest for our topic, since it includes the provision that every day, before the tax collectors’ offices, the *oikonomoi* must exhibit the tax-farming laws, ordinances,

¹¹ Wilhelm 1909, 247, whose proposal, mentioned in W.Chr. 259, at pp. 306–307, and P.Hal., at p. 42, was accepted by Schönbauer 1924, 90 and most recently by Käppel 2021, 396. On the other hand, in favour of Grenfell and Hunt’s supplement, see, among others, Westermann in P.Col. I, at p. 39 n. 113; Scholl in C.Ptol.Sklav., at p. 47; Rosamilia 2020, 129. On the different sources of Ptolemaic law, see Lenger 1964, XIX–XXI.

¹² Some doubts about these aspects were raised by Westermann in P.Col. I, at p. 39 n. 113, but on this kind of *diagrammata*, see Méléze Modrzejewski 2014, 58. On the involvement of the *logontai* in the public posting of laws, cf. P.Rev., IX, 1–6, on which see also below.

¹³ On the contrary, see Scholl in C.Ptol.Sklav., at p. 47.

¹⁴ On the ἐπιχειροτονία τῶν νόμων, see most recently Canevaro 2020 with discussion of previous bibliography.

and revisions written on whitewashed wooden tablets (καὶ τοὺς ἐπὶ τῶν ὀνῶν νόμους καὶ τὰ διαγράμματα καὶ τὰ διορθώματα ἐκτιθέναι ἐκάστης ἡμέρας πρὸ τῶν λογευτηρίων ἐν λευκώμασιν γεγραμμένα, ll. 12–14).¹⁵ In all these cases, the obligation of daily display has nothing to do with updating the document, but probably depends on the practice of relocating the tablets within the office after making them available for public consultation.¹⁶ However, it seems to me that comparison with these documents leaves no room for doubt as to which document P.Hib. I 29, 8–9 sets out to be written in large letters.

The size of the letters to be used in writing a document that was to be publicly displayed is perhaps also referred to in the so-called “Revenue Laws papyrus” (P.Rev.), which consists of two rolls, probably coming from the Arsinoite nome.¹⁷ These rolls contain at least eight different royal regulations (*nomoi* and *diagrammata*, with some emendations), dated in their most recent parts to 259/8 BCE, which are in fact documents governing tax-farming contracts concluded between the king and the farming companies.¹⁸ Here I provide my transcription of one of the very mutilated fragments of the second roll bearing the regulation on farming the *enno-mion* or pasture tax, namely Fr. 5(d) (Fig. 68):¹⁹

- - -

] οἱ τὴν ὀγ[ὴν ἔχοντες
] . τοῖς λογ[
] γίνεσθαι . [
 με]γάλοισ δε[
 5] . ιν ἐν ἡμ[έραις
]θαι ἐκα[στ-

- - -

1.] οἱ τὴν ὀγ[ὴν ἔχοντες :]οι την ω[γην Grenfell :] οἱ τὴν ὀ[γὴν Bingen 2.] .
 τοῖς :] τοῖς Grenfell, Bingen. 3.] γίνεσθαι . [:] γινεσθαι [Grenfell :] γίνεσθαι
 [Bingen 4. με]γάλοισ δε[: α]λλοισ Grenfell :]αλοισ ο[Bingen 5.] . ιν :]ιν
 Grenfell, Bingen ἐν ἡμ[έραις Bingen : εν ημ[Grenfell 6.]θαι ἐκα[στ- :]αρ[.]
 ἐκα[Grenfell :]θαι ἐκα[στ- Bingen

¹⁵ For a complete discussion of the inscription, see the *editio princeps* in Wörle 2010 (SEG LX 1536).

¹⁶ On this practice, see Susini 1989, 274–275.

¹⁷ See Grenfell 1896 for the *editio princeps* of the papyrus and Bingen 1952 for a second complete edition; for a new edition of the second roll, with a complete rearrangement of the fragments in which it has come down to us, see Borrelli 2017.

¹⁸ On the nature of the two rolls, in which originally independent *cahiers des charges* were glued together for administrative or private use, see Bingen 1978, 8–9.

¹⁹ A digital reproduction of the frame in which the fragment is housed together with others is available at the link: <<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/16a15209-5139-4726-a561-973cc76c9f02/surfaces/ca6d1655-b414-4905-baf9-3ee9374925a/>>. On the *enno-mion* in Ptolemaic Egypt, see Préaux 1939, 225–227.

Despite the complete absence of context, its belonging to the regulation on *en-nomion* is certain on palaeographic and bibliological grounds. At l. 4, after three lines on which nothing can be said except that tax-farmers (l. 1) were involved, the new reading of the adjective με]γάλοιοι may suggest the supplement δὲ [γράμμασι based on comparison with P.Hib. I 29.²⁰ On the basis of the little text surviving in the following lines, it seems possible to conjecture that this point of the regulation prescribed that a certain document should be written in large letters within a certain number of days from a given date and that it should be publicly displayed every day: at the beginning of l. 5,]ειν (presumably the termination of a subjunctive in the third person plural) can be read, enabling the assumption that ἀφ' ἧς ἂν ἡμέρας occurred immediately before the phrase, while l. 6 can be completed as ἐκτίθεσ]θαι ἐκά[κτης ἡμέρας.²¹ Based on the parallels discussed above, it seems reasonable to think that the document to be published was the pasture tax-farming regulation and that the specification of the medium on which to write it, that is, whitewashed wooden tablets, has been lost in the lacuna.

If this is the case, notwithstanding the partial nature of the papyrological documentation, we may assume that large letters were a formal feature specifically and programmatically imposed by the Ptolemies (or, at least, by Ptolemy II Philadelphus) for publicly displayed tax-farming laws and ordinances on whitewashed wooden tablets. It is not surprising that P.Hib. I 29 and P.Rev., which define every single aspect of the tax-farming contracts between the king and farmers, provide such detailed information.²²

But how large did these letters have to be? Obviously, we cannot say with any certainty because of the lack of direct evidence. However, it can be assumed that they must have been as large as those used in texts displayed on stone or other materials rather than in the archival copies on papyrus, so that they could be readable to all at a certain distance;²³ in this regard, a parallel might be offered, for example, by the aforementioned *prostagma* of Limyra, in which the letters are between 1.6

²⁰ In]γάλοιοι, part of the horizontal bar of the *gamma* reaching the *alpha* is visible (cf. γινε, l. 3); after the *sigma*, the shadow of a triangular-shaped letter can be made out under a detached fibre and then a right-concave semicircle can be gleaned on the break edge, theoretically fitting with either an *epsilon* or a *sigma*.

²¹ What remains of the presumed initial *sigma* of l. 5 is a horizontal stroke, slightly ascending from left to right, in ligature with the *iota*.

²² I believe that, like the regulations collected in P.Rev., P.Hib. I 29 is also a document governing the tax-farming contract between the king and the farmer.

²³ On large letters as a device to provide readability for exhibited writings, see Rosamilia 2020, 128-136; on the need for these regulations to reach the entire population so that the Crown would not suffer economic damage, cf. Peremans 1982, 144-145, who gave this as the explanation for the custom of publishing them in both Greek and Egyptian.

and 1.8 cm high.²⁴ I do not think it is by chance that P.Rev., IX, 2-5 does not specify if tax-farming law, exhibited inside a building (οἱ ἐν τῷ ἐμπορίῳ λ[ο]γευταὶ [ἐκ] τιθέτωσαν | ἐ[ν τ]ῷ τελωνίῳ ἐν ἡμέρα[ι]c δέκ' α' τὸν τ[ῆ]c | [ὠνῆc νό]μον γράψαντες γράμμασιν ἑλλη[νικοῖc τε | καὶ ἐγγ]ωρίοιc), should be written in large letters: in this case, since the exhibition place was not accessible to all, it would have been pointless for the writing to be highly legible.²⁵ On the other hand, the lack of indications in the inscription from Limyra about the size of the letters to use when writing the regulations for display before the tax collectors' offices might be because of the nature of the document itself, which did not require such specifications.

1.2 *Ampliores litterae* as a Distinctive Device in the *tabulae albi professionum*: The Case of P.Mich. III 166

A different kind of evidence, in which the use of large letters does not seem to depend directly on the display of the document, is provided by a well-preserved, originally sealed, wax tablet diptych of unknown provenance, P.Mich. III 166 (CPL 151). This document contains the certified copy of a *professio*, that is, a declaration of the birth of a legitimate Roman child, the girl Herennia Gemella, dated April 13th, 128 CE.²⁶ The certificate follows the usual structure: after indicating the date of the copy and the place of issue, Alexandria (*pag. 2, ll. 1-4*), there is a statement that it was made and verified *ex tabula professionum* (*l. professionum*) *quibus liberi nati sunt*, which had been posted *in Foro Aug(usti)* (*pag. 2, ll. 5-7*).²⁷ It is followed by the text of the *professio* as set out in the *tabulae professionum*, while also giving the heading with the imperial year starting on August 30th and the consuls then in office (*pag. 2, ll. 9-13*); in particular, *pag. 3, ll. 1-3* indicates the *tabula* and the *pagina* of the register where the *professio* was recorded: *tab(ula) VIII pag(ina) II amplioribus litteris | scriptum est L(ucio) Nonio Torquato Asprenat[e] | II M(arco) Annio Libone co(n)s(ulibus) et post alia pag(ina) IX*. As has been noted, the declaration was indeed recorded on the ninth *pagina* of the eighth *tabula*, while the second *pagina* contained, in larg-

²⁴ Wörrle 2010, 360.

²⁵ As far as the medium is concerned, see U. Wilcken in W.Chr. 259, at pp. 306-307, for the view that, if it is not specified that a document was written on a tablet, it must be assumed that it was written on papyrus; on the contrary, on the unsuitability of papyrus compared to wooden tablets as a writing medium for posting public notices, see Schubert 2022, 211 and 217.

²⁶ Digital reproductions available at the links: <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-3121/766pii.tif>> and <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-3121/766pi-iv.tif>>. On the birth certificates of Roman citizens, see, among others, Schulz 1942, Montevicchi 1948, and Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2001; for an updated list of the birth certificates of Roman citizens from Egypt, see Bernini 2018, 50-52.

²⁷ It should be noted that all other certified copies of *professiones* refer to a publication *in Atrio Magno*, with the exception of P.Mich. inv. 3944I, which mentions a publication *in exedra*: see the discussion on the subject with previous bibliography in the edition of the latter papyrus by Bernini 2018, 46-47.

er letters, the names of the new consuls in office under whom the declarations from 1 January onwards were made.²⁸

The diptych sheds light on an aspect of the layout of the *tabulae professionum*, namely the use of larger letters to mark the transition to a new section of the register. The enlargement of the letter form in section headings is a quite common formal device in papyri, where it is often associated with greater care in execution and other formal devices.²⁹ Again, we cannot know the size of the letters in which the *professiones* in the register were copied nor how much larger the letters were for the names of the consuls; however, if comparison with documents on papyrus is relevant, we can assume that rather than legibility from a distance, the aim was to highlight the names of the consuls, by differentiating them visually from the rest of the text, in order to give the layout a clearer and neater appearance.

2. LARGE-LETTER PLACARDS ON PAPYRUS: DIRECT EVIDENCE

While we cannot say how large the letters used in the above-examined writings were since they have not survived, the direct evidence that I am now going to discuss shows how large the letters of displayed writings on papyrus actually appeared.³⁰

The most famous example of a papyrus that was (or was to be) posted up is SB XIV 11942. From the necropolis of Saqqâra (Memphis), it contains the order of a certain Peukestas, probably one of the two commanders to whom Alexander the Great entrusted the command of his troops in Egypt at the time of his departure for Asia in 331 BCE, not to enter the chamber of a priest.³¹ This kind of prohibition was usually inscribed on stone: a later example from Ptolemaic Egypt is offered by *L.Ptolemaic* 84, a short *prostagma* found in El Kanais (east of Alexandria) and assigned

²⁸ See, in particular, Schulz 1942, 89.

²⁹ See, for example, the already mentioned P.Rev., LVII, 1-2 with pl. XII, where besides being written in larger letters with a slower *ductus*, the title of the revision of the law on oil monopoly farming ([δ]ιόρθωμα τοῦ νόμου ἐπὶ τῆι | [ἐλ]αικῆι) is set in *ekthesis* and separated from the following text by a wider line spacing. Among Latin papyri, see, for example, P.Louvre inv. E 10490 (162 CE), a military report published by Salati 2020, 149-152, in which the consular date, at l. 1, is written in large capital letters and separated from the rest of the text, in old Roman cursive, by a 1.6 cm blank space; see also P.Mich. III 162 (Ch.L.A. V 283; 193-197 CE), a military list registering the soldiers based on the consular year of enlistment: its scribe does not write the names of the consuls in larger letters, but highlights them visually by writing them in the centre of the line (cf. Salati 2020, 87 and 95). It is worth noting that enlargement of the letter form in section headings is also an expedient used in papyri with literary content: see, for example, PSI X 1181 (third century CE), bearing the remains of two poems generally ascribed to Bacchylides, where the title of the second one (l. 38) is written in larger letters and flanked on both sides by an asterisk with a function both as an ornament and to draw attention (cf. Nocchi Macedo 2011, 20 and Prodi 2016, 1172-1173 and 1177-1178).

³⁰ The case studies presented here, which make no claim to completeness, were mostly selected by searching the word “placard” in the *DDbDP* metadata and browsing through the main palaeographical catalogues of papyri (Turner 1987; Seider 1990; Cavallo and Maehler 2008; Harrauer 2010).

³¹ *Editio princeps* in Turner 1974, with plate.

to the reign of Ptolemy XII Auletes, which forbids unauthorised persons from entering the sacred treasuries of temples.³² The choice of a material such as papyrus for the order of Peukestas was probably linked to the temporary nature of the notice, which was perhaps addressed to the Greek troops then stationed in the necropolis.³³ The sheet, preserved in its original size and written in large letters (2 cm high on average) *transversa charta*, is 35.8 cm wide and 13.4 cm high and has four holes along the right-hand half of its top edge through which pins to fix it might have passed;³⁴ in the first line, the letters are larger (the 4.1 cm high *kappa* is impressive) and more widely spaced than in the following two lines, as already noted by the editor, E.G. Turner, to “catch the eye” and point out the author of the order.³⁵ In general, the scribe must have aimed for maximum legibility and was probably aware that he had to try to reproduce the impression of an inscription. This explains the use of such large letters and the epigraphic form of some of them, such as the *alpha*, sometimes with a broken crossbar and the right-hand oblique stroke exceeding the vertical upper line like in the *delta*, the rectangular *epsilon* with shorter central bar, the round *theta* with central dot, the four-barred *sigma* with divergent outer strokes, and the suspended *omega* with open loop and extended finials; obviously, as the text is written on papyrus and not on stone, some letters and strokes (for instance, the bar of the *alpha*) show a more fluid and rounded tracing.³⁶ The use of a brush instead of a pen may also have been intended to obtain maximum clarity and visibility, giving the script an accentuated *chiaroscuro* effect.³⁷

The same characteristics – large format, large letters and marked *chiaroscuro* effect provided by the use of a brush or soft reed – are found in a much later papyrus, P.Oxy. XLI 2950 (Ch.L.A. XLVII 1414) (Fig. 69). The fragment, 26 cm wide and 23 cm high, is broken to the left and right, while the upper and lower margins are preserved: it bears, written in large rustic capitals about 3.5 cm high, the remains of a dedication to Diocletian and Maximian by the *vexillatio* of the fifth Macedonian

³² See Fraser 1970, with other similar cases.

³³ Turner 1974, 242. On the temporary character of the notice, which justifies the use of papyrus as the writing medium, see again Schubert 2022, 217.

³⁴ As Turner 1974, 239 noted, inexplicably there are no balancing holes in the top left.

³⁵ Turner 1974, 241.

³⁶ Previous palaeographic analyses of the papyrus can be found, among others, in Turner 1974, 239–240, also with epigraphic parallels, Turner 1987, 136, Seider 1990, 131–134, Cavallo and Maehler 2008, 28, Harrauer 2010, 173–174, and finally Messeri 2012, 18–21, according to whom the presence of non-epigraphic letters, similar in form to those found seventy years later in Alexandrian chancery writing, betrayed the scribe’s familiarity with the chancery style in use at Alexander’s itinerant court and its presumable creation in Pella. Photographic reproductions of the papyrus are available in all these contributions. For an overview of the palaeography of Ptolemaic inscriptions, see the recent Crowther 2020, 232–250.

³⁷ So, Turner 1987, 136.

legion and possibly other army units. According to Turner's reconstruction, it must originally have been four times as wide.³⁸ The editor identified it as a placard, perhaps displayed on a temporary triumphal arch on the occasion of Diocletian's visit to Oxyrhynchus in 298 CE, but did not rule out that it could be a full-size model to be reproduced on stone; however, the use of the rustic capitals would rather suggest a temporary document to be displayed on a temporary written medium.³⁹ The readability of the message seems to be helped not only by the size and clarity of the letters, but also by some distancing between the words, which, except for the emperors' *praenomina*, *Gai]o* and *Mar]co* (ll. 1 and 2), written in full, are all abbreviated using medial dots.

The earlier PSI XIII 1307 verso (Fig. 70) and P.Mich. VII 459, assigned to the first to second century CE, are different cases, since the texts in rustic capitals they preserve were undoubtedly not displayed writings or drafts to be reproduced, but exercises by scribes training to write texts meant to be displayed.⁴⁰ However, it is interesting to note the large size of the letters (about 2 cm high in PSI XIII 1307 verso, 3–5, and 2.5 cm in P.Mich. VII 459 recto, 4, and verso, 1–2), which suggests that while the apprentice scribes practiced they had to bear in mind the imposed form of displayed writing.

P.Oxy. LXVIII 4670, 15 cm wide and 13 cm high, assigned to the fourth century CE (Fig. 71), is written along the fibres on the verso of an account mentioning the twentieth year of Diocletian and the nineteenth of Maximian, which provides us with a *terminus post quem* of 303/4 CE. The text, consisting of three lines plus traces of a fourth, is complete at the top, to the left, and to the right, while it is broken off at the bottom; it is apparently centred on the sheet⁴¹ and written with a pen in a quite large script (about 1 × 1 cm on average) in which each letter is executed with the greatest number of constituent strokes (see, for example, the *epsilon* and the *omega* in three movements): letters with a soft, rounded form

³⁸ The reconstruction of the original width of the sheet is based on the assumption that the titles were repeated in full for each of the two emperors, but of course other possibilities cannot be excluded. For an overview of rustic capitals, see Fioretti 2014, with plates.

³⁹ Harley *et al.* 2006, 116–117 favour the identification of the papyrus with a temporary placard; see also Del Corso 2010b, 206–207, who pointed out the similarities with the inscriptions from Leptis Magna.

⁴⁰ On these papyri see, respectively, Cavallo and Fioretti 2015, who proposed dating both to the Hadrianic age, and Iovine 2020, with a reproduction of the two joined fragments of P.Mich. VII 459 (separately reproduced at the link: <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-2063>>) and first-century-CE dating. I do not focus on the Greek exercise in PSI XIII 1307 verso, 1–2 or the Latin one in P.Mich. VII 459 recto, 1–3 as it is unclear whether we are dealing with exercises for displayed writings or simply for official writings (cf. Cavallo and Fioretti 2015, 116). For a digital reproduction of PSI XIII 1307 verso, see the link: <<http://www.psi-online.it/documents/psi;13;1307>>.

⁴¹ As noted in the *editio princeps*, the side margins may be original, but the top edge is broken, so there might have been other text above.

(*epsilon*, *upsilon*, *chi*, *omega*) alternate with letters with a more rigid, typically epigraphic form (particularly, the *alpha* with the broken crossbar reaching the baseline and the straight-sided *my* in four movements); the presence of hooks, serifs, and blobs at the ends of the strokes is remarkable. As for the layout, it is worth noting the height of the line spacing, almost equal to that of the letters, and the slight enlargement of the letters in the first line (particularly of the initial *epsilon*), which is also separated from the following line by wider spacing. Both the script and the layout give the document an impression of clarity and elegance that enhances its readability. Below I reproduce the text of the *editio princeps* with a new reading proposal at l. 4:

εὐτυχῶς
 Περγαμίῳ
 καλὴ ἡμέρα
 Περγα[μίῳ
 - - -

It is difficult to define the exact nature of the document, which reads “Good luck to Pergamius, a good day to Pergamius”.⁴² In his edition, P.J. Parsons labelled it as a “notice” and proposed to identify it as a doodle, a covering note for a present or a draft for a placard for a private individual or public authority. However, as the editor himself noted, the word εὐτυχῶς is of common use in acclamations;⁴³ moreover, both the repetitiveness of the text, restored by the new reading at l. 4, and the layout of the document support the third hypothesis: indeed, both the use of epigraphic letters and the enlargement of the writing in the first line to draw the readers’ attention suggest that this text was written for display, certainly on a temporary basis as can be assumed from l. 3. Comparison with similar exhibited texts written on other materials is also instructive: for instance, with a *dipinto* written on a block of plastered wall found in a building in Ahmeida (Dakhleh Oasis), *SEG XXXVIII 1685A* (SB XX 14876), apparently celebrating a βασιλικὸν πρόγραμμα; the writing is in very large letters (6.5 cm high in the first two lines and 4 cm high in the third one) and shows an epigraphic design (see, in particular, the *alpha* with the broken

⁴² The editor read τ], but, in this handwriting, the bar of the *tau*, unlike that of the *pi*, shows a hook at the left end, which is absent here. The following traces are consistent respectively with the upper curve of an *epsilon*, with the top of the loop of a *rho*, with the right end of the bar of a *gamma*, and with the intersection point of the two diagonals of an *alpha*.

⁴³ For the possibility that the acclaimed person was Flavius Pompeius Pergamius, *praeses Thebaidis* in 375/6 CE, see P. J. Parsons, *P.Oxy. LXVIII*, at pp. 109–110; on Flavius Pompeius Pergamius, see now Agostini 2020, who, however, does not include the papyrus among the sources on this figure.

crossbar).⁴⁴ Although it cannot be ruled out that P.Oxy. LXVIII 4670 was a placard to be displayed, its short format suggests that it was a draft, which however, must already have set out all the graphic and layout features to be reproduced on the placard.

P.Oxy. LXVIII 4671 (11 × 4.7 cm), tentatively assigned to the fifth century CE, is yet another different case (Fig. 72). It is broken at the top and to the right and preserves the remains of a *tabula ansata* (“tablet with handles”) framing the name Ἀρκαδίης, followed by a cross; as noted by Parsons, the original height of the *tabula* must have been about 5 cm and that of the sheet about 7 cm, while the original width cannot be estimated, since there may have been more text after the cross which has been lost. The writing is in quite large (about 1–1.5 cm high), rough letters, among which the *alpha* with the broken crossbar stands out; however, like in the previous document, the writing instrument used is a pen, not a brush. As for the type of document, the editor suggested that it was an inscription or a draft for a stone-cutter celebrating a person named Arcadia (perhaps the daughter of the emperor Arcadius) or a governor of the Egyptian province of Arcadia, or a draft or substitute of a mummy-label. The Ionic ending -ης cannot be relied on to more accurately identify the nature of the text, since, besides being literary, as Parsons pointed out, it is also found in documentary papyri. However, both the use of large epigraphic letters and the presence of the *tabula ansata*, aimed at drawing attention to the framed text, enhancing its readability and immediately informing the viewer of its function, suggest that it was a piece of (to be) displayed writing, imitating similar texts written on other materials or having the same graphic features and format.⁴⁵

3. CONCLUSION

The few cases of displayed writings on papyrus examined hitherto clearly show that the use of large letters was dictated by the function of the document and the need to make it readable at a certain distance. This is confirmed by the fact that the use of a large script is often associated with the use of other palaeographic and layout devices, such as *chiaroscuro*, enlargement of letters in the first line, and in one case reproduction of a *tabula ansata*, which aim to increase the visibility of the text.

The influence of exhibited writings on durable materials on exhibited writings on perishable materials is also evident: the most representative case is the use of *al-*

⁴⁴ See Wagner 1987, 77–78 with pl. XXXIV, who dated the *dipinto* to the third century CE, defining the writing, in my view not appropriately, as *de chancellerie*, and believed that the dedication was to a βασιλικὸς γραμματεὺς; on the contrary, for the idea that the *dipinto* celebrated a βασιλικὸν πρόγραμμα, perhaps of religious rather than administrative content, see Kruse 2002, 1036–1037 n. 366.

⁴⁵ To the best of my knowledge, the only other examples of *tabulae ansatae* on papyri are found in literary texts, in which they frame and decorate the work title, as in P.Oxy. XVII 2084, or the colophon, as in the Montserrat miscellaneous codex (TM 59453). On *tabulae ansatae* in the Late Antiquity as a monumental element improving the readability of a displayed text, see Leatherbury 2019, with some case studies.

pha with the broken crossbar, which, as Parsons noted in his introduction to P.Oxy. LXVIII 4670, aims to create “a monumental effect”; it is noteworthy that, in spite of the dynamism of the writings on papyrus, this form remained unchanged over the centuries, following the model of the much more fixed epigraphic writings.

The indirect evidence provided by P.Hib. I 29 recto, 8–11 and P.Rev., Fr. 5(d) on the large-letter writing of exhibited royal ordinances confirms the framework of a graphic choice determined by functionality, that is, the need to make the text as easy to read as possible. Moreover, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to assume, especially based on the comparison with SB XIV 11942, that the writing of these texts on whitewashed tablets was similar not only in the size of the letters used in the inscriptions, but also in their shape.

On the other hand, remarkable evidence can be gleaned from exhibited writings such as P.Mich. III 166, in which, if I am right, the large letters have an essentially ornamental function; even in a case like this, it is possible to recognise similarities between layouts used on different media.

In general, it can be observed that it is the function, be it the need to improve the readability of the entire text or the desire to emphasise a specific part of it, that determines the use of large letters.

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