

Between the Lines

Moss, Candida

DOI:

[10.1525/sla.2021.5.3.432](https://doi.org/10.1525/sla.2021.5.3.432)

License:

None: All rights reserved

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Moss, C 2021, 'Between the Lines: Looking for the Contributions of Enslaved Literate Laborers in a Second Century Text (P. Berol. 11632)', *Studies in Late Antiquity*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 432-52.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/sla.2021.5.3.432>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is the final published version of the following article: Candida R. Moss; 'Between the Lines: Looking for the Contributions of Enslaved Literate Laborers in a Second-Century Text (P. Berol. 11632)', *Studies in Late Antiquity*, Vol.5, Number3, pp.432–452, electronic ISSN 2470-2048 © 2021 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://sla.ucpress.edu/content/permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/sla.2021.5.3.432>

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Between the Lines: Looking for the Contributions of Enslaved Literate Laborers in a Second-Century Text (*P. Berol. 11632*)

ABSTRACT Recent scholarship on writing and literacy in the Roman world has been attentive to the role of enslaved literate workers in the production of texts. Yet when it comes to evaluating the potential contributions of enslaved laborers we find ourselves at an impasse. How can we identify changes that an enslaved writer might have introduced? How could we assume that any element of the text comes from a secretary rather than the slaveholding “author”? And if enslaved secretaries were at liberty to make changes to a text, how would we recognize these alterations? Utilizing the method of critical fabulation and revisions to a particular literary fragment (*P. Berol. 11632*) as a test-case, this article explores the range of collaborative possibilities that can account for textual revisions and asks what difference it might make to view such changes as the product of enslaved workers and their experience.

KEYWORDS Slavery, Enslaved Workers, Literary Culture, Writing, Books

INTRODUCTION

Ancient book culture, like so much of ancient society, was made possible by the exploited labor of enslaved workers.¹ Most Roman literature and, in particular, most prose composition utilized the bodies and abilities of enslaved or formerly enslaved literate workers.² While writing or being seen to

1. I am grateful to Sarah Bond, Ra’anan Boustan, Jeremiah Coogan, Beth DePalma Digeser, Tom Geuc, Meghan Henning, Lisa Johnson, Athena Lakri, Mark Letteney, Brent Nongbri, David Ratzan, Robyn Walsh, and the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for their generosity in reading, commenting on, and speaking and working with me on this piece. I would be remiss if I did not express special thanks to Jeremiah Coogan and Joseph Howley for the many productive conversations that have inspired and improved my thinking about these questions. Finally, I would like to thank all those at the University of California Press and beyond whose work contributed to the print and digital versions of this article.

2. I leave aside here other forms of textual production and manipulation, which were also servile activities. On the question of dictation, see P. E. Arns, *La technique du livre d’après saint Jérôme* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1953), 37–62; N. I. Herescu, “Le mode de composition des écrivains (dictare),”

Studies in Late Antiquity, Vol. 5, Number 3, pp. 432–452. electronic ISSN 2470-2048 © 2021 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://sla.ucpress.edu/content/permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/sla.2021.5.3.432>

write certain genres of texts carried a certain social cachet, most Roman elites preferred to outsource the transcriptional aspects of writing to their subordinates.³ Though there is some debate about the extent to which Romans utilized enslaved scribes, there is a general agreement that it was the more common practice among writers of ancient prose.⁴

The realization that the vast majority of reading and writing was performed by enslaved secretaries has ramifications both for Roman social history in general and for our understanding of Roman literary culture in particular.⁵ That enslaved literate workers were responsible for the production of texts opens the door to the possibility that they contributed to the meaning of the texts they produced, or what we might call its content.⁶ The practices of taking dictation, expanding shorthand into longhand, proofreading, and editing texts—tasks that fell to enslaved or formerly enslaved

Revue des études latines 34 (1956): 132–46; E. Norden, *Die antike Kuntsprosa* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1958): 953–59; J. Schlumberger, “*Non scribo sed dicto*’ (HA, T 33,8): Hat der Autor der *Historia Augusta* mit Stenographen gearbeitet?” in *Bonner Historia Augusta Colloquium 1972–1974*, ed. G. Alföldy and E. Badian (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1976), 221–38; E. A. Havelock, “Oral Composition in the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles,” *New Literary History* 16 (1984): 175–97; Nicolas Horsfall, “Rome without Spectacles,” *Greece & Rome* 42 (1995): 49–56; Myles McDonnell, “Writing, Copying, and Autograph Manuscripts in Rome,” *Classical Quarterly* 46 (1996): 469–91; G. Cavallo, “Écriture et pratiques intellectuelles dans le monde antique,” *Genesis* 15 (2000): 97–108; Tiziano Dorandi, *Le stilet et la tablette: Dans le secret des auteurs antiques* (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2000): 51–75. Recent scholarship on writing and literacy in the Roman world has been more attentive to the role of enslaved literate workers in the production of texts. In particular, see the important work of Joseph Howley, “In Ancient Rome,” in *Further Reading*, ed. Matthew Rubery and Leah Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 15–27.

3. William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 249. On literacy and social pretension, see Nicholas Horsfall, “The Uses of Literacy and the *Cena Trimalchionis*,” *Greece & Rome* 36 (1989): 74–89, 194–209; McDonnell, “Writing,” 469–70. On the writing of formulaic closing subscriptions to dictated documents, see M. B. Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers* (London: Rio Grande, 1991), 1–18.

4. Even the more skeptical admit that “the practice [of dictating to enslaved workers was] more regular among prose authors than poets,” in McDonnell, “Writing,” 474.

5. Following Howley, I do not distinguish between the work of the *secretarius* or *amanuensis* from the *notarius* because the work of these literate slaves often overlapped. See discussion in Howley, “In Ancient Rome,” 15–27. For reading, see Rex Winsbury, *The Roman Book* (London: Duckworth, 2009), 79–85; R. J. Starr, “Reading Aloud: *Lectores* and Roman Reading,” *Classical Journal* 86 (1991): 337–43; Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” *Daedalus* 111 (1982): 65–84; Thomas Habinek, “Slavery and Class,” in *A Companion to Latin Literature*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 385–93; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 249.

6. This statement offers a crass understanding of meaning making. In truth, of course, those who inscribed papyrus and parchment; read texts aloud selecting points of emphasis and deemphasis; crafted the materials on which text would be written; and bound or glued the materials that book rolls and codices were responsible for creating the meaning of the text.

secretaries—provided ample opportunity for the alteration, corruption, and stylistic improvement of the original text. Yet when it comes to evaluating the potential contributions of enslaved laborers, scholarship falters. How can we identify changes that an enslaved writer might have introduced? How could we assume that any element of the text comes from a secretary rather than the slaveholding “author”? Were enslaved secretaries at liberty to make substantive changes with or without the knowledge of the slaveholder? And, if they were, how would we recognize such alterations if they existed?⁷ Even as “scribes have emerged from invisibility and anonymity to take on personalities,” those personalities are often assumed to mirror those of their “owners.”⁸ In the deep waters of uncertainty, discussion of authorship often defaults to the ancient view that the enslaved were mere tools through which an elite author realized their vision.

This paper is an attempt to think otherwise and to recognize that the historical “archive of slavery rests upon a founding violence” that enslaved workers themselves were coerced into inscribing.⁹ Using *Papyrus Berolinensis* (*P. Berol.*) 11632, a heavily revised second-century *autograph*, as a test case, it will explore the range of collaborative authorial possibilities that can account for the additions to this text and what difference it might make to view such changes as the product of enslaved workers and their experiences. Methodologically, this paper takes its leave from the work of the historian of antebellum slavery Saidiya Hartman, who uses *critical fabulation* to responsibly reconstruct the voices of enslaved women.¹⁰ We should note, however, that

7. To generalize, the will of an enslaved person is recognized in Roman literature only in the process of penalizing that individual. See, for example, Martial, *Epigrammaton libri* 11.58 (Loeb Classical Library 480: 50–53), in which a barber attempts to secure emancipation. On this idea, see Saidiya Hartmann, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 80.

8. Roger Bagnall, *Everyday Writing in the Greco-Roman East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 3.

9. Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12 (2008): 10. She goes on, “This violence determines, regulates and organizes the kinds of statements that can be made about slavery and as well it creates subjects and objects of power.” Hartman here draws upon Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 128–29. We might fruitfully compare here the methods employed by Roger Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore in *Women’s Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

10. Hartman describes her desire “to fill in the blank spaces of the historical record and to represent the lives of those deemed unworthy of remembering” in *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008), 16. In her later work, Hartman names and defines “critical fabulation” as “advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and

this imaginative mode is not limited to the study of enslaved workers. Given what we know about the collaborative nature of ancient authorship, all reconstructions of the ancient writing process and attempts to ascribe intellectual credit are imaginative. The near omnipresence of enslaved literate workers destabilizes our notions of lone authorship: we can never be certain who is responsible for what interpretively consequential turn of phrase. We are always working in the realm of the speculative.

The reflexive historiographical default to authorial agency and autonomy is historically contingent.¹¹ Our modern constructions of historiography are author centered and, thus, it is too easy to reproduce ancient fictions in which a solitary actor works alone. It is noteworthy, however, that in order to support this idea we must rehearse an ancient discourse that silences and objectifies enslaved actors. With this in mind, we turn first to ancient discourses about authorship and enslaved workers before moving to a discussion of the papyrus and its significance.

DESPOTIC DISCOURSE AND THE ERASURE OF ENSLAVED WORK

Elite Roman authors present enslaved workers as prosthetic tools, as extensions of their own bodies, and as conduits of their will.¹² Aristotle's famous statement that "the slave has nothing in common with his master; he is

possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history, I intended both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling" ("Venus in Two Acts," 11).

11. On Romantic understandings of authorship, see Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), in which he scrutinizes the ways in which many works ascribed to a single author (e.g., John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*) are the product of two or more authors. In an appendix to the book, Stillinger notes that first person narratives of the experience of enslavement were often rewritten by modern editors (208). The ancient world is not in his purview but if it were, one hopes he would have noted that enslaved laborers were involved in the vast majority of ancient textual production, whether literary or documentary. See Robyn Faith Walsh, "The Influence of the Romantic Genius in Early Christian Studies," *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 5 (2015): 31–60, which builds on and develops Stanley K. Stowers, "The Concept of 'Community' and the History of Christianity," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011): 238–56. See also Jordan Alexander Stein, *When Novels Were Books* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), which argues that the modern author first emerges in seventeenth-century conversion narratives. For the purposes of this paper, I am putting aside the many challenges to the status and nature of authorship, authorial intent, and revision posed by literary theorists from the late 1960s onward.

12. See Reay's idea of "masterly extensibility" in "Agriculture, Writing, and Cato's Aristocratic Self-Fashioning," *Classical Antiquity* 24 (2005): 331–61; John Bodel, "Villaculture," in *Roman Republican Villas: Architecture, Context, and Ideology*, ed. Jeffrey A. Becker and Nicola Terrenato (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 51.

a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave” bluntly captures the conceptual distance between slaveholder and enslaved, and the violence implicit in structures of slavery.¹³ Representations of enslaved workers are most readily apparent in agricultural handbooks that outline the running of country estates. Varro describes how some people distinguished enslaved workers from other tools by identifying a “slave” as a “speaking sort of tool.”¹⁴ Cato’s *De agricultura*, ostensibly a set of instructions to an estate owner, functioned both as a “cheat sheet” for the absentee landowner and a set of instructions for the enslaved manager (*vilicus*) who oversaw the day-to-day running of the estate. The strangeness of addressing instructions about the storage and movement of manure in the second-person singular to an aristocrat becomes intelligible in the context of slaveholder ideology. It is what Reay has called “masterly extensibility”—the idea that enslaved workers are prosthetic extensions of the body of the master—that renders agricultural handbooks intelligible. Regardless of who actually performs the work, the owner is the one to whom it is credited.¹⁵

This much is true of “high-status” enslaved literate workers as well as “low-status” farm hands.¹⁶ Martial, for example, commends the efficient *notarius* whose hand finishes the sentences of his master before the (slaveholder’s) tongue is ready.¹⁷ More often than not, we should suspect that, when Roman elite writers tell us that they are reading or writing, “what they mean (sometimes) is that *they are being read to*” or are dictating to someone else.¹⁸ The effect is the erasure of labor and laborers from our histories: Pliny’s

13. Aristotle, *Ēthika Nikomacheia* 1161a30–b6. Translation from Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 119.

14. Varro, *Rerum rusticarum* 1.17.2. Translation from Reay, “Agriculture,” 350.

15. Reay, “Agriculture,” 349. For echoes of this theory in modern political economics, see John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (London, 1821), 5.28: “Thus, the grass my horse has bit, the turfs my servant has cut, and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property without the assignation or consent of anybody. The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them.”

16. As Jeremiah Coogan has pointed out to me, the modern language of “farm hands” also reflects the logic of masterly extensibility. Literate workers were often prisoners of war, the offspring of those enslaved as the result of political intrigue, “home-bred slaves” who were educated by the household, or freedmen who continued to work for their former slaveholders. Formerly enslaved individuals continued to be socially disadvantaged, were still classed as servile figures, and often continued to be exploited by their former enslavers.

17. Martial, *Epigrammaton libri* 14.208 (Shackleton Bailey, *Martial Epigrams, Volume III*, 318–19).

18. Howley, “In Ancient Rome,” 22–23.

description of his authorial process refers to his study of two thousand volumes and accumulation of 20,000 facts but obscures the important information that he “did all this work—reading, searching, comparing, excerpting, compiling—with the assistance of an enslaved staff.”¹⁹

The discourse of enslaved members of the household as extensions of the body of the *paterfamilias* both exerts psychic violence on those enslaved individuals in whose hearing this language was used and exposes the vulnerability and dependence of aristocrats on the labor and loyalty of enslaved people.²⁰ As Aesop famously illustrated in his fable about belly and the members, the survival of the body rests on the cooperation of the lower body parts with the head or stomach.²¹

As *P. Berol.* 11632 is an Egyptian fragment, it is worth asking whether people in provincial Egypt used and conceptualized enslaved literate workers in the same way as Roman elites did.²² As elsewhere in the Roman empire, enslaved people in provincial Egypt were property whose status followed that of their slaveholders.²³ As a famous episode in the *Acta Alexandrinorum* shows, the enslaved could be punished alongside their slaveholders or even in their stead.²⁴ While most of the extant discourse about how enslaved people in the ancient Mediterranean were viewed comes from Rome and Greece, the use of enslaved secretaries and copyists is evident in the papyri.²⁵ As Haines-Eitzen has put it, “with the exception of high-level officials who held scribal titles, scribes in the Graeco-Roman world were normally slaves or

19. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* Pr. 17. Quotation from Howley, “In Ancient Rome,” 23.

20. I am grateful to Joe Howley for this observation.

21. Livy, *Ab urbe condita libri* 2.32.9–12 (Loeb Classical Library 114: 324–45). A similar anxiety appears in Martial, *Epigrammaton libri*, 8.75 (Loeb Classical Library 95: 218–19), in which a feeble enslaved worker persuades corpse bearers to take his temporarily incapacitated well-fed Gallic owner to be burned alive. See also 1 Cor 12:12 (NRSV).

22. To complicate this question further, we do not know where in Egypt the fragment was produced. That it was purportedly acquired in Middle Egypt may suggest that it originated in Hermopolis or Antinoopolis, but the evidence is sketchy.

23. *POxy.* 4.714 (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 122 CE).

24. For the *Acta Alexandrinorum*, see *C.Pap.Jud.* 2.158b (*Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*) and discussion in Jean A. Strauss, “Esclaves maltraités ou punis dans l’Égypte romaine,” in *Le myrte et la rose. Mélanges offerts à Françoise Dunand par ses élèves, collègues et amis*, ed. G. Tallet and Chr Zivie-Coche (Montpellier: Collection CENiM, 2014), 23–31. For an example of an enslaved woman stripped and assaulted because of her slaveholder’s refusal to repay a debt, see *SB (Sammelbuch griech. Urkunden aus Ägypten)* 14 11904.

25. *P.Ryl.* 2.143 (*Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*); Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 41–52.

freedpersons.”²⁶ While letters might have been dictated to literate family members, literary texts are likely to have been a different matter entirely.²⁷ Writing by hand was a laborious and physically draining activity that people liked to avoid. In one letter from Oxyrhynchus, dictated by an Egyptian woman named Taesis, the scribe, a houseguest named Alexandros, complains that he has “worn himself out by writing the letter.”²⁸ The use of scribes also improved efficiency: the early third-century Alexandrian Origen, for example, was supplied with a team of seven secretaries and seven copyists by his patron Ambrose, a fact that can help account for Origen’s prolific output.²⁹

Scholarship on enslaved secretaries often reproduces ancient characterizations of the role of the enslaved worker as tools or conduits. We even update the ancient metaphors; instead of serving as hands or pens, enslaved literate writers are pictured as having “served many of the functions of modern technology.”³⁰ This prosthetic description reproduces ancient Roman slaveholder discourse of enslaved people—as useful but as unable to grasp fully the meaning of the texts they read, transcribed, edited, and copied. But in

26. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, 44. In some instances, those who held positions as high-ranking scribes were not responsible for the performance of the writing or translating. See, for example, the case of the identity of the named *hermēneis* Apollonos, who appears in a cluster of Egyptian papyri (*P.Cair.Zen.* 1.59065 [*Zenon Papyri, Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire*]; *P.Ryl.* 4.563; *PSI* 4.409 [*Papiri greci e latini, Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana*]), in which he is called illiterate and appears to have acted as a broker. For further discussion of translational work, see Rachel Mairs, “*Hermēneis* in the Documentary Record from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: Interpreters, Translators and Mediators in Bilingual Society,” *Journal of Ancient History* 7, no. 2 (2019): 1–53. *UPZ* 1.148 (*Urkunden der Ptolemäerzeit*), a second-century fragment of unknown origin, suggests that Greek slaves in Egypt may have been trained in Demotic in order to increase their value.

27. This does not mean that elites never copied literary works themselves. See Rafaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar’s Press, 2006), 5.

28. *POxy.* 56.3860. See also *POxy.* 4.724, a contract in which Chaerammon, an enslaved boy, is sent to learn shorthand.

29. So Jerome, who says that Ambrose supplied Origen with “parchment, money, and copyists,” (*Epistulae* 43; translation from F. A. Wright, Jerome. *Select Letters*, Loeb Classical Library 262 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933], 170–71) and Eusebius, *Ekklesiastikē historia* 6.23 in which he specifies “seven shorthand writers, and just as many scribes, along with maidens trained in calligraphy” (translation from Jeremy M. Schott, trans., *The History of the Church: A New Translation* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019], 307). According to Jerome, Origen pictured his relationship with Ambrose in servile terms and described him in his letters as a “taskmaster.” See Jeremiah Coogan, *Eusebius the Evangelist: Rewriting the Fourfold Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

30. McDonnell, “Writing,” 470. On the slippage between humans and machines, see Markus Krajewski, *The Server: A Media History from the Present to the Baroque* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

accurately tracing the contours of ancient culture and ideology—a valuable historical project—perhaps we have obscured something else: the autonomy, presence, and work of enslaved and servile workers.

These are the despotic discourses of ancient slaveholders that were tactically deployed in the hearing of the enslaved and in the service of policing the boundaries of power.³¹ We should approach such statements with the same hermeneutics of suspicion that we would bring to Polemon’s description of the character of redheads or Virgil’s fantasies of self-managing crops. When Horace, flushed with the heat of inspiration, dispatched an enslaved writer to add verses to his bookrolls, trusting that the man would accurately recall his words, do we really believe that the enslaved writer was nothing more than a tool?³² When modern commentators assume that literate workers contribute nothing to the authorial project, we inadvertently reproduce a violent ancient discourse in which the enslaved are pictured as tools with limited intellectual capacities.³³

31. Reay, “Agriculture”; Tom Geue, “Soft Hands, Hard Power: Sponging Off of the Empire of Leisure (Virgil, *Georgics* 4),” *Journal of Roman Studies* 108 (2018): 115–40; Howley, “In Ancient Rome,” 15–27.

32. Horace, *Satyrical* 1.10.92 (Loeb Classical Library 194: 122–23). The temptation might be to suggest that enslaved workers only introduced corruptions into the writing of the slaveholder. Interestingly, Roman sources do not blame stenographers or secretaries for errors in their work, preferring, instead, to blame the phenomenon of premature publication (e.g., Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 40.8. [Loeb Classical Library 423: 294–95]). Late antique Christian authors, on the other hand, do accuse stenographers of faulty transcription. The second-century reluctance to “blame the scribe” may tie into a broader context in which an elite author did not want to admit to dependence upon an inferior or to being bested by them in some way. Petronius’s *Satyrical* has Trimalchio free an acrobat who injured him “for fear that anyone might be able to say that our hero has been wounded by a slave” (Petronius, *Satyrical* 54.5, translation from *Petronius*, trans. Gareth Schmeling, Loeb Classical Library 15 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020], 170–71).

33. See an anecdote about Plutarch beating an enslaved secretary (“one whose ears had been filled with the teachings and arguments of philosophy”) and accusing him of not fully understanding his work in Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1.26.5–9, translation from *Gellius Attic Nights*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 195 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 115–19. In his work, Joseph Howley has discussed the “epistemic firewall” between the *dominus/paterfamilias* and enslaved workers that was crafted in order to police the boundaries of knowledge. Joseph A. Howley, “Despotics: The Subjugation of Workers in the Ancient Agronomists,” *Work/Life Workshop*, October 26, 2020, University of Pennsylvania. Howley explores the role of the enslaved *vilicus* (enslaved manager) who acted in the slaveholder’s stead. Similar distinctions were reinscribed between engineers and operators of machinery. In the same way, Lucian’s *Ignorant Book-Collector* casts the wealthy Syrian as epistemologically impaired: he can read his books fluently, but he does not understand the “sense of the whole,” the details, arrangement, or degree of perfection encoded within it. He is positioned as servile. (Lucian, *Adversus Indoctum* 2, translation from William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 160).

The test case in question is *P. Berol.* 11632, a 48-line fragment that describes events that took place during Demetrios Poliorketes's siege of Rhodes in 304 BCE.³⁴ The sheet was acquired by W. Schubart from local traders in Middle Egypt in 1912.³⁵ The second-century CE fragment is 27 cm in height and 21.3 cm wide and is written in a cursive script that is divided into two slender 24-line columns.³⁶ The text is written in Ionic

34. High resolution images of the fragment can be found in the Berliner Papyrusdatabank, <https://berlpap.smb.museum/03175>; see catalog numbers TM 63350, LDAB 4557, MP³ 2207. F. Hiller von Gaertringen, "Aus der Belagerung von Rhodos 304 v.Chr. Griechischer Papyrus der kgl. Museen zu Berlin," *SPAW* (1918): 752–63; Friedrich Bilabel, *Die kleineren Historikerfragmente auf Papyrus* (Bonn: Markus and Weber Verlag, 1922), 20–23, Nr. 8; Jacoby, *FGvHist* 533 F 2. The text was reprinted in Jane Hornblower, *Hieronymus of Cardia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 280–81. English translation: Shinya Ueno, "Appendix (Rhodes) (533)," in *Brill's New Jacoby: The Fragments of the Greek Historians*, ed. Ian Worthington (Leiden: Brill, 2015), BNJ 533 F 2, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1873-5363_bnj_4533. For an edition and translation formatted with textual emendations, see Sean Gurd, "Revision in Greek Literary Papyri," in *Probabilities, Hypotheticals, and Counterfactuals in Ancient Greek Thought*, ed. Victoria Wohl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 160–84.

Scholarly discussions of the papyrus include G. Vitale, "Testi recentemente pubblicati," *Aegyptus* 2 (1921): 207–9; A. Körte, "Literarische Texte mit Ausschluß der christlichen," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 7 (1924): 234; E. M. Walker, "Fragments of Historical Works," in *New Chapters in the History of Greek Literature: Recent Discoveries in Greek Poetry and Prose of the Fourth and Following Centuries BC*, ed. John Undersnell Powell and Eric Arthur Barber (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), 65–75; V. Dorandi, "Den Autoren über die Schuler geschaut: Arbeitsweise und Autographie bei den antiken Schriftstellern," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 87 (1991): 19; Hans Ulrich Wiemer, *Rhodische Traditionen in der hellenistischen Historiographie* (Frankfurt: Claus, 2001), 222–50; Hans Ulrich Wiemer, "Zeno of Rhodes and the Rhodian View of the Past 1," in *Polybius and His World: Essays in Memory of F. W. Walbank*, ed. Bruce Gibson and Thomas Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 298n76; Isabelle Pimouguet-Pédarros, *La cité à l'épreuve des rois: Le Siège de Rhodes par Démétrios Poliorkète 303–304 avant J.-C* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 23–25; Sean Gurd, *Work in Progress: Literary Revision as Social Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 132n44.

35. According to von Gaertringen, who received Schubart's copy of the text from U. von Wilamowitz.

36. Two of the three narrow strips that once formed part of the main fragment also preserve some lettering. For a discussion of the date, see von Gaertringen, "Aus der Belagerung," 754. For our purposes the date of the papyrus is not especially important. For a discussion of the problems and possibilities of paleographical dating, see Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 56–72. While it is unusual to find literary texts written in a cursive documentary hand, other autographs are also written in a documentary or hybrid style; see William D. Furley, "A Lesson to All: Lykurgos' Fate in the Tbilisi Hymn (*P.Ross.Georg.* 1.11)," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 162 (2007): 63–84. Cf. *POxy.* 2070, a late third century anti-Semitic Christian dialogue with numerous revisions that is written in a semicursive script.

Greek parallel to the fibers.³⁷ The top and bottom of the writing are intact, but the beginning of the lines in the left column and the end of the lines in the right column are damaged.

The most distinctive elements of the fragment are the many corrections and emendations, some of which were performed *in scribendo*, which characterizes the text. The awkward deletions (most of which are strike-throughs) and interlinear additions in a darker ink by the same hand initially gave rise to the hypothesis that this piece of prose historiography was produced by a “second-rate” or immature author.³⁸ The possibility that the brighter, lighter ink strike-throughs were made by a teacher was considered by Gaertringen et al. but dismissed by them because, in the opinion of Schubart, the author of the main text was too compositionally advanced to be a student.³⁹ To this we might add that it is difficult to posit a separate hand purely on the basis of strike-throughs. While the lighter ink used for the strike-throughs might suggest another hand, the interlinear additions are written by the first hand in a darker ink.⁴⁰ Other discounted possibilities include the idea that the sheet was produced by an enslaved writer at a bookseller’s or that the author was copying another text.⁴¹ Hiller von Gaertringen initially suggested that Zeno of Rhodes authored this text, but there is no direct evidence to support this claim and it has gained little traction in the field.⁴² What is clear is that the text has been revised, potentially in two stages, and that a single hand is responsible for (at least) the main text and the interlinear additions.

Such extensive revisions have led to a growing consensus that the fragment is one of a small cluster of extant autographs, or first versions, of a text. In this case, an author has revised their text both while writing and perhaps also, as the darker ink used in the interlinear space suggests, after writing individual sections. Though surviving autographs are uncommon, Tiziano Dorandi argues that

37. The use of Ionic is unusual and may suggest the deliberate imitation of an older historiographical style. It is not unprecedented, however, as contemporaries like Lucian used the same dialect. Ionicized elements are attested in other late-third-century papyri (e.g., *POxy.* 67.4627). On language and dialect in the papyri, see Eleanor Dickey, “The Greek and Latin Languages in the Papyri,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyri*, ed. Roger Bagnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 149–69.

38. See Ueno, “Appendix.”

39. Von Gaertringen, “Aus der Belagerung,” 763.

40. Von Gaertringen, “Aus der Belagerung,” 753.

41. The fact that the emendations do not correspond to more familiar copyist errors, like homeoteleutons, and include many shifts in content and omissions of information found in Diodorus Siculus (with whom some hypothesize this fragment shares a source), make it difficult to imagine that these are copying errors.

42. Von Gaertringen, “Aus der Belagerung.”

seventeen, including *P. Berol.* 11632, can be identified among the corpus of published papyri.⁴³ Paradoxically, as Manetti has noted, autographs are recognizable only because this kind of text presents a sketchy, incomplete, even aborted version of the text that may well have been discarded.⁴⁴ It is precisely because these texts contain evidence of revision that we are able to attempt a reconstruction of the writing process. Of Dorandi's examples, only six papyri contain evidence of revision, and of these *P. Berol.* 11632 provides the richest evidence as it is "the only example of literary prose containing ample revision."⁴⁵ Those interested in autographs are specifically interested in finding texts written by the named author of a text. Though the majority of prose writing was dictated to secretaries or scribes, revised texts like this one are often assumed to be the product of a solitary author. In defending Nero against charges of plagiarism, Suetonius writes that he saw notebooks of poetry that Nero surely must have written himself because there were "so many instances . . . of words erased or struck through and written above the lines."⁴⁶ Suetonius's description, which resonates with modern authors, does not exclude the possibility that an author could fumble with words and prove indecisive even in the course of dictation.⁴⁷ Quintilian's statement that the presence of a scribe could force a writer to dictate

43. The others are *P.Köln* 6.245 (*Kölner Papyri*, third century CE); PSI I.17 (fourth or fifth century CE); *P.Köln* 3.128 (second century CE); *P.Ross.Georg.* LI1 (*Papyri russischer und georgischer Sammlungen*, third century CE); *P. Berol.* 10599A–B + *P. Berol.* 10558 (*Papyrus Berolinensis*, fourth century CE). This excludes Dioscorus of Aphrodite. See Dorandi, *Le stilet et la tablette*, 53–60; Dorandi, "Den Autoren über die Schulter geschaut: Arbeitsweise und Autographie bei den antiken Schriftsellern," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 87 (1991): 11–33; J.-L. Fournet, *Hellénisme dans l'Égypte de Vie siècle: La Bibliothèque et l'oeuvre de Dioscore d'Aphrodité* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1999).

44. "Per paradosso, il testo autografo è riconoscibile solo per il fatto di presentare un abbozzo di opera, e non un'opera completa o definitiva, magari un'opera abortita e (forse) gettata nel cestino" (Daniela Manetti, "Autografi e Incompiuti: Il caso dell' Anonimo Londinese P. Lit. Lond. 165," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 100 [1994]: 48).

45. Gurd, "Revision," 163.

46. Suetonius, *Nero* 52. Translation from *Suetonius Lives of the Caesars: Volume II*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 38 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 177.

47. Though both poetry and prose demanded proficiency in certain skills, the prose author—who was in any case more likely to dictate their composition—was not held hostage by meter. Suetonius's comment here should be placed in the larger context of his use of literacy and literary competence as a means of evaluating his subjects. Augustus is distinctive for his handwriting and prewriting statements, in which he instructed his grandsons, while Titus apparently participated in tachygraphy races with stenographers and could imitate the handwriting of others. See discussion in Tom Geue, "Handing It Over: Augustus and the Handwritten Self," *Eros*, forthcoming; Geue, "Keeping/Losing Records, Keeping/Losing Faith Suetonius and Justin Do the Document," in *Literature and Culture in the Roman Empire 96–235: Cross-Cultural Interactions*, ed. Alice König, Rebecca Langlands, and James Uden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 217.

Since ~~for them~~ they were appropriate for a king, it was not possible for them to use them. ~~Any~~ And they did those things as I have said. But Amyntas, sailing toward the

eleven catapult-engineers brought islands, seized ~~many machines~~ which were [brought(?)] for Demetrius for the and many makers which siege of the cities, and also [] of weapons, ~~which~~ the Rhodians did not give back to Demetrius, although he was disposed to pay the established ransom, saying that they needed them.

The shift from *machines* to *machine engineers* is made after the writing of the main text and leads to series of subsequent changes. Now that the number of catapult engineers—eleven—is specified, the “many” (πολλά) that previously qualified as “machines” (ὄργανα) was redundant. The neuter plural φερομένα (brought) was altered to the masculine plural, with the alteration made above the line. Gurd hypothesizes that the deletion of *and* (καί) and insertion of *and many* (πολλοὺς τε) was introduced to balance the fact that the author was now writing about two groups of people.⁵¹ Now that two masculine nouns served as the antecedent of τῶν (which), the text was changed to read τοῦς with the new ending written above the line.

As was observed as early as the first edition of this papyrus, the narrative has much in common with Diodorus Siculus’s version of events and yet diverges from Diodorus’s text in notable ways.⁵² According to Walker, “It is evident that the author of the fragment derived his account from the same source as that on which Diodorus drew, and that both writers derived their accounts from this common source directly, and not at second or third hand.”⁵³ Even if Walker is correct about the literary relationship between the texts, it is clear that the author of *P. Berol.* 11632 was not directly copying from a source. The many mistakes and substantive emendations militate against this possibility.⁵⁴

51. Gurd, “Revision,” 169.

52. Walker, “Fragments of Historical Works,” 66–68.

53. Walker, 67. The linguistic parallels between the papyrus and Diodorus Siculus are printed in von Gaertringen, “Aus der Belagerung,” 755–56.

54. Von Gaertringen, who believes that the unknown literary source goes back to eyewitness testimonies, argues that Diodorus places more emphasis on the factual details of the siege while “the Egyptian author” emphasizes the personal. See von Gaertringen, “Aus der Belagerung,” 761.

REVISIONAL POSSIBILITIES

Having discussed the papyrus fragment, relevant emendations, and the text's relationship to other ancient literature, it is now possible for us to imagine the circumstances in which the revision took place. Gurd writes that the revision was elicited by "the author's discovery of new information."⁵⁵ The question for this paper is what can we imagine prompted the change or, to use Gurd's language, this "discovery"? Any response is an exercise in imagination, as we have no access to this moment in the history of this artifact. The idea that a solitary "author" changed the manuscript without input from others is not the ancient default; it is a modern assumption grounded in ancient discourse and in comparatively recent writing practices.⁵⁶ It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to at least consider a wider range of possibilities. The more specific we are, the more likely we are to be wrong, but probing the empty spaces of our evidence does not only produce a richer picture of the ancient world;⁵⁷ it is also the only way to retrieve the voices of those silenced by the processes of objectification and enslavement.

First, as is widely assumed, it is possible that a solitary writer made the initial mistake, later recalled the details of the story, and subsequently revised the manuscript himself.⁵⁸ When inspiration dragged her quarry through a thicket of words and phrases, the result was a draft that was unpolished, ragged, and full of infelicities.⁵⁹ According to the *Vitae Vergilianae antiquae*, Virgil was well-known for leaving "half-lines" in the *Aeneid* so that nothing could "impede his compositional momentum."⁶⁰ Some elite Romans are known to have corrected their works and occasionally those of associates in their own hands.⁶¹ It is possible, therefore, that the "author" wrote both

55. Gurd, "Revision," 169.

56. This is not to say that authorship was not a critically important category and means of categorizing books in antiquity. See Reviel Netz, *Scale, Space, and Canon in Ancient Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

57. I am grateful to Sebastian Heath for the observation that specificity yields a richer and riskier account of the past.

58. A variant on this scenario involves the consultation of a different textual version of the story. We should note that if this detail was fact-checked at the behest of the author (or at the behest of their peers) this process almost certainly involved that utilization of the time and skills of an enslaved reader.

59. Petronius, *Satyrica* 118 (Schmeling, *Petronius*, 296–97).

60. "Ne quid impetum moraretur" text in *Vitae Vergilianae antiquae*, ed. G. Brugnoli and F. Stok (Rome: Polygrafico, 1997), 29.

61. R. Sommer, "Pomponius Atticus und Ciceros Werk," *Hermes* 61 (1926): 403–15; T. Kleberg, "Commercio librario ed editorial nel mondo antico," in *Libri, editori e pubblico nel mondo*

text and revisions. That the author confuses enslaved prisoners of war for technical instruments reflects ancient elite perspectives that regarded enslaved people as objects and, in the case of machine operators, as almost contiguous with the machines they operated.⁶² One might wonder if such a correction would have occurred independently to someone who subscribed to this view and had been misinformed about or misremembered the details of the siege.

Second, this author might have been prompted to make the change after performing a reading of their text for a group of trusted friends at a *recitatio*.⁶³ A member of their inner circle may well have recalled or had a *lector/lectrix* consult the details of the story supplied by Diodorus Siculus or another source and suggested the change. This is possible, although not terribly likely: as it stands the text of the manuscript is an embarrassingly messy single sheet that includes numerous other revisions and corrections.

Though elite authors are often represented—by themselves and others—as presenting unpolished first drafts to their friends, this self-description almost certainly served as a form of rhetorical self-defense. In the second century, public or semipublic performances of literacy were a way of establishing one's status and *bona fides*.⁶⁴ In a context in which mispronunciations could induce social ridicule, presenting a text riddled with elementary mistakes was liable to lay the author open to criticism.⁶⁵ It would have been safer to have one's secretary produce a clean copy first and to present this more readable text as an unpolished first draft.⁶⁶ Moreover, at least some of the revisions

antico: guida storica e critica, ed. G. Cavallo (Rome: Bari, 1975), 49; R. J. Starr, "The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Roman World," *Classical Quarterly* 37 (1987): 213–21.

62. Roby, *Technical Ekphrasis*, 150.

63. For such recitations, see Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 6.17 (Loeb Classical Library 55: 436–37). It is difficult to imagine that a well-educated audience would have spotted the issue with the *catapult-engineers* and not wondered about the omission of other details included by Diodorus Siculus (and the hypothetical shared source) that go overlooked here.

64. On being seen to read, see Johnson, *Reading and Reading Culture*, 88–89, and Joseph A. Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture: Text, Presence and Imperial Knowledge in the Noctes Atticae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 83.

65. On the development of textual culture in the second century, see Thomas Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature: Writing, Empire, and Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 34–68. On mispronunciation, see Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 13.31.1–10 (Rolfé, *Gellius*, 514–515). Several texts imply that those who need to revise extensively are inadequate authors and thinkers. See discussion in Gurd, *Work in Progress*, 88. Compare the description of Nero's notebooks.

66. We might compare here the politically motivated distribution of polished *commentarii*, such as Caesar's *Galic Wars*; see Andrew Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010). Manuscript copying was almost certainly something that people left to enslaved workers. Writing was laborious and, according to some, not necessarily honorable

seem to have been made as the text was being written.⁶⁷ For example, in the second sentence of the papyrus fragment, the author has written and struck through Ἀμν , the beginning of the Ptolemaic general Amyntas's name, before changing their mind and introducing a gentler transition.⁶⁸ In sum, it seems likely that the author would have had their secretary produce a clean copy before reading the text for friends.

Finally, there is the possibility that an enslaved worker—a *lector* or *secretarius*—suggested or made the change, with or without the input of their slaveholder. Proofreading was one of the tasks assigned to trained, enslaved workers, and Cicero's secretary Tiro appears to have been empowered to make substantive changes to manuscripts.⁶⁹ Perhaps the scribe consulted Diodorus Siculus's text for the author or perhaps the literate worker simply recalled the story and suggested (or made) the change on the basis of memory.⁷⁰ Navigating ancient manuscripts and recalling the specifics of ancient texts were physically and intellectually challenging tasks that required practice. While memory formation was a fundamental part of ancient elite education and Galen suggests that liberally educated men practice using scrolls, these tasks were often outsourced to enslaved workers. Though an ancient elite might have been reluctant to admit it, an enslaved lector was almost certainly better at handling a bookroll and navigating its contents than their slaveholder. Regardless of whether or not an author or secretary inscribed the change on the papyrus, it is possible that an enslaved worker came up with the information.⁷¹

either. On copying by enslaved and formerly enslaved workers, see Starr, "Circulation," 219–23. In one letter from Oxyrhynchus, dictated by an Egyptian woman named Taesis, the scribe, a houseguest named Alexandros, complains that he has "worn himself out by writing the letter." (*POxy.* 56.3860).

67. The generous spacing in the manuscript suggests that it was composed as a draft. On line spacing, see William A. Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 156.

68. See Gurd, "Revision," 168. While two forms of corrections—overwriting and strike-throughs—are present in this fragment, generally speaking there were five forms in use: strike-throughs, parenthetical deletions, expunging dots, overwriting, and erasure. Some of these are characteristic of certain modes or phases of documentary and literary production.

69. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 15.6.2 (Rolfe, *Gellius*, 76–77).

70. In a fragment of Cato's *De sumptu suo* preserved by Fronto, Cato describes a compositional process in which he instructed his secretary to read out from a text (*caudex*) parts of an earlier speech. See Enrica Malcovati, *Oratorum Romanorum fragmenta liberae rei publicae*, 4th ed. (Turin: Paravia, 1976), 70–71.

71. To add texture to this interpretation, the story of the minor celebrity whom the enslaved catapult engineers captured during the siege of Rhodes likely had greater significance to a similarly highly skilled worker enslaved by the Romans. It is within the realm of possibility that this secretary

Against this reading, some might object that enslaved workers were not allowed to comment, correct, or offer critique on the content of the author's work. As a form of social exchange, revision involved "textual communities [that] were subject to imbalances and differentiation in taste, ideology, capability and willingness to participate, and above all power."⁷² Would an ancient enslaved literate worker have been able to challenge a version proposed by their slaveholder even in the relative privacy of the home? It is difficult to say, especially when elite authors describe a variety of compositional experiences, some of which are deliberately shrouded in secrecy. For authors, composition seems to have been embarrassingly tortuous and worthy of concealment. Petronius's satirical description of Eumolpus "groaning . . . like a wild beast" and bemoaning that "the poem struggles at the end" surely gestures to a reality in which some found composition to be intellectually taxing.⁷³ In such circumstances, a well-educated and highly literate, trusted worker would have been a valuable resource, though not one that an elite or, to use Hopkins's language, "sub-elite" would have wanted to acknowledge publicly.⁷⁴ The discourse that linked social status, literacy, and education also exerted pressure on authors, and thus we cannot be sure that ancient authors are altogether forthcoming about their writing habits.

In thinking about the dynamics of ancient compositional collaboration, Quintilian's statement about the pressure elicited by the presence of scribes indicates that, on at least one level, Roman elites were concerned about how they appeared to literate workers and wanted to be well regarded by them. That slaveholders were vulnerable to this kind of social pressure hints at an unacknowledged dynamic of tacit respect, dependence, and carefully bounded intellectual exchange.

The collaborative dynamics may have been augmented by other unknowns: the genders, ages, and abilities of the author and the secretary. Though the majority of ancient authors and secretaries were male, women often dictated letters to other people, and we have references to enslaved literate women in

was a prisoner of war and that these engineers had quasi-heroic status for the secretary. If this was the case, we can understand why an enslaved literate worker would have recalled the specifics of this story.

72. Gurd, *Work in Progress*, 4.

73. Petronius, *Satyrical* 115 (Heseltine, *Petronius*, 241). The fact that composition caused some to contort themselves is one reason that Quintilian supplies for not dictating in *Institutio oratoria* 10.3.21 (Butler, *Quintilian*, 344–45).

74. On "sub-elites," see Keith Hopkins, "Conquest by Book," in *A Companion to Latin Literature*, ed. J. H. Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 145n33.

our sources. There were female scribes, secretaries, and calligraphers, and there is no reason to assume that they were less capable than their male peers.⁷⁵ We can hypothesize about the different ways in which the various configurations of gender and social status intersected during the compositional process. In a similar fashion, we can imagine that the power dynamics between enslaved worker and slaveholding author might have been augmented if the author was suffering from congenital or age-related vision loss and was unable to read the manuscript without the help of a literate worker.⁷⁶ Writing, like all aspects of ancient life, was intersectional: we should imagine that a number of inaccessible factors influenced the relationship between author and scribe.

Though we should assume great variety on the question of collaboration, at least some enslaved workers contributed to the substance of their slaveholder's writing. Tiro's role in Cicero's writing process was both fundamental and generative.⁷⁷ While Tiro is hardly typical, there were countless other uncredited literate workers who contributed to the writing of texts.⁷⁸ In his discussion of the authorship of Hebrews, Origen speculates that the stylistic differences in the letter could be attributed to Paul's secretary.⁷⁹ His comments show that at least

75. For inscriptions related to freedwomen Roman copyists, see *CIL* 6.8882, 37802; for female teachers (*paedagogi*), see *CIL* 6.6331, 9754 (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*). On women writing generally, see Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*; Susan Treggiari, "Jobs for Women," *American Journal of Ancient History* 1 (1976): 76–104; George W. Houston, *Inside Roman Libraries: Book Collections and their Management in Antiquity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 4.

76. This is not to suggest that enslaved workers deliberately took advantage of disabled slaveholding authors but rather that the dynamic would be altered and that ancient Roman elites worried about how disability made them vulnerable. On writing and vision loss, see Horsfall, "Rome without Spectacles," 49–56.

77. Bahr, for example, writes "Tiro took part in the composition of the letter," in Gordon J. Bahr, "Paul and Letter Writing in the First Century," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966): 470; Otto Morgenstern, "Cicero und die Stenographie," *Archiv für Stenographie* 56 (1905): 1–6.

78. For hints of other important enslaved workers, see Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.3 (Butler, *Quintilian*, 343–45). Cicero's brother, Quintus, evidently had his secretary Statius reply to letters on his behalf (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Quintum fratrem* 1.2.8 [Loeb Classical Library 461: 54–55]). Rufus had scribes (here *operarii*) keep an account of literary goings on in Rome for Cicero and protested that he did not have enough time even to cast an eye over the version the scribes produced (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 8.1.1 [Loeb Classical Library 205: 342–45]). According to a later source apparently Brutus, too, employed someone to write his letters for him (Philostratus of Lemnos, *Dialexis* 2.28. [Loeb Classical Library 521: 402–3]).

79. Eusebius, *Ekklesiastikē historia* 6.25.13–14 (Loeb Classical Library 153: 76–77). Origen envisions a more pedagogical context for the writing of the letter in which Paul, a lower-status teacher, dictated to a higher-status student. It is likely that the secretary's social credentials soothed concerns about the ways in which he captured Paul's meaning, digested it, and produced a more elaborate product. My thinking on this is influenced by conversations with Cat Lambert.

one Egyptian writer (roughly) contemporary with the author of *P. Berol.* 11632 was sensitive to the ways in which a secretary could alter the character of a text.⁸⁰

For those who held that all members of the household were extensions of the body of the *paterfamilias*, the corrections of a secretary were less like impudence than they were literary self-scrutiny.⁸¹ On a syntactical and grammatical level, secretaries and copyists regularly made corrections without consultation with the authors.⁸² Such emendations fell within the boundaries of the role: an enslaved secretary who offered or made minor corrections to a text would simply have been performing the duties assigned to them.⁸³ Though this particular example from *P. Berol.* 11632 may strike us as a substantive change, to an elite Roman replacing *machines* with *machine engineers* would be a minor revision. It is a technicality that is only important inasmuch as accuracy in all respects is important.

There is no reason to think that an enslaved literate worker could not have been responsible for this revision. In this scenario, the secretary could have transcribed the text as it was dictated to them. At the conclusion of this sentence, section, or burst of compositional energy, the scribe might have suggested that *catapult machines* be replaced with *catapult engineers*. Alternatively, perhaps a lector suggested a revision. We can envision a variety of

80. The stylistic and rhetorical improvement of the dictator's style may be apparent in a number of papyri; see discussion in Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, 59–63.

81. On enslaved workers as mirrors of their slaveholders, see William Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11, 69–86.

82. Changes like these muddy the waters of text criticism and nudge us to reconsider the ways in which we discuss and categorize interpolations. On the categorization of interpolations on the part of copyists, see Richard Tarrant, *Texts, Editors, and Readers: Methods and Problems in Latin Textual Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 87–88.

83. On the agency of enslaved workers in other periods, see Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," *American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 1231–49; Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003): 113–24. Even if we were to assume that enslaved laborers were generally not permitted to weigh in on the content of a work, there is some evidence that higher status individuals would consider the opinions of lower-status individuals when the latter had relevant expertise. Pliny the Elder, for example, supplies one story in which the artist Apelles habitually placed his work in a portico so that he could hide and listen in on the criticisms of passersby. On one occasion a cobbler criticized the size of the inner loop of a sandal in one of the pieces. When, the following day, the same cobbler dared to criticize the form of the same subject's leg, "Apelles showed himself and angrily denounced him, saying that a cobbler had no business making judgments above the sandal—a line that became proverbial" (Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 35.84; trans. Sean Gurd, *Work in Progress*, 69). Apelles is willing to take the cobbler's advice, but only on the subject of shoes. Against this backdrop it might have been possible for an enslaved worker to clarify what kind of "property" had been seized during the siege of Rhodes.

situations in which author and enslaved scribe might have collaborated to produce a second, improved version of the text.

CONCLUSION

For our thought experiment, what matters is the way that this scribal revision reflects enslaved experience. We can imagine that enslaved writers attended to the difference between bodies and objects in ways that elite slaveholding writers did not. The revision here forces a recognition of this difference and, in doing so, ruptures the hegemonic and tyrannical discourse that categorized and described enslaved people as tools. The focus on accuracy forces a fleeting recognition of the difference between people and inanimate objects.

To push this further, we might say that the revision is not only a professionally appropriate concern for accuracy but also a means of resisting despotic discourses that did not distinguish between people and machinery. The worker can advocate for a revision that acknowledges their own autonomy and personhood even as they adhere to the rules that governed the proper relations between slaveholder and enslaved person. This may strike some readers as overly imaginative.⁸⁴ The alternative, however, is to default to assumptions about writing that describe enslaved people as will-less objects. These, as we have seen, are rooted in the exercise of tyrannical power. There is no way to read this passage that does not rest on an assumption about the agency of the individuals in the writer's studio.

In the opening paragraph of the first critical edition of the papyrus, the edition's "author" von Gaertringen discusses how the edition and commentary was the product of a literary collaboration between himself, Schubart (the fragment's owner), von Wilamowitz, and Wucken. He reflects on the nature of collaboration and writes that their individual contributions cannot always be sharply defined from one another.⁸⁵ There is something painfully ironic about this opening: Hiller von Gaertringen notes the difficulty of

84. Alternatively, this may essentialize enslaved workers by reducing them to caricatures that are only recognized or deemed relevant in matters that directly pertain to enslavement. This point was made with respect to women by Esther Brownsmith in her talk on "That's What She(?) Said: Gendering Authorship and the Hebrew Bible" as part of the Books Known Only By Title project at the Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters on March 3, 2021 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VE1eZk67B9I>). On the search for resistance as a function of liberal humanist interests in agency and intent, see Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives. Enslaved women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 8–9.

85. "Der hier gebotene Text ist das Ergebnis dieser gemeinsamen Arbeit, wobei der Anteil des einzelnen nicht immer scharf abgegrenzt werden kann noch soll; es kommt ja vor, dass, was der eine

paring authorship and credit, but only among his own circle of peers. When he turns to the ancient world, a world in which writing was almost always collaborative, he shifts to an assumption of solitary authorship. He is willing to explore the power dynamics and contributions of a hypothetical teacher but not those of an enslaved secretary. He is hardly alone.

This example from *P. Berol.* 11632 draws our attention to the collaborative nature of ancient writing broadly and to the compositional and interpretative possibilities generated by the crowd of workers who surrounded the ancient writing desk.⁸⁶ The ambiguities and variations in Roman writing processes mean that the alternative to this kind of critical fabulation is not bare and unadorned facts but rather a different fiction, one that reproduces the Roman despotic discourses that sought to control and deny the personhood of the enslaved. ■

postuliert, der zweite liest oder ergänzt, der dritte verbessert oder ausfeilt, der vierte verwertet,” in von Gaertringen, “Aus der Belagerung,” 752.

86. This image is borrowed from Laura Nasrallah, “1 Corinthians,” in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: New Testament*, ed. Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kettridge, and David A. Sánchez (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 432.