

## Writing Texts, Drawing Signs

On Some Non-alphabetical Signs in Charters  
of the Early Medieval West

by

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*In memoriam*  
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(1981–2016)

In European history from the fifth to the eleventh centuries the first and the most momentous break remains the break-up of the western Roman empire: “Reactions to the old moralistic reading of the ‘end’ of ancient civilization have often in recent decades sought to stress continuities across the fifth century, particularly in cultural and religious practices, and partly in political aspiration too; these continuities were real. The old image of the sweeping away of Roman culture by vital Germanic barbarism (succeeded by Roman-German ‘fusion’ under the aegis of Catholic churchmen) is irretrievably outdated as a result. But this does not mean that the fifth century in the West was not a major period of change”<sup>1</sup>. During that century the fiscal and economic basis of the Roman state did indeed change<sup>2</sup>. The result was that the economic unity of the western

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\* This is a revised and expanded version of the paper presented at the XXII<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the International Committee of Historical Sciences held in Jinan (China), 23<sup>rd</sup>–29<sup>th</sup> August 2015, for the Panel (Specialized Theme 1) ‘The History of Writing Practices and Scribal Culture’ (organized by Martyn Lyons with the support of the Australian Historical Association).

<sup>1</sup> Christopher J. WICKHAM, *The Inheritance of Rome. A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, London 2009, p. 553.

<sup>2</sup> On the issue of state fiscality, some critical remarks can be found in Salvatore COSENTINO, *Fine della fiscalità, fine dello stato romano?*, in: *Le trasformazioni del V secolo. L’Italia, i barbari e l’Occidente romano. Atti del Seminario di Poggibonsi, 18–20 ottobre 2007*, ed. by Paolo DELOGU/Stefano GASPARRI, Turnhout 2010, p. 17–35.

Mediterranean was broken, the ‘barbarian’ aristocracies at the helm of the post-Roman kingdoms became localized and poorer, and the material culture much simpler in most places. The historical relationship between the fall of the Roman empire and the beginning of ‘something else’ – the Early Middle Ages, for example, in the West – represents one of the broadest and most pervasive themes ever discussed in western historiography, in particular for the conceptualization of the period of ‘Late Antiquity’<sup>3</sup>.

Whatever the interpretations of the period from the fifth century onwards may be – radical change or continuity<sup>4</sup> – one point can be certainly made regarding that transition in the western part of the late Roman empire. In the late Roman empire the basis of the government and administration – and the network of communication in general – was founded on a Greek-Latin linguistic and graphic *koiné*<sup>5</sup>. But also in post-Roman kingdoms the barbarian aristocracies did not ignore the written medium as a tool both of government and of economic relations: they used it, certainly, in much more simplified and fragmented way – as far as we know from the

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the question and related main bibliography, most recently AVERIL CAMERON, *Christian Conversion in Late Antiquity: Some Issues*, in: *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam and Beyond. Papers from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar, University of Oxford, 2009–2010*, ed. by Arietta PAPA-CONSTANTINO/Neil MCLYNN/Daniel L. SCHWARTZ, London 2015, p. 3–22, and particularly the paragraph I, ‘Late Antiquity Again’. It is significant that at the XXII<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the International Committee of Historical Sciences (see note <sup>2</sup>) a panel was devoted to the theme ‘Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate’ (organized by Rita Lizzi Testa with the support of the Italian National Committee). The work of Chris Wickham cited above (see note 1) represents a brilliant example, in which Late Antiquity – or at least a part of it – and the Early Middle Ages are conceptualized together on the same *continuum*.

<sup>4</sup> Or both change and continuity, depending on regional differences: Christopher J. WICKHAM, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800*, Oxford 2005, p. 12–14.

<sup>5</sup> For the Greek-Latin graphic *koiné* see Medea NORSIA, *Analogie e coincidenze tra scrittura greca e latina nei papiri*, in: *Miscellanea G. Mercati* 6, Città del Vaticano 1946, p. 105–121 (= *Omaggio a Medea Norsa*, ed. by Mario CAPASSO, Napoli 1993, p. 137–156); Robert MARICHAL, *L’écriture latine et l’écriture grecque*, in: *L’Antiquité classique* 19 (1950) p. 113–147; Jean MALLON, *Conclusions: pour une paléographie gréco-latine*, in: *Paléographie romaine*, Madrid 1952, p. 161–168; Guglielmo CAVALLO, *La κοινή scrittorica greco-romana nella prassi documentale di età bizantina*, in: *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 19 (1970) p. 1–31; ID., *Écriture grecque et écriture latine en situation de “multigrafismo assoluto”*, in: *L’écriture: le cerveau, l’œil et la main*, ed. by Colette STRAT/Jean IRIGOIN/Emmanuel POULLE (*Bibliologia* 10), Turnhout 1990, p. 349–362.

rare survival of charters of that period<sup>6</sup> – but written in Latin<sup>7</sup> and in a script which was inherited in some way from the late Roman world<sup>8</sup>.

Latin remained the common language of communication for a long time in the West; it ceased to have any effect as a language of vertical communication<sup>9</sup> between the eighth and ninth centuries, at different times and phases in different parts of Europe<sup>10</sup>. What is important to stress here is that in Merovingian France or in Lombard Italy or in Visigothic Spain illiterate people participating in legal proceedings could understand written documents when they were read out to them: the “Latin parlé tardif”<sup>11</sup> always emerges, at least, in the written Latin employed in the part of the document containing the essential details of the transaction.

Even if they are extremely rare, the written sources that survive from the post-Roman kingdoms doubtless demonstrate that the form of the legal documents employed by the ‘Barbarians’ was somehow ‘Roman’, in terms of its basic structure and for single textual units, in different ways in

<sup>6</sup> Documents in decent quantity and in original transmission are available for Frankish Gaul (from the seventh century), Alemannia (from the eighth century), Lombard Italy (from the early eighth century) and Spain (rare fragments on parchment and documents on slate, from the sixth to eighth centuries). Not one document in original transmission is preserved from Rome and from the papal *curia* until the late eighth century. Facsimile-edition of all charters prior to the ninth century is available in the first series of *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores* (ChLA), voll. 1–49. For the documents on slate, see: Isabel VÉLAZQUEZ SORIANO, *Las pizarras visigodas: edición crítica y estudio* (*Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 6), Murcia 1989; *Documentos de época visigoda escritos en pizarra (siglos VI–VIII)*, ed. by Isabel VÉLAZQUEZ SORIANO, Turnhout 2000.

<sup>7</sup> At the middle of the sixth century in Ostrogothic Italy the Gothic language was known only to a small elite; on the autograph subscriptions in Gothic language and Gothic script documented in two Latin papyri of the Ostrogothic period see Lothar SAUPE, *Die Unterfertigung der lateinischen Urkunden aus den Nachfolgestaaten des Weströmischen Reiches* (*Münchener Historische Studien. Abteilung Geschichtliche Hilfswissenschaften* 20), Kallmünz 1983, p. 26, which cites previous bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> The milestone remains MALLON, *Paléographie romaine* (see note 5) p. 122–157 (chapter V, ‘La nouvelle écriture romaine’). See for a recent overview about the contribution of Mallon and other scholars Teresa DE ROBERTIS, *La scrittura romana*, in: *AfD* 50 (2004) p. 221–246.

<sup>9</sup> Michel BANNIARD, *Viva voce. Communication écrite et communication orale du IV<sup>e</sup> au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle en Occident Latin*, Paris 1992, p. 38: “Par cette expression [i.e. communication verticale] nous désignons un acte de communication par lequel un locuteur s’adresse à un interlocuteur (ou à des auditeurs) d’un niveau culturel et linguistique nettement inférieur au sien. Dans le cas des siècles et de la société dont nous nous proposons de suivre l’histoire, il s’agit essentiellement de lettrés s’adressant à des illettrés”.

<sup>10</sup> BANNIARD, *Viva voce* (see note 9) p. 485–492; see also ID., *La voix et l’écriture: émergences médiévales*, in: *Médiévales* 25 (1993) p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> For the notion, see BANNIARD, *Viva voce* (see note 9) p. 44–47.

different places<sup>12</sup>. The basic textual frame of the ‘Barbarian’ documents is, more or less, recognizable as part of a Roman ‘discourse’: this fact gives fundamental evidence for the derivation of the early medieval documentary practice from the late Roman world, but this constitutes, at the same time, the main obstacle for understanding how that process of composition worked<sup>13</sup>, that is to say, understanding concretely what the legal document was in the post-Roman kingdoms. The sources are rare also for the late Roman period<sup>14</sup>: we barely have an idea, for example, of the late Roman document in the western part of the empire. Trying to explain the structure of the contract of sale documented in the papyri from Ravenna of the sixth century, Jan Olof Tjäder had to admit: “Was den Ursprung des

<sup>12</sup> See Peter CLASSEN, *Kaiserreskript und Königsurkunden*, Thessaloniki 1977; ID., *Fortleben und Wandel spätrömischen Urkundenwesens im Frühmittelalter*, in: *Recht und Schrift im Mittelalter*, ed. by Peter CLASSEN, Sigmaringen, 1977. For the ‘private charters’, a recent overview in Antonella GHIGNOLI, *Koinè, influenze, importazioni transalpine nella documentazione ‘privata’ dei secoli VII–VIII: lo stato dell’arte*, in: *Le Alpi porta d’Europa. Scritture, uomini, idee da Giustiniano al Barbarossa. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio dell’Associazione Italiana dei Paleografi e Diplomatisti. Cividale del Friuli (5–7 ottobre 2006)*, ed. by Laura PANI/Cesare SCALON, Spoleto 2009, p. 83–110.

<sup>13</sup> For the Lombard documents most recently François BOUGARD/Antonella GHIGNOLI, *Elementi romani nei documenti longobardi?*, in: *L’héritage byzantin en Italie (VIII–XII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*. I. *La fabrique documentaire*, ed. by Jean-Marie MARTIN/Annick PETERS-CUSTOT/Vivien PRIGENT (Collection de l’École française de Rome 449), Rome 2011, p. 241–301, which cites the main related bibliography. About the collections of *formulae* as sources and their usage in Frankish Gaul see Alice RIO, *Legal Practice and the Written Word in the Early Middle Ages. Frankish Formulae, c. 500–1000*, Cambridge 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Available sources are: Egyptian papyri (from 500 to the late eighth century), Italian papyri (from Ravenna, from sixth to early seventh century), the wooden tablets from Vandalic Africa (Tebessa, fifth century). For editions and classification of all the papyri, and for their digital images see the portal Papyri.info – <http://papyri.info> (site visited 10.5.2015) –, which supports searching, browsing, and aggregation of ancient papyrological documents and related materials from Advanced Papyrological Information System (APIS), Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri (DDbDP), Heidelberg Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden Ägyptens (HGV), and Bibliographie Papyrologique (BP); it depends on close collaboration with the portal of papyrological and epigraphical resources Trismegisto <http://www.trismegistos.org> (site visited 24.6.2016). Useful, but only for papyri of Byzantine Aphrodisias, is the list (Annexe 2) in *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte. Histoire et culture dans l’Égypte byzantine*, ed. by Jean-Luc FOURNET, Paris 2008. Abbreviations for papyrological publications follow the conventions of the Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html> (site visited 2.4.2016). All the greek papyri containing some lines or words in latin language are available in facsimile also in the first series of ChLA. For the Vandalic tablets, see *Tablettes Albertini. Actes privés de l’époque vandale (fin du V<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, ed. by Christian COURTOIS/Louis LESCHI/Charles PERRAT/Charles SAUMAGNE, Paris 1952.

Formulares (der Formulare) betrifft, wird die Untersuchung gewisse Hinweise geben, aber diese müssen gegen die Tatsache abgewogen werden, dass uns für das 3., das 4. und für den weitaus größten Teil des 5. Jhs. kein direktes Vergleichsmaterial zur Verfügung steht”<sup>15</sup>. Thus signifying, theoretically, the impossibility to suppose a unique late Roman ‘archetype’ of the post-Roman documents: we can only imagine the late Roman sources as an ‘open transmission’, where stemmatic analysis can play a very limited role and relationships between witnesses and branches remain for many aspects obscure.

The early medieval charter of the Latin West does not consist of written texts only: it is a complex system of written alphabetical texts and graphic devices, as well as material ones like, for example, seals: all these are elements of different natures, employed together as codes in the same overall communicative process. The new approach in studying the early medieval charters as such a complex system began in Germany with the leading works of Peter Rück and his school<sup>16</sup>, who promoted a field of investigations where diplomatics – the discipline traditionally devoted to the study of medieval documents – must involve concepts and results taken from other disciplines – archaeology, numismatics, semiotics, anthropology for example – in explicating morphology, semantics, syntax, pragmatic function and changes over time of the elements of this system<sup>17</sup>. The well-studied subjects in this field have been, however, those ‘graphische Symbole’ which represent the typical, striking features of the charters of the rulers (kings, emperors, popes, but also dukes, counts or bishops and abbots) in the ‘late’ early middle ages, that is from the ninth century onwards. In this period the ‘communication verticale’ in Latin between literate élites and the illiterates cannot be conceived; only clerics as scribes of a ruler or laymen as public notaries of a kingdom had at that time competence and ability to write Latin texts and draw into them graphic devices; the text of the documents had to be translated, even to the addressee, while the graphic symbols can immediately, more or less, communicate a message: this is the fundamental question in understanding the communication function of medieval charters. Comparative studies in the field of diplomatic semiotics

<sup>15</sup> Jan Olof TJÄDER, *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri Italiens aus der Zeit 445–700*, Stockholm 1982, 2 p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> See Peter WORM, *Ein neues Bild von der Urkunde: Peter Rück und seine Schüler*, in: *AfD* 52 (2006) p. 335–370.

<sup>17</sup> A manifesto-book: *Graphische Symbole in mittelalterlichen Urkunden*, ed. by Peter RÜCK (Historische Hilfswissenschaften 3), Sigmaringen 1996.

have gained considerable results in understanding the morphology of monograms, distinguished scripts, special signs, layout of the text and format of the parchment, figures and *legendae* on seals<sup>18</sup>, but synchronic and diachronic analyses in this field have been conducted mainly, and naturally, on post-Roman western sources, substantially omitting the late Roman sources<sup>19</sup>.

Non-alphabetical signs are drawn within the text of legal documents as well as letters (both private and official) of the late Roman period: In this Greek-Latin written *koiné* they seem to be a widely spread writing practice, by literates and illiterates too. Their external feature is not particular noticeable within the graphic texture of the written text in Greek or Latin cursive; the technology requested in drawing signs is the same for writing a text: a human hand tracing thin lines. Some of these signs communicate meaning without any need for literacy in any language; some do not belong to an ordinary alphabetical system; some seem to have transcended the language in which they were originated. The aim of this paper is to examine the documentary sources of the Late Antiquity through the perspective of the presence and meaning of this kind of graphic signs and to explore the possibility of comparing them with analogues in the Latin “pragmatic literacy”<sup>20</sup> of the West in sixth to eighth centuries. I will highlight only few selected cases that I believe can show us further aspects of a dynamic survival of ‘Roman’ writing practices in the post-Roman kingdoms.

<sup>18</sup> An overview in Peter RÜCK, Beiträge zur diplomatischen Semiotik, in: Graphische Symbole (see note 17) p. 13–47.

<sup>19</sup> An important exception obviously concerns monograms: Volker HILBERG, Monogrammverwendung und Schriftlichkeit in merowingischen Frankreich, in: Arbeiten aus dem Marburger hilfswissenschaftlichen Institut, ed. by Erika EISENLOHR/Peter WORM (Elementa diplomatica 8), Marburg/L. 2000, p. 63–122; Ildar H. GARIPZANOV, Metamorphoses of the early medieval *signum* of a ruler in the Carolingian world, in: Early Medieval Europe 14,4 (2006) p. 419–464.

<sup>20</sup> For this notion: Malcolm B. PARKES, The Literacy of the Laity, in: Scribes, Scripts and Readers. Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts, ed. by ID., London 1991, p. 275–298.

## 1. Sign of the cross and related Christian symbols in the late Roman writing practices of daily life

In the third essay devoted to the history of the sign of cross Franz Joseph Dölger has demonstrated that from the end of the fourth century, at least, the Greek cross (+) and the diagonal cross (x) – in the shape of the so-called saltire – were employed as a Christian symbol in written texts<sup>21</sup>. Different functions can be observed according to the context, but the meaning was always the same: the ‘name of Christ’. The connection between sign and meaning is resolved in ‘Christ’ as a personal name, and it can be said that it is a sort of ‘nominal’ connection. This is due also to the fact that on the one hand the diagonal cross had the same shape of the Greek letter X (*chi*), the initial of the name *Χριστός*; on the other, that the Greek cross (+) was used to indicate the Greek letter X itself.

The first evidence of a Greek cross employed as Christian sign in letters where Christian authorship is certain is in P.Oxy.LVI 3862, a letter of recommendation written in Greek by Philoxenus to his parents and uncle, dating to the fourth/fifth centuries: it is drawn in central position over the first line of the text<sup>22</sup>. The presence of crosses with the certain function of Christian symbol in letters from the late antique Oxyrhynchus increases during the fifth century and became general in the sixth and seventh centuries<sup>23</sup>. A cross in the so-called Latin shape – or *crux ordinaria*, where the vertical stroke is longer than the horizontal one – is not documented in the papyri from the Late Roman Egypt. The Christian letters on papyrus pertaining to the Oxyrhynchus documents contain another important symbol related to the cross: the staurogram. It appears sometimes marked with Greek crosses, but sometimes it is alone, usually drawn in the left margin at either the beginning or the end of the letter. It is first documented in P. Oxy. XXXIV 2729, a letter of Dioscurides to Aquileus, in Greek, about the middle of the fourth century<sup>24</sup>. The monogram composed of the two initial letters of the name *Χριστός* – the *chi-rho* monogram, the most well-

<sup>21</sup> Franz J. DÖLGER, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens III, in: Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 3 (1960), p. 5–16; the author published a series of nine essays on the subject in this review from 1958 to 1967.

<sup>22</sup> Lincoln H. BLUMELL, Lettered Christians. Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus, Leiden 2012, Appendix p. 310, Table 4.

<sup>23</sup> BLUMELL, Lettered Christians (see note 22), p. 43–46. For the use of signs in form of diagonal crosses with no Christian implications in documentary texts (letters, orders of arrest), *ibid.* p. 43, note 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 302 and p. 310, Table 4.

known among Christian monograms – is documented only in P.Oxy. XXXI 2609, a letter to a sister dating to the fourth century, and this evidence is strongly uncertain<sup>25</sup>. No traces are found of the other two monograms based on the name of Jesus Christ, composed of its initial letters: the *iota-chi* 'Ι(ησοῦς) Χ(ριστός), and the *iota-eta* 'Ιη(σοῦς) monograms.

The function of Greek cross and staurogram in the Christian letters from the fourth to sixth centuries Oxyrhynchus papyri is clearly evident, confirmed by their position in the text: the symbols serve as an invocation to Christ, the very beginning of everything, but at the same time they also function as a special greeting, a blessing to the addressee.

The distinction between the staurogram and the *chi-rho* monogram (called also christogram or, more in general, Chrismon) is fundamental: they have different morphology and different origin. The staurogram is a compendium (in the sense of letter-combination, monogram, and not in the strict sense of abbreviation) formed by superimposing the Greek letter *rho* over a letter *tau*. As such this figure is documented for the first time in the extant portion of the codex of the Gospel of John, dated to second or third century, the P.Bodm. II: in statements referring to Jesus' cross or crucifixion the noun σταυρός and the verb σταυρώ present the monogram *tau-rho* in the middle of the word, between the initial σ- and the ending -ός or -όω, in substitution of -ταυρ- (ταυ and ρ). It has recently been argued, fairly convincingly, by Larry Hurtado that the staurogram used in certain early Christian manuscripts “represents the earliest extant visual reference to the crucified Jesus”<sup>26</sup>. Whereas the letter-combinations *iota-eta*, *iota-chi* and *chi-rho* are true monograms, whose component letters directly refer to Jesus by name or a Christological title, “the tau-rho combination did not have any such function. Its component letters neither derive from, nor refer to, Jesus' name or any of the familiar Christological titles”<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 1).

ⲧⲣ = ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ  
 Ⲭⲣ = ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ  
 —|— = ΙΗ(ΣΟΥΣ)  
 ⲧⲣ = Used in early manuscripts: P66, P45, P75, ca. 200–250 CE

Fig. 1: Monograms *chi-rho*, *iota-chi*, *iota-eta* and staurogram: from HURTADO, The Staurogram (see note 26) p. 209

A second important observation to make is that the staurogram has developed independently within the Christian tradition, without any original connection with the Egyptian *ankh* (the sign meaning ‘life’)<sup>28</sup>, which is currently called *crux ansata*. The best way to avoid the confusion about the identification of staurograms and their distinction from Christograms is to not to use such terms as *crux ansata* or ‘Enkelkreuz’ to indicate what actually is a staurogram<sup>29</sup>.

The Ancient Roman *epistola* not only “wirkte auf die Schreiben der Päpste, wie auf das Urkundenwesen der germanischen Könige” but “wurde auch maßgebend für die neuromische Geschäftskunde und durch sie für das ganze frühmittelalterliche Privaturkundenwesen”<sup>30</sup>. Thus it cannot be stated that the symbolic invocation at the beginning of charters represent an innovation of the early medieval documentary tradition<sup>31</sup>. The practices of writing letters documented in the papyri from the Christian late antique Oxyrhynchus demonstrate the contrary, as does some evidence in Greek legal documents of the age of Justinian<sup>32</sup>. An extraordinary example of the link between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages is provided in the fragments of the visigothic documents written on slate: all the invocation signs drawn at the beginning of lists, agreements, sales, conceived in the most different forms (*notitia*, *chartula* or *placitum*),

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 310, Table 4.

<sup>26</sup> Larry W. HURTADO, The Staurogram in Early Christian Manuscripts: The Earliest Visual Reference to the Crucified Jesus?, in: New Testament Manuscripts: Their Text and Their World, ed. by Thomas J. KRAUS/Tobias NICKLAS, Leiden 2006, p. 207–226; same arguments and conclusions also in ID., The Earliest Christian Artifacts. Manuscripts and Christian Origins, Grand Rapids Michigan 2006, p. 135–154 (chapter 4 The Staurogram).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 212.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 216–219.

<sup>29</sup> It happens, for example, in Erika EISENLOHR, Von ligierten zu symbolischen Invokations- und Rekognitionszeichen in frühmittelalterlichen Urkunden, in: Graphische Symbole (see note 17) p. 183.

<sup>30</sup> Oswald REDLICH, Die Privaturkunden des Mittelalters, München 1911, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> It is so, for example, in Benôit-Michel TOCK, Scribes, souscripteurs et témoins dans les actes privés en France (VII<sup>e</sup>-début XII<sup>e</sup> siècle), Turnhout 2005, p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> Griechische Papyrusurkunden spätrömischer und byzantinischer Zeit aus Hermupolis Magna, ed. by Günter POETHKE (Ägyptische Urkunden aus den staatlichen Museen zu Berlin. Griechische Urkunden 17 = Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete, Beiheft 7), München 2001: see for example the document n. 2684 (20<sup>th</sup> september 555), Taf. IX: there is a staurogram, as invocation sign, both at the beginning and at the end of the document.

are staurograms<sup>33</sup>. In two cases the staurogram is accompanied by a true christogram: it is a monogram *iota-eta*. Here the *nexus* between the two Greek initials of the name of Jesus, in minuscule form, by sharing the vertical stroke gives to the whole the shape of the Latin letter *b*<sup>34</sup>: a *figura* well known in the western early medieval charters<sup>35</sup>.

## 2. The sign of the cross as writing practice of illiterates

Christograms and staurograms “represent visual phenomena, and so, as reverential references to Jesus in early Christian usage, they have a certain iconographic function and significance, which should be recognized”<sup>36</sup>. From the point of view of their graphical realization, christograms and staurograms may appear signs of a simple shape, but they are not. Their shape is the result of writing two Greek alphabetical signs in monogrammatic composition. Certainly, one could have learned and memorized the figure in its entirety. In any case, it would have involved holding the *calamus* and managing it in order to trace a complex sign over the surface of a piece of papyrus, parchment, slate or wooden tablet: a manual skill that an illiterate could hardly have. A different matter is being able to draw a single line or two crossed lines or simple little circles.

The gradual introduction of signature in the diplomatics of the late Roman state between the end of fourth and fifth centuries and the increasing use of papyrus at the same time represent a turning point in the legal system of the period as regards the value of a document as evidence. “Die Unterschrift auf einer Papyrusurkunde”, as Lothar Saupe has written, “ermöglichte die Verbindung von Beweissicherungsfunktion und rechtsgeschäftlicher Willenserklärung [...] Die Unterschrift stellt sich somit sowohl in den Rechtsquellen wie vor allem in den urkundlichen

<sup>33</sup> SORIANO, *Las pizarras visigodas* (see note 6) n. 8, 11, 20, 40.1, 40.2, 41, 46.1, 48, 50, 54, 56, 59, 60, 70, 71, 94, 97; but the staurograms are called by the editor ‘Crismones’, *ibid.* p. 137 and *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* n. 40.1 and 59.II: respectively a *chartula venditionis* of the beginning of the seventh century and an *epistula moralis* as a school exercise probably of the age of King Quindasvinto (642–649).

<sup>35</sup> The same shape has, for example, the letter *a* of the Tironian alphabet, so that more than one possible meanings could have had this sign in its development over time and its widespread in different writing practices (in Merovingian and Carolingian chanceries, for example, or by an Italian notary of the ninth century).

<sup>36</sup> HURTADO, *Staurogram* (see note 26) p. 211.

Quellen als einer der Angelpunkte dar, welche – freilich Vorgänge übernehmend und nachvollziehend, die sich im hellenischen Bereich längst abgespielt hatten, das westliche Urkundenwesen grundlegend veränderte. Sie schuf eine wesentliche Grundlage für die Entwicklung der Urkunden des Mittelalters”<sup>37</sup>.

Persons who were not able to write a signing line to a legal document – a so-called *subscriptio*<sup>38</sup> – could also take part in the writing process of the document – as author of the written contract or as witness – by drawing a *signum* in the empty space left for it in the line written by the scribe or by a delegated third-party literate person<sup>39</sup>, in the following way, more or less: *Signum* – (empty space for the autograph sign) – *N. N.* (name, title, role of the person and sometimes with a comment that he/she is not able to write this line). In the documentary sources from the fifth to seventh centuries the vast majority of the autograph ‘Handzeichen’ of illiterate people show two simple shapes: Greek cross or diagonal cross.

The *Tablettes Albertini*, a set of estate documents of the 490s from Tebessa, an economically marginal zone of southern Byzacena, are the only documents we have from Africa under the Vandals: they comprise forty-five cedar-wood tablets, written in ink, containing thirty-four documents. Among twenty-eight signs of illiterates, eighteen are crosses (eleven are diagonal crosses, seven are Greek crosses traced in a very cursive manner). Also the remaining signs have simple shape: little circles or semicircle (four occurrences), short wavy lines (in the shape of a 2 or a 9: five occurrences), *episemon* (a unique occurrence)<sup>40</sup>. Although signs other than a

<sup>37</sup> SAUPE, *Unterfertigung* (see note 7) p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> See the definition and related terminology in *Vocabulaire international de la diplomatique*, ed. by Maria Milagros CARCEL ORTÍ, Valencia 1997, p. 66 n. 254: “*Les souscriptions* (lat.: *subscriptiones*) sont les formules par lesquelles les parties, les témoins de l’acte juridique ou de l’acte écrit, le scribe, marquent la part qu’ils ont prise à cet acte et manifestent leur volonté personnelle, leur consentement ou leur présence [...] All.: *Subskriptionen/Unterschriften*; – angl. *subscriptions* (*autograph* ou *non-autograph*); – esp. *suscripciones*; – ital.; *sottoscrizioni*”.

<sup>39</sup> Lothar SAUPE, *Unterfertigung mit Handzeichen auf Urkunden der Nachfolgestaaten des Weströmischen Reiches bis zur Mitte des 8. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Graphische Symbole* (see note 17) p. 99–105. For the distinction between a signature by writing a text and a signature by drawing a sign (a ‘Handzeichen’), – in German terminology, respectively ‘Unterschrift’ and ‘Unterzeichnung’ – see SAUPE, *Die Unterfertigung* (see note 7) p. 2. A quite different matter is that of the ‘Handfestung’, that is the placing of an illiterate’s hand over the sign traced on the parchment by the scribe of the document: in Lombard Italy there is the first palaeographical evidence of this in 737, *ibid.* p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> See *Tablettes Albertini* (see note 14) 1 p. 59.

cross are present in these sources, there is no doubt that the traced crosses were Christian signs: particularly significant is the similarity of the shape of the traced diagonal cross to the Greek letter *chi* –  $\chi$  –, initial of *χριστός*.

Illiterate signatories to Greek private documents on papyrus from the early Byzantine Egypt seem to prefer drawing simple Greek crosses<sup>41</sup>. The same practice is documented in almost the same period in the Italian papyri, with the Latin private documents from the Ostrogothic and then Byzantine Italy (from the fifth to seventh centuries)<sup>42</sup>. The illiterate seller *Domninus*, a hayward (*agellarius*) and *vir honestus*, seems to have intended to give a particular graphic emphasis to the sign of the cross in his subscription: it is composed of a Greek cross and a diagonal cross crossing each other and of a circle around them connecting their extremities<sup>43</sup>. The evidences we have from the original documents preserved from Frankish Gaul (from the sixth to seventh centuries) and Lombard Italy (from the eighth century) show us again illiterates drawing a cross before (or within) their respective signing line which the notary or the scribe of the document had written. The cross appears traced in one of the two typical forms inherited from the Late Antiquity: the Greek cross or the diagonal one (the ‘saltire’ seems to be used only in the Merovingian documents)<sup>44</sup>. In at least one Frankish charter the Greek cross written by illiterate appears in a significant variant form, the ends of its two arms are bent at nearly right angle: its form is that of a hooked cross<sup>45</sup>.

In terms of writing practices by illiterates, the sources from the fifth to eighth centuries do not show elements of discontinuity. Hence two observations can be made. For an illiterate drawing the cross was the only possibility of taking active part in the writing process of legal documents: given the use by literate of putting a Christian symbol at the beginning of the autograph subscription – as we will see in the next paragraph –, one could most easily conclude from it that the ‘illiterate cross’ – if we can call it thus – was in some way a sort of “Unterschrift in abgekürzter, rudi-

<sup>41</sup> Joseph A. M. SONDERKAMP, *Die byzantinische Privaturkunde*, in: *Graphische Symbole* (see note 17) p. 107–114, here p. 112.

<sup>42</sup> See for example the six autograph crosses of the six illiterate sellers in ChLA 20, n. 704 l. 130–135 (Ravenna, 551).

<sup>43</sup> Not without some incertitude; see the facsimile in ChLA 3, n. 181 l. 61 (Ravenna, 6<sup>th</sup> June 572).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example ChLA 13, n. 564 l. 36 and 38 (Lamorlaye, 673 March 10<sup>th</sup>).

<sup>45</sup> ChLA 13, n. 558 (Clichy, 654 June 22<sup>th</sup>): cross of the *vir inluster* Aigulfo comes *palatii* and of the *vir inluster* Probato.

mentärer Form”<sup>46</sup>. Moreover, the cross was a potent symbol and it never lost all the intensity of its symbolic meaning. It must surely have seemed inconceivable for anyone to draw that sign by their own hand with the purpose of misusing it. In any case, the practice of drawing a cross by illiterates in the post-Roman period involves – it must be stressed again – the fundamental assumption, that an illiterate Frank, Goth or Lombard could understand – still in the seventh century, at least – the written Latin language of the document, that the notary used to read aloud again at the end of the writing process to all participants (author and witnesses), according to the statement *relegi ei chartam* contained in the document itself.

### 3. In the name of crucified Jesus: staurogram in autograph subscriptions

In the Late Roman Antiquity, drawing a Greek cross or, more frequently, a staurogram at the beginning and also at the end of an autograph text with the intention to give all the messages that a visual reference to the cross of Jesus could communicate<sup>47</sup>, was not exclusively a feature of the practice of letter writing at least, as we have seen, from the fourth/fifth centuries onwards. The sparse evidence we have in the sixth century – legal documents written by one of the two contracting parties, for example, or inventories<sup>48</sup> – are presumably traces of a more widespread use in pragmatic literacy. The same use connected with the same original function – it would be reasonable to presume – can be observed also in the autograph subscriptions to official documents, issued in the form of *epistolae* by provincial officials and government bureaucrats. What we know about the

<sup>46</sup> It is a successful definition by SONDERKAMP, *Privaturkunde* (see note 41) p. 112.

<sup>47</sup> “Whether the tau-rho was adopted originally as a pictogram of the crucified Jesus (as I tend to think), or was interpreted more along the lines of Ephraem’s numerical symbolism, either way it was a visual reference to the cross of Jesus”, HURTADO, *Staurogram* (see note 26) p. 225.

<sup>48</sup> For the first example, see *Griechische Papyrusurkunden* (see note 32) n. 2684, a lease, dated 20<sup>th</sup> September 555, written in a very elegant cursive by the leaseholder Aurelio Paulos, who also drew in a very elegant shape the staurograms at the beginning and at the end of the text. For the second example a little staurogram ended an inventory of documents, in ligature with the ending of the final letter of the last word of the last *item* in an unpublished fragment of Latin papyrus datable to the end of sixth century, about which a forthcoming study by Teresa De Robertis, Antonella Ghignoli and Stefano Zamponi is announced in DE ROBERTIS, *Scrittura romana* (see note 8) p. 232, note 32.

subscriptions of emperors, government bureaucrats, and secretaries of the provincial chanceries is that those subscriptions were brief, structured in according to recurring formulas of greeting (*bene vale*), of order (*proponatur*), of statement (*legi, complevi, recognovi*)<sup>49</sup>; they were generally autograph, written in first person but without the name of the signatory expressed; moreover those subscriptions were in Latin language and Latin alphabet even though the text of the document was written in Greek language and Greek script<sup>50</sup>.

The only autograph subscription of an emperor we have is that of Theodosius II, datable between 425 and 450, preserved in the so-called P.Leid. Z: *bene ualere te cupimus* without any symbolic sign<sup>51</sup>. However, some autograph subscriptions of provincial officials survive.

From the fourth century we have a short series of papyri containing orders of the *praeses Thebaidos*: the *praeses* has drawn before his *legi* or *legimus*-statement a staurogram, but sometimes the sign is traced also at the end of the line. The subscription of the *praeses* is accompanied by that of the secretary in the form of the so-called ‘R barré’, an abbreviation with the fairly probably meaning of *R(ecognovi)*<sup>52</sup>: it has a little Greek cross traced over the letter *R*<sup>53</sup>.

Another good example is preserved in a fragment of an official letter, written in a provincial chancery cursive, datable to the fifth century but whose provenance is unknown<sup>54</sup>: a perfectly drawn staurogram precedes the autograph signature in Latin, *bene uale*<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> See in details Peter CLASSEN, Spätromische Grundlagen mittelalterlicher Kanzleien, in: ID., *Ausgewählte Aufsätze (Vorträge und Forschungen 28)*, Sigmaringen 1983, p. 74–77.

<sup>50</sup> See in general on the subject Bruno FAAS, *Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der römischen Kaiserurkunde*, in: AUF 1,2 (1908), p. 185–271; CLASSEN, *Spätromische Grundlagen* (see note 49) p. 77–81; SAUPE, *Unterfertigung* (see note 7) p. 108–124.

<sup>51</sup> FAAS, *Studien* (see note 50) p. 188–194; CLASSEN, *Spätromische Grundlagen* (see note 49) p. 77–78.

<sup>52</sup> CLASSEN, *Spätromische Grundlagen* (see note 49) p. 76, note 42; SAUPE, *Unterfertigung* (see note 7) p. 117.

<sup>53</sup> SB 5 8028, P.Cair.Masp. III 67080, P.Cair.Masp. I 67030, P.Cair.Masp. I 67031, see the reproductions respectively in: ChLA 10, n. 464, ChLA 41, n. 1192, 1195 and 1196.

<sup>54</sup> P.Ryl. Gk. 615 = ChLA 4, n. 252.

<sup>55</sup> Its shape is identical to that of the staurogram traced on the margins of Greek Bible manuscripts of the same period, Bruce M. METZGER, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Palaeography*, New York 1981, p. 84–85, Table 17.

A spectacular piece is P.Ryl. Gk. 609, an authentic order from Theophanes *comes rei militaris Thebaici limitis*, dated to the year 505<sup>56</sup>. It was written in Greek by a scribe in the count’s chancery and it carries three Latin subscriptions: the signature of Theofanes – *bene uale* – preceded by a staurogram; the subscription of the *referendarius* – *Complevi ...* – certifying the regular form and correct content of the letter, also preceded by a staurogram; the signature of the scribe himself (with the same ink as the text) – simply a *bene vale* without any symbol. Remarkable is the different *ductus* of the two staurograms. The *referendarius* draws the sign in the normal way, in two strokes: the first one, without lifting the *calamus*, serves to trace the loop of the *rho* – the ‘head’ of the crucified – towards left and down the vertical stroke; the second stroke, to trace in elegant wavy line the horizontal stroke of the *tau*. Theofanes employs instead three strokes: the first, to trace, without lifting the *calamus* a closed circle, in a not perfectly round shape, as ‘head’ of the symbol (the loop of the *rho*); the second one, to trace the vertical stroke as descender both of the *rho* and the *tau*; the third one to trace the horizontal stroke of the *tau* (Fig. 2).

The so-called *Papyrus Butini* is a well known fragment of a charter from the chancery of a *comes sacri stabuli*, datable to the sixth century<sup>57</sup>, written in the cursive of the Roman provincial chanceries, which Jean Mallon considered the direct ancestor of the chancery scripts employed by Merovingian kings in Frankish Gaul<sup>58</sup>. It carries two autograph subscriptions. One – *bene uale* – is preceded by a small Greek cross: for Mallon and for the editor of the fragment in ChLA it is, probably, of the *comes* himself. In the other subscription something appears traced before the *bene uale*, but in that point the papyrus is damaged and only conjectures are possible<sup>59</sup>. There is another source datable to the sixth century: it is an

<sup>56</sup> The facsimile in ChLA 4, n. 246. See also Karl BRANDI, *Ein lateinischer Papyrus aus dem Anfang des 6. Jahrhunderts und die Entwicklung der Schrift in den älteren Urkunden* (mit einem Lichtdruck), in: AUF 5 (1914) p. 269–288.

<sup>57</sup> ChLA 1, n. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Jean MALLON, *Le Papyrus Butini*, in: *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 14 (1952), p. 283–288, reprinted in ID., *De l’écriture. Recueil d’études publiées de 1937 à 1981*, Paris 1982, p. 216–219.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Mallon considered it as the rest of the letter *g* and presumed the presence of the word *signum*. The same opinion has the editor of ChLA 1, n. 5, p. 8: “To left, under *bene uale*, the remains of a *g* visible (ca. 7 cm long). As Mallon suggests, this is probably part of the *signum*-line, which would have consisted of *sig* on the extreme left, and *num* on the extreme right, together with the name of the signatory, so that the charter would therefore



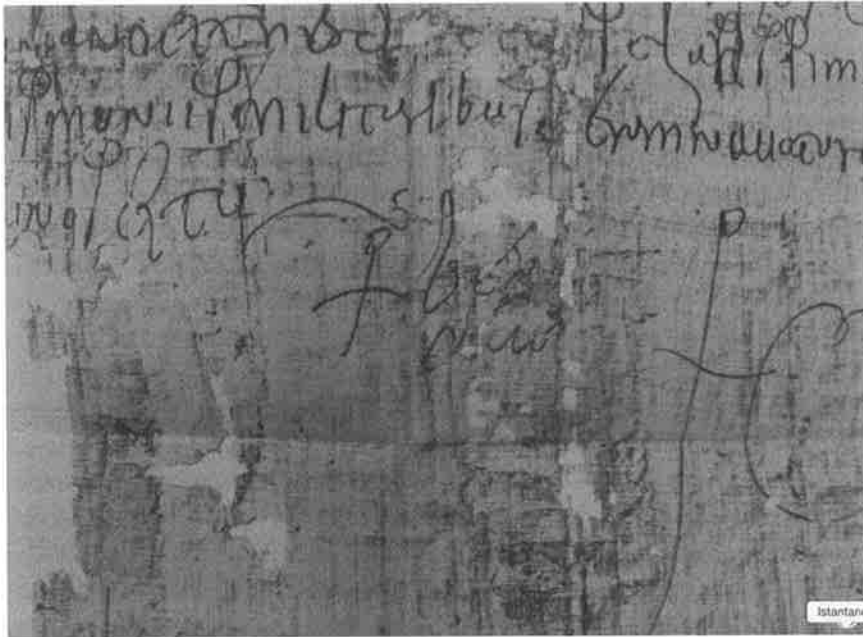


Fig. 2: P.Ryl. Gk. 609: Detail from BRANDI, Ein lateinischer Papyrus (see note 56)

official letter, in which a certain Gammon asks a certain Paulus to protect the inhabitants of a village<sup>60</sup>. It is written in Greek, in a chancery hand, and has two subscriptions in Latin language: one is of the scribe – *Legi scribus* (with a solecism in *scribus*); the other is, presumably, of the author of the letter, Gammon, who opens and ends his statement – *Legi* – drawing a staurogram<sup>61</sup>.

have a very considerable width, since nothing of *num* is now recognizable”. This reconstruction is hardly acceptable. The main difficulty involves the presumed presence of a personal name and of the word *signum*; if accepted, it would be a hapax legomenon, see CLASSEN, Spätromische Grundlagen (see note 49) p. 75–76. If there are the remains of a letter g, the only possible reading is *(le)g(i)*. For the editor of ChLA 1, n. 5, the subscription is of the chancellor, for Mallon it may be of the scribe of the text.

<sup>60</sup> P.Oxy. 8 1106 = ChLA 4, n. 237.

<sup>61</sup> Another case of subscription *legimus* is in the fragment P.Vindob. L 148, edited in ChLA 45, n. 1350 without suggesting date and provenance. The latin word *legimus* is preceded by a staurogram and written between two crosses with the vertical stroke longer than the horizontal; a similarity with another *legimus* from Ravenna (ChLA 22, n. 721 and see below note 64) has been noted because of the presence of uncial letters, see ChLA 22, p. 35, note g.



Fig. 3: P.Iand. Inv. 161

In the case of subscription in form of a greeting – *bene uale* – the literal meaning of the sign of cross (the name of Christ) or of the staurogram (the visual evidence of the cross of Jesus) seems evidently to be headed towards the addressee (and, of course, the whole document too): *In nomine Christi/In nomine crucis Jesu bene uale* (‘In the name of Christ’/‘In the name of the cross of Jesus’, or ‘of the crucified Jesus’, be well). In the case of subscriptions in the form of statement – *legi, complevi, recognovi* – the function of the Christian sign (staurogram, the most documented) written at the beginning of the phrase could be different. The literal meaning of the Christian sign is evidently headed to the statement itself: the invoked name of Christ or imagine of his cross makes sure that the action of *legere* or *complere* or *recognoscere* has been performed in full faith (‘In the name of Christ, the crucified, I have read, proofed, approved’) and, at the same time, validates the truth of the statement itself.

Out of the field of the official documents and their subscriptions, another significant example can be found in P.Iand. Inv. 161. It is a small piece of papyrus datable around the year 500: it was probably a card accompanying a gift<sup>62</sup>. The text is a statement with a name expressed, presumably of the donor – *Fl(avius) Symeonius cornicularius obtul(it)* – written between two staurograms (Fig. 3). Here too, the function of the opening and closing symbol is probably to provide with truth the identity of Flavius Symeonius and what is declared in third person (*obtulit*, ‘he offered a gift’): the text could have been written either by *Flavius* himself or by a secretary. However, the stronger meaning seems to be: ‘Flavius offered (this gift) in the name of the crucified Jesus’. The shape of the two staurograms is remarkable: the vertical stroke of the letter *rho* is a thin long line and the horizontal one (that is the part of the monogram which represents the letter *tau*) is not drawn as a straight line (as it is usually drawn) but as

<sup>62</sup> See Jan Olof TjÄDER, Papyrus Iandana 68b. Eine paläographische Studie (Kurzberichte aus den Gießener Papyrussammlungen 25), 2. durchgesehene und ergänzte Auflage, Gießen 1977. Facsimile in ChLA 11, n. 490.

an elegant wavy line. The practice of writing such personal messages as well as that of writing individual subscriptions in letters and official documents seems to have made it possible to elaborate, in a personal way<sup>63</sup>, the shape of the staurogram, to which a widespread (in books as well as in documents) and long-lasting usage had given a relatively consolidated structure.

The archive of the archbishop of Ravenna furnishes us with a considerable collection of private documents on papyrus dated to the Ostrogothic Kingdom (490–554) – usually seen as Italy's last period of Roman-style stability – and to the later Byzantine period in Italy until the seventh century. Thus, the so-called Italian Papyri may represent a sort of bridge between Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages<sup>64</sup>, between the Late Roman Empire and Lombard Italy. All the autograph subscriptions documented in the Italian papyri – written by the authors of the contracts, by the witnesses or by the *tabelliones*, who were responsible for writing the text of the document – present an initial (sometimes also a final) sign of invocation: it is generally in the form of the Greek cross, but the main form that occurred is the staurogram. It is reasonable to think that the sign maintained also in this case all its meanings as a Christian symbol. The most interesting feature we can observe in the subscriptions of literates of the Ostrogothic and Byzantine Italy is the morphology of the sign of the staurogram: its structure shows in many cases variants of shape as a result of different degrees of execution. Most of them concern the transverse stroke exactly how we have seen in P.Iand. Inv. 161<sup>65</sup>. A large number of variants involve also the loop at the top of the symbol, that is at the 'head' of the

<sup>63</sup> See above note 56 (and Fig. 2), the graphic 'interpretation' by Theofanes, who drew this part of the sign in a different way to usual, probably according to his ability to manage the *calamus* but presumably also to his aesthetic sense and personal sensibility towards that symbol. In the case of the so-called *Papyrus Butini*, what is considered by scholars the remains of a letter *g* (see above note 59), could be, more simply, the ending part in curled shape of the long vertical stroke of a staurogram.

<sup>64</sup> The most evident marker of a continuity in this context is represented by the form of the autograph subscription of the archbishops of Ravenna: a *legimus* written between two staurograms, see P.Ital. 44 = ChLA 22, n. 721 (Ravenna 648–621).

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, P.Ital. 14–15B (572) = ChLA 21, n. 713 l. 13; P.Ital. 37 (591) = ChLA 21, n. 716. Some variants involving the extremes of the horizontal stroke could have been influenced by the figure of the staurogram with *alpha* and *omega*; they could have been a 'cursive version' or an 'individual interpretation' of the epigraphic structure of this symbol, sometimes enriched by tachigraphic notes: some examples among many in P.Ital. 14–15B (572) = ChLA 21, n. 713 l. 10–12; P.Ital. 6 (575) = ChLA 21, n. 714 l. 10–13.

visual evidence of the crucified Jesus<sup>66</sup>. The graphic elaborations of the sign of staurogram documented in the late Roman period can be seen then as a first phase of a future successful development.

The practice we found in the Greek private documents on papyrus from Egypt of the early Byzantine period is substantially similar to that which is documented in the Italian papyri: the presence of the staurogram as opening (and sometimes as closing) sign in subscriptions is relevant<sup>67</sup>. With regard to the original charters survived from the Merovingian Gaul, Lombard Italy and Visigothic Spain after the seventh century it could be said that literates began their own subscriptions drawing a cross but, more frequently, a staurogram<sup>68</sup>, in the same shape we have seen in the Latin private documents documented in the Italian papyri of the sixth and seventh centuries and in the Greek documents preserved in the Egyptian papyri. In the Italian Papyri we can observe, as mentioned above, a variety in the execution of the staurogram and some developments of its 'figure', which remains nevertheless always recognizable. This is a valid reason to reconsider in some way the origin and formation of the signs of invocation drawn in Visigothic documents and in Lombard charters as well: it is possible to explain the graphic structure of those signs as a step of a process begun in the practices of the late Roman Antiquity in the West<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, P.Ital. 37 (591) = ChLA 21, n. 716 l. 73 and 77; P.Ital. 16 (seventh century first half) = ChLA 4, n. 240 l. 28, 38, 50, 60, 71 and 81.

<sup>67</sup> Particularly in Oxyrhynchus: Notarsunterschriften im byzantinischen Ägypten, ed. by Johannes M. DIETHART/Klaas A. Worp, Wien 1986, 1 p. 13. See also Griechische Papyrusurkunden (see note 32) n. 2683, 2687, 2689, 2691, 2694, 2695, 2696, 2697 and 2698 (subscription of the scribe of the document); n. 2682, 2687 and 2694 (subscription of the author of the document). The Greek documentary papyri from the Egypt of the sixth century are also evidence of the use of the staurogram as opening symbol of the whole text of the document, as we have seen above, note 48.

<sup>68</sup> An exception to this late Roman and early 'Barbarian' *koiné* is the documentation attested for the Romans under the Vandals in Africa: the few signing lines of literates that have survived on the wooden tablets from Tebessa are conceived without any sign of invocation: *Ego N. N. subscripsi*.

<sup>69</sup> But see EISENLOHR, Rekognitionszeichen (see note 29) p. 201–206. For the Lombard charters, see Antonella GHIGNOLI, Segni di croce e segni della mano nella carte longobarde (forthcoming).

#### 4. Writing in a different way: shorthand and other graphic signs as ending marks in autograph subscriptions

The constant presence of the cross or of the staurogram as initial marks in subscriptions (with the sole exception we have seen in Vandal Africa) can be considered one of the structural elements of a wide *koiné* generated among the writing practices in the late Roman empire, that emerges still vital and alive in the post-Roman West.

We observe that some signatories after the last word of their subscription, whichever alphabet they have used<sup>70</sup>, continue writing a text, but this time in shorthand<sup>71</sup>. In most cases in this way they communicate again their own name, but sometimes also something else that however remains almost invariably obscure to us. This second message appears, in fact, written not only through tachigraphic notes, but also through crossed lines drawn as interlocking pieces of a complex structure, which is impossible to 'read' and to understand. This graphic ensemble ends up having a very characteristic shape, like a special complex forming a unique sign.

In all subscriptions documented in our sources the first 'block' (the initial Christian sign, whether cross or staurogram) and the second one (the text of subscription itself) are always present; however, not all the literate were able to complete that third 'block' consisting in a further, concentrated microtext written in shorthand (that is in a system of codes completely different from that of Greek and Latin alphabet) and/or in a complex special graphic structure (Fig. 4).

More significant than an occasional absence is the fact that the final block emerges, in the late Roman period, both in the Greek private documents on papyrus of the Byzantine Egypt (in the notarial subscription)

<sup>70</sup> For subscriptions written in Latin language but in Greek alphabet, an example in ChLA 21, n. 714 (Ravenna, 575 febr. 25<sup>th</sup>); for subscriptions in Gothic language and Gothic alphabet, an example in ChLA 20, n. 704 (Ravenna 551). For subscriptions in Greek language written partially in Latin script, see Notarsunterschriften (see note 67) p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> In general, for the period before the fifth century, useful survey is Hans C. TEITLER, *Notarii and Exceptores. An Inquiry into Role and Significance of Shorthand Writers in the Imperial and Ecclesiastical Bureaucracy of the Roman Empire (From the Early Principate to c. 450 A. D.)*, Amsterdam 1985; for greek shorthand see Herbert BOGE, *Griechische Tachygraphie und Tironische Noten*, Hildesheim 1974; for latin shorthand see David GANZ, *On the History of Tironian Notes*, in: *Tironische Noten*, ed. by Peter GANZ, Wiesbaden 1990, p. 35–51. The best survey on the Tironiana in the Early Middle Ages, with bibliography and historiographical accounts, in Martin HELLMANN, *Tironische Noten in der Karolingerzeit am Beispiel eines Persius-Kommentars aus der Schule von Tours (MGH Studien und Texte 27)*, Hannover 2000, p. 1–98.

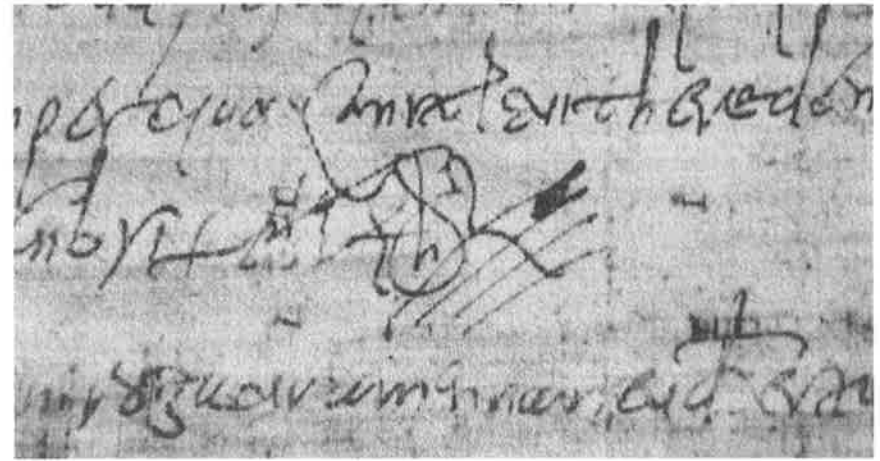


Fig. 4: P.Ital. 6, l. 5–7: Detail

and in the Latin Italian papyri of the Ostrogothic and Byzantine Italy; and in the post-Roman period, both in the Merovingian documents and, more rarely, in the Lombard ones. The structural similarity of the final complex sign in Greek subscription from Egypt of the sixth century, in the Latin subscriptions from Ravenna of the same period and in the Latin subscription from Frankish Gaul of the seventh century is absolutely remarkable<sup>72</sup>. The instances survived from the Lombard Italy of the eighth century are a little different, because the graphic constructions of tachigraphic notes at the end of subscription appear much simpler; they do, however, exist<sup>73</sup>.

Two aspects then must be stressed here. First, as regards the graphic aspect, we see that substantially nothing differentiates the subscription of a notary from that of a literate signer involved in some way in the document: at least the Italian papyri show that clearly<sup>74</sup>. The second aspect re-

<sup>72</sup> For examples from Egypt, Ravenna and Gaul, see respectively *Notarsunterschriften* (see note 67) 1 p. 50 n. 21.3.1, Taf. 15 (Arsinoites 663); P.Ital. 6 (Ravenna 575) = ChLA 21, n. 714, l. 6; ChLA 13, n. 558 (Clichy, 654 June 22<sup>th</sup>), subscription of Chradobercthus (p. 38 without indication of line).

<sup>73</sup> The most famous (and unique) Lombard evidence is in the subscription of a bishop of Pisa, ChLA 26, n. 803 (Pisa, 748), recently discussed in Antonella GHIGNOLI, *Su due famosi documenti pisani dell'VIII secolo*, in: *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo* 106,2 (2004) p. 25–27. Another evidence is in a charter of the end of eighth century from the capital of the Carolingian *regnum Italiae* (Pavia, 792), ChLA 28, n. 857: Baro completes his autograph subscription with a group of tachigraphic notes crossed each other (l. 26: but the editor of ChLA 28, n. 857 does not recognize it as such).

<sup>74</sup> See for example P.Ital. 36 = ChLA 21, n. 715, l. 61 and P.Ital. 6 = ChLA 21, n. 714, l. 6.

gards the use of tachigraphic notes. The survival of tachigraphic notes and Tironian notes in the pragmatic literacy of the post-Roman West is a problem for which it is hard to see an easy solution. But one point can be made: writing in shorthand must be thought, at least in the fifth to seventh centuries, as a widespread ability (both in Ostrogothic and Byzantine Italy and Byzantine Egypt), not exclusively associated to *notarii* and *exceptores*. The Italian papyri demonstrate that literate merchants and people of the middle class – like the *virii honesti* – had at least a basic knowledge of shorthand, so that they could employ it to mark their *subscriptions*<sup>75</sup>: one direction for analysis could be to assume that a shorthand based on a simplified vocabulary was perhaps employed in business and commerce, as far as they could exist in Ravenna in the sixth and seventh centuries; however it could be thought also for the Lombard Italy.

Regarding the function of all that might be contained in this ‘third’ block, it can be guessed that it was added in order to make it easier to identify and recognize the subscription as autograph by the signer himself (and not by others) in case of a trial. ‘Writing’ the ‘third block’ was not compulsory: this is evident. Thus, after having finished the text of the subscription, there became a place available on the line for the signer, in which he could give his own view of himself by writing, even though in not ordinary way. Identifying and understanding those graphic codes, therefore, would mean having a possibility of correlating the type of tachigraphy employed (syllabic notes, Tironian notes) to a specific social or cultural context.

### 5. The late antique ΧΜΓ and the ‘doodles’ of the Early Middle Ages

The sequence of Greek letters ΧΜΓ has been the subject of many investigations since at least the late nineteenth century<sup>76</sup>. It appears widespread throughout the south-eastern regions of the Roman Empire from the

<sup>75</sup> See for example P.Ital. 37 = ChLA 21, n. 716, l. 95 (subscription of *Lumenosus vir honestus*). GANZ, *History* (see note 71) p. 37 argued that only *virii clarissimi* and notaries of Ravenna employed syllabic notes.

<sup>76</sup> It is impossible to reproduce the complete bibliography here. For a summary of the earliest studies, see William K. PRENTICE, ΧΜΓ, A Symbol of Christ, in: *Classical Philology* 9 (1914) p. 410–416. For the state of debate in the middle of the twentieth century, see Jan Olof TjÄDER, Christ, Our Lord, Born of the Virgin Mary (ΧΜΓ and VDN), in: *Eranos* 68 (1970) p. 148–190. For a recent discussion of the topic, see Stephen R. LLEWELYN, The Christian Symbol ΧΜΓ, an Acrostic or an Isopsephism?, in: *New Documents Illustrating Early*

fourth to seventh centuries on a wide range of media – brick stamps, amphora necks, graffiti, sculptures<sup>77</sup>, door lintels<sup>78</sup> and papyri –, in a large variety of contexts, written almost all in Greek language and Greek script, sometimes in association with a cross or with a staurogram or with a Christogram, or with the isopsephism composed of the Greek letters *koppa* and *theta*, whose numerical equivalent was 99 and stands for ἀμήν (*amen*).

Scholars still debate over the origin and exact meaning of ΧΜΓ in certain contexts. Some see the symbol as an isopsephism<sup>79</sup>, but the arguments of this interpretation are intrinsically weak<sup>80</sup>. The majority of scholars, however, see the symbol as an acrostic but there is uncertainty about the interpretation and several abbreviated phrases have been proposed as possible meanings: Χ(ριστόν) Μ(αρία) Γ(ενναῖ), Χ(ριστός) Μ(αρία) Γ(έννα), Χ(ριστός ὁ ἐκ) Μ(αρία) Γ(εννηθείς), Χ(ριστός) Μ(ιχαήλ) Γ(αβριήλ), Χ(ριστός) Μ(άρτυς) Γ(ένηται)<sup>81</sup>.

There is a general agreement, however, that it was a Christian catchword or marker therefore it was not imperative in the investigation that only one rendering be preferred: probably the symbol had different meanings at different times and in different geographical areas.

Christianity 8: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published 1984–1985, Grand Rapids Mich. 1998, p. 156–168.

<sup>77</sup> A famous example is the statue monument of the Roman magistrate Oecumenius from Aphrodisias, erected around 380, see most recently Beat BRENK, *The Apse, the Image and the Icon*, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 69–70.

<sup>78</sup> A significant example is the inscription dated 606/7 on a monastery church in Mu‘llaq, north-east of Anasartha, in the Roman province of Syria, which testifies to continuing resistance to the Persians and to imperial investment in fortifications, given the senatorial rank of the person who built the church; the text of the inscription is preceded by the following group of signs: + ΧΜΓ ΧΜΓ ++. See: *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars 2: AD 363–630: A Narrative Sourcebook*, ed. by Geoffrey GREATREX/Samuel N. C. LIEU, London 2002, p. 245 and 322, note 41.

<sup>79</sup> The numerical equivalent of the Greek letters ΧΜΓ is 643, which could correspond to the numerical value of several Greek phrases: θεὸς βοηθός (God is help) is the solution preferred.

<sup>80</sup> See on that Brent NONGBRI, The Lord’s Prayer and ΧΜΓ: Two Christian Papyrus Amulets, in: *Harvard Theological Review* 104,1 (2011) p. 67–68, notes 20–22. See also Tomasz DERDA, Some Remarks on the Christian Symbol ΧΜΓ, in: *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 22 (1992) p. 26, note 29.

<sup>81</sup> See TjÄDER, *Christ, Our Lord* (see note 76); Alain BLANCHARD, Sur quelques interprétations de ΧΜΓ, in: *Proceedings of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Papyrologists*, London 1975, p. 19–24; Antonia GOSTOLI, Una nuova ipotesi interpretativa della sigla cristiana ΧΜΓ, in: *Studia Papyrologica* 22 (1983) p. 9–14; Georgina ROBINSON, ΚΜΓ and ΘΜΓ for ΧΜΓ, in: *Tyche* 1 (1986) p. 175–177; DERDA, *Remarks* (see note 80) p. 21–27; Anna Di BITONTO KASSER, Un nuova attestazione di χριστου μαρια γεννα, in: *Aegyptus* 78 (1998) p. 123–129.



Fig. 5: P.Osl. 5

The *chi-mu-gamma* group (and the alternative forms of the symbol such as the ΚΜΓ and ΘΜΓ)<sup>82</sup> is well documented in papyri both in magic spells and prayers and in letters and legal documents. In the first group of texts the apotropaic value of the symbol is evident (Fig. 5)<sup>83</sup>. In letters the acrostic appears centred above the first line<sup>84</sup> and it can be found in the same position in legal documents, where it sometimes appears also at the beginning of the contract, near the datation<sup>85</sup>. Besides having an apotropaic value, in this second group of sources the symbol has undoubtedly also the function of an invocation of Christ, an expression of devotion and religiosity.

The cryptogram is not an exclusively matter for Greek papyrologists. Jan Olof Tjäder has pointed out the presence of ΧΜΓ (more precisely *χμγ*, because it is written in cursive minuscule script) in three latin legal documents on papyrus from Ravenna dating from the sixth to seventh centuries – P.Ital. 30, P. Ital. 6, P. Ital. 25 – and therefore this symbol becomes interesting to us too.

<sup>82</sup> See ROBINSON, ΚΜΓ and ΘΜΓ (see note 81). For other alternative forms (such as the ΧΣΜΓ, ΧΘΓ or even ΧΜ), more rarely documented, see DERDA, *Some Remarks* (see note 80) p. 24–26.

<sup>83</sup> An example of such text is the amulet P. Oslo 5 (Fig. 5), datable to the fourth or fifth century. Another papyrus amulet with the symbol ΧΜΓ is discussed and edited in NONGBRI, *The Lord's Prayer* (see note 80) p. 64–68: the group ΧΜΓ is written here four times in a row, the three letters are in ligature and each group shows a different execution of the ligature between X and M.

<sup>84</sup> BLUMELL, *Lettered Christians* (see note 22) p. 47–48.

<sup>85</sup> Some examples among many in *Griechische Papyrusurkunden* (see note 32), n. 2680, 2682 and 2690 with Taf. V–VII. In the document n. 2690, datable from the sixth century, the cryptogram is preceded by a Greek cross and the letters are written in ligature.

In P.Ital. 30<sup>86</sup>, a contract of sale, dated to the year 539, *χμγ* stands, written by the notary, at the end of the text of the document after the so-called short final datation: [*Actum diae et quinquiaes p(ost) c(onsulatum) s(upra) s(cripti). Ravennae. χμγ.*] It occurs in the same position in the much later P.Ital. 25<sup>87</sup>, which is a fragment of a donation and long-term lease (an *emphyteusis*) datable to seventh century, but here it is preceded by a staurogram: *Actum Ravenna, imperio, anno, die et ind(ictione) s(upra)s(crip)ta.* (Staurogram) *χμγ.* It is noteworthy that in other papyri we can find a set of three Greek crosses or a set of three staurograms written by the notaries in the same position, after the so-called short final datation: for example, in P.Ital. 31 (Ravenna, 540, where the three Greek crosses can be seen also as three Greek letters *χ*) and in P.Ital. 28 (Ravenna, 613–641)<sup>88</sup>. It is significant also that in the *chartae* of the Lombard Italy (and Merovingian Gaul too) the expression *feliciter* – the so-called *apprecatio* – will stand exactly in the same position occupied in the Italian papyri by the *χμγ*-group (P.Ital. 30, 25) or by the set of three Greek crosses and staurograms.

The *χμγ*-group is not however traced by the notary in P.Ital. 6<sup>89</sup>, which we can say is a contemporary of P.Ital. 30. It is a will dated 575 February 22th, the testator is a Goth, Manna son of Nanderit. Here the *χμγ*-group appears at the end of the subscription written in Latin by one of the seven witnesses, Quiriacus *vir honestus*, a superintendent of a storehouse (*orrearius*)<sup>90</sup>. The witness Andreas, *vir honestus*, completes his subscription, however, drawing a set of three Greek crosses<sup>91</sup>. Also the witness Πετρος completes his subscription written in Latin language but in Greek alphabet drawing a set of three Greek crosses<sup>92</sup>. Two other witnesses, Iohannis *vir strenuus* and Riccitanc *vir clarissimus*, write after the last word of their subscription in Latin alphabet a microtext in tachigraphic notes containing their own name between, respectively, two Greek crosses and two staurograms<sup>93</sup>.

Jan Olof Tjäder has argued that the *χμγ*-group in the three Ravenna papyri – P.Ital. 30, P. Ital. 6, P. Ital. 25 – is “certainly a matter of the importation of Byzantine scribal practice. It is conceivable that those who wrote,

<sup>86</sup> ChLA 20, n. 706.

<sup>87</sup> ChLA 28, n. 843.

<sup>88</sup> See the reproductions respectively in ChLA 20, n. 707 and ChLA 4, n. 232.

<sup>89</sup> See the reproduction in ChLA 21, n. 714.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 23.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 20.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 27.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* l. 6, l. 13. Iohannis draw in addition to this ‘third block’ a further complex sign (see above paragraph 4 and note 72).

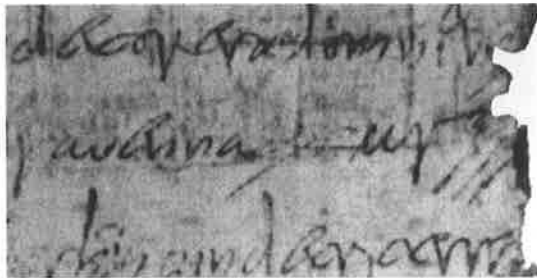


Fig. 6: P.Ital. 30, l. 74–76:  
Detail, l. 75: *Ravennae. χμγ*)

even though they were not aware of the phrase *χ(ειρός) μ(ον) γ(ραφή)*, nevertheless believed they were expressing the idea ‘written with my own hand’<sup>94</sup>. Given the consistent meaning which the cryptogram had in the contemporary sources of the Greek part of the late Roman world, this interpretation does not have sufficient arguments<sup>95</sup>. There is no reason to reject the view that the group of Greek letters was employed also in the Ravenna papyri as a graphic Christian symbol of blessing like a cross or a staurogram. Moreover it is not necessary to postulate an importation from Byzantium, given the ‘universal’ value which such composite symbol had throughout the Christian Late Antiquity.

What is really worth considering in the matter of the presence of *χμγ* in the Italian papyri is the palaeographical aspect. The notary of P.Ital. 30 and the witness of P.Ital. 6 are expert at writing Greek, if not literates in that language: the notary of P.Ital. 30 probably completed the group tracing an additional sign (Fig. 6), but in that point the papyrus is damaged<sup>96</sup>; Quiriacus *horrearius* traced the symbol in the alternative form of *χςμγ*<sup>97</sup> (Fig. 7), therefore it is likely that the phrase in his mind was *Χ(ριστὸς) μ(άρτυς) γ(έννηται)*, ‘let Christ be my witness’<sup>98</sup>. In the later document – P.Ital. 25,

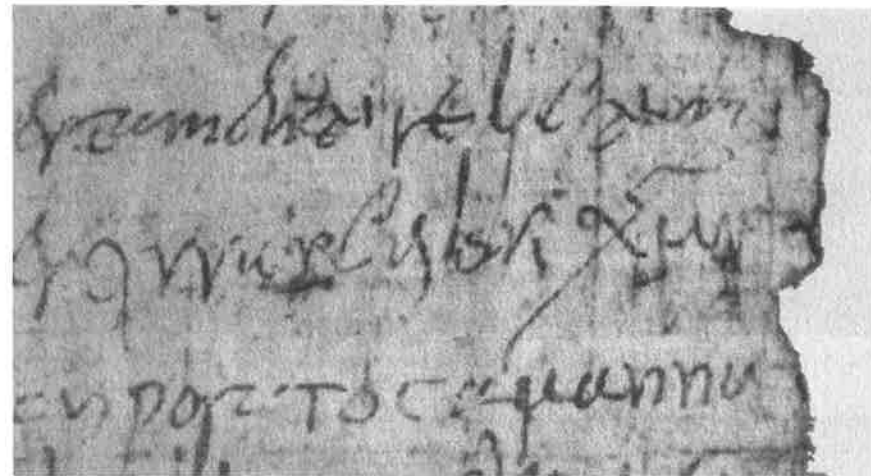


Fig. 7: P.Ital. 6, l. 22–24: Detail, l. 23: *suscripsi. χςμγ*

where the group stands at the end of the text, after the dating – the notary draw it in cursive, without lifting his *calamus* and it is evident that he was not expert at writing Greek, probably he was not literate in Greek. The result is an uninterrupted chain, a series of connected lines and loops (Fig. 8). The “*mécanisme visuel*” employed by scribes who “*pratiquent exclusivement l’un ou l’autre des systèmes graphiques simultanés*”<sup>99</sup> is a well-known form of imitation in a situation of “*multigrafismo assoluto*”<sup>100</sup>. In P.Ital. 31 of Januar 540 from Ravenna<sup>101</sup> the *vir devotus* Flavius Severus Iunior completed his subscription tracing a graphic device: it can be considered the fourth occurrence of the *χμγ*-group in the Italian papyri (Fig. 9)<sup>102</sup>. It is evident that Flavius Severus Iunior was not literate in Greek and that he was not able to write in Greek alphabet, but he was certainly intended to write the symbol *χμγ* at the end of his subscription; he made an effort to imitate the ‘original’ shape of the group<sup>103</sup>. From a

<sup>94</sup> TjÄDER, Christ, Our Lord (see note 76) p. 171.

<sup>95</sup> The interpretation *χ(ειρός) μ(ον) γ(ραφή)* was suggested by Carl WESSELY, Griechische Papyri des British Museum, in: Wiener Studien 9 (1887) p. 252–254, but it is generally rejected also for the occurrences in the Greek documentary sources.

<sup>96</sup> Probably the notary traced a sign composed of a set of diagonal lines crossed each other; this graphic device is evidently a *χ*-based symbol and it is quite common in Italian papyri. I do not agree with the reading of Tomasz Derda, who sees a letter *sigma* between *chi* and *mu*: DERDA, Remarks (see note 80) p. 23.

<sup>97</sup> I agree with the reading proposed for this passage in P.Ital. 6 in DERDA, Remarks (see note 80) p. 23. Tjäder edited *χμγ* in P.Ital. 6 and in ChLA 21, n. 714.

<sup>98</sup> See GOSTOLI, Una nuova ipotesi (see note 81) and ROBINSON, ΚΜΓ and ΘΜΓ (see note 81). It is possible also the interpretation *Χ(ριστὸς) Μ(αρίας) Γ(έννα)* presumably the most common: see DERDA, Remarks (see note 80) p. 24; see also NONGBRI, The Lord’s Prayer (see note 80) p. 67, note 18.

<sup>99</sup> CAVALLO, Écriture grecque (see note 5).

<sup>100</sup> For the concept see Armando PETRUCCI, Funzione della scrittura e terminologia paleografica, in: Palaeographica, Diplomatica et Archivistica. Studi in onore di G. Battelli, Roma 1979, 1 p. 10.

<sup>101</sup> The facsimile in ChLA 20, n. 707, l.14.

<sup>102</sup> It is ignored, however, both in P.Ital. 31 and in ChLA 20, n. 707.

<sup>103</sup> The two strokes of *χ* are not perfectly diagonal (the sign looks like a Greek cross), but the letter is recognizable; the attempt to trace *μγ* in ligature without lifting the pen emphasizes the loops at the top and at the bottom of the traced line. Moreover, Flavius completed the graphic device tracing and additional sign of three *chi* crossed each other: see above note 96.



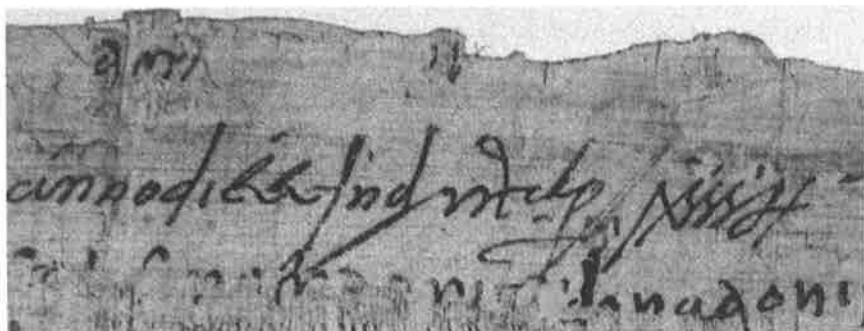


Fig. 8: P. Ital. 25, l. 2: Detail: *anno, die et ind(ictione) s(upra)s(crip)ta*. (Staurogram)  $\chi\mu\gamma$

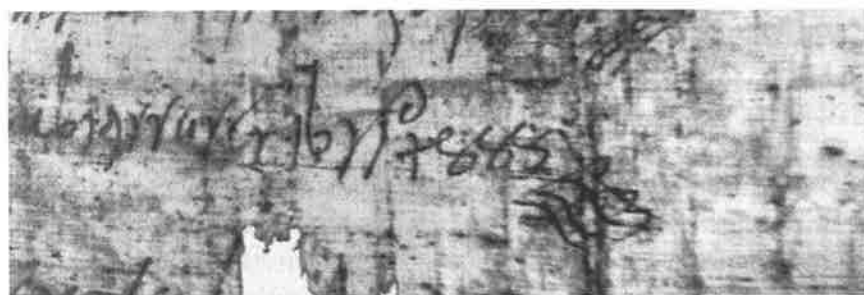


Fig. 9: P. Ital. 31, l. 14: Detail

strict palaeographic point of view the graphic group traced by Flavius is as pseudo- $\chi\mu\gamma$ . We can probably guess at presence of pseudo- $\chi\mu\gamma$  in several other occurrences in the Italian papyri, at the end of a subscription or at the end of the short final datation of the document, where only ‘doodles’ (‘ghirigori’ or ‘svolazzi’ in the lexicon of the Italian palaeographers, ‘Schnörkel’ in that of the German ones) seem apparently to be traced (Fig. 10)<sup>104</sup>.

The shape of these graphic groups is surprisingly similar to that of the ‘doodles’ that often mark typically the end of the text of the document (and after the datation as an alternative to the *apprecatio* formula, *feliciter*) and sometimes also the end of a subscription in the early medieval charters, and in particularly in some cases from eighth-century Italy<sup>105</sup>. Even though the conjecture is based only on palaeographical observations and

<sup>104</sup> Some examples: P. Ital. 36, l. 49, l. 54 (= ChLA 21, n. 715); P. Ital. 43 (535–542), l. 39 (=ChLA 29, n. 864); P. Ital. 24 (ca. 650), l. 20 (= ChLA 29, n. 865); P. Ital. 13, l. 78 (=ChLA 29, n. 880).

<sup>105</sup> For example, in ChLA 30, n. 897 l. 21: at the end of a subscription (S. Lorenzo a Vaccoli, 720); *ibid.* n. 911 l. 2 (Lucca, 737), after the *apprecatio, feliciter*.

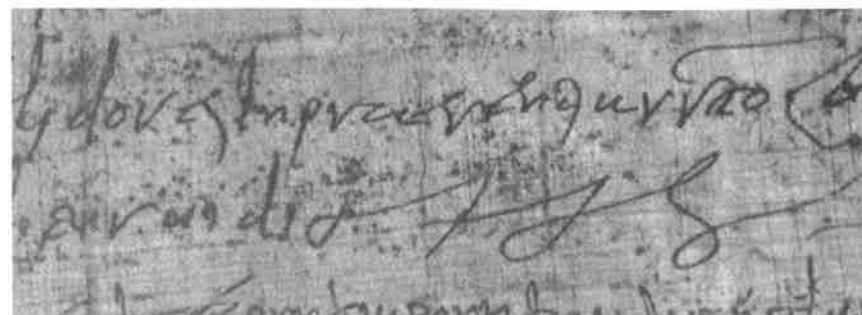


Fig. 10: P. Ital. 36, p. 54: Detail

few occurrences in erratic sources, I would hypothesize that what is indicated and called ‘doodle’ in some Lombard charters is actually a graphical transformation (or imitation) of what, in origin, was the Greek cryptogram  $\chi\mu\gamma$ , undertaken by literates who did not know other written languages than the Latin written and spoken in eighth-century Italy, but who knew concretely what that graphic symbol was and what that graphic symbol meant.

In conclusion, the original  $\chi\mu\gamma$  – with all the complexity of its religious and apotropaic meanings, collected in its long life and widespread existence in the written practice of the late Roman world – had been changing its original shape as ‘signifier’ (meant in the sense of Saussure’s linguistic terminology), but it did not change its ‘signified’ in the Latin scribal practice of the Ostrogothic and then Byzantine Italy: as demonstrated by the Italian Papyri of the sixth and seventh centuries. If we are willing to look at ‘doodles’ – in this case at the Lombard doodles – as something which is worth considering as ‘writing practice’ as well as alphabetical words, then it can be surmised that a graphic device originated by the transformation of the  $\chi\mu\gamma$ -group at least in the Ostrogothic period remained somehow and somewhere in Italy after the Lombard invasion, presumably as sign with the same original apotropaic value.

There is a general tendency toward alphabetocentric bias, which characterizes palaeographical studies and too often it happens that what appears as something other than a written line is classified as ‘doodle’, if it is not immediately recognizable as ‘sign’. So it happens that ‘ghirigori esornativi’ and ‘Schnörkel’ are implicitly elevated to a fixed category of palaeographical objects, characterized by their certain ahistorical nature. The early medieval pragmatic literacy is a historical issue, therefore not a single written line on a charter is to be presumed *a priori* as being merely decorative or

superfluous, drawn by literates or illiterates who were bored or thinking about something else<sup>106</sup> rather than writing something 'significant'.

#### Abstract

Dieser Beitrag ist eine erweiterte Fassung des Vortrages, den die Autorin im Panel „The History of Writing Practices and Scribal Culture“ auf dem vom Comité Internationale des Sciences Historiques (CISH) veranstalteten 22. internationalen Kongress für Geschichtswissenschaft gehalten hat, der vom 23. bis 29. August 2015 in Jinan, China, stattfand. Er befasst sich mit dem Urkundenwesen, wie es sich in der spätantiken römischen Welt herausgebildet und in den entstehenden Nachfolgestaaten weitergelebt hat. Dabei werden die in den Unterfertigungen vorhandenen nicht-alphabetischen Zeichen bzw. graphischen Symbole dahingehend untersucht, ob und inwieweit in der pragmatischen Schriftlichkeit der nachrömischen westlichen Welt allgemeine Tendenzen festzustellen sind.

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## Siegel- und Wappenkunde

Begründet durch

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Herausgegeben von

IRMGARD FEES und ANDREAS MEYER

62. Band · 2016

Sonderdruck

im Buchhandel nicht erhältlich



<sup>106</sup> Definition of doodle in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: "meaningless scrawls or scribbles, while one is or ought to be paying attention to something else".