'Εγραψα ύπ'ερ αὐτοῦ ἁγραμμάτου (ὄντος)—'I wrote for him who is illiterate'. The vast number of non-literary papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt presents various formulae for subscriptions in documents in the case when someone wrote on behalf of someone else. Among these the cited form together with its variants constitutes one specific type. So-called ύπογραφαῖς signed deeds, letters, or other documents in contractual and juridical proceedings for those who were incapable of writing. The illiterates then just had to add their names, if at all, and sometimes a few characteristic words in order to be properly identified.

1 Three major formulae types can be found in documents in which a ύπογραφαῖς, a person writing on behalf of somebody else, formed the indispensable subscription for someone writing slowly or being completely illiterate. They may be classified as follows: (a) ἔγραψα ύπ'ερ αὐτοῦ ἁγραμμάτου (ὄντος)—'I wrote for him who is illiterate', (b) ἔγραψα ύπ'ερ αὐτοῦ μη εἰδέναι γράμματα—'I wrote for him who does not know letters', and (c) ἔγραψα ύπ'ερ αὐτοῦ βραδέως γράφοντος—'I wrote for him who writes slowly'. These are only types, i.e. many variants similar to the three types can be found. See on these formulae Cf. Majer-Leonhard, 69–73; R. Calderini, 'Gli ύπογραφαῖς', 14–41; Exler, The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter, 124–6.

2 The following papyri should give an impression of the widespread usage of this formula over several centuries. Roman letters in square brackets indicate the century, Arabic numerals the year of origin, where all dates are A.D. Small Roman letters stand for the column of a document. P.Oxy. II 275 [66]; SB V 7998 [I/II]; BHamb. I 71 [149]; Stud.Pal. XXII 40; EAthen. 27 [both 150]; BVars. 10 i [~ 156]; BGU I 152 [158/9]; Stud.Pal. XII [166]; PSI VIII 96A [176/8]; EMil.Vogl. II 71 [161–180]; P.Amnh. II 102 [180]; BGU I 118 ii [188/9]; SB III 6293 [195/6]; PSI X 1116; 1117; P.Bvars. 8 [all three II]; P.Boux. 28 [IIa]; SB IV 7375 [222–235]; PMich. V 614 [256]; P.Cair. Isid. 2 [298], 3, 4 [299] etc.; P.Oxy. I 71 i [303] PSI IX 1038 [313] EMerst. II 91 [316], 92 [324]; P.Amnh. II 138 [324]; P.Oxy. I 133 [550], 140 [550], 134 [569], 137 [584]; P.Amnh. II 150 [592]; P.Köln III 158 [599]; P.Amnh. II 149 [VI]; P.Oxy. I [612]. Even waxed wood boards, tabulae ceratae, as shown by PSI IX 1027 (ll. 19–20: a subscription for an illiterate woman), and ostraca supply us with illiterate formulae. See, on the reconstruction of the lives of ordinary people from non-literary papyri, Winter, Life and Letters in the Papyri, esp. 46–135.

as the partner mentioned in the body of the document above. Such a ἀπογραφεύς, in most cases a close relative, a friend, or a trustworthy professional scribe, not only signed for someone else, he also had to fulfil the task of proofreading the whole document. This became necessary to avoid that an illiterate, an ἀγράμματος, was deceived, because he himself could not check the contents of the document he signed, i.e. the obligations and claims he agreed to. Thus, among their many functions the ἀπογραφεύς enabled illiterates to participate in contractual and juridical proceedings as equal partners, and by this means they eliminated many of the disadvantages an illiterate person in Graeco-Roman Egypt might have had to endure.\(^3\)

The New Testament confronts us with a case of people described as being ἀγράμματος. In Acts 4:13 the members of the Sanhedrin—the collective term used in v. 15 to include the rulers, elders, scribes, and priests from verses 5–6—speak of Peter and John: ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοι εἰσίν καὶ ἰδιώται. Peter and John as ‘illiterate men’? May the meaning and understanding of ἀγράμματος in the papyri simply be transferred to this passage of the New Testament? That would at least be a quick and easy solution to the question at stake. But of course this is not the end to the discussion. In the New Testament ἀγράμματος is found only in Acts 4:13 and thus no other usage of this word can be related to the verse in question in order to make its exact lexicographical meaning there clear. The semantics of a word which is used only once in a longer context is problematic, above all when the thoughts and the ways of thinking of people from earlier times are concerned. And there is more to Greek words than just being translated into another language in a rather brief and precise way. What did the words mean then? What connotations did the early listeners or readers associate with them? Can one get any information about the educational, social, or intellectual status of Peter and John from the usage in Acts 4:13? The aim of this brief study is to offer a consideration of what Acts 4:13 implied then, and to discuss what information can be filtered out of the verse for the reader of today. The reflections on ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοι εἰσίν καὶ ἰδιώται and its surrounding context will hopefully lead not only to a translation into another language, which is usually meant to be as

---

\(^3\) On illiteracy in papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt see R. Calderini, ‘Gli ἀγράμματος’, 14–41; Majer-Leonhard, ΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΙ; Harris, Ancient Literacy; Youtie, ‘ΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ’, 161–76; idem, ‘βραδέως φράφουν’, 240–43; idem, ‘ΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΕΥΣ’, 201–21. See the reprints of Youtie’s articles in his Scriptiunculae II and Scriptiunculae Posteriores I.