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## A Village Scribe on the Eve of Change

For the study of individual histories in late antique Egypt, few sites offer better opportunities than Western Thebes, for both secular and monastic lives. While archaeological traces of this period have suffered in favour of the earlier, famous pharaonic remains,<sup>1</sup> one of the greatest gifts of the Theban region is the huge volume of written material that has survived from late antiquity.<sup>2</sup> Written primarily in Coptic and dating to the seventh and eighth centuries, the textual sources document the day-to-day reality of men and women living at a time of great political change in the country, from the Byzantine-Persian struggles for control of the land to the Arab conquest and the subsequent integration of Egypt into the new and expanding Muslim empire.<sup>3</sup> A number of studies have focussed on known individuals, including townspeople,<sup>4</sup> monks,<sup>5</sup> and bishops.<sup>6</sup> Rather than focus on the people whose affairs are recorded in the non-literary record, it is possible to look beyond these parties to the scribes who wrote the documents. Even though the role of these men (only men worked as professional scribes at this time) was to document the affairs of others, focusing on what and how they wrote instead reflects administrative changes introduced and implemented during the late seventh and early eighth century.

Many legal documents from the village Jeme<sup>7</sup> were signed by the scribes who wrote them. The best attested of these scribes is Aristophanes son of Johannes, whose dossier amounts to over 140 texts, comprising mainly legal documents and

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1 On the late antique reuse of the Theban pharaonic monumental landscape, see O'Connell (2007).

2 The online papyrological database trismegistos.org includes almost 2,500 documents from Western Thebes from the seventh and eighth centuries (as of July 2017), which constitutes almost twenty percent of all documents from Egypt in the same period. This number is probably a conservative one, as many texts of uncertain or unknown provenance likely also derived from Thebes.

3 For the transition to new rule, see Sijpesteijn (2007a) and (2007b), while Kennedy (1998) provides a concise chronology of the post-conquest centuries.

4 This is especially true of women, notably the female moneylender Koloje and her family, see Wilfong (1990) and (2002) chapter 5, and the families of Elizabeth and Abigaia, see Schiller (1953) and Wilfong (2002) chapter 2. For the archive of Daniel son of Pachom, see Cromwell (2014), and for the family of Germanos, see Cromwell (2013).

5 See *O.Frange* for the monk Frange, who resided in Theban Tomb 29 (TT 29).

6 Much of the documentation from the monastery of Apa Phoibammon at Deir el-Bahri (the ancient mortuary temple of Hatshepsut) concerns the affairs of its founder, Abraham, bishop of Armant (Greek Hermonthis); see Krause (1956) and Godlewski (1986). As a result of the Persian occupation, many individuals fled from northern Upper Egypt to Western Thebes. Of particular note is Pisenthius, bishop of Coptos, known by a dossier of letters written to and by him, as well as hagiographies and *encomia* dedicated to him; for the letters, see most recently Dekker (2011) and references therein.

7 Jeme, built in and around the mortuary temple of Ramesses III (Medinet Habu), is the only non-monastic settlement in Western Thebes whose location and physical remains have been discovered; see Hölscher (1954) and the general introduction in Wilfong (2002) 1–22.

tax receipts.<sup>8</sup> Providentially, three of these documents are dated absolutely and provide the chronological framework for his other texts: *P.Bal.* 130 Appendix A is dated by the *hegira* and the indiction year to January 724 while *P.KRU* 14 and 15 are dated via the reign of Diocletian to April and November 756 respectively. Aristophanes' timeline falls into two main phases: a short yet intensive phase in the 720s during which time he produced documents connected with taxation (in addition to tax receipts, this includes *P.CLT* 3, a request for a travel permit for three monks in which it is noted that they have paid their taxes for the year, and *P.CLT* 6, an agreement between seventeen men concerning the naval duty), and a longer phase from the 730s until the 750s during which time he produced private, legal documents. Aristophanes represents new scribal practices in Western Thebes, in linguistic and supralinguistic (e.g. palaeography) terms. In order to recognise these new practices and to begin to address why they occurred, it is necessary to look at his predecessors in the village and identify the ways in which they differ.

The most prolific of Aristophanes' predecessors is Psate son of Pisrael, whose dossier in terms of sheer numbers rivals if not exceeds Aristophanes' own. However, this numerical observation obscures the types of documents involved: Psate wrote far fewer legal documents (or, at least, fewer have survived) but more tax receipts. The following brief overview of his textual output is in chronological order. In each instance, the individuals involved in the texts and the dates on which they were written are key, as well as Psate's signature (i.e., the principal means to attribute documents to him).

Psate's earliest document is *P.CLT* 1, which concerns money donated to the monastery of Apa Paul (most likely to be identified with the complex at Deir el-Bachit<sup>9</sup>).<sup>10</sup> The first party is Moses son Plouj, a monk in the monastery, and the second party comprises the superiors of the monastery, Apa Daniel, Apa Jacob, and Apa Athanasius. The date is given simply as Thoth 16 (= 13 September) of a twelfth indiction year. Additionally, the bilingual Greek-Arabic protocol at the head of the papyrus records the name of Egypt's governor at the time the roll was manufactured: 'Abd al-Azīz b. Marwan. 'Abd al-Azīz's tenure as governor of Egypt spanned 684–705, during which period there is only one year that corresponds with the twelfth year of an indiction cycle: 698. However, it cannot be discounted that the roll was produced toward the end of 'Abd al-Azīz's tenure and was not used until 713. Psate wrote his signature in Coptic:

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ϣⲁⲧⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲏⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲡⲓⲁⲕ(ⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ) ⲡⲓⲥⲣⲁⲛⲗ ⲁⲛⲱϣⲏⲥ ⲡⲉⲓⲗ(ⲁ)ⲭ(ⲓⲥⲧⲟⲥ) ⲙⲙⲟⲛ(ⲁ)ⲭ(ⲟⲥ) ⲁⲓⲧⲉⲓ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓ ⲁⲓⲥⲙⲓ  
ⲡⲉⲓⲉⲓⲓⲣⲁⲫ(ⲟⲛ) ⲡⲓⲣⲙⲓⲕⲏⲙⲉ ⲛⲧⲁⲟⲓⲗ.

<sup>8</sup> Aristophanes' work is the subject of Cromwell (2017a), which provides details of his dossier.

<sup>9</sup> A growing body of literature is available now for this complex, which has been excavated since the beginning of the current century; see most recently Beckh (2016), Hodak (2016), and Polz *et al.* (2012) 127–134.

<sup>10</sup> Translations available in MacCoull (2009) 42–47 and Till (1964) 22–27.

The humblest monk Moses asked me, Psate the son of the late Pisrael, and I wrote this document in Egyptian by my hand (lines 141–142).<sup>11</sup>

In *P.CLT* 5, the two *lashneu* (village headmen, plural of *lashane*) of Jeme represent the monastery of Apa Phoibammon in a dispute with the monastery of Apa Paul over a large sum of money.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the beginning of the document is damaged and any absolute dating criterion that may have been written there is lost (e. g., the year from Diocletian, which is included in some documents). However, the current indiction year is mentioned on lines 79–80 (“in this current tenth year”  $\epsilon\lambda\tau\alpha\tau\eta\ \epsilon\tau\omega\sigma\theta\iota\ \tau\epsilon\nu\omicron\gamma$ ) and the date is written in full on line 152, before the witness statements: Hathor 29, indiction year 10 ( $\mu\eta\nu\iota\ \delta\omicron\upsilon\rho\ \kappa\theta\ \iota\nu\lambda\epsilon\iota\kappa\tau\iota\omega\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\epsilon\kappa\alpha\tau\eta$ ). Even though Walter Till in his dating of the Theban documents overlooked the full date, he did note the indiction year.<sup>13</sup> Based on the chronology of the superiors of the monastery of Apa Paul in *P.CLT* 1, 2, 4, and 5, Walter Till placed this document as the last in the sequence, and so dated it to 711. Till’s date can now be corrected to 25 November 711, incorporating the dating information that he overlooked. Psate’s final notation is the longest in all his documents:

ἀνοκ ἴατε πῶνρε ἱπμακαρ(ιος) πισραηλ ἀισῆν πειετγραφον ἱρονολογια ἡταβιχ λγω ἱρμοος εεραῖ  
 ἡν ἡθαγμασιωτατ(ος) ὀomas ἡν κομεσ ἡλαω(ἡνυ) ἡππαγ ἡταταπαλλαγη ὀωπε ἕν τμητε  
 ἡνεσῆνυ ἡμῆνογτε ἡν ἀπα βικτωρ πεπρε(σβγτερος) λγω λγκελεγε και ἀισῆνῆτ̄ προς τεγκελεγσις

I, Psate the son of the late Pisrael, wrote this document of agreement by my hand. I am present with the esteemed *lashneu* Thomas and Comes at the moment that the discharge occurred between the God-loving brethren and the priest Apa Victor, and I was ordered and drew it up at their command (lines 168–171).

For over a decade, Psate issued tax receipts to Jeme’s inhabitants, for a range of impositions among which the poll tax (*diagraphon* at Thebes) is the most common.<sup>14</sup> His known receipts are dated to the twelfth, fifteenth, and first through ninth indiction years, equating to 713/4 to 726.<sup>15</sup> Of these, 123 receipts bear his signature, while a further 69 can be attributed to him on formulaic, orthographic, and palaeographic grounds.<sup>16</sup> He wrote receipts in both Coptic (142 receipts) and Greek (50 receipts), al-

<sup>11</sup> An image of this papyrus is available on the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s online catalogue (inv. 24.2.3a–c).

<sup>12</sup> Translations available in MacCoull (2009) 54–59 and Till (1964) 30–34.

<sup>13</sup> Till (1962) 43–44.

<sup>14</sup> Delattre/Fournet (2014) 214–222 discuss the different impositions recorded in Jeme’s receipts.

<sup>15</sup> Until recently, his highest year was the eighth indiction year, leading Kahle (1974) to propose that Psate died in 725. However, *P.Stras.Copt.* 41, 52, and 60 are dated to the ninth year and have extended his dates to April 726.

<sup>16</sup> These numbers include unpublished tax receipts in various collections that are being prepared for publication by Nikolaos Gonis and the ostraca in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Ann Arbor that I am currently editing (Wilfong [2004] discusses the Kelsey tax receipts, but focuses on



ferent from that in his earlier legal texts, as he now signs entirely in Greek: δι' ἐμοῦ Ψάτε Πισραήλ ἐγράφ(η) (*P.KRU* 36) and δι' ἐμοῦ Ψάτη Πισραηλίου ἐγρ(ά)φ(η) (*P.KRU* 37) “Written by me, Psate son of Pisrael”.<sup>24</sup>

The final dated document that Psate wrote is *P.KRU* 44, which records arbitration between married sisters and their husbands over the division of their paternal estate.<sup>25</sup> Once again, the date is lost at the beginning of the document, but an oath recorded at the end of the text, before Psate’s signature, includes the date: Thoth 13 (= 10 September) indiction year 12. On prosopographic and formulaic grounds, this indiction year 12 can be equated to 728 rather than 713.<sup>26</sup> Psate’s notation is in Greek and, as in *P.KRU* 37, his patronymic is in its genitival form, but his use of γίγνομαι (rather than γράφω) is new: δι' ἐμοῦ Ψάτε Πισραηλίου ἐγένετο.

Two documents that Psate signed, *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9, concern the same matter and are dated only by their indiction cycle: Mechir 30 (= 24/25 February) indiction year 11.<sup>27</sup> Walter Till suggested they should be dated to either February 698 or 728, rejecting the intermediate indiction cycle (i.e., 713) on prosopographic grounds.<sup>28</sup> The two documents are protective promises issued by the *lashanes* Severus and Johannes to brethren of an unnamed monastery (or perhaps two different monasteries). It is possible that both texts concern the monastery of Apa Paul, which was the second party in *P.CLT* 1 and 5 that Psate wrote, but without further details this identification is difficult to confirm. Concerning their date, Till argued that a 713 date was impossible, based on the *lashanes*, as in 711/12 different men held this post (Thomas and Comes in *P.CLT* 5, mentioned above). However, Thomas and Comes served in the position in the previous year and, as the office was held for only one year, there are no other impediments to dating *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9 to 713. One other dating criterion is perhaps important here. Psate wrote his notation in Coptic in each text: “(I,) Psate (son) of Pisrael was commanded and I drew up this assurance” ὕατε μπισραηλ ἀγεπιτρπιε ναϊ αἰσιῖῃ πλογοϛ (*O.CrumVC* 8) and “I, Psate the son of the late Pisrael, was commanded [...]” ἀνοκ ὕατε πωρηε μπιακ(αριος) πισραηλ ἀγκελεγε [...] (*O.CrumVC* 9).<sup>29</sup> In his legal texts of the 720s, Psate signed in Greek and his use of Coptic may represent an earlier practice. Hence, the two texts should be dated to either early 698, in which case they would be our earliest texts for Psate, or to 713.

<sup>24</sup> Psate’s signature in *P.KRU* 37 is very faint and I rely on the *editio princeps* for the reading of the genitive of Pisrael here. It is difficult to compare it to the clear writing of the genitival form in *P.KRU* 44. Concerning the writing of the name of Psate’s father in his receipts, the declension (or lack thereof) of patronymics is a topic that requires further analysis and discussion; this point is beyond the scope of the current study.

<sup>25</sup> Translations available in MacCoull (2009) 131–134 and Till (1954) 136–140.

<sup>26</sup> Till (1962) 24.

<sup>27</sup> Translations available with the *editio princeps* and in Till (1964) 235–236.

<sup>28</sup> Till (1962) 47–48.

<sup>29</sup> I understand Psate’s use of the Greek verbs ἐπιτρέπω and κελεύω to be synonymous; alternatively, ἐπιτρέπω may carry the meaning ‘entrusted’ or ‘authorised’.

Finally, an unsigned document, *P.KRU 23*, is attributed to Psate on the basis of its palaeography.<sup>30</sup> The document records a sale of part of a house<sup>31</sup> and both the beginning (with the date) and end (with the scribe's notation) are lost. As the three documents that Psate wrote between villagers, *P.KRU 36, 37, and 38*, date 724–728, it is tempting to date *P.KRU 23* to this same period.

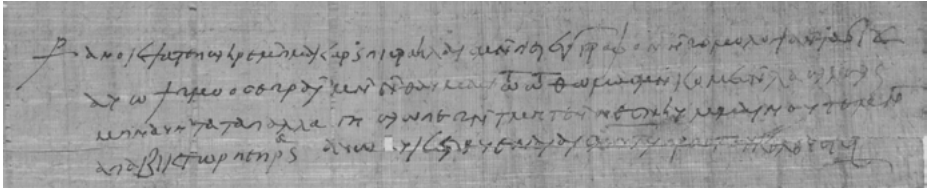


Fig. 3: Psate's signature in *P.CLT 5.168–171* © The British Library Board (Or. 9525/1)

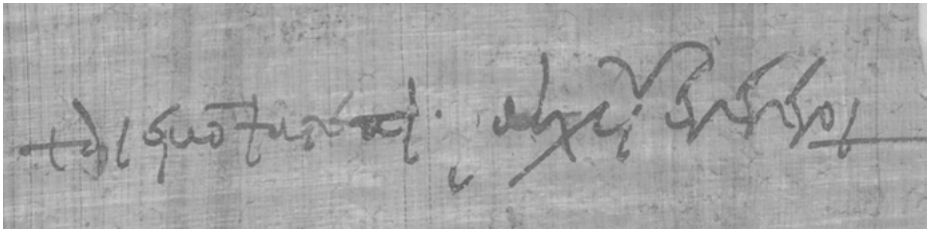


Fig. 4: Psate's signature *P.KRU 44.154* © The British Library Board (Or. 4884)

With his documents laid out, a broad trend is observable in which his texts can be divided into three groups: (1) texts involving monasteries; (2) tax receipts; (3) private legal documents. During the years in which he wrote tax receipts, Psate changed his signature, from a long Coptic notation to a shorter Greek one. As well as a language shift, his Greek signatures are also written in a modified script, marked by greater ligaturing and modification of letter forms (Figures 3 and 4). This form of bigraphism is a characteristic feature of the next generation of scribes in Jeme, beginning with Aristophanes.<sup>32</sup> There are no indications of bigraphism in Psate's earliest documents. The pivotal moment seems to be his involvement with taxation and the decade that he spent issuing receipts from the mid-710s to mid-720s.

<sup>30</sup> Till (1962) 185: "nur nach der Handschrift bestimmt".

<sup>31</sup> Translation available in Krall (1888) and accompanying its edition in *CPR IV 27*. Note that in the description to its edition in *SB Kopt. IV 1800*, the text's origin is erroneously given as Hermopolis. An image of the papyrus is available via the online catalogue of the Austrian National Library.

<sup>32</sup> Cromwell (2010) discusses Aristophanes' graphic variation between Coptic and Greek. Note that bigraphism does occur in other texts from elsewhere in Egypt at different dates, but specifically in Jeme it is a practice that only develops from the early eighth century (see, e.g., the discussion also in Cromwell [2017a], chapter 6).

While Psate's later documents exhibit some use of two scripts, neither his Coptic nor his Greek script resemble those of Aristophanes. Figure 5 compares the handwriting of each man, from approximately parallel formulae and with common words highlighted in each for comparison. Aristophanes' hand is cursive, highly ligatured, and with tendencies towards unevenness, while Psate's hand is square and even with few ligatures. The two men do not belong to the same school of practice; Aristophanes' style is a new introduction to Thebes and has greater similarities with documents produced in Hermopolis and Aphrodito.<sup>33</sup>

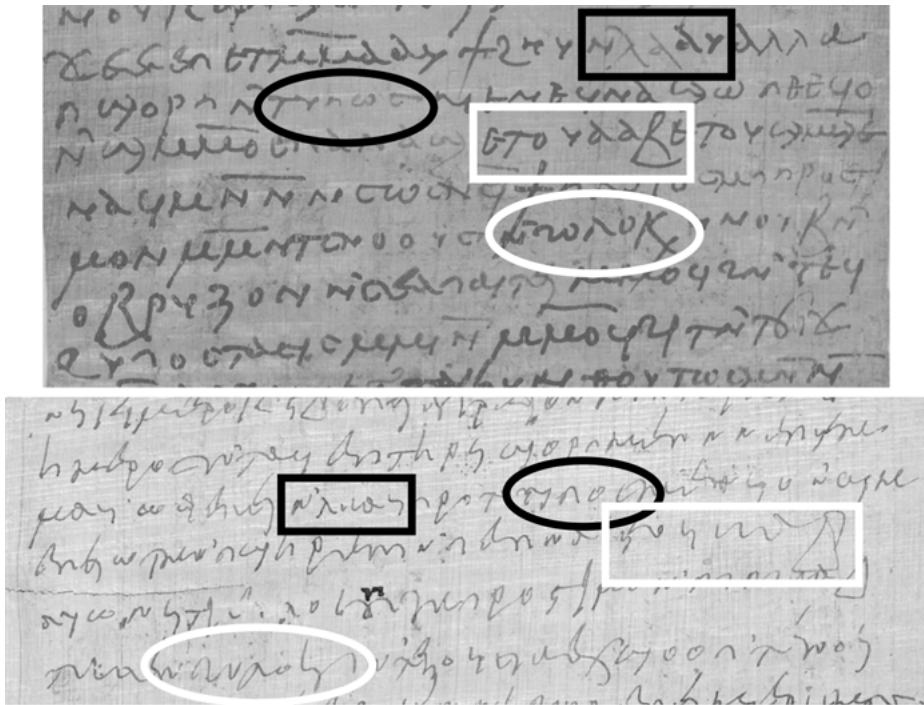


Fig. 5: Comparison of handwriting of Psate (top, *P.KRU* 44.104–109) and Aristophanes (bottom, *P.KRU* 39.63–67) © The British Library Board (Or. 4884 and Papyrus CIV)

Aristophanes, as well as the scribe Cyriacus son of Petros,<sup>34</sup> first wrote documents concerning taxation and then wrote legal documents for Jeme's inhabitants. Psate also follows this pattern, more or less (there are a couple of years of overlap

<sup>33</sup> These similarities extend to linguistic features, notably the use of  $\eta\kappa\omega\tau\tau\acute{\iota}$ , which is characteristic of texts from Middle Egypt and is only used by Aristophanes in Thebes; for more on this construction, see Richter (2017).

<sup>34</sup> Cyriacus wrote tax receipts only in the eleventh indiction year, for taxes of the ninth; see Delattre/Fournet (2014) 236–237. He is also the scribe responsible for *P.KRU* 28 (perhaps dated to the 730s) and 50 (August 739).



from 724, but there is no evidence that Psate did anything except issue tax receipts for the previous eleven years). One significant difference between the scribes is that Aristophanes had no connections with monastic communities. *P.CLT* 3 (dated 728) concerns monks of the monastery of Apa Paul, but it was written by the *lashneu* of Jeme to a local Arab official (presumably pagarch) requesting official documentation (a travel pass) and giving confirmation that the monks have paid their annual taxes. Aristophanes' latest documents include three child donation texts, in which the monastery of Apa Phoibammon is the second party, *P.KRU* 87, 101 + 95, and 103.<sup>35</sup> However, in each of these instances he wrote for the first party, the parents of the child being donated. Therefore, while both the monasteries of Apa Paul and Apa Phoibammon appear in documents that he wrote, there is no evidence that Aristophanes had any direct involvement with them. Psate's relationship with the monastery of Apa Paul seems to be more direct: the first party of *P.CLT* 1 is a monk at the monastery of Apa Paul and while the first party of *P.CLT* 5 are *lashanes* they represent the monastery of Apa Phoibammon; the monastery of Apa Paul is the second party in each instance.

At the beginning of this chapter, I said that in order to understand and appreciate the differences introduced in the 720s by Aristophanes and others (e.g., Cyriacus son of Petros, mentioned above), it is necessary to look back at the previous generation of scribes. The question, then, is what these differences, in styles and the level of direct contact with Thebes' monasteries, signify. The clear differences indicate that these men received different scribal training. Are generational changes enough to account for these changes – 26 years separate the writing of Psate's earliest document in 698 and Aristophanes' first text in 724? Where people in Jeme learned to write is difficult to identify. Despite the huge number of ostraca found in the village, there are only three identifiable writing exercises and nothing that has been identified as an elementary school piece.<sup>36</sup> Instead, all school texts/exercises from Western Thebes are associated with individual monks and monasteries.<sup>37</sup>

The absence of school material from Jeme cannot be a coincidence, given the quantity that survives from elsewhere in the area. This point therefore leads to the

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<sup>35</sup> *P.KRU* 101 and 95 are in fact part of the same donation, preserving different sections of the text (Aristophanes' signature is on *P.KRU* 95); see further Cromwell (2017a).

<sup>36</sup> *O.Medin.HabuCopt.* 160 (a short note mentioning a large quantity of money, assumed to be an exercise by the editors based on this sum); *O.Medin.HabuCopt.* 175 (the practice of epistolary formulae); *O.Medin.HabuCopt.* 212 (repetition of greeting formulae with different names and corrections). Two ostraca of unknown provenance, typically assigned to Thebes, provide evidence for the payment of basic instruction in reading and writing, but without secure provenance it cannot be used as proof of teaching within the village; see the re-edition of and discussion on the ostraca in Boud'hors (2016).

<sup>37</sup> Cromwell (forthcoming a) discusses the evidence for school texts across Thebes. Criboire (2007) is a preliminary introduction to a group of ca. 150 school texts in Columbia University (currently being prepared for publication), the monastic milieu of which is certain: they were found during the Metropolitan Museum of Art's excavations at the monastery of Epiphanius (TT 103) and Deir el-Bahri.

question of where people from the village went to learn to write. The current state of research on the palaeography of Theban texts is such that it is difficult to draw firm conclusions on this point. Nevertheless, broad strokes can be made and the following points are key: Aristophanes (and subsequent scribes<sup>38</sup>) wrote in a completely different style that shows strong similarities with contemporary scribal practices elsewhere in Egypt;<sup>39</sup> Psate wrote in a mostly-square majuscule Coptic hand that is standard in Theban texts of the seventh century and it is possible that he was trained by a local monk,<sup>40</sup> but he introduced a new variant Greek script after he began to produce tax receipts. The implication of these points is that there was a break in tradition in the 720s.

In the greater picture of early eighth-century Egypt, the changes that appear in Jeme can be viewed as part of the greater centralization of administrative practices in the country, in order to manage the collection of the poll tax and other impositions.<sup>41</sup> Rather than impose external administrators upon the village, local scribes were used to issue receipts and collect taxes. At the beginning of this process, existing scribes – in this case, Psate – were utilized and taught how to produce such receipts. Once the next generation of scribes had been trained – i. e., Aristophanes and Cyriacus – they took over these duties. In each case, this scenario necessitates the involvement of scribes from other sites (or perhaps part of the local pagarch's staff), who had the requisite expertise, in the transfer of this knowledge to the village. This technical knowledge included: the names of the different taxes, the payment periods (the *ka-tabolē*), and the correct formulae in Coptic and Greek, including the repetition of the amount of taxes in an abbreviated notation.

While Aristophanes presents the strongest ties with practices occurring beyond both Jeme and Western Thebes, Psate represents a period of transition. He had been working as a scribe for at least 15 years before he wrote his first tax receipt and was a highly skilled writer in the village. As such, he was an excellent candidate to train in new administrative processes. Psate wrote the largest proportion of the known corpus of tax receipts and he wrote them for the longest period of time. Even though we know little about the man himself, following the progress of his activities over three decades reveals how local scribes were integrated into the larger administrative framework of Egypt, as a response to the increasing output of paper-

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**38** Including Cyriacus son of Petros, David son of Psate, and Souai son of Philotheos. Cromwell (2012) discusses the generational distinctions between scribes who, on onomastic grounds, may be father-and-son scribes.

**39** Aristophanes' similarities with scribal practices elsewhere in Egypt are discussed in Cromwell (2017a) chapter 6.

**40** Given Psate's involvement with the monastery of Apa Paul, it is tempting to identify it as the source of his education. A considerable number of school texts have recently been found at Deir el-Bachit (59 ostraca included on the online database of the texts, [koptolys.gwi.uni-muenchen.de](http://koptolys.gwi.uni-muenchen.de), are labelled school texts). However, there is no evidence to confirm such a hypothesis.

**41** The role of Coptic within these changes is discussed in Cromwell (forthcoming b).

work connected with the management of tax collection. Living half-a-century after the conquest, Psate son of Pisrael worked on the eve of change, when Egypt's rulers were strengthening central control and his working life is evidence of how this control reached down the Nile Valley.

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