

THE MEANING OF ΧΕΙΡΟΓΡΑΦΟΝ IN COLOSSIANS 2:14 REVISITED

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Summary

In this article we explore the uses of χειρόγραφον in ancient papyri and ostraca and conclude that χειρόγραφον does not refer to a debt certificate, contrary to scholars' consensus (except for Peter Arzt-Grabner). Instead, χειρόγραφον was used to express various handwritten declarations including receipts, loans, contracts, and records of oath in ancient Greek papyri. In particular, χειρόγραφον and its cognate words are used in the formula of declaration (ὁμολογῶ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ χειρόγραφον) and with the expression of oath (χειρογραφία ὀρκου). Χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 can be interpreted in this context. Declaration or oath on the observance of religious regulations was significant in ancient paganism and Judaism. Thus, χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν in Colossians 2:14 can be read as the handwritten document which contains the declaration or oath with regard to the observance of religious regulations.

1. Introduction

There has been a long history of scholarly disputes surrounding the meaning of the phrase χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν in Colossians 2:14, but the solutions suggested by interpreters remain unsatisfactory. In general, most scholars agree that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 refers to a certificate of indebtedness. In his monumental work *Licht vom Osten*¹ Adolf Deißmann argues that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14

¹ Adolf Deißmann, *Licht vom Osten: Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1908), 240-41.

was meant as ‘*Schuldhandschrift*’ (i.e. an i.o.u.), according to his papyrological evidence.

Deißmann’s interpretation has been supported by the majority of scholars,² who maintain that the term in Colossians 2:14 reflects a Jewish idea that regards God as a heavenly creditor and humanity as a debtor. Some scholars argue that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 symbolises some threats to the soteriological certainty of the Colossian saints. Eduard Schweizer states that χειρόγραφον refers to a private document which was not certified by a notary and that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 was meant as a certificate of indebtedness which can jeopardise the certainty of salvation of the Colossian believers.³ In the same vein, Joram Luttenberger also associates χειρόγραφον with

² E.g. Rudolf Hoppe, *Der Triumph des Kreuzes: Studien zum Verhältnis des Kolosserbriefes zur paulinischen Kreuzestheologie* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994), 254-55; Michael Dübbers, *Christologie und Existenz im Kolosserbrief: Exegetische und semantische Untersuchungen zur Intention des Kolosserbriefes* (WUNT II/191; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 257; Nikolaus Walter, ‘Die Handschrift in Satzungen Kol 2,14’, *ZNW* 70 (1979), 115-18; Joram Luttenberger, ‘Der gekreuzigte Schuldschein: Ein Aspekt der Deutung des Todes Jesu im Kolosserbrief’, *NTS* 51 (2005), 92-93; C. Masson, *L’Épître de Saint Paul aux Colossiens* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux, 1950), 127-29; T. J. Lang, ‘Disbursing the Account of God: Fiscal Terminology and the Economy of God in Colossians 1,24-2514’, *ZNW* 107 (2016), 136; Roy Yates, ‘Colossians 2:14: Metaphor of Forgiveness’, *Biblica* 71 (1990), 248-59; Roy Yates, ‘Colossians 2:15: Christ Triumphant’, *NTS* 37 (1991), 583; J. D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 164; Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1982), 124; Douglas, J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, 2008), 209; E. Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund: Gleerup, 1946), 89; Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 158; Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (JSNTSup 36; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 142-43; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Sacra Pagina 17; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 102; T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 255; Andreas Lindemann, *Der Kolosserbrief* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1983), 44. In a similar vein, several interpreters identify χειρόγραφον in Col. 2:14 with the Mosaic Law in respect of the condemnatory force or as the bill of indictment. See Heinrich J. Holzmann, *Kritik der Epheser- und Kolosserbriefe auf Grund einer Ihres Verwandtschaftsverhältnisses* (Leipzig: Von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1872), 207; B. J. Oropeza, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Opponents of Paul: Apostasy in the New Testament Communities*, vol. 2 (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), 249; Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon* (NCCS 12; Eugene: Cascade, 2009), 80; Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 107; Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (trans. Astrid B. Beck; New York: Anchor, 1994), 371.

³ Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary* (trans. Andrew Chester; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1982), 150-51.

accusation and condemnation, and argues that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 refers to a certificate of debts (*Schuldenbelege*).⁴ He discovers his evidence in BGU 664 and BGU 472,⁵ and states that δόγμα in Colossians 2:14 formulates the obligation of the debtor towards the creditor.⁶ Accordingly, χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 is linked with all transgressions of human beings.⁷

Whereas Nikolaus Walter maintains that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 undoubtedly refers to the certificate of indebtedness, Walter suggests that God should not be considered as a heavenly creditor who calculates human guilt in Colossians 2:14. In his perspective, χειρόγραφον is also associated with the confession of indebtedness as sinners in the given context,⁸ and χειρόγραφον does not merely symbolise the accusation from God the heavenly creditor, but also the anxiety for their sins (*Sündenangst*) by the Colossian believers.⁹ Yet, while many interpreters agree with the view that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 was meant as a certificate of indebtedness, this view does not sufficiently explain the reason why the certificate of indebtedness is modified by τοῖς δόγμασιν in Colossians 2:14.

Second, on the basis of the first option (i.e. a debt certificate), some interpreters argue that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 symbolises a celestial scroll that records human sins.¹⁰ For example, Eduard Lohse appeals to *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 3:6-9 and *Apocalypse of Paul* 17, where the handwritten document is associated with a heavenly book, and he argues that, in this sense, χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14

⁴ Lutzenberger, 'Der gekreuzigte Schuldschein', 88.

⁵ Lutzenberger, 'Der gekreuzigte Schuldschein', 84-85.

⁶ Lutzenberger, 'Der gekreuzigte Schuldschein', 88.

⁷ Lutzenberger, 'Der gekreuzigte Schuldschein', 87. Lutzenberger insists that baptism in Col. 2:14 is considered as the place where sins are remitted. He reaches a conclusion that Christ crucified is *Schuldurkunde des Lebens*. Lutzenberger, 'Der gekreuzigte Schuldschein', 95.

⁸ Walter, 'Die Handschrift in Satzungen Kol 2,14', 117.

⁹ Walter, 'Die Handschrift in Satzungen Kol 2,14', 118.

¹⁰ E.g. Schweizer, *Kolossier*, 105; Olivia A. Blanchette, 'Does the Cheirographon of Col. 2:14 Represent Christ Himself?' *CBQ* 23 (1961), 306-12; Thomas J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* (JSNTSup 53; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 100-108; Walter T. Wilson, *The Hope of Glory: Education and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Colossians* (NovTSup 88; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 30; Robert L. Cavin, *New Existence and Righteous Living: Colossians and 1 Peter in Conversation with 4QInstruction and the Hodayot* (BZNW 197; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 140-42. See Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 100-108, 216-217; Ian Smith. Cf. H. Weiss, 'The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians', *CBQ* 34 (1972), 294-314.

symbolises accusation or condemnation.¹¹ Yet, the term χειρόγραφον originally refers to a handwritten declaration, so it seems that the usage of *chirographum* in this tradition could be figuratively used to stress the sense of the heavenly book as an official declaration. Moreover, it is unclear that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 can refer to a heavenly book without any explicit explanation in the given context.

Thus, NT scholars generally agree that χειρόγραφον refers to a debt certificate. We find an exception in Peter Arzt-Grabner's commentary on Philemon, where he briefly observes that χειρόγραφον was not merely a debt certificate, but the most important document type in the private law in the second or third century AD.¹² Yet, we will explore that χειρόγραφον was not simply used for a private purpose, but in an official situation. Some interpreters maintain that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 is related to accusation or condemnation, and that χειρόγραφον expresses the idea that God is a heavenly creditor who calculates human transgressions. However, this study will offer an alternative interpretation of Colossians 2:14. For this purpose, we will examine the uses of χειρόγραφον and its cognate words (i.e. χειρογραφία and χειρογραφεῖν) in ancient papyri and ostraca written in the second century BC to the third century AD.¹³

2. Χειρόγραφον in Ancient Greek Papyri and Ostraca

The majority of NT scholars concur that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 refers to a certificate of indebtedness, as discussed above. Yet, it should be recognised that the term χειρόγραφον does not refer to a debt certificate, contrary to Deißmann's argument, but can be defined as a main certificate type of ancient private law.¹⁴ We will explore this point in this section. For instance, χειρόγραφον was used in various documents such as a lease contract (P.Fouad 40, AD 35), house sale contract (P.Louvre 1:10, AD 75–99), farm sale contract (P.Mich. 5:272,

¹¹ Lohse, *Kolosser*, 110–11.

¹² Peter Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon* (Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament Band 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 240–41.

¹³ The terms χειρόγραφον and χειρογραφία are interchangeable and synonymous in many cases. Cf. P.Oxy. 4.719; P.Cair.goodsp. 21,22,24,33,44,47,72,74, etc.

¹⁴ Otto Gradenwitz, *Einführung in die Papyruskunde* (Leipzig: Von S. Hirzel, 1900), 38. Cf. Winfried Trusen, 'Chirographum und Teilurkunde im Mittelalter', *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 75 (1979), 233–49.

AD 45–46), and loan contract (P.Gen. 2:1:24, AD 96). So, χειρόγραφον was a general term referring to an official handwritten declaration between two contractors.¹⁵

For example, it is stated in a papyrus concerning a house sale contract (P.Oxy. 3:983) that some property was sold according to χειρόγραφον. In P.Corn. 8 (first century AD), someone makes a contract and declares according to the contract (ὁμολογῶ κατὰ τὸδε τὸ χειρόγραφον). The formula of the declaration of a contract (ὁμολογῶ κατὰ τὸδε τὸ χειρόγραφον) is widely used in ancient papyri (e.g. P.Amst. 1:44; BGU 1:50; BGU 1:272; P.Fay. 34; P.Bad. 2:25; P.Princ. 3:149; P.Stras. 5:370; Stud.Pal. 20:3, etc.). In this case, the phrase τὸδε τὸ χειρόγραφον (this handwritten declaration) indicates that χειρόγραφον was meant as the document that contains a declaration made by the contractors.

The author of P.Amh. 2:67 (AD 231–237) recorded a judicial proceeding, and states the following:

... εἶπον ὅτι πρὸ τῆς Μασκουλείνου ἀποφάσεως γέγονεν [...] τοχὴ καὶ ὅτι ἐγὼ μέρους ἦρξεν. οὐ δύναται οὖν συνάπτειν [...] οἱ οὐτὲ τὰ τελευταῖα τοῖς προτέροις μιγνύναι. ἐπίτρεπον δὲ ἀναγνωσθῆναι αὐτοῦ τὴν χειρογραφίαν δι' ἧς ὁμολογεῖται τὰ γεγενημένα καὶ ἀνέγνω τὰ ὑποτεταγμένα οὐ ἀρχή.

... I said that before the verdict of Markouleinos, he became [...] and that he ruled on his behalf. Therefore, he cannot join to [...] nor be united with the seniors at last. Permit to read the handwritten declaration through which he acknowledges what was decided and he has read what is subjected from the beginning.

In this papyrus, the council of Alexandria and Aurelius Serenos Dioskopos hand down a verdict, and χειρογραφία refers to the handwritten declaration of this verdict (ἀπόφασις). In this case, what was decided in the court is declared (ὁμολογεῖται) through this χειρογραφία. This case also connotes that χειρογραφία or χειρόγραφον is related to the concept of official declaration.

In the following case (BGU 1:272, AD 138), the term χειρόγραφον is used with the formula of the declaration of a contract (ὁμολογῶ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ χειρόγραφον) and the direct payment formula (ἔχειν παρὰ σοῦ παραχρῆμα διὰ χειρὸς ἐξ οἴκου):

¹⁵ E.g. contract (BGU 1.50, P.Oslo. 3.161, O.Claud. 1.156, P.Corn. 8); hiring document (P.Mich. 11.603); bond (P.Oxy. 75.5052, O.Claud. 1.156, P.Col. 10.287, P.Heid. Gr. 3.239), receipt (BGU 1.104, BGU 1.172, BGU 2.440, BGU 2.441, BGU 2.443, P.Col. 7.145, P.Col. 7.158, P.Aberd. 49), bank document (P.Oxy. 75.5052), etc.

ὁμολογῶ ἔχειν παρὰ σοῦ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ χειρόγραφον
 παραχρῆμα διὰ χειρὸς ἐξ οἴκου ἀργυρίου δραχμᾶς χειλίας ἑκατὸν
 εἴκοσι ...

I declare that I received from you according to this handwritten document (τοῦτο τὸ χειρόγραφον) immediately from hand to hand out of the house, valued at 1120 drachma ...

In this case, *χειρόγραφον* refers to a contract document for a house sale, and is used in the private contract situation with the direct payment formula which indicates a private contract between two contractors.¹⁶ The direct payment formula was employed in various contract papyri. For instance, in P.Mich. 5:272, Herakles, son of Panouris, sells a part of his palm garden as follows:

ἀπέχω παρὰ σοῦ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν συνεχορημένην πᾶσαν ἐκ πλήρους
 παραχρῆμα διὰ χερὸς ἐκς οἴκου, καὶ βεβαιώσω τὴν πρᾶσιν πάση
 βεβαιώσιν ἀπὸ μὲν δημοσίων ὀφλημάτων τῶν πάντων καὶ ἐπιγραφῶν
 πασῶν.

I have received from you the entire price agreed upon, fully immediately by hand out of the house, and I guarantee this transaction with every guarantee, from all public debts and all registers.

The direct payment formula is utilised in many cases of a private contract made immediately between two contractors: the verb of receiving (*ἔχειν*, *ἀπέχειν* or *λαμβάνειν*) + the origin of payment (*παρὰ σοῦ* or *παρ' αὐτοῦ*) + the adverb to express 'without an intermediation of the third party' (*παραχρῆμα*) + a direct means of payment (*διὰ χειρὸς ἐξ οἴκου*). We detect similar uses of the direct payment formula in many ancient contract papyri.¹⁷ In his *Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus* 2, Plutarch also mentions this formula: 'εὐθὺς ἐκ παιδὸς τὰ ὄπλα διὰ χειρὸς εἶχε' (He immediately bought the arms from the servant by direct payment). This formula was also used in ancient marriage contracts about dowries (e.g. BGU 4:1050; BGU 4:1103; BGU 4:1104, etc.). By contrast, if there is a bank involved, the

¹⁶ For similar cases, see BGU 3.800; P.Mich. 9.573; P.Bad. 2.25; P.Diog.27; P.Diog. 31dupl; P.Nyu. 2.23; P.Princ. 3.149; Stud.Pal.20.3.

¹⁷ E.g. P.Lond. 2.143; C.Pap.Gr. 1.7; P.Ryl. 2.177; P.Mich 3.188; P.Mich 4.550; BGU 4.1057; BGU 4.1147; BGU 1.183; BGU 4.1050; P.Fam.Tebt. 10; BGU 4.1145; BGU 4.1130; BGU 4.1126; BGU 4.1122; BGU 4.1150; BGU 4.1154; BGU 4.1155; BGU 7.1664; BGU 7.1650; BGU 4.1175; BGU 4.1174; BGU 11.2111; BGU 11.2121; BGU 13.2330; BGU 15.2476; BGU 15.2477; BGU 15.2478; CPR 1.2; CPR 1.3; CPR 1.28; CPR 1.64; CPR 1.88; CPR 1.90; CPR 1.203; P.Amh. 2.111; P.Atheion 21; P.Fay.91; P.Louvre. 1.9; P.Hamb.3.218; P.Fam.Tebt. 23; P.Flor. 1.51; P.Fouad 40; P.Hamb. 3.218; P.Kron. 48; P.Louvre 1.10, etc.

formula of διὰ τῆς τραπέζης (by banker's order) could be used instead of παραχρήμα διὰ χειρὸς ἐξ οἴκου (immediately by hand from the house).¹⁸ So, we find that the term χειρόγραφον was used with the direct payment formula in BGU 1:272 (ὁμολογῶ ἔχειν παρὰ σοῦ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ χειρόγραφον), and it denotes that χειρόγραφον is a stereotyped word referring to the document which contains a declaration made by two contractors.

The term χειρόγραφον was used in the document of a slave sale (P.Oxy. 60:4058, AD 158–159):

κατὰ χρηματισμὸν διὰ γραφείου Τριμείθεως τῆς ὑπὸ σοὶ Ὀάσεως ...
μητρὸς Τσενήσιος ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς Τριμείθεως ἀγορασθέντα καὶ ὑπ'
αὐτοῦ κατὰ χιρόγραφον.

According to the transaction through the record officer of Trimeitheos of Oasis near to you ... sold from Trimeitheos her son and by him according to the handwritten declaration (χιρόγραφον).

The slave is sold according to χιρόγραφον [i.e. χειρόγραφον] between the contractors in this papyrus, the transaction is warranted by the public grapheion (record office), and the sale of the slave is declared by χειρόγραφον. In this case, χειρόγραφον is also employed in the sense of the declaration of the contract.

Even when the term χειρόγραφον is associated with the certificate of indebtedness, it was not directly meant as the certificate of indebtedness or the bond: it simply refers to the document or the certificate with regard to a handwritten declaration. In P.Mich. 11:614 (AD 256), Aurelius Papontheus's sons appeal to Aurelius Sarapion, strategos of the Oxyrhynchite nome, because Aurelius Horos did not repay his debt for thirty-four years. In this papyrus, the term χειρόγραφον refers to the original loan contract with the debtor:

βουλόμενοι δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ δισσοῦ χειρογράφου μοναχὸν ἐν δημοσίῳ
γενέσθαι δίδομεν τῇ πόλει ἕνεκα τοῦ μοναχὸν δημοσιοῦσθαι τὰς
ὀρισθείσας δραχμὰς ἱβ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ τῆς δημοσιώσεως ὀρισμένον, καὶ
ἀξιοῦμεν ἀναλαβόντας αὐτὸ παρὰ τοῦ διαπεσταλμένου ὑφ' ἡμῶν
Τιβερίου [...]ου Διονυσίου ὑποκεχειρογραφημένον ὑπὸ αὐτοῦ περὶ τοῦ
εἶναι τὴν μετὰ τὸν χρόνον ὑπογραφὴν ἰδιόγραφον τοῦ ὑπὲρ τοῦ
Αὐρηλίου Ὡρου ἀγραμμάτου ὄντος ὑπογράψαντος Αὐρηλίου
Ἀνδρονίκου ...

And we wish that from two copies of the handwritten contract (ἀπὸ τοῦ δισσοῦ χειρογράφου), a single copy will be made public, and we submit

¹⁸ E.g. P.Oxy. 55.3798; BGU 2.445; BGU 3.702; BGU 8.1156, etc.

it to the city, because the single copy will be made public, the determined 12 drachmai and the fee for the publication, and we desire that you will take it from our representative, Tiberius ... Dionysios, signed by his hand (ὑποκεχειρογραφημένον) to the effect that the subscription after the date is of the illiterate Aurelius Horos' signatory Aurelius Andronikos.

Ostensibly, it is likely that χειρόγραφον refers to a debt certificate, but we discover the same formula in SB 24:16265 (approximately AD 259) as follows:

βουλόμενος δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ δισσοῦ χειρογράφου μοναχὸν ἐν δημοσίῳ γενέσθαι δίδωμι τῇ πόλει ἔνεκα τοῦ μοναχὸν δημοσιοῦσθαι τὰς ὀρισθείσας δραχμὰς ἱβ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ τῆς δημοσιώσεως ὠρισμένον καὶ ἀξιῶ ἀναλαβόντας αὐτὸ παρὰ τοῦ διαπεσταλμένου ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ὑποχειρογραφουμένην ὑπὸ αὐτοῦ ...

And I wish that from two copies of the handwritten contract (ἀπὸ τοῦ δισσοῦ χειρογράφου), a single copy will be made public, and I submit it to the city, because the single copy will be made public, the determined 12 drachmai and the fee for the publication, and I desire that you will take it from my representative signed by his hand ...

In this case, Aurelia Isadora purchased some wine, and paid for it, but the wine was not delivered. So, she petitioned to the strategos with the original sale contract (χειρόγραφον) in this papyrus. In this case, χειρόγραφον is not related to the certificate of indebtedness, but refers to the handwritten sale contract in SB 24:16265. Likewise, it is apparent that χειρόγραφον in the same formula was not also meant as a debt certificate in P.Mich. 11:614, but as the declaration of the contract. Thus, χειρόγραφον does not refer to a debt certificate itself, but to a handwritten declaration, even when it is used in respect of a loan or a bond.

As Ludwig Mitteis already observed, the usage of χειρόγραφον was not limited to a private contract, but also to public situations.¹⁹ Nonetheless, most NT scholars maintain that χειρόγραφον was used only in a private situation. For instance, Ernst Lohmeyer associates χειρόγραφον with the obligation of indebtedness that the debtor made by his own hand without the involvement of a notary.²⁰ Lutzenberger

¹⁹ Ludwig Mitteis, *Reichsrecht und Volksrecht in den östlichen Provinzen des römischen Kaiserreichs, mit Beiträgen zur Kenntniss des griechischen Rechts und der spätromischen Rechtsentwicklung* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1891), 494.

²⁰ Lohmeyer, *Kolossier*, 100.

also argues that χειρόγραφον refers to a debt certificate in a more private form.²¹

While χειρόγραφον could be used in private situations, we have some evidence that χειρόγραφον could also be employed with regard to a public situation. The term χειρόγραφον was also associated with the receipt of grain and tax:

P.Aberd. 49 (AD 158): σιτολόγοις Καρανίδος. ἔσχον προσφώνησιν χειρογραφήσας σπερμάτων κβ ἔτους Ἀντωνεῖνου Καίσαρος τοῦ κυρίου.

To the collectors of grains in Karanis. I received the hand-written (χειρογραφήσας) report about the seeds. In the twenty second year of Antonius Caesar the Lord.

P.Col. 7:145 (AD 335): χειρόγραφον σίτου θ ἰνδικτίονος Οὐρανίου Παύλου.

The receipt (χειρόγραφον) of grains. The 8th indiction of Uranios Paulus.

In the first case (P.Aberd. 49), προσφώνησιν χειρογραφήσας refers to a handwritten report or a public declaration that grains were received. In the second case (P.Col. 7:145), χειρόγραφον was meant as the tax receipt about grains. In both cases, χειρόγραφον and its cognate word (χειρογραφήσας) are not merely limited to a private contract.²²

In an official correspondence (P.Oxy. 10:1252, AD 288–295), the term χειρόγραφον was meant as a document which contains an official declaration, as follows.

χειρόγραφον ἀποδίξεων πρὸς Θέωνα καὶ Ἡρακλείδην καὶ Θώνιον γενομένους ἐπιμελητὰς τοῦ ἐν Ἡλενσάῃ φρουρείου περὶ τοῦ μὴ διασεσεῖσθαι ὑπὸ Φιλέου ἐκ προστάξεως τῆς ἡγεμονίας. Αὐρηλίῳ Ἡρακλείδῃ ἐξηγητῇ Ἀλεξανδρείας στρατηγῷ Ὁξυρυγίτου παρὰ Αὐρηλίων Θωνίου καὶ Ἡρακλείδου ἀμφοτέρων ἐξηγητῶν καὶ Θέωνος ἀρχιερέως τῶν τριῶν βουλευτῶν τῆς λαμπρᾶς καὶ λαμπροτάτης Ὁξυρυγίτων πόλεως γενομένων ἐπιμελητῶν τοῦ ἐν Ἡλενσάῃ φρουρείου. ἐπὶ σήμερον ἥτις ἐστὶν ἡ μετεκαλέσω ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ ὑπομνημάτων σὼν ἀνέγνως γράμματα τοῦ διασημοτάτου ἡμῶν ἡγεμόνος Οὐαλερίου Πομπηιανοῦ δι' ὃν προσέταξεν εἰ μὴν εἴημεν διασεισθέντες ὑπὸ Φιλέου ἄρξαντος Ἀλεξανδρείας ἡκεῖν μετὰ τῶν

²¹ Luttenberger, 'Der gekreuzigte Schuldschein', 88.

²² The next example shows that χειρόγραφον could refer to a document signed in public: in P.Heid.Gr. 4.325 (AD 215): περὶ δημοσιώσεως χειρογράφου ὡς καθήκει ὑπογεγραμμένων (a handwritten declaration presently signed concerning a public affair).

ἀποδείξεων, εἰ δὲ μή, κατὰ χώραν μένειν, καὶ θθάσαντες μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν σῶν ὑπομνημάτων προηνεγκάμεθα μηδε δειασισμὸν πεπονθέναι ὑπὸ τοῦ Φιλέου, ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ καὶ ἐνγράφως ἠθέλησας ἡμᾶς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσφωνῆσαι, πάλιν ἅπερ προηνεγκάμεθα δηλοῦμεν ὡς μηδὲν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ σεσεῖσθαι καὶ ἀξιοῦμεν αὐτὰ ταῦτα φανερὰ τῷ μεγαλείῳ αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι.

The handwritten declaration (χειρόγραφον) of proofs towards Theon and Herakleides and Thonios, former overseers of the fort in Helensaes concerning the fact that they experienced no extortion from Phileas according to the ordinance of the prefect. To Aurelios Herakleides, a translator of Alexandria, strategos of the Oxyrhynchite nome from Aurelios Thonios and Herakeides, both translators and Theon a chief interpreter²³ of three senators of the brilliant and the most brilliant city of Oxyrhynchus, who took charge of guard in Helensaes. Until Today, it has been 18 years since you summoned us, and in your remembrance you have read the letter written by the most distinct prefect Oualerios Pompeianos, through which he commanded to come with the proofs as to whether we had suffered extortion from Phileas, a former magistrate of Alexandria, and if not, to stay at home, and we declared in your remembrance that we did not experience no extortion from Phileas, but you wanted us to write this statement, and we again make clear of the former declaration that nothing was extorted by him, and we desire these to be made known to his highness.

In this papyrus, Aurelios Thonios, Herakeides, and Theon declare that they were not extorted by Phileas, a former magistrate of Alexandria, and it is the declaration that χειρόγραφον in the first line refers to.²⁴ So, χειρόγραφον ἀποδείξεων (the handwritten declaration of proofs) in this papyrus is an official declaration of proofs which demonstrates the guiltlessness of Phileas in his office as a magistrate.

On the other hand, the term χειρόγραφον is employed in the sense of an official membership report for a guild (*collegia*). In P.Mich. 5:244 (AD 43), Kronious the son of Herodion is elected as a superintendent of tax collection for a guild, and he enumerates the names of the guild members in this papyrus. In the final line of P.Mich. 5:244, Kronious

²³ In this case, ἀρχιερέως (high priest) seems to be a misspelling of ἀρχέρμηνεύς (chief interpreter). First, ἀρχιερέως does not match well with the given context. Second, ἀρχέρμηνεύς was used along with ἐξηγητής (translator) as a word pair and as a common official title. For example, an inscription discovered in Colossae (early second century AD), we find the phrase 'Μάρκῳ Μάρκου Κολοσσηνῶν ἀρχερμηνεὶ καὶ ἐξηγητῇ[ι]' (To Markos, Son of Markos, the chief interpreter and translator of Colossae). For the text of this inscription, see A. H. Cadwallader, 'A New Inscription, a Correction, and a Confirmed Sighting from Colossae', *Epigraphica Anatolica* 40 (2007), 109-18.

²⁴ For similar cases, see BGU 16.2571; BGU 16.2572.

finishes his report by his mention ‘χειρόγραφον Κρονίωνος τοῦ Ἡρωδίωνος (cheirographon of Kronious the son of Herodion)’. In this case, χειρόγραφον (i.e. χειρόγραφον) does not refer to a private debt certificate or a private contract, but to an official declaration of guild membership for public tax.

Χειρόγραφον could be employed in the context of the declaration of the official delegation. In P.Fay. 34 (AD 161), Heron is designated as a tax collector instead of the two former tax collectors at the village of Polydeucia, and χειρόγραφον refers to the document of the delegation as a tax collector in this case:

Ἡρων Ἡρωνος ἀπὸ κώμης Φιλαγρίδος Πανενσὶ Ὁρου καὶ Μάρωνι Ἀπολλωνίου βοηθοῖς γεωργῶν κώμης Πολυδευκείας. ὁμολογῶ κατὰ τότε τὸ χειρόγραφον ἀνθ’ ὑμῶν τὴν εἴσπραξιν ποιήσασθαι καὶ ἐκδῶναι σύμβολα μονοδεσμίας χόρτου καὶ ἄλλων εἰδῶν νομαρχίας τῶν ἐπιμεριθεισῶν ὑμῖν Πολυδευκείας διὰ τῶν ἀπὸ Φιλαγρίδος ἐν Πάλλῃ

Heron, son of Heron from the village of Philagris, to Panes, son of Horos and Maron, son of Apolonios, assistants of farmers in the village of Polydeucia. According to this handwritten declaration, I acknowledge that I will practise the task of the tax collection and that the task for the collection of the tax of crops (μονοδεσμίας χόρτου) and of other forms in Nomarkes which was formerly assigned to you will be substituted by the one from the village of Philagris in Pale.

In this case, χειρόγραφον (i.e. χειρόγραφον) is used together with the formula of declaration (ὁμολογῶ κατὰ τότε τὸ χειρόγραφον), and is associated with some kind of declaration. Heron undertakes the collection of the tax of crops (μονοδεσμίας χόρτου)²⁵ and the other taxes, and χειρόγραφον refers to the official document which records his task and delegation as a tax collector. So, the term χειρόγραφον could be utilised to express public and official declarations, not simply private contracts.²⁶

²⁵ This tax (χόρτου μονοδεσμία) is also found in the following papyri: e.g. BGU 13.2283; P.Mich. 6.388; SB 1.5982; P.Wisc. 1.26. For the specific information, see P. J. Sijpesteijn, ‘Receipts for χόρτου μονοδεσμία and Other Taxes’, *ZPE* 87 (1991), 263-67.

²⁶ The following use of χειρόγραφον in P.Bodl. 1.31 (AD 169-176) is also related to appointing a representative: ‘Ἀποσυνέστησά σε φροντιοῦντα μου τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ... εὐδοκῶ πᾶσι τοῖς ὑπὸ σοῦ ἐπιτελεσθησομένοις. Τὸ χειρόγραφον τοῦτο κύριον ἔστω πανταχῇ ὡς ἐν δημοσίῳ κατα κεχωρισμένον’ (I appoint you as a representative to administer my property ... I delight in everything which will be completed by you. This hand-written declaration. May the Lord [i.e. the Roman emperor] be everywhere in public as divided). In this case, τὸ χειρόγραφον τοῦτο refers to the certificate of appointment, not a debt certificate.

The following papyrus (P.Hib. 2:247) contains a priest's declaration, and the verb *κεχειρογραφηκέναι* is associated with an action of writing a declaration: 'ἐγράψατε ἡμῖν ἀκηκοῖναι τοὺς ἐν [...] ἱερεῖς κεχειρογραφηκέναι ἡμῖν περὶ τοῦ σησάμου καὶ τοῦ [...] (You wrote us to obey what was written to us by the priests about the sesame and the [...]). The infinitive *κεχειρογραφηκέναι* refers to an action to record the priests' declaration about the sesame. So, the handwriting (*κεχειρογραφηκέναι*) is associated with the record of the declaration in this case.

We also detect a formula used in the document containing orders or directions in the form of the sentence 'you or he/she received the order'. P.Oxy. 18:2185 (AD 92) includes a declaration for a grant of seed, and the phrase *παρ' οὗ καὶ λάβεται τὴν καθήκουσαν χειρογραφίαν* (from him he also received the present handwritten declaration) is employed after the declaration.²⁷ In this case, *τὴν καθήκουσαν χειρογραφίαν* refers to the present official declaration. We observe a similar formula in ancient papyri.

O.Petr. 309 (third century AD): 'καὶ λάβε παρ' αὐτοῦ χειρόγραφον' (He also received the present handwritten declaration from him).

BGU 16:2562 (BC 7–8): 'καὶ λάβετε παρ' αὐτοῦ τὰς καθηκούσας χειρογραφίας' (You also received the present handwritten declaration from him).

BGU 16:2570 (BC 8–7): 'καὶ λαβὲ παρ' αὐτοῦ τὰς καθηκούσας χειρογραφίας' (You also received the present handwritten declaration from him).

P.Oxy. 57:3907 (AD 99): 'παρ' οὗ καὶ λάβετε τὴν καθήκουσαν χειρογραφίαν δισσίην' (You also received two copies of the present handwritten declaration from him).

So, the term *χειρόγραφον* or *χειρογραφία* was not simply applied to a private document, but also to an official declaration. The term *χειρόγραφον* could be used in the sense of the document which contains certain declarations, as shown above. Thus, we have sound fundamental that the term *χειρόγραφον* and its cognate words were not merely used to refer to a private debt certificate, and could be employed for various purposes in respect of an official declaration.

Similarly, the term *χειρογραφία* could be used to express the documents which record someone's oath. For example, we find the

²⁷ See also BGU 16.2565 (BC 3–2): 'καθηκούσας χειρογραφίας'.

following mention in P.Ryl. 4:572 (second century BC): ‘ἐπιμελέστερον λαβὲ παρ’ αὐτῶν χειρογραφίαν ὄρκου’ (He received a handwritten declaration of oath from them more carefully). ‘This χειρογραφία is the handwritten document which recorded a royal oath not to perform the following behaviour: ‘μὴ πράξειν παρευρέσει ἡτινιοῦν μηδ’ ἐτέρωι ἐπιτρέπειν ἀπὸ τοῦ εἶδους τοῦ παραλογεῖν’ (not to practice according to the pretext permitted in the unreasonable form). So, the term χειρογραφία refers to the statement of an oath in this case. We observe a similar case in P.Oxy. 2:260 (AD 59): ‘Θέων Ὀννώφριος ὑπηρέτης ἐπηκολούθηκα τῇ αὐθεντικῇ χειρογραφίᾳ’ (Theon Onnophrios the servant. I have followed by the original declaration). In this case, the term χειρογραφία is also related to the promise of attendance in court. A similar usage of χειρογραφία is found in P.Tebt. 3:801 (134BC): ‘ὄρκος ὃν ὤμοσεν ὑφ’ ὃν κὶ ἐχειρογράφησεν Πολεμάρχωι καὶ στρατηγῶι καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν προσόδων Ἀπολλώνιος Ἀπολλωνίου Ἀθηναῖος κυβερνήτης κοντωτοῦ’ (An oath that I swore under what I also wrote by hand (ἐχειρογράφησεν) to Polemarcho and the leader concerning the income of Apolonios the son of Apolonios, Athenian, the governor crutched).²⁸ So, χειρογραφία was often used in the sense of a document on declaration of an oath or a promise.

In brief, we have explored many pieces of evidence that, contrary to Deißmann’s definition and the present consensus, except for Arzt-Grabner, χειρόγραφον does not simply refer to a private debt certificate, but was used to express various handwritten declarations and contracts including receipts, loans, contracts, and records of oath in ancient Greek papyri. The formula of declaration is often used with the term χειρόγραφον (e.g. ὁμολογῶ κατὰ τόδε τὸ χειρόγραφον), and this shows that χειρόγραφον is associated with a document that contains some declaration. Χειρόγραφον and its cognate words could be employed with the expression of oath (e.g. χειρογραφία ὄρκου), and refers to the document which contains someone’s oath or promise in that case. Thus, χειρόγραφον can be defined as a handwritten contract or declaration used in both private and public situations.²⁹

²⁸ For this usage, see Chr.Wilck. 181 (BC 259–258); P.Tebt. 3.1.815 (BC 223–222); SB 5.8008 (BC 77); SB 5.8754 (BC 78), etc.

²⁹ The compound verb ὑποχειρογραφεῖν (to sign by hand) could be used in similar situations. For example, in SB 24.16265, ‘ὑποχειρογραφουμένην ὑπὸ αὐτοῦ περὶ τοῦ εἶναι τὴν ὑπογραφὴν ιδιόγραφον τῆς Αὐρηλίας Ἰσιδώρας’ (signed by him just as her document signed by Aurelia Isidora). In this case, ὑποχειρογραφεῖν refers to signing on χειρόγραφον.

3. Χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν in Colossians 2:14

If χειρόγραφον does not refer to a debt certificate, it is unlikely that Paul expected his readers to understand this term as the bond between God and humanity. Moreover, it should be noted that there is no expression concerning a debt in Colossians 2. Instead, it is more probable that the Colossian believers read χειρόγραφον as a handwritten document relating to a declaration, promise, or oath. The modifier τοῖς δόγμασιν can be considered as the dative case of respect.³⁰ If so, χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν refers to χειρόγραφον with respect to the religious regulations.

Scholars diverge as to the meaning of δόγμα in Colossians 2:14. Some interpreters understand the background of δόγμα in Colossians 2:14 in terms of Hellenistic philosophy.³¹ Eduard Schweizer maintains that δόγμα in Colossians 2:14 contains the religious features of the Pythagorean and Platonic idea.³² R. E. DeMaris contends that the false teaching is related to a sort of Middle Platonism.³³ Yet, other scholars maintain that δόγμα in Colossians 2:14 is associated with the Jewish ritual law.³⁴

³⁰ Walter, 'Die Handschrift in Satzungen Kol 2,14', 118. Cf. Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 97-98.

³¹ Morna Hooker argues that there was no false or heretical teacher over whom Paul is fighting in Colossians and that he is not correcting a particular error of the Colossian church. See Morna Hooker, 'Were There False Teachers in Colossae?' in *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 121-36. Yet Hooker's argument has not been accepted by the majority of scholars. The majority view is that false teachers or errorists existed behind the Colossian church. First, pronouns τις (2:8,16) and μηδεὶς (2:18) were probably used with reference to a definite group in the Colossian church. Second, τῆς φιλοσοφίας in 2:8 also highly likely refers to a specific philosophy. Third, the present verb 'δογματίζεσθε' in 2:20 also implies that some specific error is being made in Colossian church at present. Fourth, in 2:8-23 (the so-called polemical core), the author of Colossians intensively delineates specific features of the teachings he objects to, which highly likely suggest that 2:8-23 reflects the actual errors of some Colossian believers. In addition, the following phrases seem to allude to slogans of the false teachings: 1) 'πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα' in 2:9 (cf. 1:19); 2) 'θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων' in 2:18; 3) 'ἃ ἐώρακεν ἐμβατεύων' in 2:18; 'μὴ ἄψη μηδὲ γεύση μηδὲ θίγης' in 2:21; and 4) 'ἐθελοθρησκία', 'ταπεινοφροσύνη', and 'ἄφειδιὰ σώματος' in 2:23. The false teaching must be connected to regulations on food, drink, festivals, and calendric observance as in 2:16,20-21.

³² Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 90.

³³ Richard E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy: Wisdom in Dispute at Colossae* (JSNTSS 96; Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1994), 58, 112.

³⁴ Dunn, *Colossians*, 29-35; Wright, *Colossians*, 23-30; Allan Bevere, *Sharing in the Inheritance*, 53-59; Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 179-80; Marianne

Whether the false teaching contains Jewish features or not, it seems obvious that δόγμα in Colossians 2:14 refers to the religious regulations required to the Colossian believers, and that it is related to ascetic regulations. It should be noted that a religious declaration or an oath to obey certain regulations was common in initiation rituals of ancient cults. For example, a papyrus which records a declaration or an oath in an initiation ritual of Mithras mysticism deserves attention:³⁵

Ὁρκος ὑπὸ κήρυκος Ὁμνῶ κατὰ τοῦ διχάσαντος καὶ κρίναντος τὴν γῆν ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καὶ σκοτός ἀπὸ φωτός καὶ ἡμέραν ἐκ νυκτός καὶ ἀνατολὴν ἀπὸ δύσεως καὶ ζωὴν ἀπὸ θανάτου καὶ γενέσιν ἀπὸ φθορᾶς ...

An oath under the messenger. I swear according to the one who distinguished the earth from heaven, darkness from light, day from night, and sun-rising from sunset, life from death, birth from destruction.

This oath was declared in the initiation ritual, and the one who swears requests a protection by Mithras according to the oath. We also detect oaths with regard to Mithras in ancient literature. For instance, Claudianus writes that a Persian king swore towards Mithras (*De Consulatu Stilichonis* 1:61-63). Xenophon also records an oath towards Mithras (*Oeconomicus* 4:24).

An oath in the initiation ritual was also significant in ancient Pythagoreanism. In Pseudo-Plutarch, *Placita Philosophorum* 1:3, we discover an oath sworn in the initiation ritual.

διὸ καὶ ἐφθέγγοντο οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι, ὥς μεγίστου ὅρκου ὄντος τῆς τετράδος, οὐ μὰ τὸν ἀμετέρα ψυχᾶ παραδόντα τετρακτύν, παγὰν ἀενάου φύσεος ρίζωμὰ τ’ ἔχουσιν.

Therefore, Pythagoreans declared that there is the number four as the greatest oath, swearing towards the one who gave our mind tetractys (τετρακτύς), source and root of eternal nature.

According to the citation above, we find that Pythagoreans take an oath with regard to tetractys (a Pythagorean triangular figure consisting of ten points) in their initiation ceremonies. In *Pythagorean Golden Verses* 2, we find Pythagoreans' emphasis on the significance of oath:

Thomson, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 6-9; Wilson, *The Hope of Glory*, 34-40; Bird, *Colossians*, 15-26; Andrew Bandstra, 'Did the Colossian Errorists Need a Mediator?' *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 329-43.

³⁵ Vittorio Bartoletti, 'Frammenti di un rituale d'iniziazione ai misteri', *Annali della R. Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 6 (1937), 143-52. As for similar contents, see PSI 10.1162.

‘First, admire the immortal gods in the order determined by the law (νόμος), and revere oath.’ Isocrates also writes that the sacrifice is an external expression of piety, but keeping an oath is an expression of nobleness in *Demonicus* 13.³⁶

The significance of declaration or oath in initiation rituals is also emphasised by some Jewish groups. In the Damascus Document, an oath is a precondition for entering the covenantal relationship with God, and this oath is related to the observance of the Jewish law (CD XV 5–8). In 1QH VII 17, the oath of the Qumran community is linked with entering the covenantal relationship and abiding by the Jewish law. The oath of the Qumran community is a part of the initiation ceremonies for the candidates and includes their declaration about obeying the Jewish law. Taking an oath occupies an important position in the initiation ceremony of the Essenes. Josephus writes that those who want to enter the Essene community have an obligation to take a solemn oath relating to the rules of the community (*J.W.* 2:142). Thus, we observe that the religious oath in respect of the community rules or the Jewish law was significant in some Jewish groups.

We already observed that χειρόγραφον and χειρογραφεῖν are respectively employed to express the document and the action related to a declaration or an oath in the previous section. If so, χειρόγραφον used in Colossians 2:14 can be related to the document which recorded the declaration to observe the religious regulations taught by the false teaching. Removing χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14, then, reflects the reason why the Colossian believers do not have to adhere to the regulations. Thus, Christ nullified the validity of their previous declaration on the regulations through his crucifixion in Colossians 2:14.

We can consider the verb ἐξαλείφω (Col. 2:14) in this context. The verb ἐξαλείφω refers to an action of erasing a papyrus and is associated with the concept of freedom in the next papyrus (BGU 2:388):

ὕφελόμενοι αὐτῶν τὰς ... ταβέλλας τῆς ἐλευθερώσεως καὶ ἐτέραν ταβέλλαν μετὰ τὴν τοῦ ἐλευθερωθέντος τελευτήν καὶ ἐξαλείψαντες ἐκ τῶν τούτου ταβέλλων.

After the completion of manumission, the manumission document was removed, and erased (ἐξαλείψαντες) from these documents.

³⁶ As Cicero states, ‘whoever, therefore, violates his oath violates the faith’ (*Qui ius igitur iurandum violat is fidem violat*). *De Officiis* 3.104.

The verb ἐξαλείφω is used in the sense of erasing ταβέλλα (a written note) and is related to manumission in this case. In BGU 2:388, manumission is not only freedom from slavery, but also accompanies erasing a written note on slavery. So, manumission means a freedom from the legal foundation of slavery in this case. We have already discussed that χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 can be linked with some Colossian believers' declaration or oath on religious regulations. Some Colossian believers were required to obey religious regulations, but the cross of Christ offers the foundation that the Colossian believers are free from these. Thus, Christ has set the Colossian believers from their previous declaration or oath to observe religious regulations through his crucifixion.

In summary, we do not find any proper reason we should read χειρόγραφον as certificate of debt in the synchronic context of Colossians 2. There is no explicit mention of indebtedness and of the condemnatory function of the Law in Colossians 2. Alternatively, it seems that χειρόγραφον refers to the handwritten document which contains the declaration by the Colossians believers with regard to the observance of specific religious regulations.

4. Conclusion

We have explored the uses of χειρόγραφον in ancient papyri and ostraca and have concluded that χειρόγραφον does not refer to a debt certificate, contrary to Adolf Deißmann's view and the consensus of subsequent scholars (except for Arzt-Grabner). Χειρόγραφον can be redefined in the sense of the handwritten document which contains a private or public declaration or oath. We have also observed that χειρόγραφον and its cognate words are used in the formula of declaration (e.g. ὁμολογῶ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ χειρόγραφον) and with the expression of oath (e.g. χειρογραφία ὄρκου). Χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 can be interpreted in this context. Declaration or oath on the observance of the religious regulations was important in ancient paganism or Judaism. Thus, χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν in Colossians 2:14 can be read as a handwritten document containing the declaration or oath regarding the observance of religious regulations.