

In this post I continue to dig down into whether a poor Aramaic-speaking fisherman in rural Galilee could compose a highly sophisticated Greek treatise such as 1 Peter. In my last post I dealt broadly with the question of how many people in antiquity could write. In this post I turn my attention to Peter's own historical context, Roman Palestine. Is it true that boys were consistently taught literacy there and that it's plausible that one of them could write rhetorically effective Greek compositions?

I take the discussion, again, from my book Forged.

It is sometimes thought that Palestine was an exception, that in Palestine Jewish boys all learned to read so that they could study the Hebrew Scriptures, and that since they could read they could probably write. Moreover, it is often argued that in Palestine most adults were bilingual, or even trilingual, able to read Hebrew, speak the local language Aramaic, and communicate well in the language of the broader empire, Greek. Recent studies of literacy in Palestine, however, have shown convincingly that none of these assertions is true.

The fullest, most thoroughly researched, and widely influential study of literacy in Palestine during the period of the Roman empire is by Catherine Hezser.^[1] After examining all of the evidence Hezser concludes ...

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