

43. PARATEXTUAL MARKS

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Documents written in cursive scripts regularly exhibit various forms of correction, annotation, and ornamentation around the main text.

These lines, dashes, dots, symbols, and other characters in black or red ink are commonly referred to as *paratextual* marks. They were added at different stages of the writing process, either within or on the margins of the text. The number, form, and function of these marks varied according to the era, literary genre, support, and script. During the Old Kingdom, they were limited to funerary and administrative texts, but their use gradually spread to magical texts (Middle Kingdom) and literary texts (New Kingdom) on portable media (§36).

From the Old Kingdom onwards, separating lines and end marks (𓄿) structured the layout of certain monumental and cursive texts. In the Middle Kingdom, literary papyri saw the addition of the pause sign (𓄿), punctuation mark (•), and numbering (of lines, columns, and chapters). The New Kingdom saw the addition of filler dashes (→ and ⇐). At the same time, documentary texts came to include “check” marks: dots (•), dashes and slashes (–, |, /, ~), crosses (+, ×), and abbreviations (e.g. 𓄿 “absent” and 𓄿 “efficient”; Fig. 148), the use of which appears to have become systematised as early as the Middle Kingdom.

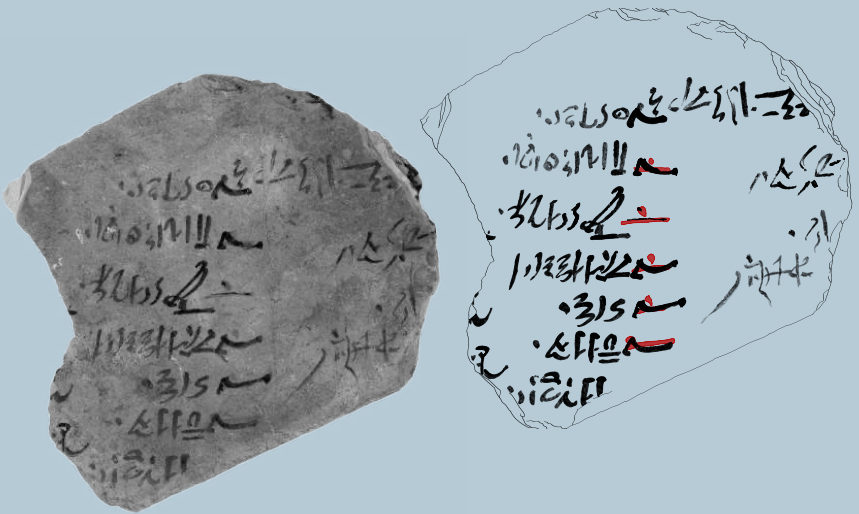


Fig. 148. O. DeM 912 Check marks 𓄿 (“absent”) corrected into 𓄿 (“arrived”). © IFAO, NU_2003_01620.

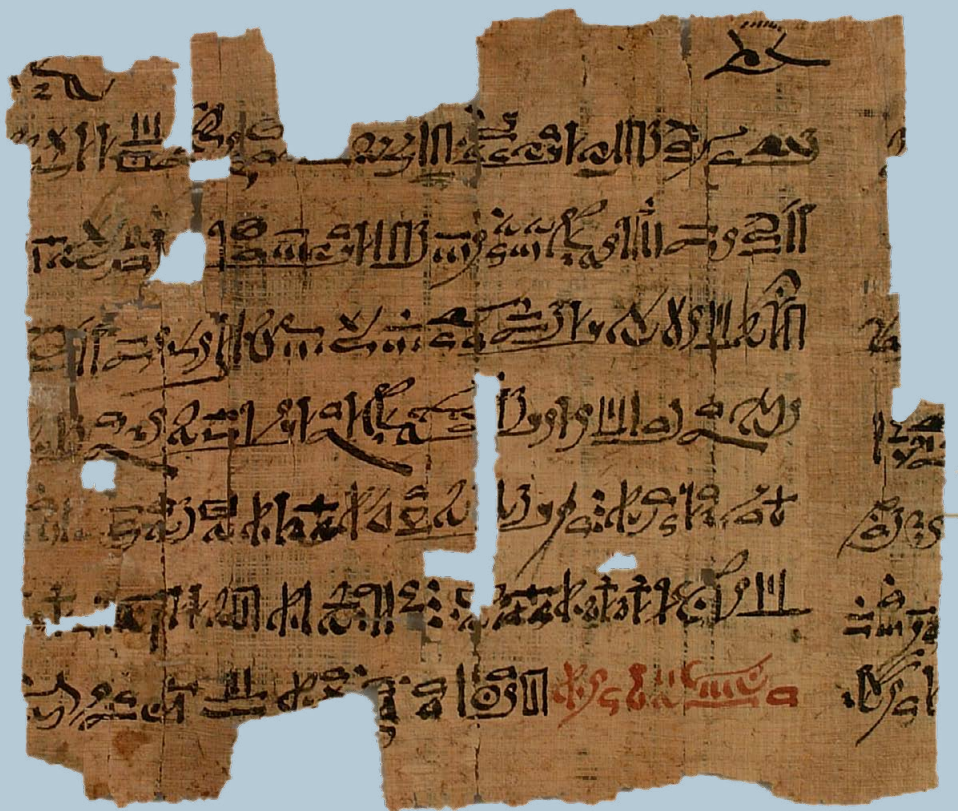


Fig. 149. P. DeM 1, r° 3, with ornamental paratextual marks in the upper margin. © IFAO.

The first emendation signs appeared during this period as well: crosses, dashes (single or multiple), semicircles, dotted circles, etc. Their use was only systematised in the Late Period, however, at which time the signs \int and λ also appeared, to indicate an addition and its insertion point. Furthermore, various notations, such as \equiv “vice versa” and \circ “repeat again”, told the reader how to read and recite the text, while other signs advised on the copying process, like R “gap in the text” or literally “found missing (in the source)”, + “variant” or literally “another manner of saying”. Signs were also used to mark dates. Lastly, some signs appear to reflect a form of ornamentation or calligraphic exercises and thematic indicators in the margins of literary manuscripts (Fig. 149).

Seemingly of secondary importance, these notations provide valuable information on how documents were (re)produced and used.