Introduction (pp. 1-8)

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The ancient Egyptians left behind a wealth of written sources—thousands of documents written on papyri, writing tablets, pieces of broken ceramics, stone stelae, even tomb and temple walls. These documents comprise a variety of genres, from literary narratives to administrative records to medical treatises, and illuminate the inner workings of ancient Egyptian society, from the details of great battles and temple rituals, to the salaries of royal workmen and petty conflicts between neighbors. Scribes were involved in the production of all of these documents, whether in their composition, their writing or carving, their canonization, or their preservation in collective memory. For most of the his- tory of modern Egyptology, Egyptologists have studied the texts ancient scribes left us in order to reconstruct life and culture in ancient Egypt. But these texts also provide insight into the scribes themselves—how they created these texts, how they passed them down over time, how they thought about their writings, how they envisioned themselves and their role in society—who have too often been neglected by Egyptologists in their study of ancient Egyptian culture.

Like many other textual studies fields, Egyptian philology has been strongly influenced by the methods of Karl Lachmann. In this type of textual criticism, the philologist seeks to establish genetic relationships between manuscripts: they examine textual variation in order to determine which manuscript was copied from which other manuscript, moving backward in time until they can reconstruct a lost "original" version of the text. This theoretical "Urtext" then becomes the basis for evaluating all surviving copies of a text, which are considered to be corruptions of the "original." Lachmannian textual criticism, and the discipline-internal frameworks Egyptologists have built around it, have long held sway in Egyptology. This approach to

Egyptian texts reveals an implicit interest in certain scribal practices—namely copying and transmission—but engages with these issues only superficially, often primarily for the purpose of identifying copying errors in the service of producing a more "correct" reconstruction.[1]

While Lachmannian textual criticism has made, and continues to make, important contributions to Egyptian philology—as do other major schools of text interpretation[2]—Egyptologists in recent years have begun to embrace more contextualized approaches to Egyptian texts, which seek to re-embed ancient manuscripts in their social, material, and historical contexts. Thanks to several groundbreaking works of scholarship on reading ancient Egyptian texts in context,[3] the field of Egyptian philology now explores alternative approaches to the study of texts. These new approaches engage with theoretical contributions in other disciplines—most notably material philology, originally developed in medieval studies, as well as literary criticism's new historicism and cultural studies' cultural materialism—in order to integrate text with manuscript and social, cultural, and political history. R.B. Parkinson, for example, finds meaning in scribes' patterns of dipping their brushes in their inkwells and reconstructs oral performances of poetry. C. Ragazzoli restores individuality to ancient scribes through their handwriting, which bears traces of their gestures, while F. Hagen reexamines the identification and interpretation of school exercises in the ancient Egyptian textual corpus. These works do not reject traditional modes of textual criticism, but rather demonstrate what can be gained from combining

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[1] On the history of philology in general and Karl Lachmann in particular, see Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), esp. 74–94; Paolo Trovato, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lachmann's Method: A Non- Standard Handbook of Genealogical Textual Criticism in the Age of Post-Structuralism, Cladistics, and Copy-Text*, trans. Federico Poole (Padua: Libreriauniversitaria.it, 2014). For an exam ple of the Lachmannian approach within Egyptology, see for example Stephan Jäger, *Altägyptische Berufstypologien* (Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, 2004), in which he tries to reconstruct the "Urtext" of *The Teaching of Khety*.

[2] See for instance, with references, Michael Friedrich, "Introduction: Towards a Holistic Study of Written Artefacts in Ancient History" in *The Ancient World Revisited: Material Dimensions of Written Artefacts*, eds. Marilina Betrò, Michael Friedrich, and Cécile Michel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), 1–28, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111360805-001.

[3] E.g. Richard B. Parkinson, *Reading Ancient Egyptian Poetry: Among Other Histories* (Chich- ester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Fredrik Hagen, *An Ancient Egyptian Literary Text in Context: The Instruction of Ptahhotep* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012); Chloé Ragazzoli, *Scribes: Les artisans du texte de l'Égypte ancienne (1550–1000)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2019).

"old" philology with "new" philologies that engage with archaeology, literary criticism, and social and cultural history.[4]

As a result of this shift in philologists' interests, ancient Egyptian scribes themselves, their practices, and their culture are increasingly coming to the fore.[5] Scribes were foundational to the creation, transmission, and reception of ancient Egyptian textual traditions and knowledge. Likewise, those textual traditions were essential to scribal culture and identity, which was based not only on scribes' intellectual activities, but also in the bodily practices and experiences of writing. Text, copyist, and the act of copying are inextricably inter- twined, and the study of one illuminates the study of the others. Thus, integrating text, manuscript, and context sheds new light on the production, transmission, and reception of ancient Egyptian texts and the key role of scribes in these processes.

The international conference "Looking Beyond the Text: Scribal Practices in Ancient Egypt," held in Mainz, May 16–18, 2023, explored the ancient Egyptian textual record by delving deeper than the texts themselves and focusing instead on the scribes who made these texts, the contexts in which they made them, the processes they employed, and what all of these can reveal about scribal culture in ancient Egypt. The present volume gathers a total of thirteen contributions, originally presented and discussed in Mainz, which explore various facets of scribal culture and practice.

The volume takes a broad understanding of the central concepts of scribes, scribal culture, and scribal practice—all rather nebulous terms with contested definitions that we believe must be understood flexibly and inclusively in order to accommodate the many ways of

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[4] For more on material philology, see Verena M. Lepper, *Untersuchungen zu pWestcar: Eine philologische und literaturwissenschaftliche (Neu-)Analyse* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 6–7; Parkinson, *Reading Ancient Egyptian Poetry*, 6–7, 272–276; Hagen, *Ptahhotep*, 26–27, 216–217. On the influence of new historicism and cultural materialism on Egyptian philology, see, e.g., Richard B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in the Middle Kingdom: A Dark Side to Perfection* (London: Equinox, 2002), 21–22, 27–29, 39–40, 101–102, 232.

[5] See for example the following works: Ragazzoli, *Scribes*; Niv Allon and Hana Navrátilová, *Ancient Egyptian Scribes: A Cultural Exploration* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Nathan Carlig et al., *Signes dans les textes: Continuités et ruptures des pratiques scribales en Égypte pharaonique, gréco-romaine et byzantine; Actes du colloque international de Liège (2–4 juin 2016)* (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2020); Rodney Ast et al., *Observing the Scribe at Work: Scribal Practice in the Ancient World* (Leuven: Peeters, 2021). See also the numerous publications by the project "Crossing Boundaries: Understanding Complex Scribal Practices in Ancient Egypt" and its team members (accessed March 22, 2024, http://web.philo.ulg.ac.be/x-bound/publications/).

writing, reading, and self-identifying in ancient Egypt.[6] The volume understands "scribe" as a term for the people involved in the writing, copying, and usage of the manuscripts—the "compiler, composer, editor, and corrector of text" described by R. Yuen-Collingridge,[7] as well as a reader—that relates to both a profession and a social identity.[8] By "scribal culture," we mean the practices and beliefs of ancient Egyptian scribes that informed their social functions, identities, and self-perceptions, and that can be at least partially understood through analysis of the evidence they left behind, including manuscripts, textual and artistic representations of scribes and other forms of scribal discourse, scribal equipment, and other artifacts. The umbrella of "scribal culture" includes not only writing activities, but also issues of self-fashioning and self-presentation, the development of scribal ideals, and scribal education and initiation. Finally, we understand "scribal practice" as the activities scribes performed in the production of texts and manuscripts. These activities include textual practices (e.g., excerpting, editing, redacting) and paratextual practices (e.g., punctuation, formatting, ink dipping), as well as the embodied experiences of writing (e.g., ergonomics of manuscripts, preparation of writing media and tools, visual or aural copying).[9]

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[6] On the difficulties of defining scribes and their associated activities and beliefs, see, e.g., Niv Allon and Hana Navrátilová, *Scribal Culture in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer- sity Press, 2023), 2–12; Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, "Observing the Scribe at Work," in *Observing the Scribe at Work: Scribal Practice in the Ancient World*, eds. Rodney Ast et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2021): 1–8; Massimiliano Samuele Pinarello, *An Archaeological Discussion of Writing Practice: Deconstruction of the Ancient Egyptian Scribe* (London: Golden House Publications, 2015).

[7] Yuen-Collingridge, "Observing the Scribe at Work," 4.

[8] While we appreciate the need for a more precise definition of "scribe"—one that can accommodate the full spectrum of professional and non-professional activities and complexities of social and cultural identities, while still being restricted enough to be a meaningful emic category, as well as useful analytic category for scholars today—this desideratum is outside the scope of the present volume, which is more interested in writing practices, their mate- rial traces, and the potential avenues of future inquiry that can be identified by studying this evidence.

[9] The boundaries between these categories are somewhat fluid, due in part to writing's nature as both intellectual and physical, as well as to a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes paratext—a term first proposed by G. Genette in the 1980s, implicitly for modern literary traditions—in ancient Egyptian manuscripts. On this issue, see, e.g., Carlig et al., *Signes dans les textes*, especially Jean Winand, "Quand le texte ne suffit plus: Éléments de réflexion sur la notion de paratexte dans l'Égypte ancienne"; or Giovanni Ciotti and Hang Lin, "Preface," in *Tracing Manuscripts in Time and Space through Paratexts*, eds. Giovanni Ciotti and Hang Lin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), vii–xii, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110479010-001.

The broadest question that guides the volume, like Ariadne's thread, is how did the physical practices of writing, as well as social contexts and cultural conceptions of writing and scribedom, shape the production, transmission, and reception of texts and manuscripts in ancient Egypt? In order to begin answering this multifaceted question, and its various accompanying methodological questions, this volume brings together scholars studying Egyptian texts from a variety of periods and genres, who employ new and varied approaches to studying scribal practices and their impact on scribal culture and identity. The volume's scope is comprehensive, ranging from the Old Kingdom to the Coptic era, with papers exploring manuscripts of poems, legal texts, letters, medical compendia, and religious corpora, among other genres. The variety of text gen- res is accompanied by a variety of manuscript media, from papyri to ostraca, from stelae to tomb walls, and even digital projections of ancient manuscripts. By bringing together such a diverse array of papers, we hope to illuminate commonalities in scribal practices across periods, areas, and genres of text production, as well as to expand beyond the traditional boundaries of Egyptology to explore theories and methods from other disciplines—including literary studies, neuroscience, and book history—that can be brought to bear on ancient Egyptian material.

Rather than a strict chronological presentation, papers are organized into thematic sections in order to foster discussion and identify avenues of further research.

The volume opens with thoughts on **Social Contexts** during the second half of the second millennium BCE. **Kathryn E. Bandy** tells the story of Tell Edfu Ostracon 131, a rare late Second Intermediate Period copy of *The Instruc- tion of a Man for his Son*, through the lens of its physicality and material- ity, with consideration of its unique archaeological and historical contexts. With a focus on the visual features of the Amduat tabular version in kv 34 (Thutmose III), **Jordan Miller** seeks to understand the transmission process by comparison with the long and short versions. He also investigates the tomb's suitability as an educational and initiatory space for scribes(-in-training), in conjunction with its opportunities for a specific royal self-presentation cen- tered around these concepts. Drawing on P. Turin C, **Judith Jurjens** recon- structs, step by step, the colophon ending the copy of *The Blinding of Truth by Falsehood* on P. BM EA 10682 (P. Chester Beatty II). Its content suggests literary activities were occurring in the mortuary temple of Ramesses iii in Medinet Habu. It also reveals another possible instructor-apprentice relation-ship, like the well-known contemporaneous relationship between Qageb and his apprentice Inena.

The concepts of scribe, scribal culture, and scribal practice are

intimately intertwined with **Education and Formation** in ancient Egypt, a topic about which much ink has been spilled, yet many questions remain unresolved. This section contributes to this ongoing discussion with two papers. **Amr El Hawary**'s paper is an examination of the so-called "crossword" stela (BM EA 194), which contains a hymn to the goddess Mut written within a grid, whose squares have three reading directions. Through a selection of examples, he illustrates its educational purpose for skilled scribes as an initiatory game. **Rowida AboBakr Mohamed Fawzy**, on the other hand, raises new questions about Coptic education in Thebes. Focusing on a rare legal exercise, o.TT157 Inv.478/1, she provides new insight into secular education at a time when religious education was strongly prevalent. Both papers illustrate how textual traditions contributed to the construction of scribal culture and identities.

The third section moves to **Writing Mechanics**, whose reconstruction allows one to better understand the human agents hiding behind a written artifact: its copyist(s). Six Middle Kingdom letters, written on papyri and wooden boards, constitute the case study of **Ahmed Osman**. Building on virtual grid systems and the conceptual metaphor of time as space, he argues that the elongated upright signs and the many phonetic complements in their epistolary formulae may have been intended to indicate stress patterns for oral performance. Papyri copied by multiple scribes display other writing mechanics. In his paper, **Émil Joubert** discusses the copying process of a selection of 21st Dynasty funerary papyri and the ways scribes addressed the complexities of retrograde writing to favor either the text's legibility or the papyrus' aesthetic appearance. The third paper, by **Juliane Unger**, focuses on the additions, mistakes, corrections, ink dippings, handwritings, layout, and paratext of a Late Period papyrus (P. Brooklyn 47.218.75 + 86) from an institutional library. These features of the manuscript allow her to reconstruct the life of a collection of medical recipes, from the moment they were copied by the first scribe, to the later additions of two other scribes. Through its uses and reuses from library to private context, this artifact exemplifies particularly well the practice of writing as a "socially embedded act."[10]

Scribal Materials, be they the tools of the scribe or the selected writing medium, also highlight the role of the copyists and are the focus of the fourth section. **Leah Packard-Grams** approaches the Tebtunis papyri of "Scribe X" as evidence of embodied experiences of writing during the late Ptolemaic period. She observes how the

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[10] Allon and Navrátilová, *Scribal Culture in Ancient Egypt*, 8.

writing tool, a reed pen (*kalamos*) rather than a rush, impacted the scribe's Demotic writing. She then expands her observations, drawing on experimental archaeology and neuroscience to discuss how the *kalamos* influenced the scribe's sensory experience of writing and spatial awareness and eased his shifting between languages. Through her paper, **Chana Algarvio** aims to build bridges between various disciplines through a shared terminology. She advocates for a conceptual framework (*book as idea*), in which the term "book" is dissociated from its materiality, in line with cataloging practices in library and information science and recent research in book history. In a second step, she discusses the framework's applicability to often-disregarded text mediums, with stone as a case study.

The final section focuses on **Transmission and Reception**, which are explored in three papers. **Roberto Antonio Díaz Hernandez** delves into Middle Kingdom mortuary literature to expose its diglossia and bilingualism, examining mechanical errors and conceptual variants,[11] as well as shift-induced interference. With the many surviving copies of *Prebend of Amun*, part of the Demotic Inaros stories, **Jacqueline Jay** exposes (conscious) meaningful variants and (unconscious) less meaningful differences, which she terms "memory variants." This approach helps her to frame the contexts of use and reception of this narrative. **Susanne Töpfer** addresses the question of reception from the point of view of the museum curator. Her aim is to improve museum visitors' engagement with key written artifacts through the help of infographics, video projections, and interactive installations, with the goal of making ancient Egyptian manuscripts both more attractive and more intelligible to the general public.

The thirteen papers in this volume explore new directions of philological study and advocate for more contextualized and materially informed philologies. It is our hope that *Looking Beyond the Text* will contribute to the ongoing shifts in Egyptian philology's primary topics of inquiry and methods, as well as demonstrate the necessity of fully acknowledging the various facets of scribal culture and scribal practice as integral components of Egyptian textual studies.

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[11] Chloé Ragazzoli, "Beyond Authors and Copyists: The Role of Variation in Ancient Egyptian and New Kingdom Literary Production," in *(Re)Productive Traditions in Ancient Egypt: Pro- ceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Liège, 6th–8th February 2013*, ed. Todd Gillen (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2017), 95–126.

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