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Scribes, Repertoires, and Variation

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> 'Texts are unlikely to provide good evidence if they are used primarily to reconstruct something else' (Merja Stenroos).

§1. FREE VARIATION AND SCRIBAL REPERTOIRES

As in spoken language, variation abounds in written texts. In the case of the latter, linguistic and extralinguistic variation coexists: one finds variation in lexical and grammatical features, on the one hand, and in other textual parameters such as orthography, phraseology and formulary, palaeography, layout, and formatting, on the other. Such variation occurs both within the written output of individuals and across broader corpora that represent 'communities' of diverse types.

Scholarly reactions to such variation vary. Philologists have tended to subject variation in texts (and manuscripts) to an anachronistic aesthetic judgement, or to emend it out of existence in text editions. The assumption underlying such practices seems to be that modern scholars know better than earlier scribes; the corresponding conclusion is that modern scholars are entitled to abstract from textual variation (often viewed as 'scribal errors' or 'textual corruption') in order to reconstruct coherent, homogeneous linguistic entities. In this respect, the views of traditional philologists intersect with those of some theoretical linguists, who hold that variation and other 'extraneous' performance factors are obstacles to linguistic analysis.[1]

In contrast to such views, sociolinguists have long considered variation to be an opportunity to understand the relationships between languages and the societies in which they are embedded. However, until fairly recently, sociolinguists have

[1] See, for example, Hale (2007, 19–26). Also, on this point, see the discussion by Stenroos in the current volume.

tended to focus their attention on synchronic variation in spoken language. It is precisely in the gap left by traditional philologists, historical linguists, and synchronically-oriented sociolinguists that a broad spectrum of contemporary linguistic approaches and frameworks has emerged: from 'sociophilology' (Wright 2002) to 'historical sociolinguistics' (Bergs 2005) and 'sociohistorical linguistics' (Romaine 1982), as well as a range of critical voices emerging from diverse philological disciplines (Cerquiglini 1989 and Fleischman 2000, to name but two). These frameworks have argued that variation in texts or, more specifically, manuscripts can and should be taken as data for empirical research and as an opportunity for framing new research questions.[2]

The papers collected in this volume reflect different approaches to and perspectives on the issue of variation; some are primarily associated with linguistics, but others deal with problems that are traditionally considered to fall within the purview of philology, the critical study of manuscripts and texts. In order to encapsulate this, we use the inclusive term 'scribal repertoires', a concept that is intended to cover the entire set of linguistic and non-linguistic practices that are prone to variation within and between manuscripts. Furthermore, it is probably artificial to draw too firm a distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic features, since we are dealing with written language and the way in which linguistic forms are written. The concept 'scribal repertoires' also serves to place focus on scribes as socially and culturally embedded agents, whose choices are reflected in texts. Scribal repertoires are shaped by education and experience; while they will be shared to an extent by members of a given community, they will not be exactly the same for any two individuals.

Socio-historical approaches to texts and manuscripts have made much progress in the study of western European languages, most notably Germanic and Romance languages.[3] However, these research frameworks have barely begun to penetrate other linguistic and philological disciplines.[4] In some cases,

[2] See also Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003).

[3] See, for example, the references cited above.

[4] For Egypt (the focus of this volume), such studies do exist, but they are rare. Some notable examples include Eyre 1979 (see pp. 86–7 especially, on palaeography); Funk 1988 (linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of dialects as realized in manuscripts); Goldwasser 1990, 1992, 1999 (registers and diglossia); Janssen 1987 (palaeographic variation within the writing of specific grammatical items within the texts of a single scribe and between those by several, and the possible reasons for this); Prada 2013 (use of extralinguistic marks to distinguish between grammatical features); Richter 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2008b (language contact, genre- and register-specific repertoires, social aspects of language use in general); and Sweeney 1994, 1995, 1998 (gender, idiolects). These are demonstrative of an interest in applying historical sociolinguistic methods and concerns to the study of Egyptian, but they are still uncommon.

This is also not to say that other regions of the ancient world would not also be excellent settings for such analyses. Mesopotamia provides a wealth of written material over a long period of time. An example of variation in cuneiform tablets is found in the series of seventh-century tablets inscribed with an oath to uphold the succession of Esarhaddon, king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, by the crown prince Assurbanipal ("Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty"). With copies and fragments found in the Assyrian cities of Nimrud and Assur, as well as a copy on the other side of the empire

this is more or less justified—relatively few of the world's past and present languages have a long and bountiful tradition of writing. But in others, the attested documentation renders the study of variation possible—and necessary—in order to better understand the premodern and modern societies with which we are concerned.

The central aim of this volume is to demonstrate some of the ways in which we can approach the fact of variation in scribal texts. In essence, the papers collected here all ask what we can learn about texts, their authors or copyists, and the social worlds in which they lived and worked if we take variation seriously. As their source material, these papers use different types of texts, from different periods, in different languages and scripts. They provide a diversity of approaches and perspectives towards the primary evidence, which can be used in the development of further studies. Furthermore, since they deal with Egypt—at once outside of Europe and yet never detached from it—they provide valuable comparative data for the field of historical sociolinguistics, which has a strong research bias towards the better-known languages of western Europe.

§2. GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL SCOPE OF THE VOLUME

The volume opens with two papers dealing with premodern English, which differ significantly from the others in time and place. While these articles might seem out of place in a collection devoted to scribal cultures of Egypt, their inclusion is crucial. Their main purpose is to sketch the scope and goals of socio-historical linguistics for the unacquainted reader. It is in the philological disciplines devoted to the study of western European languages that the most advanced theoretical and methodological frameworks have been articulated. They introduce the conceptual toolbox common to contemporary historical sociolinguistics, from notions such as 'text language', 'manuscript community', and 'social network', to innovative—even radical—perspectives about what we can ask of scribal texts. These papers frame and contextualize the papers dealing with both the indigenous and non-indigenous languages of premodern Egypt. This framework is embraced and applied to Ancient Egyptian by Polis (Chapter 4), whose paper serves as a bridge between the two worlds.

While Stenroos (Chapter 2) takes a broad approach to medieval English, Bergs (Chapter 3) focuses on two case studies in eastern England: the letters written by the Paston family, a well-known family from fifteenth-century

in Tell Tayinat, this corpus provides a wealth of textual variants—orthographic, phonetic, semantic, etc.—for analysis. Current analysis of this variation, being undertaken by Jacob Lauinger (Johns Hopkins University), focuses on scribal production and is illustrative of the potential for future work.

Norfolk, and an eleventh-century chronicle from an abbey of sixty monks in Peterborough. While removed in many ways from the Egyptian material, there are several points of contact: they deal with transitions between phases of the same language—e.g. from Old to Middle English with the Peterborough Chronicle and in a closer time frame between generations of a single family—and the potential issue of language contact and the variation that arises from writing in a non-native language, which may be the case with the Peterborough Chronicle.

As noted above, Egypt is the geographic area in focus here, but the case studies presented span thousands of years as well as a number of languages and sociocultural milieus. The scope of the papers collected ranges from the period of indigenous (Pharaonic) rulers to later times, in which Egypt was conquered and became part of the empires of foreign nations: Roman, Byzantine, and Arab. The texts were therefore written under different circumstances, from periods when traditional Egyptian religion, Christianity, and Islam were the dominant religious forces in the country. Several stages of the indigenous Egyptian language are represented (Late Egyptian: Polis, Winand; demotic: Mairs, Ryholt, Quack; Coptic: Boud'hors, Cromwell, Richter) as well as Greek and Latin (Clarysse, Halla-aho, Mairs), on the one hand, and Hebrew (Wagner and Outhwaite), on the other. These languages are written in a number of native writing systems, as well as later alphabetic scripts. The chronological range and changing political climates create the environment within which these different systems came into contact, creating bilingual (and at times trilingual) documents, as language contact becomes increasingly prevalent, or at least visible in written texts.

At present, there are significant disciplinary divides even within Egyptology. Scholars tend to focus on Coptic, demotic, or pre-demotic Egyptian, and while there are often strong links between Greek and Latin papyrology, on the one hand, and demotic or Coptic papyrology, on the other, it is only in recent years that similar links have begun to be forged between Egyptian (demotic and Coptic), Greek, and Arabic.[5] While the study of medieval Hebrew is often dealt with in connection with medieval Arabic, it is only rarely that the former is at all considered in the context of the other linguistic and textual traditions of premodern Egypt.

The nature and quantity of documentation are not equal over the four millennia covered. While some periods and places are nearly black holes for the modern observer, others provide us with almost incomparably richer materials. The Theban region in southern Egypt has produced high numbers of documents in hieratic, demotic, Greek, and Coptic, providing information, if not consistently then for much of the period, from *c.*1200 BCE to 800 CE.[6] Conversely,

[5] As an example of the working relationships being fostered between specialists in different fields, see Mairs and Martin (2008/2009) and Naether and Renberg (2010).

[6] This, and the following information, is based on statistics from Verreth (2009), concerning texts written (as opposed to found) in the sites in question, for the 1,600 years spanning the eighth century BCE to eighth century CE. For Thebes there are 349 hieratic, 3,681 demotic, 9,284 Greek,

some sites provide only a snapshot of a single time. One of the most notable of these is Pathyris (Gebelein), only 30 km south of Thebes, for which the papyrological material is mostly confined to those texts produced between 188 and 86 BCE, when the site was the location of a minor military base.[7]

Within the studies offered, four such rich situations stand out. The first is the New Kingdom village of Deir el-Medina (*c.*1500–1050 BCE) on the west bank of Thebes, the village of the workmen responsible for building and decorating the royal tombs of this period. Polis' and Winand's contributions deal with texts from this site. In the same region, but two millennia later, is the seventh-/eighth-century-CE town of Djeme, built within Medinet Habu, the mortuary complex of Ramses III. Djeme was part of a larger, connected western Theban region that included several monasteries and hermitages, which have produced a wealth of monastic and secular material. The papers by Boud'hors and Cromwell focus on texts from both domains. The west bank of Thebes is also the site of the Ptolemaic (second century BCE) priestly community dealt with in Mairs' study of bilingual legal documents. The third is the Fayum region, as represented by studies focusing on demotic (Ryholt and, in part, Quack) and Greek (Clarysse) texts, with texts coming from both the large temple estates (see the temple library from Tebtunis, examined by Ryholt) and private landowners, in the case of Greek texts.[8] Finally, there is the Cairo Genizah, a collection of over 190,000 Jewish manuscript fragments written in Hebrew, Judaeo-Arabic, and Arabic, which was found in the storeroom of the Ben Ezra synagogue in Old Cairo (Fusṭāṭ). Hebrew letters from this corpus are the focus of the study by Wagner and Outhwaite.[9]

and 3,504 Coptic texts. These statistics do not provide a chronological breakdown of when the documents were written.

[7] For Pathyris, Verreth (2009) lists 1,005 demotic and 234 Greek texts (no hieratic texts are included for the period in study and only four Coptic texts, all of which concern a fifth-century group of Blemmyes at the site). The language of these has been the focus of recent studies; see, for example, Vierros 2007, 2008, and 2012 (and the references therein). It is important to stress that the statistics in Verreth (2009) are based on the papyrological material dated after the eighth century BCE, and this is not to say that no written records survive from earlier periods. As a prime example, see the First Intermediate Period (*c.* 2125–1975 BCE) stela of Iti, which records how he supplied his town during famine (see Lichtheim 1973, 88–9 and references therein), which is vital not only for the study of the history of this period but, from a philological perspective, for the study of early Egyptian biographies. Further restrictions concerning the utility of Verreth's statistics are discussed in n. 10.

[8] As is the case with the Zenon archive, one of the studies discussed by Clarysse. This corpus is the focus of ongoing linguistic analysis, for which see especially Evans 2010a and 2012 (and see therein for background). Found at Tebtunis, but concerning a village not far to the north-west of it, is also the archive of the scribe Menches, *komogrammateus* of Kerkeosiris (see Verhoogt 1998). This archive has yet to undergo a linguistic analysis, such as that for the Zenon material (but is an excellent candidate for such a study).

[9] Research on Hebrew texts from the Genizah is far more advanced than Arabic papyrology, as noted by Grob 2010, xiii n. 1. Grob's excellent study on the form, function, content, and context of Arabic letters on papyrus from the seventh to tenth centuries starts to redress this imbalance. Here, she raises many of the same issues relevant to the issue of variation and the reasons for it,

The data available for these sites allows us to frame and pursue research questions that are difficult for other periods. In this respect, the pre-New Kingdom periods of Egypt's history (i.e. pre-1540) especially spring to mind.[10] In part, this is connected with the type of written material available for study. As will be discussed in the following sections, the majority of the case studies here take non-literary material as their primary evidence, that is, letters and other documentary genres. The exceptions are the papers by Ryholt and Quack, which primarily focus on demotic literary works, and Richter, whose study is on 'semi-literary' texts. For most of Egypt's history, especially before the New Kingdom, relatively few large corpora of non-literary documents have survived. Nevertheless, where they do survive, our knowledge of the work of individual scribes, which at times includes literary and non-literary documents, allows us to examine their repertoires, focusing on the ways in which genre/*Textsorte* or register informs their scribal choices. For example, Polis provides a detailed study of the linguistic choices of a single New Kingdom scribe, Amenakhte son of Ipuy, who wrote or copied numerous literary and non-literary texts.

To varying degrees, each period and each place was characterized by its own particular scribal culture, its own set of practices, embedded in an ever-changing socio-historical context. One of the goals of this volume is to encourage the kind of research that would make possible the search for continuities and discontinuities or transformations in scribal cultures in a single area whose texts cover a range of dates, cultures, and languages. The contributions to the current study raise several key concepts, and set up the possibilities for future research on many of these—as well as other—points.

§3. MAIN THEMES

§3.1. From Scribes to Text Communities

Bergs and Stenroos stress that the object of research in historical sociolinguistics is not the 'Holy Grail of the vernacular', but rather the constraints on variation

from language use (including whether or not a 'Documentary Standard' can be postulated on the basis of such letters as a counterpart to the Literary Standard of Classical Arabic), layout and palaeography, how speech is mapped onto the documents, how the relationships between the different parties are encoded, and so on (Grob 2010, xvii).

[10] The statistics provided by Verreth (2009) start only from the eighth century BCE, so it is not possible to produce comparable statistics that cover Egypt's entire history, and the information in question is documentary, thus excluding a wealth of other text types. For the period in question (eighth century BCE to eighth century CE), 110,174 texts are included (since the compilation of these figures on 23 August 2009, insufficient numbers of texts have been published that would significantly alter them). Of these, the overwhelming majority are Greek (76,182 = 69.1%), followed by demotic (14,136 = 12.8%) and Coptic (9,976 = 9.1%), followed by texts written in hieroglyphs (4.2%), Latin (3.6%), hieratic (1.3%), and Aramaic (1.1%), with numerous languages represented by much smaller numbers.

in written texts. Such variation often turns out to be anything but 'random, chaotic, or riddled with "free variation"'. One of the main ways of seeing past the messiness of the data—and identifying patterns of variation—is to return to the individual language user. In the context of the present volume, this often means the scribe. However, we interpret the category 'scribe' rather broadly (and conveniently) to include not only individuals who copied manuscripts, but also authors (understood broadly to include those responsible for 'everyday writing'[11]), translators, and editors. This conceptualization is necessary because modern conceptions of scribes might not be cross-culturally valid. For example, McIntosh (1963) shows that for Middle English scribes, there is a scale with *literatim* copyists at one end and translators at the other, with a wide range of interim possibilities.

In many cases dealt with in the present volume, we are lucky enough to know at least something about the scribes in question: a name, place of activity, family members or associates, the nature of his social relations with an addressee, his religious and economic practices. Even when this information is known (Clarysse and Halla-aho), the goal of the authors in this volume is not necessarily to focus on what we can deduce about the writers themselves, but about the implications of their language selection upon wider social issues. Other papers explicitly focus on certain known individuals, being close micro-studies of aspects of their work.

For example, the texts written by the scribe Amennakhte son of Ipuy from Deir el-Medina are dealt with by Polis, who analyses the parameters of linguistic variation according to the genre of his texts, allowing an identification of the written registers or selections operating within his repertoire. This detailed analysis demonstrates that the variation at the level of an individual scribe is far from being random and is almost entirely free from 'unmotivated or asystemic idiosyncracies'. Boud'hors' study contrasts the work of two monks, from seventh- and eighth-century Thebes, who lived at different times in the same cell—Mark and Frange. Palaeographic and linguistic analyses of their respective dossiers show how diverse they were as scribes. Their unequal graphic skill (Mark exhibits better penmanship) and different use of language (Frange writes in a style more influenced by regional traits and personal habits) set them apart. On one hand, this is indicative of education level and social position, but on the other hand, the time separating them (perhaps fifty years or more) must also be a factor, especially as during this period Egypt was undergoing a series of administrative changes following the Arab conquest.

It is within the same historical and geographic framework that Cromwell's study is set. In this paper, we move away from the focus on a single scribe to the work of multiple scribes producing legal documents and the degree of variation

[11] This is the term used by Bagnall (2011), which is not entirely synonymous with documentary texts and does not exclude literary and semi-literary texts, depending on their form and social usages, which are more important than content (see especially p. 3).

found between them, specifically focusing on one formulaic component. Scribes can be grouped together based on the language and formulae that they used. Here, 'used' rather than 'chose' is an important distinction, as it is argued that the decisions made by these scribes are not necessarily personal ones but are rather indicative of the type of training that they received. Again, variation is not arbitrary but influenced by factors derived from the professional networks within which the scribes worked.

These three papers collectively exhibit a spectrum, from the individual scribe to multiple scribes to scribal communities. Wagner and Outhwaite's contribution encompasses a much broader scribal community. The Judaeo-Arabic letters from Egypt are placed within the wider community of Hebrew letters from Palestine and Babylonia, as well as the native and antique Egyptian tradition and those of Arabic–Islamic correspondences. This brings us back to Stenroos' contribution and the concept of text community, a flexible term that must be defined for each study, but which refers to groups of text with something in common. In these instances, we know the region involved, the history of the period, and many of the individuals who interacted in this time. The texts were not produced in isolation, but by living and interacting language users.

This is not to say that anonymous texts, or those lacking precise provenance, have less to offer. In some scribal cultures, including within Egypt, anonymous manuscripts are the norm, but this does not mean that the study of the variation therein cannot yield new insights. Richter and Winand deal with anonymous scribes, but much can be learned about their practices as individuals and as members of scribal communities, as well as their probable sites of activity.

A recurring theme is that of scribal education and training. Many of the papers deal with this issue to a limited extent, often emphasizing how little we know about the reality of such training. However, the search for text communities is often accompanied by the assumption that the clustering of shared practices is indicative of a shared background or 'school of practices'. This matter is prominent in the paper by Cromwell, but is also discussed in the papers of Boud'hors, who mentions Frange's role as a teacher, and of Quack, who examines the local successes of particular writing styles in Roman Egypt as traces of broader sociopolitical changes with deep consequences for scribal education.

§3.2. Types of Variation

Looking at individual scribes tends to reduce the amount of variation observed in a corpus, since an individual scribal repertoire might not comprehend the totality of variation observed across a broader corpus. A focus on individual scribes intersects with another methodological issue prominent in the study of written language, namely, the conceptualization of the data used. If, in everyday parlance, one speaks of 'dead languages', there has been a trend in

sociolinguistically-oriented philology and linguistics to reconfigure the data as 'text languages' (Fleischman 2000). Taking this a step further, Stenroos argues that 'text languages' are better thought of as 'manuscript languages', in order to reflect the nature of the actual data and to emphasize the kind of research questions and methods that would be appropriate for their study.

For example, contemporary scholars of variation in written texts have begun to study the relationship between individual scribes and manuscripts and the communities in which they are embedded, using a range of methods that can be described collectively as 'social network' approaches. Pioneered by Milroy (1987) for the study of spoken language, social network theory has been expanded to the study of written texts by Bergs (2005) and others. While Bergs in this volume focuses on scribal networks (e.g. in the Paston letter corpus), Stenroos develops a framework that is highly fruitful for situations in which we have anonymous manuscripts. Stenroos' flexible concept of text community, 'a group of texts that have something in common, so that it makes sense to refer to them as an entity', has yielded impressive results for the study of variation in Middle English, and it is certain that it can—and should—be applied to other 'manuscript languages'.

Both of these concepts (scribal networks and text communities) are the focus of Polis' paper on a single scribe active in Deir el-Medina. Polis deals with orthographical variation, on the one hand, and lexical, morphological, and syntactic variation, on the other, showing the significant impact of register and genre on the latter. For example, a marker of topicalization (*ir*) is avoided in literary registers, while abundantly attested in non-literary texts by the same author. Adjectives are shown to be rarer in non-literary texts than in literary texts. In some cases, orthography and syntax intersect: Polis shows that the graphic presence or omission of a tense-aspect marker is dependent on syntactic context. Moreover, the careful study of a single scribe's corpus over his entire career clearly demonstrates that individual scribal usage can change over time; these 'micro-diachronic' changes in the individual scribe's active repertoire are examined against the background of broader patterns of change within the scribal community at the site.

Other papers to address parameters of variation typically considered to be 'linguistic,' i.e. variation in lexical and grammatical features, include Halla-aho's. Here she shows that for dictated Greek letters from Egypt, while orthography and, to a lesser extent, morphology reflect the scribe's repertoire, syntax tends to be that of the (dictating) author. However, there is no reason that the framework of historical sociolinguistics should not be applied to other types of variation, as demonstrated by the studies here that deal with other socio-historical aspects of scribal repertoires. To take two examples, which will be dealt with in greater detail below, Clarysse discusses the ways that epistolary formulary employed by scribes encode social power asymmetries between superiors and subordinates, while Richter reconstructs the social and intellectual milieu of a

group of scribes, based on their sophisticated use of different graphic codes as 'high' and 'low' varieties.

Palaeographical variation is addressed by a number of papers, although the only paper to focus almost entirely on handwriting is Quack's. Quack demonstrates that for the Ptolemaic period we can identify palaeographical regionalization—the development of distinctive local norms—in cursive (hieratic and demotic) manuscripts. It is striking that these norms can be limited to quite small areas, with considerable differences found between relatively close locales. Quack argues that this regionalization cannot be divorced from significant sociopolitical changes, especially changes in the status of political elites, the breakdown of a dominant supraregional 'centre', and the consequent decentralization of scribal training. In essence, Quack proposes that sociopolitical institutions and agents that previously held a more or less standardized norm in place were no longer able to do so, leading to the destandardization of cursive Egyptian writing. Quack concludes with several provocative proposals regarding the 'success' of certain types of hands, raising the possibility that these hands persisted due to the high prestige of the individual scribal teachers who innovated and disseminated them.

Palaeography is also emphasized, but not exclusively, in Boud'hors' study of the repertoires of two scribes from the Theban area. Boud'hors compares the respective dossiers of documents written by Mark, a seventh-century priest, and Frange, a monk active in the first half of the eighth century. Mark wrote letters and wall inscriptions, but also copied literary manuscripts, some of which have survived, while Frange's dossier mostly comprises letters, and the evidence for other forms of scribal activity, e.g. copying, is more tenuous. Boud'hors sketches the differences in their palaeographical and linguistic practices, showing how scribal repertoires changed over time in a single area. While Mark wrote a standard Sahidic dialect and shows evidence of having been trained in both Coptic and Greek, Frange's usage is heavily localized, with the linguistic features typical of the destandardized repertoire of the Theban area. Boud'hors identifies both orthographical–phonological and morpho-syntactical Theban features in Frange's repertoire, features that may have been known to Mark but were not part of his active repertoire. Some of these features, including a still poorly understood verbal construction, appear to be idiolectal marks. Moreover, while Mark's hand remained relatively stable, that of Frange—something of a palaeographic chameleon, able to imitate well the hand of others—changed throughout his career. Boud'hors attributes the differences between Mark's and Frange's repertoires to a range of factors: level of education, social position, and large-scale changes in the written representation of language after the Arab conquest of Egypt.

Cromwell takes variation in legal formulae as the basis for a preliminary study to isolate what Stenroos would call text communities in early Islamic Djeme. The religious invocation at the beginning of legal documents is used as

a case study to illustrate how much information can be extracted from close analysis of language selection (here Greek or Coptic), orthography, and palaeography, and what these reveal when examined together. While orthography appears to reflect competency rather than training, palaeography is shown to be an extra dimension in language choice. Palaeographical variation reveals the intriguing phenomenon of bigraphism, the use of two different scripts in the same text by a single scribe: Djeme scribes wrote Greek either in the writing typical of Greek documents or in the same script used for writing Coptic. Some scribal repertoires included a distinction between the two, while others were limited to the Coptic system for writing both Coptic and Greek. This corpus has the great advantage that many texts are dated (a few absolutely) and bear the names of the scribes that wrote them. Dossiers of work by different individuals can be compiled as a result. Two connected observations result from this study: functional domain, i.e. the types of documents that a scribe produces, is not a unifying factor (scribes producing the same types of texts write in different styles); and scribes show greater similarities with their direct contemporaries than those writing in the previous generation or generations.

The palaeographic 'matrix system' of late Coptic alchemical manuscripts is examined by Richter, as one part of the strategies and repertoires available to scribes (see §3.3). Collectively, Boud'hors, Cromwell, and Richter provide an important contribution to the field of Coptic palaeography, which is not as developed a discipline as its Greek counterpart. Richter in particular stresses this point. Terminology that remains standard in Coptic palaeographic analyses—'uncial' is the main case in point—are no longer used by Greek scholars. A volume such as this, which brings together different languages and scripts, while showing the diversity of approaches to written material, highlights some of these discrepancies in the situation of related areas across fields. These studies do not aim to resolve this situation, but they can be used as the base from which advances can be made.

These studies show how variation in practices usually considered non-linguistic, such as orthography and palaeography, can be integrated into a more comprehensive study of scribal repertoires. Furthermore, they serve to illustrate how linguistic and extralinguistic features can be investigated together to reveal points of correlation or divergence in the type of variation exhibited.

§3.3. Repertoire

Scholars of language contact (e.g. Matras 2008) have adopted the notion of repertoire to reflect the fact that the competence of individual language users ('speakers') can comprise more than one linguistic code ('language'). In fact, it is not certain that there is a sharp division between bilinguals and monolinguals, since even the latter often have competence in different codes ('varieties',

'registers'), the choice between which is often constrained by the circumstances and contexts of use, construed broadly. The contributions illustrate the internal complexity of scribal repertoires. In some cases, we are dealing with 'multilingual' repertoires that comprise multiple codes. In other cases, the comparison of the repertoires of different scribes reveals historical change in active repertoires. Boud'hors shows that the decades separating two scribes in a single place—decades in which a radical sociopolitical change took place—were enough to allow highly local, non-standard features to become visible in texts as part of active scribal repertoires. This, of course, raises the interesting possibility that these features were part of earlier scribes' passive repertoires, but for still-unknown sociocultural reasons were barred from representation in written texts.

Cromwell, with her discussion of bigraphism, expands this conception of repertoire to the graphic—purely visual—aspect of scribal documents. Bigraphism, the use of more than one script in the same text, is parallel to situations in which language users' repertoires comprise more than one language or variety. When phrased in this way, it becomes apparent that one can ask questions very similar to those posed by sociolinguists, e.g. regarding the contexts of use in which a variant—in this case, a graphic one—is selected.

Richter also deals with the graphic 'bag of tricks' of a single scribe of whose output two late (tenth-century) Coptic alchemical manuscripts survive. While the majority of the documents are written in what Richter calls a 'matrix system', a number of alternative codes are employed by the scribe, for a variety of reasons. Richter points out that these alternative codes are a matter of pure choice, since the scribe could have relayed the content using the matrix system. Richter's discussion highlights the complexities involved in script choice in literary manuscripts. He shows that what is normally a rather specialized graphic code in most literary manuscripts, namely, the so-called 'sloping uncial' writing style (in his terminology, as applied to Coptic palaeography) has a particular functional significance when it is used outside of bigraphic situations, such as in one of the alchemical manuscripts. Its use to mark a text as of a lower 'textual level' or degree of 'literariness' reveals, in fact, contemporary sociocultural attitudes of the scribes towards the texts they themselves wrote and copied. Interestingly, this code often correlates with less standardized language. The matrix system of the other manuscript is the bimodular uncial, usually thought to be a 'high variety' used for literary manuscripts. Richter argues that this is a misconception. While the other option, the unimodular bookhand, was indeed limited to high-prestige types of text production, the bimodular uncial was often used as part of a bigraphic practice: the unimodular hand was used for writing the basic text, whereas the bimodular hand was used for paratextual units. This perspective allows Richter to analyse the choice of the 'high variety' bimodular script as a functional equivalent in one text to the clearly 'low variety' sloping uncial found in the other text.

Moving beyond the matrix system, Richter describes a range of alternative graphical codes: the use of miniscule letters, cryptographic code, Arabic letters,

and alchemical symbols. He proposes several motivations for the choice of alternative codes, mainly the use of a 'group code', reflecting scribal self-consciousness and professionalism, on the one hand, and the deliberate obscuring of esoteric content, on the other. Richter traces the origins of these practices to a range of contexts: the Coptic scriptorium tradition, the Coptic documentary tradition, specific scientific traditions, and a bilingual (Arabic–Coptic) intellectual milieu.

These repertoires are connected with the writing of text, represented by different modes of scribal activity, whether *literatim* copying, translating, taking dictation, paraphrasing, or producing a partially new document on the basis of existing templates. The range of activities in which scribes were engaged is here extended. Especially interesting in this respect is Ryholt's paper, in which he focuses on a single site of manuscript production, conservation, and transmission: the library of the temple of Soknebtunis at Tebtunis in the Fayum. Ryholt provides a detailed description of the material aspects of text production at this site, from the use of fresh vs reused papyrus, the formatting of manuscripts (e.g. lines and pagination, and the choice of coloured ink), and contrasting the Tebtunis manuscripts with those found or produced at other sites. Also documented are additional scribal activities that can best be characterized as 'editorial', namely correcting and collating manuscripts, or 'conservatorial', such as repairing damaged or worn-out papyri.

Ryholt assesses what we know about the scribes active in the temple library, based on prosopography and palaeography: while very few scribes' names are known, others can be identified on the basis of handwriting. This section complements—and complicates—Quack's in-depth treatment of the regionalization of Roman demotic hands. Some manuscripts found in Tebtunis were written in hands highly similar to styles typical of other sites, which raises the possibility of some form of trade in manuscripts between temples or that scribes were mobile, that is, receiving their training in one temple and later working in another. Identifying 'manuscript communities' on the basis of palaeography also allows Ryholt to conclude that the temple library scribes were probably not specialized for particular scribal jobs or textual genres.

Also expanding the range of activities performed by scribes, Winand deals with the role of scribes in producing the New Kingdom dossier of juridical documents known as the 'Tomb Robbery Papyri', written in a particular variety of Late Egyptian. Against the reasonable expectation of a high degree of standardization, Winand identifies a considerable amount of orthographical, lexical, and grammatical variation, even within the more formulaic parts of these manuscripts. Based on this variation, Winand is able to reconstruct the production of these legal reports as a three-step process: taking notes during the questioning, composing a preliminary draft, and writing the final version. As opposed to private letters, in which the dictated content is usually largely that of the sender/author, these legal texts show a high degree of involvement

on the part of the scribe, who often fills in information, rephrases what had been said during the depositions, and in general standardizes the phraseology of the final documents.

A parallel is found in a Ptolemaic bilingual dossier of legal documents in demotic and Greek, which provides Mairs with the opportunity to examine the almost invariably 'invisible' role of translators as active agents in legal proceedings. Her study of the legal formula *kata to dunaton* ('according to what is possible') leads her to identify an important, albeit often neglected, type of translation: the kind of 'functional' translation that does not require full bilingualism and whose goal is not the production of an idiomatic, native-like text in the target language. The perspective is shifted from the axiological ('bad Greek', 'translationese') to the functional, i.e. how this kind of Greek is embedded in the specific cultural activity of translating a demotic Egyptian document into an Egyptian Greek one. Mairs also points out that translation is not the only option available to scribes: transliteration, a kind of graphemic code-switching, in her view, was also a perfectly acceptable and functional choice for translators who could rely on the audience's exposure to and acquaintance with both the source and target languages.

§3.4. Genre

As noted above (§2), the papers collected here deal with both literary and non-literary textual genres. As Polis cautions, it is crucial to keep in mind that our modern genre categorizations are often anachronistic with respect to the culturally alienated premodern societies we study: in some cases, we may not identify native genres, while in others, we may argue—without necessarily reaching new insights—about the proper categorization of literary letters, pieces of literary texts preserved as scribal exercises, or a tale written according to the conventions of an administrative report. Nevertheless, a nuanced conception of genre—and its relevance for the study of variation in written language—is characteristic of most of the authors whose papers make up this volume. For example, Richter (2005) shows that even documentary texts, specifically child donation texts from the same Coptic Theban corpus examined by Cromwell, have a narrative dimension that can only be understood as intertextuality with literary texts.

In some studies genre is not the primary motivating factor, but location. This is important in Quack's study of texts, which come principally from Tebtunis, Soknopaiou Nesos, and Narmouthis in the Fayum. Sometimes, different periods produced different types of text. From Ptolemaic (third to first centuries BCE) Tebtunis the evidence is mostly documentary, but from the Roman period (first to third centuries CE) it becomes mostly literary or sub-literary. For the variation at the heart of his study, 'the dominating factor is the local one, not

the text genre'. In other studies, as discussed below, a selection is made, and here non-literary texts are divided into letters and legal documents, while literary includes also semi-literary productions.

§3.4.1. Epistolary practices

Several papers deal with letters, letter writing, and letter writers, such as those by Boud'hors and Polis, as part of broader studies of the scribal repertoires of known individuals. In others, these receive a more focal position.

Halla-aho interrogates the process of letter composition, and the specific contribution of scribes to the process. Arguing that it is essential to know 'whose linguistic competence is presented', she points out that if the language attested in letters mainly reflects the competence of scribes, it would mean that the linguistic output of a rather circumscribed and atypical group—educated scribes—is embodied in letters. Working on Latin and Greek letters from Roman Egypt, Halla-aho poses questions that are relevant to most situations in which the sender of a letter is not necessarily the person who penned it. Taking issue with some prevalent views of the type of language production involved in dictation, Halla-aho stresses that dictated language is not 'oral language' and is not necessarily close to a putative 'spoken' language. Finally, she shows that gender is not an especially important parameter in identifying the role of the scribe in the final written output.

Clarysse deals with ways of encoding asymmetrical relations of social power between superiors and subordinates. Based on two archives of Greek letters dating between the third century BCE and the third century CE, Clarysse studies how epistolary language is used to negotiate nuanced power relations between senders and addressees. Patterns of linguistic variation correlate with differences between situations in which (a) a superior writes to a subordinate, (b) a subordinate writes to a superior, or (c) the sender and addressee are more or less of equal status. Clarysse finds that 'high-to-low' letters are characterized mainly by what is absent—namely, conventional politeness formulas—as well as the density of curt directive forms.

Wagner and Outhwaite deal with changes in the use of Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic as written vernaculars, appropriate for use in various forms of letter writing. The authors examine the ways in which functional domain influenced language choice, focusing on the florescence of Hebrew as a written vernacular. Interestingly, Wagner and Outhwaite approach the question of language choice through the textual parameters of formulas (greetings, religious invocations, and dating), showing that in some respects, early letter writers were working with not only a bilingual linguistic repertoire but also within multiple epistolary traditions. At a later time, the differences between Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic letters dwindled, the former coming to resemble the latter. This paper, perhaps more than the others collected here, shows how changing epistolary practices

and traditions can reflect significant changes in society. For example, changing political realities in late-eleventh-century Egypt had significant consequences for the ways that Jews wrote letters, leading in the end to a discontinuity between earlier and later traditions.

§3.4.2. *Legal documents*

It has been noted already that the New Kingdom scribes discussed by Winand that were responsible for the 'Tomb Robbery Papyri' had more involvement in the production of these texts than scribes involved in letter writing. These texts are therefore held up as a contrast to those studied by Halla-aho. Here he deals with the evidence for processes of composing and editing legal protocols from the so-called Tomb Robberies corpus, recording the depositions of the defendants, which were written by scribes navigating constantly between the conventional and the formulaic, on the one hand, and the particular, on the other. In these texts, variation marks the unexpected, what is exceptional or remarkable, but even in these personal accounts, uniformity is encountered, showing the influence of the scribes in question.

Again, in contrast to letters, where style is accredited to the dictator, Cromwell gives the scribe full responsibility for the formulae used in the Djeme corpus. The content of the documents in question in her study and the judicial aspect of the legal activity recorded form no part of the discussion. The specific formula in question—the invocation of the Holy Trinity—is found at the beginning of sales, settlements of dispute, testaments, and other document types. Variation is not examined in order to differentiate one type of document from another, but to look at the people behind the text, the legal parties become secondary to the scribes themselves.

Mairs' study focuses on a set of translated documents drawn up for the same family some ten years apart. The two sets of papers concern the transfer of rights to perform liturgies and receive income from certain tombs in the Theban necropolis. These comprise a sale document and a cession document in each case (although only one of the cessions survives). How the translator of the demotic texts chose to translate and condense the phraseology into Greek is the key feature of this paper, but Mairs demonstrates that a comprehensive knowledge of the historical and social context of these documents is vital in understanding the choices made.

§3.4.3 *Literary and 'semi-literary' texts*

The term 'literary' in connection with Egyptian texts generally refers to historical and religious or mythological narrative material, as well as 'wisdom literature'. 'Semi-literary', also referred to as 'paraliterary' or 'subliterary', or '*Kleinliteratur*', primarily comprises technical literature, whether on medicine, dream interpretation,

or other scientific matters. Richter's paper on alchemical texts falls into this category. These more or less elaborate compilations of alchemical recipes provide evidence for the reception and appropriation of contemporary scientific knowledge from Arabic sources in medieval Egypt. Yet, again, it is not the content of these recipes that is the focus of this study, but rather how the anonymous scribe presented them. The palaeographic component of this was discussed above, but this is just the start of the 'bag of tricks' at the scribe's disposal. This text type also allowed him to play with numbers, cryptography, and the striking use of 'scientific signs', including the sun (☉), the moon (☽), and the rectangle (▭) to represent gold, silver, and sheet metal respectively: a range of devices not appropriate for other genres.

Ryholt focuses on the Roman-period productions from the library belonging to the temple of Soknebtunis at Tebtunis. As noted regarding Quack's paper, the texts from this time are mostly literary in nature. This study highlights important aspects of the formal and physical elements of such texts, which are specific to this genre. One feature that is immediately clear is the very use of the demotic script for literary texts. Hieratic was still in use at the site, but it was reserved for texts directly associated with the cult, whereas the bulk of the demotic material preserve literary and semi-literary texts. This distinction in script choice is also reflected in other scribal practices, including the use of formatting lines and red ink. Both are more frequent in the hieratic manuscripts: as cultic texts, they were generally prepared more carefully.[12]

Both of these papers, by Richter and Ryholt, show that scribes had various techniques at their disposal, and were conscious in their use of them when producing works of different natures. Different genres required different considerations.

§4. MOVING ON FROM HERE: KEY ISSUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As stated at the beginning, there have been studies that consider variation and scribes, but these have been relatively uncommon. This is changing, with more serious thought being given to the kinds of issues that are raised in the following

[12] Parkinson (2009, 90–112) provides a rare study of the physical features of literary manuscripts from the Middle Kingdom, specifically a scribe working *c.*1780 BCE. In some respects, this study is reminiscent of features discussed by Ryholt, including column length, margins, placement of rubrics, correction techniques including erasures with wet fingers, which in one case appears to have left a fingerprint (!) (see p. 98), mistakes, and the reasons for mistakes. Parkinson also addresses the reasons for variation between the copy made by the scribe in question and other known copies: 'Some of his orthographic idiosyncrasies may reflect something of his cultural circumstances and attitudes' (p. 115; see pp 115–19 for further detail).

contributions. In the past five years, significant works have appeared that show a general trend in this direction.[13] Impediments to this type of research, notably access to text editions and original manuscripts, remain, but these are being slowly overcome by various research tools providing online and immediate access, e.g. the online Deir el-Medina database (New Kingdom), the Datenbank demotischer Texte (demotic texts), and the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri (initially Greek texts but now incorporating Coptic material).[14] Accurate diplomatic renderings of texts are required, so that variation can be studied rather than removed as 'corruption' by text editors.

But more broadly, we envision a change in the philological and linguistic practices of scholars working on the languages of premodern Egypt. This means taking into account the fact that the textual artefacts were written by individual human beings, who were educated or trained in particular places at particular times, and who lived and worked with social, professional, and often religious networks composed of other individuals and their interrelations. This translates into the attempt to relate scribal practices, whether found in a single manuscript or across a broad corpus of manuscripts, to the communities in which they were produced. These practices are themselves historical products, the result of processes of innovation, diffusion, and conventionalization—and they are often related to wider changes in the sociocultural and political matrices in which scribal cultures were embedded. These processes, as the papers collected here show, can be traced, given careful attention to manuscripts and scribes. The results clearly demonstrate that such perspectives enrich our knowledge of both synchronic and diachronic dimensions of written culture.

Furthermore, looking at individual scribes as social actors means investigating the ways that textual conventions of different types inform linguistic and non-linguistic scribal practices. For example, it is clear that the active repertoires visible in manuscripts depend strongly on the parameter of textual genre. Genres are also historical products that evolve over time, in ways that are often contingent on the changing reality outside the world of texts.

Finally, the historical sociolinguistic perspective—and the study of variation in particular—introduces an often-lacking dose of concrete realities (and new data) into the abstract theoretical discussions of language change. The latter often focus so strongly on gaining access to underlying linguistic systems that they forget that such systems, which are quite possibly only useful fictions, are accessible only through the concrete (and often messy) linguistic output of

[13] For example, note the papers collected in Evans and Obbink (2010) concerning Greek and Latin, Parkinson (2009) for Middle Egyptian, and Prada (2013) for the importance of orthographic variation in certain demotic texts, to name but three.

[14] See respectively, http://dem-online.gwi.uni-muenchen.de (Deir el Medine online; Nichtliterarische Ostraka aus Deir el Medine), http://www.adwmainz.de/index.php?id=44 (Datenbank demotischer Texte), and http://www.papyri.info (Duke Databank).

language users. And in the case of premodern written cultures, this usually means that one is dealing with scribes and their practices.

This paradigm—like all paradigms—is not just a set of analytical techniques or methods to be applied to data. Rather, it is first and foremost a set of questions and preoccupations, as its practitioners emphasize. In the words of Merja Stenroos, 'Rather than making the best of bad data, we should turn them into good data by designing enquiries for which they are suited.'