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Of marks and meaning : a palaeographic, semiotic-cognitive, and comparative analysis of the identity marks from Deir el-Medina.

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PART II

SEMIOTIC & COGNITIVE ANALYSIS

THE MEANING OF THE MARKS

WHEN WE ASK how the marks convey meaning we find ourselves in the field of semiotics. Semiotics is, in short, the study of signs and sign systems. The term semiology is sometimes found to denote the same, although it may be used specifically in affinity with a French tradition whilst semiotics may relate particularly to an American tradition.¹ The study of semiotics goes back at least to Plato and Aristotle, but it tends to be closed off to non-initiates mainly due to the use of a jargon that seems to ‘keep out those who are not already ‘members of the club’’.² Therefore, we begin Part II with an introduction to semiotics that explains the issues it has traditionally focused on and the reasons to use its theories and models (chapter 1). We continue with a detailed discussion of selected leading theories and models on the functional structure and signification of signs in systems of visual communication, highlighting aspects on the generation and conveyance of meaning and reflecting upon them with regard to the marks from Deir el-Medina (chapter 2). In the final chapter we turn to cognitive science, which complements and supports the study of semiotics with neurological theories and psycholinguistic models on human communicative behavior, specifically the production and interpretation of communication in the human brain. The ultimate aim of the semiotic and cognitive analysis is to suggest a model in which we can accommodate the marks that explains and visualizes how they, as a system of visual communication other than linguistic writing, can be decoded and interpreted in the context of the life and work in Deir el-Medina and the Valley of the Kings.

¹ These French and American traditions will be discussed in detail in chapter 2. In the present dissertation I choose to use the more generally accepted term semiotics, except where it concerns specific French models and theories, such as in chapter 2, sections 1a-c.

² Chandler, *Semiotics*, xiii.

