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CROMWELL, J. and E. GROSSMAN (eds.) — *Scribal Repertoires in Egypt from the New Kingdom to the Early Islamic Period*. (Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018. (23 cm, XX, 373). ISBN 978-0-19-876810-4. £ 90.00.

The multi-authored and multi-disciplinary volume here reviewed is a strong boost for the research of the role of written text in Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic Egyptian society. Not only by the sheer range of different periods and text genres represented in its papers, but also by its socio-linguistic approach, it is probably the most substantial contribution so far to this type of research of pre-modern Egyptian texts, a growing field in recent years.

'Scribal repertoires' are defined, by the editors of the volume, as 'the entire set of linguistic and non-linguistic practices that are prone to variation within and between manuscripts' (p. 2). The editors have not thought it wise to make a strict distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic aspects (the latter being the visual and material qualities of manuscripts), since the volume is entirely about *written* languages, hence about written texts, about the manuscripts containing these texts, and about the associated scripts. The *spoken* counterparts of the languages considered, be it noted, have vanished long ago: the most recent of them are variants of medieval Arabic and English.

In order to drive home to the reader the all-important difference between spoken and written language, and the heavy restrictions posed by the latter on research of the former through written texts, the series of papers on Egypt are preceded by the contributions of two socio-linguists, both working on medieval English language and texts. Merja Stenroos and Alexander Bergs thus act, in the words of the editors, 'as midwife to the reconceptualization of 'free' scribal variation as symptoms of the socio-cultural agency of pre-modern scribes in Egypt' (Preface, p. v). As Merja Stenroos' contribution (p. 20 ff.) makes clear, texts produced in the past primarily inform us about written language, and at best only indirectly about spoken language. We can only study scribes and their language through their writings.

The scribes themselves may be the authors of original textual compositions, but also copiers of text previously conceived by others, as the editors point out in their introduction (p. 7). It is mainly through the former capacity of scribes that we may hope to see glimpses of spoken language, but we must not hope for too much. In fact, even the scribes themselves may be difficult to catch in the surviving texts, which we can group together so as to form 'text communities', that is, networks of interrelated texts (Stenroos, p. 34 ff.). We may or may not suppose that such text communities have been produced by one or several identified scribes, but 'discourse communities', persons brought together in the past by common knowledge and practice, including written and spoken language, are largely beyond our grasp (*ibid.*). Such a community, or professional network, has a strong influence on the language and writing practices of an individual scribe (editors, p. 8), whose texts therefore do not necessarily reflect his own spoken language. Closest to reflections of spoken language come verbatim quotations as revealed by exceptional grammatical constructions and by slang (see the contribution by Jean Winand, p. 134 ff.), and in dictated letters, which primarily reflect the language of the dictator (Alexander Bergs, p. 46-47) – although dictating is essentially 'pro-

ducing written language in spoken form', as Hilla Halla-aho is keen to point out in her paper (p. 231).

Such are the complications one faces when using written documents to investigate languages that have ceased to be spoken long ago. The 'repertoires' investigated in the volume under review are truly scribal, and as such only indirectly connected with the languages spoken at the time the source documents were produced. As it turns out, most papers in the volume do concentrate on language: Merja Stenroos (p. 20-40) and Alexander Bergs (p. 41-59) on English historical sociolinguistics, Stéphane Polis on Ancient Egyptian linguistic variation (p. 60-88), Jean Winand on the language of the late Ramesside Tomb Robbery papyri (p. 127-152), Rachel Mairs on Greek translations of demotic legal phraseology (p. 211-226), Willy Clarysse on the reflection of administrative hierarchy in Greek letters from Egypt (p. 240-250). Some linguistic papers include brief discussions of writing. Stéphane Polis' paper on the Ramesside necropolis scribe Amennakht includes a section on orthography (p. 102-108), and so does Hilla Halla-aho's paper on Greek letter-writing in Roman Egypt (p. 231-233). The discussion by Jennifer Cromwell on invocations in Coptic legal documents includes sections on orthography and palaeography (p. 256-263), while Anne Boud'hors integrates the research of both language and palaeography in the dossiers of two Coptic authors (p. 274-295). Esther-Miriam Wagner and Ben Outhwaite discuss the use of Hebrew and Arabic scripts for writing the Arabic language in medieval letters from the Cairo Genizah, and also observe particular features of their layout (p. 314-332). Two papers focus entirely on writing: Joachim Friedrich Quack analyses regional features of the demotic and hieratic scripts of Roman Egypt (p. 184-210); Tonio Sebastian Richter discusses Coptic script types and their combination with numerals, Arabic letters and scientific symbols in alchemic manuscripts (p. 296-313). The paper by Kim Ryholt on manuscripts from the Tebtynis temple library is the single one to concentrate on material and visual aspects of manuscripts: papyrus (re)use and formatting (e.g. pagination, tables), in addition to hieratic and demotic 'hands' (p. 153-183). The order of the papers is not by topic, but purely chronological, starting with Ramesside texts from ca. 1300 BCE onward (Polis and Winand) and ending with Judaeo-Arabic writing in the medieval Middle East, until ca. 1300 CE.

Scribal repertoires 'place focus on scribes as socially and culturally embedded agents, whose choices are reflected in texts' (editors, p. 2). Accordingly, it is the scribes and their choices that are central in the volume: choices of language, of genre, of script, and of writing materials. How can we recognize the individual scribe and his choices? Let us first look at the choice of language. The question of whose language we are confronted with when reading an ancient text is mainly addressed by Stenroos, Bergs, Polis, Winand, Halla-aho, and Boud'hors. In the second of his two papers (p. 89-126), Stéphane Polis sets himself the task of identifying hieratic texts as the products of a prolific and highly competent scribe of the Twentieth Dynasty: the senior scribe Amennakht of the royal necropolis workforce that lived at Deir el-Medina. It turns out that even in this well-documented case it is difficult to demonstrate what the personal characteristics of this scribe's language, style and orthography are – in this sense, the paper complements the preceding one by the same author on linguistic variation and conformity

(p. 60-88), both of which obscure, rather than reveal the scribe's own language. If anything can be attributed to Amennakht specifically beside his handwriting and some peculiarities of his spelling, it is his great ability to switch between the different linguistic registers required for the types of texts he produced, as Polis makes admirably clear. Jean Winand takes a close look at several texts from the corpus of the Tomb Robbery Papyri from the end of the Twentieth Dynasty (p. 127-152). Although authorship by individual scribes may be apparent from their handwriting, their language is obscured by the formalization of these legal documents. More natural language occurs in the depositions by the interrogated tomb robbers, which probably include verbatim quotations but have otherwise also been subjected to editing. Standardization thus stands in the way of identifying scribes, to the extent that similarities in language do not necessarily point to the same authors ('similarity is not sameness', p. 151).

With the question of language comes the issue of competence, which is obviously not about spoken language either, but about mastering language(s) of writing, correctly using stock phraseology, and structuring texts. When translating demotic legal phraseology into Greek, scribes would sometimes add the phrase *kata to dunaton* 'as far as possible' (Mairs, p. 211 ff.). That phrase was not an allusion to their personal competence in demotic or Greek, as Rachel Mairs makes clear, but a disclaimer with respect to any mistake that might arise from rendering the original formulations in a different language. Far from converting demotic expressions to perfect Greek equivalents, the translators rendered the demotic originals as accurately as possible, in some cases even transliterating demotic words instead of translating them. The result is not a reflection of linguistic incompetence, but of highly competent bilingualism, and of the 'Greek-of-Egypt' (p. 223, with reference to more literature on code-switching). This more or less ties in with recent insights with respect to the copyists of Middle English texts, whose linguistic variation in rendering originals have long been regarded as scribal corruptions, hence as tokens of incompetence. This is now no longer so (Stenroos, p. 24-25).

Of course there were highly skilled scribes and less professional ones. Those who occasionally wrote letters for relatives or others would often belong to the latter category (referred to as 'social scribes' by some: Halla-aho, p. 229). Such scribes were more prone to variation in language, style and handwriting than professionals, who would closely follow the conventions of their trade. This, indeed, appears to have been an essential difference between two Coptic scribes and authors, the priest and hegemon Mark of the early seventh, and the monk Frange of the early eighth century CE (Boud'hors, p. 274 ff.). Whereas Mark used the same classic Sahidic language throughout his writings, Frange's texts show more linguistic variety. Boud'hors attributes this difference to Mark's higher social status and higher level of education, although she does not exclude that the difference in time is relevant here as well – a general 'destandardisation' (including more reflection of spoken language) having been noted for the eighth century (p. 295).

Professional or social networks were of some influence to the writings of individual scribes. As Bergs notes for medieval England, people with dense social networks tended to be more conservative language users than were those less socially involved (p. 53). This was no different in Ancient

Egypt. A higher social position meant a higher degree of conformity (Polis, p. 70), and also a local 'close-knit multiplex network' such as the Deir el-Medina community brought about 'uniform network norms' (idem, p. 87). But a caveat is in order here as with the Coptic authors Mark and Frange. The lack of comparative material of the same richness as that of Deir el-Medina, from other communities, makes it difficult to assess to what extent we are dealing with a 'sociolect' (p. 88). Another way in which a social network could determine writing conventions is shown by the letters produced in Jewish communities of the Near East after ca. 1000 CE, and retrieved from the Genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue, Cairo. These letters were written in Hebrew (which was not a spoken language at the time), but more often in Judaeo-Arabic, that is, Arabic written in Hebrew characters and punctuated with Hebraisms. Although initially adopting features of contemporary Islamic Arabic letter-writing, such as dating, and the invocation of the deity, the period from the late eleventh century onwards saw a return to a more traditional Jewish style, abandoning dating and invocation. This traditionalism was caused, according to Wagner and Outhwaite, by the more introspective attitude of Jewish communities, who felt their position became increasingly uncertain under new Islamic rulers (p. 328, 331-332). A truly expert network is revealed by the codes of letters and symbols, even ciphers, used by the authors of Coptic alchemic manuscripts. Rather than secretive, such codes should be considered indicative of the skills and attitudes of authors as representatives of their network and milieu, and as such of scribal self-consciousness and professionalism (Richter, p. 308, 313).

To the reader working his way through the collected papers it becomes increasingly clear what 'sociolinguistic' means. It means that analysis of the social and professional networks of scribes is of great importance for the interpretation of the language, style and visual appearance of their writings. It also becomes clear that, when we read ancient documents, we are not necessarily looking at the scribes' own language and style. Nor are we looking at their local or regional dialects, for that matter. The connections made so far between pre-Coptic Egyptian language varieties and spoken dialects are not convincing according to Polis (p. 66). We seem to be on firmer ground with Egyptian texts of the Roman Period, which do reveal regional characteristics. Joachim Quack poses the intriguing question if this merely appears to us to be the case because we can compare the language of the texts to the slightly later Coptic dialects, or if the regionalization of writing habits in this period actually allowed dialects to creep in (p. 209).

This question comes at the end of Quack's paper, which is mainly on regional variations in handwriting, not language. The author's argument is that intense local training at temple schools of the Greco-Roman Period, in demotic and hieratic, resulted in 'styles' of writing (or 'types' of hands) that were not so much personal as local (p. 185-186, 209). His main examples are Roman-Period papyri from Soknopaiou Nesos and Tebtynis. In papyri from Soknopaiou Nesos, three different styles of hands can be recognised in demotic as well as hieratic papyri, according to Quack, whereas yet another highly characteristic style dominated at Tebtynis. Papyri from the latter site are central in the paper by Kim Ryholt, who looks at the external features of demotic and hieratic manuscripts, including handwriting. Although this author also notes the increasing 'insularity' of hieratic and demotic

writing in temple libraries of the Roman Period, his emphasis is on diversity, rather than the expected uniformity: ‘the range of distinctive hands is noteworthy’ (p. 182). Quack also allows for different individual hands within the local styles or types he distinguishes, it being the *styles* that he ascribes to local training. Ryholt, however, suggests that the differences between *hands* at Tebtynis indicate training of the scribes at different localities and not together (p. 179, 182-183). The reader is left with an uneasy feeling of contradiction and, if not very well at home in Greco-Roman demotic and hieratic, is in a bad position to judge, since the relevant palaeographic differences, especially those between supposed local ‘styles’ and individual ‘hands’, are difficult to see for the non-specialist. A similar lack of expertise will make it difficult for the average reader to appreciate the refined distinctions made by specialists in other types of script, such as ‘unimodular’, ‘bimodular’ and ‘sloping’ uncial Coptic, all of which are further subdivided into ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ (Richter, p. 299 ff.). For the untrained eye, such distinctions are difficult to see in the photos of the actual manuscripts as supplied by the authors.

That palaeography, orthography and phraseology indicate shared training is also assumed by Jennifer Cromwell for Coptic documentary texts from western Thebes. The author has to admit, however, that the reality presented by the manuscripts is rather one of diversity, which leads her to the hypothesis that the producing individuals, while working at the same location, came from different education environments (p. 252). Despite the attempts made so far to obtain more clarity here, ‘the training of Coptic documentary scribes is a poorly understood area of study’ (ibid.). Cromwell’s paper indeed points to different backgrounds of the scribes investigated. Documentary and epistolary phraseology, meanwhile, is perhaps the most ‘unpersonal’ factor in scribal habits. Notwithstanding a certain variability in precise formulation, the choice for this or that type of epistolary formula, dating, or invocation of deities, depends on genre, social context, time period and historical circumstances, rather than on personal preferences, as becomes especially clear in the papers by Clarysse, Cromwell, Wagner and Outhwaite.

Although the individual papers have not been, nor can be discussed in detail here, the present review should make it sufficiently clear that they are all highly effective steps in the process of defining the positions and actions of scribes as members of social and professional networks, and as agents of scribal cultures. It is this focus, running through the entire volume, that makes it so admirably coherent in spite of its multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural range of papers. The individual contributions are all of high quality. There is no jumping to conclusions. On the whole, authors take much more care to nuance their findings than may be apparent from this review, which is important in view of the problems and apparent contradictions noted in the previous paragraphs. The coherence and quality of the papers, together with their wealth of relevant observations, should make *Scribal Repertoires* a beacon for the socio-linguistic research of ancient and medieval Egyptian manuscripts for many years to come.

Leiden,
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Ben HARING

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SPENCER, P. — Amara West III. The Scenes and Texts of the Ramesside Temple. (Excavation Memoir, 114). Egypt Exploration Society, London, 2016. (30 cm, XXIV, 44, 206 pls.). ISBN 978-0-85698-227-9. £ 70.00.

The site known today as Amara West is located roughly halfway between the Third and Second Cataracts in Sudan. The geographical addition to the name is somewhat of a misnomer as it would normally refer to a location on the west bank of the Nile, whereas Amara is actually situated to the north of the river, which runs from west to east here. In antiquity the fortified town with its Ramesside temple was built on an island in the Nile, the northern channel of which has since dried up. The site was excavated by an expedition of the Egypt Exploration Society directed by H.W. Fairman during two seasons in 1938–9. After the interruption of the Second World War the expedition returned in 1947–8, when its first priority was to rebury the temple which had stood unprotected from the elements for eight years. Even in 1938 Fairman had expressed his concern that there would be ‘heavy loss’ during the summer as ‘the stone is of such poor quality’. Reburying the temple meant that its exterior walls had to be left uncopied and they remain so to this day.¹⁾ Unfortunately publication of the results of both excavation and epigraphical work was delayed time and again due to Fairman’s commitments to complete the final volume of Pendlebury’s *City of Akhenaten* III and many other projects including his own excavations at Sesebi as well as his ever increasing workload as Professor of Egyptology at Liverpool University, and at Fairman’s death in 1982 both Amara and Sesebi were still unpublished.

In 1993 the Committee of the EES entrusted Dr Patricia Spencer, then EES Secretary and an experienced archaeologist, with the publication of the Society’s work at Amara based on the extensive records left by Fairman and his team. This daunting task – it is never easy to publish someone else’s work, let alone if it was carried out half a century before – she has accomplished admirably. After publishing two volumes on the architecture and on the pottery and the cemeteries²⁾ she has now produced a full report of the epigraphical work on the scenes and inscriptions of the Ramesside temple. The front matter of the book is followed by 41 pages of text containing an Introduction, a description of the wall decoration of the temple based on Fairman’s notes, diaries, letters and preliminary reports,³⁾ a chapter summarizing the history of the temple and an Appendix dealing with the Viceroy of Kush in the Twentieth Dynasty, some of whom are attested at Amara only, their inscriptions being published here for the first time. After an index of personal names and objects (i.e. the locations where these objects are housed nowadays), the text is followed by 206 Plates containing photographs, facsimile drawings and, where the latter are not available, hand copies of the scenes and inscriptions.

¹ Excavations were continued during two seasons in 1948–9 under the direction of P.L. Shinnie, but no further epigraphic work in the Temple was done. Since 2008 work at Amara has been resumed by an expedition led by the British Museum, see the popular account in N. Spencer, A. Stevens, M. Binder, *Amara West: Living in Egyptian Nubia* (London, British Museum, 2014). See also www.britishmuseum.org/AmaraWest

² *Amara West I: The architectural report* (EES Excavation Memoir 63; London, 1997); II: *The cemetery and the pottery corpus* (EES Excavation Memoir 69; London, 2002).

³ *JEA* 25 (1939), 139–44; 34 (1948), 3–11. Fairman’s unpublished records are preserved in the EES Archive in London.