The teaching of Khety and its use as an educational tool in ancient Egypt
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PART TWO
CONTEXT

4 Introduction to the context

4.1 *The Teaching of Khety* and education

We know surprisingly little about the details of scribal education in Ancient Egypt.[95] For example, it is unclear where exactly children were taught. Textual references point to the existence of schools (ꜥ.t-sbꜣ), but only two of these mention specific locations: the "place of learning" at Deir el-Medina and one at the royal palace in Memphis.[96] Besides these two establishments, the evidence suggests that teaching activities took place at the Ramesseum and the temple of Mut in Karnak, as well as other places.[97] The archaeological evidence for this (if any) rests largely on the presence of literary ostraca considered to be school exercises on site; traces of actual school structures have not yet been identified with certainty in the archaeological record.[98] Children were thus most likely taught in the open air, for example in the shadow of temple walls.[99] On the practicalities surrounding school activity, the textual and art historical evidence also remains largely silent. We have, in fact, no exact idea of the age at which children started school, what hours they went to school, what they learned, the didactics used, and so on.

The aim of this part of the research is to gain more insight into these matters by studying the use of *The Teaching of Khety* as an educational tool. *Khety* is linked to education in several ways. First, its contents are used as a source of historical information on ancient Egyptian educational practices. On the basis of text-internal evidence it has been concluded (albeit often with the necessary caution) that there was a school in the Residence during the Middle Kingdom; that children from modest backgrounds were also admitted to school; that *Kemyt* was part of the curriculum; and that school classes ended at noon.[100] Secondly, *Khety* is considered by some to be a "school text", i.e. a text written with the intention to be used in schools.[101] Other scholars, on the other hand, think that it is first and foremost a literary text and that its use as an educational tool is only secondary, or in the words of Richard Parkinson: "*Khety* was perhaps written by a courtly author as a literary entertainment, and was, like other poems, subsequently adopted by scribal educators, when it was also an influential literary model for Ramessid literature."[102] Lastly, *Khety* was one of the most popular texts used in the education of ancient Egyptian scribes. Hundreds of ostraca with excerpts of this text have survived. While perhaps not all of them are school exercises, the sheer amount is an indication that many of them were produced in an educational context (see below, pages 387–391).

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[95] Van de Walle 1948: 16–17; Brunner 1957: 7; Eyre, et al. 1989: 93; Janssen, et al. 1990: 68; Marshall 2022: 87–88; Gasse 2022: 212.

[96] Marshall 2022: 90.

[97] Brunner 1957: 18; Williams 1972: 216; Lazaridis 2010: 5; Fischer-Elfert 2001: 441; Janssen, et al. 1990: 76–77; Marshall 2022: 88. For Deir el-Medina, see especially Gasse 2000. For the Ramesseum, see especially Leblanc 2004 and Barbotin 2013. Other places are, for example, the mortuary temples of Merenptah (Müller 2014), the mortuary temple of Amenhotep II (Sesana, et al. 1998), the temple of Ramesses II in Abydos (Navratilova 2021), and the forecourt of the tomb of Senenmut (TT 71): Hayes 1942: 3.

[98] So, for example, Lazaridis 2010: 5; Hagen 2012: 78–79; Hagen 2021: 7; Marshall 2022: 90.

[99] E.g. Brunner 1957: 18; Lazaridis 2010: 5; Gasse 2022: 213.

[100] Otto 1956: 42; Brunner 1957: 159–106 (with references to page numbers); Van de Walle 1963: 193; Meeks 1967: 189–190; Fischer-Elfert 1989: 61; Schlott 1989: 204; Janssen, et al.: 71, 75; McDowell 2000: 218; Fischer-Elfert 2001: 441; Lazaridis 2010: 6.

[101] Brunner 1957: 85; Posener 1956: 7; Shupak 1993: 26.

[102] Parkinson 2002: 277 (see also 69, 235, 273). So also Van de Walle 1963: 199; Jäger 2004: 192; Widmaier 2013: 541.

4.2 Material philology

It is these objects that are studied in this thesis. Being the product of students, they are an important source for ancient Egyptian educational practices. In order to gain insight into these matters, I have studied every single object with *Khety*, focusing especially on paratextual features (see below). This approach is inspired by Material Philology (also called New Philology), a methodology which has gained popularity in Egyptology in recent years.[103] It propagates to look beyond the text, as it were, and also take into account the material object on which the text was applied. In addition to the main text, other features can sometimes be found on these objects, such as colophons, corrections and marginalia. Studying these paratextual elements allows us to contextualize the text. In other words, it helps to illuminate the social context in which the text was used (e.g. education), while also shedding light on copying procedures, scribal practices and textual transmission.[104]

For *Khety*, a study like this has not been undertaken before, in which the source material is dealt with in its entirety. Previous editions of the text were firmly rooted in the "old" philological tradition, focusing purely on a text-critical approach. H. Brunner and W. Helck only mention in passing that many sources were made by students; they do not go into further detail.[105] Even the latest edition of S. Jäger does not discuss the *Sitz im Leben* of the poem, except for a page or two.[106] Jäger instead focuses on reconstructing a hypothetical *Urtext*, i.e. the text as it was originally intended by the author before being 'corrupted' by scribal 'errors' during the transmission process. To do this he uses the traditional stemmatic approach, comparing all textual variants and trying to determine which of these are most likely to have been part of the 'orginal' text. However, Material Philology rejects this practice, arguing that variants are an inherent feature of textual transmission, and rather than being dismissed as errors, they should be studied, as they provide information how the text was transmitted.[107]

4.3 Outline of part two of the thesis

This part of the thesis thus focuses on the materiality of the poem, studying the objects themselves in addition to the text they bear and transmit. The study is structured in two sections and aims to present the results of the undertaken research.

The first section, comprising four articles, deals with paratextual features. After all, as seen above, "paratextual elements can provide documentary information on how these texts [i.e. any text that was part of the cultural heritage and was taught in different contexts] were transmitted and taught".[108] I use the term "paratext" in a broad sense, referring to all features that are not strictly part of the main text. This ranges from corrections to dates; from colophons to secondary features, i.e. elements that have no direct connection to the text, such as jottings on a papyrus or drawings on a reused ostracon. The latter are seemingly excluded from the definition proposed by J. Winand, who defines paratext as "tout ce qui, en dehors d'un texte idéal, supposé brut, est mis en œuvre pour le presenter au lecteur".[109] However, I include them for two reasons. First of all, often one has to study them before they can be recognized as

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[103] See, for example, the studies of Parkinson 2009, Hagen 2012, Ragazzoli 2021.
[104] For more on Material Philology, see, for example, Lepper 2008: 6–7; Parkinson 2009: 6–7, 272–76; Hagen 2012: 26–27, 216–217.
[105] Brunner 1944: 11, 16; Helck 1970: 152.
[106] Jäger 2004: 191–192.
[107] Cerquiglini 1999.
[108] Brinkmann 2021: 4
[109] Winand 2020: 12.

secondary features. Secondly, even these elements, although secondary, can provide information on the social context in which the text was written. For example, if drawings are found on the same ostracon as *Khety*, it may be that the object was produced in a context where scribes and artisans worked side by side.

Each of the four articles deals with one or two paratextual features that are found on material objects with *Khety*.

The first paper presents an analysis of the DATES that occur on ostraca with *Khety*.[110] Various aspects of these dates are discussed, for example their palaeography and their location on the ostracon. The aim of this study is to gain more insight into teaching methods and scribal practices: who added the dates and for what reason, when did students receive education, how much text did students write during one session.

The second article discusses the scribes who named themselves in COLOPHONS or who signed their work in other ways. What information about their identity can be gleaned from this particular paratextual feature? In other words, who were the scribes that wrote *Khety*? Special emphasis is placed on the question to what extent these scribes worked within an educational setting.

The subject of the next article is twofold. First it discusses so-called MARGINALIA, in other words, large hieratic signs that are found in the margins of papyri or on ostraca. The main question is whether these should be regarded as writing exercises (executed by the scribe himself) or as corrections (made by the teacher). Secondly, DRAWINGS are analysed. For both drawings and marginalia, their relationship to the *Khety* excerpt, found on the same material object, is discussed. Furthermore, conclusions are presented about the scribal environment in which *Khety* was produced

The fourth paper focuses on the CORRECTIONS found on ostraca. Several questions are addressed: who made the corrections, which techniques did scribes use to correct the text, what kind of mistakes did they focus on. Finally, the role of memory in copying and correcting texts is discussed. Throughout the article, many examples of corrections are given for illustrative purposes.

The second section takes a more holistic approach. It consists of two articles, both of which focus on a single object: an ostracon and a papyrus. A "close reading" of each object is provided, meaning that all (paratextual) features that appear on the object are studied in combination. In this way more can be learned about the production context.

The first article in this section considers the materiality of oBM EA 65597. A study of various aspects (such as palaeography and lay-out) identifies the ostracon as a school exercise. A teacher first wrote a chapter of *Khety* on the recto and he then asked a student to continue the text on the verso. This particular didactic method has not been described before in the Egyptological literature.[111]

The second paper provides a close reading of pTURIN CGT 54019, an important new source for the second part of *Khety* (chapters §21,4–§30,6). It concerns the first publication of this papyrus, including a hieroglyphic transcription, transliteration and translation of the text. In accordance with Material Philology special attention is paid to the numerous variants that are unparalleled in the other sources.

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[110] To the list of ostraca with dates mentioned in the article can be added the following: oANAsh.Mus.H.O.839; oBerlin P. 14171; oLouvre E 23562; oLouvre E 32930; oLouvre E 33040; oMoscow I,1b 344; oMoscow I,1b 347; oRAMM A432. The dates it concerns can be found in the synoptic text. These new sources are all ostraca that came to light after publication of the article, or on which a date was later discovered through collation. Collation also improved the reading of the following dates: oUC 32995: II ꜣḫt 2 instead of II ꜣḫt 8; oLouvre E 33020 (=oVarille) […] prt 15 (?) instead of […] prt 10. These new discoveries have no effect on the conclusions of the article, but rather confirm them.

[111] This article was awarded the Jaarprijs Cuijpers-Opdenakker in 2021 for the best scientific publication written in the Netherlands by a young researcher in the field on the Ancient Near East and Egypt. This annual prize is an initiative of The Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO), in collaboration with Ex Oriente Lux, and financially made possible by C. P. M. Cuijpers and R. J. G. Opdenakker.

Finally, the colophon is studied in detail. This paratextual feature mentions the temple of Medinet Habu, thus shedding more light on the relation between temples and scribal activity.

Together the six articles tell the story of the (educational) context in which *The Teaching of Khety* was produced. The papers are followed by a conclusion, entitled "*The Teaching of Khety* as an educational tool", in which all the information regarding scribal training presented in the foregoing papers is brought together in a summary fashion. The conclusion also incorporates my research on one final paratextual feature, namely the presence of other texts, both literary and administrative in nature, on the same material object as *Khety*. Although this feature is not discussed in any of the articles, it will be included in the discussion, as it is also instructive regarding ancient Egyptian education.

As a final note, it should be mentioned that all six articles were published in different Egyptological peer-reviewed journals. As a result, the lay-out differs per article, as does the way bibliographical references are formatted. For the references one should consult the bibliography of the articles themselves rather than the one at the end of this thesis, since the references are not necessarily repeated there. As regards cross references, one should also note that the articles were not written and published in the same order as they are presented here. Furthermore, it is possible that the name of an object as stated in one of the articles (for example oVarille) does not match that in the synoptic text (for example oLouvre E 33020), one of the reasons being that research progressed and unpublished ostraca became published. An index has been added as an appendix where these various numbers can be found, as well as the pages where a particular object is mentioned.