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# KEEPING RECORD

THE MATERIALITY OF RULERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION  
IN EARLY CHINA AND MEDIEVAL EUROPE

*Edited by Abigail S. Armstrong, Matthias J. Kuhn,  
Jörg Peltzer and Chun Fung Tong*

MATERIALE TEXTKULTUREN

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# **Materiale Textkulturen**

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Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 933

Herausgegeben von  
Ludger Lieb

Wissenschaftlicher Beirat:  
Jan Christian Gertz, Markus Hilgert, Hanna Liss,  
Bernd Schneidmüller, Melanie Trede  
und Christian Witschel

**Band 43**

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ISBN 978-3-11-132362-6  
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-132366-4  
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-132422-7  
ISSN 2198-6932  
DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111323664>



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**Library of Congress Control Number: 2024933895**

#### **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2024 with the author(s), editing © 2024 Abigail S. Armstrong, Matthias J. Kuhn, Jörg Peltzer and Chun Fung Tong, published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston.  
This book is published with open access at [www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com).

Typesetting: Sonderforschungsbereich 933 (Nicolai Dollt), Heidelberg

Cover image: Left: Liye Tablet 8-461, Institute for Cultural Relics and Archaeology of Hunan Province, China. Photo: Chun Fung Tong. Right: Lewis E 201 “Chronicle of the History of the World from Creation to Woden, with a Genealogy of Edward IV”, Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, United States. Copyright: Public Domain.

Print and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

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## Preface

This volume results from the online workshop ‘Keeping Record: The Materiality of Rulership and Administration in the Pre-Modern World’, hosted by Heidelberg University on the 24–25 March 2022. The workshop was co-organised by sub-projects B09 ‘Bamboo, Wood, Silk and Paper as Writing Materials in Early China’ and B10 ‘Rolls for the King’ of the Collaborative Research Centre 933 ‘Material Text Cultures: Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies’.

The editors would like to thank all the scholars who took part in the online workshop for providing a stimulating two days of discussion. Particular thanks must go to the contributors of the chapters in this volume for all their efforts—especially regarding the tight turnaround from workshop to print—in helping this book come to fruition. We are also grateful to Nicolai Dollt and students Sarah Kupferschmied, Linda Mosig and Leon Wölfelschneider for their assistance and support in ensuring the smooth organisation of the workshop and the preparations of these proceedings for publication. Finally, we would also like to extend our thanks to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for having financed the conference and the publication of this volume within the framework of the CRC 933 and its MTK series (Project Number 178035969 – SFB 933).

Heidelberg, 4 April 2023

Abigail S. Armstrong, Matthias J. Kuhn, Jörg Peltzer and Chun Fung Tong



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## A Material Approach to Written Artefacts of Rulership and Administration: An Introduction

1979 was an exceptional year for the studies of pragmatic literacy in the pre-modern world. That year Michael Clanchy published *From Memory to Written Record*, which became an instant classic of medieval European pragmatic literacy,<sup>1</sup> while Evelyn Rawski offered us an in-depth analysis of what she called “popular literacy” in late imperial China.<sup>2</sup> Over four decades after the publication of these two seminal works, the field of pragmatic literacy is well-established in both medieval European and pre-modern Chinese history. What remains less well explored, however, are trans-cultural comparative studies deepening our understanding of pragmatic literacy in a global perspective and, indeed, of the potentially very different approaches by (national) historiographic traditions in addressing that theme. Admittedly, this volume—which is the result of an online workshop hosted by the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 933 “Material Text Cultures” at Heidelberg University in March 2022—cannot and does not aim to fill this gap, but it endeavours to provide some pointers for such studies in future. It contains case studies looking at written artefacts produced and used by rulers and their administrations in medieval Central and North-western Europe between c. 1050 and c. 1540 CE—with a heavy emphasis on late-medieval England—and ancient China, focussing predominantly on its early imperial period (c. 221 BCE–220 CE). In line with the general theme of the CRC 933, particular attention is paid to the materiality of these artefacts and what it tells us about the significance, purpose and use of the written objects.

In what follows we will first set out very briefly our understanding of rulership and administrative writing, then look at the historiographical traditions in the scholarship on pragmatic literacy and the material approach to studying manuscript cultures in medieval Europe and ancient China before explaining how and why this volume originated. The final section of this introduction tries to identify the major points and common themes of the individual contributions. Given the premature state of

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1 The first edition was published in 1979: Clanchy 1979. Unless otherwise stated, subsequent references to this work will cite the third edition: Clanchy 2013.

2 Rawski 1979.

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This publication originated in the Collaborative Research Centre 933 ‘Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies’ (subprojects B09 ‘Bamboo and Wood as Writing Materials in Early China’ and B10 ‘Rolls for the King. The Format of Rolls in Royal Administration and Historiography in the Late Middle Ages in Western Europe’). The CRC 933 is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

comparative studies on medieval Europe and ancient China in this field, these tentative connections are offered as prompts and potential starting points for further, fully fledged transcultural research in the future.

The realms of rulership and administration were two closely related but separate spheres. Sometimes they were overlapping spheres or two sides of the same coin working in tandem to ensure effective rulership.<sup>3</sup> In order to rule successfully, a ruler would be supported by an efficient administration that could apprise them of the current state of affairs. All of this required information. This information could flow in both directions, with up-to-date evidence about the situation on the ground being collected, processed, organised and passed up the rulership and administrative hierarchy, which was in turn used to shape and decide laws or levels of taxation etc. These decisions then had to be formulated and conveyed back down to the ruler's subjects or the masses, in order for the ruler's will to be enacted. Much of this could be—and was—done orally, but committing this information to writing could help to enhance the legitimacy, longevity and usefulness of the acts. 'Rulership writing' often displays, establishes and legitimises rulers' authority through the written word. 'Administrative writing' on the other hand, is more concerned with information management: collecting, organising, summarising and storing information. But any perceived dichotomy between rulership and administrative documents is not so clear cut. Many written artefacts were produced with a combination of administrative and rulership functions. These documents or manuscripts could serve dual purposes, containing the necessary day-to-day records of bureaucracy while also emphasising the legitimacy or authority of the ruler, underscoring the interplay and interconnectivity between rulership and administration.<sup>4</sup>

How these laws, orders, reports, notices, surveys and other texts were committed to writing can influence the trustworthiness of the contents and the probability that these instructions would be followed. The ruler's authority had to be imbued in the written artefact to ensure their will was implemented. Information necessary for day-to-day management had to be recorded in an organised and logical manner in order to be useful. These needs could be achieved through the use of different material substrates of varying expense and durability, size, form, format,<sup>5</sup> layout, languages, scripts, ornamentation, elements of verification or validation and standardisation.

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<sup>3</sup> The subject of rulership and administrative writing as two separate but interrelated, and sometimes overlapping, facets of government or rule is addressed more fully in: Armstrong et al. 2023. An English translation of this chapter will be published in 2024.

<sup>4</sup> For discussion of the dual nature of administrative accounts, see: Lewis 1999, 1–2, 18–35; Mattéoni 2011, 3. See also the contributions by Jörg Peltzer and Hanna Nüllen in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> Form and format describe the size and shape of manuscripts. Within subproject B10 of CRC 933, "form" is used to denote the shape of a manuscript (roll, codex, single-sheet etc.), with "format" used to specify a particular "form" (for example, in the case of rolls, whether they are of the exchequer- or chancery-style), following J. Peter Gumbert. See: Peltzer 2019, 2; Gumbert 1993 and 2013.

The materiality of writing had to serve the purpose of being able to effectively express rule and administration. Therefore, the investigation of the materiality of artefacts associated with rule and administration is an important and relevant facet of examinations of domination and rulership.

The present volume strives to explore the materiality of rulership and administrative writing by drawing on examples from medieval Europe and ancient China. Despite their social, geographical and historical differences, the two cultures shared a crucial feature: they both developed bureaucratic governments in which written records became the preferred medium of communication between rulers and their functionaries. The contents of these written records—including the texts, figures or images—have always been a mainstay in the study of medieval European or ancient Chinese history; however, a more holistic approach to these artefacts, with questions regarding literacy and the materiality of such documents at the fore, has only slowly gained currency among historians.

For medieval Europe, Michael Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record* was crucial in paving the way in this regard. He explored the 'documentary revolution' that took hold in England during the high Middle Ages. Literate ways of thinking and doing business quickly became the norm in England by the end of the thirteenth century. Writing in a variety of forms and records was introduced on mass to respond to administrative, legal and political needs. This resulted in an unprecedented growth in the production and retention of records. The royal court was the driving force implementing governance and bureaucracy through writing, which then spread across all levels of society from the royal centre to the local level and their respective rulers (lords, guilds, towns etc.) and administrations. Over the course of the thirteenth century in England, there was an increasing familiarity with record-making practices across the social hierarchy.

Clanchy's study was divided into two parts. The first focussed on the material aspects of the production of records in high medieval England. In the chapters on the making and use of records—namely the chapters on "The Technology of Writing" and "The Preservation and Use of Documents"—Clanchy demonstrated that developments were both subtle and technical rather than revolutionary. Skill and expertise were required to produce the writing materials, as well as to enter text upon them. As such, material concerns were largely shaped by the demands of the document and the needs of the user; new scripts were developed for speed, layouts for clarity and shapes of manuscripts for convenience of transportation, use and storage. Economic considerations, as well as the ease of construction and ephemerality or permanence of documents, also dictated the material choices of these artefacts.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the second part of the book, focussing on literacy, which took the forefront and inspired subsequent research. Clanchy traced the development of lit-

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<sup>6</sup> See chapters "The Technology of Writing" and "The Preservation and Use of Documents": Clanchy 2013.

eracy and the importance of written records to governance in medieval England from the eleventh to the early-fourteenth century. He demonstrated how lay literacy grew out of bureaucratic needs, as the increased demands of the royal exchequer and the courts of law compelled knights in the shires and burgesses in the towns to create lesser bureaucracies of their own. This growth in literacy for practical purposes—namely the ability to read the written orders presented to all levels of society and to produce and keep records themselves in order to make adequate answers to the ever-increasing burden of written proof within English society—resulted in a pragmatic literacy.<sup>7</sup>

This growing literate society and culture, however, did not necessarily imply that writing had become the primary means of communication in everyday lives of commoners. Quite the opposite, Clanchy posited that the foundation of literate society in thirteenth-century England was grounded in text rather than writing. At the time, reading was still closely linked to the acts of reading aloud and hearing sound, rather than silently scrutinising written texts.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the skills of reading and writing remained separate. Therefore, even if non-literates could not understand the textual content themselves, they could still *read* the text and participate in a literate society if it had been conveyed to them orally by those able.<sup>9</sup> Clanchy even contended that the production of symbolic written artefacts, which carried extraordinary material characteristics, usually occurred in a pre-literate society, suggesting that only literates “were going to be convinced that the writing was superior to the symbolic object. Such objects, the records of the non-literate, were therefore preserved along with documents”.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, it seems that Clanchy did not attribute great significance to the materiality of written artefacts within literate societies. Yet, in the years following the first edition of 1979 he appears to have become increasingly aware of the importance of material aspects for a comprehensive understanding of the texts. In his second edition published in 1993, even though he retained the above quoted comment,<sup>11</sup> he added a sub-chapter on “Wax, Parchment, and Wood”, while further additional sub-chapters on “Word and Image” and “The Symbolism of Seals and Crosses” also portray a more comprehensive approach to the understanding of the written artefacts in question.<sup>12</sup>

In the decades following Clanchy’s first edition, the study of pragmatic literacy has become a substantial branch in European medieval studies. It suffices to look at major collaborative research enterprises to gain an overview of the dynamics of this field. In Germany, following directly from Clanchy, the medieval development of pragmatic literacy (or *pragmatische Schriftlichkeit* in German) was the focus of study within the

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7 Clanchy 2013, 1, 19, 329.

8 A similar observation with regard to the case of ancient China is made by: Behr/Führer 2005.

9 Clanchy 2013, 272–274. Rawski suggests the same for the Qing society: Rawski 1979, 145.

10 Clanchy 2013, 261.

11 The quotation was retained in each subsequent edition: Clanchy 1979, 207; Clanchy 1993, 259; Clanchy 2013, 261.

12 Clanchy 1993, xi.

CRC 231 at Münster between 1986 and 1999. The intention of the CRC was “to explore the intrinsic normativity of the written word and to include any written artefact whose use corresponds to an immediate intentionality” and they defined pragmatic literacy as “the use of the written word with the intent of producing a concrete effect, writing to act and perform, in contrast to more abstract and theoretical writing activity”.<sup>13</sup> Following in Clanchy’s footsteps, they determined that pragmatism was the key driver of literacy in the high Middle Ages. The need to be able to read written artefacts in order to perform particular functions, but also more generally as part of everyday life with regard to specific actions and communication required and advanced increased literacy.<sup>14</sup> While not completely disregarded, the materiality of the written artefacts was not at the core of this research programme. In subsequent research enterprises, however, material aspects have increasingly gained in importance.

This is particularly noteworthy in France, where research in the materiality of a range of documents has been especially vivid since the turn of the millennium.<sup>15</sup> The ARTEM (*Atelier de recherches sur les textes médiévaux*) research group based at the Université de Nancy 2 was established in the 1990s to study medieval texts of an episcopal or institutional nature, with a particular focus on economic and legal documents.<sup>16</sup> One of the major projects of this work was to create a database of all original acts preserved in France pre-dating 1121.<sup>17</sup> Stemming from this project, the researchers organised a roundtable workshop to explore the role played by diplomatic texts in the expression of power—the proceedings of which were published in 2003.<sup>18</sup> A key research question addressed by the group concerned the role of the materiality of charters, which were produced to ensure the transmission and perpetual validity of an act beyond human memory, but were also manifestations of the power and might of the grantor of the act.<sup>19</sup> The group found that the external form of a document was the easiest way to impress those who could not necessarily read the contents. Moreover, the quality, format, layout, script and decoration all gave the act a solemnity and emphasised the importance of the document which was replicated in the contents of the text.<sup>20</sup> This was most evident in the contribution by Marie-José Gasse-Grandjean and Benoît-Michel Tock who found that a spacious layout was utilised to indicate

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**13** Barret/Stutzmann/Vogeler 2016, 10.

**14** Meier 2006, 26. Some of the key publications of the CRC 231 include: Keller/Grubmüller/Staubach 1992; Meier/Hüpper/Keller 1996; Keller/Meier/Scharff 1999.

**15** Cf. also: Peltzer 2019.

**16** It is unclear if this research group still exists although a book series under the same name continues to publish research in these fields: ARTEM series: <https://www.brepols.net/series/ARTEM#publications> (accessed 24.08.22).

**17** An inventory of pre-1121 charters was published in two volumes: *La diplomatie française*, ed. Tock et al.

**18** Gasse-Grandjean/Tock 2003.

**19** Tock 2003, 11.

**20** Tock 2003, 13.

the high status of the grantor of the act.<sup>21</sup> Similarly inspired studies focussing on the material expressions of authority include the use of decoration in charters as symbols of royal power.<sup>22</sup>

A further working group for the historical study of accounts was established in 2008 at the IRHIS (*Institut de Recherches Historiques du Septentrion*) at the Université de Lille 3. One strand of investigation sought to take a codicological approach—applying the material and technical analysis of manuscripts often utilised by book specialists—to other forms of medieval documents and texts, particularly administrative accounts, as promoted by Patrice Beck.<sup>23</sup> This approach had previously and successfully been utilised in the study of the diplomatic and memorial functions of cartularies.<sup>24</sup> The first fruits of the group’s codicological analysis of medieval accounts were published in a special issue.<sup>25</sup> The volume demonstrated how accounts were ordered texts, utilising specific layouts for the purposes of organising information; sums of income and expenditure were presented so that they could be easily accessed. Accounts were also standardised to permit better control and the verification of information.<sup>26</sup> Since this group’s inception, the investigation of material, codicological aspects of documents has become an integral rather than a supplementary approach to the study of written artefacts of medieval rulers and their administrations.<sup>27</sup>

Turning from medieval Europe to ancient China it is notable that a major influence came from outside sinologist circles. William V. Harris’ pioneering 1989 study of literacy in ancient Greece and Rome was not only highly significant for subsequent work in this field,<sup>28</sup> but also stimulated work on literacy in ancient China. Harris in turn knew of Clanchy’s *From Memory to Written Record*,<sup>29</sup> which may have had some—albeit minor and indirect—influence on subsequent research into ancient Chinese writings. Drawing on Harris, social historians of ancient China in the last decades have focussed on the effect of texts in spreading various forms of literacy and creating literate societies. Much like the medieval English case, the bureaucratisation of government organisations during the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE) compelled the proliferation of written records in administration and spread a “scribal literacy”,

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**21** Gasse-Grandjean/Tock 2003, 99–123.

**22** This was first explored by Elizabeth Danbury with regard to English charters, with subsequent studies focussing on continental charters. See: Danbury 1989 and 2013; Brunel 2005; Brunel/Smith 2013; Roland/Zajic 2013. See also Peter Rück’s groundbreaking study on graphic symbols on medieval charters: Rück 1996.

**23** Beck 2006, “Introduction”.

**24** Guyotjeannin/Morelle/Parisse 1993.

**25** *Comptabilités 2: Approche codicologique des documents comptables du Moyen Âge* (2011).

**26** Mattéoni 2015.

**27** See for example: Hermand/Nieus/Renard 2012; Barret/Stutzmann/Vogeler 2016; Nosova 2020.

**28** Harris 1989. Subsequent work on ancient literacy include, for example: Bowman/Woolf 1994; Johnson/Parker 2009.

**29** To give just a few examples, see: Harris 1989, 5 n. 6; 29 n. 6; 34 n. 32.

that is “the knowledge required for selection as a scribe”, through the use of primers and state-run schools.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, efforts have been dedicated to the different types of functional literacy acquired by commoners such as soldiers, women and artisans.<sup>31</sup> Yet despite scholars often utilising a wide spectrum of written artefacts in their discussions, they seldom addressed the materiality of these writings. Such an overwhelming preference for text is evident in the monograph of Charles Sanft. Following Clanchy’s distinction between reading and writing,<sup>32</sup> Sanft emphasised the pivotal role played by oral communication in the formation of a literate community along the north-western frontier of the Western Han Empire (202 BCE–9 CE).<sup>33</sup> Simply put, what mattered most was the content of the texts that community members articulated verbally, rather than the written record.

It is only recently that a material approach to the study of ancient Chinese pragmatic literacy has made some substantial inroads. When studying the literacy of soldiers serving on the Han frontier, Enno Giele specified the social implications of notches carved on wooden tally contracts. Given that these notches recorded the sums of cash and commodities involved in transactions, non-literates—such as soldiers and commoners—could ensure the amount they received was correct when they counted the items at hand and compared the number with that recorded by the notch(es) on the contracts—so long as they understood the numerical system of such notches. In this way, the material form of tally contracts allowed non-literates to partly access their contents.<sup>34</sup> Along this line of investigation, Tsang Wing Ma further expounded the idea of ‘administrative literacy’. In addition to the ability to write, administrators also had to acquire skills related to the ‘reading’ or comprehension and ‘writing’ or production of non-textual information, such as making notches, splitting tallies and understanding the meanings behind the use of certain forms, sizes and layouts of written artefacts. Inasmuch as this patchwork of skills was indispensable to administrative duties, it formed an organically learnt—rather than taught—part of an administrator’s literacy.<sup>35</sup>

However, it should be noted that the relative obscurity of the material approach in studying ancient Chinese pragmatic literacy does not represent the whole of the study of manuscript culture in early China. As early as 1962, Tsuen-Hsuei Tsien published his *Written on Bamboo and Silk*. Revised from his dissertation, this pioneering work offered a comprehensive overview of the substrates, supports, forms and formats of early Chi-

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**30** Foster 2021, 179. Other notable works on this subject include: Yates 2011, 345–360; Hsing 2011, 596–64; Giele 2009, 149–154; Miyake 2009, 193–215; Tomiya 2010, 106–140.

**31** For the literacy of soldiers and women, see: Yates 2011, 360–367. For the literacy of artisans, see: Poo 1998, 181–182; Barbieri-Low 2011, 370–379.

**32** Sanft 2019, 169 n. 2; 173 n. 27; 174 n. 43; 175 n. 62.

**33** Sanft 2019, 10–23. For the role that orality played in the transmission of law and order, see also: Yates 2011, 341–344.

**34** Giele 2007, 488–492.

**35** Ma 2017, 331–332.



nese writing, exploring the relationship between the production of written artefacts and the materiality of their writing supports.<sup>36</sup> Tsien traced the proliferation of writing to the increased demand for written communication between regional states after the fall of the Western Zhou dynasty (1045–771 BCE).<sup>37</sup> He also tried to distinguish between the use of perishable, convenient and cheap writing supports—such as bamboo and wooden slips—from more permanent, hard and durable ones—e. g. stone slabs and bronze—suggesting that the former group was primarily for government documents, historical records, literary compositions and personal correspondence, whereas the latter was for “making commemorative or other inscriptions of more lasting value”.<sup>38</sup> Despite being rather descriptive, Tsien’s book paved the way for later research and remains a useful reference for anyone interested in ancient Chinese writing culture.

After Tsien, in recent decades, numerous efforts have been dedicated to the materiality of early Chinese manuscripts. This has resulted in a series of studies on the physical dimensions,<sup>39</sup> the reconstruction and contextualisation of different types of administrative manuscripts based on material and archaeological evidence,<sup>40</sup> as well as attempts to discern the different hands that potentially produced and handled them.<sup>41</sup> A notable recent effort is from Zhang Rongqiang 張榮強, who examined how the material transformation of writing supports—from slips and tablets made of wood and bamboo to paper—changed the practices of household registration. Zhang argued that the material advantages of paper—which provided a larger writing space than multi-piece scrolls and could produce smaller volumes—not only gave the government the technical basis for including more information on household members within a single manuscript, but also initiated a shift in the production and storage of household registers from districts (*xiang* 鄉) to counties (*xian* 縣), which were higher

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**36** Tsien’s work was inspired by the earlier treatise of Wang Guowei 王國維, who offered a concise synthesis of the materiality of ancient Chinese manuscripts using both transmitted sources and the evidence from manuscripts found in Dunhuang and present-day Xinjiang: Wang 2004 (1st edition 1914). About the same time as Tsien, Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 also published a detailed analysis of the materiality of Han manuscripts based on the then newly excavated Wuwei manuscripts: Chen Mengjia 1980 (1st edition 1964), 291–315.

**37** Tsien 1962, 7–9. In 2004, Tsien published an updated version of his book, where he supplemented various new materials, as well as an afterword by Edward L. Shaughnessy, which outlined palaeographic sources from 1960s to early 2000s. The main arguments, however, remained unchanged.

**38** Tsien 1962, 179.

**39** For a comprehensive summary of the materiality of Chu manuscripts, see: Chen Wei 2012, 5–28; for that of the Han administrative manuscripts: see Li/Liu 1999, 1–19, 60–142. For the length of the slips on which early Chinese multi-piece manuscripts were produced and the notches on Han wooden tallies, see: Hu 2000; Momiyama 2015a, ch. 1.

**40** Loewe 1967; Hou 2014 and 2018; Ling 2015 and 2019; Yang 2022. See also Chun Fung Tong’s contribution in this volume.

**41** For studies of hands in Chu manuscripts, see: Richter 2006 and 2009; Li Songru 2015. In addition, both Enno Giele and Hsing I-tien examine the nature of ‘signatures’ by analysing the handwriting in the north-western Han manuscripts: Giele 2005; Hsing 2021, 13–92.

in the administrative hierarchy. These institutional changes, he suggested, signified the ruler's endeavour to avert the wrongdoings of grassroots officials and thereby further centralise state power.<sup>42</sup>

In particular, Japanese scholars have conducted some especially noteworthy studies of early imperial Chinese administrative manuscripts utilising a material approach. Their perspectives and research questions often stem from the Japanese tradition of diplomatics: *komonjo gaku* 古文書学. While *komonjo gaku* used to focus more on the context, social arena and formulaic language of ancient documents that were transferred from one place to another,<sup>43</sup> over the last decades Japanese scholars working on such Chinese manuscripts have paid increasing attention to non-textual aspects including the writing support, visual impact and symbolic meanings of written artefacts.

Tomiyama Itaru 富谷至, an expert in early imperial Chinese law and government administration, coined the term “visual slips and tablets” (*shikaku kantoku* 視覚簡牘) to emphasise the visual impact of these records. As Tomiyama rightly pointed out, a written artefact's material substrate, size, layout and form all conveyed meanings supplementary to and independent of its textual content.<sup>44</sup> For example, the length of writing supports—bamboo and wooden slips (*die* 牒 or *jian* 簡) and tablets (*du* 牘)—was often connected to and represented a manuscript's authority. While the standard length of writing supports for ordinary official documents was 1 *chi* 尺 (c. 23.1 cm) long, the emperor's edict was longer at 1.1 *chi* (c. 25.2 cm) in length. The designated length for the Confucian classics and statutory laws—which respectively recorded the sages' words and the stipulations of the state—was even longer. Additionally, the public-display nature and the peculiar shape of *xi* 檄 visualised the authority of such documents. In this way, the materiality of manuscripts was utilised as an expression of the ruler's authority.<sup>45</sup>

While Tomiyama examined the peculiar material characteristics of Han manuscripts, Sumiya Tsuneko 角谷常子 tried to discern the implications behind their seemingly ordinary forms. Analysing the handwriting and other material traces of such manuscripts, she argued that different types and versions of records often utilised distinct formats. The formal or clean copy of an administrative document was written on double-

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<sup>42</sup> Zhang 2019a and 2019b.

<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the notion of '*komonjo*' includes private letters, but not writings such as dairies or accounts; see: Satō Shinichi 1996 (1st edition 1971), 1. This sets it apart from the Chinese concept of *wenshu* 文書 and the Western European concepts of 'document', *charte* or *Urkunde*: Rüttermann 2020, 170–176. Such an approach also profoundly influenced Japanese scholarship of early imperial Chinese administrative documents: Momiyama 2015b, 156–165. This may also explain why Takatori Yuji's painstaking synthesis of the Qin-Han official documents also concentrated on subjects such as terminology, formulaic language and methods of transmission as demonstrated in textual information: Takatori 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Tomiyama 2010, 102–103.

<sup>45</sup> Tomiyama 2010, 48–49, 101–103.

column slips (*erhang die* 二行牒 or *lianghang* 兩行), which were bound together to form a multi-piece roll, whereas single-column slips (*zha* 札) were used in drafts, registers or accounts.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Sumiya examined the use of *du* tablets within the Liye Qin administrative corpus. Based on transmitted metatextual accounts, Sumiya defined *du* as a writing support whose width exceeds two columns. She further suggested that *du* was designated a single-piece manuscript (*tandoku kan* 单独簡), meaning that each *du* constituted an independent codicological unit.<sup>47</sup> This feature prevented the loss of text due to the decay of binding strings, thereby granting *du* an irreplaceable advantage over multi-pieces. In this light, Sumiya suggested that *du* was considered a more valuable writing support than multi-pieces during the Qin era.<sup>48</sup> In short, Sumiya's studies demonstrated that the choice of writing support was often deliberate, reflecting not only a manuscript's stage of production and durability but also its level of authority.

The material approach of Japanese scholarship towards early imperial manuscript culture has had a far-reaching impact.<sup>49</sup> Ma's abovementioned concept of "administrative literacy", for instance, is partly inspired by the notion of *shikaku kantoku* that Tomiya advocated. In addition, Sumiya's study of writing supports, such as *jian*, *die* and *du*, has propelled further inquiries into the forms and terminologies of contemporaneous manuscripts. On the one hand, some scholars urge the avoidance of using these confusing traditional terms. Such efforts are exemplified in the topology developed by Takamura Takeyuki 高村武幸, who generalised six ideal types of manuscript forms based entirely on their respective material traces.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, other scholars, such as Thies Staack, have adopted a more cautious attitude, trying to understand better the distinctions of these traditional terms by delving into their meanings and usage during the ancient period. Staack's thorough investigation of the forms and functions of *die* and *du* in Qin administrative and legal corpora confirmed Sumiya's conclusions that *du* was associated with single-piece manuscripts, whereas *die* formed the basic unit of a multi-piece manuscript. Such a distinction was not only

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**46** Sumiya 2003, 98.

**47** Gumbert defined a 'codicological unit' as "a discrete number of quires, worked in a single operation (unless it is an enriched, enlarged or extended codicological unit), containing a complete text or set of texts (unless it is an unfinished, defective or dependent unit)": Gumbert 2004, 33. While Gumbert's definition stems from European codices, it is a useful description of ancient Chinese manuscripts – if we replace 'quires' with 'pieces'. In this respect, once a *du* tablet was inscribed, even if later scribes could have successively added new texts to the same *du*, these extra layers only "enriched" the original codicological unit and did not change its basis.

**48** Sumiya 2012.

**49** Notably, recent Japanese scholarship of Japanese *komonjo* also began to realise the importance of non-textual information of written artefacts, although the inspiration is mainly drawn – at least ostensibly – from the works of European medievalists rather than classical sinologists: Satō Yūki 2020, 212–215. Such concerns over manuscripts' materiality open up possibilities of potential comparative studies between the medieval Japanese and Western European manuscript cultures: Okazaki 2020, esp. 198–203; Thaller 2020.

**50** Takamura 2018, 287–336.

terminological but also affected the way in which different manuscript types were stored and handled. Additionally, Staack pointed out that the Qin authorities promulgated meticulous stipulations to standardise the length and width of *die* and *du* and the proliferation of multi-piece manuscripts likely resulted from the growing demand for record keeping. This in turn necessitated the use of multi-piece manuscripts that could accommodate longer texts.<sup>51</sup>

All of these studies have advanced our understanding of the manuscript culture in early imperial China. Although their subject matters are closely related to those being discussed in the contributions of this volume, only a few of them—except Tomiya Itaru—have explicitly addressed rulership writing.

This very cursory sketch of the more recent historiographies of pragmatic literacy and materiality in medieval Europe and ancient China points not only to common links and independent traditions, but it also shows that in both fields the materiality of written artefacts has been receiving increasing scholarly attention. These developments have received further impetus by recent German research initiatives.

The material turn in the humanities has not only stimulated individual scholars, it has also had a major impact on the research designs of collaborative research enterprises funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). In 2011, the CRCs 933 “Material Text Cultures” in Heidelberg and 950 “Manuscript Cultures in Asia, Africa and Europe” in Hamburg were established.<sup>52</sup> When in 2020 the centre at Hamburg came to an end, much of its research programme continued within the even larger framework of the Cluster of Excellence “Understanding Written Artefacts: Material, Interaction and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures”, which was established in 2019.<sup>53</sup> Both CRCs were interested in pre-modern manuscripts, examining written artefacts from Europe and Asia—and in the case of Hamburg also Africa—and both placed questions concerning materiality at the heart of their research agenda. While in Hamburg the emphasis was laid on the identification and understanding of manuscripts cultures, at Heidelberg the principal goal was to find out how the materiality of written artefacts shaped their use and the understanding of the text.<sup>54</sup> It is too early to judge the extent of the influence of both CRCs’ work on the international research landscape, but they have created research environments in which these questions were addressed not only in a disciplinary, but also an interdisciplinary, framework.<sup>55</sup> As a

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51 Staack 2018. For a recent response to Staack’s arguments, see: Shih 2021, 202–203.

52 For the programme of the CRC 950 see: Collaborative Research Centre 950, “About”: <https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/sfb-950/about.html> (accessed 25.08.22).

53 Hamburg Cluster of Excellence: Understanding Written Artefacts: <https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/written-artefacts.html> (accessed 25.08.22).

54 For Heidelberg, see: Collaborative Research Centre 933, “Goals and Central Ideas”: <https://www.materiale-textkulturen.org/article.php?s=2> (accessed 12.08.22); Meier/Ott/Sauer 2015.

55 See the publications of sub-project B09, which include: Berkes/Giele/Quack/Ott 2015; Giele 2015 and 2019; Staack 2016, 2018 and 2019; Tong 2021, 2022 and 2023. Publications arising from sub-project B10 include: Holz/Peltzer/Shirota 2019; Peltzer 2019; Holz/Peltzer 2021; Holz 2022; Peltzer

consequence, they created spaces where various historiographical traditions could meet and potentially influence each other.

At Heidelberg, sub-projects B09 “Bamboo, Wood, Silk and Paper as Writing Materials in Early China” and B10 “Rolls in the Service of the King” started to work together at a very early stage in an attempt to describe the various formats and uses of rolls within medieval European and ancient Chinese contexts.<sup>56</sup> In another joint endeavour that also involved scholars working on ancient Egypt, ancient Rome and medieval German literature, the focus was directed specifically towards the materiality of rulership and administrative writing.<sup>57</sup>

From this second collaboration originated the idea for the workshop leading to this volume. We were curious to find out what a closer examination of medieval European and ancient Chinese rulership and administrative writings might reveal. To create a common framework for those studies, we decided to take our lead from Clanchy’s work—for studies concerned with pragmatic literacy he still is the natural reference point for European medievalists and, as we have seen, partly even beyond—but with an important modification: the materiality of the written artefact was to be understood as an integral part of understanding the texts; it was an important part of literacy.

The analysis of the material characteristics of records, including the size and shape, the material substrate, the hands that wrote them, the use of different scripts and decoration, the layout and presentation of the text and how these documents were used and stored can—so the assumption—enhance our understanding of the expression of power and authority or the functioning of governmental and administrative bodies. In addition, this material approach may shed further light on the aims pursued by the issuing administrations, the skills of their agents, the emergence of common standards, the pace of their dissemination and the mechanisms for controlling their application. To test these hypotheses against case studies from medieval Europe and ancient China was the main goal of the online workshop “Keeping Record: The Materiality of Rulership and Administration in the Pre-Modern World” hosted by sub-projects B09 and B10 at Heidelberg in March 2022.<sup>58</sup>

Its papers—plus additional contributions from Maxim Korolkov and Andrew Kourris—are published in this volume. Four out of a total of ten articles correspond to ancient China and six to medieval Europe. The four Chinese contributions analyse

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2023. Collaborative publications from the two sub-projects include: Giele/Peltzer/Trede 2015; Armstrong et al. 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Giele/Peltzer/Trede 2015. For a description of the sub-projects, see their respective webpages: Collaborative Research Centre 933, “Sub-projects”: <https://www.materiale-textkulturen.org/subprojects.php> (accessed 26.08.22).

<sup>57</sup> Armstrong et al. 2023.

<sup>58</sup> Collaborative Research Centre 933 Blog, “Workshop Report”: <https://sfb933.hypotheses.org/3300> (accessed 12.08.22).

written artefacts from the Qin and Han periods, while the medieval articles correspond to Western and Central Europe, with a particular focus on England, during the high and late Middle Ages and into the early modern period (c. 1050–c. 1540). It should also be noted that there is a major difference concerning the survival of the sources for the European and Chinese studies. While the European material was and still is preserved in archives, most of the Chinese sources have been found during excavations and, at present, it is unclear whether they had originally been archived. This means that the European evidence is the result of a conscious selection made by contemporaries, who may not have intended to preserve their records for several centuries, but at least for some time after their creation. The Chinese evidence, by contrast, may be the result of mere chance and represent ephemeral documents to a much greater extent than the European sample (consider, for example, the thousands of writs issued by the medieval English royal administration, which were simply discarded once they had served their purpose).

The choice to use case studies from two different spheres in time and space was made to offer perspectives on different cultures.<sup>59</sup> With a diverse range of rulers, political systems and administrations, defined in the broad sense of both individuals and institutions (secular, religious and military), these case studies emphasise various features of administrative practice. Despite their temporal and spatial differences, it becomes evident that the choice of material, format, layout and execution of administrative documents was as deliberate a decision in ancient China as it was in medieval Europe. These findings strongly suggest that the materiality of written artefacts was not only of importance just to pre-literate societies as suggested by Clanchy, but also to literate societies, where the materiality of documents remained instrumental in expressing the ruler's power and effecting efficient bureaucratic processes. Such similarities are the common ground upon which future transcultural comparison of the two featured pre-modern societies can be built.

The above understanding also calls for a more nuanced analysis of the multiple functions of administrative writing. As noted earlier, it often aimed at expressing the ruler's authority and thus shared similar functions with rulership writing. In this light, rulership and administrative writings are better understood as the two ends of a broad continuum, along which documents can be placed depending on the degree to which they fulfil these different functions. Nevertheless, a written artefact's materiality—the material substrate, format, layout, execution, location of production, use and storage etc.—may help us to anchor its position along this figurative scale. Considering the positive correlation between the materiality of administrative writing and its

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<sup>59</sup> For a large-scale attempt of transcultural studies in regards to Asia and Europe, see: Publications of the former Heidelberg Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context": <https://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/cluster/publications.html> (accessed 25.08.22). See also: De Weerdt/Morche 2021.

authority, the more (or less) materially embellished an administrative manuscript is, the closer (or more distant) it is towards the realm of rulership writing.<sup>60</sup>

Just how much groundwork still needs to be done to gain a basic understanding of the material at hand is a theme common to all contributions, but it is particularly prominent in the papers of Andrew Kourris, Romain Waroquier and Tsang Wing Ma. The contrasts of their written artefacts of study—in terms of how long they have been known to scholarship—could hardly be greater. On the one hand, Ma's bamboo and wooden manuscripts are recent archaeological discoveries and on the other, Kourris' and Waroquier's charter rolls and charters are some of the oldest objects of study in the English and Flemish historiographies respectively. Yet, certain aspects of the making of the charters and charter rolls are still as obscure as if, they too, had only recently been unearthed. To this day, for example, we know very little about the scribes of the rolls in the English royal chancery in the thirteenth century. Kourris is tackling this issue for a short time span during the reign of Henry III, trying to identify the hands that wrote the royal charters and copied them onto the charter rolls. He finds that only a small number of people executed these tasks—each for a period of about 16–24 months—and that there was a significant concordance between the hands engrossing the original charter and that of the copy in the roll. As Kourris rightly points out, if these findings are combined with further studies on the scribes of the other records produced in the royal chancery, it might be possible to identify career patterns and, as a consequence, perhaps even a certain hierarchy among the documents.

Scribes and the production of records are also the focus of the articles by Waroquier and Ma. Looking at Flemish charters mostly from the twelfth century, Waroquier points to a certain lack of standardisation in the writing of a charter and the selection of the witnesses. The writing could be done at the time of the transaction described in the charter or at some later point and occasionally a charter was even written in several stages. The witnesses were normally chosen among those people present at the transaction, but the reasons for the inclusion of some and not others appear to have varied. However, the physical constraints of the writing material—namely the lack of space on the parchment—influenced the length of witness lists and the selection of witnesses. Waroquier suggests that the scribes themselves had some agency in selecting the witnesses, which, if correct, would promote them to a much more prominent role than simple amanuenses in the process of issuing a charter. This clearly deserves further investigation.

The agency of an individual engaged in making a document is also a theme in Ma's study of sealing practices in early imperial China. Examining the recent archaeological discoveries made at Wuyiguangchang, he shows that during the Eastern Han Empire (25–220 CE) scribes could choose either to seal or to sign the document in which they declared to act as security on behalf of a third person. In this case, there-

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<sup>60</sup> See: Armstrong et al. 2023.

fore, the materiality of the guarantor's commitment did not matter in terms of its validity nor was it related to the guarantor's status or that of the guarantee. Signing and sealing were just two different means to the same end. However, given that the analysis of the material of Wuyiguangchang has only just begun, Ma is rightly cautious not to exclude any other (material) factors that may have influenced the choice. For instance, it is not yet known whether the guarantor had a choice if the document had already been prepared to carry a seal. This, of course, assumes that the guarantor had no say in the production of the document, another question still to be answered with certainty.

A second group of articles by Maxim Korolkov, Chun Fung Tong and Abigail Armstrong is again looking at little explored material and, as a consequence, provide detailed descriptions of their documents. Common to all three is the question of standardisation and its relationship with governmental authority. Taking a close look at the Liye archive containing wooden documents from the Qin Empire (221–206 BCE) Korolkov argues that the standardisation of the script, layout and format of documents was a conscious effort by the government to implement their rule across their far-flung territories. This process, he considers, may have been advanced by specifically trained scribes who were sent out to the regions to work in the local writing offices. The scribes are probably also those who signed the documents using the specific graph *shou* (“hand”) to authorise the document. This practice may have had purely pragmatic origins—the scribe was the official closest at hand—but it is perhaps also indicative of the importance attributed to the form of the script and the document in conveying governmental authority. Nevertheless, during the subsequent Han Empire (202 BCE–220 CE) the bureaucratisation of governmental procedures gained full strength. As a result, the scribe receded back into the shadows of the anonymous daily labour as it was the responsibility of the senior official of the respective governmental office to authorise the documents.

Looking less at the script, but more on the composition of the wooden tablets used by the administration in the eastern Han Empire, Tong provides greater nuance to our understanding of the highly standardised appearance of governmental records. Analysing material from the Wuyiguangchang cache, he shows that local practice could change swiftly in spheres that were not prescribed by the standards of the central government. However, such changes in local practice did not mean that it would disconnect itself totally from the characteristic features of official documents. The potential of standardised forms to communicate authority was thus not jeopardised. While this required a certain stability in the appearance of these forms, it did not necessarily lead to their fossilisation. Tong makes a strong case that the administration experimented with the use of single and multi-piece manuscripts in the first decade of the first century CE. Eventually though, the multi-piece manuscripts prevailed, probably because they allowed for a clearer demarcation of the accountability of different officials. A further argument against an oversimplified narrative of standardisation during the Han period is brought forward by Tong's examination of the Zoumalou



corpus dating from the early third century CE. These records contain single-piece tablets that utilise a different format and layout than those used two centuries earlier. The tablets date from the Wu regime, but their appearance was mostly the result of changes brought about during the earlier Han rule.

Standardisation and innovation are also two major themes of Armstrong's analysis of four account rolls from the estates of the earls of Northumberland in Northern England dating from the early sixteenth century CE. Arguing that these rolls were temporary documents used to collect information during the audit process, which would then be transferred to a clean copy for the final version of the account, she provides insight into the relatively complex nature of the administration of a seigniorial estate. There was a hierarchy of officials and a chain of accountability. This contributed to a standardisation of the process of auditing and record-keeping across the entire estate. Yet, there remained room for innovation. Similar to Tong's findings for Han China, these innovations did not, however, radically alter the appearance of the form. The changes made were within the established framework of the document and thus contributed to the endurance of the routine of lordly rule rather than to challenge it.

Almost seamlessly, Enno Giele's contribution bridges between the second and the third group of articles, which predominantly focus on visual forms of authority and legitimacy. Looking at multi-piece manuscripts from early Chinese administration, he investigates how governmental authority was expressed in writing and the artefacts themselves. Moreover, he is interested in the means with which the reader was guided through the text, in other words how a hierarchical relationship among the portions of the text was established. Giele shows that contrary to what the occident-trained mind might expect, images, precious materials or large size characters were not used to convey the ruler's authority in administrative writings. This was perhaps due to the possibilities or limitations afforded by the writing supports. Unlike with silk and paper that allowed for more ornate writing, the narrow, oblong writing strips of ancient China did not easily lend themselves to such tasks.<sup>61</sup> But the concept of a column width of written text being defined by the width of a bamboo slip did perhaps lead to a cultural tendency of not enlarging characters beyond that width of writing slips. Instead, scribes used the bindings and the grid-like nature of the strips to communicate authority and to guide the reader. In producing the manuscript, they aimed for uniformity—here again we find the motif of standardisation as an important argument in conveying authority. Against that backdrop, the scribes' use of indentation and the protrusion of terms or columns served as markers guiding the reader through the text. Giele's arguments point to the somewhat obvious, but easily side-lined, fact that the affordance of the writing support plays an important role in determining its description and/or depiction.

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<sup>61</sup> Although it was quite possible to draw large diagrams onto a roll of bamboo slips or wooden strips, surviving examples are uncommon. See, for example, the diagrams embedded in various popular hemerological manuals: Kalinowski 2017, 176–193.

The importance of affordance is underscored by Matthias Kuhn's analysis of a number of royal genealogical rolls from fifteenth-century CE England. The form of the roll was ideally suited to delineate generations of rulers and to emphasise inter-generational connections. Parchment was a common writing material but was also receptive to illustration and, indeed, it is the colours and diagrams that dominate the rolls that are investigated by Kuhn. These representations of royal authority and legitimacy were of primary importance while the accompanying explanatory text played a supplementary role and was, so-to-speak, almost only 'illustrative' in nature. Kuhn's article also points to the important fact that pragmatic literacy is not limited to purely administrative writings. In his case, the rolls were produced in the context of a civil war—the Wars of the Roses—fought over the English throne. They served as propaganda—in this specific case for the Yorkist party—and aimed first and foremost at keeping their followers united behind their faction. These genealogical rolls were a form of pragmatic literacy that thus played their own important role in supporting claims of royal authority. It would be intriguing to see whether similar documents also played a role in pre-modern Chinese history and, if so, whether this was connected with the introduction of new writing supports.

By contrast, the so-called Great Cowcher, a two-volume cartulary composed in England during the first decade of the fifteenth-century CE and subject of the article by Jörg Peltzer seems to be a straightforward case of administrative writing. Remarkably, we have what might be termed a metatext providing the reasons for making a specific manuscript: King Henry IV's order to produce the cartulary. He—as heir to the duchy of Lancaster—explained that the cartulary was to serve as evidence and information for the council of the duchy of Lancaster so that the charters and other important documents could be stored and preserved in a safer way than had hitherto been possible. The motive for making the cartulary could hardly have been put in a more pragmatic way. Yet, the analysis of the arrangement of the cartulary and above all its materiality makes very plain that its purpose went far beyond mere administrative needs. The generous use of high quality parchment, the uniform layout and script, the lavish and colourful decoration of the folios, the depiction of coats of arms relating to Lancastrian property and the precisely targeted deployment of two images in initials all contributed to the visualisation of a message in support not only of the Lancastrian lands, but also of Henry's royal dignity. Against the backdrop of Henry's troubled reign, the Great Cowcher was one of the many means by which the king tried to strengthen his grip on the crown. In this light, the seemingly clear boundaries between the cartulary and the genealogical rolls start blurring. We should therefore be wary of categorising our manuscripts too quickly and too rigorously, for such labels may actually prevent us from seeing the full picture.

This is also underscored by Hanna Nüllen's contribution on codices produced by the councils of the imperial towns Friedberg and Gelnhausen in the Holy Roman Empire in the fifteenth-century CE. Already the circumstances leading to the keeping of a codex could vary greatly. It was not always due to the initiative of the council and

their desire to keep track of their affairs, but could also be imposed on the council by the imperial representatives to serve as a check. Moreover, the materiality of the codices could differ from each other. The privileges received by the town from the emperor and others were kept in splendid books, which due to the colour of their binding were usually called the “Red Book”. Their purpose was close to that of the Great Cowcher. In contrast, other books kept for documenting the council’s minutes, for example, showed no extraordinary material features; they were literally all business. Looking at the way they were handled is revealing in the context of the visualisation and visibility of authority and power. The minutes were only permitted to be read by the council and locked up in chests; they were not accessible to the municipal community. As a consequence, the quotation of Cicero’s *De officiis* found on the title page of the minute book of 1539 CE was an exclusive and very explicit reminder to the council members to keep the common good in mind when going about their business. Nüllen’s analysis shows that depending on their purpose, the various municipal books could create different communities of communication within a town.

Although the contributions in the present volume cannot claim to be representative of wider Chinese or European trends or developments in general, the ten articles in this volume provide insights into some of the similarities and differences in using written artefacts to rule and administer polities. Each of the articles is a stepping stone stimulating further research. They demonstrate how (re-)examining both newly-discovered and long-studied records from a material perspective can shed new light on the functioning of governments, administrations and their respective officials. The correlation, but also divergence, in practice opens the door for subsequent studies to engage more fully with questions of materiality at the heart of genuine transcultural comparisons. Such studies will uncover the extent to which aspects of administrative and rulership record-keeping and record-production were either isolated to a particular institution or individual or more widely accepted and utilised beyond the confines of a single polity, government or ruler in the expression of their authority and the administration of such realms. Here we raise some of themes or factors evident from the articles in this volume which may stimulate further research.

Firstly, the case studies in this volume suggest that rulers in Qin-Han China and medieval Europe seemed to hold differing views on the uniformity of administrative writing. Although both cultures sought to standardise written communication of an administration, ancient Chinese rulers—albeit with varying degrees of success—showed greater concern towards the government’s authorities to ensure that their administrators used uniform documents with standardised sizes, layouts and scripts. In contrast, the regularity and consistency of scripts and the format of administrative documents in medieval England was not enforced by the ruler. Instead such uniformity was achieved mostly through the agency and training of scribes, as well as unofficial manuals and the endurance of tradition rather than statutory laws and regulations. This indicates that there was different degrees of centralised control and

prescriptions over the production of various administrative records among the two cultures, though the validity of this claim is worthy of further scrutiny.

Secondly, ancient China and medieval Europe seem to have adopted different devices to express political authority. Medieval European rulership writings (and sometimes even those more administratively oriented ones) often utilise diverse aspects of decoration, image and layout to visualise the ruler's authority—albeit unsystematically and, again, without prescription.<sup>62</sup> An iconographic system could be established using a range of visual elements that expressed rulership without even having to resort to text. Although such devices were not completely absent from similar written artefacts in early China, their uses were limited and hardly comparable to the intricate colour and iconographic schemes in the Great Cowcher or in genealogical rolls. Instead, ancient Chinese rulership and administrative writings tend to visualise the ruler's authority primarily through the manuscripts' physical attributes—namely the writing substrate, its size or means of verification. Such differences were possibly rooted in the differing materials and shapes utilised, but also in the divergent ideological and socio-political structures among the two literate societies.<sup>63</sup>

Thirdly, one of the biggest benefits of comparative study lies in learning from the academic discipline(s) beyond our own. Whereas the contributions in this volume do not aim for strict transcultural comparisons, they still offer perspectives and insights which could be mutually beneficial. New insights into medieval European written artefacts resulting from the utilisation of a material approach can help to create new possibilities and research questions for the study of the social and cultural history of pre-modern Chinese manuscripts and vice versa. Furthermore, the idea of “administrative literacy”, which considers non-textual knowledge—namely abilities beyond reading and composing texts—an essential part of the administrator's literacy, may

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**62** For the differing practices of medieval European rulers' use of image and text, see: Armstrong et al. 2023.

**63** The emperor's edicts in late imperial China, during which paper had long become the major writing support, still lacked the intricate visual representations appearing in their European counterparts. In this view, the limitation of writing supports (bamboo and wooden slips) cannot fully explain the absence of visual elements on Chinese rulership writing. Interestingly, Satō Yūki 佐藤雄基 also observed a similar trend between medieval Japanese and Western European administrative writing. Satō offered two working hypotheses to explain this phenomenon. On the one hand, he suggested that medieval Japanese official documents were promulgated to the populace mainly through oral communication and thus prioritised hearing over viewing. He further attributed this phenomenon to the divergent political cultures between Europe and Japan, in that European rulership emphasised the visibility, whereas Japanese emperors believed that political authority was manifest in the secrecy of their bodies and voices. On the other hand, he suspected that the rich visual elements in European manuscripts might have something to do with the literacy (or the lack thereof) of the recipients: Satō Yūki 2020, 210–215. However, given that users of ancient Chinese manuscripts were certainly aware of their visual impact, in conjunction with the increasing literacy in medieval Europe, one cannot help but wonder if Satō's hypotheses can explain the abovementioned differences between Chinese and European manuscript cultures.

also widen the scope of existing inquiry into the pragmatic literacy and practices of scribes in medieval Europe. Finally, the contributions in this volume illustrate the usefulness of adopting a material approach to further our understanding of the written administrative and rulership practices of both ancient China and medieval Europe.

These are just a few avenues for further investigation opened up by the ten contributions of this book. Above all, however, if the present volume helps to create a communicative bridge between the communities of scholars working on medieval Europe and ancient China and to promote the advantages of utilising a material approach with regards to a range of documents, it will achieve its major goal.

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Andrew Kourris

# The Charter Scribes of King Henry III

## A Palaeographical Investigation of English Royal Charter Engrossments and Enrolments, 1259–1265

Anyone seeking to research almost any aspect of the reign of King Henry III of England (1216–1272 CE) will have to familiarise themselves with the documents and records produced by the royal chancery. These charters, writs or rolls produced by the king's writing office survive on a grand scale and collectively provide a remarkably vivid picture of the kingdom's affairs. Royal commands, payments, the movements of armies or officials, the temporary or permanent bestowal of property and licences of various kinds are among the many types of business contained within this immense corpus of material. As with many other contemporary polities across Europe and the world, the ability to produce and disseminate standardised legal documents largely shaped the powers that could be exercised by the medieval English government. Much of what survives can be found at The National Archives (TNA), with many records published, sometimes in the original Latin and sometimes in translated summary.<sup>1</sup> The reign of King Henry III arguably represented the chancery at the zenith of its power, after years of post-conquest development but before its eventual descent into decadence and sinecurism.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, and the fact that documents produced by the Henrician chancery are still widely referenced by historians and genealogists alike, there are still surprising gaps in our knowledge of the office's day-to-day operations.

No complete survey, in the vein of Bertie Wilkinson's comprehensive analysis of Edward III's chancery, has ever been undertaken, except some insightful but brief notes from Alfred Stamp.<sup>3</sup> The neglect of the chancery has not extended to other bureaucratic offices of Henry III's government. Both the king's finance office (the exchequer) and his household office (the wardrobe) have been comparatively well-served by detailed investigations into their operations.<sup>4</sup> However ripe the Henrician

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<sup>1</sup> All material published by the Records Commission pertaining to reigns before Henry III is transcribed in Latin, including the charter rolls of King John: *Rotuli Chartarum*, ed. T. D. Hardy. The rolls of Henry III, by contrast, have been printed in various states of translation and transcription. The Patent and Charter Rolls, for instance, were both fully calendared and translated: *Calendar of Patent Rolls*; *Calendar of Charter Rolls*. The Close Rolls were never translated in this way, since there were fourteen volumes for the reign of Henry III alone: *Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III*.

<sup>2</sup> Carpenter 2004, 49–51. David Carpenter's exact phraseology was that the thirteenth-century chancery "stands as a peak between the valleys of the twelfth and fourteenth centuries either side": *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkinson 1929; Stamp 1933.

<sup>4</sup> Our modern understanding benefits enormously from the fact that one of its top clerks in the late twelfth century, Richard fitzNigel, wrote an account of its operations: Richard fitzNigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario*. More recent research has tested fitzNigel's 'guide' against textual evidence, further

chancery might be for analysis, it is easy to see why the clerks' routine has not yet been subject to a detailed investigation: there is too much information to examine. The raising and spending of money, whether by the exchequer for the kingdom or the wardrobe for the royal household, is relatively easy to quantitatively research. To parse the tens of thousands of record entries and original engrossments (legal documents) produced by the chancery across a 56-year reign would be a herculean task. The only workable solution is to divide this huge research area into more manageable pieces, covering only a fraction of the total mass of documents. For example, a recent PhD thesis from Adam Chambers focuses primarily on the processes by which chancery rolls were produced.<sup>5</sup> In this article, stemming from my wider doctoral research, I have attempted to uncover the working patterns of the clerks who wrote and recorded one type of document (charters) across a period of baronial revolt, civil war and the temporary deposition of the king, though not his administration (1259–1265).<sup>6</sup>

Clerks were a distinct class of people and they have been reasonably well-served with literature laying out their unique social and professional position.<sup>7</sup> What is not so obvious is how the affairs of clerks might be of interest to other historical researchers, who may be more concerned with the macrocosm of Henrician England. Why ask how faceless and nameless clerks produced, recorded and dispatched the legal documents required by bishops, knights or kings? There are undoubtedly certain historical narratives that can indeed be outlined, if not entirely fleshed-out in a Thomas Carlyle-esque “biography of great men”,<sup>8</sup> but such narratives can never satisfactorily address how rulers and the nobility were able to maintain their political and social pre-eminence. It might be possible for a particularly skilled soldier or diplomat to coerce the population into calling him ‘king’, but this would require constant feats of arms or unerring political skill.<sup>9</sup> A ruler like Henry III, who was neither a great commander nor politi-

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burnishing our understanding of how the exchequer really functioned. See: Kypta 2018. See also: Madox 1769. The operation of Henry III's wardrobe department was explored in great detail in Thomas Frederick Tout's multi-volume classic and more recently by the pioneering research of Benjamin L. Wild: Tout 1920; *The Wardrobe Accounts of Henry III*, ed. by Benjamin L. Wild.

<sup>5</sup> Chambers 2022. This recent doctoral thesis greatly improves our understanding of both the engrossment and enrolment processes.

<sup>6</sup> Unlike the thesis referenced above, my own research is focused on the lives and careers of chancery clerks themselves, investigating topics including which days they worked, when they were at court and their prospects of promotion or patronage.

<sup>7</sup> It would be impossible to give a complete guide to all noteworthy scholarship on the lives and careers of clerks, but two useful examples include: Cuttino 1954; Rutledge 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Carlyle 1840. The original quotation has now acquired a degree of infamy. The “thickened political narrative” championed by Carpenter goes a long way towards bridging the gap between dry quantitative analysis and mere biography, where the subject is appropriate for this approach: Carpenter 1990, 4–5.

<sup>9</sup> In the terminology of the sociologist Max Weber, this hypothetical king must always display ‘charisma’. For an explanation of how Weberian ‘routinised charisma’ can be understood within the context of the English royal chancery, see: Clanchy 2013, 64–70.

cian, had considerable need of a mature bureaucracy to routinize his kingship. This was a complicated proposition for a king who had governmental, political, judicial and—as he saw it—sacerdotal responsibilities to undertake.<sup>10</sup> Some of the most developed administrative processes were reserved for one of any king's top priorities: the delicate business of distributing patronage. To give too much, in the form of wealth, rights, territory or office, weakened the king's power, but to give too little would antagonise the very baronage upon whom he depended.<sup>11</sup> Land or other rewards could be alienated only temporarily, for a fixed period or for the lifetime of the recipient. Such an arrangement would typically be made using letters patent, documents of middling rank in the chancery hierarchy.<sup>12</sup> More damaging to the crown—and commensurately more attractive to the grantee—was a permanent grant of land or some other major benefit, which could not usually be revoked except under exceptional circumstances.<sup>13</sup> These transactions were typically conveyed by means of charters, the foremost document in the chancery hierarchy. Copies of such charter transactions were then recorded on sheets of parchment, sewn together from top to bottom and rolled up into a cylinder for easy storage.

This article makes two new claims regarding this high-prestige aspect of chancery administration in the years 1259–1265: firstly, that single scribes seem to have had the duty of copying up most charters into the charter rolls for a period between eighteen and twenty-four months before being replaced by another single scribe; and secondly, that these same individual scribes seem to have also had the responsibility of writing the corresponding original charters sent out to recipients. Even in this tumultuous period of medieval English history, it seems that the Henrician administration must have found value in a charter scribe *understanding* the material that he was writing out. Far from a simple pen pusher, the scribe was expected to spend a period of time working solidly on both the production of original charters and the rolls which recorded them, which may help to explain the remarkable degree of similarity between the enrolled record and the original.

The power and permanence of a charter grant is one of the reasons to focus on the production of these records, since even the most minor among them were of significant importance in their own time. It could be assumed that these higher-status documents demonstrating permanent grants were produced with more care and atten-

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**10** See: Clanchy 1968, 213–214.

**11** Whether King Henry got the balance right is a moot point, though there is a general consensus that he did not. See: Clanchy 2013; Carpenter 1985.

**12** For the definitive brief guide to these chancery document types, see: Chaplais 1975, especially 12–20 for specific definitions of charters, letters patent and other documents.

**13** Even in the present-day United Kingdom, charters may only be revoked by primary legislation and not by the arbitrary will of the sovereign. There are no known examples of such a revocation occurring after the reign of King Charles II. See: Privy Council Office: Royal Charters, <https://privycouncil.independent.gov.uk/royal-charters/> (accessed 30.05.22).

tion than their lesser chancery equivalents and thus by more experienced scribes.<sup>14</sup> Another reason for the study of the charter rolls stems from this enhanced status: charters were issued in far smaller numbers than other chancery records, such as the letters patent and close. Therefore, the enrolments of charters are much easier to examine than their more unwieldy patent or close roll counterparts, while the prestige and permanence of the acts contained within them has helped contribute to the large number of surviving originals.

Royal charters and their corresponding rolls produced in the reign of Henry III represent a high standard of English document production and provide a strong insight into the networks of patronage emanating from the king. To the benefit of this study, they also survive in significant numbers and were recorded in rolls of a manageable length, permitting a systematic analysis of the handwriting. Five charter rolls and fourteen extant original charters, all covering the years 1259–1265, form the basis of this article.<sup>15</sup> In this endeavour, I must acknowledge a particular debt to the work of T. A. M. Bishop, particularly his classic *Scriptores Regis*.<sup>16</sup> Though only a short book—due to concision rather than omission—Bishop was able to identify particular hands in the royal charters produced from the reigns of Henry I to Henry II, before making further deductions as to the professional origins of these scribes. His first objective was to separate forgeries from genuine charters and from there to determine which charters were written by full-time royal scribes, casually employed scribes working for the king or scribes working for the beneficiary.<sup>17</sup> This was an elegant and comprehensively evidenced conclusion to draw for that period, but English royal documentary production had changed greatly by the mid-thirteenth century, the focus of this investigation.<sup>18</sup> Both casual employment and beneficiary-produced charters had all but disappeared from royal charter production by this stage, leading to a much stronger stylistic continuity between such documents. Therefore the division of charters by their scribal hand, as Bishop did, would be a pointless endeavour as it would reveal little about the circumstances of the individual scribes.

Instead, it makes more sense to divide up the hands of the charter rolls—since this constitutes a much larger sample—and then compare these hands with those of

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**14** Clerks *de precepto* (those who were more senior) seem to have had a monopoly on writing high-value documents, leaving basic and repetitive writs *de cursu* to their juniors. See: Stamp 1933, 305–307. It is not yet known whether this hierarchy of clerks extended to the writing of charters and letters patent, or whether these were written by all the more senior clerks alike.

**15** The rolls in question were those from the 44th to the 49th years of Henry III's reign: TNA C 53/50–54. The original charters will be referenced as they are individually discussed.

**16** Bishop 1951.

**17** Bishop 1951, 3–4.

**18** Though T. A. M. Bishop was quite right to divide the charters of Henry I and II up in this way, this approach nevertheless requires considerable circumspection. One undetected forgery, later chancery 'restoration', or unperceived quirk of scribal identity (e. g. producing a document for 'export' for a different institution) can lead to perverse conclusions being reached. See: Webber 2020, 221.

the corresponding surviving original charters to see if they match. This allows for two useful questions to be answered: firstly, how many scribes it took to record several years of charter output; and secondly, whether these same scribes typically wrote the enrolment as well as the engrossment of any particular charter. If the roll entries were recorded haphazardly by various scribes, especially for grants to the same beneficiary or witnessed on the same day, and if the corresponding original charters were written by different scribes again, then we would be looking at a generalised rather than a specialised administrative process. Such an administration would seem to view writers as interchangeable cogs in a machine that need only be able to reproduce what they could read. Conversely, if there is an underlying logic to the assignment of scribes and if scribes wrote a charter and its corresponding record entry, this indicates a heightened degree of specialisation. In such a system, it seems to matter that the scribe understood the precise legal context of the charter as well as the literal meaning of the words, which is why he was involved throughout the drafting and recording process. The evidence of this study generally favours the latter hypothetical over the former, at least in the period under consideration.

Though each individual scribe had his particular idiosyncrasies, both the original charters and the rolls that record the copies of their contents are written in a mostly-standardised cursive script. Having developed from within English bureaucracy, this sort of court hand would be labelled “Anglicana” by Malcolm B. Parkes.<sup>19</sup> The rolls, in particular, display the hallmarks of having been written at high speed. Curved strokes replaced straight ones, standardised connecting strokes were employed across whole groups of letters and slow-to-write letterforms—notably those with long vertical ascenders—were simplified.<sup>20</sup> Another characteristic of this sort of script is the use of loops to facilitate cursivity, particularly on the ascenders of letters such as **b**, **d**, **h**, and **l**.<sup>21</sup> From the start of the thirteenth century, the visual appearance of some high and low grade court hands started to take on an appearance of greater visual weight, due to the emphasis of and thickened diagonal strokes. A by-product of this emboldened style of writing was that certain letterforms were sometimes changed to highlight the new style, such as an m-shaped majuscule **S**-form that was in vogue for several decades, including during this 1259–1265 period.<sup>22</sup> Anglicana in its most basic form was a rough-and-ready style of writing, but it could be adapted for various documentary needs depending on the type of document being produced. For instance, by the late-thirteenth century a refined form of the script—termed “Anglicana Formata” by Parkes—came to be used in the production of books, eventually becoming ubiquitous in that application.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Parkes 1969, xiii–xxvi.

<sup>20</sup> Parkes 1969, xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Bischoff 1990, 137–138.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson/Jenkinson 1915, xx–xxi.

<sup>23</sup> Parkes 1969, xiv–xvi.



Charter engrossments were not usually written in such a book-like hand but were almost invariably written in a slower, more conscientiously executed form of the script, albeit sometimes with more formal influences visible in individual hands.<sup>24</sup> While these hands display strong institutional assumptions about how a charter or a roll ought to be written, there is also scope for scribal individuality even beyond the mere random difference that makes all handwriting unique. Formality, speed, formatting, letterforms and many aspects of overall visual identity seem to have been left to the scribe's discretion. This can be a blessing or a curse; within the same type of document, greater freedom makes individual scribes easier to identify. When comparing across document types—as between charters and rolls—the situation is more complex: is the charter neater because a different scribe who habitually wrote with more care produced it or was it produced by the same scribe who wrote the enrolment but took greater care with the charter knowing he was producing a higher-grade document?<sup>25</sup> To avoid this problem of introducing too many variables at once, I have started by identifying and tabulating the hands of the charter rolls, since this offers a vastly greater sample size with fewer chronological lapses than the surviving original charters.

## Handwriting: Rolls

The tables below show the five surviving charter rolls from years 44–49 of King Henry III's reign, with the vertical columns representing each membrane and the horizontal rows representing each individual charter entry.<sup>26</sup> I have assigned each hand a letter based on when it occurs in the series, with that letter being repeated if the hand is seen again in a later membrane or roll. It cannot be overstated that, while this analysis was conducted according to proper palaeographical reasoning, there is always an element of subjectivity in such appraisals. Fortunately, a single charter entry is surely easier to misattribute than six rolls, which makes this maximalist approach worthwhile as a hedge against error.

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<sup>24</sup> It has been widely noted that speed and care could be self-consciously regulated by a scribe to make a charter appear more formal, with or without the addition of any book-like elements to the script. Although this observation pertains to documents from the twelfth century, its validity is perhaps universal, see: Webber 2007, 158–159.

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent illustration of different sections of writing in a single document being produced by a sole hand, see: Parkes 1969, 21.

<sup>26</sup> According to Public Record Office convention, the membranes are numbered in reverse order, with Membrane 1 always being the most recent. This reflects the way in which the rolls are physically enrolled with the earlier records being on the outer part of the cylinder and the later ones being at the centre. "Sched." denotes a schedule (a smaller piece of parchment) attached to the membrane. These schedules were charters sewn into the roll and are discussed below.



**Tab. 5:** Identification of the Hands of Each Entry on Charter Roll 49 Henry III.

49 Henry III (TNA C 53/54)						
Mem. 7	Mem. 6	Mem. 5	Mem. 4	Mem. 3	Mem. 2	Mem. 1
N	N	O	O	N	N	Q
N	G		P	N	N	G
N	N		N	N	N	R
N	N		N	N	N	(Sched.) S
N	N		N	N	N	
N	N		N	N	N	
N	N			N	N	
N	N			N	N	
N	N			L		
	N			N		
				N		

**Tab. 6:** Number of Entries Written by Each Hand across Charter Rolls 44, 45, 46, 48 and 49 Henry III.

Hand	Number of Entries Identified
A	15
B	1
C	40
D	1
E	3
F	2
G	78
I	3
J	1
K	5
L	6
M	1
N	55
O	2
P	1
Q	1
R	1
S	1

As can be seen in the tables, eighteen hands have been identified across the 217 entries in the rolls for this period. This is a much larger number of hands than might be observed in a typical comital or episcopal writing office, even allowing for the fact that such offices were more likely to make use of casually employed writers.<sup>27</sup> Further investigation, however, shows that this figure is somewhat misleading, as the work was not evenly distributed across the eighteen different hands. Of the 217 entries on the rolls, 173 appear to have been written by just three hands. Fifteen further entries were written by another hand with the remaining 29 transcribed by fifteen

<sup>27</sup> It is impossible to state definitively how many clerks were typically retained by lay magnates or bishops, as the complexity of their respective administrative requirements varied considerably. That said, even the most powerful and important men do not seem to have required anything like the number of personnel employed by the royal chancery. Nicholas Vincent was able to identify six hands from the thirty-one surviving letters and charters of Peter des Roches, Justiciar and a powerful bishop of Winchester whose episcopate lasted thirty-four years: Vincent 1994, lxiv. According to Teresa Weber, Ranulf III, earl of Chester (1181–1232) seems to have retained four clerks, with no more than two serving simultaneously: Webber 1991, 142–144. For information on the use of casual scribes, see: Webber 1991, 139; Patterson 1973, 16–21, 26.

scribes. Moreover, the three predominant hands are mostly found working in substantial blocks with little mixing. This suggests that, at least in this period, it was one clerk's duty to copy up the majority of original charters into the rolls, albeit with additional clerks copying out one or two charters as needed. It is difficult to say with certainty whether all the apparently differing 'minor' hands, who undertook only a few entries, are those of genuinely different individuals, since the much smaller sample size—compared to the 'major' hands who were responsible for the bulk of the drafting—makes it more difficult to detect each scribe's variance of letterforms and idiosyncrasies. Returning to the three predominant hands, here labelled C, G and N, it should be further noted that the identity of the 'primary scribe' did not change with a new regnal year: C gives way to G as the primary hand mid-way through the roll for year 45, and G gives way to N towards the end of the roll for year 48. Indeed, each new primary hand takes up its duty without waiting until a new membrane has commenced on the roll.

Though some of the 'minor' hands are difficult to distinguish from each other, the three primary hands fortunately display great individuality. Hand C (Fig. 1), is the first of these three main hands. It is generally the least neat and gives the appearance of being written in haste. This scribe—at least in these rolls—is not concerned with maintaining uniform letter sizes or straight ruling of the text block. Much of the time, though not always, the C scribe employs a thicker line weight than the other hands, especially in suspension marks and vertical ascenders. He tends not to use hairline flicks to denote the dot of the minuscule *i*, but rather an elaborate ligature mimicking the ascender of the Anglicana *d*. The majuscule *H*-form is varied in its execution but consistent in its general style and is elaborate compared to most other scribes' hands. The *h* is usually shaped with a loop surrounding it, though this is sometimes only a hairline. The majuscule *S*-form—which is the form that displays the most individual idiosyncrasy in all these hands—is of the type that resembles a looped *m*, with the rhythm and angle of the strokes being in accordance with the *d*- and *i*-forms previously discussed.

The G hand (Fig. 2) is by far the most common in the rolls under analysis and is among the most handsome. This script is characterised by conscientious horizontal ruling, limited use of italicization, long, thin suspension marks and certain letterforms—such as the majuscule *Q*, *g* and *y*—making exaggerated use of horizontal lines. These forms can be inconsistent, particularly on the *g*. The majuscule *S* is highly idiosyncratic, being oversized in height. This particular scribe also tends not to use flicks on the *i*-forms and creates the *m* with pronounced bowls when it is at the start of a word. This scribe also has a tendency to use a looping form of the long *s* in areas where other scribes in these rolls usually use the short *s*.

The N hand (Fig. 3) is another that is generally pleasing to the eye, giving the appearance of having been written with some care. It is particularly noticeable for the elaborate *s*-form, which is produced with a high degree of consistency throughout this scribe's many entries. Like the G scribe, this hand is written with uniform line

thickness without much use of shading—except for the **d** ascender and suspension marks, which are typically thickened. This scribe places very little emphasis on capital letters, through either shading or decoration, making them difficult to distinguish at a glance.

Of all the hands examined in these rolls, that of A (Fig. 4) has proved to be the most difficult to pin down with certainty. In many ways—notably in line thickness, shading and several letterforms—it is very similar to the C hand. On balance, however, there are sufficient differences to suggest that a distinct scribe wrote these entries, such as recognisably different majuscule **P**-, **H**- and **S**-forms. This script also seems have far fewer spidery hairline decorations than those favoured by the C hand and more uniform consistency of letter size. With fifteen entries apparently written in this hand, A is the only one that fits somewhere between being a ‘major’ and a ‘minor’ contributor.

As noted previously, the C, G and N hands (but also the contribution of the A hand) make up the overwhelming majority of entries on these five rolls. For the sake of completeness—and to illustrate the surprising variety of scripts—I will also discuss some unusual ‘guest’ hands. The script shown in Fig. 5 (F hand), which appears in only two non-consecutive entries, is most unlike a charter hand in its rhythm and overall impression. The majuscules are quite conventional for such a script, but the minuscules are unusually pointed. Unique elements include a majuscule **S**-form with a larger right bowl than left, a large but unelaborated majuscule **H**-form, a mixture of hairlines and ligatures to denote the **i**-form and very little abbreviation being used. This last point may suggest that this scribe was more accustomed to writing originals than the enrolled versions.

The J hand (Fig. 6), which only seems to occur once in this series of rolls, is particularly flamboyant. Again, it has the appearance of having been written by someone more accustomed to producing original charters, though it understandably lacks that level of care in formatting and layout. The **d**- and sometimes **a**-forms are extensively clubbed, the most common majuscule **S**-form employs a long horizontal flick and all capital letters are substantially enlarged and shaded. There is an alternative majuscule **S**-form used for the Bishop of Salisbury in the witness list that is even more elaborate and not found in any other scribe’s hand in these rolls.

These two hands in Fig. 7 (hand D) and 8 (hand S) are unlike all others in these rolls, as they are pure charter hands devoid of major concessions to haste. Indeed, that is because they *are* both charters, presumably drafts used to engross the original, which were then sewn directly into the roll rather than copied onto the roll. It is impossible to say with absolute certainty whether they are the same as the hands of the regular roll entries as the letterforms are produced with far greater care and attention to detail. Taking the D hand (Fig. 7) first, there are certain similarities with the G hand discussed above: the graceful flow of the script, thin suspension marks, lack of shading or clubbing, the straight-bottom **g**-form and the tendency to elongate capitals are all present. On the other hand, the majuscule **S**- and **P**-forms both show

marked similarity to the rather idiosyncratic equivalents in the A hand, which is also closer to this charter in date. Overall, this hand is difficult to satisfactorily assign to any of the other hands of the roll. The S hand (Fig. 8) poses considerable difficulties: there are certainly some similarities to the N hand, which would be plausible given that this charter is dated during that hand's period of dominance. However, the overall rhythm of the script, as well as the pointiness of the letterforms in comparison to the usually rounded N hand, tip the balance of evidence against the two hands being the same. Not only is there no obvious example of this hand within the charter rolls, there does not seem to be any comparable hand among the surviving original charters either. If these two documents were originally produced as single-sheet charters to be sent to the recipient—as seems highly likely—then they do not closely resemble any of their immediate documentary contemporaries. Textual mistakes were made in both documents, which is presumably the reason why they were not sealed or issued from chancery.

Before moving on to the hands of the original charters, there is at least one further question to pose: were the marginal entries recording the charter recipients always written in the same hand as the main entries themselves? Much of the time, there is simply too little written in the margin to be sure. Despite focusing on differences here, it cannot be denied that these hands all bear a considerable similarity to one another, often to the point of being indistinguishable, especially when the scribe does not have the opportunity to employ any of his characteristic letterforms or marks. For this reason, I have not found it possible to draw up a definitive table of hands for the marginal entries. That said, there are enough instances of the hands clearly not being the same to indicate that the main-entry writer did not necessarily write the marginal label. The main body of the penultimate entry on membrane 4 of the roll for year 49 was written by the N scribe, but labelled by a different scribe entirely. The exact same phenomenon is twice apparent on membrane 7 of the same roll—for the last and fourth from last entries—and again on membrane 3, with the added advantage that the main-entry letterforms constituting “Salop.” can clearly be seen to be completely different from their marginal counterparts. In similar fashion, the third entry on membrane 3 of the roll for year 46 appears to be written by the I hand, whereas the marginal label is clearly written in the G hand, complete with its unique majuscule **S**. However, this point should not be over-emphasised; it is clear that most marginal entries are written in the same hand as the main body corresponding to them, especially in the cases of the C and G hands.



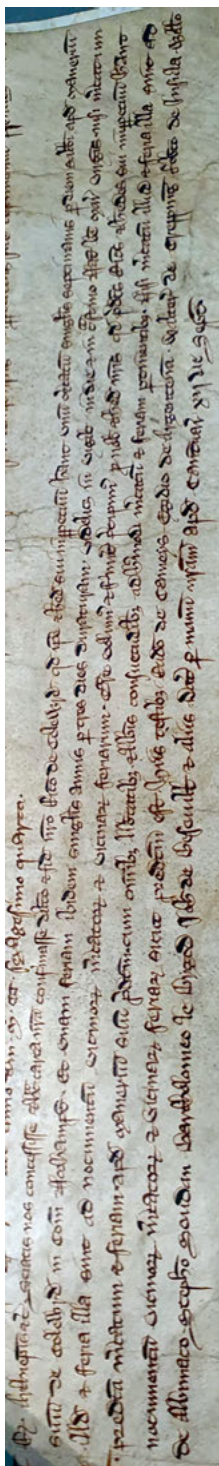


Fig. 3: N hand, TNA C53/53, Charter Roll 48 Henry III, Membrane 2.

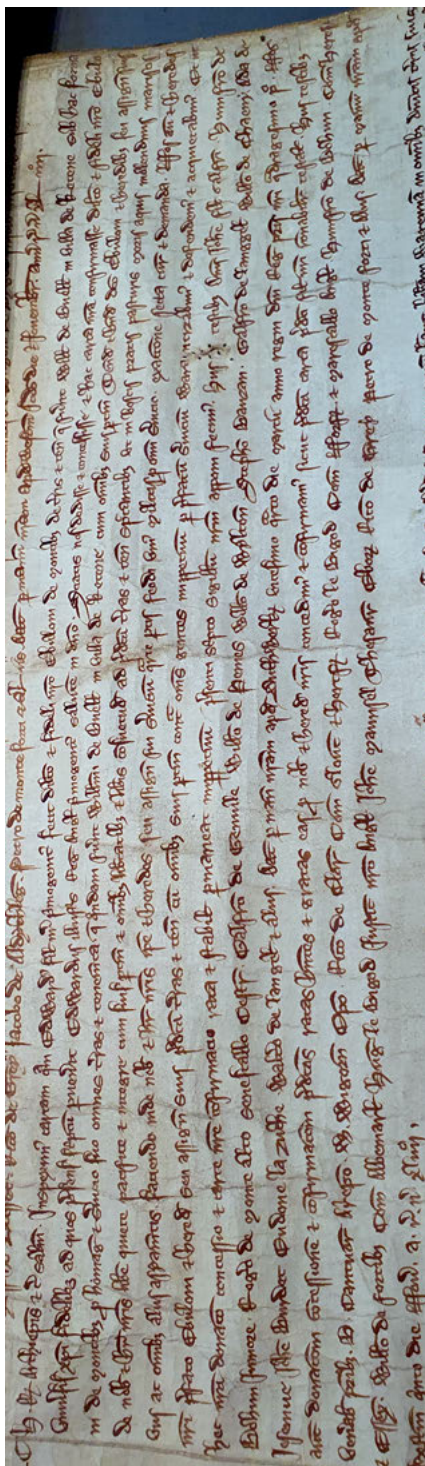


Fig. 4: A hand, TNA C53/50, Charter Roll 44 Henry III, Membrane 6.











## Handwriting: Comparison with Original Charters

The challenges of examining the handwriting of surviving original royal charters are quite different from those apparent in the analysis of the rolls' hands seen above. In a sense, the process is easier. Since the chancery scribes were producing public-facing documents conveying permanent awards, they took far more care in the consistency of the size and shape of letterforms, as well as the overall impression created by the text block. As Michael Clanchy argued, these self-consciously official documents became a critical component of medieval rulership, with the solemnity and grandeur of the royal court being replicated in the form of a highly symbolic document.<sup>28</sup> Charters are also usually much less abbreviated than roll entries, which increases the likelihood of being able to compare complete words or phrases between two documents. Helpful as all of this is, there are also considerable difficulties inherent in comparing charter hands with roll hands over such a short period of time. The chief among these difficulties is that a much smaller sample size of originals is known to have survived compared to the equivalent period in rolls entries and many of the hands used in these originals do not even show up in the rolls. Despite this, comparing the single-sheet originals to the enrolled copies can yield important information on the working practices and numbers of chancery scribes. The pertinent questions are these:

- 1) Are the roll entries typically written by the same hand as the surviving original charter?
- 2) Does the whole corpus of original charters follow the same chronological pattern of scribes as the rolls?

It should be reiterated that the sample size is relatively small and drawn from a period of considerable disruption. The examples above may not be representative of the broader picture, especially from earlier in King Henry's reign. There are also inherent difficulties in comparing the handwriting of a charter with that of a roll entry. Since the former was produced with a much greater sense of visual quality and the latter with more allowance for speed, it is entirely plausible that the same scribe could drastically alter the letterforms he employed, as well as elements like shading and clubbing. That said, much of a scribe's general style remains even when writing quickly and those elements that have been preserved from charter to roll can help build a case as to whether the hands match. From the period under investigation, only fourteen royal charters survive which correspond to a matching roll entry, making it possible to comment on the similarity between the hands in each case. This information is presented below.

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<sup>28</sup> Clanchy also argued that the auditory aspect of a land grant being pronounced at court added to its solemnity. Charters, with their text being written down, could be read aloud to reproduce this effect: Clanchy 2013, 303–315.

6 Nov. 1259

Engrossment: *Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter City Charters no. 9 (SM XIII)*

Enrolment: *44 Henry III (TNA C 53/50), Membrane 6*

Inconclusive. The script of the original charter has much less variation in the size of letterforms, a more conscientiously ruled text-block, both larger and more consistent gaps between lines and a greater contrast in the size of capitals compared to minuscules. The roll hand is thicker with a heavier line weight. The rhythmic features of the two scripts display some similarities: the looped flick forming a bowl on the majuscule **S**-forms, the gentle curve on the long **s**, as well as the size and shape of hairline flicks on the **h**- and other forms. Suspension marks also differ between scripts: they are straighter and join with ligatures in the original charter but fatter and always separate on the roll.

20 May 1260

Engrossment: *Faversham Borough Charters, 20 May 1260*

Enrolment: *44 Henry III (TNA C 53/50), Membrane 5*

Possibly the same hand. The original charter is written in a much finer script, full of idiosyncrasies not reflected in the roll. Suspension marks have a distinctive hairline doubling in the original and the **i**-, **g**- and **y**-forms all feature careful 45-degree flicks, none of which is in evidence in the roll entry. The original seems to have been somewhat influenced by book-hands, with some lozenge shaping and standardisation of minims. There is no great dissimilarity in common minuscules, but all majuscules are formed very differently, including **B**, **P**, **H**, **S**, **Q** and **R**. The overall rhythm of the script and uniformity of shading are very similar between the two, including the clubbing of the **d**-form. It is clearly the same hand that engrossed charters London Metropolitan Archives LMA 25241/32; TNA E 40/15178 and Somerset Heritage Centre DD/SAS/S/2437/1, though in this instance with the weakest resemblance between the roll and original versions of all these.

20 Sep. 1260

Engrossment: *Nottingham University Library, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, Middleton Mi D3663*

Enrolment: *44 Henry III (TNA C 53/50), Membrane 3*

Inconclusive. There are some similarities in the overall rhythm and layout of the text. Rounded minims are similarly utilised across both. The original charter has much more clubbing and variation in line thickness. Both employ hairline flicks over **i**. Capitals in the original are often formed with flamboyant rounded flicks, sometimes hairline, which are mostly absent in the roll. Majuscule **S** is sometimes long in the original. The **H**- and **h**-forms, as well as the majuscule **B** are formed very differently in

original to roll. Majuscule **T**- (with bowl), majuscule **D**- (triangular), majuscule **Q**- and **S**- (excluding long) and majuscule **W**-forms are quite similar across both, but the **g** is more rounded and with a smaller bowl in the roll entry. Given the inherent differences in charter and record hands, it is impossible to rule out that these scripts came from the same hand, despite the varied use of shading making the original look very different to the roll at first glance.

1 Oct. 1260

Engrossment: *London Metropolitan Archives LMA 25241/32*

Enrolment: *44 Henry III (TNA C 53/50), Membrane 3*

Probably the same hand.<sup>29</sup> The line thickness and lack of shading are similar between the two scripts, though, as usual, the original charter is more evenly ruled and much easier to read. Both use hairline flicks on **i**-forms and the overall rhythm of the hands is again fairly similar, making allowances for the differences in document type. Some letterforms are also similar, such as the **R** and **H** majuscules and minuscule **h**, albeit without any of these being very distinctive. Other letterforms are quite clearly different, including **g**, **d**, **v** and majuscule **P**, **S** and **B**. Areas of each script that seem especially idiosyncratic—such as the suspension marks in the original or the **P** on the roll entry—are notably absent in the other. The rhythm of flicks and size of bowls are similar in both. If the same scribe wrote both documents, he did so by using different (but internally consistent) letter shapes for no readily obvious reason.

1 Oct. 1260

Engrossment: *TNA E 40/15178*

Enrolment: *44 Henry III (TNA C 53/50), Membrane 3*

Probably the same hand. The original charter and roll entry clearly have the same scribe as London Metropolitan Archives LMA 25241/32 and the roll entry discussed above—though in this instance the hands appear even more similar. The **d**-, **g**- and **a**-forms remain different between the original and roll, but the **v**- and **S**-forms are the same, with the majuscule **P**-form displaying far more similarity than previously. In all these cases it is the roll version of each letterform that has ended up on the charter, not the other way round. The most conclusive evidence that these hands are the same comes from the suspension marks: there is at least one example of the flicked type that this scribe always seems to employ on his original charters.

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<sup>29</sup> See subsequent charter of same date for further clarification.

24 Oct. 1260

Engrossment: *Somerset Heritage Centre, DD/SAS/S/2437/1*

Enrolment: *44 Henry III (TNA C 53/50), Membrane 3*

Probably the same hand. Again, both original and roll-entry seem to have been written by the scribe described above. There is no evidence of the split suspension mark in the roll entry this time, but the overall impression is of similarity rather than difference. Both majuscule and minuscule **H**-forms and majuscule **G**- and **S**-forms are notably similar, with the **h** in particular being quite distinctive. **P**- and **V**-forms are quite different, unlike the previous entry.

21 Nov. 1260

Engrossment: *Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society, MD335/7/25*

Enrolment: *45 Henry III (TNA C 53/51), Membrane 4*

Possibly the same hand. The roll entry is short and appears to have been written hurriedly, which makes comparison difficult. Slightly thicker lines and more shading are used in the roll entry. Suspension marks in both are generally similar. Minims are standardised in the charter, much less so on roll. The use and size of hairline flicks are fairly consistent across both, though all are more haphazard on the roll. Letterforms such as the majuscule **S**, **W**, **L** minuscule **v** and, above all, the majuscule **P** look very similar across the two documents. Yet, neither document is very consistent in its **g**-form, which impedes comparison. The **d**-form is a little better and more consistent across the two, though the **a**-form is clubbed in the roll but not the charter.

8 July 1262

Engrossment: *Merton College Muniments 1660*

Enrolment: *46 Henry III (TNA C 53/52), Membrane 2*

Probably the same hand. Letterforms exhibit more differences than similarities across the two documents. The majuscule **H**-, **T**- and **h**-forms are similar in overall shape but differ in the detail of decoration. The majuscule **S**- and majuscule **D**-forms are completely different. The charter is inconsistent in its **g**-form, though this particular roll-entry scribe is similarly inconsistent in other entries. Though the charter has generally thicker lines and slightly more shading than the roll entry, particularly on the suspension marks, it must be noted that both documents convey a strong impression of horizontal emphasis (especially in the **d**-form), with some elements of lozenge-shaped serifs and standardised minims in both.



8 July 1262

Engrossment: *Merton College Muniments 1661*

Enrolment: *46 Henry III (TNA C 53/52), Membrane 2*

Probably the same hand. Observations are largely as above, as these two charters pertain to the same roll-hand and the charter hands are also the same. There are many differences in letterforms between this original charter (1661) and the previous (1660), but none that more closely resemble the roll entry. The exception is that the suspension marks are thinner here, though still not quite as thin as on the roll. Vertical ascenders and descenders are very slightly clubbed in the original charter, which detracts slightly from the impression of horizontal emphasis given by this roll scribe. The rhythm of the two scripts is quite similar despite the very different line weights and there are instances of the **g**-form across both documents that look strikingly similar: figure-eight shaped and highly-lozenged.

8 July 1262

Engrossment: *TNA E 40/15179*

Enrolment: *46 Henry III (TNA C 53/52), Membrane 1*

Certainly the same hand. This is a very straightforward comparison, since the two documents are very similar. Line weight, writing rhythm and letterforms are all essentially the same across the two documents, including in the notably idiosyncratic letters such as this scribe's majuscule **S** and **P**. The only slight differences are that the **d**-form is slightly more clubbed on the original, the **W**-form curves in opposite directions in the two documents and the lozenge serifs on the minims in the original.

13 Dec. 1263

Engrossment: *TNA C 146/9826*

Enrolment: *48 Henry III (TNA C 53/53), Membrane 4*

Possibly the same hand. This is a difficult pair to assess objectively, mainly due to the difference in line weight. The original charter is written in a hand with very thick strokes, further thickened by pronounced clubbing. This is not the general style of this scribe and is not how the roll entry is written. Moreover, numerous letterforms are different, notably **g**, majuscule **H** and **d**, though the **g** is quite similar to the type used by this scribe elsewhere. There are some similar letterforms, particularly the fairly distinctive **R** and short **s**. Despite the difference in superficial appearance, much of this scribe's usual style of writing is in evidence here, particularly his considered treatment of longer suspension marks. This is further illustrated by a series of lines used as decoration at the end that display the same style.

15 Dec. 1263

Engrossment: *Bedford, Bedford Record Office, DD (Lucas) L (Jeayes) 916*

Enrolment: *48 Henry III (TNA C 53/53), Membrane 4*

Certainly the same hand. This is another instance of the original charter being quite untidy for a document of its type and the roll entry being unusually neat and well-ruled, culminating in the two documents looking strikingly similar. Even elements that are almost invariably inconsistent within the same document (the **I**- and **d**-forms, for example) are here shared between both charter and roll. Shading, line spacing, treatment of minims and letterforms are strikingly similar. There are some differences, as between the majuscule **H**- and **S**-forms, but nothing inconsistent with the slightly greater time taken over the charter.

24 Aug. 1264

Engrossment: *TNA C 146/9827*

Enrolment: *48 Henry III (TNA C 53/53), Membrane 3*

Certainly the same hand. There is more clubbing and contrast in line weight in the original charter compared to the roll entry. However, the overall impression of the two hands, especially the rounded minims, is very similar. What really confirms the fact that the same hand wrote both documents is the unusual number of highly idiosyncratic forms shared identically between the two: majuscule **P**, **S** and **H**, as well as minuscule **d**, **l** and **h**, to give a small selection. The consistency of the decoration of the letterforms is particularly striking as the same hand might use different decorative elements within the same document.

26 Oct. 1265

Engrossment: *Nottingham, Nottingham University Library, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, Middleton Mi D4681/1*

Enrolment: *49 Henry III (TNA C 53/54), Membrane 2*

Probably the same hand. Comparison is impeded slightly due to the damage suffered by the roll membrane, but the text is mostly legible. Letterforms are mixed: the **d** is inconsistent in the roll entry, but there are several instances in which it resembles the clubbed, almost-vertical type used in the original charter. The **a**-forms are quite different between the two documents, with the clubbed type found on the charter not being found on the roll entry at all. The treatment of the **i** is the same in both documents, though suspension marks are heavier in the original charter. Descenders are long and taper to a point in both, which is particularly apparent on the **q**- and **p**-forms. Though the roll is scruffier and seems to have been written in considerable haste, the overall impression created by the minims is very similar in both, which leads me to believe that these are probably the work of the same hand.

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from this close examination of the hands writing charters and the corresponding enrolments. It cannot be stated with certainty that scribes always wrote up their own charters in the rolls, as there are numerous instances of the evidence being ambivalent. That said, there is significant evidence that roll entries were indeed written by the charter scribe much of the time. I have been fairly conservative in my assessments that a hand is certainly shared between original and roll and have preferred to demur when there is any doubt at all. The nature of these documents means that a purely objective judgement is often impossible, due to the inevitable inconsistencies in even the most conscientious scribe's documentary output. If I were asked to give my judgement without such extreme caution, I would say that at least ten of these fourteen charters were written by the same hand as their respective roll entry. Yet, if further research proves that charters were mainly written by the same scribe as the corresponding enrolled entry, what does this mean for original charters? Did they follow the same pattern of a single scribe writing most charters over a period of months, with an occasional 'guest' scribe writing a charter here or there? Though it has not been possible to match any of the 'guest' scribes with the hands from the original charters, it was much easier to find evidence of the three most common hands of the rolls, here labelled G, C and N. I have here grouped the charters that I believe, to a reasonable degree of certainty, were written by these scribes.

### **Original Charters Written in the G Hand**

At least ten surviving original charters in this period appear to have been written in this distinctive hand, similar to that of the G scribe previously identified in the charter rolls.<sup>30</sup> This scribe was the main charter roll writer from March 1261 to December 1263 and remained a regular contributor until October 1264. The surviving original charters in the same hand cover a similar period between November 1261 and August 1264. This gives further credence to the hypothesis that a single scribe had responsibility for writing and recording the majority of charters in both single-sheet and enrolled formats in a given period. Just as the rolls had certain entries written by 'guest' scribes, there is a surviving charter from this period that does not appear to be written in this hand: Truro RO AR3/144 from January 1264.

### **Original Charters Written in the C Hand**

There is another distinctive recurring hand among the original charters, this time focused on the earlier part of the period. Though the resemblance of the handwriting

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<sup>30</sup> Merton College Muniments 1661; Merton College Muniments 1660; TNA E 40/15179; TNA C 146/9826; TNA E 40/15180; Faversham Borough Charters 20 Nov. 1261; Nottinghamshire Archives, DD SR/102/167; Nottinghamshire Archives, DD SR/102/166; TNA C 146/9827; Bedfordshire Archives, DD (Lucas) L (Jeayes) 916.

in these charters is clear, it is slightly harder to match it to a rolls hand than in the case of the G hand. Once allowances are made for the differences in presentation between rolls and charters, it is my belief that four charters were written by the scribe of the C hand detailed in the tables above.<sup>31</sup> Again, the match between the dates of the hand occurring in rolls and original charters corresponds well considering the small sample size: the rolls correspond to the period from November 1259 to October 1260; the originals between May and October 1260.

### Original Charters Written in the N Hand

The N hand, which dominates the charter roll for the 49th year of King Henry III's reign, is slightly less distinctive than either the G or C hands and some elements of the scribe's handwriting can vary considerably. The main letterforms that are common to this scribe's charter and roll writing are the unique **S**-form, the unusually straight and clubbed **d**-form, as well as the general rhythm of the writing, particularly in the very rounded minims. I feel confident in assigning at least three original charters to this hand, which date from February to October 1265.<sup>32</sup> Despite the extremely small sample size of just three charters, these dates compare fairly well with the N hand's period of dominance on the charter roll, from October 1264 to October 1265.

It is important to be circumspect when drawing conclusions from a small dataset such as the one used for this study. Even a single attribution error for the hand of a charter can lead to a radically incorrect conclusion being drawn. Several misattributions of hands in the same investigation could support a conclusion that is completely false. Moreover, since I have only been examining the rolls and charters of a short period—much of which was dominated by civil war—it would be illogical to try and extrapolate these conclusions across Henry III's 56-year reign. That said, there are two important conclusions that can be drawn from this study, which shed light on the practices of the Henrician chancery during this time. Firstly, most enrolments on the charter rolls were made by the same scribe who wrote the original engrossments. Secondly, the rolls seem to have been largely written by a 'main' scribe serving for about eighteen months to two years before being replaced by another in this duty, with other less prolific scribes writing a handful of entries each as and when required.

That the English royal chancery relied so heavily on a single scribe for its charter output is remarkable. As we know from court records, the chancery could employ numerous clerks at any given time. This could be indicative of a division of labour

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<sup>31</sup> TNA E 40/15178; Somerset Heritage Centre DD/SAS/S/2437/1; London Metropolitan Archives LMA 25241/32; Faversham Borough Charters, 20 May 1260.

<sup>32</sup> Nottingham University Library, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, Middleton Mi D/4681/1; Herefordshire Archive and Record Centre, BG 11/15/6; Herefordshire Archive and Record Centre, CA/1457.

within the different outputs produced, although such conclusions could only be drawn through further examination of the corresponding close and patent rolls for the period. To employ the handwriting of one of the best or most senior scribes for charter-writing makes sense, but to then employ that same scribe to record the charters on the rolls in a quicker, scruffier hand seems ostensibly to be a perverse allocation of labour. As discussed previously, the most logical explanation is that such scribes were expected to have knowledge of each charter's content as they prepared a draft, copied out the grossment and then finally wrote the heavily abbreviated enrolled record.

To have one scribe writing most charters and enrolments suggests a degree of speed in the charter writing and recording process that may be surprising for a researcher who is more accustomed to the painstaking pace of a modern calligrapher. A single scribe not only seems to have had the responsibility to write (and possibly also draft) numerous charters in a short period of time, he also apparently had the time to copy them into the rolls. Plainly, these professional clerks worked to a different set of requirements than their contemporary monastic counterparts writing religious manuscripts. The difference in speed between writing in an English court hand and Gothic *texturalis* must have been profound. While this main scribe seems plainly to be the person assigned to charter writing and the corresponding enrolment, it is not clear whether the less frequently occurring hands belong to clerks who would usually work on something else or whether there were always a group of junior individuals who were permitted to undertake such duties. The only solution to this problem would be to discover the hand of one of the 'guest' scribes in a different type of document, such as a patent or close roll. As well as the origins of the 'guest' scribes, it is also difficult to guess what the professional progress of the 'main' scribes might have been after their tenure was completed, as there are few cases of a main hand returning and even then only for one or two entries. Possibilities include retirement, promotion to a supervisory role or re-deployment to writing other types of documents. Again, the only way to be sure is to discover these distinctive hands outside a charter context. The place where the discovery was made would reveal much: if on the patent roll, it would suggest that the hierarchy of documents did not necessarily correlate with the seniority of the scribes; if on a high-profile letter produced by the king's secretariat, it would suggest that such documents were written only by those who had proven themselves in domestic charter writing. Overall, though an interesting pair of linked discoveries, this investigation can only be the start of a more in-depth look at the career progression of chancery scribes. More clarity in the hierarchy of the writing office and typical career progression would further illuminate the hierarchy of the documents themselves, as well as the underlying assumptions of the monarchical government that caused them to be made.

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Romain Waroquier

# The Scribe and the Witnesses: The Drafting of Witness Lists in the Charters of the Counts of Flanders (1071–1191)

## Introduction

The material drafting of witness lists in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—and that of archival documents more broadly—is an eminently complex subject. Studies on the documentary practices of writing and the production of charters have focussed on a range of different issues such as the decision to put legal action into writing,<sup>1</sup> or the identity and writing habits of the scribes of these acts.<sup>2</sup> Historians, particularly in France, have also explored matters relating to the life of the document after its production, conservation practices and the perpetuation of the legal action contained within, particularly in relation to cartularies.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, only Benoît-Michel Tock's major work on scribes and subscribers of French records between the seventh and early-twelfth centuries discusses the drawing up of lists of witnesses, with special emphasis on the autography of the scribe or subscribers.<sup>4</sup> This article is an attempt to uncover this understudied aspect of witness lists. It will focus exclusively on aspects pertaining to the material drafting of witness lists and the way in which these were conceived by the scribes. In addition to the intrinsic features related to their preparation, this topic is of major interest for many historical investigations for which witness lists are fundamental sources.<sup>5</sup>

First of all, it is necessary to contextualise what is both the object of this study and its main source: the lists of witnesses. In continuity with late-Roman law, these lists constitute a legal guarantee by providing the names of several people, who, in the event of litigation, can certify that the donation reported by the charter or notice is real.<sup>6</sup> In short, the role of these individuals is to keep a record of the legal action that

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1 Morelle 2009a, 41–74, esp. 51–52. For the British Isles, see: Broun 2000, 113–131.

2 Postles 2000, 27–42; Tock 2005, 110–125.

3 This was recently noted by Benoît-Michel Tock: Tock 2009, 379. See also: Chastang 2006, 21–31; Chastang 2016, 24–44. For more general studies, see: Guyotjeannin/Morelle 2007, 367–403; Chastang 2008, 245–268.

4 Tock 2005, 369–411.

5 Since the classic work of Jean-François Lemarignier, studies and prosopographical research on royal, episcopal and princely *curiae* have flourished: Lemarignier 1965. To cite just a few key works, see: Guillot 1972; Depreux 1997; Croenen 1999; Macé 2000; Marchandisse/Kupper 2003; Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 2015.

6 Tock 1991, 86–87. According to Heinrich Fichtenau, followed by Levi Roach, late-Roman law required private transactions to be attested by witnesses: Fichtenau 1986, 329; Roach 2013, 27–29.

they witnessed so as to attest to its reality and validity—and thus to the authenticity of the material act established on this occasion—in case of contestation.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, witnesses give legal legitimacy to the act by their mere presence, showing their support for the author’s decision and actively participating in the recorded legal action; they also draw attention to the author’s network of influence.<sup>8</sup> The drafting of these witness lists, which had high political and legal stakes for both the issuer of the act and its beneficiary, was therefore probably not left to chance. Historians have long debated this reality, although agreeing on the fluctuating, even arbitrary, nature of the work of drawing up witness lists. Some researchers dismiss the value of these lists as a simple ‘presence list’ and stress the scribe’s free choice to choose specific individuals among those present.<sup>9</sup> Though it is unlikely that a person of high social status would be omitted, other researchers affirm that individuals were carefully chosen for inclusion in the final act, the product of negotiations between the two parties.<sup>10</sup> Should we therefore question whether the witnesses entered at the bottom of the charter were a true reflection of all those present or should we assume there was a systematic selection from the audience? The objective here is to determine when and especially how the scribes of these diplomatic documents recorded the witnesses during the drafting process.

To carry out this investigation, it is first necessary to define an appropriate set of documents. The charters of the counts of Flanders drafted between 1071 and 1191 provide an edited corpus of 987 acts that is sufficiently large, rich and coherent for investigation of the execution of witness lists. Our study also benefits from the expertise of the editors, particularly on certain aspects relating to writing practices.<sup>11</sup> For

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7 Guillot 1972, 12–20; Tock 2005, 259–270. Despite acknowledging the primordial role played by the written word in transmitting the memory of the legal act that it records, Morelle argues that it should not be reduced to a “vector of memory”: Morelle 2009a, 52–55. See also: Morelle 2009b, 124–126. This view is also expressed by Tock: Tock 2009, 381.

8 Gawlik 1970; Schneidmüller 2009, 16–18; Sirantoine/Escalona Monge 2014, 19; McNair, 2017, 10–12.

9 Tock 1991, 94; Ehlers 2003, 99; Plassmann 2019, 44–45. The existence of fictitious witness lists is well attested in somewhat later corpora. However, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to enter into this debate. See: Tessier 1962, 222; Croenen 2003, 281–282.

10 Broun 2011, 263–264. See also: Tock 2005, 229.

11 The corpus studied here is essentially composed of charters published in *Actes des Comtes de Flandre (1071–1128)*, ed. by Vercauteren (hereafter Vercauteren) and *De Oorkonden der Graven van Vlaanderen, Juli 1128–September 1191*, ed. by Hemptinne/Verhulst/de Mey (hereafter DH). This collection was completed with another twenty documents drafted on behalf of the counts and countesses of Flanders or in which they were evidently implicated: *Documents Relatifs à la Flandre Maritime*, ed. de Cousse-maker, 65–66, no. VIII; *Cartulaire de l’Abbaye de Saint-Vaast*, ed. by Van Drival, 289–290, 297–298; *Les Chartes de Saint-Bertin*, ed. by Haigneré, 53, no. 137; *Cartulaire de l’Eglise Collégiale de Saint-Pierre*, ed. by Hautcoeur, vol. 1, 28–29, no. 20; *Recueil des Chartes de l’Abbaye de Cluny* ed. by Bernard/Bruel, 836–838, no. 3733bis; *Diplomata Belgica*, ed. by Gysseling/Koch, 251, nos. 142, 172 bis, 301; Huyghebaert 1951, 150–152; Koch 1957, 261–278; Platelle 1960, 77–82; *Les Chartes de l’Abbaye de Corbie*, ed. by Morelle, 610–612, no. 134; *Les Chartes de l’Abbaye d’Anchin*, ed. by Gerzaguet 2005, 124–125, no. 28; *Les Chartes des Comtes de Saint-Pol*, ed. by Nieuw, 87, n° 4; Vanderputten 2011, 281. Two *deperdita*, which mention

these reasons, this corpus of twelfth-century Flemish charters constitutes the ideal material for this study.

Even with such a well-defined and dense corpus, this investigation encounters several challenges, which are not insurmountable, but complicate the historian's task. The acts that provide a glimpse into the scribes' work are incomplete and few in number. The information that can be gleaned is difficult to interpret, even ambiguous, and is not amenable to any quantitative analysis. On the one hand, the analysis relies almost exclusively on external elements such as changes in hand, letter size or ink colour, which point to interruptions in the writing process. These variations may indeed reflect the delayed writing of the witness list, although this is not always the case. The same scribe may, for example, simply choose to change the ink or letter size to draw attention to a particular part of the document such as the witness list. Similarly, a change in the ink colour sometimes occurs in the same sentence or even the same word when the scribe re-dipped his pen in ink for instance, but this is not significant.<sup>12</sup> Palaeographic examination may also prove difficult. A change of hand when transcribing witnesses does not automatically mean a different scribe. The remarkable ability of medieval scribes to imitate the handwriting of one of their peers or to deliberately modify their own style to give the illusion of an autograph subscription, for example, has already been demonstrated.<sup>13</sup> Some charters are even penned by two scribes, with one attempting to reproduce the hand of the other. On the other hand, the few charters that contain clues about their production in their main text are also problematic. In most cases, they were drawn up in important cases of contentious jurisdiction, which still required a detailed description of the legal proceedings and the evidence given in addition to the witness lists. These are often exceptional documents in the primary sense of the word. This raises the question about generalising these conclusions to deeds of gift, which became slightly more standardised in the twelfth century.

Despite these difficulties, this chapter endeavours to shed light on the scriptural practices of archive scribes in the county of Flanders in the twelfth century by focusing on the way in which they drafted witness lists and their relationship with their material support. Indeed, the materiality of the charter as an object and the associated constraints in terms of its production – from an administrative and political perspective, as well as from a purely technical standpoint – compelled medieval scribes to be inventive. The chapter will be divided into two parts. Firstly, it will look at the practical conditions in which the scribes drew up the lists of witnesses as part of the process of writing the counts' acts. Secondly, it will examine their rigour and professionalism when recording the witnesses who attested to the legal action or the promulgation of the act that preserves its memory.

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the list of witnesses of the corresponding lost act, are also added to the corpus: Vercauteren XXXII; DH XCI. Of these 987 acts, 174 do not include a list of witnesses for various reasons.

<sup>12</sup> Tock 2005, 310–315, 369–377.

<sup>13</sup> See: Tock 2005, 315–324.

## The Drafting Procedures of Witness Lists

The way in which scribes drew up a charter in the twelfth century immediately raises the question about the timing of the drafting of the witness list. Indeed, the petitioner—the person or institution requesting the charter—could not simply appear in front of an authority and immediately receive a document in due form with all the official signs of validation. Once the request for a favour or arbitration was submitted and the legal action carried out, the text was prepared, drafted and then engrossed, most often by the beneficiary of the act himself. After verifying these operations, the issuing authority validated the act with a list of witnesses and/or a seal and then delivered it to its recipient.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it is well known that the drafting of the document and its witness list could take place at different moments during this process. The document may have been drawn up entirely after the completion of the legal action mentioned therein or prepared beforehand and finalised during or after its execution with specific information that the scribe could not know in advance, such as the date or the witnesses present.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, these witnesses (as well as the date) may relate to the legal action itself or its promulgation, with a period of a few days or even weeks generally elapsing between the two stages.<sup>16</sup> Bearing these issues in mind, some interesting conclusions can be drawn from the Flemish corpus.

Among the 333 extant originals, in 324 cases, the charter and its list of witnesses appear—with a high degree of certainty—to have been transcribed by the same hand and with the same ink. The act was thus materially drawn up in a single stroke. Although it is not impossible that the legal action and its writing took place simultaneously, it is more likely that the material composition of the act occurred at a later stage.<sup>17</sup> It is then necessary to postulate that a draft listing the names of the witnesses

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<sup>14</sup> Guyotjeannin/Pycke/Tock 2006, 227–237.

<sup>15</sup> Tock 2005, 305–307, 369. For these considerations, see also: Broun 2000, 258–265.

<sup>16</sup> A well-known example is the famous charter of Count Robert II for St Donatian in Bruges, whose legal action took place on 18 October 1089 and was promulgated not before 31 October of the same year. See: Nieus 2015, 11. This was also common in the chancery practices of the counts of Champagne in the second half of the twelfth century, see: Benton 1959, 284–286. For an overview of the complex debate between the witnesses of the legal act and its promulgation, see: Tock 1991, 89–93; Tock 2005, 267–270.

<sup>17</sup> There are many different views on this issue, with the main problem relating to the time needed to draw up the charter. Tock considers it unlikely that the witnesses had the patience to wait for the scribe to write the charter after the legal action had taken place: Tock 2005, 307. Broun is much less categorical and envisages this possibility, although he suggests that the quality of the scribe's writing would decline as the document was written: Broun 2000, 258–261. Prell finds this eventuality to be completely conceivable: Prell 1997, 209–211. Although it may be imaginable that short routine charters were drafted in the location where the legal action took place, it is much less plausible for more important documents that required careful writing and formatting. The Flemish charters themselves do not contribute any additional elements to this debate.

present was drawn up at the time of the *actio* to serve as a model for the engrossment of the final document, which was then sealed and delivered.<sup>18</sup> The Flemish corpus includes a charter from Philip of Alsace to the leprosarium of Ghent (1183–1184) which survives in two preparatory versions. These, however, use the third person singular—indicating that they were drafted by the beneficiary—whereas the final charter uses the traditional first person singular and contains neither the corroboration formula announcing the sealing nor the list of witnesses. These are not—strictly speaking—drafts but rather ‘working documents’, preliminary to the drafting of the final text. Some of the clauses were deleted or reworked, certainly following the negotiations between the representatives of the leprosarium and the count when the legal action was carried out. It is therefore logical that the names of the witnesses are not given.<sup>19</sup> Thereafter, the ‘standard’ drafting process must have resumed: either the act was prepared in its entirety at the time of the legal action or a draft was drawn up with the names of the witnesses present and then engrossed.

An exceptional charter of Thierry of Alsace, dated 1146 in Bruges, provides much information about how it was composed and delivered to its recipient, the Abbey St Nicolas in Tournai. After outlining the details of the legal action, the count orders the names of his followers to be included in the list of witnesses to the charter. The text then specifies that the charter was delivered “written and signed” into the hands of Abbot Gerard via the intermediary Baldwin, the count’s son.<sup>20</sup> The original shows the identical handwriting used for the list of witnesses and the main part of the document, indicating that the act was written in a single stroke.<sup>21</sup> The count of Flanders therefore had the ability to send his charters to be validated ‘remotely’ via an intermediary; either he had them composed in his own chancery, recognised by his followers and validated (in this case, using his monogram) before sending them to the recipient or the recipient drafted the original document and sent it for validation to the count who then returned it to him.

In contrast, the Flemish corpus preserves nine charters in which the witnesses were seemingly added after the writing of the body of the text. An interesting act of Count Thierry of Alsace for the Abbey of Oudenburg, dated 27 May 1130, was undoubtedly drafted by two distinct hands: the first scribe dealt with the protocol and the

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**18** In his study of the drafts of the St Gall charters from the Carolingian period, Bruckner observes that in most cases, the witnesses listed in the preparatory version correspond in number and order to those named in the final document: Bruckner 1931, 297–315, esp. 301–304. On drafts in general, see: Guyotjeannin/Pycke/Tock 2006, 230, 233; Gawlik 1991, col. 1427.

**19** DH 675. On this particular case, see: Verhulst 1959, 9–11.

**20** DH 93: [...] *meisque fidelibus asscriptis eorum nominibus huius constitutionis atque mandati mei testimonium iussi perhibere [...]* Balduinus filius comitis qui hanc kartam, precepto patris scriptam et signatam, Gerardo prefate ecclesie abbati manu sua tradidit.

**21** The original of this act is now lost, although a facsimile was made at the beginning of the last century: Pirenne 1909, plate 13B.



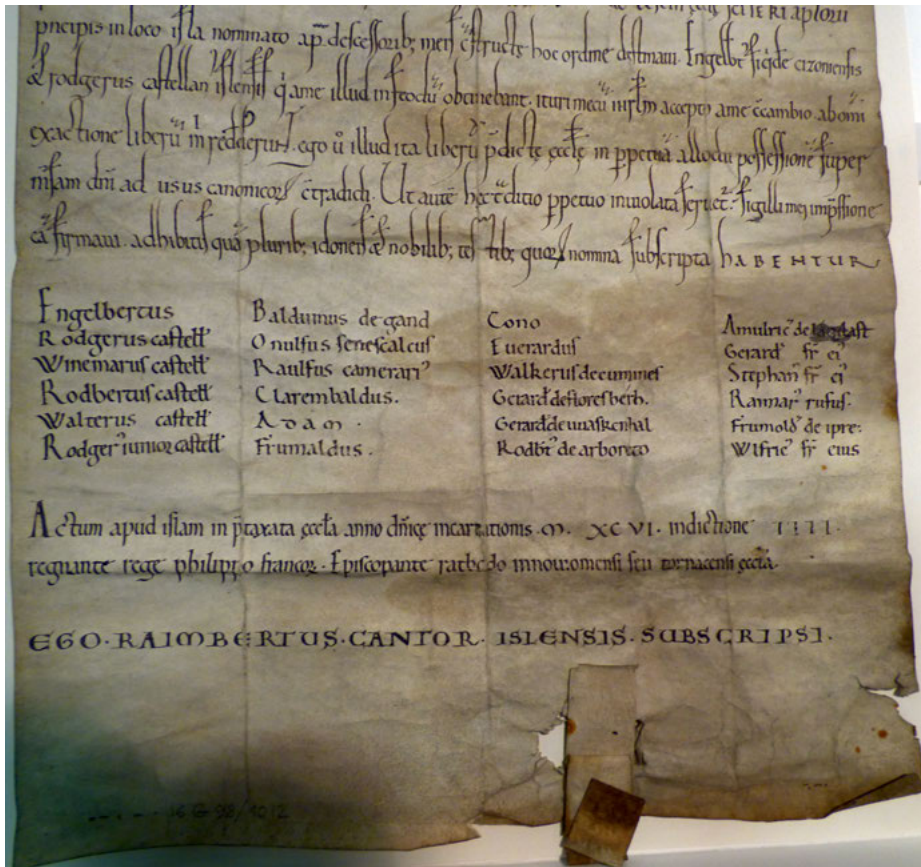


Fig. 2: Lille, Archives départementale du Nord, 16G98/1012 (Vercauteren 20).

(23 instead of 22) (Fig. 1).<sup>22</sup> Another clear precedent is found in the Flemish corpus. In a charter of Count Robert for St Peter's in Lille dated 1096 (Fig. 2), a first scribe wrote the main body of the text, but the name of the witnesses (in four columns) and the dating clause are evidently the work of a second scribe—possibly the cantor Raimbert who subscribed this act—probably added at the time of the *actio*.<sup>23</sup> There is no error in the calculation of the date here but the change of hand and ink is obvious, supported by the different formatting and layout of the text. Two other examples suggest a similar situation wherein a second scribe writes the subscribers (and possibly the dating formula) at the time of the legal action or its promulgation.<sup>24</sup> These acts were

<sup>22</sup> DH 10.

<sup>23</sup> Vercauteren 20. It is possible, though not certain, that the dating formula was written by a third scribe.

<sup>24</sup> There is an early example of a charter of Robert I the Frisian for Etrun Abbey (1085–1093) in which the handwriting gives the impression that the scribe has added the subscribers in a hurry at the bottom



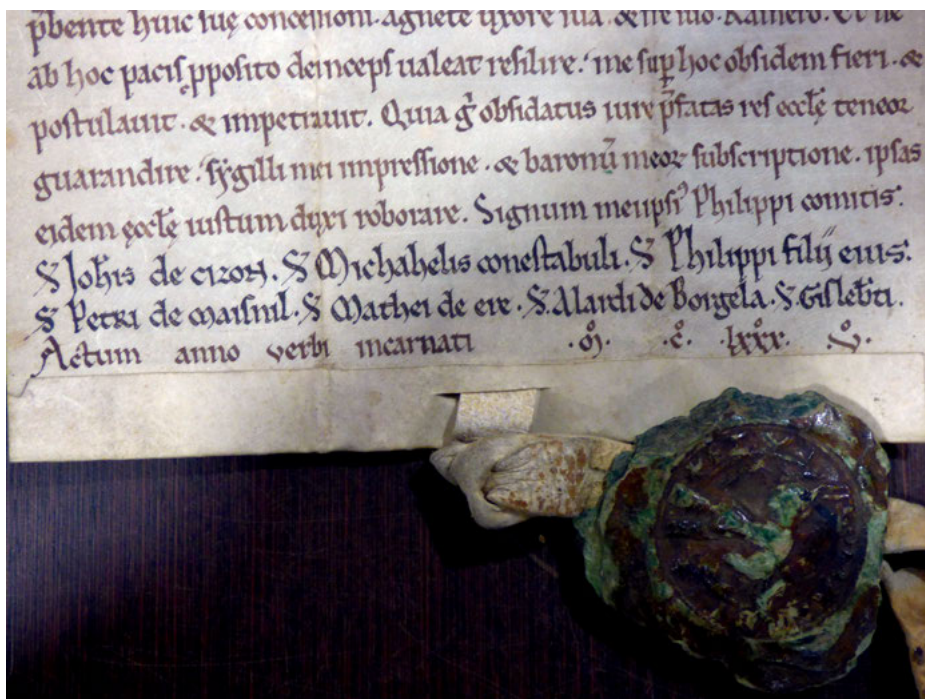


Fig. 3: Lille, Archives départementale du Nord, 1H42/477 (DH 689).

probably prepared in advance and then completed at the time of the legal action or its promulgation with the names of the witnesses present, as the scribe obviously could not know the attendees in advance.

A charter of Philip of Alsace for the Abbey of Anchin, dated 1185, presents a different problem (Fig. 3). The text was clearly written by one hand but with changes in the ink colour. The list of subscribers is written in a darker ink before returning to the initial ink of the main body of the text for the dating formula.<sup>25</sup> There are three similar acts (two of which are shown in Fig. 4 and 5) with a distinct change in the ink colour for the witness list, although it is almost impossible to determine whether they were written by one or two hands. Nevertheless, the use of a different ink to transcribe the subscribers and the date does not in itself confirm a two-stage process of production.<sup>26</sup> In an act of Thierry of Alsace for the Collegiate Church of St Donatian (1155–1157), the scribe probably changed the ink, and possibly also the pen, when transcribing the list

of the act: *Diplomata Belgica*, ed. by Gysseling/Koch, no. 172bis. Another example is an act of Count Thierry for the Abbey of Marchiennes, dated 1157: DH 168.

<sup>25</sup> DH 689.

<sup>26</sup> Vercauteren 121 (Auchy Abbey, 1126): Fig. 4; Vercauteren 123 (Saint-Vaast Abbey of Arras, 1119–1127); DH 563 (Anchin Abbey, 1180): Fig. 5.

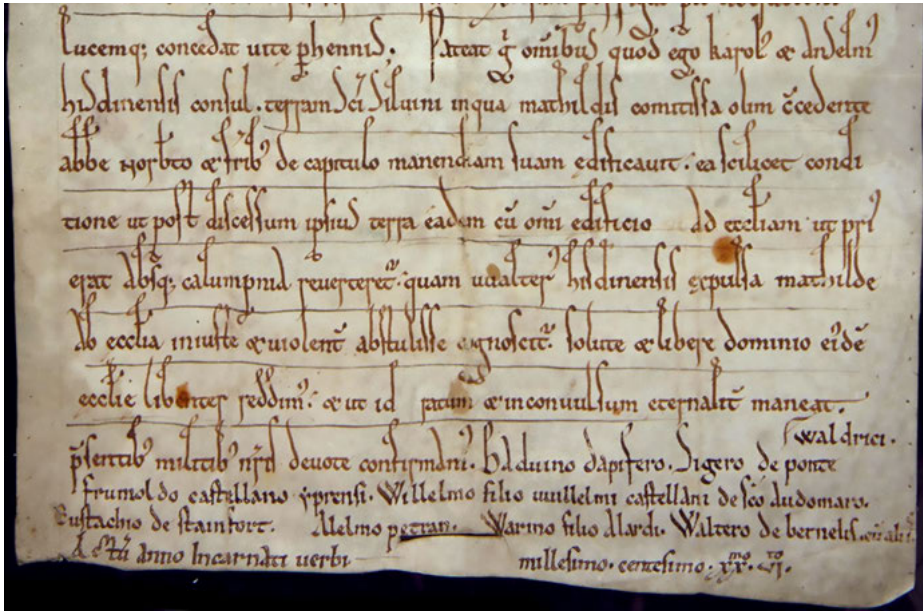


Fig. 4: Arras, Archives départementale du Pas-de-Calais, 2H6 (Vercauteren 121).

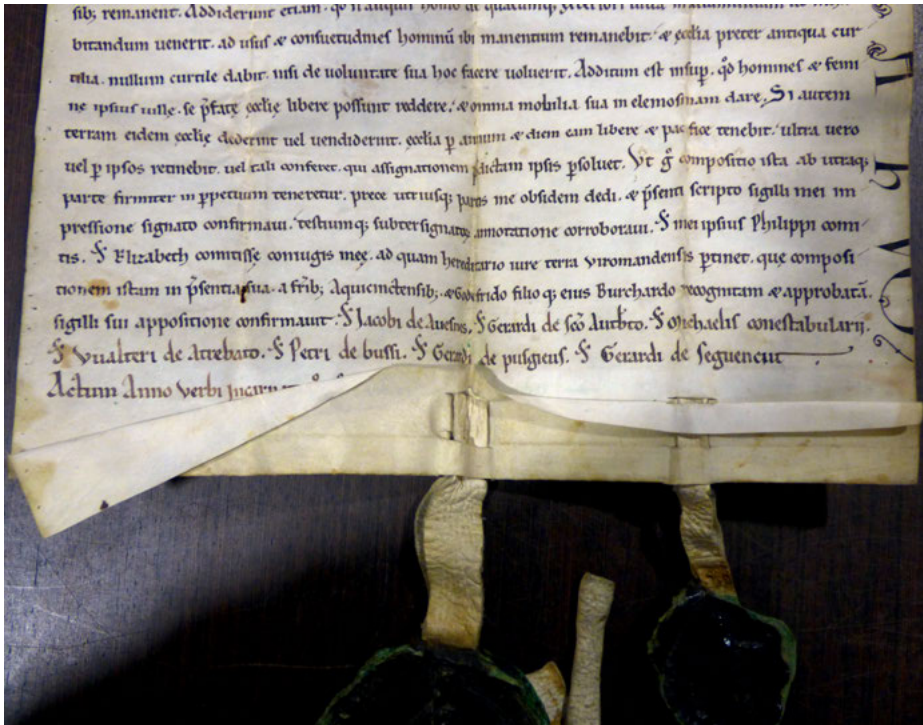


Fig. 5: Lille, Archives départementale du Nord, 1H42/472 (DH 563).

of subscribers, which was written in the same hand.<sup>27</sup> As comital charters were often produced by the beneficiary, it is plausible that the same scribe prepared the main text and the dating clause of the record in advance, leaving a space between the two and then, when personally present at the legal action or its promulgation, he himself added the names of the witnesses in the gap. Nevertheless, a difference in the colour of the ink that cannot be linked to a change of hand does not definitively exclude the possibility of a single hand, as the scribe may simply have encountered a technical problem or an issue that caused a pause in the writing during the engrossment of the document.<sup>28</sup> Considering that he was writing the charter while the legal action was taking place, the scribe could also have interrupted his work after writing the *dispositio* to wait for the parties involved in the act to choose the witnesses from among the individuals present.<sup>29</sup> This issue of choosing the witnesses listed at the bottom of the count's charters—whether independent of the scribe or not—is addressed next.

## A Selection of Witnesses?

In 1139, on his return from his first trip to the Holy Land, Thierry of Alsace confirmed an act given a year earlier by his wife to the Abbey of Ter Duinen. The scribe of the count's charters copied Sibyl of Anjou's record verbatim, including the dating formula and the list of witnesses, although replacing the name of the countess with that of the count. The only other change was the addition of Michel I of Harnes, castellan of Cassel, among the witnesses, inserted between Yvan of Alost and Anselme of Bailleul; otherwise, the original witnesses are written in the same order and with the same spelling. How can the addition of the Lord of Harnes be explained? Perhaps he was present with Sibyl of Anjou and the scribe, intentionally or not, forgot to write down his name when the countess' charter was engrossed, with this error only being corrected on the count's return. In this case, it would be necessary to imagine that the memory of his presence persisted. An examination of the originals shows that the two acts are clearly not written in the same hand, although they are similar in style—perhaps because they were written in the scriptorium of Ter Duinen. Another possibility is that the count's charters were drawn up from a no longer extant draft kept at the abbey that mentioned the presence of Michel of Harnes, whom the scribe of Sibyl's version simply overlooked in his transcription of the final text. Although it is clear that the scribe of Thierry's charter used a previous version of the document, given the perfect reproduction of the spelling of the witnesses' names, it would be more logical

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<sup>27</sup> DH 166. While the editors remain cautious about the scriptural continuity of the text, there is no convincing palaeographic evidence for the existence of a second hand.

<sup>28</sup> Tock 2005, 310. For instance, Michel Zimmermann notes the example of a scribe who indicated his use of several inks and pens to write a single document: Zimmermann 2003, 63.

<sup>29</sup> Broun 2000, 263–264.

that the scribe used the final version in the name of the countess Sibyl, which omitted the castellan.<sup>30</sup> One hypothesis that cannot be excluded is that the Lord of Harnes was present with Count Thierry when he confirmed his wife's act and that the scribe then added his name to the list of witnesses that he was copying. This example nevertheless calls into question the presence of Michel of Harnes at one of the legal actions and the way in which the scribes recorded the names of the witnesses attesting to the *actio*.

In three notable instances, two comital acts were given on the same day, in the same place and for the benefit of the same institution contain significant differences in their respective witness lists.<sup>31</sup> The choice of witnesses is difficult to explain, if not by a careless mistake then by the scribe's desire to deliberately record (or not) certain individuals present during the legal action. In other cases, there are chronological constraints that are sometimes difficult to determine. For example, two charters of Thierry of Alsace for the Abbey of Saint Peter's in Ghent, given in 1150, appear to be identical in their conception, transcribed by the same scribe with an identical form and broadly similar witness lists save for a few additional individuals in the first charter.<sup>32</sup> However, the charters could not have been produced on the same day. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive that the scribe would have omitted from one of the witness lists important figures such as the count's son or two eminent abbots in the region. Therefore, it is probable that a short period of time, a few days at most, separated these two acts, which were passed during the count's stay in Ghent, thus allowing the different witnesses to come and go depending on their occupations. A similar observation can be made in a pair of charters intended for the Abbey of Ename, drafted a decade earlier in Aalschoot, regarding properties located in Langebeke.<sup>33</sup> This thesis is also supported by the examination of two other charters of Thierry of Alsace for the

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**30** DH 46 and 53.

**31** DH 254–255: three witnesses (Gauthier monk of Zomergem, Jean of Boisleaux and Robert of Gondecourt) are added to DH 255 (Marchiennes Abbey, Lille, 16 February 1166). DH 369 and 370: significant differences between the two lists, with the addition of the abbots of Lieu-Restauré and Saint-Denis of Paris in DH 370 (Abbey of Valsery, Villers-Cotterêts, 1 December 1174). DH 642–643: six additional witnesses (Gauthier III of Nevele, Siger II of Poeke-Viggezele, the count clerk Joseph and three canons of St Donatian) in DH 642 compared to DH 643 (Collegiate Church of St Donatian in Bruges, Male, 25 March 1183).

**32** DH 121–122. The following people only appear in DH 121: Baldwin, the son of Thierry of Alsace, the abbots of St Bavo and Ename, Rainier of Zwijnaarde and three monks from the Abbey of St Peter in Ghent. On the scribe who wrote these documents, see: Huyghebaert 1982, 59, n. 172.

**33** DH 54–55. These acts show mutual borrowings and common formulas such as their dating (*Actum est hoc anno uerbi incarnati M<sup>o</sup> C<sup>o</sup> XL<sup>o</sup>, in Alescot, ubi tunc temporis comes cum suis, uenationi intendens, morabatur*). They are both intended for the abbot of Ename, who requested them from the count. Although the hand is fundamentally different, eight of the nine witnesses of DH 55 are also present in DH 54, which leads us to compare them. It is probable that DH 54 is somewhat later than DH 55 and that the other witnesses of this charter were added to those of the first one. In contrast, DH 54 may have been given shortly before and some of the witnesses may have left before the legal action of DH 55.

Abbey of St Peter in Oudenburg, given in Bruges in the count's house and dated to 20 and 22 February 1161. The documents have several similarities in their notification and dating formulas.<sup>34</sup> From a palaeographic perspective, the two hands are similar, suggesting that they were made by the same scribe. Regarding the witnesses, most are common to both charters, although the second act sees the addition of a certain magister Gauthier, John of Esen and the aldermen of Bruges. The abbot of Oudenburg, Herman, certainly visited Count Thierry in his home in Bruges in order to obtain both a charter of exemption and a charter of confirmation (of an act of Charles the Good). The witnesses are all from the Bruges region and were probably summoned by the count to attest to these two legal actions. Perhaps faced with an unexpected request from the abbot of Oudenburg, Thierry of Alsace was only able to call on vassals located near the city of Bruges, some of whom, like Jean d'Esen, could perhaps only arrive in time for the second act on 22 February. It is also possible that the confirmation act required, for one reason or another, the presence of several Bruges aldermen, who were only able to join the count and his entourage on that date.<sup>35</sup>

These examples illustrate the fluctuating nature of witness lists in twelfth-century Flemish count diplomacy.<sup>36</sup> Witnesses, often of high social standing, would regularly come and go from the count's court, which would explain these variations.<sup>37</sup> To justify the disparities between two contemporary witness lists, could the time of day have influenced their composition? The available evidence suggests that in some cases, the scribe intentionally selected specific witnesses for reasons that largely escape us. Indeed, 74 witness lists (i. e., nine percent of the Flemish charters contain-

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<sup>34</sup> DH 191–192.

<sup>35</sup> This notion of summoning witnesses is assumed by the importance of their testimony as a power issue for the author or recipient, but is never clearly stated in the sources. Some, like Prell even cast doubt on it, arguing that the presence of a particular witness is only a “matter of circumstance, even of chance”, which in some cases cannot be fundamentally ruled out: Prell 2003, 214.

<sup>36</sup> Six other cases of this type exist in the Flemish corpus. Two charters dated 1175 for Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, from Count Philip of Alsace and Countess Elisabeth of Vermandois respectively, have a strictly identical *dispositio*. Only the lists of witnesses are modified. In Philip's charter, the witnesses are introduced by: *Huius rei testes sunt*; while those in the countess' charter are subscribers. The greatest difference is the replacement of Gauthier of Arras by Raas IV of Gavere in the list. The place of promulgation of the countess' charter is not specified, unlike the count's charter (Arras). Some graphical variants in the names of the witnesses are also present, suggesting that the two documents were not written by the same scribe. In any case, it may be assumed that a short period of time elapsed between the charters of the count and countess, which would have allowed enough time for the departure of Gauthier of Arras and the arrival of Raas of Gavere, with one perhaps accompanying the count and the other the countess (DH 384–385). Similar cases are found in DH 780–781 (between 1184 and 1190), where the same judgment is confirmed successively by Countess Matilda and then by Count Philip before a similar, but not completely identical, assembly and DH 801–802 (1190), when the same individual, Thierry of Rubroek, carries out two transactions with two different beneficiaries before the same witnesses with only one exception.

<sup>37</sup> Bates 1997, 100–101; Green 1997, 254.

ing such lists) conclude with sentences that indicate that the scribe did not record all the individuals present at the legal action or promulgation: *et alii quamplures* (32 occurrences), *et alii multi* (seventeen occurrences), *et aliorum plurimorum* (eighteen occurrences), *et ceteri multi* (1 occurrence), *cum aliis* (four occurrences), *et alii fideles* (two occurrences) and so on.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, witnesses of low origin are not the only ones to be omitted as the great vassals of the count's court were also occasionally overlooked.<sup>39</sup> Sometimes the scribe simply states that too many people were present and that it would take far too long to list all their names.<sup>40</sup> Is the laziness of an indolent scribe before a large assembly to blame here? This is a possibility, although material constraints also seem to be at play. An investigation of the extant originals shows that in some cases, the scribe did not have enough space on the parchment to record all the names of the witnesses. He thus interrupts his enumeration and adds the appropriate "and others" formula. These documents confirm a selection—involuntary and unavoidable, but undeniable—of witnesses from the audience.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, some scribes end their enumeration when there is still space available on the parchment.<sup>42</sup> This selection can only be voluntary—although it is possible that the piece of parchment used as a draft at the time of the legal action was too small to contain all the witnesses. On the contrary, it is conceivable that the draft of a charter may have encompassed more witnesses than the final version because the scribe did not have a piece of parchment large enough to transcribe all the names recorded at the time of the *actio*. In practice, these cases do not modify my argument. The selection of witnesses was made either at the time of the legal action (or its promulgation) or during the drafting of the final text, in which case the scribe took full responsibility for his choices. In these situations, the materiality of the charter as an object has a significant influence on the scribe's scriptural practice, although this does not call into question its purpose as a vehicle of memory.

On what criteria was this selection based? Unfortunately, the Flemish documentation contains no direct evidence. Was it, as mentioned above, the outcome of a negotiation between the participants in the act or an arbitrary decision made by the scribe?

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**38** Vercauteren 63, 66, 71, 73, 76, 83, 121, 125; DH 14, 19, 23, 185, 189, 228, 230, 243, 244, 248, 252, 253, 264, 265, 267, 270, 271, 274, 275, 290, 302, 310, 311, 333, 348, 352, 398bis, 399, 401, 404, 405, 422, 425, 431, 443, 449, 458, 460, 564, 576, 580, 584, 588, 589, 590, 621, 631, 640, 641, 649, 655, 667, 672, 673, 682, 692, 713, 715, 723, 728, 757, 759, 824, 841 and 843. One scribe uses a biblical quotation (John 20:30) to indicate that not all the witnesses are listed in the charter: *alii que quorum nomina non sunt scripta in libro hoc*: DH 69.

**39** *multisque aliis de optimatibus nostris*: Vercauteren 12; *et plures de curia comitis primates*: Vercauteren 75; *et ceteris nobilibus quos enumerare longum est*: DH 96; *ceterisque probabilibus viris quam pluribus*: DH 431; *Et plures alii homines comitis*: DH 641; *Et plures alii de meis hominibus*: DH 824.

**40** *et ceteris nobilibus quos enumerare longum est*: DH 96; *ceterisque quos dinumerare longum est*: DH 97; *et ceteri quos enumerare longum est*: DH 126.

**41** Vercauteren 63, 71, 73, 76, 121; DH 23, 69, 185, 189, 244, 265, 405, 641, 649, 715.

**42** Vercauteren 66, 75, 125; DH 14, 352, 404, 584, 589, 590, 631, 757.

Could the Count of Flanders himself influence the choice of names transcribed on the parchment? And how random was this selection? These questions remain unanswered, especially as other considerations complicate the problem. Studies of Anglo-Saxon charters have stressed the importance of the order of witnesses as a mirror of the social hierarchy, based on the principle that the scribes transcribed the names of the individuals according to an order governed by social rank, with the first witness situated at the top of the hierarchy.<sup>43</sup>

In Flanders, the witnesses are usually organised according to the following model: firstly, the members of the clergy, headed by the bishops and archbishops, followed by the abbots and provosts and then the rest of the clergy; then come the laity, with the count's family in the leading positions, followed by the great aristocrats of the county, the princely officers and the castellans—who often come from these important lordly families—and finally, the urban bourgeoisie and aldermen. In the case of a larger assembly, a cohort of individuals from different social backgrounds—small local lords, members of village communities, etc.—may be listed between the last two categories.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, exceptions do exist. The list of witnesses included in an act of Count Robert II for the Abbey of Saint-Amand is not organised hierarchically.<sup>45</sup> Sometimes, secular witnesses are listed before the clergy or the two orders are mixed, with the names of the abbots being placed at the end of the list.<sup>46</sup> In the majority of cases, however, the scribe puts the most eminent people at the top of the witness list and because it is generally accepted that such lists also served to emphasise the author's network of influence, it would be very surprising indeed if he did not mention their names.<sup>47</sup>

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**43** Russell 1937, 319–329; Benton 1959, 291–293; Keefe 1997, 93–109; Vincent 2007, 325. See also: Tock 2005, 254–258.

**44** These general observations are based on a close and careful reading of the witness lists of the Flemish corpus. It is nevertheless difficult to provide solid quantitative evidence to support this statement. It seems futile to indicate the average position of a witness in all the lists in which he appears, as this criterion is too closely correlated with the numerical importance of the lists.

**45** Vercauteren 50 (5 Augustus 1111). The original has been lost. It is possible that the witness list was organised in columns, although this form was not preserved in the surviving copies.

**46** Vercauteren 26 (1101), 31 (14 October 1104), 32 (1105); DH 101 (1139–1147), 153 (1156), 198 (1161), 226 (1163). Again, the possibility of having a list of witnesses organised in columns cannot be ruled out for charters where the original is missing. Fortunately, this order can be confirmed in the originals: Vercauteren 31, 32; DH 198.

**47** See the studies cited above in fn. 8.

## Conclusion

Before concluding, let me once again reiterate the critical precautions to be taken in relation to the observations made in this article. The interpretation of the materiality of the sources and particularly their palaeographic examination can indeed be ambiguous and illustrates the limitations of a strictly materialist approach to the subject. Despite this broadening of perspectives, the corpus of the acts of the counts of Flanders offers few certainties regarding the questions raised in the introduction. Nevertheless, some convincing elements can be highlighted. The general tendency—it is impossible to speak of a norm in the context studied here—involves the material composition of the charter in one sitting made by a single scribe either at the same time as the legal action, its promulgation or after its completion. In the latter case, the memory of the witnesses was probably preserved in a draft, which was then engrossed by the scribe. However, the way in which Flemish archival documents were drawn up seems to have been so varied—including multiple preparatory versions and validation of the record ‘remotely’—that it is difficult to imagine their complete standardisation. A few rare charters show a clear break in their writing, whether it be a change of hand or ink, which would suggest that they were written in several stages. This implies an initial preparation, with the scribe leaving an empty space to add the names of the witnesses at a later point, based on the individuals who attended the legal action or its promulgation. While some examples are ambiguous, others seem to support the hypothesis that the recording of witnesses was chosen on the spot from those present at the assembly.

The selection of witnesses seems to be a relatively frequent phenomenon in Flemish charters, even if it is far from systematic. The choice is sometimes involuntary, such as when the scribe is subject to technical constraints, for example in the case when the materiality of the support influences the scriptural practice. However, the process can be quite deliberate in other cases. The criteria for selecting witnesses are not apparent from the documentation and must certainly be numerous. The choice was probably made at the time of the ceremony relating to the legal action, although it could also take place afterwards when the charters were engrossed. The scribes were certainly responsible in this operation, even though this is impossible to prove. To sum up, between 1071 and 1191, the lists of witnesses in the count’s charters provide a faithful but partial picture of the individuals present with the count of Flanders when he made his acts, especially regarding those of lower social rank. As indispensable as charters are to many historical investigations, they must be handled with care, bearing in mind that their creation is the outcome of a complex process that is far from standardised and rationalised.



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Tsang Wing Ma

# To Write or to Seal?

New Evidence on Literacy Practices in Early Imperial China

## Introduction

Since William V. Harris' pioneering work on Greco-Roman literacy in 1989, the topic of literacy in the ancient world continues to this day to be frequently discussed.<sup>1</sup> Drawing inspiration from the new approaches to literacy studies in anthropology and education studies,<sup>2</sup> instead of treating literacy as a quantifiable skill that can be applied universally, most scholars of ancient history have started to see literacy as an embedded social practice and emphasise the particular social and cultural contexts in which literacy is employed in achieving specific goals. As Rosalind Thomas puts it: "Rather than see 'literacy' as an independent, separable skill, researchers as well as teachers in the field tend to wish to see it more as an embedded activity—or to see a tension between the social context and the potentialities of writing".<sup>3</sup> As such, in the area of early China, multiple literacies were coined in order to accommodate different contexts in which literacy skill was put in practice.<sup>4</sup> While such an approach focuses on the literacy acquired by an individual or a social group in a particular context, Charles Sanft has recently brought to our attention the concept of 'literate community', in which individuals of different levels of reading and writing skills interact with texts on various occasions.<sup>5</sup> Sanft's application of the concept into the context of early China has generated meaningful discussion in literacy studies across different disciplines.<sup>6</sup>

Along with this growing interest in literacy studies of early China is the increasing amount of bamboo and wooden manuscripts excavated in recent decades, which provide indispensable and new bodies of evidence for testing these approaches.<sup>7</sup> Of them

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1 Harris 1989. A large number of journal articles, monographs or edited volumes are devoted to the topic since Harris' book. See, for example: Bowman/Woolf 1996; Johnson/Parker 2009; Eckardt 2018; Kolb 2018.

2 See, for example: Street 2003, 77–91.

3 Thomas 2009, 14.

4 For 'craftsman's literacy', see: Barbieri-Low 2011; for 'administrative literacy', see: Ma 2017; for 'scribal literacy', see: Foster 2021; for discussions on multiple literacies, see: Yates 2011; Hsing 2021c.

5 Sanft 2019.

6 See: Bagnall 2019; Long 2019.

7 For a general introduction, see: Ma 2020a.

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I would like to thank the organisers and participants of the "Keeping Record: The Materiality of Rulership and Administration in the Pre-Modern World" workshop for their feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter. I am also indebted to the editors for their careful reading and Charles Sanft for his useful comments.

the bamboo and wooden administrative texts excavated from storage pit no.1 (J1) at Wuyiguangchang 五一廣場 (May 1st Square) in the city of Changsha 長沙, Hunan 湖南 province in 2010 have not yet received much attention, especially in Western academic circles.<sup>8</sup> This article examines a few examples from the discoveries at Wuyiguangchang to demonstrate how seals were applied as an alternative means of writing to verify one's identity and vouch for others in the early Chinese administration. The examples presented in this article show that the decision to seal rather than write was not necessarily due to the lack of writing ability, but simply because sealing as a form of literacy practices in early China shared a significant part of the functions of writing. Individuals in early China appear to have enjoyed a certain degree of freedom in choosing to write or to seal in some specific contexts.

## The Use of Seals in Early China

The use of seals in East Asian culture is so unique and widespread that it is perhaps not unfamiliar to any student or scholar of Chinese history, yet the functions of the seals in the early imperial period were quite different than those developed in later periods. As a symbol of their status, only the seals of the emperor (*huangdi* 皇帝) and regional kings (*zhuhou wang* 諸侯王) were named *xi* 璽, while the seals held by the officials or commoners were called *zhang* 章 or *yin* 印. The first Chinese dictionary, *Explaining the Graphs and Analysing the Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), states: “*Yin*, the tokens held by the governors” 印, 執政所持信也.<sup>9</sup> According to the Qing 清 scholar Duan Yucai 段玉裁, the “governors” (*zhizheng* 執政) refer to those who held official positions. Each Han official who was ranked at or above 200 bushels (*shi* 石) was issued an official seal accompanied by a silk ribbon (*shou* 綬), both of which were produced in imperial workshops or private workshops under official supervision. Those who were ranked below 200 bushels could use the seal of their affiliated office when they were on duty. According to the imperial regulations, the material and decoration of an individual's seal and the colour of its silk ribbon had to match his salary grade (*zhi* 秩).<sup>10</sup>

A more standardised system of the official seals was introduced in the fourth year of Yuanshou 元狩 of Emperor Wu 武 (119 BCE). Officials whose salary-grade were 200 bushels or above would be issued “official seals” (*tong guan yin* 通官印), known as “square-inch seals” (*fang cun zhi yin* 方寸之印),<sup>11</sup> while those who were

<sup>8</sup> To my knowledge, the only work devoted to this finding in Western languages so far is: Yates 2019.

<sup>9</sup> *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 1988, 9A.33A.

<sup>10</sup> For the official seal system, see: Wang 1997; Lin 1998. For the official silk ribbon system, see: Abe 2000; Abe 2012.

<sup>11</sup> The estimation of one Han *cun* 寸 changed slightly from the Western to Eastern Han. The surface area of one Han square-inch seal was supposed to be c. 5.34 cm<sup>2</sup> (2.31 × 2.31 cm) in the Western Han compared to 5.64 cm<sup>2</sup> (2.375 × 2.375 cm) in the Eastern Han. Unless otherwise stated, the conversion rates follow: Luo 1994, 3.

ranked below 200 bushels could only use “smaller official seals” (*xiao guan yin* 小官印) known as “half-sized seals” (*ban tong yin* 半通印).<sup>12</sup> Each official would have to return his seal when he left his position. Along with the official salary grade, carriage (*yu* 輿) and clothing (*fu* 服) systems, the official seal and silk ribbon system was part of a hierarchical and visual Han official system, in which, ideally, each official was defined by the salary he received, the carriage he rode, the clothes he wore and the seal and ribbon he carried.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the official seals issued by the Han government, both officials and commoners could own private seals (*siyin* 私印).<sup>14</sup> Although private seals, in terms of their scripts and decorations, appeared to be much less regularized,<sup>15</sup> Han wooden slips recovered from the north-western region indicate that superior officials, such as the Company Commander (*hou* 候), would use their private seals for conducting official business and their subordinates could use their private seals when acting (*xing* 行) temporarily on behalf of their superiors.<sup>16</sup>

Enno Giele and Hsing I-tien 邢義田 have both indicated that seals in early China performed part of the functions of a modern signature.<sup>17</sup> In a recent study, Liu Hsin-ning 劉欣寧 puts sealing along with handwriting and tally-matching as the three means of verification in Han China.<sup>18</sup> By impressing his official or private seal onto clay (*fengni* 封泥) on the envelope or cover (*fengjian* 封檢),<sup>19</sup> or directly onto the document itself, one verified that he was the sender of the document or would take responsibility for its contents, even though in some cases his subordinate or representative would carry out this action on his behalf.<sup>20</sup> It is also worth mentioning that although the practice of sealing is different from our usual understanding of the act of writing, namely ‘putting pen to paper’,<sup>21</sup> the “script for official seals” (*moyin* 摹印) was nonetheless one of the six or eight forms of scripts that a hereditary scribe

<sup>12</sup> The width of a half-sized seal is said to be 5 *fen* 分 (approximately 1.16 cm in the Western Han and 1.19 cm in the Eastern Han): Wang 1997, 86; Lin 1998, 154. In fact, there are also a small number of official seals which were rectangular in shape and smaller official seals square in shape, which seems to have deviated from the official regulations. See, for example: Luo 1987, 35–36.

<sup>13</sup> For such a hierarchical and visual system, see: Hsing 2021d.

<sup>14</sup> See Zhao 2012, 72–87.

<sup>15</sup> In a silk letter found from Xuanquan zhi 懸泉置, Dunhuang 敦煌, Yuan 元 requested Zifang 子方 to carve a private seal on Lü Zidu’s 呂子都 behalf. The seal was expected to be of Censor (*yushi* 御史) style—which means that it should be made of silver and decorated with a turtle knob—and its width should have been 7 *fen* (approximately 1.62 cm in the Western Han or 1.66 cm in the Eastern Han): Hu/Zhang 2001, 187–91. For an English translation of this letter, see: Giele 2015, 430–435.

<sup>16</sup> See: Hou 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Giele 2005, 353–361; Hsing 2021b, 143–147.

<sup>18</sup> Liu 2021, 90–91.

<sup>19</sup> For a recent study on the sealing practices, see: Lü 2018.

<sup>20</sup> This appears to be a worldwide practice in ancient administration. For the use of seals in the Achaemenid Persian Empire, see: Lewis 1996, 31–32.

<sup>21</sup> See: Selbitschka 2018, 416.



(*shi* 史) during the Qin and early Han had to master.<sup>22</sup> The examples examined below attest that sealing could be used as an alternative means of writing to vouch for others. They reveal that the persons who chose to use sealing to vouch for others were not necessarily unable to write, but also included the scribes who were expected to be well trained in writing.

## The Guarantee System in the Eastern Han Society: Evidence from the Wuyiguangchang Site

The city of Changsha is famous for its enormous number of bamboo and wooden manuscripts excavated from abandoned wells or storage pits in the last three decades. In 1996, more than 100,000 bamboo and wooden slips and tablets of the Wu 吳 Kingdom (222–280 CE), about 70,000 of which were inscribed with Chinese characters, were recovered from well no. 22 at Zoumalou 走馬樓. Since then, at least five other groups of bamboo and wooden manuscripts were found in the nearby area. The dating of these manuscripts spans from the mid-Western Han 西漢 to Three Kingdoms 三國 periods (second century BCE–third century CE). The corpus examined in this article was discovered in 2010 when the Wuyiguangchang station of the Changsha subway was under construction. Located at the centre of Changsha city, the site is twenty meters north of another site where approximately 2,000 Western Han bamboo and wooden manuscripts were excavated in 2002 and 80 meters northeast of the above-mentioned Zoumalou site.<sup>23</sup> Both the transmitted and excavated evidence attest that the Wuyiguangchang site and the nearby area were very possibly the office of Linxiang 臨湘 County (*xian* 縣) or Marquisate (*houguo* 侯國), which was under the jurisdiction of Changsha Kingdom (*wangguo* 王國) in the Western Han and later Changsha Commandery (*jun* 郡) in the Eastern Han and Wu Kingdom periods.<sup>24</sup>

Storage pit no. 1 was found beneath the fifteenth level of archaeological pit no. 1 (T1). Archaeological evidence shows that the fifteenth level roughly dates to the mid-late Eastern Han 東漢 to Wei-Jin 魏晉 periods (second–fifth centuries CE). According to a preliminary archaeological report, storage pit no. 1 is 3.6 meters in diameter and 1.5 meters deep and can be further divided into three levels. However, except for a brief description, the archaeologists have not yet disclosed the details regarding the distribution of the bamboo and wooden manuscripts in these three levels.<sup>25</sup> A small selection consisting of 26 pieces of manuscripts was made public in the preliminary archaeological report in 2013.<sup>26</sup> Two years later, a larger selection of 176 representative

<sup>22</sup> See: Hsing 2011. See also: Barbieri-Low/Yates 2015, 1103–1104, n. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2013 (hereafter *JB*), 4.

<sup>24</sup> See: Ma 2020a, 548–50.

<sup>25</sup> *JB*, 5–6.

<sup>26</sup> *JB*, 14–25.

pieces or fragments with annotations was published by a research team composed of four institutes in mainland China.<sup>27</sup> From 2018 to 2021, the same team published six volumes containing 2,600 pieces or fragments, which account for more than one-third of the total number.<sup>28</sup> Of concern to this present study is that this corpus of materials contains invaluable information for the first time revealing the operation of the guarantee system in the Eastern Han society.<sup>29</sup>

As previous research has shown, criminals sentenced to hard labour during the Han were requested to provide guarantors to vouch for their conduct during their sentences. For those who could secure guarantors, they could be exempt from wearing restraints such as collars or manacles at work.<sup>30</sup> Yet, before the discovery of the Wuyiguangchang materials, the actual operation of the vouching system was not known. A wooden two-column (*mu lianghang* 木兩行) slip included in the *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu xuanshi 2015* (hereafter *XS*) reads:

**92 (2010CWJ1③:325-1-15)<sup>31</sup>**

[Line 1] 分、敢等十七人傳任。趙、撫、古、非，亡人，未得任。輒逕召催促撫、非家屬。即日撫母予、非母委

[Line 2] 詣鄉，辭：撫、非前逕(速)，從沉牢(?)亡，今無肯任撫、非等。盡力曉喻，撫、非今出具任。任具復言。唯

Seventeen people including Fan and Gan have registered [the information of their] guarantors. Zhao, Fu, Gu and Fei are absconders and they have not secured guarantors. [I] immediately summon the families of Fu and Fei and urge them [to secure guarantors]. Yu, Fu's mother, and Wei, Fei's mother came to [the office of] the District on the same day and stated that, "Fu and Fei were previously arrested and they absconded from the prison of Yuan... Now, no one is willing to vouch for Fu, Fei and the others." [I] did my utmost to instruct them. Fu and Fei have now provided [the information of] their guarantors. [I] report again after they have provided [the information of] their guarantors. [I] beg...

Probably tied with other wooden slips as a multi-piece document submitted to the higher authority, the above quoted wooden two-column slip from the Wuyiguangchang site reveals that absconders like Fu 撫 and Fei 非 would be requested to register their guarantors in governmental records. Yet, as stated in their mothers' statements, for absconders like them, it was not easy to secure guarantors, which implies that

<sup>27</sup> *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu xuanshi 2015* (hereafter *XS*).

<sup>28</sup> *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu 2018–2020* (hereafter *JD*).

<sup>29</sup> For the guarantee system in Tang and Song China: Niida 1983, 296–329.

<sup>30</sup> Yu 2012, 296–303.

<sup>31</sup> Note that the publication numbers in *XS* are different from those in *JD*, even though the same piece or fragment would appear in both editions. Unless otherwise stated, the transcriptions of Wuyiguangchang materials cited in this article are all from *JD*. Each publication number of a piece or fragment will be accompanied with an original excavation number in a round brackets. Also note that the sign + between two publication numbers indicates they are fragments of the same piece and have been recovered by the research team.

the persons who vouched for them would be held legally responsible if they were to abscond again or commit further crimes.<sup>32</sup> Li Junming 李均明, a lead member of the research team, has recently pointed out that each of the officials or commoners awaiting trial would have to secure “five guarantors” (*ren wu ren* 任五人).<sup>33</sup> This matches the records inscribed on bricks discovered in the graves of convicted labourers near the Eastern Han capital of Luoyang 洛陽. The title *wuren* 五任 indicates that the hard-labour convict who bore the title had found five persons to guarantee that he would not abscond or commit any crime during his sentenced term, even though he might not survive his term.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the evidence from Wuyiguangchang reveals that the persons who acted as guarantors for the convicts or the accused were expected to be men of “integrity and sincerity” (*wanhou* 完厚),<sup>35</sup> preferably serving in official positions (*li* 吏).<sup>36</sup>

Through a close examination of two pairs of examples from the Wuyiguangchang site, this article demonstrates that the guarantors could vouch for the guarantee by writing their own names or using their seals. Incorporating the unearthed evidence from the Juyan 居延 site in modern Inner Mongolia 內蒙古 and Gansu 甘肅 province, it appears that individuals were inevitably confronted with the choice of either to write or to seal on different occasions in the early Chinese administration.

### To Vouch for a Person by One’s Handwriting

The first pair of examples consists of two wooden two-column slips (nos. 441 and 1120) from the Wuyiguangchang site, on which two Writing Assistants (*shuzuo* 書佐)—Hu Dou 胡竇 and Chen Xin 陳訢—from Linxiang county served as guarantors for Constable (*tingzhang* 亭長) Hu Xiang 胡詳 of Xiaogong 效功 police station and guaranteed that he would not abscond. Hu Xiang was probably awaiting trial at the time and his case should have entered the judicial process. These two wooden documents were made on the same day in almost identical handwriting in the same format. According to the data provided by the research team, their size is also roughly the same. While no. 441 is 23.4 cm long and 3 cm wide, no. 1120 is 23 cm long and 3 cm wide. As sug-

<sup>32</sup> It is also stated in the early Han legal regulations that those who guaranteed a person to be an official would hold legal responsibility for his misconduct or incompetence. See: Barbieri-Low/Yates 2015, 649–650.

<sup>33</sup> See nos. 540 (2010CWJ1③:261-20), 655 (2010CWJ1③:263-5) and 449+5876+5867+4344+3778+2574 (2010CWJ1③:205-8+291-142+291-133+285-304+284-906+283-22).

<sup>34</sup> Li 2017, 2. See also: Yu 2012, 296–303. The hard-labor convicts during the Han were usually sent to perform the most dangerous or nasty work and probably would have died before they finished serving their terms. See: Barbieri-Low 2007, 255.

<sup>35</sup> See: no. 540 (2010CWJ1③:261-20).

<sup>36</sup> See: no. 449+5876+5867+4344+3778+2574 (2010CWJ1③:205-8+291-142+291-133+285-304+284-906+283-22).

gested by Li Junming, the accused would have to find “five guarantors” to vouch for them.<sup>37</sup> These two wooden two-column slips might have been tied with other wooden slips carrying three other guarantors’ vouches for Hu Xiang, for there are still clear traces of binding on them. The writers appeared to be quite conscious to leave blank spaces for two sets of cords running through the slips (Fig. 1).

**441A (2010CWJ1③:204A)**

(Line 1) 永元十七年四月甲申朔十二 (blank) 日乙未書佐胡竇敢言 (blank) 之願葆任效功亭長  
(Line 2) 胡詳不桃(逃)亡竇手書 (blank) 敢言之

**441B (2010CWJ1③:204B)**

門下書佐王史<sup>38</sup> (blank) □

**Recto side**

On the Yiwei day, the twelfth day of the fourth month whose first day is Jiashen, in the seventeenth year of Yongyuan (of Emperor He) (105 CE), Writing Assistant Hu Dou ventures to state: [I] wish to vouch for the Constable of Xiaogong police station Hu Xiang and guarantee that he will not abscond. Dou, by his handwriting, ventures to state.

**Verso side**

Writing Assistant of Beneath-the-Door Wang Shi...

**1120 (2010CWJ1③:264-274A)**

(Line 1) 永元十七年四月甲申朔十二 (blank) 日乙未書佐陳訢敢言 (blank) 之願葆任效功亭  
(Line 2) 長胡詳不桃(逃)亡訢手 (blank) 書敢言之

**1120 (2010CWJ1③:264-274B)**

金曹佐王史□

**Recto side**

On the Yiwei day, the twelfth day of the fourth month whose first day is Jiashen, in the seventeenth year of Yongyuan (of Emperor He) (105 CE), Writing Assistant Chen Xin ventures to state: [I] wish to vouch for the Constable of Xiaogong police station Hu Xiang and guarantee that he will not abscond. Xin, by his handwriting, ventures to state.

**Verso side**

Assistant of Bureau of Finance Wang Shi...

Particularly important to our discussion is the term *shoushu* 手書 mentioned in these two documents. In translating it, I have opted for the term ‘handwriting’. At first glance, the writing on the recto sides of these two documents appears to have been

<sup>37</sup> Li 2017, 2.

<sup>38</sup> JD leaves this character untranscribed. However, it should be read as *shi* 史, if we compare the same character in: 1120 (2010CWJ1③:264-274B).

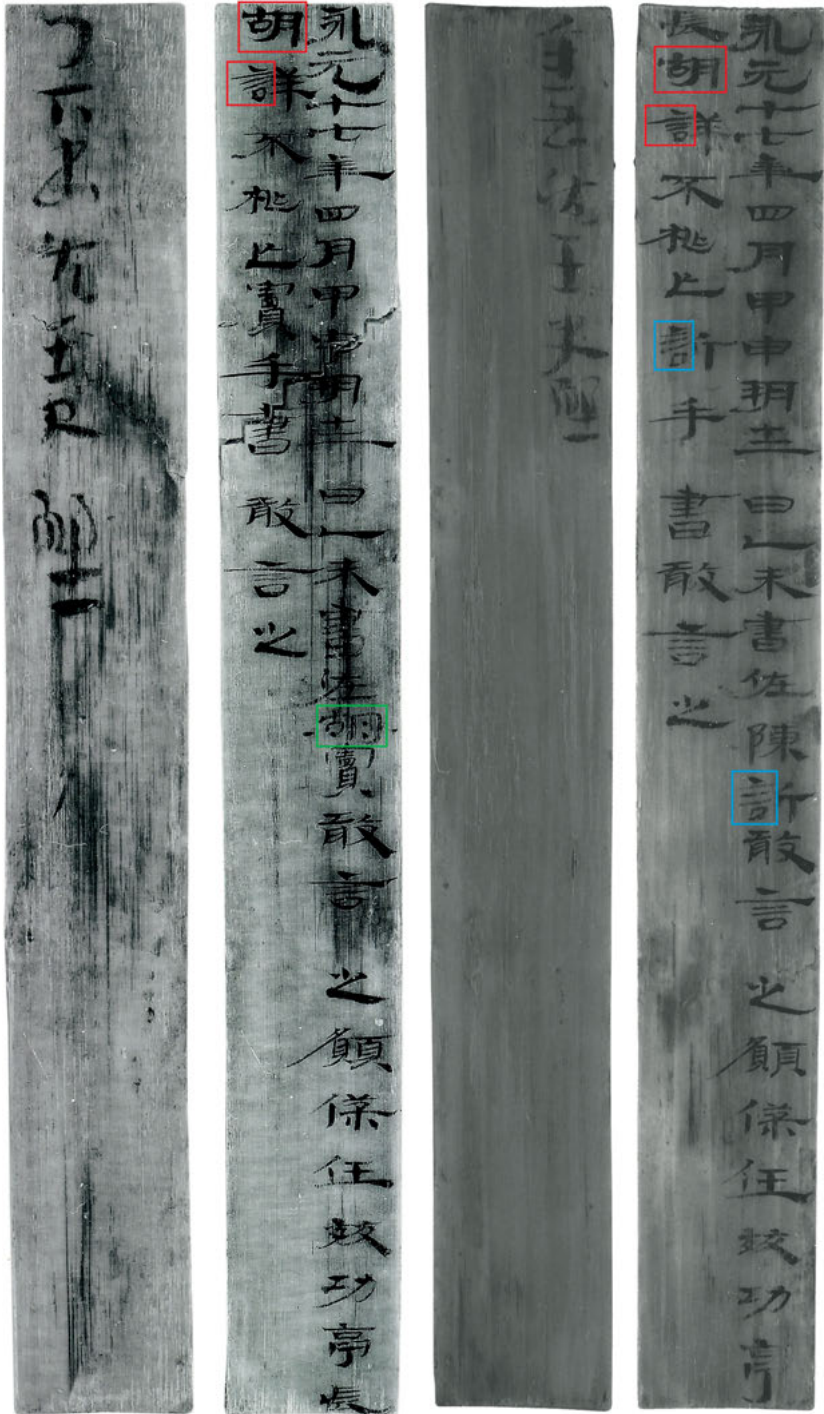


Fig. 1: Wuyiguangchang nos. 441 verso, 441 recto, 1120 verso and 1120 recto (from left to right).

written by the same hand. Yet a closer look at their names, comparing them to the same character or the same radical in the rest of the documents, reveals that their names were written by different hands, possibly by the guarantors themselves (Fig. 2 and 3).



Fig. 2: The handwriting of the character *hu* 胡 in Wuyiguangchang nos. 441 and 1120.

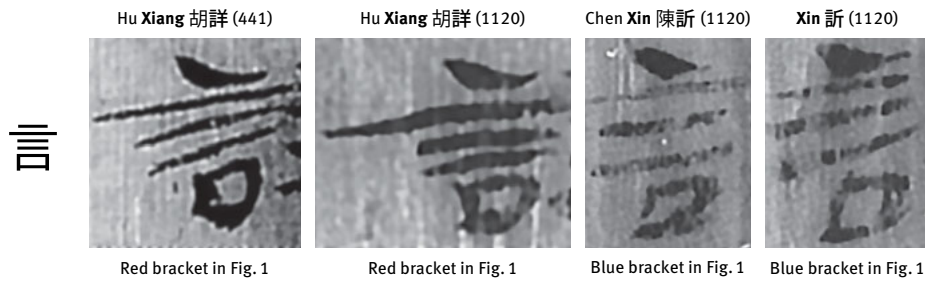


Fig. 3: The handwriting of the radical *yan* 言 in Wuyiguangchang nos. 441 and 1120.

The guarantor Hu Dou and the guarantee Hu Xiang shared the same surname *Hu*, which provides important evidence for examining my theory. Hu Xiang's full name appears respectively in nos. 441 and 1120 and the handwriting looks almost the same. However, the handwriting of Hu Dou's surname seems to be different from that of Hu Xiang: the two horizontal strokes in the radical *yue* 月 were apparently simplified as two round dots (Fig. 2). Similarly, the handwriting of the radical *yan* 言 in Chen Xin's given name is also different from that of Hu Xiang. The first horizontal stroke in the radical *yan* of the character *xin* 訢 was written shorter than that in the character *xiang* 詳 (Fig. 3). As such, the names of the guarantors Hu Dou and Chen Xin could have been written by other hands and, I would suggest, very possibly by the guarantors themselves. If this is the case, it could explain the usage of the term *shoushu* in this context. Hu Dou and Chen Xin vouched for Hu Xiang by writing their names on the documents. These two examples suggest that even though the act of writing one's own name in Han China could not be understood as synonymous with signing in the

modern sense, it did serve the function of authentication, especially when vouching for others.<sup>39</sup>

Given the similar handwriting in the rest of the two documents, they could have been prepared by the same person—Wang Shi 王史—as recorded on the verso sides. The handwriting of the verso sides looks much less formal and Wang Shi’s official titles appear to be less standardised: one as Writing Assistant of Beneath-the-Door (*menxia shuzuo* 門下書佐) and the other as Assistant of Bureau of Finance (*jincuo zuo* 金曹佐). Both titles could refer to an assistant position affiliated to a specific bureau (*cao* 曹) serving directly under the Magistrate (*xianling* 縣令). The “Door” in the term “Beneath-the-Door” (*menxia*) could originally refer to the physical door of the private chamber of the Magistrate and the officials whose title contained the term might have actually served by the door of the private chamber,<sup>40</sup> but as time passed, the term only indicated one’s closeness to the Magistrate. The character right after Wang Shi’s name, which has not been transcribed, might indicate his role in the vouching process, which I will revisit in the following section when we encounter this character again.

### To Vouch for a Person by Sealing

The second pair of documents demonstrates how sealing could be used as an alternative to writing in the vouching process. In comparison to the first pair of documents discussed above, this pair does not start with the date as most administrative documents are supposed to. Additionally, we do not see the common term “venture to state” (*gan yin zhi* 敢言之) that appears in most documents submitted to the higher authority—although no. 526+534 does start with the term *pibao* 辟報 indicating that it was a report made at someone’s request. They might have been sent along with a formal written report addressing the recipient. The reason that I put them into one group for examination is that the two guarantors—Scribe of the Bureau of Household (*hucao shi* 戶曹史) Qi Mo 棋莫 and Scribe of the Bureau of the Left Granary (*zuo cangcao shi* 左倉曹史) Xue Xi 薛熹—both vouched for the same person, Probationary Scribe (*shou shi* 守史) Zhang Pu 張普. They both guaranteed that Zhang Pu would not abscond and would come to the office when summoned. As shown in the previous section, there might have been three other guarantors vouching for Zhang Pu. The most striking feature of these documents is that a seal clay case (*fengni xia* 封泥匣) was made in the middle of the documents for holding the seal clay. This is the first time

<sup>39</sup> Hsing I-tien has argued that a lot of superiors’ ‘signatures’ (*shuming* 署名) in the Han administrative routine were actually written by their entrusted subordinates. The authority of the superiors was mostly represented by their seals: Hsing 2021a. Judging from the examples examined above, however, the subordinates (two Writing Assistants) could verify their vouches by using their self-written names just like a modern signature.

<sup>40</sup> See: Zou 2008, 50–51.

that we have encountered such concrete evidence demonstrating how the guarantors vouched for the guarantee by using their seals in early China (Fig. 4).

**526+534A (2010CWJ1③:261-3+261-13A)**

辟報：戶曹史棋莫詣曹願保任  守史張普不逃亡徵召可得以床(癸)

**526+534B (2010CWJ1③:261-3+261-13B)**

印為信 史郭

**Recto side**

Report: Scribe of the Bureau of Household, Qi Mo, comes to the Bureau and wishes to vouch for  Probationary Scribe Zhang Pu and guarantee that he will not abscond and will come [to the responsible bureau] when summoned.

**Verso side**

[Qi Mo] verifies [the vouch] by his seal. Scribe Guo...

**2572A (2010CWJ1③:283-20A)**

左倉曹史薛憲詣曹願保任  守史張普不逃亡徵召可得以床(癸)

**Recto side**

Scribe of the Bureau of the Left Granary, Xue Xi, comes to the Bureau and wishes to vouch for  Probationary Scribe Zhang Pu and guarantee that he will not abscond and will come [to the responsible bureau] when summoned. [Xue Xi]

**2572B (2010CWJ1③:283-20B)**

印為信

**Verso side**

verifies [the vouch] by his seal.

These two documents afford us with many new insights into the practice of sealing, as well as the vouching process. First, although the seal clays were already lost or decayed when they were discovered in the storage pit, the shape of the existing clay cases indicate that they were made in a rectangular shape. The seals that Qi Mo and Xue Xi impressed on the clay cases were possibly the so-called ‘half-sized seals’ or their private seals.<sup>41</sup> This would correlate with the official seal system, as explained above, as the salary grade of scribes (*shi* 史) serving in the county was normally below 100 bushels; both Qi Mo and Xue Xi were not entitled to hold a full size seal.

<sup>41</sup> The surface area of the seal clay cases on these two documents is even smaller than a 5-*fen* seal based on the photos provided in *JD*. Recent research indicates that there was a type of private seals whose script was composed of an official title and a name. The official title of the seal-holder inscribed on the seal serves the purpose of informing the viewer of his official status, a desirable quality in a guarantor from the perspective of the government. For this type of seal, see: Zhao 2012, 78–80; Du 2019.



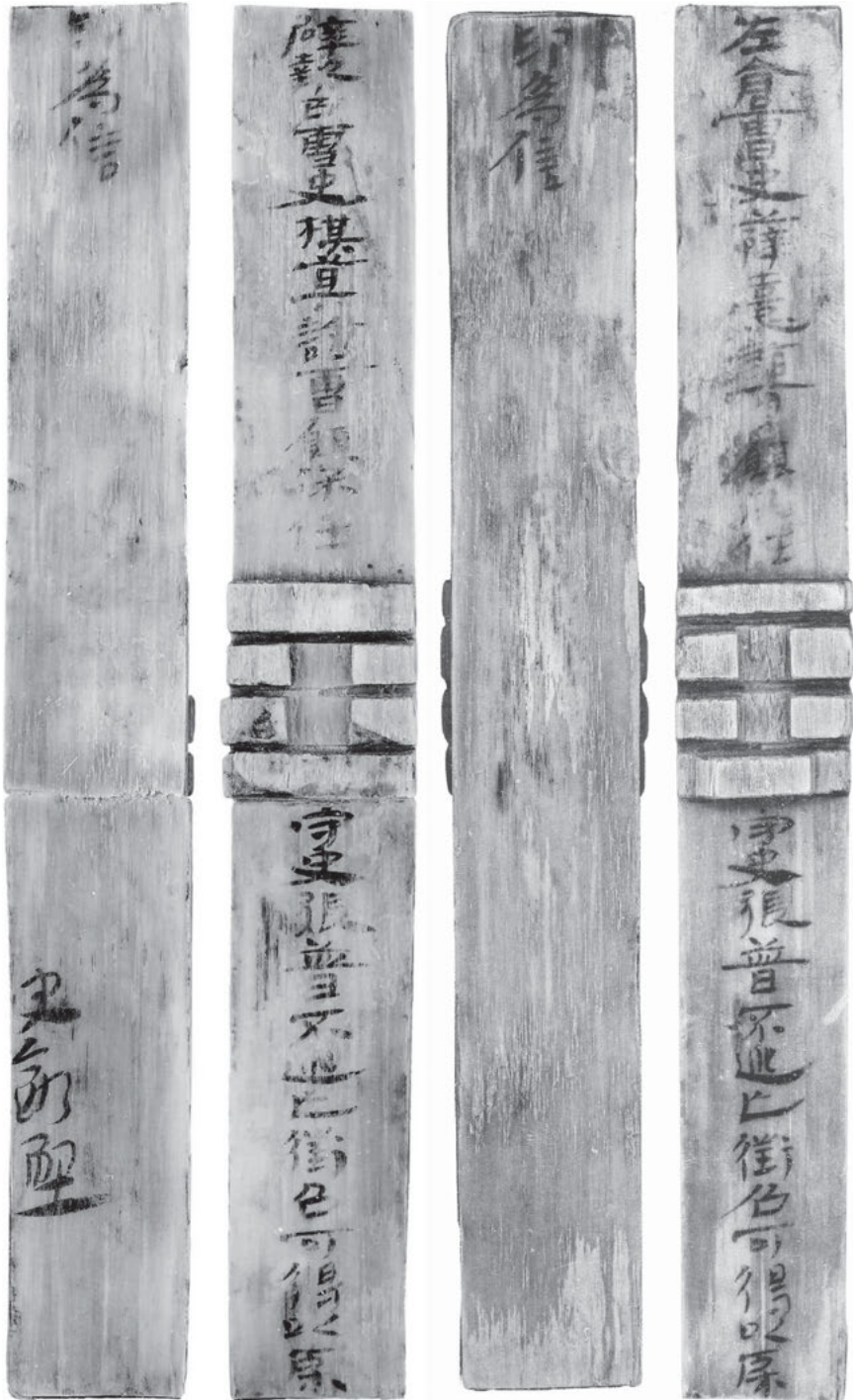


Fig. 4: Wuyiguangchang nos. 526+534 verso, 526+534 recto, 2572 verso and 2572 recto (left to right).

Second, in comparison to the first pair of the documents, the term *shoushu* (hand-writing) was replaced by the phrase *yi qi yin wei xin* 以床(癸)印為信 (to verify by one's seal). As outlined in the previous section, the use of a seal in this context was not the only means to vouch for others; one could also vouch for others by writing his own name. The advantage of using seals was that the seal-holder could reproduce identical script without being able to write.<sup>42</sup> However, for Qi Mo and Xue Xi the choice of using seals instead of writing their own names was, apparently, not due to the lack of writing ability, as writing was one of the everyday tasks of the scribes.<sup>43</sup> I would suggest that these examples show us that the guarantors enjoyed a certain degree of freedom in choosing to write or to seal in the vouching process.

Third, Enno Giele and Hsing I-tien have both touched on the issue of sealing versus writing based on the Juyan materials, but in a quite different context.<sup>44</sup> The above two pairs of Wuyiguangchang documents allow us to examine this issue further. Two Juyan documents could serve as excellent comparable materials (Fig. 5):

#### 282.9A

(Line 1) 初元四年正月壬子箕山 (blank) 隧長明敢言之□

(Line 2) 趙子回錢三百唯官 (blank) 以二月奉錢三□

On the Renzi day, the first month of the fourth year of Chuyuan [of Emperor Yuan (45 BCE)], Squad Officer Ming ventures to state...[owed] Zhao Zihui 300 coins. [I] beg the [Jiaqu] Company to use my salary of the second month, 3[00 coins]...

#### 282.9B

以=付鄉男子莫以印為 (Seal clay) 信敢言之□<sup>45</sup>

... be given to adult male Mo of [the same] District. (Seal clay) [Ming] verifies by his seal. [I] venture to state ...

#### 37.44

□□□□□□□□以自書為信

... verify by his self-writing

It is stated in no. 282.9 that Officer (*suizhang* 隧長) Ming 明 of Jishan 箕山 Squad owed Zhao Zihui 趙子回 300 coins and he confirmed, by impressing his seal, that he would use his salary in the second month of the same year to clear his debt. On the verso side of this document, the sealing clay was still attached to the tablet when it was found from the A8 site, which had been the office of Jiaqu company 甲渠候官, a military unit on the Han north-western frontier whose bureaucratic status was

<sup>42</sup> For the use of seals in medieval Europe, see: Clanchy 2013, 309–318.

<sup>43</sup> See: Ma 2017, 297–333.

<sup>44</sup> Giele 2005, 353–361; Hsing 2021b, 143–147.

<sup>45</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all the transcriptions of the Juyan materials excavated in the 1930s follow: *Juyan Han jian* 2014–2017. For those excavated in the 1970s, I follow the transcriptions from: *Juyan xin jian jishi* 2016.



Fig. 5: Juyan nos. 282.9 verso, 282.9 recto and 37.44 (from left to right).

equivalent to the county in the interior region of the empire. As stated in the document, Ming impressed his seal in the clay directly on the document as a verification of his promise to Zhao Zihui. The Jiaqu company was the unit to pay Ming's monthly salary, which explains why Ming submitted this verification document to the office of the company where it was finally kept.<sup>46</sup> Due to the damage of the slip, however, it is not clear why Ming would ask the office to give the money to Mo 莫 rather than his creditor, Zhao Zihui.<sup>47</sup>

Of particular importance here is that the seal clay was impressed directly on the document without a case. The writer of this document appeared to be quite conscious of leaving space for the impression of the seal clay. As there was no seal case for holding the clay, a notch was made on one side for the tying of cord in order to prevent the clay from falling off the slip (Fig. 5). The clay here was clearly not for the purpose of securing the document but rather for bearing the script of Ming's seal as verification. The Wuyiguangchang research team has identified nos. 526+534 and 2572 as sealing envelopes or covers (*fengjian*), mainly due to the existence of the seal cases. Drawing insights from Juyan wooden slip no. 282.9, it is quite clear that the real function of sealing in these cases was not to secure the document but rather to authenticate it. As such, I would suggest that this type of verification documents could be considered as a "self-contained slip" or "single slip" (*tandoku kan* 单独简), a term coined by Japanese scholars to refer to a slip or tablet that contains a complete or full document.<sup>48</sup>

Despite its fragmentary nature, Juyan slip no. 3744 indicates that another means for verifying oneself was to use his own handwriting (*zishu* 自書). The handwriting of this slip also appears to be more personalised. The same term *zishu* can also be seen in a silk letter excavated from Xuanquanzhi, which indicates that the section that starts with such a term was written by the sender.<sup>49</sup> The Wuyiguangchang and Juyan examples presented above attest to the fact that individuals would encounter the problem of choosing to write or to seal on different occasions in the early Chinese administration.

Finally, the material features of these two Wuyiguangchang documents—including the size,<sup>50</sup> layout and handwriting—appear to be highly standardised. They must

<sup>46</sup> See: Li/Liu 1999, 242.

<sup>47</sup> An alternative explanation could be that the debtor in this case was Zhao Zihui and the creditor was Mo. Ming was the official who informed the Jiaqu company about this case. Yet, such an explanation is quite unlikely as there are at least two more similar cases excavated in the 1970s, indicating that the officials who submitted the verification was usually the debtors. See: Juyan slip nos. EPT52:88 and EPT51:225.

<sup>48</sup> For such an exposition of the concept, see: Sumiya 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Hu/Zhang 2001, 191, n. 23; Giele 2015, 432.

<sup>50</sup> According to the appendix on the size of Wuyiguangchang manuscripts in *JD*, no. 526+534 is recovered from two fragments, one is 13 cm long and 2.9 cm wide and the other is 9.9 cm long and 3 cm wide. Put together, the size would be approximately 22.9 cm long and 2.9 or 3 cm wide. No. 2572 is 23 cm long and 3.1 cm wide. The size of the two documents is almost the same and is very similar to the first pair of examples (nos. 441 and 1120) examined in the previous section.

be the intended result of someone's careful handling. The "Scribe Guo" 史郭 who appears on the verso side of no. 526+534 was very possibly the person who handled these two documents. As in the case of Assistant Wang Shi on the verso side of nos. 441 and 1120, "Scribe Guo" was also followed by the same untranscribed character (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 6:** The untranscribed character appearing on the verso side of Wuyiguangchang nos. 441, 1120 and 526+534 (from left to right).

The research team reads it tentatively as *ye* 野 (wild, field or the outskirts), but both its literal meaning(s) and shape do not fit the one appearing in these three documents. Li Hongcai 李洪財 proposes that it could be read as *jie* 解, referring to the act of opening a sealed document. Li's proposal is based on the understanding that no. 526+534 is a sealing cover or envelop as suggested by the research team.<sup>51</sup> As demonstrated above, drawing inspiration from the Juyan materials, no. 526+534 could be considered as a complete or full document. The seal was to authenticate the document rather than to secure it. Such an explanation could not apply to nos. 441 and 1120, since they were part of a "multi-text manuscript".<sup>52</sup> Although there is still no satisfactory transcription of this character, judging from the context in which it appears, it should refer to the process of handling or supervising these vouches. Both Wang Shi and Guo left their names with such a character to indicate their accountability in the process.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Li 2018.

<sup>52</sup> I adopt the term 'multi-text manuscript' from Imre Galambos when referring to a manuscript composed of more than one document or text: Galambos 2020. Based on his research on the manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang indicates that, "[i]n addition to the one-text-per-one-manuscript model, there are also many physically homogeneous manuscripts which include discrete texts written in succession, sometimes in the same hand, but not necessarily so": *Ibid.*, 23. Both nos. 441 and 1120 could be seen as a separate text, or in the Japanese scholars' term, *tandoku kan*. They were tied together mainly for the convenience of filing. Another excellent example of the multi-text manuscript in early imperial China are three tablets excavated at Liye 里耶, Hunan province in 2002. I argue that they were tied in accordion form for the purpose of filing: Ma 2020b.

<sup>53</sup> A similar term *shou* 手 placed after a personal name in the Liye materials was used to indicate one's accountability of handling a document: Ma 2017, 322–332.

## Conclusion

This article has examined two pairs of Wuyiguangchang documents to discuss the issue of writing versus sealing in the early Chinese administration. My discussion reveals that individuals in early imperial China would have to choose to write or to seal when they verified their identity or vouched for others, but the decision was not necessarily due to the lack of writing ability. The two pairs of examples examined in this article show that the administrative specialists, scribes and assistants,<sup>54</sup> could have chosen to write or to seal when serving as guarantors. These cases show that individuals had enjoyed a certain degree of freedom in choosing to write or to seal in early Chinese administration.

Furthermore, among the Wuyiguangchang materials published so far, there are two other similar cases in which an adult male named Huang Jing 黄京 and a Constable of Du 都 police station named Li Zong 李宗 used sealing to vouch for others. The two documents specifically mention that Huang Jing and Li Zong arrived at the offices of the county or the responsible bureau “without being summoned” (*buzhao* 不召),<sup>55</sup> which implies that in most cases the guarantors would only come to the office when summoned. It is highly possible that there will be more evidence regarding the guarantee system and the vouching process when the Wuyiguangchang materials are made fully public.

Finally, building on the evidence excavated from the Juyan site, it is apparent that sealing as a way of verification was not less uncommon than writing one’s own name in early Chinese administration. One could employ sealing to verify a promise to use his salary to clear his debt, as seen in the Juyan materials. Considering the writing produced by the act of impressing an inscribed seal on clay, sealing should be regarded as a literacy practice, which correlates with my previous suggestion that literacy practices in early Chinese administrative contexts should not be understood to refer only to the act of using a brush to apply ink on a writing material.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For their predecessors during the Qin and early Western Han: Ma 2017, 297–333.

<sup>55</sup> See: nos. 620 (2010CWJ1③:261-106) and 1274 (2010CWJ1③:265-20).

<sup>56</sup> Other practices include using a writing knife (*shudao* 書刀) to carve various shaped notches on a pair of tallies (*quan* 券) to transmit numerical information that corresponds with the written content of the tallies: Ma 2017, 322–332.

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Fig.1–4: Institute for Cultural Relics and Archaeology of Changsha City 長沙市文物考古研究所.  
 Fig. 5: Modified from *Juyan Han jian (Jiayi ban)* 1980, v. 1, 32 and 214.

Maxim Korolkov

# Handwriting in the Official Documents from Liye and Bureaucratic Politics in the Qin Empire

This article presents a methodology for discerning individual scribal hands in the official documents from the Qin Empire (221–207 BCE) excavated at Liye, Hunan Province of China. These remains of a county-level administrative archive are the largest collection of Qin manuscripts published so far. It contains thousands of documents inscribed by dozens of scribes, whose names are known in many cases. I investigate the instrumentality of layout, handwriting and signing practices in the functioning of bureaucratic government and production of authority in the Qin Empire. I will argue that the formal ‘correctness’ of documents rendered these pieces of inscribed wood a vehicle of authoritative action. I also hypothesise that the eventual routinisation of bureaucratic government under the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) reduced the concern about individual responsibility for graphical ‘correctness’, leading to changes in the formulaic structure of official documents.

## Why is Handwriting Important for Understanding Official Texts?

One century after Aurel Stein’s discovery of ancient Chinese manuscripts on wooden and bamboo slips, the study of the handwriting of the manuscripts provides valuable insights into the social contexts of text production and circulation.<sup>1</sup> It allows for the reconstruction of the original writings from excavated text fragments and helps to establish the authenticity of inscriptions and manuscripts without provenance.<sup>2</sup> An understanding of individual, local and regional writing habits is crucial for the handwriting analysis, as are the varying environments and circumstances of text production and the physical features of the writing material.

Let us briefly consider some implications of handwriting analysis for understanding administrative practices in the context of an official archive such as the one exca-

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1 See, for example: Smith 2011, 173–205; Schwartz 2020; Venture 2009, 943–957.

2 Richter 2006, 132–147; Li 1997, 1–41.

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The author is grateful to Roderick Campbell, Adam Schwartz and the participants of the conference “Orthopraxy, Orthography, Orthodoxy: Emic and Etic Standards and Classifications of Chinese Manuscripts” (Heidelberg University, 2014) and the workshop “Scribal Hands and Scribal Practices in Manuscripts from Warring States and Early Imperial China” (Heidelberg University, 2016) for their comments on the early versions of this paper. I would also like to thank the editors of the present volume for their insightful remarks.

vated at Liye. Firstly, handwriting is important for the reconstruction of original texts. Typically inscribed on wooden tablets, these documents are often found in fragments and need to be reconstructed. Along with the content of the texts and physical features of the tablets, such work relies on the identification of scribal hands.

Secondly, the study of handwriting allows for the investigation of the nature of documents and patterns of their circulation. Identification of documents as originals or copies sheds light on the previously poorly understood organisation of official archives in the Qin Empire. Qin and Han laws paid close attention to the issues of document circulation and storage. An official's place in the government hierarchy defined their access to information contained in the documents, the right to store them and to take copies.<sup>3</sup> The example of the first Han chancellor Xiao He 蕭何—who secured military victory for the new dynasty and high position for himself by taking control over the imperial Qin archive—illustrates the centrality of access to official texts to power in the early Chinese empires.<sup>4</sup> The handwriting of the documents offers insights into the distribution of power among the government offices producing, circulating and storing these documents.

Thirdly, consistency and variation of individual handwriting reflects scribal training and the implementation of script unification in the Qin Empire. The Qin unification of script is considered a turning point in the history of Chinese writing. It signified a radical shift from the variety of graphic forms and high degree of script phonetisation in the late Warring States period (453–221 BCE), to the standardised forms and fixed correspondence between the meaning, shape and sound of a graph.<sup>5</sup> To what extent did this policy succeed? How was it enforced? How much graphic variation was tolerated? Was the Qin reform of script, after all, such a dramatic departure from earlier writing practices?<sup>6</sup> These and other questions can be addressed by the analysis of the writing habits of Qin scribes.

## Handwriting in Manuscripts and Archival Documents

The manuscript discoveries of recent decades have prompted scholars to think systematically about the criteria for discerning scribal hands. Matthias Richter elaborated one of the most detailed approaches that is primarily geared to the analysis of the Warring States Chu bamboo manuscripts from Guodian 郭店, Hubei Province. Here is the list of handwriting features that, according to Richter, are indicative of varying scribal hands:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: Peng/Chen/Kudō 2007, 222–225, slips 328–336.

<sup>4</sup> Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 53.2014.

<sup>5</sup> See: Boltz 1994, 156–177; Qiu 2000, 98–103.

<sup>6</sup> In his study of the Chu writing habits, Olivier Venture observes that the degree of tolerance to variant graphic forms in the Warring States Chu manuscripts may be overestimated: Venture 2009, 946–947.

<sup>7</sup> Richter 2006, 132–147.

- Layout features: utilisation of space, size of characters, spacing.
- Morphologic and orthographic peculiarities of graphs, including structural and non-structural (“calligraphic”) variations in graph forms.<sup>8</sup>
- Features of individual strokes: writing speed, pressure, saturation with ink, frequency of ink replenishment, inclination and connection of strokes.
- Features of ductus: sequence of strokes, relation of strokes within the character, features of the execution of strokes.

These criteria sometimes point in opposite directions when, for example, morphologic consistency of a graph on two different slips is offset by the variation in the execution of strokes or inconsistency in the size of characters. Richter offers several working principles to deal with such situations, including the assumption that the scribes did not change several of the abovementioned features simultaneously within the same text and that change in one feature is insufficient to establish the change in scribal hand; the identification of stronger (e. g., changes in the forms that are subject to trained, automatic movements of the hand) and weaker criteria (e. g., changes in the forms that are deliberately chosen); the recognition of the fact that handwriting is subject to change over time, that one scribe could master more than one type of script and that the plainer, more casual style better betrays characteristics of a hand than elaborated, ornamented styles with more conscious treatment of strokes.<sup>9</sup>

Some of these criteria and principles have been independently formulated by other scholars working with the Warring States Chu manuscripts.<sup>10</sup> However, Richter’s system provides the most comprehensive guideline for inquiry into handwriting variation. At the same time, one should not overlook the difference between the long literary texts that Richter is dealing with and the archival documents examined in this article.

While Richter’s criteria can potentially be applied to the handwriting of official documents excavated from Liye and other sites, the working principles guiding their application need to be modified. Each of the Chu manuscripts studied by Richter and other scholars was admittedly drafted within a relatively short period of time. Archives such as the Liye, on the contrary, contain a larger number of short texts drafted by more or less the same group of people over a relatively long period, within which individual handwriting could undergo significant changes. Which features of handwriting were more subject to change over time and which stayed relatively consistent to allow the identification of individual hands?

Another problem is related to our limited knowledge about the environment of text production. Changing air temperature, for instance, may have a significant impact on individual handwriting. One may also suspect that surface conditions of the

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<sup>8</sup> See also: Li 1997, 16–24.

<sup>9</sup> Richter 2006, 132–147.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: Zhu 2011; Li 2007, 63–67; Li 2015.

wooden or bamboo substrate influenced the shape of graphs and features of strokes and that these conditions varied less in the multi-slip manuscripts produced for the elites, such as Guodian, than for the nitty-gritty bureaucratic communication among low-level government offices. These factors are difficult to control. Even high-resolution photographs do not permit confident judgments on the conditions of surface and the environmental conditions of handwriting are altogether elusive. On the other hand, most of the archival documents are drafted in a casual style, without much evidence of deliberate ornamentation, which facilitates the task of identifying scribal hands across the textual corpus.<sup>11</sup>

## Individual Documents and Files in the Liye Archive

For the purposes of handwriting analysis, it is important to recognise the existence of two broad categories of documents in the Liye corpus: individual documents and files. Individual documents record one particular official transaction, such as the distribution of grain or the request for action to be taken by another office, as can be seen on tablet 8-211.

稻五斗。卅一年九月庚申，倉是、史感、【稟人】堂出稟隸臣□  
令史尚視平。

Rice, five *dou* (c. 10 l). 31st year, ninth month, day *geng-shen* (5 October 216 BCE). [Supervisor of] Granary Shi, Scribe Gan, and Grain-disburser Tang issued rations to bondservant(s) ... Overseen by County Scribe Shang.<sup>12</sup>

This document accounts for one transaction conducted by a Qianling 遷陵 county granary on a particular day. The document was submitted to the county court and consequently stored in its archive.

In contrast, files are tablets that contain more than one individual document. Consider the following example on tablet 5-1. The individual documents within the file are numbered in the translation.

元年七月庚子朔丁未，倉守陽敢言之：獄佐辨、平、士吏賀具獄，縣官食盡甲寅，謁告過所縣鄉以次續食。雨留不能投宿齋。來復傳。零陽田能自食。當騰期卅日。敢言之。七月戊申，零陽襲移過所縣鄉。/齣手。/七月庚子朔癸亥，遷陵守丞固告倉嗇夫：以律令從事。/嘉手。  
(正)  
遷陵食辨、平盡己巳旦□□□□遷陵。  
七月癸亥旦，士五臂以來。/嘉發(背)

<sup>11</sup> See below.

<sup>12</sup> *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi* 2012, 115.

**Front side**

(1) The first year, seventh month, *geng-zi* being the first day of the month, on day *ding-wei* (16 August 209 BCE). Yang, the Provisional Supervisor of the Granaries dares to report the following: Bian and Ping, Assistants [to the office of] Criminal Investigation, and He, a Military Officer, are investigating a [criminal] case. The food rations they received at [our] county office expire on day *shen-yin* (23 August). I request all the counties and districts that they pass on their way to keep on [issuing them] rations. If they are delayed by rainy [weather] and unable to reach their [next] accommodation, [keep on] supplying [them with rations]. [This is the] travel certificate for the two-way journey. [While in] Lingyang county, they can feed themselves at the [office of] agricultural fields. [This] should be copied [whenever it is necessary to take] a copy. [This is valid for] the period of thirty days. Dare to report this.

(2) Seventh month, day *wu-shen* (17 August). Xi, the [Magistrate] of Lingyang county, dispatched [this travel certificate] to the counties to be passed on this journey. Drafted by Yi.

(3) Seventh month, *geng-zi* being the first day of the month, on day *gui-hai* (1 September). Gu, the Provisional Deputy Magistrate of Qianling, instructs the Supervisor of the Granaries to proceed [on this matter] in accordance with the statutes and ordinances. Drafted by Jia.

**Back side**

(3 continued) Distribution of food rations to Bian and Ping at the Qianling [county] is to be terminated on day *ji-si* (7 September) in the morning... Qianling.

(4) Seventh month, day *gui-hai* (1 September), in the morning. Delivered by private Bi. Opened by Jia.<sup>13</sup>

This tablet bears no less than four individual documents that were drafted in three different offices in two counties of Dongting commandery 洞庭郡, Lingyang 零陽 and Qianling. Document 1 was inscribed on the tablet on 16 August. This is a travel certificate issued by the office of granaries in Lingyang county for three officials sent on a mission outside the county. Document 2 was added to the tablet on the next day, 17 August. The Magistrate of Lingyang, who was the highest-ranking official in the county, affirmed his subordinate's decision to send the three officials on a mission and dispatched their travel certificate to the counties they were to pass on this journey, including Qianling. Document 4, on the back side of the tablet, confirms the delivery of the travel certificate to Qianling county on 1 September. On the same day, the Deputy Magistrate of Qianling issued document 3, which instructed his subordinate, the Supervisor of the Granaries, to disburse grain rations to the three traveling officials from Lingyang and, on the back side of the tablet, specifies the deadline by which the Lingyang are expected to leave Qianling county.

The file on tablet 5-1 therefore consists of four separate documents. We know the names of at least two scribes who drafted these texts—Yi 齋 and Jia 嘉—but we do not know if more scribes were involved. We also do not know if all the documents on the tablet were originals or if some of them were copied at a later stage of communication. For example, the Lingyang documents could have been copied on their arrival to Qianling county, along with the name of the scribe who drafted one or all of the originals,

<sup>13</sup> Liye Qin jian du jiaoshi 2012, 1–7.

and the Qianling documents could then be added to this copy. One way to resolve this uncertainty is to analyse scribal handwriting. Prior to such analysis, however, let us consider the ‘signature’ clauses in the Liye texts.

## Scribal ‘Signatures’ in the Qin Documents

The text on tablet 5-1 mentions two officials involved in the production of this file, Yi and Jia. Their names are followed by the graph *shou* 手, which literally means “hand”. On the back surface, the name of Jia is followed by the graph *fa* 發, which has the meanings including “to send”, “to issue” and “to open.”

The *shou* clause has been interpreted as the signatures of scribes who drafted the preceding text.<sup>14</sup> However, some scholars argue that the graph marks the names of the officials responsible for the transaction recorded in the respective documents, rather than the signatures of scribes who inscribed these documents.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, for the documents from the Han and the Three Kingdoms period, it has been convincingly demonstrated that the lists of officials’ names that follow the main body of the text do not necessarily include the names of persons who actually inscribed these documents. Instead, these lists contain the names of officials responsible for the content of the documents.<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the *shou* clause disappears after the late second century BCE. This clause seems to have been a feature of the Qin bureaucratic practice that was discontinued sometime during the first century of Han rule.<sup>17</sup> If this clause is meaningful, its presence or absence may reflect the difference between the Han and Three Kingdoms’ practice of recording the responsibility for the content of a document, but not for its graphic execution, and the Qin practice of assigning responsibility to individuals (never groups) in charge of the physical production of the text—in most cases clerical personnel such as scribes (*shi* 史) and assistants (*zuo* 佐).<sup>18</sup> The hypothesis about the *shou* clause as a scribal signature can be assessed on the basis of handwriting analysis.

Another term used to indicate personal responsibility for processing official documents, *fa* 發, is known from one of the entries in a manuscript excavated from the Qin burial no. 11 at Shuihudi 睡虎地, Hubei Province: “When there are ‘thrown letters,’ these are not to be opened (*fa*); as soon as they are discovered, they are to be burned”.<sup>19</sup> “Thrown letters” were anonymous accusations. Not only were authorities

<sup>14</sup> Zhang and Long 2003, 8–25; *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi* 2012, 5, comm. 12; Hsing 2012a.

<sup>15</sup> Hu 2013; Giele 2003, 353–387.

<sup>16</sup> Giele 2003, 365–384; Hsing 2012b, 166–188.

<sup>17</sup> The so-called ‘Qin clay document’ (*Qin washu* 秦瓦書) discovered in 1948 and emulating the Qin bureaucratic documents’ layout also contains the *shou* clause: Guo 1986, 177–180.

<sup>18</sup> Hsing 2012a.

<sup>19</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian* 1990, 106, slip 53; Hulsewé 1985, 134, D43.

instructed against taking such accusations into consideration, they were also prohibited to open (*fa*) the “thrown letters”, which probably refers to the removal of the seal. In the Liye documents, too, the procedure of *fa* follows the delivery of a document to a government office. It is reasonable to assume that the record of ‘opening’ was made by an individual whose name figures in the *fa* clause.<sup>20</sup>

The meaning of another term, *ban* 半 (“to halve or split in half”), is close to that of *fa* and apparently refers to breaking the seal on the document.<sup>21</sup> The formulaic function of the *ban* clause is identical to that of the *fa*: both graphs are preceded by names and represent the ‘signature’ of officials who opened the documents. The *ban* and *fa* clauses follow the note on the document delivery. The reason for the use of two different terms for indicating what appears to be the same procedure remains unclear. Hsing I-tien 邢義田 observed that the term *ban* appears in the documents written before the 31st year of First Emperor’s reign (217–216 BCE), and is replaced by *fa* in the latter texts. Hsing proposes that this change was the result of a vocabulary reform, which is attested elsewhere in the Liye documents.<sup>22</sup> As I argue later in this article, signature and delivery clauses should, indeed, be understood as part of the state’s broader claim to control written communication.

## Handwriting in Individual Documents

Let us first consider handwriting in individual documents. One of the largest groups of such documents in the Liye corpus are the grain ration receipts. These are records concerning the distribution of grain to government personnel and dependent labourers, including convicts. The distribution of rations was guided by a standard procedure that typically involved four officials: a Supervisor of the Granary (*cang sefu* 倉嗇夫, usually abbreviated to *cang* 倉), a Scribe (*shi*) or Assistant (*zuo*) and a Grain-disburser (*linren* 稟人, often abbreviated to *lin* 稟); distribution was overseen by a magistrate’s scribe (*lingshi* 令史).

The ration receipts are a convenient material for handwriting analysis because their standardised, formulaic structure implies multiple graphic coincidences across the corpus and these documents are so numerous that many of the Liye scribes are only known by drafting one of these. Receipts also provide evidence for the use of the *shou* clause as a scribal signature. The following analysis focuses on the receipts drafted by a certain Gan 感, one of the most prolific Liye scribes whose name appears on more than three dozen tablets.

Tablet 8-766 is a typical example of a ration receipt drafted by scribe Gan (see Fig. 1).

<sup>20</sup> Giele 2003, 363.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example: *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi* 2012, 72–76, tablet 135.

<sup>22</sup> Hsing 2012a. For the introduction of new official vocabulary, see: *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi* 2012, 155–160, tablet 8-461.



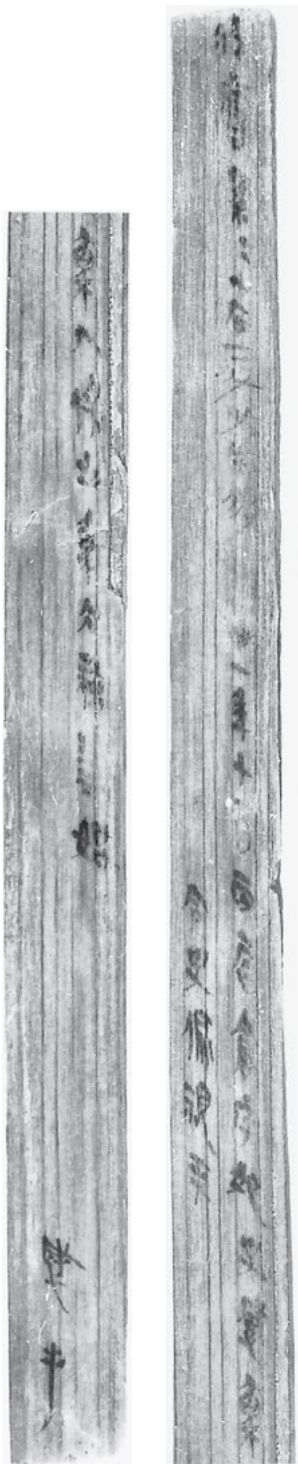













Fig. 1: Tablet 8-766 (*Liye Qin jian*, vol. 1, 111).

徑廩粟米一石二斗半斗。卅一年十一月丙辰，倉守妃、史感、稟人援出稟大隸妾始。  
令史偏視平。感手。

Jing Granary, millet, one *shi* and two and one-third *dou*. 31st year, eleventh month, day *bingchen*, [Provisional [Supervisor of] Granary Ji, Scribe Gan and Grain-disburser Yuan issued the ration to adult bonds-woman Shi.

Overseen by magistrate's scribe Bian. Inscribed by Gan.<sup>23</sup>

The orthographic features of handwriting allow the identification of individual scribal hands, provided that we can identify a graph component that is systematically rendered in a sufficiently specific way for a given corpus. A relevant example in the present case is graph *jing* 徑. Tablet 8-766 is too poorly preserved to allow analysis. However, on tablet 8-762, which was also supposedly drafted by Gan, the graph is rendered as , with the radical 工 clearly consisting of three strokes and the vertical stroke connecting central points of the two horizontal ones.<sup>24</sup> This way of writing this radical is characteristic of Scribe Gan. It is also testified by his rendering of graphs *qiong* 邛  on tablet 8-645 in the part of the file signed by this scribe and forms of the graph *jing* 徑 on tablets 8-800, 8-1239, 9-13, 9-440, 9-1033 and 9-1493.<sup>25</sup> This was not the common shape of this radical, as other Liye scribes tended to write it in two strokes, with the vertical and lower horizontal strokes forming a single check mark, or even in one stroke, as in the following examples of graph *jing* 徑  on tablet 8-426, drafted by Scribe De 得; graph *zuo* 佐  by the same scribe, on tablet 8-474; graph *zuo* 佐  by scribe Ren 壬 on tablet 8-764; and graphs *jing* 徑  and *zuo* 佐  by scribe Fu 富 on tablet 8-1739.<sup>26</sup> These two forms, with one and two strokes, are also attested in the Shuihudi corpus.<sup>27</sup>

The orthographic peculiarity of Gan's handwriting is also manifested in the form of another frequently used graph, *chu* 出. It consists of four strokes, with the vertical stroke cutting down to connect with the lower horizontal stroke, as in the following examples on tablets 8-217 , 8-762  and 8-1063 .<sup>28</sup> This is distinct from the graphic execution by other scribes, such as the aforementioned Fu who leaves a gap between the upper part of the graph and its lower horizontal stroke, as on tablet 8-56 .<sup>29</sup>

It is important to emphasise that it is the combination of morphologic and orthographic features such as those discussed above, rather than any single one of them,

<sup>23</sup> *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 220–221.

<sup>24</sup> *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 110.

<sup>25</sup> *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 88, 118, 158; *Liye Qin jian* 2018, 9, 60, 124, 167.

<sup>26</sup> *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 64, 70, 111, 222.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example: Zhang Shouzhong 1994, 129.

<sup>28</sup> *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 49, 110, 142. For more examples of this feature of Gan's handwriting, see: Hunan-sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2018, 9, tablet 9-13; 11, tablet 9-16; 26, tablet 9-85; 60, tablet 9-440; 94, tablet 9-726; 137, tablet 9-1122.

<sup>29</sup> *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 19.

that allows the identification of individual hands. For example, Gan's way of writing the graph 出 is also adopted by some other Liye scribes. Yet, his way of rendering the 工 radical is much more idiosyncratic. The combination of these two features provides relatively safe ground for identifying Gan's handwriting.

Now let us turn to the signature clause at the end of ration receipts. The group of the Provisional Supervisor of the Granary Ji and Grain-disburser Yuan (see the document on tablet 8-766 translated above) employed two different scribes in the course of the 31st year of Qin Shihuang's reign (217–216 BCE). Scribe Fu filled this position until the eleventh month of the year when he was replaced by Scribe Gan, with all other members of the group remaining the same. The arrival of Gan coincided with a noticeable change in the handwriting. Three receipts issued by the group during Fu's tenure (tablets 8-56, 8-1545 and 8-1739) and the documents issued after Gan's appointment (tablets 8-762, 8-766, 8-1239+8-1334, 9-13 and 9-85+9-1493) contain the graphs analysed above.<sup>30</sup> In the documents drafted during Fu's tenure, the name of the granary, *jing* 徑, is written as 徑 (8-56) and 徑 (8-1739), with the vertical and lower horizontal strokes in the 工 radical conflated into a check mark. During Gan's tenure, the receipts feature the same graph as 徑 (8-762) and 徑 (8-1239), in the manner typical of this scribe's handwriting. The graph 出 appears in two of Fu's documents as 出 (8-56) and 出 (8-1545) and in Gan's documents as 出 (8-762), 出 (8-766), and 出 (8-1334). The Gan forms of the graph show much more consistency in their graphic execution: the vertical stroke connects with the lower horizontal stroke and the tips of the horizontal strokes curve upward. The combination of these features is absent in the Fu forms.

The possibility remains that the documents were drafted by none of the three officials mentioned on the tablets but by a different person (let us call him the 'third scribe'). However, this would suggest that the appointment of Gan as a granary scribe coincided with the arrival of a new 'third scribe', which seems an unlikely coincidence.

The standardised form of ration receipts leaves relatively little space for the expression of individual writing habits in the layout. The text is inscribed on one surface of the tablet and runs in two vertical lines, with the right line recording the details of the grain-issuing entity (usually a granary), the volume and date of distribution, the names of the responsible officials and the recipient(s). The left line provides the names of the magistrate's scribe supervising the transaction and of the scribe who drafted the document. In all cases, the name of a granary (when present) and the volume of grain issued are separated from the rest of the first line by a blank space (see Fig. 1).

Formulaic standardisation notwithstanding, some deviations can still be observed, which possibly point to individual writing habits. The example of Scribe Gan is illustrative. This scribe often, although not always, used an interpunct “.” to highlight the beginning of a new section of the document following the blank space (see Fig. 1).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 19, 110–11, 158, 166, 200, 222.

<sup>31</sup> See also *Liye Qin jian* 2018, 167, tablet 9-1493; 106, tablet 9-813; 124, tablet 9-1033.

The use of an interpunct to separate distinct parts of a document is typical of the Qin and Han punctuation.<sup>32</sup> However, Scribe Gan was exceptional in using this sign in ration receipts.

Other layout features such as the utilisation of space, the size of characters and spacing varied considerably depending on the type of document. The same scribe could adopt a tighter layout when he needed to squeeze information into one line, as in the ration receipts, but opted for more generous spacing when the format allowed, as in Fig. 2. This example also reveals a degree of variation in the execution of individual strokes in Gan's handwriting. On tablet 8-762, for example, strokes are bolder than on tablets 8-763 and 8-1511. As already observed, the lack of information about the handwriting environment and the material conditions of wooden tablets could have been a factor influencing these differentiations and thus limits the possibility for further analysis of the significance of this feature.

The study of individual documents in the Liye archive highlights several criteria for discerning individual handwriting and understanding scribal signatures in Qin. I have mainly focused on the analysis of morphological and orthographic features of graphs that reveal a considerable degree of consistency through individual's handwriting. I have followed one of Richter's working principles and paid particular attention to the forms subject to trained, automatic movements of the hand, such as the frequently recurring radical 工 and graph *chu* 出. Morphological features contributing to idiosyncratic graphic forms can be an important criterion once an unusual graphic form is demonstrated to be typical of individual's handwriting. In our case, the single occurrence of an unusual form of graph 扁 does not allow for such generalisation.

Besides the graphic criteria, layout features may also be used for discerning individual handwriting in an archival context. Individual punctuation habits could diverge from the standard scribal practice and formulaic rules. The interpunct is a punctuation mark that is potentially useful for the analysis of individual writing habits. Closer attention needs to be paid to other frequently occurring marks such as slash “/” — used to separate scribes' signatures from the main body of text in files (see the following section) — and half-bracket “┌” used to differentiate items in a list. It is important to remember that a scribal hand should be identified on the basis of the combination of features, rather than solely by any one of them. Nevertheless, the handwriting analysis has confirmed that the *shou* clause is the signature of scribe who drafted corresponding documents.

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<sup>32</sup> Li and Liu 1999, 60–88.

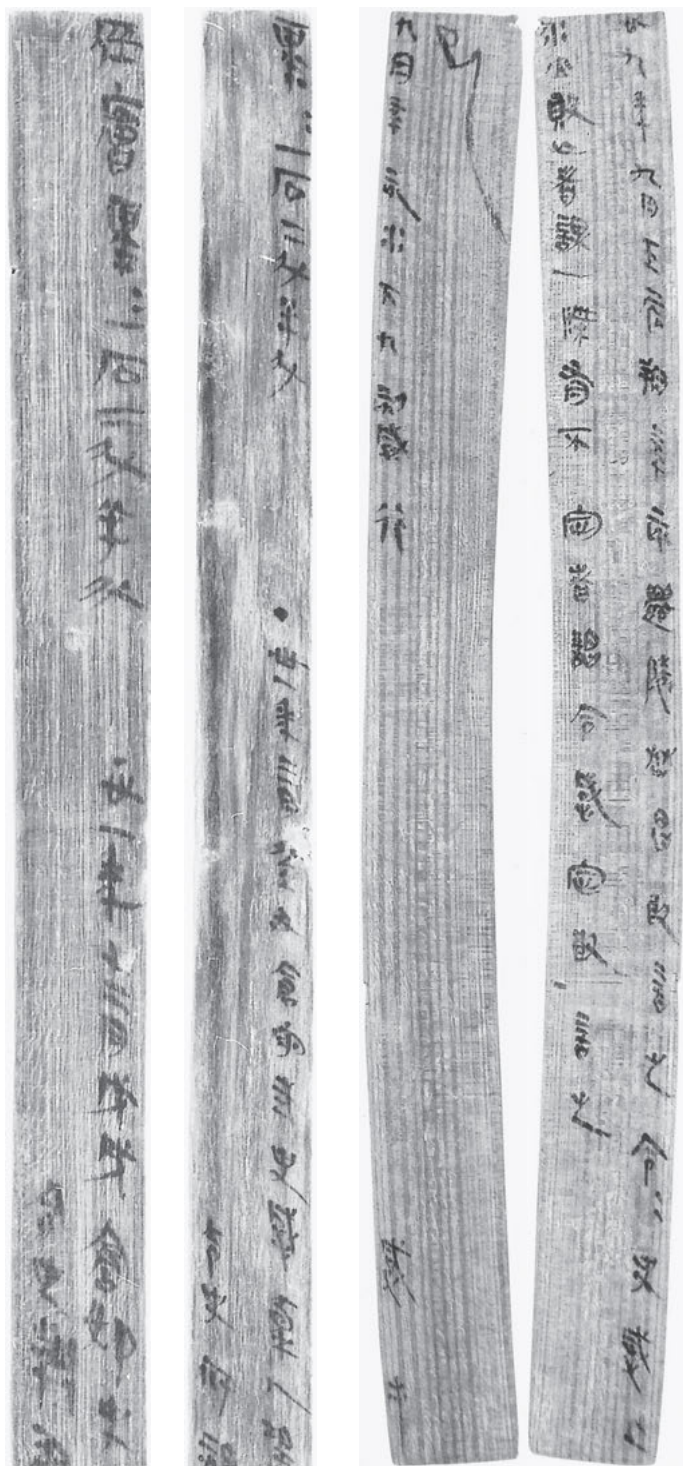


Fig. 2: Tablets 8-762, 8-763 and 8-1511 (from left to right) (*Liye Qin jian*, vol. 1, 110, 190).

## Handwriting in Files

In the previous section, I have established the criteria for identifying scribal hands in archival records containing only one document. Here I apply these criteria to the files that contain several individual documents. Analysis of handwriting in files allows us to discern originals from copies and to understand the patterns of distribution, circulation and storage of information in the local governments of the Qin Empire.

Tablet 8-157 is a file that contains two individual documents: a request by the head of Qiling district 啓陵鄉, one of the administrative sub-units of Qianling county and the subsequent response by the deputy magistrate of Qianling.<sup>33</sup> The tablet bears two notes: one on the delivery of the document from Qiling district to the county court of Qianling and another noting the dispatch of a messenger to deliver the deputy magistrate's response. There are three signatures, two of them marked by the *shou* clause, and one by the *fa* clause (see Fig. 3).

卅二年正月戊寅朔甲午，啓陵鄉夫敢言之：成里典、啓陵  
郵人缺。除士五成里旬、成，成為典，旬為郵人，謁令  
尉以從事。敢言之。（正）

正月戊寅朔丁酉，遷陵丞昌郤之啓陵：廿七戶已有一典，今有（又）除成為典，何律令應？  
尉已除成、旬為啓陵郵人，其以律令。/氣手。/正月戊戌日中，守府快行。正月丁酉旦食時，  
隸妾冉以來。欣發。壬手。（背）

### Front side

32nd year, first month, *wu-yin* being the first day of the month, on day *shen-wu* (8 March 215 BCE), the Head of Qiling district dares to report this: The [posts of] the Head of Cheng village and the Qiling [district] Postman are vacant. [I beg that] the residents of Cheng village, commoners Gai and Cheng are appointed. Cheng [should be appointed] the Village Head and Gai the Postman. I beg [you] order [the County] Commandant to process this matter. Dare to report this.

### Back side

First month, *wu-yin* being the first day of the month, on day *ding-you* (11 March), deputy [magistrate] of Qianling [county] Chang rebukes [the head of] Qiling [District]: 27 households [in Cheng village] already have one head, and today [you are asking] to appoint Cheng a Village Head. What statute or ordinance does this correspond to? The [County] Commandant has already appointed Cheng and Gai the Postmen in Qiling [district] in accordance with the statutes and ordinances. / Drafted by Qi. / First month, day *wu-xu* (12 March), midday, the guard of the [county] office Kuai is dispatched [to deliver the response].

First month, day *ding-you* (11 March), breakfast time, delivered by bonds-woman Ran. / Opened by Xin. Drafted by Ren.

This correspondence between the authorities of Qiling district and Qianling county concerns the process of appointing local functionaries. The district head recommended

<sup>33</sup> *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 37; *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi* 2012, 94–95.










Fig. 3: Tablet 8-157 (front side on the right)  
(*Liye Qin jian*, vol. 1, 37).

the candidates, who were either affirmed or rejected by the county officials. In the present case, the deputy magistrate of Qianling county disallowed the appointment.

Three signature clauses appear on the back side of the tablet, including two *shou* clauses with the names of Qi 氣 and Ren 壬 and one *fa* 發 clause with the name of Xin 欣. Ren and Xin are among the most prolific Liye scribes who served at various county offices and whose carriers can be traced in some detail over many years. Scribe Qi drafted at least two other Liye documents.

The text on tablet 8-157 is divided into three parts: the text on the front side, two lines on the right of the back side and one line on the left of the back side (see Fig. 3). The composition of the file, as well as the signatures, suggest that these three sections were drafted by different persons at different times. The text on the front side was written in Qiling district, the leftmost line on the back side was added on the reception of the tablet at the county court of Qianling and the right two lines on the back side were inscribed the next day, recording the response by the county's deputy magistrate.












Analysis of the layout and handwriting confirms that three different individuals drafted these three parts. Consider the features of layout, such as the utilisation of space, size of characters and spacing. The inscription on the front side has larger characters and larger spaces than the inscriptions on the back side. Two inscriptions on the back side also vary in size of graphs and spacing, but not so much as the inscriptions on the front and the back sides. The characters and spaces in the left line on the back side are larger compared to the right lines.

On a stylistic level, the handwriting on the front side is more casually executed than on the back side. For example, on the back side, the graph *zheng* 正,  and , has an upward bend of the left tip of the lower horizontal stroke, while the right vertical stroke curves leftward to coalesce with the left vertical stroke, which structurally complies with the seal script form of the character . On the front side, the graph is written as  in just three strokes instead of four, without the characteristic bend of the lower horizontal stroke, and with the lower horizontal stroke and right vertical stroke written as a single 'check mark' stroke. Similar execution can be witnessed in the graph *chu* 除, the seal script form of which is . The right part of the character is constituted by the radicals 人 and 禾. The standard clerical script form of the character attested in the Shuihudi texts complies with this composition: 除, 除 and 除.<sup>34</sup> So too does the form of the character on the back side of the tablet . The inscription on the front side goes against the standard structure and has the 示 element instead of 禾 in the lower right-hand corner of the graph . Even if the scribe did in fact have the 禾 element in mind, the final product of his handwriting deviated from the standard form, another reflection of the untidiness of his handwriting.

The layout difference between the two right lines and the left line on the back side of tablet 8-157, discussed above, suggest two different hands, which is supported by

<sup>34</sup> Zhang 1994, 214.



examination of the graph shapes. Consider the different ways of writing *yue* 月 and *you* 酉 that show up in both parts. 酉 is written as  in the rightmost line and as  in the left line. The lower element of the graph is written with the ‘closed’ bottom in the first instance, resembling  月, and with the ‘open’ bottom in the second, somewhat resembling  月. Further inquiry demonstrates that the ‘closed’ or ‘closing’ bottom in curved and rectangular elements is typical of the handwriting in the right two lines. In the graph *chang* 昌 , both top and bottom elements are ‘closed’, as is the bottom element in graph *yan* 寅 . Moreover, when it comes to the radicals with the ‘opened’ bottom in their standard forms, such as 月, the scribe still tends to ‘close’ the bottom, as in *yue* 月 , *shuo* 朔 , and *you* 有  and . In contrast, the handwriting of the left line is characterised by the ‘opened’ bottoms of graphs, as exemplified not only by its form of 酉, but also by that of 月 , without the hook-like bend of its right leg as in all examples in the right two lines.

Study of the graph forms indicate that tablet 8-157 bears inscriptions by three different scribes. Two of them can be identified as Qi (for the right two lines on the back surface) and Xin (for the left line on the back surface) who signed their names after respective parts of the text. The third name that appears of the tablet, Ren, is probably that of the scribe who wrote the text on the front surface. Scribes who wrote the text on the front side of the tablet often signed their names in the lower left corner on the back side, a well-known feature of the Liye documents.<sup>35</sup>

Both documents on tablet 8-157—the inquiry by the head of Qiling district and the response by the Qianling county authorities—can be considered originals. There should have been another copy of the response (that is, the two right lines on the back surface of tablet 8-157) sent to Qiling. This copy is not preserved because it was probably stored at Qiling, whose location remains unknown. This district would have to store two archival items instead of one: a copy of the original query and the response by the county court. The official communication was, therefore, designed to facilitate the storage of documents and retrieval of information at the county court, which had to deal with larger flows of communication than the district authorities.

The study of scribal hands in files, therefore, provides insights into the technical aspects of bureaucratic politics, namely the mechanisms of power distribution among different levels of local government through production, circulation, and storage of documents. By facilitating access to administrative information, these processes defined the nodes of official control over the flow of information.

35 *Liye Qin jian* 2012, 21, tablet 8-62; 31, tablet 8-136; 32, tablet 8-140; 35, tablet 8-152.

## Concluding Remarks

At the beginning of this article, I outlined the criteria and methodology for discerning individual scribal hands in early Chinese manuscripts. The examination of several documents from the Liye archive demonstrates that some of these criteria are useful for the analysis of Qin scribes' handwriting, while others are less applicable because archival documents are different from the longer literary bamboo and silk scroll manuscripts that were studied by Richter and others. Distinction between individual documents and files is equally important for the handwriting analysis. In conclusion, I would like to highlight some implications of the handwriting in official documents and indicate possible directions for future research.

One of the key topics in this article is the relationship between handwriting and bureaucratic politics. One striking difference between the Qin documents from Liye and the administrative texts from the subsequent Han and early medieval periods, such as the documents from Juyan and Zoumalou, is the emphasis on the signatures of scribes in the Qin texts. In the vast majority of Liye documents, signature clauses are most likely referring to the persons who actually inscribed the respective texts. These 'signatures' emphasise the responsibility for the physical production of writing by using the graph *shou* 手 ("hand") as part of the clause, a feature that disappears from the bureaucratic language after the middle of the Western Han. It seems that administrative communication became less concerned with recording a scribe's responsibility. Rather, it was the senior official of a respective government bureau who authorised the content of a document.

The scribes that left traces of their activities in the Liye archive and their colleagues throughout the Qin Empire were active in the years immediately after the imperial 'unification' of East Asia, which was accompanied by standardisation reforms, including the famous unification of script.<sup>36</sup> The efficiency of empire-wide bureaucratic government depended on the successful implementation of these measures and the issue of script consistency became central to imperial politics. 'Correct' forms of graphs, along with the 'correct' punctuation, layout and format of documents was something that transformed a piece of wood into the exclusive vehicle of authoritative action. Unsurprisingly, then, the control over and manipulation of the formal variables of writing, such as graphic forms, layout, punctuation and formulaic language, became powerful means of projecting power. By the same token, a facilitated access to the official information, attained through the process of recording, copying, storing and retrieving the physical documents, created privileged nodes in the bureaucratic network and perpetuated bureaucratic hierarchy. Another related issue that deserves investigation

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<sup>36</sup> Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 6.239. For the revisionist interpretation of the Qin standardisation of script that describes it as a drawn-out process, not a momentary transition, see: Galabmos 2004, 181–203. For a discussion of the Qin policies of script and language standardisation based on the excavated government documents in the Liye archive, see: Tian 2018, 403–450.

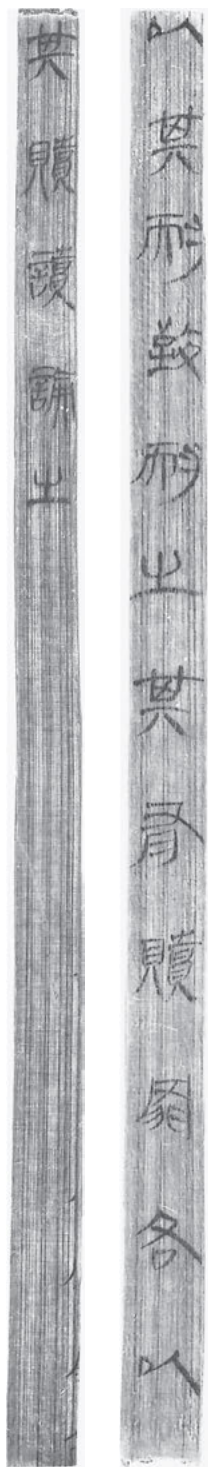


Fig. 4: Tablets 8-775+8-884 (*Liye Qin jian*, vol. 1, 114, 125).

in future is the regional, local or corpus-specific types of Qin handwriting. This type of study has already been started with regard to the Chu manuscripts. It suggests substantial difference between the indigenous and ‘foreign’ writing habits.<sup>37</sup>

In this article, the analysis of several Liye documents involved a comparison of their handwriting with roughly contemporaneous Qin texts from Shuihudi, some 300 kilometres to the north-east of Liye. It revealed that some of the Liye scribes were occasionally using rather idiosyncratic graphic forms, even though the overall consistency of script is remarkable. Other Liye documents feature deliberately stylised handwriting with graphic forms resembling those of the seal script and are emphatically different from the more casual and cursive clerical script (see Fig. 4).

Is this the evidence for an ‘elite’ group of scribes trained in standard seal script, who probably arrived from the capital or another central location that provided advanced scribal training? While the documents rarely inform us about the origins of the scribes who drafted them, a more detailed handwriting study may in future identify groups characterised by common writing habits, possibly indicative of shared geographic origins or modes of training. Further study of these groups may shed light on region- or office-specific scribal training, principles of recruitment and patterns of official careers, all of which are important aspects of the social history of handwriting.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Venture 2009, 943–957.

<sup>38</sup> Similar conclusions are drawn by Kourris for medieval England in this volume.

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Chun Fung Tong

# Between Slip and Tablet

Rulership and Writing Support in Eastern Han China, 25–220 CE

## Introduction

The material, size and shape of a writing support often provided a written artefact with authority independent of its textual content. The connection between materiality and political authority is exemplified in administrative manuscripts produced by government organisations in the Qin and Han period (221 BCE–220 CE), during which bamboo and wooden slip (*die* 牒 or *jian* 簡) and tablet (*du* 牘) were the typical writing supports of manuscripts. The choice of writing support for an administrative manuscript was regulated by official models and standards. As noted in the introduction of this volume, Han government personnel often wrote the formal and clean copy of an administrative document on double-column slips (*erhang die* 二行牒 or *lianghang* 兩行), and drafts, registers or accounts on single-column slips (*zha* 札).<sup>1</sup> These pieces would then be bound together to form a multi-piece scroll.<sup>2</sup> In the Eastern Han dynasty, new evidence confirms that although tablets were by nature single-piece manuscripts, they could also be tied or bound together with slips.<sup>3</sup> The diverse forms of administrative manuscripts call for a re-examination of the relationship between administrative practice and standardisation, both of which symbolised the coercive power of the state and reminded the subjects of the presence of political rule.

To this end, this article will explore the dynamics between the authority of local rulers and the materiality of the writing supports of administrative documents through the recently surfaced Wuyiguangchang 五一廣場 manuscripts, which relate unprecedented details of government administration and manuscript culture in south China at the turn of the second century. Discovered in 2010, these manuscripts were unearthed from pit no. 1 of the Wuyiguangchang site in Changsha, Hunan, in which the seat of Linxiang county 臨湘縣 was located.<sup>4</sup> The cache comprises more than

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1 See Armstrong et al in this volume.

2 Sumiya 2003, 98; Shih 2021, 32.

3 Shih 2021, 125–126.

4 For an introduction to the archaeological context of the Wuyiguangchang site, see Tsang Wing Ma's article in this volume.

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This publication originated in the Collaborative Research Centre 933 'Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies' (subproject B09 'Bamboo and Wood as Writing Materials in Early China'). The CRC 933 is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). I would like to thank Abigail S. Armstrong, Michael Friedrich, Thies Staack and the participants of the 'Keeping Record' workshop for their helpful remarks, which have considerably sharpened earlier drafts of this work.



6,800 pieces of written artefacts, most of which were administrative or judicial documents produced by the administrative units in the purview of Linxiang. The dated samples range between 90 and 112 CE.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I will focus on manuscripts that record the instructions (*jiao* 教) of the County Prefects (*xian ling* 縣令). First, I will introduce the sources, in which the subsequent analysis is grounded. Specifically, I will discuss the writing supports, forms and contents of two types of instructions—namely, multi-piece and single-piece—as evidenced in the Wuyiguangchang manuscripts. Second, I will establish a chronology of multi-piece and single-piece instructions, suggesting that the adoption of single-piece instructions in Linxiang took place in late 105 CE and likely lasted less than three years. The last section will explore the possible factors that contributed to such transitions, as well as how the choice of writing supports signals the authority of the local ruler.

## Forms of ‘the Lord’s Instruction’ Manuscripts from the Wuyiguangchang

In the decision-making process of an Eastern Han county government, one of the key procedures was “*hua nuo*” (畫諾; literally, “drawing the *nuo* character”). The magistrate would sign a cursive, flamboyant “*nuo*” (literally, “to approve”) or “*ruo*” (若; here serving as a synonym of *nuo*) character on the submitted documents to authorise his subordinate officials’ “deliberations” (*yi* 議) of administrative affairs.<sup>6</sup> As the signed *nuo* (*ruo*) character is always preceded by the pre-written set phrase ‘the lord’s instruction’ (*jun jiao* 君教), researchers often call this type of documents ‘the lord’s instruction’ tablets or slips, dependent upon the manuscripts’ writing supports.

As administrative documents, these instructions record regulations and reminders that magistrates, such as the Commandery Governor (*jun taishou* 郡太守) and County Prefects, created for their subordinates as well as the populace in their purview. The promulgation of such regulations was left to the discretion of the magistrate and aimed to tackle issues of governance caused by the peculiarities in the locality. Hence, the magistrate’s instructions often complemented—but also sometimes even contradicted—statutory laws.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2018, vol. 1, preface.

<sup>6</sup> Theoretically, a “*nuo* (*ruo*)” could only be signed by the magistrate, although one cannot deny the possibility that the magistrate could have authorised a subordinate official in his presence to undertake this task: Hsing 2021a, 167–172. Note that the “*hua nuo*” procedure was not necessarily applicable to all administrative affairs. It might well be that only those more complicated and serious matters would require the personal approval from the Prefect: Tong 2019, 166–167.

<sup>7</sup> Satō 2021, 287–293, 301. Note that most of such regulations were promulgated by Commandery Governors or higher authorities and extant instructions from County Prefects were often merely concerned with internal administrative procedures within county governments.

Within the published Wuyiguangchang corpus, the ‘the lord’s instruction’ manuscripts represent only a small proportion of the manuscripts. Nevertheless, this does not mean that these were insignificant documents. On the contrary, it would suggest the opposite, namely that these were important administrative documents. The majority of the Wuyiguangchang cache consists of much more ephemeral, less important documents that were regularly and routinely discarded. As such, this corpus was not the product of a systematic archival or storage scheme but instead likely dumped as waste. Therefore, the relative rarity of ‘the lord’s instruction’ manuscripts within this and similar pits may serve as proof of their special status, as records that were not regularly produced. Indeed, given that these documents concurrently embodied the magistrates’ authority and pushed forward administrative procedure, they are rare exemplars of the interplay between political rule and administrative practice of government organisations. To date, two forms of instruction manuscripts have been identified in the Wuyiguangchang corpus. The first type is a hybrid of slip and tablet, whereas the second type comprises single-piece tablets. Both forms could be tied or bound with supplementary manuscripts.

Before turning to the material characteristics of these documents, given that the extant multi-piece manuscripts in the Wuyiguangchang corpus only survive in a fragmentary state and are detached from one another, it is important to outline the three criteria used to reconstruct the manuscripts that form the basis of investigation in this article. The first criterion is the textual evidence. If the transcriptions of several fragments can be read continuously or share similar contents, it is likely that they constituted the same original manuscript and have been treated as a single document. The second is based on the material traces of fragments, such as their handwriting, layout and the positions of binding strings. The third supplements the internal evidence with the archaeological context of the fragments, especially their locations in the pit.<sup>8</sup> While it is not uncommon that two distant pieces could have initially belonged to the same manuscript,<sup>9</sup> many reconstructed manuscripts are often found in close proxim-

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<sup>8</sup> Given that the formal reports do not include the diagrams that record the manuscripts’ relative positions in the pit, the only source on which we can rely to study the archaeological context of these manuscripts is their excavation numbers (*chutu bianhao* 出土編號), which typically consist of three parts. Consider the reference number: CWJ1③:282-2. “CWJ1” is the short form of “Changsha Wuyiguangchang Jing 1”, which is the Romanised Chinese characters of the pit. The “③” before the colon designates the archaeological layer where a manuscript was buried. The number after the colon is a manuscript’s serial number. Specifically, the number prior to the hyphen refers to the number of a bundle that yields manuscripts, whereas the latter number denotes the sequence when a manuscript is retrieved from this bundle. For example, “282-2” means the second slip of bundle 282. See: *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2018 vol. 1, general conventions (*fanli* 凡例).

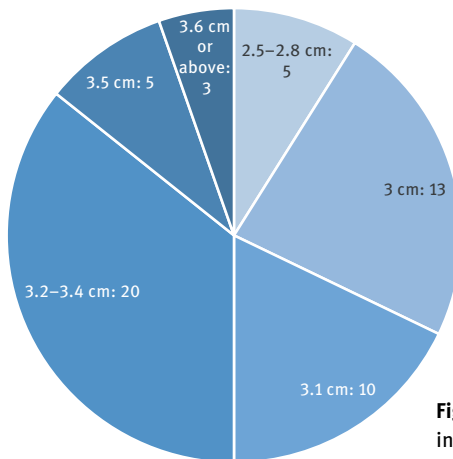
<sup>9</sup> For example, slips 328 (CWJ1③:162), 595 (CWJ1③:261-79) and 1752+1755 (CWJ1③:266-84+266-87) belong to the same manuscript even though they were found in different archaeological layers. For their reconstruction, see: Zhou 2021a.

ity to each other.<sup>10</sup> Hence, if several fragments sharing similar contents and material traces were placed together, the possibility that they belonged to the same manuscript naturally increases.

### Multi-piece ‘the Lord’s Instruction’ Manuscripts

In the Wuyiguangchang corpus, a multi-piece instruction always consists of multiple forms and writing materials. Unfortunately, such instructions are mostly written on bamboo slips, which are often poorly preserved and only less than a handful of them can be reconstructed. Extant evidence reveals that the text of a typical multi-piece instruction can be divided into three parts. The Scribes (*shi* 史) of a Bureau (*cao* 曹) would first draft a deliberation, followed by the endorsements of the Bureau Head (*guan* 掾) and the county’s Vice-Prefect (*cheng* 丞). These first two parts were entered on single-column bamboo slips. The last part comprises the magistrate’s *nuo* (*ruo*)—sometimes coupled with his remarks—written on a wooden tablet, with an average width of 3.19 cm. These tablets are significantly narrower than the standard width of a three-column tablet (c. 3.5 cm) stipulated by a Qin (221–207 BCE) ordinance.<sup>11</sup> As illustrated in Fig. 1, only five of the 56 extant examples strictly meet this standard.

That said, given that the Qin Empire fell almost three centuries before the establishment of the Eastern Han dynasty, it may be somewhat anachronistic to judge such artefacts by this earlier standard.

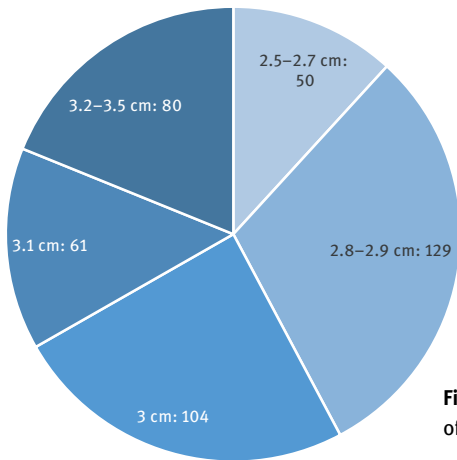


**Fig. 1:** Distribution of the width of wooden tablets in multi-piece instruction manuscripts.

<sup>10</sup> For example, slips 2190 (CWJ1③:282-2), 2198 (CWJ1③:282-10), 2199 (CWJ1③:282-11) and 2200 (CWJ1③:282-12) obviously belong to the same manuscript, which also comprises a much more distant slip 400 (CWJ1③:203). See: Zhou 2021a. This example illustrates the complexity of manuscript reconstruction.

<sup>11</sup> Staack 2018, 271.

The average width of intact double-column slips in the Wuyiguangchang corpus published so far (424 pieces in total) is c.2.98 cm, which is approximately 73% wider than similar slips found in the north-western frontier of the preceding Western Han dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE).<sup>12</sup> All the published examples from Wuyiguangchang do not have ridges on their surfaces and two-thirds are not more than 3 cm wide (Fig. 2). In contrast, only c.32% (eighteen out of 56) of the published multi-piece tablets maintain a similar measurement, whereas half (28 out of 56) of these examples are wider than 3.2 cm (Fig. 1). While the difference in width between multi-piece tablets and double-column slips is ostensibly inconsequential, the statistics do suggest that producers of such tablets seem to have deliberately differentiated multi-piece tablets from double-column slips by slightly increasing the former's width. In this regard, these artefacts should be classified as *du* rather than *jian* despite their relatively narrow width.



**Fig. 2:** Distribution of the width of double-column slips

Additionally, a multi-piece instruction could be supplemented by another multi-piece bamboo manuscript or wooden tablet, thereby creating mixed forms of ‘composite manuscripts’.<sup>13</sup> Examples of the different forms are addressed next.

The simplest form of multi-piece instruction is that without a supplementary manuscript. Tab.1 lists an example (henceforth Example 1) reconstructed by Sumiya Tsuneko 角谷常子, consisting of seven bamboo slips and a wooden tablet:

<sup>12</sup> According to Takamura Takeyuki, the average width of the ridged double-column slips unearthed in the Dunhuang region is c.14.567 mm, whereas those unridged is c.17.146 mm. In comparison, the average width of the unridged double-column slips found in the Juyan region is c.19.957 mm: Takamura 2022, 207, 211. These figures are significantly narrower than the Wuyiguangchang samples.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Composite manuscript’ (or simply ‘composite’) refers to a manuscript which comprises more than one ‘codicological unit’. For a thorough discussion of the term, see: Gumbert 2004, 26–29.

Tab.1: Text and translation of Example 1.<sup>14</sup>

Writing Support/Sections	Original Text	Tentative English Translation
Bamboo slips/ Deliberation	左賊史昭、助史穆白： 左尉書言：追傷人者□ 真，未能得。小武亭部羅 <sup>1298</sup> 界下有九重山，去 縣二百里。真父□□殺 鄭□、楊烝逃。能(?)兄 不□及載(?) <sup>1297</sup> 斗，輒亡 入羅界□自□□北(?) 部□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□九 <sup>1302</sup> 重 山下，櫟丘例 <sup>16</sup> 亭長轉部 羅界下□ <sup>1296</sup> 例已得亭 長，如□ <sup>17</sup> 言。□ <sup>18</sup> 屬功 曹，亟遣(?)例亭長□□ 伉□□□ <sup>1299</sup>	Scribe of the Left Bureau of Robbery Zhao and Assisting Scribe Mu report: A document from the Left Commander says that he pursued a person who injured others called ... Zhen and was not able to capture him. In the district of the Xiaowu police station, near the boundary of the Luo [county] there is Jiuchong mountain, which is 200 <i>li</i> (ca. 83.2 km) away from the county [headquarter]. Zhen's father ... killed Zheng ... and Yang Zheng and escaped. Neng's elder brother could not ... and carried[?] Dou, and instantly absconded and entered the purview of the Luo [county] ...self ... the northern district ... near Jiuchong mountain, [ordering] the Inspecting Constable of Li settlement to transfer his position [to patrol the region] near the boundary of the Luo [county] ... the inspection [post] already has a Constable; this agrees with what [the Commander?] said. [We petition?] to assign [this affair] to the Bureau of Merit to immediately send an Inspecting Constable ... [to?] Kang ...
Bamboo slips/ Endorsement	兼左賊掾 香如曹 <sup>1306</sup> 丞顯如掾。屬(?) <sup>1307</sup>	Concurrent Head of the Bureau of Robbery <i>Xiang</i> agreed with [the opinions of] the Bureau. Vice-Prefect <i>Xian</i> agreed with the Head [of the Bureau of Robbery]. Assign[?]
Wooden tablet/ Approval	君教：諾。舊故有例者， 前何故不署？ <sup>1308</sup>	The lord's instruction: <i>Approved. In the past there was someone who inspected [that region], why didn't you station [this person] from the outset?</i>

Given the fragmentary state of this manuscript, the above translation is tentative at best. Both their related contents and proximate archaeological numbers—indicating the pieces were found in close proximity to one another—suggest that these pieces belonged to a single multi-piece manuscript. Moreover, the rugged edge of tablet 1308 seems to intrude into the concave part of slip 1307, indicating that the two pieces were joined. This supports the theory that tablets and bamboo slips could be attached together in multi-piece manuscripts, despite the larger size of the former.

<sup>14</sup> For the reconstruction of Example 1, see: Sumiya 2021, 52–53.

<sup>15</sup> The subscript numbers refer to the folio number (*zhengli hao* 整理號) of the various constituent pieces (tablet, slips) of a manuscript.

<sup>16</sup> Li Junming contends that the term “例” in this context denotes a kind of temporary checkpoint for inspection, which is adopted in the translation: Li Junming 2020, 10.

<sup>17</sup> The character may be “尉”.

<sup>18</sup> Based on other textual witnesses, this character may be “請”.

The handwriting of the manuscript is also noteworthy. The handwriting of the ‘deliberation’ section is uniform and was probably written by the same scribe who was also likely responsible for the ‘endorsement’ section. The personal names of Vice-Prefect Xian 顯 and Head Xiang 香, however, were added later, after both parts one and two had been written, and were possibly autograph. The graph “*Xiang*” on slip 1306 is slightly larger and also clings to the “*ru*” (如) graph below, indicating a later, different hand added the name. The *nuo* and the remark on tablet 1308 (see the italic text in Tab. 1) were possibly brushed by the magistrate or one of his deputies. Taken together, this multi-piece instruction conceivably went through four different hands (namely those of the County Prefect and Vice-Prefect, as well as the Head and Scribe of the Left Bureau of Robbery). This suggests that the production of this manuscript was a highly interactive process.

Apart from the more usual tripartite ‘deliberation–endorsement–approval’ structure, another peculiar type of multi-piece instruction without attachments is a draft, which also appears to have required the magistrate’s approval. The manuscript below (henceforth Example 2) is an example:

Tab. 2: Text and translation of Example two.<sup>19</sup>

Writing Supports/ Sections	Original Text	Tentative English Translation
Bamboo slips/ Deliberation	永初二年正月戊辰 朔日 □□□□ 丞優告……東部勸 農 <sup>887A</sup> 賊捕掾□、 游徼、求盜、亭長： 民自言，諦如辭。 尊負租不輸所 □□□□□ <sup>886</sup>	In the second year of the Yongchu reign (108 CE), in the first month that began on a <i>wuchen</i> day, on the [blank], that is, the [blank] day,...Vice-Prefect You informs...the Head of Encouraging Field Cultivation and Pursing Robber of the Eastern District..., Patrol Leader, Thief Catcher, and Constable: A commoner has lodged a personal statement, [in which the particulars] are verified as accorded with the testimony. [Chen?] Zun was held accountable for the land tax but failed to transfer the amount [to the authorities]...
	掾成、令史陵 <sup>20</sup> 、兼 史勤 <sup>887B</sup>	Head Cheng, Scribe Director Leng, and Concurrent Scribe Qin.
	永初二年正月廿九 日丙申白。主簿□ <sup>21</sup> 省；書佐這劔主 <sup>885</sup>	[This draft is] reported on the 29th, that is, the <i>bingshen</i> day of the first month of the second year of the Yongchu reign. Checked by Master of Accounts...; handled by Writing Assistant Zhe Jian.
Wooden tablet/ Approval	君教：諾 <sup>884</sup>	The lord’s instruction: <i>Approved</i> .

<sup>19</sup> For the texts and images, see: *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2019, vol. 3, 86–87.

<sup>20</sup> The editors of the Wuyiguangchang manuscripts transcribe the graph as “昧”. However, in view of the orthography and the same graph on slip 1676, the graph here should be “陵”.

<sup>21</sup> The editors seem to regard the space between “簿” and “省” as blank. As Takatori Yuji points out, there should be a character in between: Takatori 2021, 224 n. 38.













Fig. 3: Extant pieces of Example 2.

Judging by the handwriting, the ‘deliberation’ section (slips 885–887) was written by the same scribe. A marked feature of the execution of these slips is the ample space reserved for the upper binding string. A crack on tablet 884 (Fig. 3) indicates that it was similarly bound together with the slips in the same position. The interrelation between the slips and tablet 884 is also supported by the consecutive archaeological numbers (CWJ1③:264-38-41) of these pieces, an indication that they were buried in close proximity. In short, the four pieces belong to the same manuscript, although they probably do not comprise all of its original constituent parts.

In view of the blanked dates and the use of single-column slips, Example two is likely a draft.<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that it may pertain to another multi-piece manuscript (which at least comprises slips 1673–1674 and 1676–1677) that records the affairs of a man called Chen Zun 陳尊, who like the “Zun” mentioned in Example 2, also failed to pay the land tax. Moreover, slip 1676 reveals that Scribe Leng and Concurrent Scribe Qin—both of whom appear in Example two—were also involved in Chen Zun’s case.<sup>23</sup> In this light, “Zun” probably refers to Chen Zun. Notably, although the verso of slip 887 lists the titles and personal names of Leng, Qin and Cheng, they were likely not the scribes who created the draft. Rather, it should have been written by “Writing Assistant Zhe Jian”, who appeared in slip 885.

Tab. 3: Comparison of the handwritings of slips 887B and 1676.

Character/ slip no.	<i>shi</i> 史	<i>leng</i> 陵	<i>jian</i> 兼	<i>shi</i> 史	<i>qin</i> 勤
887B					
1676					


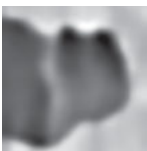


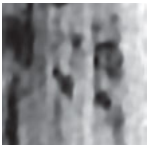

The fact that slip 887B and slip 1676 were written by two different scribes becomes even clearer when we compare their handwriting. As shown in Tab. 3, the scribes who respectively inscribed slips 887 and 1676 wrote the same set of characters in significantly different fashions. Particularly, the scribe of slip 1676 preferred to end a brushstroke in a sharp and pressed manner, whereas the one who wrote slip 887B maintained more even endings (Tab. 4).

<sup>22</sup> For the traces of drafts among Han administrative manuscripts, see: Hsing 2021b, 72–80.

<sup>23</sup> Judging by its formulaic language, slip 1676 is probably the opening slip of a deliberation drafted by Scribe Leng and Concurrent Scribe Qin who mention that they list “the script of the personal statement made by a commoner in the [attached] slips” (民自言辭如牒). Notably, the two preceding slips (1673–1674) contain the personal statement of a man called Huang Lü 黃閭, who seems to have reported the crime of Chen Zun. Given the spatial proximity of these slips, they were likely fragments of a multi-piece manuscript.



Tab. 4: Comparison of the ending of brushstrokes of 887B and 1676.

slip no.	ending of brushstrokes		
887B			
1676			

That the names on the verso were written by another official leads us to two observations. First, this further confirms that such names were not signatures in the modern sense.<sup>24</sup> Second, this suggests the existence of a secretariat where official documents—at least those that were sent under the name of senior officials—were centrally produced, checked and disseminated.

Moreover, the draft was checked by the Master of Accounts (*zhu bu* 主簿), who primarily served as the secretary of the Commandery Governor or County Prefect and took care of the compilation of accounts and registers during the Han period. This position was also an important constituent of the so-called ‘Beneath-the-Door’ (*mengxia* 門下) organisation, which was filled with the County Prefect’s trusted officials.<sup>25</sup> Given the involvement of the Master of Accounts and the prominence of the ‘Beneath-the-Door’ organisation, the latter might have been the above-mentioned potential secretariat.<sup>26</sup>

After receiving the magistrate’s approval, the Writing Assistant would probably copy the text on the more formal double-column slips and send the clean copies to the recipients.<sup>27</sup> Such a procedure indicates that the magistrate had to authorise drafts submitted by his subordinates, although it is unclear if this practice was universally applied to all administrative documents or was confined to certain types of special documents. Either way, this example shows that in the Eastern Han local government, the local ruler’s authorisation was an essential prerequisite for advancing everyday administrative process.

<sup>24</sup> For more detailed analyses of the nature of the listed names on administrative manuscripts during the Qin and Han period, see: Giele 2005; Hsing 2021b, 17–30.

<sup>25</sup> For the roles that the Master of Accounts played in the Han provincial administration, as well as their connection with the *mengxia* organisation, see: Yen 1990, 124–125, 226.

<sup>26</sup> For discussion of the *mengxia* organisation in Linxiang county, see: Tong 2022, 92–100.

<sup>27</sup> To date, it is unclear if the Magistrate’s remarks would also be incorporated into the clean copies, though sometimes the replying letters of subordinate officials do cite the texts of the lord’s instructions.

Sometimes a multi-piece instruction could be appended by another multi-piece or single-piece manuscript and in turn form a ‘homogenetic’ composite manuscript.<sup>28</sup> Regarding a multi-piece attachment, the abovementioned slips 1673–1674 and 1676 indicate that the personal statement submitted by a commoner eventually became part of a multi-piece instruction. What follows will focus on a multi-piece instruction (henceforth Example 3) that was attached by a single-piece tablet.

Tab. 5: Text and translation of Example 3.<sup>29</sup>

Writing Supports/Sections	Original Text	Tentative English Translation
Wooden tablet/ Attachment	<p>兼左部賊捕掾勤叩 頭死罪白：案故事， 橫溪深內<sup>30</sup>，常恐有 小發，置例亭長禁 姦，從聞以來省罷。 方今民輸租時間， 溲陽鄉民多解止橫 溪入縣輸 十一月六日開<sup>○1792A</sup> 租，或夜出縣，歸主 人。恐姦猾昏夜為 非法，姦情難知。願 置例亭長一人，禁 絕姦人，益為便，唯 廷。勤愚戇，職事無 狀，惶恐叩頭死罪 死罪。·十一月五 日甲申白<sup>○1792B</sup></p>	<p>Concurrent Head of the Bureau of Robber Pursuing of the Left District Qin kowtows and risks death penalty to report: [I] checked the precedent, which states that Heng stream flows deep inside the remote areas and [the authorities] used to fear that small [gangs of robbers] would emerge therein, so they established an Inspecting Constable to prohibit the treacherous people. Recently [this position] was abolished to save costs. Now is when commoners transfer the land tax, and the people of Liaoyang commune mostly entered the county [town] to transfer the land tax by ways of Heng stream. They may leave the county [town] at night and return to their landlords' [houses].<sup>31</sup> I fear that treacherous and wicked people may conspire illegal activities in the evening and night, and it will be difficult to obtain the facts. I hope that we can establish an Inspecting Constable to prohibit the treacherous persons; [this measure] will be advantageous and I beg the court [to implement it]. I am foolish and naïve and failed my official duties; [for this] I fear, kowtow, and repeatedly risk the death penalty. Reported on the fifth, that is, the <i>jiashen</i> day of the eleventh month (105 CE). <i>Opened on the sixth day of the eleventh month.</i></p>

<sup>28</sup> Here ‘homogenetic’ implies that the codicological units in a composite manuscript are ‘related’ and ‘come from the same circle and time’: Gumbert 2004, 27.

<sup>29</sup> For the texts and images of these pieces, see: *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2020, vol. 5, 78–80. Note that Li Junming has reconstructed the “deliberation” section (that is, slips 1800, 1796, 1798, 1801) and related it to tablet 1792: Li Junming 2020, 7. However, Li does not realise the possible connection between these pieces and slips 1803–1804, as well as tablet 1794. Nor does he discuss the materiality of Example 3.

<sup>30</sup> The editors suggest that this character is a scribal error of “匿” (to hide), which is accepted here.

<sup>31</sup> The term “主人” here probably does not refer to the master of unfree labourers. Slip 408 records that an official called Zhang Dong 張董 “exited from the county and returned to the house of the

Writing Supports/Sections	Original Text	Tentative English Translation
Bamboo Slips/ Deliberation	𠄎賊捕掾勤言所部 橫谿道前有例亭 長。閒 <sub>1800</sub> 𠄎猾(?)為 (?)非,願置例亭 長一人禁絕。案:往 <sub>1796</sub> 時橫谿竊匪有 小發,前置例亭,并 循行冢間,防遏未 <sub>1798</sub> 然,如勤言。可 復請□□□選(?) 亭長一人,以傳(?) 例。 <sub>1801</sub>	(Scribe of the Left Bureau of Robbery X reports:) Qin, Head of the Bureau of Robber Pursuing, said that the route of Heng stream that he supervises formerly had an Inspecting Constable. Recently... [feared that] treacherous and wicked people may conspire illegal activities, and hoped [the court] establish an Inspecting Constable to prohibit them. Now I [we] have checked: In the past treacherous persons had emerged from hiding in Heng stream, and formerly we established an Inspecting Constable, who would also make a thorough inspection of nearby cemeteries, so as to prevent [crimes] from happening. This agrees with Qin's report. [Now we] can again petition [to assign the Bureau of Merit?] to select a Constable to assist the inspection post.
Bamboo Slips/ Endorsement	左賊掾…… <sub>1804</sub> ……如掾。 <sub>1803</sub>	Head of the Left Bureau of Robbery [X agreed with the opinions of the Bureau]. [Vice-Prefect X] agreed with the Head [of the Left Bureau of Robbery].
Wooden tablet/ Approval	君教: 諾。 <sub>1794</sub>	The lord's instruction: <i>Approved</i> .

All the listed pieces of Example 3 were unearthed from bundle 266 of layer three (“③:266”). Their archaeological numbers indicate that these pieces were likely located in proximity.<sup>32</sup> The four slips (1800, 1796, 1798 and 1801) in the middle of the document bear an identical hand (Tab. 4). Although slightly damaged, their texts can be read continuously. These features again suggest that these four slips form the same manuscript. Taking the structure of Example 1 into account, these slips were probably followed by slips 1803–1804. Similarly, on the basis of the examples discussed earlier, tablets 1792 and 1794 were likely flanked the bamboo slips. The remnants of binding strings on the two tablets indicate that they were bound together with other pieces (Fig. 4). Moreover, the positions of the binding strings of tablet 1794—which records the magistrate's *nuo*—are akin to those of slips 1800, 1796, 1798 and 1801 (Fig. 4). This may further substantiate the connection between these pieces.

Material traces also hint at the format of this manuscript. Considering the existence of tablet 1794, the manuscript was possibly folded rather than rolled.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, the space between 1794–1803 and 1804 may form the axis for the initial fold on

landlord Su Dao” 從縣出, 歸主人蘇到舍。Obviously, Zhang could not have been Su's slave. As such, I read “主人” as “landlord”.

<sup>32</sup> *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2020, vol. 5, 78–80.

<sup>33</sup> A similar method of storage emerged as early as the third century BCE: Xiao 2017, 247–252.

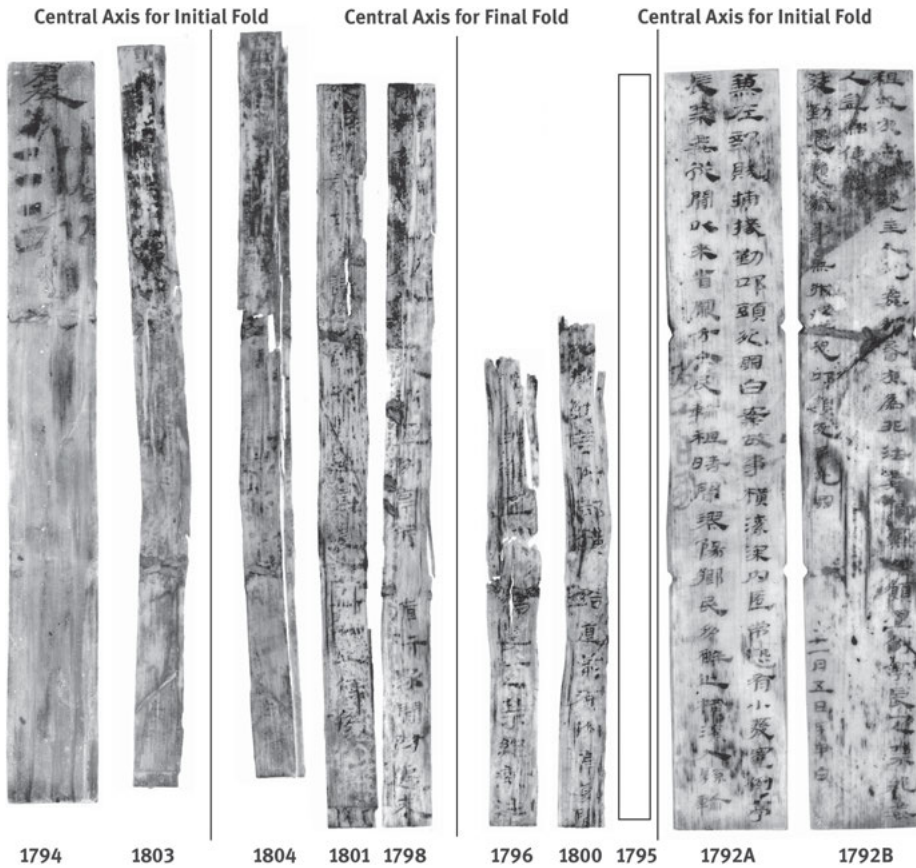


Fig. 4: Extant pieces of Example 3.

the left, meaning that 1794–1803 likely covered slips 1804, 1801 and 1798. Likewise, the right of the wider tablet 1792 might have folded and covered slips 1796, 1800 and 1795, the last of which is blank and was pivotal in keeping the balance between tablet 1792 and slips 1796 and 1800, making the manuscript foldable.<sup>34</sup>

The manuscript might have been folded again between slips 1796 and 1798. Logically, it could be folded in both directions, although the upward direction seems more likely as it would cover all the writing and, as a result, better protected the contents, enhancing confidentiality. The prerequisite of such a formatting method is that the pieces—especially those between the axes—were bound loosely; otherwise it would be difficult to flex the folded parts. This may explain why the remnants of binding

<sup>34</sup> For the existence of the blank slip 1795, see: *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2020, vol. 5, 191.

strings on the tablets and slips are unevenly positioned, as the strings might have moved more easily due to the large gap between each piece. In short, the folded manuscript was likely a compact rectangle.

### Single-piece ‘the Lord’s Instruction’ Manuscripts

The instructions written on single-piece tablets are by far the most well studied manuscripts of the whole Wuyiguangchang corpus. This is both attributable to the early publication of their images and texts, as well as their peculiar material attributes and importance. The average size of such manuscripts is c. 23.05 cm long by c. 4.73 cm wide. It is worth noting that the above-mentioned Qin ordinance stipulates that the width of a five-column tablet—which was the largest possible size for this type of writing support—should be c. 4.4 cm.<sup>35</sup> The measurement of the single-piece instructions is therefore not far removed from this standard.

While the use of tablet was by no means exceptional in the Eastern Han period, the five-column tablet seems to occupy a special status. Wang Chong 王充, a contemporaneous thinker, once lamented:

When writing on a five-column tablet or composing a letter comprising ten memorials, if one is of inferior talent, he or she will find it specifically difficult to wield the power of brush and ink, let alone [asking this person to] combine sentences to paragraphs and [write] hundreds of chapters!

書五行之牘，書十奏之記，其才劣者，筆墨之力尤難，況乃連句結章，篇至十百哉！<sup>36</sup>

The underlying rationale of Wang’s proposition is that although the five-column tablet was not designed for writing an extremely lengthy text, someone who lacks writing talent would still face difficulties to fill it with characters. This would suggest that producing manuscripts such as ‘the lord’s instruction’ was still considered a challenge for a normal person.

Another notable feature of such manuscripts is their extraordinary layout. A single-piece ‘the lord’s instruction’ comprises two registers. The lower register records the deliberations of subordinate officials, whereas the upper is often inscribed with the autograph (“*ruo*”) of the magistrate (Fig. 5). Indeed, all the *ruo* characters on such manuscripts are of an extraordinary size, occupying almost one-third of a tablet’s surface. This layout easily makes the *ruo* the centre of the viewer’s attention.

Although single-piece instructions were in theory self-contained, it is evident that they could be bound with either another tablet or several slips along the adminis-

<sup>35</sup> Staack 2018, 271.

<sup>36</sup> Huang Hui, *Lun Heng jiaoshi*, vv. 13, 583. The translation is modified from: Forke 1962, 89.

trative process like their multi-piece counterparts.<sup>37</sup> Two examples are provided. The first example features a single-piece instruction, which comprises a tablet and several supplementary double-column slips, whereas the second is a multi-tablet manuscript that constituted two tablets.

A single-piece instruction could be bound with both single- and double-column slips. Tablet 429+430 and double-column slips 431–433 constitute one such manuscript (henceforth Example 4).<sup>38</sup> Specifically, the three double-column slips (one of which is broken) were from an ‘explanation’ (*jie* 解) document, which was used exclusively by subordinate officials to clarify the inquiries of their superior on government affairs. Here, the explanation was compiled by Du 篤, who was requested to investigate the crime of two officials named Huang Gong 黃宮 and Li Zong 李宗.<sup>39</sup>

Du’s explanation should have served as the attachment of a related single-piece instruction (tablet 429+430), in which the subordinates’ deliberation on the lower register explicitly states that they attached the “explanation in slips” (*jie ru die* 解如牒) for the magistrate’s reference. This claim conforms with the existence of a crack which indicates the passing of a binding string. Equally important, all four manuscripts were found in layer ③:202 of pit no. 1 and were likely buried in proximity given their consecutive serial numbers. Considering the materiality, archaeological context and textual content, tablet 429+430 was likely bound together with the three double-column slips.

The creation of this manuscript was not the last stop of the lifecycle of tablet 429+430. The inscription of an inventory label reads: “The Case of Scribes for Measuring Fields Huang Gong and Li Zong; examined in Autumn” (丈田史黃宮、李宗本事; 秋考實).<sup>40</sup> This label should have been attached to the container that stored the documents pertaining to the case of Huang Gong and Li Zong, probably including Example 4. This indicates that the composite manuscript was archived after being signed by the magistrate.

While Example 4 was made for the magistrate’s reference, the creation of multi-tablet manuscripts seems to have been primarily for an archival purpose. Published material of the Wuyiguangchang corpus contains at least two specimens of multi-

<sup>37</sup> In this respect, calling such ‘instruction’ tablets single-piece manuscripts is somewhat misleading. The reader is reminded that in the present context, the phrase “single-piece” is in contrast with instruction manuscripts written on multiple strips and does not include the attachments.

<sup>38</sup> Zhou Haifeng 周海鋒 has correctly pointed out that a single-piece instruction (tablet 1509) and two double-column slips 1858 and 1099 are related: Zhou 2021b. This is another example of the “tablet+double-column” form.

<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, Huang and Li were assigned the crucial tasks of verifying the number of agricultural fields and collecting the land tax. During their trip, however, they abused their power and beat up a man called Deng Guan 鄧官. Tablet 429+430 centres on the reliability of this explanation, which the subordinate officials described as “careless” (*sanlüe* 散略) in their deliberation.

<sup>40</sup> *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jian du* 2018, vol. 2, 90, label 418. For the term “*benshi*” 本事 (literally, “fundamental affair”), see: Yang 2013, 49; Yates 2019, 86–87. The latter of which has translated the inscription of twelve such labels in the appendix.



Fig. 5: Relevant pieces of Example 5.

tablet manuscripts; that is, a single-piece instruction in combination with another single-piece attachment. The following will concentrate on the case of tablets 336 and CWJ1③:305 (henceforth Example 5).<sup>41</sup>

Fig. 5 shows the images of the latter example. Tablet 336 on the right is a letter submitted from Wang Chun 王純 to the county court, reporting that he was assaulted by the relatives of a murderer called Huang Wu 黃胡, whom he had killed in a combat. When the letter was delivered, it was likely immediately handed in to the Prefect for his instruction; this accounts for the cursive remark on the left of the verso (which also indicates that tablet 336 is an original). Following Wang's report and the Prefect's preliminary instruction, the responsible subordinate officials drew up a deliberation (tablet CWJ1③:305), which required the Prefect's authorisation. However, the Prefect was absent when the subordinates finished the tablet, so the latter had to replace his *nuo* with the line "the lord is pursuing a murderer in the district of Xiao Wuling guard post" (君追殺人賊小武陵亭部).

With their related contents and similar cracks caused by a binding string on the lower parts, tablets 336 and CWJ1③:305 were likely bound together.<sup>42</sup> The most probable storage method of a "multi-tablet" composite manuscript was to fold the tablets face to face.<sup>43</sup> Such an arrangement suggests two things: first, binding two pieces of tablets violated the affordance of this type of writing supports, which should have carried self-contained texts; second, it was difficult to secure the position of two pieces of wood that are relatively large and unevenly shaped. Considering that the Prefect likely knew the content of tablet CWJ1③:305 beforehand, it was unlikely that subordinate officials would have attached it when they gave their deliberation to the magistrate. As such, the production of a "multi-tablet" manuscript was presumably motivated by archival demands, rather than serving as reference material for the magistrate. By putting separate administrative documents concerning the same event together, government personnel could trace and check relevant documents more efficiently in the future.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Another example of such multi-tablet manuscripts is tablets 2496 and 2497.

<sup>42</sup> Shih 2021, 126.

<sup>43</sup> As Tsang Wing Ma notes, if this type of manuscript comprised more than three tablets, a quasi-accordion fold might have been created, meaning that the tablets were folded back and forth to form a compact manuscript: Ma 2020, 364–367.

<sup>44</sup> Shih 2021, 126.



## Chronology of Multi-piece and Single-piece ‘Instruction’ Manuscripts

The variety of forms of the ‘the lord’s instruction’ manuscripts have not been devoid of scholarly attention. Sumiya Tsuneko argues that multi-piece instructions aimed to document mundane accounts and reports that did not require the deliberation and petition of the Vice-Prefect and Bureau Head, whereas single-piece instructions were created especially for recording these two procedures.<sup>45</sup> Takatori Yuji 鷹取祐司, on the other hand, suggests that the instructions written on multi-piece manuscripts were the actual administrative documents used during the decision-making process. In contrast, single-piece instructions were compiled on the basis of their multi-piece counterparts and their purpose was to emphasise that the Prefect, the Vice-Prefect and the Head endorsed and approved the Bureau Scribe’s deliberations. In other words, Takatori argues that multi-piece instructions were the precursors to single-piece instructions, although he refrains from characterising the former as drafts or the latter as copies.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, the materiality of both types of instruction manuscripts suggests that they were the actual documents used during administrative process. On the one hand, the magistrate’s signing of “*nuo* (*ruo*)” carried a strong symbolic meaning. Although Example 2 reveals that drafts of official documents sent in the name of the County Prefect might also require his approval, these documents were, after all, designed to be disseminated outside the county court. This sets them apart from other ‘instruction’ manuscripts, whose contents mostly revolved around internal discussions within the county court, although later examples indicate that ‘instructions’ of the Commandery Governor could be monumentalised in stone.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, it is unlikely that subordinate officials would have to produce drafts or copies of such instructions.

On the other hand, that single-piece instructions—like their multi-piece counterparts—could have included attachments during their submissions suggests that their production and signing were not mere formalities. It is equally unlikely that single-piece instructions were reworked from the multi-piece ones, because if this was so, it implies that after a follow-up single-piece instruction was produced, the officials in charge would have to untie the attachment that was originally bound with a multi-piece instruction, in order to put it together with the new single-piece instruction and sign it for the second time. While one cannot completely deny the possibility of this repeating procedure, it does seem unnecessary.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Sumiya 2021, 52–54.

<sup>46</sup> Takatori 2021, 252–254, 261–262.

<sup>47</sup> Sumiya 2014, 23.

<sup>48</sup> A possible reason would be that the single-piece instructions were devoted to ritualistic purposes. Nevertheless, such manuscripts’ ordinary (23.05 cm on average) length—which was a common

In contrast to Takatori's proposition, existing evidence suggests that the dates between most multi-piece and single-piece instructions do not overlap, meaning that the use of the two forms may be influenced by diachronic factors. The following attempts to reconstruct the chronology of these two types of instruction manuscripts.

Regarding the dating of multi-piece instructions, two of the three examples discussed above are dated to late 105 CE and early 108 CE. Although Example 1 is undated, it mentions "Vice-Prefect Xian" in slip 1307. Among the published Wuyiguangchang material, the earliest appearance of Xian should be dated to 109 CE.<sup>49</sup> Prior to Xian, this position was held by You 優, who stepped down in early 108 CE (see Example 2). Also in another multi-piece manuscript, Vice-Prefect Xian is listed alongside the "Mi Constable Wang Gu" (廩亭長王固),<sup>50</sup> who appears in a document in 109 CE.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, Example 1 likely postdates early 108 CE. Additionally, slip 1091, datable to the eleventh month of 107 CE, was likely a fragment of a multi-piece instruction based on its synonymous content with the above-mentioned slip 885.

The dating of single-piece instructions is much clearer than their multi-piece counterparts. The dates of single-piece instructions (including unpublished pieces) range from approximately the twelfth month of 105 CE (tablet 1509) to the fifth month of 107 CE (tablet 330).<sup>52</sup> Strikingly, such a timeframe barely overlapped with the dated multi-piece instructions, suggesting that single-piece instructions were only used for a short time. Although the sampling size of the dated multi-piece instructions is too small to reach any conclusive argument, the distribution of the *nuo* (*ruo*) characters in the single-piece and multi-piece instructions does seem to substantiate the above hypothesis. Tab. 6 categorises six types of *nuo* (*ruo*) characters taken from the published 'the Lord's instruction' manuscripts:

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denominator of a written artefact's authority—makes this theory unlikely. For a detailed examination of how the length of writing support affected the authority of a manuscript in Qin and Han China, see: Tomiya 2010, 29–49.





















**49** Slip 1808 lists Prefect Dan and Vice-Prefect Xian. Despite missing the regal year, the slip records that it was produced "on the 23rd, that is, the *gengxu* day of the ninth month" 九月廿三日庚戌. According to the reconstructed calendar, the only year that matches both the numerical and sexagenary days and the span of the Wuyiguangchang manuscripts was the third year of Yongchu (109 CE): *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2020, vol. 5, 81.

**50** The manuscript comprises at least slips 737, 739, 741, and 743–745. Xian and Wang Gu appear respectively in slips 739 and 741; see: *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2018, vol. 2, 159–161.

**51** *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu* 2018, vol. 1, 111, slip 88.

**52** I am grateful to Yang Xiaoliang 楊小亮 for checking the dates of unpublished single-piece instructions for me, thereby confirming this hypothesis. Dr. Yang also informed me that Zhang Chi 張馳, a doctoral student from Tsinghua University, made a similar observation that all single-piece instructions in the Wuyiguangchang corpus range from the eleventh month of 105 CE to the eleventh month of 107 CE: email communication with the author.

**Tab. 6:** Categorisation of *nuo* and *ruo* character forms taken from the Wuyiguangchang ‘the lord’s instruction’ manuscripts.

Type	Images of <i>nuo</i> ( <i>ruo</i> ) samples					
<i>Nuo</i> 1a						
	17 (multi-piece)	308 (multi-piece)	368 (multi-piece)	388 (multi-piece)	690 (multi-piece)	
						
	718 (multi-piece)	1271 (multi-piece)	1689 (multi-piece)	1718 (multi-piece)		
	<i>Nuo</i> 1b					
		103 (multi-piece)]	310 (multi-piece)	424 (multi-piece)	521 (multi-piece)	757 (multi-piece)
						
		884 (multi-piece; 108.1 CE)	1285 (multi-piece)	2514 (multi-piece)	CW1③:306-2 (multi-piece)	984 (Single-piece)
						
		2495 (multi-piece)				

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**Type** **Images of *nuo* (*ruo*) samples**


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*Nuo 2*

98 (multi-piece)



419 (multi-piece)



1114 (multi-piece)



1147 (multi-piece)

1794 (multi-piece;  
105.11 CE)

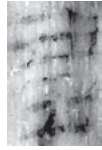
2499 (multi-piece)



1777 (multi-piece)

*Nuo 3a*

573 (multi-piece)

1308 (multi-piece;  
109 CE?)*Nuo 3b*132+86  
(multi-piece)

2194 (multi-piece)

*Ruo 1*

311 (multi-piece)



658 (multi-piece)



670 (multi-piece)






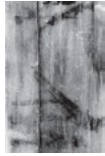



















748 (multi-piece)




1061 (multi-piece)



604 (multi-piece)

Type	Images of <i>nuo</i> ( <i>ruo</i> ) samples				
<i>Ruo</i> 2					
	314 (multi-piece)	386 (multi-piece)	689 (multi-piece)		
<i>Ruo</i> 3					
	390 (multi-piece)	96 (Single-piece; 106.7 CE)	156 (Single-piece; 106.7 CE)	290 (Single-piece; 106.9 CE)	307 (Single-piece)
					
	331 (Single-piece; 106.12 CE)	427 (Single-piece)	429+430 (Single-piece)	538+393 <sup>53</sup> (Single-piece; 106.9 CE)	1106 (Single-piece; 106.11 CE)
					
	1110 (Single-piece)	1276 (Single-piece; 107.3 CE)	1509 (Single-piece; 105.12?)	1687 (Single-piece; 106.12 CE)	1729 (Single-piece; 106.7 CE)
					
	1772 (Single-piece; 106.10 CE)	1848 (Single-piece)	CWJ1③:325-2-9 (Single-piece; 106.8 CE)	CWJ1③:325-5-21 (Single-piece; 106.8 CE)	CWJ1③:325-32 (Single-piece; 107.4 CE)

<sup>53</sup> The tablet is reconstructed in: Wang 2019.

Each of the six types of “*nuo* (*ruo*)” graphs has its own distinctive characteristics. Overall, three hands chose to sign in *nuo*, whereas the other three preferred *ruo*. Compared to the *nuo* forms, which are closer to the standard orthography of the time, the *ruo* forms are executed in a more abstract, exaggerated style, carrying curved and elongated strokes. Sometimes subtle structural variances can be found within the same group. For example, despite maintaining a synonymous orthography, the top-right component of *nuo* 1a never penetrates the horizontal stroke below (e. g. , something that the scribe who wrote *nuo* 1b always did.

With regard to the dated examples, slips 1794 (the eleventh month of 105 CE) and 884 (the first month of 108 CE) were signed respectively in types *nuo* 2 and *nuo* 1b, whereas slip 1308—which is allegedly dated to 109 CE—adopts a *nuo* 3a style. Additionally, all thirteen datable *ruo* 3 samples are scattered between the twelfth month of 105 and mid-107 CE, implying that it is probably the autograph that the magistrate adopted during the timeframe. Assuming that a magistrate would have signed consistently in the same style within a given period, *nuo* 2 seems to be immediately succeeded by *ruo* 3. As such, we may surmise the following chronology: *nuo* 2 (?—the eleventh month of 105 CE); *ruo* 3 (the twelfth month of 105 to mid-107 CE); *nuo* 1b (108 CE); and *nuo* 3a (c. 109 CE). In other words, the autographs on the instruction manuscripts changed frequently within the five-year span.

Admittedly, this chronology is approximate because of the incomplete sources. That said, it may still help us to reconstruct the dating of instruction manuscripts. First, among the twenty specimens of *ruo* 3, all except tablet 390 adhere to single-piece instructions. Second, tablet 984 is the only relatively intact single-piece instruction that was not signed in the *ruo* 3 style (Fig. 6). These two trends indicate a strong correlation between single-piece instructions and *ruo* 3, suggesting that most undated single-piece instructions which carry *ruo* 3 were likely produced between 106–107 CE.

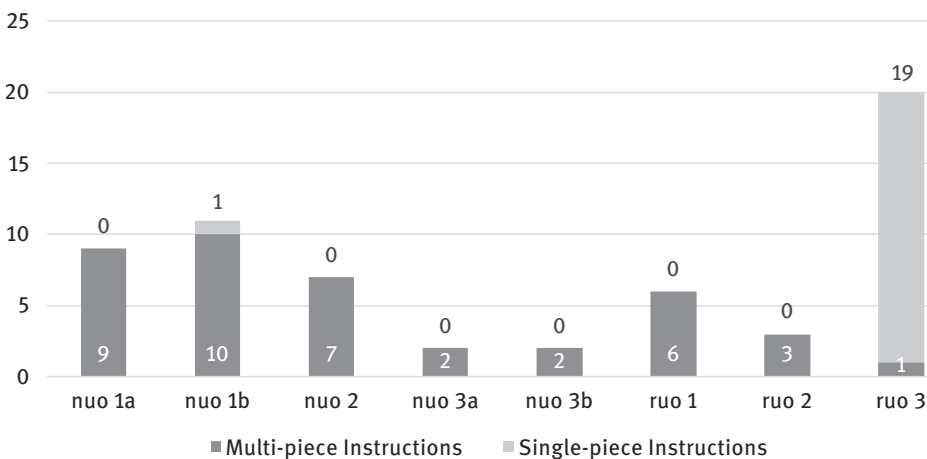


Fig. 6: Distribution of *nuo* and *ruo*.

This theory also seems to correlate with the content of the exceptional tablet 984:

Shi and Min, the scribes of the Left Bureau of Robbery, report: A letter from the commandery headquarter says: Wang Zheng injured Zhen, and Guo Xi the Pending Head of Yong, Huang Lang the Head of Robber Arresting, Yin Hong the Patrol Leader, and Zhang Han the Constable did not thoroughly pursue him; [rather, they] blamed the Constable of Xiaogong. You the Vice-Prefect, Ou Xun and Tang Jiu who served as the Heads, Zhe Xiu, Peng Qian, Chen Bao, Liu Xin who served as the scribes, Wang Cheng the Head of Robber Arresting, as well as Wang Lun the Constable intentionally let [Wang Zheng] go during the investigation, and thereby failed to adjudicate [Wang] Zheng's case; their explanation is [...] each of their fines of redeeming the death penalty amounts to two *jin* and eight *liang*, as said in the headquarters' letter. You the Vice-Prefect and Jun the Head suggest: We petition to assign [the affair] to the Bureau of Currency, ordering them to collect the debts owed by Xun, Xin, Jiu, Bao and others in cash, whose amount should be booked in the account of the ninth month. The Head of the Bureau of Merit informed [Huang] Lang, [Ying] Hong, and [Zhang] Han: [You] suggested to resolutely examine [Wang Zheng?] and exempt the absconded...

左賊史式、晏白：府記曰：王政傷枕，靡待事掾郭憲、賊捕掾黃朗、游徼殷泓、亭長張漢不窮追，適效功亭長。丞優、掾區訓、唐就，史這脩、彭遷、陳寶、劉信，賊捕掾王成，亭長王倫考縱不結政，解□□，贖死金各二斤八兩，如府記。丞優、掾均議：請屬金曹收責訓、信、就、寶等金錢，薄以九月時。功曹謂朗、泓、漢：議詭課，除亡□□□□□<sup>54</sup>

The report entails the corporate malfeasance of the Linxiang officials in a lawsuit case. The names of the listed officials hint at the artefact's dating. Notably, Vice-Prefect You appears in documents ranging from mid-106 to early 108 CE, while a letter datable to autumn 107 CE mentions a Bureau Head called Zhu Jun 朱均,<sup>55</sup> who was likely the Jun in this report. Additionally, Example 2, which carries a *nuo* 1b autograph, is also dated to early 108 CE. These pieces of evidence suggest that tablet 984 was possibly produced between mid-106 and early 108. Such a span coincides neatly with the abovementioned dating of other single-piece instructions.

Adopting the same method, we may surmise the following chronology of multi-piece and single-piece instructions. The Linxiang county government appear to have primarily used multi-piece instructions prior to the twelfth month of 105 CE. Afterwards, the government replaced multi-piece with single-piece instructions, which seem to have been employed no later than early 108 CE, with a brief overlap. From late 107 or early 108 CE onward, multi-piece instructions once again became the prevalent form of instruction manuscripts. Simply put, single-piece instructions were only used for a short twelve-to-eighteen-month period before being replaced again by multi-piece instructions.



<sup>54</sup> Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu 2019, vol. 3, 104, tablet 984.

<sup>55</sup> Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu 2020, vol. 5, 62, slip 1703.

## Writing Supports and Rulership in the Linxiang Government

The previous section has shown that the writing supports and forms of the ‘the lord’s instruction’ manuscripts exchanged between multi-piece and single-piece in the government of Linxiang county in less than two years. Rather than serving as the sources of single-piece instructions, multi-piece instructions were likely produced in the same administrative procedure and performed an authorising function identical with their single-piece counterparts. Such a rapid transition of the material forms of the ‘lord’s instruction’ manuscripts does not seem to have been prompted by any order of the central authorities, as such institutional reforms tended to be more long-lasting. Hence, the more conceivable impulse was the demand of the so-called ‘lords’—that is, the Prefect—or the leading subordinate officials of Linxiang county. The seemingly arbitrary transition calls into question the standardisation of administrative documents. What were the factors that encouraged the local ruler(s) to impose such changes over a few years?

Comparing the contents of the texts of the published single-piece and multi-piece instructions, the affairs they address and the number of words they carry show no salient differences. For instance, Examples 4 and 5 discussed earlier entail criminal cases such as abscondence and murder; these themes can also be found in Examples 1 and 3. Additionally, the average length of the texts of twenty complete single-piece instructions amounts to 90.8 characters, whereas that of the four intact multi-piece is 82.25 characters. In this light, we may exclude these two factors from the list of possible reasons.

Moreover, the transition of material forms may not even be caused by a change in magistrate. While the diverse *nuo* (*ruo*) autographs displayed in the last section do hint at such a scenario,<sup>56</sup> the styles of some of these autographs are not far removed from each other. For instance, the upper part of the *nuo* 1b specimen on tablet 1285 was written in a “” shape. If its two vertical strokes are extended, the part will become the elongated “” characteristic of *nuo* 2. Hence, it may even be that *nuo* 1b and *nuo* 2 were created by the same person. Likewise, both types *nuo* 2 and *nuo* 3 share not only the elongated, curved vertical stroke, but also a similar orthography. Taking the chronology of instruction manuscripts developed in the last section into consideration, in an extreme case, it is even possible that the oscillation between the multi-piece and single-piece instructions might have taken place during the term of the same magistrate.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Li Songru 2016, 169.

<sup>57</sup> As noted earlier, the signing of “*nuo* (*ruo*)” could in theory only be executed by the County Prefect. If the Prefect was absent, an instruction manuscript, regardless of whether it was a single-piece or multi-piece, would state his whereabouts or condition. Published Wuyiguangchang materials such as tablet 392 and slips 295, 437 and 2362 reveal that the Linxiang County Prefect since 109 CE was Yin Dan 殷丹. However, to date there is no information on the name of the Prefect prior to this time, although an undated record (tablet 99) indicates the transition of the Prefect.



Putting the factors discussed above aside, what were the irreplaceable advantages that propelled the ruler to return to multi-piece instructions? To tackle this question, we may look at the two unique features of multi-piece instructions. First, in such manuscripts, the last wooden tablet with which the magistrate's authorisation is inscribed sometimes carry an extra remark after the "approved" statement, which is absent from the single-piece instructions.<sup>58</sup> The published Wuyiguangchang material comprises five multi-piece instructions that include the magistrate's extra remarks:

**Tab. 7:** Texts and translations of instructions that contain extra remarks.

Original Texts	Tentative English Translations	Serial nos.
君教：諾。勅獄、司空條【言？】 <input type="checkbox"/>	The lord's instruction: Approved. Order the prison and the office of convict labour to [report?] in columns...	CWJ1③:306-2 <sup>59</sup>
君教：諾。送第十七連道。字(?)	The lord's instruction: Approved. Escort the number seventeen to Lian march. Word[?]	310 <sup>60</sup>
君教：信真臧非。	The lord's instruction: Xin's [words] are authentic whereas [those of] Zang are wrong.	601 <sup>61</sup>
君教：諾。勿錄問。	The lord's instruction: Approved. Do not examine and inquire.	1271 <sup>62</sup>
君教：諾。舊故有例者，前何故不署？	The lord's instruction: Approved. In the past there was someone who inspected [that region], why did you not station [this person] from the outset?	1308

All the listed remarks were added in response to affairs enumerated in the subordinates' deliberations, meaning that the tablets had to be accompanied by other manuscripts. It is worth noting that tablet 601 does not contain the "*nuo (ruo)*" of the magistrate, even though there should have been one in view of other examples. That said, this remark was still reminiscent of other instructions, in that it aims at deciding

<sup>58</sup> Takatori Yuji also observes this feature. He argues that it implies single-piece instructions were made after the deliberations were acknowledged by the County Prefect, thereby attesting his proposition that multi-piece instructions were the precursors of single-piece instructions: Takatori 2021, 258–259.

<sup>59</sup> Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu xuanshi 2015, 70.

<sup>60</sup> Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu 2018, vol. 1, 156, tablet 310.

<sup>61</sup> Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu 2018, vol. 1, 2, 135, tablet 601.

<sup>62</sup> Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jiandu 2019, vol. 4, 87, tablet 1271.

certain matters. Regardless, this suggests that the real focus of these tablets was on the remarks rather than the *nuo* autograph. Equally important, the remarks on tablets 310 and 1308—both of which are written in cursive—occupy the whole recto, although the magistrates could certainly have executed them in a more spatially economic manner. Moreover, the space of the upper register of a single-piece instruction could handily accommodate these concise remarks. For example, the upper register of the above-mentioned CWJ1③:305 carries ten characters, whose number is only three less than that on tablet 1308.

A possible reason for writing on a separate tablet may be that it allowed a magistrate to sign and write in the way he preferred. To flaunt the political authority of the magistrate (i. e. the lord), the *nuo* (*ruo*) characters were often large, cursive and in some measure individualistic. As part of the magistrate's instruction, his remark also undertook an identical function and should thus have been written in a style like the *nuo* (*ruo*). What really mattered, therefore, was *how* rather than *what* one should write. In this respect, multi-piece instructions granted the magistrate more than enough space to express his ideas and exhibit his authority. This is an advantage that the single-piece instructions could not have offered.

The second unique feature of the multi-piece instructions is that the endorsements of the Vice-Prefect and the Head of a Bureau were always written separately on two individual bamboo slips. In contrast, such records were integrated into subordinates' deliberations in the single-piece instructions. Additionally, unlike multi-piece instructions, in which the scribes of a related Bureau were the personnel who proposed the deliberation, the same section in single-piece instructions always began with the names of the Vice-Prefect and the Head.<sup>63</sup>

Two hypotheses can be raised regarding this distinction. First, it may reflect an internal rearrangement of the responsibilities of Linxiang government officials between late 105 CE and mid-107 CE. As a result, the task of drafting deliberations to the magistrate was transferred from the Scribes of a Bureau to the Vice-Prefect and the Head of that Bureau. Second, the scribes were always in charge of this task and the change appeared in single-piece instructions that sought to express the division of accountability between officials more clearly—both visually and textually.<sup>64</sup> The second of the two theories seems more probable. Inasmuch as the Vice-Prefect and the Bureau Head were the superiors of the scribes, it seems unnecessary to transfer such a task to them, though they might have been responsible for presenting the deliberation to the magistrate in person.

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<sup>63</sup> Takatori 2021, 249–252.

<sup>64</sup> Takatori Yuji also contends that such records are only a simplified form of the “endorsement” section on multi-piece instructions. However, he suggests that this distinction indicates that the major goal of creating a single-piece instruction was to highlight the identities of the Head and the Assistant Prefect who approved the scribe's deliberation for future reference: Takatori 2021, 261.

Such an advantage of the materiality of multi-piece instructions is also embodied in the replacements for the ‘the lord’s instruction’ tablet. The Wuyiguangchang corpus includes the peculiar tablet 2571, whose inscription reads: “The Master’s instruction: I agreed with the deliberation of the Bureau” 卿教：如曹議。<sup>65</sup> Given that the text of this slip resembles those of the endorsement slips of the Bureau Head, the “Master’s instruction” (*qing jiao* 卿教) likely refers to the instruction of a Bureau Head or the Vice-Prefect. This may account for the absence of the “*nuo (ruo)*” signature on this tablet, as such officials were not qualified to perform this act. Additionally, on tablet 1830 is written: “I agreed with the report” (如白事), in which the character “事” (*shi*) is inscribed in a considerably larger size and more cursive than the preceding graphs. These traits echo the magistrate’s signatures on instruction manuscripts.

In sum, the textual and material characteristics of tablets 2571 and 1830 suggest that they likely served to substitute the ‘the lord’s instruction’ tablet when the County Prefect was not in office and thus could not approve the deliberation. Notably, this practice was only possible in the multi-piece instructions, where the accountability of the Vice-Prefect and the Bureau Head was recorded on separate slips. In other words, the format of multi-piece instructions allowed the reader to better understand who actually approved a deliberation, rather than simply attributing it to the absent magistrate. This may prompt the revival of such a form in 108 CE. However, such an advantage came at a price. Although the multi-piece instruction may better demonstrate the mutual accountability of officials who took part in the administrative procedure, the ruler’s authority became less pronounced when the tablet carrying his “*nuo (ruo)*” signature was merely placed alongside other slips, instead of catching the user’s immediate attention as in a single-piece instruction. In this respect, the back and forth between multi-piece and single-piece instructions somewhat manifests the dynamics between the pragmatic concern over a more efficient administration and the better expression of rulership.

Regardless of the motivations behind this phenomenon, it in itself indicates that the choice of writing supports and material forms of administrative documents could be remarkably flexible. The seeming lack of consistency in the writing supports urges us to reconsider when and to what extent standardisation would have been imposed on administrative documents. On the one hand, it may be because the magistrates’ instructions were primarily circulated internally within the county headquarter and therefore were more casual in its writing materials and forms. On the other hand, such swift transitions indicate that although the Qin and Han central authorities had evidently instituted manifold regulations to standardise administrative documents, considerable leeway in relation to government affairs was left to the discretion of the local ruler and their subordinates.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Changsha Wuyiguangchang Dong Han jian du* 2020, vol. 6, 124. For the meaning of “*ru*” (如) in this context: Takatori 2021, 240–247.

<sup>66</sup> Thies Staack also makes a similar observation based on the layout of grain disbursal tallies in the Liye corpus: Staack 2023, 169.

Within a permissible range—which was often circumscribed by the contemporaneous framework of standardisation—administrative units on different levels of the political hierarchy across different regions might have developed their own individual practices, which were contingent upon the customs of an organisation (such as a scriptorium, a secretariat) or the preference of a magistrate and the responsible officials. Interestingly, the flexible choice of writing supports of instruction manuscripts is in line with the nature of ‘the lord’s instructions’, whose promulgation manifested the local ruler’s authority and was independent of the central government’s regulations and interests.<sup>67</sup> In this respect, the flexible forms of instruction manuscripts may result from the fact that the central government did not set a strict standard for the forms of such documents in view of the local ruler’s authority. This in some measure reflects the limit of the central government’s power.

That said, official standards were not the only restriction imposed on the users of written artefacts. Rather, users’ choices would inevitably be structured by contemporaneous manuscript culture. The employment of relatively narrow wooden tablets in multi-piece instructions is a good example of such influences. Given the almost negligible differences between the width of such tablets and double-column slips, the former could be easily replaced by the latter. However, the officials in Linxiang still troubled themselves to produce these wooden tablets and use them exclusively to carry the authorisation of the magistrate in multi-piece instructions.

The insistence of the Linxiang officials may be under the influence of the cultural implications of tablet. Eastern Han sources reveal that tablet, as a writing support, was often associated with reporting to one’s superior. The following anecdote vividly portrays such a function of tablet:

Meanwhile [the fifteenth year of the Jianwu reign; (39 CE)], commanderies each sent their messengers to report affairs, and the emperor [Emperor Guangwu 光武帝] saw that a tablet owed by the official from Chenliu [commandery] was inscribed; When he looked at it, [the text] reads: “[You] may ask [the officials] from Yingchuan and Hongnong [commanderies], but not those from Henan and Nanyang [commanderies].” The emperor interrogated this official about the cause and background [of the statement on the tablet], and the official refused to confess, falsely claiming that he got the tablet on Changshou street. This angered the emperor. By the time, Xianzong (Emperor Ming; Guangwu’s successor), who was the Duke of Donghai and aged twelve, said behind a curtain that: “This official should have received the order of the Commandery [Governor], who wished to attain a number of cultivated fields comparable [with his colleagues].”

時諸郡各遣使奏事，帝見陳留吏牘上有書，視之，云「潁川、弘農可問，河南、南陽不可問」。帝詰吏由趣，吏不肯服，抵言於長壽街上得之。帝怒。時顯宗為東海公，年十二，在幄後言曰：「吏受郡勅，當欲以墾田相方耳。」<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> As Satō Tatsurō observes, the predominance of ‘the lord’s instruction’ documents should be put in the context of relatively weak central authorities during the Eastern Han period: Satō 2021, 289.

<sup>68</sup> Fan Ye, *Hou Hanshu*, vv. 22, 780–781.

The concise remark of the Chenliu Governor resembles those on the multi-piece instructions discussed above, although it seems unlikely that the tablet was an instruction made by the Governor; otherwise the emperor would have immediately recognised the person who articulated the remark. Indeed, the context indicates that the tablet was to assist the Chenliu official when he orally reported the affairs of his commandery to the emperor. Thus, the remark on the tablet might have been written by the official himself in order to remind him of the crucial terms that he should or should not have mentioned. This confirms that as a type of writing support, a tablet facilitated not only written but also oral communication.

The close connection between tablet and reporting is also reflected in contemporary terminologies. Wang Chong, for instance, often described tablets using compounds such as “*zou du*” 奏牘 or “*du zou*” 牘奏, both of which literally mean “tablets for memorials.”<sup>69</sup> A similar term also appears in an anecdote of Zhang Ji 張既:

[Zhang] Ji's ancestry was an ordinary family, and he was a person who maintained a decent appearance and decorum. From a young age, he practiced his craft at writing letters and served as a junior official at the *menxia* of the commandery, thereby making his family rich. He regarded himself as coming from a humble background and thought that there was no way that he could establish himself by his own efforts. He thereupon always carried high quality writing-knives, brushes, and boards for memorials with him, waited and immediately gave [them] to those prominent officials when they ran out of their own stationery, thereby making acquaintances with them.

既世單家，為人有容儀。少小工書疏，為郡門下小吏，而家富。自惟門寒，念無以自達，乃常畜好刀筆及版奏，伺諸大吏有乏者輒給與，以是見識焉。<sup>70</sup>

In this context, the word “board” (*ban* 版) should be equivalent of tablet (*du*),<sup>71</sup> and the term “prominent officials” (*dali* 大吏) likely denotes subordinate officials who held important posts such as the Head of the Bureau of Merit or the Master of Accounts.<sup>72</sup> Such subordinate officials likely maintained frequent communication with the magistrate. This undoubtedly created an incessant demand for tablets, which were the pivotal writing support for reports. Taking this a step further, one may even say that the affordance of tablets was to help report to one's superior. This may account for the use of wooden tablets in multi-piece instructions, as these documents were also reports presented to the magistrate. In this respect, although the magistrate of Linxiang could have the authority to deliberately change the form of instruction manuscripts, the choices were still circumscribed by the manuscript culture of his time.

<sup>69</sup> Huang Hui, *Lun Heng jiaoshi*, vv. 12, 551; *Ibid.*, vv. 13, 607.

<sup>70</sup> Chen Shou, *Sanguo zhi*, vv. 15, 471.

<sup>71</sup> Note that such usage differs from those in a Qin regulation and *Lun heng*, both of which distinguish between *ban* and *du*. See: Staack 2018, 253–254. That said, the *ban* in the above passage clearly refers to a writing support similar to *du*.

<sup>72</sup> Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, vv. 83, 3400.

## Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have discerned the interplay between political authority of local rulers and the materiality of administrative documents through the study of the transition of the material forms of the “the lord’s instruction” manuscripts in Eastern Han China. To this end, it has first shown the diverse forms of multi-piece and single-piece instructions. Multi-piece instructions constituted bamboo slips that carried the subordinate officials’ report and the endorsement of the Vice-Prefect and the Head, as well as a wooden tablet signed by the magistrate to authorise the suggestion. In contrast, single-piece instructions were often inscribed on a wooden tablet that could accommodate five or more lines of writing. Both multi-piece and single-piece instructions can be supplemented by tablets and slips, thus further complicating the materiality of such manuscripts.

The second part of this article attempted to reconstruct a chronology of multi-piece and single-piece instructions. It argues that multi-piece manuscripts were replaced by single-piece in late 105 CE. Such a change was nonetheless reversed in 108 CE. Simply put, there was a transition between multi-piece and single-piece manuscripts in four years.

In addition to changes in magistrates, two unique features of multi-piece instructions may be the reason for the reversion from single-piece to multi-piece. First, in addition to the magistrate’s *nuo* (*ruo*), the wooden tablet of a multi-piece instruction sometimes carries his additional remarks, which are absent from the single-piece instructions. From this perspective, multi-piece instructions might have provided the magistrate more space to express his decisions and authority in the way that he preferred. Second, in the multi-piece instructions, the endorsements of the Vice-Prefect and the Head of a Bureau were always written on two individual bamboo slips respectively, rather than being integrated into the scribes’ report. This allows a clearer division of accountability between officials.

The swift, non-linear transition between multi-piece and single-piece manuscripts seems to delineate the boundary between central and local authorities. Despite the manifold standards instituted by the central government, local rulers retained certain autonomy in everyday administrative affairs. This probably led to various individual practices across different administrative units. That said, the choices of officials were never totally unconstrained. Rather, they were inevitably affected by manuscript culture of the time. For instance, the employment of relatively narrow wooden tablets in the multi-piece instructions may be ascribed to the fact that tablet was often associated with reporting to one’s superior. Such an affordance may account for the use of wooden tablets in the multi-piece instructions, which also comprise reports of subordinate officials.

Similarities in the Wuyiguangchang ‘the lord’s instruction’ manuscripts can also be found in the Zoumalou 走馬樓 corpus dated to the early third century CE. While most Zoumalou instructions are single-piece, both material and textual traits

suggest that they were not directly derived from the single-piece instructions in the Wuyiguangchang corpus. Materially, the published Zoumalou instructions are written on both wooden and bamboo tablets, although wood seems to remain the preferred material substrate;<sup>73</sup> the average width of these manuscripts is c. 3.97 cm.<sup>74</sup> It is noteworthy that there is a marked difference among the width of the Zoumalou instruction manuscripts. The average width of the twenty-four intact wooden tablets is c. 4.07 cm, whereas that of the three bamboo tablets only amounts to c. 3.17 cm. However, it is difficult to determine if such a discrepancy was caused by a deliberate choice of the scribes or by the higher shrinkage rate of bamboo. Overall, the 3.97 cm figure is almost 20% narrower than that of the Wuyiguangchang single-piece instructions.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, unlike the Wuyiguangchang instructions, the Zoumalou examples include only abstracts of subordinate officials' reports, which often occupy the right-hand corner of the tablets.

Content-wise, the Zoumalou instructions concern the verification of accounts and registers, whereas the extant Wuyiguangchang examples mostly deal with legal cases.<sup>76</sup> Rather than being incorporated into the text of the subordinates' reports, the "endorsement" section of the Zoumalou instructions were written separately like the multi-piece Wuyiguangchang examples. Likewise, records of the checking of officials such as the Master of Accounts became one of the required items; this also mirrors the multi-piece instructions from the Wuyiguangchang. These commonalities suggest that the Zoumalou instructions likely stemmed from their multi-piece, rather than single-piece, peers in Wuyiguangchang.

Conceivably, the changes that we can observe from the Zoumalou 'the lord's instruction' manuscripts were not the invention of the Wu 吳 regime, which ruled over the Linxiang region during the early third century CE. Rather, a Han stele that carries the text of an instruction datable to 182 CE reveals that most abovementioned textual changes were already in place prior to the end of the Eastern Han Empire.<sup>77</sup> The reason underlying this transition remains unclear. Perhaps this was because of the advantage of tablet as a writing support, which reduced the risks of losing texts due to broken binding strings, as well as of the layout of single-piece instructions, which displayed the ruler's authority more prominently. Thus, once officials discovered a way to incorporate the advantages of a multi-piece instruction — sufficient space and more intelligible expression of mutual responsibilities — into a single tablet, they adopted such a

<sup>73</sup> The official report of the Zoumalou instruction manuscripts remains unpublished. However, among the thirty-two instruction manuscripts listed in Xu Chang's 徐暢 book, only seven were written on bamboo tablets: Xu 2021, 73–86.

<sup>74</sup> The figure is calculated from the figures offered by Xu Chang, who has disclosed the measurements of twenty-seven intact single-piece instructions: Xu 2021, 73–84.

<sup>75</sup> For a similar observation, see: Sumiya 2021, 55.

<sup>76</sup> Sumiya 2021, 55.

<sup>77</sup> Sumiya 2014, 23.

form for the second time. Suffice to say that the Zoumalou examples once again illustrate how flexible the instruction manuscripts could be. Nevertheless, further study is required to track the trajectory of development of these intriguing materials.

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Abigail S. Armstrong

# Record-Keeping on the Estates of the Earls of Northumberland

## Drafts, Templates and Innovation?

Some of the documents that survive in the greatest volume from medieval England are manorial records.<sup>1</sup> They were produced in the course of the day-to-day management of estates and therefore provide a wealth of information regarding the rural economy and society, as well as lordship and landholding. The focus of this article is on four unusual early-sixteenth century documents that shed light on the complex, centralised system of accounting implemented on the estates of the earls of Northumberland at the very end of the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> Rather than examining the rolls solely for their contents, it

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**1** For an overview of manorial records, see: Harvey 1999; *The English Manor*, trans. by Bailey. For more detailed studies of the development, purpose and use of manorial accounting, see: Harvey 1976; c. f. Drew 1947; Stitt 1953; Campbell 2000. A large number of manorial accounts from a variety of landholders have been published, see for example: *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley; *Ministers' Accounts of the Warwickshire Estates*, ed. by Hilton; *Marcher Lordships of South Wales*, ed. by Pugh; Harvey 1976; *Durham Priory*, ed. by Britnell.

**2** I prefer to class these pre-Reformation accounts as late medieval, rather than early modern, as they contain the individual accounts of multiple manors enrolled together in a single document. Individual *compoti* are rarely found after the dissolution of the monasteries in the late 1530s, replaced instead with centrally produced composite accounts or specialist books: *The English Manor*, trans. by Bailey, 111. Enrolled accounts were not uncommon within medieval manorial records. They were most famously produced for the administration of the bishops of Winchester (the Winchester Pipe Rolls), but also for the estates of the duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster: Campbell 2003, 35–36. For the earls of Northumberland, individual accounts are uncommon; the majority survive as collations of multiple accounts in one document, ranging from a few manors in a barony to all the accounts pertaining to the estates in a county. For example, eleven individual accounts from manors and officials pertaining to the barony of Prudhoe for the year 1473–1474 are enrolled together on an exchequer-style roll: The Archives of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle (hereafter Alnwick Castle), Sy: C.VIII.6a. A sixteenth-century enrolment of Northumberland accounts (Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5a) is discussed in detail below.

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This publication originated in the Collaborative Research Centre 933 'Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies' (subproject B10 'Rolls for the King. The Format of Rolls in Royal Administration and Historiography in the Late Middle Ages in Western Europe'). The CRC 933 is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). This research would also not have been possible without the kind permissions of the Duke of Northumberland and Lord Egremont to access, cite and reproduce in this article some of the accounts of the earls of Northumberland held in their respective archives at Alnwick Castle and Petworth House. I would also like to thank the participants of the Keeping Record Workshop, as well as Christopher Hunwick, Linda Mosig and Maree Shirota for their comments and feedback on various drafts of this article.

also considers the materiality of the records. Focussing on the processes of drafting these accounts suggests the sophistication and standardisation of the administrative practices in the northern estates of the late medieval earls of Northumberland.

The thirteenth century witnessed changing estate management practices and the increased burden of written proof. Written manorial accounts were adopted over the course of the century as landholders of estates of all sizes—both ecclesiastical and secular—switched from leasing lands to direct demesne exploitation. In comparison to leasing lands in return for a fixed rent, direct demesne management involved landlords appointing local officials (such as reeves and bailiffs) to cultivate the land and manage any stock (produce and animals) on their behalf.<sup>3</sup> The primary purpose of these written records was to establish the state of account between the lord and his official. These regular reckonings were used to calculate who was in debt to whom—most often the official was indebted to his lord—and by how much.<sup>4</sup>

In the fourteenth century, the declining and uncertain profits of direct exploitation prompted a return to leasing.<sup>5</sup> Instead of cultivating the lands themselves—and being subject to changeable harvests and fickle weather—landlords sought to secure a more stable income by leasing manors. Therefore, the burden of cultivation and the uncertainty of profitability was passed onto tenants who leased the lands for a fixed rent. However, it must be noted that the rental system was also not a guaranteed source of revenue, as difficulties in the fifteenth-century economy witnessed decreased rental incomes.<sup>6</sup> The reversion to leasing meant that only a small number of home farms were retained in hand by the landlord, largely to provide for the household.<sup>7</sup> Within the northern estates of the earls of Northumberland, almost all demesne lands were leased by the fifteenth century.<sup>8</sup> With the resumption of leasing, the importance of manorial accounts did not subside. Manorial officials were now charged with collecting the rents and other income of manors and written accounts remained an integral part in this process of accountability.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The troublesome term ‘demesne farming’ is avoided because of its confusing meanings in contemporary and medieval usage. In medieval usage, ‘farm’ meant rent, and ‘farmer’ the lessee: Harvey 1976, 12. Instead, the terms ‘direct demesne management’ or ‘direct exploitation/cultivation’ are used so as not to confuse the two different styles of estate management.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey 1976, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Dyer 1980, 113.

<sup>6</sup> For the decrease in rental income in the North East of England in the fifteenth century, see: Arvanigian 1996. For the wider difficulties facing landholders in the late Middle Ages, see: Bolton 1980, 220–236.

<sup>7</sup> Campbell 2000, 29.

<sup>8</sup> John Bean affirms that the demesne in the barony of Alnwick was already leased as early as 1314–1318, but not until the fifteenth century on the Yorkshire estates, although Bruce Campbell suggests that direct demesne cultivation never really took hold in the Northern counties: Bean 1958, 12–13; Campbell 2000, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey 1999, 35–36.

These late medieval manorial accounts recorded the flow of cash and the liability of officials and were presented at the annual audit. Each official accounted for how much money he was responsible for collecting and how much had been spent, delivered to the lord's coffers or remained uncollected. Once the official had proffered his version of events, the earls' auditors scrutinised the accounts, checking and updating the figures and even disallowing any sums, namely expenditure, that the official was unable to prove he was entitled to make. In order to test these claims, the auditor compared the account to other documents and paperwork. As a result, the accounting records produced needed to be well laid out, accurate and comprehensible so as to be presented as credible evidence.<sup>10</sup>

The account rolls extant today are the result of gathering and processing a large volume of data. This involved a multi-step production process as information was collated and formatted from verbal accounts, tallies, notes and memoranda used to produce drafts and then neat copies of accounts. Unfortunately, the majority of these intermediary draft documents and subsidiary records are no longer extant, but their traces are apparent in those that survive. Much of the preserved material consists of accounts that were produced for submission to the audit—and were subsequently annotated by the auditors—or clean copies prepared post-audit.<sup>11</sup>

A large—albeit incomplete—corpus of medieval manorial records survive for the earldom of Northumberland. From its creation in 1377, the earldom was predominantly held by one of the great northern families: the Percys.<sup>12</sup> With roots dating back to the Norman Conquest, the Percy family enlarged their estates in Yorkshire, acquiring lands across England through purchase and marriage. During the fourteenth century, attentions turned to the acquisition of land in Northumberland. They acquired the barony of Alnwick from Anthony Bek, bishop of Durham, in 1309, with what would become one of the principal seats of the family's estates, Alnwick castle. As a major landowner on the border with Scotland, the Percys played a key role in the Anglo-Scottish conflicts of the fourteenth century, for which they were rewarded with further grants of land in Northumberland and, finally, with the earldom in 1377. Acquisitions continued and within less than a century following their elevation as earls, the Percys held the castles of Alnwick, Cockermouth, Egremont, Langley, Prudhoe and Warkworth among others, five baronies, over 70 estates in Northumberland and 30 in Cumberland, extensive holdings in Yorkshire and manors in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Essex, Sussex, Somerset, Dorset and London.<sup>13</sup> Over the course of the fifteenth century, however, the fortunes of the Percy earls fluctuated. Twice their estates were forfeited to the Crown for rebellion, two earls were killed in battle, the territorial aggran-

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<sup>10</sup> Dobie 2015, 61.

<sup>11</sup> *The English Manor*, trans. by Bailey, 103.

<sup>12</sup> Given-Wilson 1987, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Given-Wilson 1987, 132–135. For a list of Percy estates at the beginning of the fifteenth century, see: Bean 1958, 158–160.

disement of their rivals—the Nevilles of Middleham—threatened their position and their estates declined in value. Nevertheless, by the end of the century, the Percy earls of Northumberland held an unchallenged position as the greatest magnates north of the River Trent.<sup>14</sup> The Percy supremacy ended with the death of the sixth earl, Henry Percy, in 1537, resulting in the reversion of the earldom back to the Crown.<sup>15</sup>

The estate of the earls of Northumberland was extensive and spread over multiple counties in England. The efficient management of these lands necessitated a complex administrative structure of financial responsibility. The hierarchy of administrators utilised by the earls was comparable to the predominantly threefold system employed across England. On the ground level, the manorial official or lessee was responsible for individual manors. At the next rank, the local receiver collected money from manors in a specific administrative area and accounted to the receiver-general who headed the financial hierarchy and passed cash to the lord and his household.<sup>16</sup> However, the administration of the earls of Northumberland does not appear to have been headed by a receiver-general, but rather a keeper of the coffers, to whom the receivers paid the revenues they collected.<sup>17</sup>

The extant accounts of the earls predominantly correspond to the first two levels of the administrative hierarchy, at the level of the manor or the local county receivers. Rather than surviving as individual documents, the records of the manorial officials (predominantly reeves but also collectors) survive as enrolled accounts, whereby the accounts of numerous manors and officials for one year were entered together in a single document. These records do not survive as an unbroken series of successive accounts, but rather sporadically and in greater number from the fifteenth into the sixteenth century. The focus of this article is on four enrolled accounts—two corresponding to manors in Northumberland and two pertaining to the Yorkshire estates—that demonstrate a sophisticated, multi-step process of record-keeping within the earls' estate administration and perhaps innovation. The first part of this article describes the four accounts in detail, outlining their contents and how they differ from other manorial accounts. The second part then turns to their purpose and function within the administrative practices of the earls.

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<sup>14</sup> Bean 1958, 3–11; Emery 1996, 37.

<sup>15</sup> For the dissolution of the Percy estates, see: Bean 1958, 144–157.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey 1999, 37.

<sup>17</sup> A receiver-general only appears to have acted in the southern estates of the earls from c. 1498, although he still delivered revenues to the keeper of the coffers: Bean 1958, 161.

## Description and Contents of the Rolls

The first of the four documents examined in this article contains summaries of accounts for the Northumberland manors pertaining to the years 1531–1534.<sup>18</sup> It is an exchequer-style roll of 90 paper membranes (called rotulets in this format). Each sheet is stacked one on top of the other and stitched together at the head, forming a flip-chart-like gathering. In its current state, the accounts have been rebound within a leather wrapper. This wrapper extends from the head of the first rotulet, over the top of the gathering and covers the back of the last rotulet, stitched into place at the head by thick thread through all 90 membranes (see Fig. 1 below). The rotulets are then folded in half from the bottom upwards, with the longer leather cover wrapping around the entire bundle and secured in place with a thread tie. This nineteenth-century rebinding obscures the original construction of the document, nevertheless, its current state and the internal layout of the information within the accounts suggests that it was originally constructed as an exchequer-style roll of at least 90 rotulets, each consisting of a single paper membrane. Rather than folded, the document would have been stored rolled, from the stitched head to the bottom, forming a rather chunky paper roll.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the rebinding, the document has also been repaired slightly. Most of the conservation work is concentrated predominantly on the first two and final six rotulets of the gathering. These outermost layers were the most susceptible to damage in the roll format — again, suggesting that the document was originally rolled. The text of the accounts is then entered from head to foot, the length of each membrane. As each rotulet is turned, the text continues in the same direction, running from the head of the dorse onto the front of the next rotulet in the gathering.

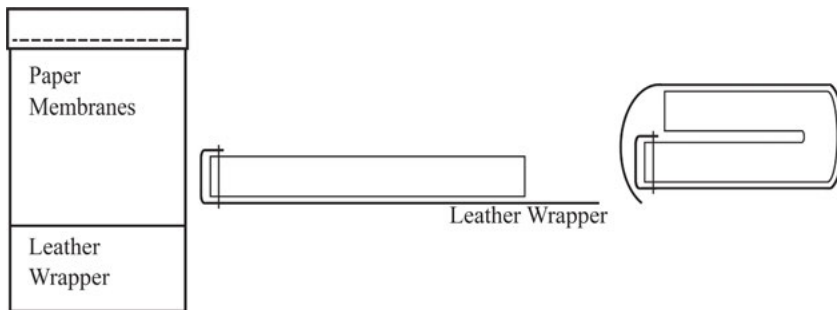


Fig. 1: Wrapper of The Archives of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b.

<sup>18</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b.

<sup>19</sup> Two of the other accounts discussed in this article are currently rolled. Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5c has a later parchment wrapper added for protection to the outermost rotulet and is rolled. Petworth House Archives (hereafter PHA) 13330 has a blank last paper membrane with an additional parchment wrapper added at the foot to protect the accounts when rolled. The other, Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a, is currently stored flat in a folder, but would also originally have been stored rolled up.



Within this exchequer-style gathering, the accounts of the manors and officials of the earl's estates within the county of Northumberland are entered one by one. Starting with the account of the reeve of Alnwick castle, the roll contains 51 individual accounts. Each separate account—like all medieval manorial accounts—follows an identical structure: charge-discharge. A heading was entered at the top of the page naming the accounting official and the dates to which the account pertained. Then the account listed all receipts or income (the charges) for which the official was responsible, followed by any outgoings or expenditure made (the discharges) in the fulfilment of the office. The accounts were then submitted to the auditors for checking. The negotiation of the audit that followed was manifested materially on the accounts as the auditors would amend, add to and update the accounts and their figures. Charges could be allowed (cancelled) or respited (postponed for collection at a later date) by the auditors for certain payments that were acknowledged as being unobtainable. Conversely, discharges could be disallowed if expenditure was not permitted. The balance was then reckoned, deducting the outgoings total from the receipts total to work out the indebtedness of the official to his lord. Sometimes, the account would balance and the official would be quit or clear. Occasionally, the expenditure outweighed the income, with the official owed money from his lord to reimburse his work. Most frequently however, the receipts exceeded the expenditure and the officer would be indebted to his lord. If the official held any of this cash in hand, he could pay it during the audit to reduce his indebtedness. Further sums were also commonly allowed or respited. If this did not clear the official's account, the outstanding sums owed were listed at the foot of the account and the figure translated on to next year's account as arrears, for which the official was accountable until they were collected.<sup>20</sup>

The receipts listed in these accounts did not necessarily correspond to actual cash received by the official for that year, but rather the sum for which the reeve or bailiff was answerable. Instead of recording the amount of cash actually received by the official, it stated the sum the official ought to have collected on his lord's behalf from the manor or office for which he was responsible.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the outgoings could involve any reductions to these expected receipts (such as the decline in the value of lands or leases remaining vacant), as well as any fees, payments or costs (such as repairs) for which the official was permitted in the execution of his role.

In this respect, this enrolled summary account of Northumberland manors is not unusual. What makes this account different from the others is that it does not pertain to one accounting year, but rather three. Usually within the enrolled accounts of the earls of Northumberland, each of the individual officials' accounts for the same year

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<sup>20</sup> In the reconstruction of the 1524–1525 account for Tughall (Fig. 2), the reeve owed £ 11 6 s 4 d after his expenditure accounts had been deducted from the receipts. No further allowances or deliveries were made during the audit and as such, the account continues by listing the outstanding sums which still needed to be collected in the *unde super* subsection: Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5a rot. 3d.

<sup>21</sup> Dyer 1980, 5, 162.

were collated together, creating a gathering of all the officials' accounts for one year. For example, all the accounts of the various manors and officials within the county of Northumberland for the year 1524–1525 (from Michaelmas in the sixteenth year of the reign of King Henry VIII [29 September 1524] to the same feast of Michaelmas in the seventeenth year of the same king [29 September 1525]) were enrolled together in a parchment exchequer-style roll.<sup>22</sup> In comparison, this enrolled summary of accounts for Northumberland included 51 different officials' accounts for the 24th (1531–1532), 25th (1532–1533) and 26th (1533–1534) years of Henry VIII's reign.<sup>23</sup> This collation, moreover, was not just the enrolment of all accounts for the 24th year, followed by the accounts for the 25th and then the 26th year. Instead, it was much more innovative; the figures for all three years were entered on the same page. In order to collate the information coherently for three successive years, it was necessary to amend the layout that was commonly used throughout the earls' medieval financial accounts. The typical layout will be outlined first, before explaining how the scribes cleverly manipulated this framework to add multiple years' worth of figures on the same page.

The late medieval accounts of the earls of Northumberland—like the majority of his peers—utilised a specific standard layout. This framework was common no matter which form the account took, be it a roll or a booklet. As has been reconstructed in Fig. 2 below, the membrane or page was divided into a series of columns that would help to frame the text of the accounts. These lines were very rarely drawn, but could be dry-point ruled or folded.

Manor/Official Title	Heading of the Account		
Left-hand margin Section subheadings	Entry	Centre line Subsection Total	Right-hand margin
Example layout showing how different subsections are entered on the framework based on the 1524–1525 account for Tughall.			
<b>Tughall</b> <b>Account of John Clarke, reeve of the same for the said time</b>			
<b>Arrears</b>	The same accounts for £10 19s 2d of arrears from the last account of the preceding year	Total: £10 19s 2d	
<b>Income and Rents</b>	And of £21 10s 10d rendered for all income and rents of the same for this year, as in previous years	Total: £21 10s 10d	
	<b>Total receipts with arrears:</b> £33 4s 2d of which		
<b>Repairs to the mill with the expenses of the seneschal</b>	The same accounts in cash for the payments made towards the repair of the grain mills this year – 13s 4d. And in cash paid towards the expenses of the seneschal this year – 2s.	Total: 15s 4d	
<b>Cash deliveries</b>	And in cash delivered to John Horseley, the receiver of the lord, of the said issues	Total: £21 2s 6d	£21 2s 6d
	<b>Total allowances and deliveries:</b> £21 17s 10d. <b>And owes:</b> £11 6s 4d		
<b>Outstanding sums [unde super]</b>	John Scott and Thomas Roderford for part of the rents of the grain mill owed from the eighteenth year of the former king, Henry VII, in arrears and unpaid		70s
	William Henryson, reeve of the same, also owed from the eighteenth year		39s 10d

**Fig. 2:** Reconstruction of the framework for the text of the accounts using the 1524–1525 account as an exemplar: Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5a rot. 3d.

<sup>22</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5a.

<sup>23</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b.

As can be seen in the exemplar, the left-hand column was used for subsection headings to delineate the page, making it clear which entries belonged to which receipts or expenditure accounts. Each entry was written in the central portion of the membrane, with the figures entered at the start of the receipt entries and at the end of expenditure entries. The right-hand margin was used for certain expenditure subsections, such as cash deliveries, and the list of debts (*unde super*) after the state of the account had been reckoned. Each entry for these subsections connected to its corresponding figure in the right-hand margin with line fillers and brackets. The sums of any further allowances or respites permitted during the audit followed the “and owes” (*et debet*) figure. With each line of text, the writing of this audit discussion crept back a little to the left, line-by-line, stretching back from its more central starting position to the left-hand margin (see, for example, Figs. 3 and 4).

This layout was almost ubiquitous among the late medieval manorial accounts in medieval England. From their inception during the thirteenth century, manorial accounts were remarkably unchanged. Rodney Hilton pointed to the use of treatises as the cause of such standardisation.<sup>24</sup> The popularity of these handbooks or manuals for the audit process meant that they were frequently copied and were widespread in the fourteenth century. Nevertheless, they did not outline the recording of information on parchment or paper.<sup>25</sup> The striking uniformity across various different estate administrations in England has led Mark Bailey to suggest that there were “medieval management schools for scribes and estate administrators”, although there is no evidence for such schools.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, this framework was altered in the 1531–1534 roll, in order to allow the accounts for three years to fit on the same membrane.<sup>27</sup> As can be seen in the image and reconstruction (Figs. 3 and 4), this was done by adding a column before the right-hand margin; the centre line was no longer added. The text of the entries was still entered within the central portion of the membrane, although subsection headings—other than the list of outstanding sums subheading—were omitted. Instead, the new right-hand column, as well as the left- and right-hand margins were used to enter the corresponding figures for every entry for each year. After all the figures for the receipts and expenditure accounts had been added, the balance of the accounts was reckoned, one by one in chronological order. If there were still outstanding sums following any further respites or allowances permitted during the audit, the list of debtors would be added below. Once this was completed for one year, the next year would follow suit. After all three years’ accounts had been reckoned, the next manor or official’s account was entered in a similar fashion, generally starting on a new rotulet.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ministers’ Accounts of the Warwickshire Estates*, ed. by Hilton, xi. The use of templates and specimens is discussed below.

<sup>25</sup> *Walter of Henley*, ed. by Oschinsky, General Introduction.

<sup>26</sup> *The English Manor*, trans. by Bailey, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b.

There are three other extant accounts that also use a similarly altered framework. Another exchequer-style roll survives consisting of 57 paper rotulets containing summarised accounts of the manors in Northumberland.<sup>28</sup> It follows a very similar layout to the 1531–1534 roll, with large left- and right-hand margins and a column for figures before the right-hand margin. Nevertheless, the accounts entered on the roll only correspond to one year (1536–1537), ending at Michaelmas in the 29th year of King Henry VIII's reign (29 September 1537). The left- and right-hand margins are predominantly blank, suggesting that space was being left for successive accounts to be added. This is also evident in the numerous blank rotulets of the roll, intended for the final reckonings of each year's accounts and any subsequent list of debts to be added. Nevertheless, none were entered. The way in which the account has been audited demonstrates that this special framework was no longer necessary; auditors' notes added to explain why figures have been altered or disallowed are permitted to extend into the right-hand margin. While it seems that the original intention was to continue to enter the manorial incomes for the next two years on the account, by the time the audit took place post-September 1537, the lands were no longer held by the Percy earls. The death of the childless sixth earl in 1537 resulted in the reversion of the earldom to the Crown.<sup>29</sup> From this point onwards, the lands would be subject to the audit of the royal Exchequer with its own accounting and record-keeping practices. Therefore there was no longer any use for the two margins prepared by the earls' administrators to add the figures for successive years.<sup>30</sup> Although incomplete, this account was nevertheless drafted with the intention of entering the accounts for consecutive years on the same page, just like the 1531–1534 roll.

Another extant roll that works on a similar principal is the 1525–1527 damaged collation of summarised accounts of the earl's estates in Yorkshire.<sup>31</sup> The exchequer-style roll consists of 52 extant paper rotulets with 35 individual accounts—although originally this gathering may have contained more, as the first extant rotulet begins midway through an account. Its layout is identical to the other two rolls described above, with a left- and right-hand margin and a column before the right-hand margin. The left-hand margin remains mostly empty, with the corresponding figures for the eighteenth (1525–1526) and nineteenth years (1526–1527) of Henry VIII's reign entered in the right-hand column and right-hand margin of each account respectively.

The final extant account also pertains to the earls' manors in Yorkshire and is the earliest of all the four accounts discussed in this article.<sup>32</sup> It consists of 20 paper

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<sup>28</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5c.

<sup>29</sup> Bean 1958, 144–157.

<sup>30</sup> On the third rotulet, for example, a series of decayed rents figures have been disallowed by the auditor's hand, striking through the original figure, correcting it to nil and adding a note that extends into the right-hand margin explaining why: Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5c rot. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a rot. 1.

<sup>32</sup> PHA 13330.

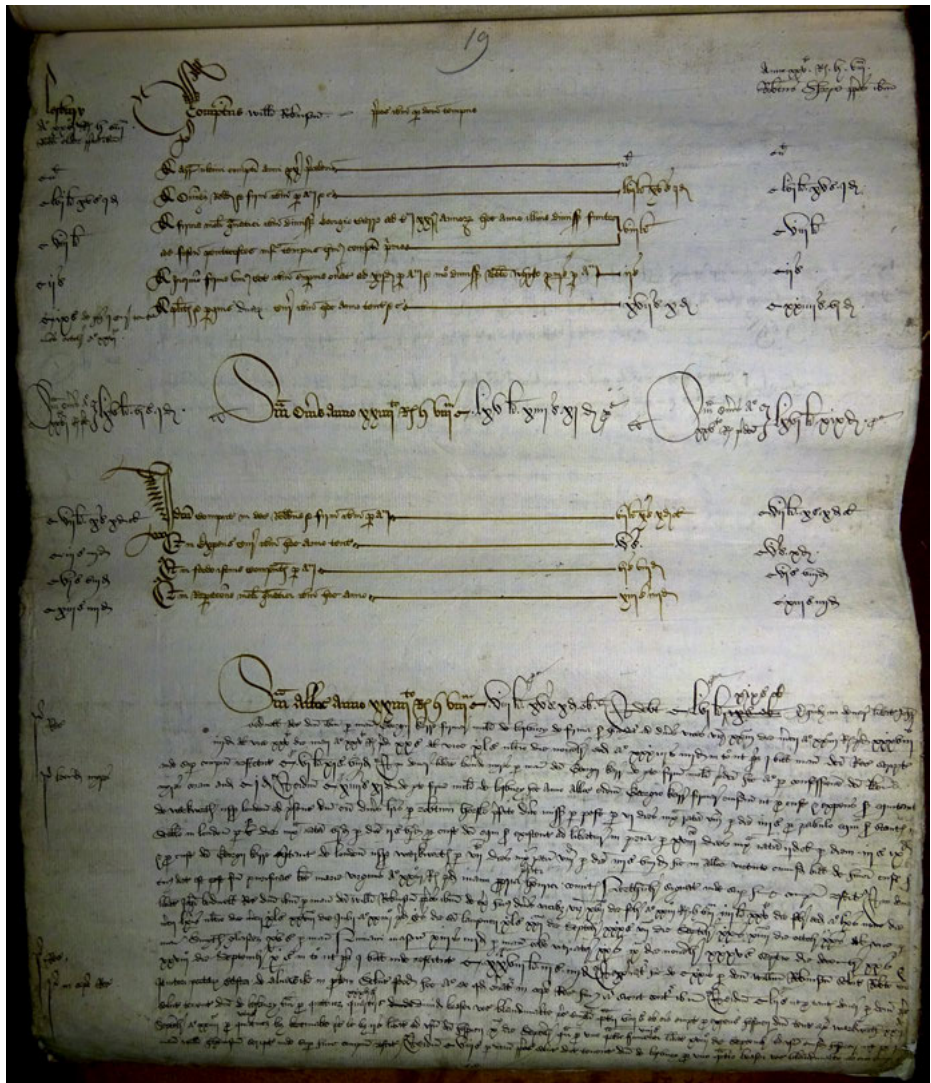


Fig. 3: Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b rot. 19 showing the account for Lesbury.

rotulets containing 20 different summarised accounts.<sup>33</sup> Like the 1536–1537 Northumberland roll, it pertains to only one year – the fifteenth year of the reign of Henry VIII (1522–1523) – however, the framework consists of only a left- and right-hand margin. There is no additional right-hand column for figures. Nevertheless, the framework is utilised in the same fashion. The central portion of the membrane records each of the

<sup>33</sup> Each account does not inhabit its own rotulet and is of varying length.

Manor/Official Title	Heading of the Account, Year 24		
Left-hand margin		Right-hand column	Right-hand margin
Year 26 Heading			Year 25 Heading
Figures for account of year 26	Entry	Figures for account of year 24	Figures for account of year 25
	Total all receipts or allowances		
Reconstruction based on the 1531–1534 account for Lesbury.			
<b>Lesbury</b>	<b>Account of William Robinson, reeve of the same for the said time [year 24 King Henry VIII]</b>		
<b>Year 26 Henry VIII Robert Elder, reeve</b>			<b>Year 25 Henry VIII Robert Sharpe, reeve</b>
-- nil	Of arrears of the last account -----	nil	-- nil
-- £56 15s 1d	Of all income and rents -----	£56 15s 1d	-- £56 15s 1d
-- 9s for one court held in Oct Year 26	Of profits of two courts held -----	17s 10d	-- 24s 6d
<b>Total Year 26 } £65 6s 1d</b>	<b>Total all receipts for year 24 Henry VIII -- £65 14s 11d</b>	<b>Total Year 25 } £66 19d</b>	
-- £7 10s 10.5d	The same accounts for decayed rents this year -----	£7 10s 10.5d	-- £7 10s 10.5d
-- 3s 4d	And in expenses of the courts held this year -----	5s	-- 5s 10d
	And in fees this year -----	6s 8d	-- 6s 8d
	And in repairs to the grain mill this year -----	13s 4d	-- 13s 4d
	<b>Total allowances for year 24 Henry VIII -- £8 15s 10.5d. And owes -- £56 19s 0.5d.</b> Of which respites, and allowances were granted or further cash deliveries made... etc. <b>And owes -- 19s 0.5d.</b>		
Outstanding ("super")	A number of tenants for various fines -----		3s 4d
	<b>Total allowances for year 25 Henry VIII -- £8 16s 8.5d. And owes -- £57 4s 10.5d.</b> Of which respites, and allowances were granted or further cash deliveries made... etc. <b>And owes -- 35s 1.5d.</b>		
Outstanding ("super")	The same Robert owes from issues of his office this year -----	35s 1.5d	
	<b>Total allowances for year 26 Henry VIII -- £8 14s 2.5d. And owes -- £56 11s 10.5d.</b> Of which respites, and allowances were granted or further cash deliveries made... etc. <b>And is quit.</b>		

Fig. 4: Reconstruction of the framework for the text of the 1531–1534 accounts of Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b rots. 19–21.

different entries of income and expenditure with the corresponding figures added in the right-hand margin.

Having described the workings of these unusual accounts, focus now turns to the purposes of their construction. The placement of multiple years’ worth of figures side by side on each account within a single document raises questions regarding their creation which can further our understanding of the earls’ record-keeping. Were these records intended as templates or an intermediary document used for the collation of information before the production of neat, individual accounts? Alternatively, were they a new type of record introduced to facilitate year-on-year comparisons of revenue and expenditure?

## Drafts, Templates or Innovation?

Most of the medieval manorial accounts that survive to this day were the fair copies produced post-audit rather than drafts or working documents.<sup>34</sup> These clean copies were drafted generally by a sole hand with little to no correction or emendation. Looking at the 1531–1534 roll it is clear that the document was not the final neat or clean copy produced after the audit. Instead, the changes in the handwriting, the colour of ink and the spacing of entries suggest that this account was a working document—written in stages as more information was known—that was then subject to the audit (see Fig. 3).

Paul Harvey outlined the three stages of drafting accounts. Firstly, the body of the account was drawn up before audit. Secondly, additions or alterations were made during the audit. Finally, any further notes or memoranda would be added to the account post-audit.<sup>35</sup> These accounts were drafted almost as fill-in forms, whereby the headings and main entries were added with gaps left for figures, names and dates to be added at a later stage once the information was known. These phases of production are clearly evident in the documents in question and are indicative of the complex administrative structures and procedures within the estates of the earls of Northumberland.

In the 1531–1534 roll, the main framework of the account was drafted first in an oxidised brown ink. This comprised the main heading of the account, the receipt and expenditure entries, as well as some of the known figures, such as sums that were fixed annually and could be found in other records of the earls' administration.<sup>36</sup> During the audit, the account was then completed. Any omitted figures and the official's name were added in a darker, black ink. All the figures were checked against other documents and were updated and corrected if they were erroneous. Other entries, particularly claims of expenditure, could be deleted from the account because the official was not permitted such expense or was not actually accountable for the sums. Often these entries were disallowed because sums had been paid by another official and could be found on their respective account. For example, on the Newham account, the profits of court entries were entered as "nil" for each year because the reeve for Ellingham was accountable for those sums, not the reeve of Newham. On the subsequent account—that of the Ellingham reeve—the profits of court for both Newham and Ellingham were entered.<sup>37</sup>

The audit phase was often quite destructive as figures were struck through and rewritten or entries—or even entire subsections—were excised from the account.<sup>38</sup> Following these amendments, the accounts were then totalled with the figures for

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<sup>34</sup> Harvey 1976, 58.

<sup>35</sup> Harvey 1976, 42–43.

<sup>36</sup> Such as expected rental income or permitted expenditure for fees or repair costs. For the standardisation of the accounts, see below.

<sup>37</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b rots. 30, 32.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, the account for the former Talbot lands held in Tynedale, where the expenditure

the total receipts and allowances statements completed before the account was reckoned. The same audit hand then added the discussion of the audit, whereby further allowances and respites were allowed or the official delivered more cash to the central office or to other officials of the earl in an attempt to clear his account. Finally, any outstanding debts were listed at the bottom of the account.

In any standard manorial account—consisting of only one-year’s account—this would have been the final stage and, if necessary, a clean final copy could be produced for storage as part of the earl’s central administration. Nevertheless, as outlined above, this 1531–1534 roll appears to have had a much more interactive afterlife than merely for consultation in later years. The numerous changes in ink colour indicate these accounts were subject to multiple hands over a long period of time as further accounts were added for later years.

Once the framework had been drafted in brown ink and the first-year’s accounts added in a darker ink, the account for the subsequent year was added. Again, the different stages of entering and auditing the accounts are visible. A short heading in the right-hand margin and the standard annual sums were entered using a black ink. At the audit, a slightly lighter, greyer ink has recorded the rest of the missing figures, totalled the accounts and added the corresponding reckoning for that year to the end of the account. The process was then repeated for a third year’s account in the left-hand margin with a black ink entering the first figures before a greyer ink completed and audited the account (see Fig. 3 and 5 for changes in the ink colour).

Evidence of the auditors checking the totals and arithmetic is also materialised on the accounts. As has been mentioned above, the final reckoning could include a series of entries whereby the total owed would be reduced through a series of allowed or respited sums, or even the official making further payments. This meant that the final statement of account—the total outstanding—may need to be recalculated on a number of occasions. These calculations were entered occasionally on the account using a system of dots, generally in the left-hand margin. As has been described by Charles Martin, a series of dots divided by perpendicular lines were used to represent the different sums of £sd.<sup>39</sup> Within the final reckoning of the Alnwick castle reeve’s account for the 26th year (1533–1534), the official owed over £35. During the negotiations of the audit, this sum was whittled down through a series of twelve further allowances, respites and payments, reducing the debt and resulting in a surplus of 4 s 3.25 d owed to the reeve. These further allowances were interspersed with totals as the outstanding sum was intermittently recalculated. Following an intermediary “and owes” statement, the dots in the margin correspond to the sum of five subsequent exonerations and was used towards calculating the amount that needed to be

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accounts were deleted and rewritten by the auditor’s hand, with new figures added: Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b rot. 86d.

<sup>39</sup> Martin 1910, xii–xiii.



deducted from the reeve's debt.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in the 1525–1527 Yorkshire gathering of accounts, the Healaugh reeve's final amount owed was calculated and represented by a series of dots in the margin.<sup>41</sup>

As the accounts were written in stages as more information became known and as each account was checked and reckoned as part of the audit, the scribes had to estimate how much space each account would require within the roll. In the 1531–1534 Northumberland enrolment, accounts generally start at the head of a rotulet, either on the front or dorse. The 1525–1527 gathering of Yorkshire accounts is more haphazard. Each individual account could be entered anywhere on the membrane where the scribe considered enough room had been left to complete the account. This could also result in more than one account being entered on the same side of a rotulet.<sup>42</sup>

The amount of space needed appears to have been difficult to judge. Sometimes there were numerous rotulets left blank that were surplus to requirement or, on other occasions, insufficient space was assigned for all the accounts to be entered. The space needed in the 1525–1527 enrolment of Yorkshire accounts was particularly poorly planned. The three accounts for Catterton, the collector of Spofforth and the bailiff of Spofforth were entered successively on rotulets 4, 4d and 5 respectively, with the heading of each account at the top of the membrane.<sup>43</sup> The Spofforth collector's account appears to have been much longer than foreseen.<sup>44</sup> Only half the membrane was left blank for the final reckonings at the audit for both years that were to be entered. The final reckoning for the eighteenth year of Henry VIII's reign contained a series of allowances, respites and further cash deliveries, meaning that the text filled the allotted blank space. This left no room for the final reckoning of the following nineteenth year. As a result, the scribe had to squeeze in over five lines of text into the gap between the end of the expenditure entries and the final reckoning for year eighteen. In order to do so, he used a smaller hand and began after the left-hand margin, stretching to the far-right-hand edge of the membrane. Nevertheless, he still had to write over the enlarged opening initial S of the final reckoning for year eighteen, disrupting the structure and layout and causing the two separate accounts to run into one another (see Fig. 5). Luckily both accounts were quit negating the need to enter a list of debtors to the ends of the accounts for which there was no space left to do so.

The hands, ink, spacing and evidence of mathematical calculations all indicate that these documents were working accounts produced for and edited during the audit, demonstrative of the multi-stage process of the annual audit on the earls' estates. They

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<sup>40</sup> Although a final entry was added before the final statement of the account: Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b rot. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a rot. 3.

<sup>42</sup> The account for Ergham (*Erghus*) was short so the Nafferton account was entered below it and continued onto the dorse: Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a rot. 44.

<sup>43</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a rots. 4, 4d, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a rot. 4d.

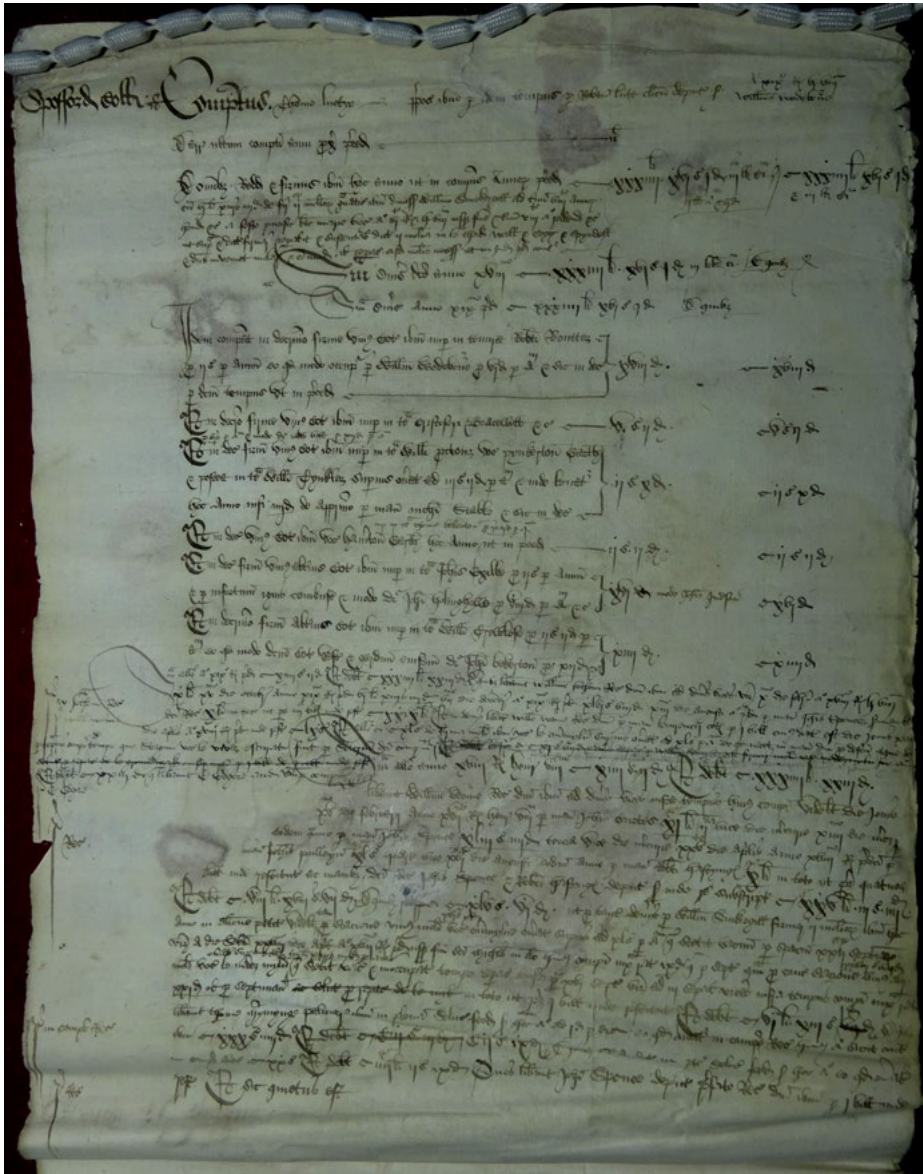


Fig. 5: Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a rot. 4d.

also exhibit some of the difficulties and pitfalls of collating financial information from various sources and drafting these records. Nevertheless, this is nothing new; numerous manorial accounts survive from this stage of the production process. What is unusual is that the enrolled accounts were produced for submission to the audit. Usually enrolled copies of accounts were fair copies produced after the audit as a final

record of the approved accounts for retention by the central administration. It was very unusual for enrolled copies to be audited.<sup>45</sup> What makes many of the documents discussed here even more intriguing is that they consist of more than one year's account in an enrolled format.<sup>46</sup> Attention must now turn to why these summary accounts containing multiple years' worth of figures on the same page were created.

As has been mentioned, the majority of medieval manorial accounts survive as much neater, clean copies of accounts for single years. Nevertheless, in order to produce these final versions, a wide array of other written materials—accounts, notes, drafts and memoranda—would need to be consulted. Yet very few of these documents survive, suggesting that they were predominantly discarded after use in the production of the extant accounts. The four summaries of accounts are perhaps chance survivals of these more intermediary documents used as templates for the production of further accounts.

From the mid-thirteenth century until c. 1400, as manorial accounting spread across England on estates of every size, so too did didactic literature, formularies and treatises on estate management and accounting.<sup>47</sup> As a result, accounts became increasingly formalised and standardised in their layout and presentation. Specimen accounts also existed and could take the form of an imaginary account, which a clerk could use as a guide for drafting the accounts of his lord. Some specimens were adapted for use on a particular estate and as a result, can easily be mistaken for genuine accounts.<sup>48</sup> The four rolls that are the subject of this article do not appear to be locally adapted specimens or fictitious accounts as they contain the actual accounts for the manors held by the earls in Northumberland and Yorkshire. Instead, I would suggest that these accounts were specifically produced with the aim of being an intermediary document, a draft or template used to collate the necessary financial information from a variety of other sources. Within this framework, the figures for multiple years could be entered on the same document—almost like a precursor to a spreadsheet of accounts for successive years—from which a final neat account for each individual year could be copied, once the accounts had been approved and finalised at audit.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Harvey 1999, 37.

<sup>46</sup> The only other reference I have found to similar documents are two “tabulated” accounts from the Duke of Buckingham’s estates, dating from the end of the fifteenth century: Rawcliffe 1978, 59. One of these rolls contains the account of the Caus receiver and the constituent manors for 1497–1501. Unlike the rolls described above, the Caus account is designed as a table. It contains four years’ worth of accounts (for the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth years of Henry VII’s reign) entered in four narrow consecutive columns towards the right-hand side of the membrane—the margins remain blank: British Library, Egerton Ch 2198.

<sup>47</sup> *Walter of Henley*, ed. by Oschinsky, 56. For examples of specimen accounts enrolled with treatises, see: *Ibid.*, 49–50.

<sup>48</sup> Harvey 1999, 26; Harvey 1976, 21.

<sup>49</sup> See Enno Giele’s contribution in this volume for the use of spreadsheet-like layouts in ancient Chinese manuscripts.

Yet this does raise interesting questions about why the earliest extant exemplar of enrolled summary accounts—that for the Yorkshire manors for 1522–1523—pertains to only one year.<sup>50</sup> It is the sole example of a roll of summary accounts intentionally drafted for a single rather than multiple years. The framework of the roll omits the right-hand column, but otherwise the layout of the accounts is very similar and the content—summarised accounts relating the key totals—is identical to the later extant examples. This roll may have been a model that inspired the accounts that followed with multiple years' worth of figures added on the same page. The left-hand margin is largely empty, devoid of almost all subheadings and the figures in the right-hand margin occupy relatively little space—although sometimes the auditor's annotations fill up more of this space. Therefore, it could be suggested that a scribe also saw this empty space on the page and rather than draft a new roll for the next year's accounts, decided instead to enter the figures in the left-hand margin, which then led to the insertion of another column for a further years' accounts in later iterations. It may have even been the same scribe or clerk who wrote all four accounts.<sup>51</sup> There are striking similarities in the hands, abbreviations, ligature forms and elaboration or decoration of letter forms, especially between the two 1520s Yorkshire rolls<sup>52</sup> and the two 1530s Northumberland rolls.<sup>53</sup> With this innovation, the scribe could save on labour, writing materials and storage space by recording multiple accounts on one rather than numerous rolls. Entering the figures for consecutive years side by side on the same page also facilitated the retrieval of multiple years' worth of financial information with the consultation of a single roll instead of multiple documents.

The increasing standardisation of the accounts in both content and layout permitted the use of such a template. By the sixteenth century, manorial accounts no matter to which estate they belonged, looked incredibly similar, albeit with contents reflecting the different circumstances on each manor. Moreover, as these documents concern fixed rents that were to be collected by the officials, the entries and figures recorded within them were also reasonably consistent. As there was generally very little differentiation in the types of receipts and expenditure from year on year, this may have allowed the use of a template. This in turn increased the standardised appearance of the accounts. Each official had a set number of receipts for which he was accountable. This included the rents of the manor, as well as any other income, such as profits of

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**50** PHA 13330.

**51** I am hesitant to state that all four accounts were the work of the same scribe. The discussion of the audit and the addition of figures over multiple years could be added in ink that has oxidised in different colours but similar hands. There is a high degree of standardisation in the hands across all the accounts produced by the earls' administration in the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries, indicative of a well-trained body of clerks perhaps using a house style. Patrick Conner has discussed how scribes in a monastic context mastered matched hands, which obscures the division of labour on the page: Conner 2013.

**52** PHA 13330; Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a.

**53** Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b; Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5c.

jurisdiction.<sup>54</sup> The same was applicable for expenditure. Certain officials had responsibility for paying the fees of others below them in the administrative hierarchy or were permitted annual expenditure towards the costs of maintenance and repairs of buildings, such as the manor mill. Even the figures for some of these accounts were entered with certainty—often before the audit—as they could be found in other documents, such as rentals or lists of fees.

The customary nature of the income accounted for is evident in the phrasing of the entries. In the Birling account, for example, entries state: “all income and rents this year, as in previous years” and “all allowances this year, as in previous years”.<sup>55</sup> The wording suggests a one-size-fits-all approach that allowed multiple years to be entered on the same account.<sup>56</sup> The one subsection omitted—that was often a regular feature of the Northumberland accounts—was the cash deliveries. Even though all cash surplus was meant to be delivered to the receivers in each county—and subsequently to the lord’s coffers—these sums were harder to regulate or standardise. The accounts of the foresters of Swinlees, for example, regularly consisted solely of receipts, which were delivered to the earl’s receiver.<sup>57</sup> In the 1531–1534 account, there are similarly no expenditure accounts, instead the receipts total is translated across into the outstanding debts subsection where it is then exonerated because the foresters had not been paid the fees of their office by the receiver.<sup>58</sup> Instead, the sums that were much more variable and depended on confirmation or approval were left for the final reckoning of the audit.

Once the account had been reckoned and approved at audit, this template could then be used to draw up a neat final copy of each account for individual years. Unfortunately, this theory is not greatly supported by the extant material, which provides little evidence to suggest that further documents were produced from these templates. There are no surviving corresponding accounts produced from the four extant summary of account rolls, either as separate accounts for individual years, or even as a clean post-audit enrolled copy, more neatly reproducing the multiple years’ worth of accounts for each manor on the same rotulet. This is, however, unsurprising considering the patchy survival of the earls’ manorial accounts. Furthermore, these extant accounts are devoid of any signs that could indicate that the accounts had been copied. Sometimes a series of dots might be entered in the margin alongside individual entries suggesting that the scribe was counting out the entries within a subsection, touching the paper with his pen to keep track.<sup>59</sup> There are also no signs of entries

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<sup>54</sup> For discussion of the various profits of jurisdiction, see: Dyer 1980, 174–176.

<sup>55</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b rot. 57.

<sup>56</sup> For the summary nature of the accounts, see below.

<sup>57</sup> Such as in the 1524–1525 account: Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5a rot. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.5b, rot. 11d.

<sup>59</sup> Anne Thick described such marks as a precursor to the modern audit practice of placing ticks against amounts as they were checked: Thick 1999, 274.

being deleted or crossed through to prevent the scribe copying the incorrect totals or final reckoning for year 24 onto the copy of year 25's account, for example. Additionally, there are no notes to indicate that the account had been engrossed elsewhere.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, there is one extant account that could indicate these summary rolls were used in the production of further accounts. One chancery-style roll contains a reformatted version of the information entered in these summarised enrolled accounts: a 1513–1514 receiver's account or valor of the Yorkshire manors written in English.<sup>61</sup> Valors were a type of survey of financial resources available to a lord and his administration. They summarised the expected income and expenses of each manor on the estate. These records could be compiled annually and were produced after the audit, based on the information from the accounts submitted to the audit.<sup>62</sup> In this 1513–1514 English account, each manorial official was entered one by one, listing the income and any expenditure he was accountable for before stating the net value—calculated by deducting the official's outgoings from his income.<sup>63</sup> At the end of the account, the cash surplus was calculated. The net income of each manorial official was added together and from this total subsequent expenditure (predominantly the payment of fees or the delivery of cash sums to other senior officials, including the keeper of the coffers—the head of the earls' financial administration—and the controller of the household) was deducted.

Although the accounts do not correspond to the same years, all the information in the 1513–1514 document appears to have been sourced from an enrolled summary of Yorkshire accounts, similar to the 1522–1523 and 1525–1527 rolls.<sup>64</sup> The total receipts, each item of expenditure and the balance for each manor could all be easily found in these templates. As this valor was only concerned with the figures entered onto such a template, which were easily identifiable in the columns and margins, it could explain

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**60** Other Northumberland accounts contain notes indicating that copies had been produced. See, for example, the enrolled Northumberland accounts for 1473–1474: Alnwick Castle, Sy: C.VI.2b. These accounts have been edited and printed but the editor omits these notes: *Percy Bailiff's Rolls*, ed. Hodgson.

**61** PHA 13335. This roll is very unusual, unlike any of the other accounts of the earls' surveyed, with a unique layout (each membrane is divided into five narrow columns) and written in English rather than Latin. The head of the roll is damaged and lost, obscuring the heading and the date to which it corresponds. The catalogue states 1513–1514, although this is difficult to verify as there are no other references to the date elsewhere in the extant membranes of the account: West Sussex Record Office Online Catalogue, <http://185.121.204.173/SearchOnline/default.aspx> (accessed 13.03.2023). The document may be a valor, but differs from similar records. It uses a different layout and language to the earlier fifteenth-century Latin valors and corresponds only to the Yorkshire manors, rather than as a survey of the entire estates of the earls. Similarly, the reckoning of the Yorkshire receiver's liability at the end of the account suggests the roll could be a receiver's account. Yet, the contents of this roll are summarised, whereas normally the earls' receivers' accounts are more detailed and focussed on solely the receiver's income and expenditure, not those of each individual manorial official.

**62** Harvey 1999, 38; Davies 1968, 214–217.

**63** PHA 13335.

**64** PHA 13335; PHA 13330; Alnwick Castle, Sy: X.II.6, Box 19.a.

the lack of traces of copying in these multi-year enrolments. The four rolls discussed in this article could possibly be the link demonstrating the transfer of information from each individual manorial account to wider surveys, such as this valor. The key totals provided in the full manorial accounts for each individual manor would be extracted and entered into these summary rolls, which were then used in turn to produce a further survey of the revenue of the estate for the year.<sup>65</sup>

Another reason to think that these accounts were intermediary documents is the material substrate of the rolls: paper. It has long been held that paper was predominantly used for drafts, introduced as a writing support in medieval England because it was cheap and more convenient—albeit less durable—than parchment. Documents intended for longer-term preservation, storage and archiving were copied onto the more robust material.<sup>66</sup> It is perhaps because of these long-held assumptions regarding the status of paper and its uses that resulted in the two gatherings for Northumberland being described in the catalogue at Alnwick as “draft accounts”.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, Orietta Da Rold’s excellent recent study of paper use in medieval England has challenged many of these assumptions, demonstrating that paper did not replace parchment and both materials were used concurrently to meet the demands of written administrative practices.<sup>68</sup> An account on paper does not necessarily mean it is a draft.

Paper documents are extant within the records of the earls’ financial administration for the northern counties from the 1470s. The majority of the paper accounts are in the booklet form. The use of paper in the exchequer-style roll format was uncommon, but not unheard of. There are only a handful of extant exemplars from the records of the earls, four of which are the focus of this article. This is not to suggest that paper was not used more frequently for the earls’ accounts, but perhaps more a remark on survival rates. For the enrolled accounts of the Northumberland manors, both paper booklets and parchment exchequer-style rolls remain extant. My wider study of the earls’ records has shown that paper was often used for the accounts submitted to the audit but parchment was preferred for the final post-audit versions of accounts.<sup>69</sup> That these summaries of accounts were subject to the hands of the audit fits this pattern. Moreover, as only four exemplars survive, they are perhaps chance survivals of documents unintended for long-term preservation. If these accounts were intermediary documents—namely templates that could be discarded once a subsequent version intended for long-term preservation was produced (on parchment)—the use of the more ephemeral material, paper, made sense.

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<sup>65</sup> These surveys could, of course, be produced while cutting out this middle step of using such templates.

<sup>66</sup> Ivy 1958, 37–38.

<sup>67</sup> Alnwick Castle, Catalogue of Class C records. The comparable Yorkshire account was somewhat incorrectly described as an “Account roll of the Receiver for the Yorkshire estates for year 18 Henry VIII”: Alnwick Castle, Catalogue of Syon House, Class X Records. Much work is currently underway at Alnwick Castle to update and modernise the catalogues.

<sup>68</sup> Da Rold 2020, 47–49, 114–116.

<sup>69</sup> For the use of paper and parchment within the earls’ record-keeping, see: Armstrong Forthcoming.

Another possibility is that these unusual documents are evidence of innovative record-types produced within the earls' administration that allowed for the comparison of accounts and figures over multiple years. The increasing consistency and standardisation of manorial accounting from its inception in the thirteenth century meant that accounts were more readily comparable from year to year.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps these documents were an attempt to facilitate this comparison with the accounts for consecutive years added side by side.

That the accounts related in the documents are not full accounts but rather summary accounts, supports this suggestion. The production of summaries of accounts was common across medieval estates. Variant copies of accounts—recording the same overall total financial sums but with different levels of subdivision of income and expenses—could be prepared and preserved.<sup>71</sup> At Durham Cathedral Priory, for example, some accounts survive in two versions: in a summarised version (where a single entry and total is given for each particular category of expense, as is the case with the earls' summaries discussed here) or a more detailed version with multiple entries under each category of expense or receipt.<sup>72</sup> Usually, these summaries were produced as part of the last stage of the production process, whereby working documents were drafted in great detail and audited, from which the cleaner, summarised final version was created.<sup>73</sup>

Instead of a full breakdown of every individual item of receipt or expenditure within each subsection of the account, summaries are provided. Rather than listing every individual rent that the reeve or bailiff was responsible for collecting, a total figure was found under the entry “all rents”. Similarly, the expenditure accounts were collated and grouped, providing the total for “all fees”. The accounts are supplying the headline figures, uninterested in the detail, offering a more accessible view of the key figures of receipts and expenditure, which could be compared year on year.

The combination of accounts over consecutive years on one document allowed for closer direct comparison, perhaps as a check to ensure efficient management across the estate, but also close supervision of the officials. With the accounts for multiple years on the same page, the central administration could easily see any discrepancies in income and expenditure from one year to the next. The survival of two accounts for the Northumberland estates (1531–1534 and 1536–1537) and a similar roll for the 1525–1527 Yorkshire accounts, all drafted with the intention of recording more than one year's worth of accounts on the same page, indicates that these rolls may have been produced more regularly than the surviving material suggests.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Dobie 2015, 156.

<sup>71</sup> Dobie 2015, 77.

<sup>72</sup> Dobie 2015, 140.

<sup>73</sup> Harvey 1976, 58.

<sup>74</sup> I would like to thank Christopher Hunwick for drawing my attention to the existence of further multi-year accounts in the archives at Alnwick Castle, although they all date from the 1570s and



Nevertheless, evidence that these accounts were used for comparative purposes is lacking. The earliest exemplar, the 1522–1523 Yorkshire enrolled accounts, was only ever intended to record one year’s worth of figures.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, at the end of each account, or even the entire roll, there was no comparative statement discussing or evaluating the consistency or fluctuations in the figures of the accounts. There was also no attempt made at reckoning profit or the profitability of each estate, although this was more common when the manors were directly cultivated rather than leased.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, these accounts were not an attempt at double entry bookkeeping, with money in entered on the left-hand side and money out on the right-hand side, implemented in late-medieval Italian city-states and by Italian merchants.<sup>77</sup> Instead, the accounts appear to have been produced and used solely as records of the accountability of officials.

The lack of comparative statements suggests that these accounts were not necessarily produced to facilitate year-on-year comparisons. Nevertheless, the layout utilised in these rolls made it very easy to see the differences or discrepancies in the annual receipts and expenditure, which perhaps negated the need for such a statement.<sup>78</sup> The ability to compare accounts year-on-year was perhaps a useful, albeit unintended, consequence of the time- and material-saving use of a template capable of holding multiple years’ worth of information for each manor on the same page. The variety of hands, ink and spacing, as well as the calculations in the margin, indicate that these were working documents produced for and edited during the audit. The increased standardisation of the contents, layout and presentation of account, in combination with the summaries provided, rather than detailed accounts, allowed the figures for subsequent years to be collated together within one document. Although there are no direct copies of accounts produced from these four rolls, the survival of a valor containing similar information suggests they were used as an intermediary document in the production of further surveys and accounts.

In conclusion, the four rolls of summaries of Northumberland and Yorkshire accounts have been examined with the aim of determining whether they were used as templates or intermediary documents for the production of further accounts and surveys or produced as a comparative account allowing for the assessment of income and expenditure on a manor over successive years. The theory that they were templates

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later. The gap of 40 years between exemplars could indicate the earlier practices did not become a regular aspect of account production, or that as intermediary documents they were not necessarily routinely archived.

<sup>75</sup> PHA 13330.

<sup>76</sup> Dyer 1980, 79–80; Davies 1968, 215.

<sup>77</sup> Brown 2004, 99–100.

<sup>78</sup> Carole Rawcliffe suggests such tabular accounts produced for the estates of the Duke of Buckingham would allow comparisons of revenues over a long period and any discrepancies to be seen “at a glance”: Rawcliffe 1978, 59.

is the most compelling. While inconclusive, the evidence of corrections, calculations and the audit process on enrolled accounts indicate that these were working documents used for the collection and checking of information before the production of further neater documents once the accounts had been approved at the audit. The preceding discussion has highlighted some of the difficulties in trying to uncover the record-keeping strategies and practices of lordly administration. Although accounts were visually uniform in their layout and presentation of information in late medieval England, each account had to meet the needs of the administration and the formats and materials used for their records varied from estate to estate. Such an investigation is particularly hindered by the incomplete series of extant accounts and the lack of handbooks or treatises that outlined the specific administrative practices on an individual estate, such as that of the earls of Northumberland that spanned several counties.

Nevertheless, the examination of these rolls and their potential purposes has revealed a number of key points about the administration of the earls' estates. Firstly, the earls' administration was a complex operation. There was a hierarchy of officials and chain of accountability and—with the written burden of proof—this resulted in the production of a variety of records. This production process was multi-stepped as information was collected, submitted to and approved during the audit and re-organised or re-formulated to meet the administrative needs of the lord and his officials, be it as individual manorial accounts or surveys of income across the entire estate. The four rolls discussed in this article are evidence of this synthesis and reformulation of financial information as part of a system of keeping records of accountability, liability and annual income. Secondly, the survival of these rolls corresponding to manors held in the counties of Northumberland and Yorkshire suggests a standardisation of administrative practices and record-keeping across the earls' entire estate. However, thirdly, this standardisation did not inhibit innovation. The amendment of the standard framework of manorial accounts, with the addition of the extra column, indicates that the layout could be altered to meet the needs of the records. The framework was not completely overhauled but rather tweaked, in order to be able to enter all the necessary information for multiple years in a clear manner. The layout was recognisable and the most important information was still clearly identifiable. These rolls embody the manifestation of lordship and manorial accountability; they were drafted, redrafted, approved and stored by the lord's central administration to regulate and control his vast estate.

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Enno Giele

# Layouting Authority

## Graphic Reflections of Power Relationships in Early Chinese Administrative Documents

### Introduction

If today, we receive a letter from the Internal Revenue Service about our tax return (or some other governmental agency), it can be taken for granted that we deal with a document and an institution that demands our undivided and prompt attention because its authority over our well-being is considerable. This power relationship is embodied in its letterhead, or at least we have been culturally conditioned to regard it as being a standardised form of highlighting legitimacy that is very effective. However, the power symbol of a letterhead functions only top down. If we address representatives of a governmental agency in a letter, we use other forms of respect that usually consist only of certain formulaic expressions of respect (“Dear Sir/Madam”) and are far less elaborate and conspicuous.

Functionally, the letterhead could be compared both to illuminations of initials and other scenic images in medieval European books for their structuring, awe-inspiring and explanatory power and to seals<sup>1</sup> and monograms in pre-modern times, such as the *tughra* of an Ottoman sultan,<sup>2</sup> or the *signum manus* or royal cypher of medieval potentates in Christian Europe,<sup>3</sup> more or less standardised ornate signatures that appear on documents, coins or buildings and represented the rulers and their authority to the individual recipients of state documents and the public alike.<sup>4</sup>

Somewhat differently, in ancient Egypt since the early Old Kingdom until the Roman period, the pharaoh’s name was encircled or bracketed by a so-called ‘cartouche’ – closed or open coinciding with certain script styles – not only in inscriptions emanating from the court, but also when he was referred to in writing by his subjects. Thus, the cartouche was a symbol that was operative both top-down as well as

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1 Giele/Oschema/Panagiotopoulos 2015.

2 Kühnel 1955.

3 Garipzanov 2008, esp. chapter four, “*Signum Auctoritatis*: Changing Signs of Carolingian Authority”, 157–202.

4 See, for example, Peltzer’s contribution in this volume.

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This publication originated in the Collaborative Research Centre 933 ‘Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies’ (subproject B09 ‘Bamboo and Wood as Writing Materials in Early China’). The CRC 933 is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

bottom-up and as such was a far subtler and persistent way to impress authority into the minds of a literate public.<sup>5</sup>

Illuminated medieval manuscripts and ancient Egyptian cartouches are well-known even today. Here they serve to introduce to the topic and basic question of this contribution, which seeks to tackle a comparatively less well-known ancient writing culture, namely that of ancient China. How were expressions of power or authority related through the physical writing or the written artefacts themselves in ancient China? Were there ways to indicate the presence and power of the ruler beyond mentioning his or her name or title? If the title was mentioned, was this done in an extraordinary fashion compared to the rest of the writing? How were social and institutional hierarchies in general, below the ruler, inscribed into or visualised in documents, if at all? And what constituted the hierarchy of written information that guided recipients' attention to the most important part of a document even before they started reading it? Clearly, a well-structured layout of a written text allows easier orientation during the reading process and thus speedier access of information. But it also needs standardisation and training to actually make readers realise what a well-structured layout is and to apply it—standardisation and training of a kind that political hierarchies usually engender. Both types of authority and hierarchy—the social which the documents presumably mirror, as well as the informational which structures the communicational process—are therefore thought to be intertwined.

## Materiality and Size of Early Chinese Administrative Manuscripts

In the following, I will focus on administrative and political writings from early China. These come in many different materials, shapes and sizes. The most basic form was oblong-shaped very thin spliced off slips of bamboo and sawed strips of wood that hold only one or two columns of characters, seldom more. These constituted the main type of everyday writing support between roughly the middle of the first millennium BCE until the first two or three centuries CE. They were accompanied by broader wooden tablets, rods or irregular pieces of all kinds of widths and shapes as well as by the occasional silk sheets, which were much rarer because they were far more expensive.

A most basic ancient unit of length for slip or strip (as well as some silk) manuscripts was a 'foot' or *chi* 尺. According to textual sources as well as archaeological finds, this unit gradually increased in actual length from antiquity to the nineteenth century CE, from around 23 cm during the so-called Warring States (c. 481–221 BCE)

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<sup>5</sup> Beckerath 1999, 27–29. The bottom-up approach was complicated by certain taboos regarding the direct naming of the ruler by his subjects but this, in itself, did of course impress authority into the minds of people even more. On this topic, see: Quack 2010.

and early imperial periods (221 BCE–220 CE—namely the periods of the Qin 秦 and Han 漢 dynasties and the Xin regime 新) to about 35 cm.<sup>6</sup>

During the early imperial period that interests us here, many quotidian texts were written on slips, strips or boards that are about 23 cm long. But several early legal texts have been found on slightly larger writing materials of 1.2 *chi* or roughly 30 cm length. A few legal manuscripts of only 23 cm have been found among the north-western border fortifications, but these can perhaps be explained as unauthorised copies for private purposes. The longer documents found in tombs are mostly thought to belong to former officials, which are more likely to have observed the regulations, which variously provided for official documents of 1.1–3 *chi* length.<sup>7</sup>

The *Duduan* 獨斷 (‘Solitary Decisions’ or ‘Independent Assessments’), a received text of the second century CE, contains the following definition and prescription or description:

策書：「策」者，簡也。《禮》曰：「不滿百文，不書於策。」其制，長二尺，短者半之。其次，一長一短，兩編，下附篆書。起年月日，稱「皇帝曰」，以命諸侯王、三公。……三公以罪免，亦賜策；文體如上策，而隸書，以尺一木，兩行，……。

Diplomas (*ceshu*): *Ce* means [multiple] writing slips. The [repository of ritual rules and etiquette, the] *Rites* say, “What is not as much as hundred graphs [long], is not written onto (multiple) slips.” As a rule, long [slips measure], two *chi* (c. 46 cm), the shorter ones [measure] half of this (length). The(ir) sequence (is): one long, one short (slip in alternating order) with two connecting strings [one at the upper, one at the lower end of the shorter slips]. Below [the connecting strings], one applies [the text in archaic] seal script. At the beginning, [the date]—year, month and day—[is stated and the document employs the formula] “The August Thearch (i. e., the emperor) says ...” in order to [convey a] charge [upon] (i. e. to invest or appoint) vassal kings and executive council members [the highest-ranking persons under the emperor] [...]. If a member of the executive council is dismissed because of some legal infringement, he is also granted a diploma (or: dismissal note). [In this case] the literary style [employed] is like in the diplomas [mentioned] above, but [the current] clerical script [is used instead of archaic seal script] on wood(en writing support), a *chi* and one (*cun* [i. e., c. 25.4 cm] long) in two columns; [...].<sup>8</sup>

To date, no actual manuscript consisting of writing slips or strips of alternating length has been found, which is not surprising considering that archaeologically retrievable manuscripts have mostly been preserved in fringe locations such as the desert areas of northwest China, while diplomas (and dismissal notes) for the highest authorities of state were bound to be issued and kept in and around the capital and cannot have been too numerous either. What this source does show, however, whether it is indeed

<sup>6</sup> See: “Zhongguo lidai duzhi yanbian cesuan jianbiao” 中國歷代度制演變測算簡表 (Simplified Table of Measurements of the Changing Length Systems Throughout Chinese History) in the supplement volume of the *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> On the topic of the length of manuscripts, see: Hu 2000, esp. 72–73.

<sup>8</sup> Giele 2006, 272–273. On the title and nature of this source, see: *Ibid.*, 21–23.



a faithful reflection of a diplomatic system in actual operation or just an ideal, is that aside from textual and formulaic content, format, size, layout and script style were consciously chosen parameters in documents that reflected imperial authority.

As important paraphernalia to the documents themselves, seals or sealings—usually four to six characters arranged in a square stamped into a lump of clay that covered wrapping cords—were as important in ancient China as they were in the Near East, Europe and elsewhere to establish the authority of a document. These shall not be our focus here as there is abundant research on them already.<sup>9</sup>

What is less well-known—but also difficult to write about for lack of preservation—are the containers for ancient Chinese manuscripts used during transport or storage. Only a few passages in received literature hint at the use of textile pouches (*nang* 囊) to contain letters to the emperor. Their colours, such as black (*zao* 阜) or red-and-white (*chibai* 赤白), seem to have indicated their content or the pressing nature of petitions and emergence messages, but specifics are unknown.<sup>10</sup>

## Multi-piece Manuscripts Make for Unique Layout Functionality

The layout of manuscripts consisting of narrow bamboo slips or wood strips is special insofar as it can be changed after the pieces have been inscribed. Of course, once characters were brushed onto a bamboo or wooden surface, you could not change their size or form anymore, neither could you change their position relative to one another, unless you scraped them off the surface and re-wrote them. Yet, since the bamboo or wooden writing surface was very limited, it took combining a lot of these surfaces by stringing the pieces together at their top and bottom—sometimes, in longer specimen, also in the middle—forming what we shall call ‘multi-piece manuscripts’. Needless to say, if you changed the relative position of the inscribed pieces and thus rearranged the lines—or rather columns—of the written text, you could change the layout.

Naturally, this would change the overall meaning, too, and in any consecutive narrative or longer text with sentences continuing from one column to the next or otherwise logically interlinked content, any re-arrangement of columns—i. e., slips or strips—would be discernible because it would not make much sense. So it is fair to say, that although it *was* possible to change the layout of many ancient Chinese manuscripts—at least those multi-piece ones—after they had been written by rearranging their constituent parts, this cannot have happened too often and is just a curious side-note in a systematic description of ancient Chinese writing culture. However, there are three aspects of this that deserve our attention:

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<sup>9</sup> A short overview is provided in: Giele/Oschema/Panagiotopoulos 2015, 551, 553–556, 558, 561–562; at length in: Sun 2002. On seals throughout Chinese history, including later times when they were produced with red colour on paper, see: Wagner 1987. See also Tsang Wing Ma’s article in this volume.  
<sup>10</sup> For black pouches: Giele 2006, 153–155, 165, 168–170; for red-and-white pouches: *Ibid.*, 174–175, 181.

- 1) the actual procedure of inscribing and binding the single pieces together;
- 2) the using of binding strings in partitioning the writing surface horizontally into so-called ‘registers’;
- 3) the problems of textual coherence and restoration created by lists and short-entry type of texts, which do not allow us to gauge a sequence by reading from one column to the next.

### Planning the Layout

While it is not likely that the layout was changed much on those multi-piece manuscripts after they had been produced, the question of *how* they were produced remains. Intriguingly, most ancient pictorial representations of people inscribing those oblong slips, strips or boards show them doing so by holding up one piece in one hand and the brush in the other and writing in mid-air.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the pieces were probably often inscribed first and only then bound together—a practice that seems logical, if one wanted to avoid having to rebind or scrape off the surface from documents that contained clerical errors. This practice is also evidenced by the fact that in some places where the original binding strings have been preserved they cover up some of the characters. For an example, see the *Yongyuan Era Ledger* in Fig. 5 below. Only occasionally—as in the manuscript EPF22:81 from Juyan 居延, Inner Mongolia, shown in Fig. 1 below—do we observe brush strokes that were interrupted by a binding string already in place. The document is a request by a low-ranking soldier for a sick leave from the military border guard of China’s north-western frontier in the first century CE, whence this document originated. Apparently, the superior officer, after receiving the request, brushed a quick note in a visibly different, bold hand, ordering: “Today report to the headquarters, ask to be allowed to see a doctor!” (*Jin yan fu, qing ling jiu yi* 今言府請令就醫). On the preserved strip, the last vertical stroke of the character “be allowed” (*ling* 令) is divided into two parts, presumably because the brush was drawn over the binding string that has since long disintegrated together with the bit of ink on it, thus leaving a blank space on the strip’s surface. What is otherwise clearly seen on this document, however, is how neatly the request itself leaves room for the binding strings after the first and before the last third on the three strips, where the characters are slightly further apart than in the rest of the writing. This ubiquitous phenomenon usually allows us to observe how and where original binding strings held multi-piece manuscripts together.

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<sup>11</sup> There are not many such representations that survive. One particularly clear example is the clay figurine from tomb no. 9 in Jinpenling 金盆嶺 near Changsha, Hunan Province, probably dating to the early fourth century which represents two clerks, one of whom is writing in the above-mentioned fashion while the other holds a stack of writing material (slips, strips or boards); see: Andō 1968.



**Fig. 1:** A ruler (on the right: Juyan document A8-21.6+4.22, 24.8 × 1.4 cm) with indications—represented by the horizontal strokes of the characters *shang* 上 and *xia* 下—for finding the correct position of the two binding strings in a regular two-stringed administrative document (here, as an example, a sick leave request on the left: Juyan document EPF22:79–81, 22.5 × 1.5 cm), even when the strings had not yet been fastened.<sup>13</sup>

This, of course, also begs the question how this type of layout, which leaves space for strings that were applied only later, was planned and executed. As Lin Suqing 林素清 has shown, a kind of ruler of the standard length for quotidian administrative documents of one *chi* 尺 (about 23 cm) was used as a layout tool, on which the position of the two binding strings is indicated by the characters for “upper” (*shang* 上) and “lower” (*xia* 下), and whose inscription was often written in ornate archaic seal script as in Fig. 1.<sup>12</sup> This is also interesting because archaic seal script—as the hallowed cul-

<sup>12</sup> Lin 1998, 57–60. For ink lines on the sides of writing strips that may also have indicated the position of binding strings: Shi 2018, esp. 685–691. I am indebted to Chun Fung Tong for this reference.

<sup>13</sup> For the photo and transcription of A8-21.6+4.22 see: *Juyan Hanjian* 2014–2017; for those of EPF22:79–81 see *Juyan xinjian jishi* (7) 2016, 232. Please note that I regularly add the designation of the

tural hallmark of antiquity—must have carried a certain authority as we have seen in the prescription for diplomas in the *Duduan* above. We do not know who provided the military scribes with the rulers, but the whole system of writing supports of standardised lengths that were inscribed with standardised tools must have made the users aware of the authority of the state that decided upon and demanded those standard shapes and layouts.

### Registers and Tabular Layout

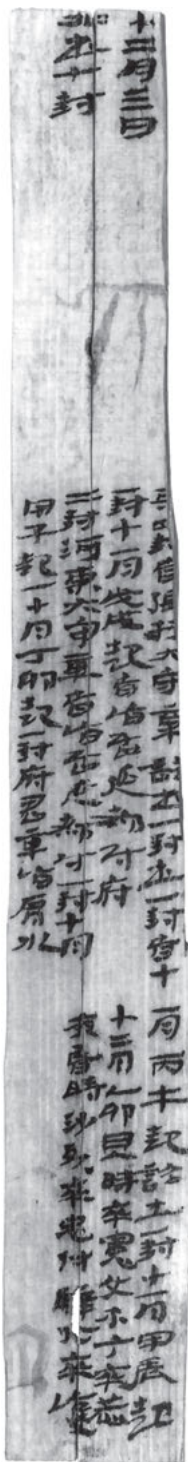
The second aspect of these multi-piece documents is that the oblong pieces naturally partitioned the writing surface vertically whereas the writing strings partitioned it horizontally. The result was a kind of grid that the ancient Chinese scribes consciously used to structure and lay out their writings—much like we use squared paper today. The top of the pieces as well as the two strings—in other cases also three strings, one each at the top and bottom of the pieces leaving a margin of about a centimetre, and one in the middle—were regularly used to start blocks of writing that have come to be called ‘registers’ (*lan* 欄). These functioned to form or support the textual hierarchy. The first register at the very top of a piece (above the first binding string in case of two strings) often contained a kind of header that sometimes—but not always and not even frequently—was written with slightly larger characters. The separation of the writing surface into registers also usually meant for the reader to first read through the entire text of the first register from the first piece on the right to the last on the left and then proceed to the next register below. However, there were also exceptions to this ‘rule’ either because different parts of an itemised text were relegated to the different registers or because of individual oversights.

The former is seen in a wall writing from the ancient Xuanquan 懸泉 Relay Station near Dunhuang in Gansu Province that carried an *Edict of Monthly Ordinances for the Four Seasons in Fifty Articles* from 5 CE. The seasonal regulations and prohibitions contained in this edict are laid out in two registers: the upper register contains a terse title or short form of a regulation in elegant, courtly language; the lower a more elaborate and colloquial explanation. In both registers the entries were headed and marked by a bullet point. These were helpful because some entries in the lower register were two columns long. In these cases, the first register above that second column was left blank and there was no bullet point.<sup>14</sup>

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archaeological site (such as A8, A33 or A35) to the number of the manuscripts that were found in Juyan in the 1930s. In this way, comparison with the manuscripts that were excavated at the same—albeit differently designated—sites in the 1970s and later on (such as EP or EJ) is made easier without the cumbersome checking of distribution tables.

14 Sanft 2009.



1 Twelfth month, third day [of the year 5 BCE]	3 Of these, four envelopes all carry the seal of the Governor of Zhangye [Province]: one edict, one (private?) letter, both dated to the 23rd day of the eleventh month; one edict dated to the 21st day of the eleventh month;	7 On the 3rd day of the twelfth month, at the double-hour of sunset: Private Xian received [this batch of mail] from Private Gong from the Border station.
2 Northbound mail, seven envelopes	4 One envelope dated to the 15th day of the eleventh month. All are addressed to the headquarters of the Juyan Commandant.	8 At the double-hour of dusk: Private Zhong from Shatou [Station] handed [this batch] to Private Hu from Xinbei [Station].
1 十二月三日	5 Two envelopes carry the seal of the Governor of Hedong [Province]: all are addressed to the Juyan Commandant. One envelope is dated to the tenth month,	6 the 11th day; one to the 14th day of the tenth month. One envelope carries the seal of the Lord of the headquarters [of our province]: it is addressed to Jianshui.
2 北書七封	6 甲子起; 一十月丁卯起。一封府君章: 詣肩水。	7 十二月乙卯日入時卒憲受介亭卒恭。
3 其四封皆張掖大守章: 詔書一封、書一封, 皆十一月丙午起, 詔書一封十一月甲辰起,	4 一封十一月戊戌起, 皆詣居延都尉府。	5 二封河東太守章: 皆詣居延都尉, 一封十月
6 甲子起; 一十月丁卯起。一封府君章: 詣肩水。	8 夜昏時, 沙頭卒忠付驛北卒護。	

Fig. 2: Juyan document A35-502.9+505.22, 23 × 3 cm: a postal delivery record in three registers.

An example of individual oversight is found on Juyan strip A35-502.9+505.22 as shown in Fig. 2. This is a record of postal delivery. The general direction and sum total of the letters to be delivered are entered in slightly larger characters in the head register. These are then explained in more detail in registers two and three below, but inconsistently so. In the first column the text runs from the second register all the way down to the third, but then through three columns in the second and two further columns in the third register.<sup>15</sup>

One effect of the layout of consecutive text in registers being read through from right to left is that it becomes well-nigh impossible to change the sequence of the strips—and thus the text and the layout—because of the multiplied textual connections from one strip to the next. A striking example of this is one of the earliest palaeographic texts using registers from the end of the third century BCE. It is a collection of proverbs, short adages and other rote knowledge that were presumably helpful for those aspiring to literacy and a job as a servant of the state. This text on 51 bamboo slips, organised into five registers, with traces of original binding strings at the top, middle and bottom of each slip, has been found in Qin-tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi 睡虎地, Hubei Province.

Like so many others of the time, this manuscript did not bear an original title. It has been dubbed *Wei li zhi dao* 為吏之道 (Principles for Functionaries), which is not exactly the original title, but based on the very beginning of the first part of the text which reads: *Fan wei li zhi dao* ... · 凡為吏之道 (“Principles for all those who are functionaries: ...”). Given that this apparently was a state-sponsored or at least state-tolerated tool of indoctrination, this absence of a title as an authority marker is curious. But its layout nevertheless strongly supports its integrity.

It shall suffice here to demonstrate (in Fig. 3 below) the structure of this unique<sup>16</sup> document by way of a schematic representation which also indicates contingent text blocks based on content (alternating white and grey areas), metrics and scribal hands (circles and squares representing single characters), original punctuation and numbering, as well as prosody (end rhymes being expressed by a Chinese character that stands for the respective rhyme group). As can be easily observed, a second hand (represented by squares) has filled in some of the space that was originally left empty not only in the final fifth, but also at the end of the fourth column. Even so, it is impossible to assume that the 51st slip could have been placed anywhere else. Its content connec-

<sup>15</sup> This is so irregular that it has misled even Michael Loewe, who consequently misinterpreted it: Loewe 1967, vol. 2, 257, n. 5. For the dating of this strip see: Tong 2014, 231. For ease of reference, the days that are specified in the original with their sexagenary cyclical designation, as was typical until the end of the Former Han period or roughly until the beginning of the Common Period, have been re-calculated to fit our system of counting the days in a month by ordinal numbers, a system that was also used since the reign of Wang Mang (r. 9–23 CE) in China.

<sup>16</sup> Strictly speaking, the document cannot be called “unique” any more since similar documents have been found as part of the so-called \*Yuelu shuyuan and \*Peking University caches. It is also observed in some hemerological manuals (‘almachs’). However, this form is still comparatively rare.



**Fig. 3 (opposite page):** Schematic representation of a functionary’s manual dubbed *Weili zhi dao* 為吏之道 (Principles For Functionaries), organised into registers, from Shuihudi, Hubei Province, late third century BCE. The actual writing is not transcribed here. Instead, each single Chinese character in the original is represented by either ◦, □, or a specific Chinese character (usually at the end of a sentence or stanza) that signifies the Old Chinese rhyme group of the respective underlying word. The difference between ◦ and □ (graphs the pronunciation of which does not matter) is perceived to be one of hand: □ presumably is a second hand added later on. • are original bullet points, = original reduplication marks, L original enumeration commas, X signifies a fragmented bottom of a slip, ? doubt concerning the interpretation. Numbers 1 through 5 in the second register represent an original numbering, though with Chinese numerals, of course. The numbering of columns at the top and bottom is purely for convenience.

tions to the preceding slip are still too obvious, as indicated by the white and grey text blocks extending from the first to the second and from the second to the third register.

Being partitioned vertically by writing on narrow slips one character wide and horizontally by registers and binding strings, this kind of document is only a small step away from the veritable spreadsheet format which we can observe in calendars and in the famous tables of the received *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Court Chronicler*), both dated to the first century BCE.<sup>17</sup> The almost grid-like pattern that creates little fields or ‘text containers’ on the writing surface echoes the uniform building-block nature that is characteristic for the Chinese script itself.

### Lists, Titles and Head Markers

The third potential aspect of multi-piece documents that is noteworthy concerns writings that do not consist of stacked registers and logically interlinked text, but of mostly independent single columns that do not give clues as to how they fit into the wider context. This is the case, for example, in lists or itemised entries, where each

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the annual calendrical table of the year 11 BCE with entries from a diary of the deceased from the Han tomb no. 6 at Yinwan 尹灣, near Lianyungang 連雲港 City in Jiangsu Province. This document with the original title *Yuanyan emian* 元延二年 (Second year of [the era] Yuanyan) consisted originally of 61 bamboo slips plus one title slip, of which now 76 fragments (YM6J1–76) survive. Cardinal numbers in the column headings marking the days repeat the sequence one through nine six times, each time ending in ten, twenty or 30. That is, the first digit of the numbers 11–19 and 21–29 is not spelled out. Also, this process is repeated twice because there are only six, not twelve, registers. The first slip on the far right carries the headings for the months with odd numbers (first month, third month and so on), also known as ‘large months’ with 30 days. In the middle of the multi-piece roll, another header slip (no. 32) then carries the ‘small months’ of 29 days each that were evenly numbered (second month, fourth month and so on). For photos and a transcription of the fragments, see: *Yinwan Hanmu jiandu* 1997, 61–70 and 138–144. For the *Shiji* “Tables” (*biao* 表), see chapters 13 through 22 in any edition.



entry and even most headings or introductory remarks are so short that they do not reach to the bottom of the writing slip. Interchanging the slips and thereby grouping more entries than there had been before under a certain heading within the document is quite possible. The same is true for title slips and stand-alone headings that occupy an entire writing slip in narrative or short-unit texts, such as legal stipulations.

This does, in fact, create quite considerable problems with the restoration of caches of archaeologically retrieved bamboo slips, such as those from tomb no. 336 at Zhangjiashan 張家山 in the central Chinese province of Hubei, which are inscribed with ancient Chinese law codes. Like most ancient Chinese multi-piece manuscripts, the original cohesion and order of the entire manuscript had been destroyed with the decay of the binding strings and the subsequent shifting of position of components (slips) within the document. Allegedly, the publication of these materials was delayed for decades, not because the texts were illegible or unintelligible, but because the excavators and compilers could not decide which textual building blocks—in this case: which laws—were to be grouped under which of the numerous header slips that carried all but the designating title of a law.<sup>18</sup>

To demonstrate this, it shall suffice to show (in Fig. 4) the structure of three similar, but already published stipulations from tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan and two title slips that, in accordance with ancient Chinese practice, followed the sections for which they provided the name instead of preceding them. A schematic representation may be clearer than photos in this case, as the originals are already quite weathered and warped. According to almost unanimous scholarly consensus, these materials date to the year 186 BCE.<sup>19</sup> The three laws shown here probably represent legal stipulations from the *Statutes on Robbery* (*Daolü* 盜律) and from the *Statutes on Denunciations* (*Gaolü* 告律)—at least these are the extant title slips under which the modern editors have grouped them. All 28 title slips of the document must have been easily discernible in the original layout because they are marked by a blackened slip head (the margin between the top of the slip and the top binding string), below which the respective statute's title appears with the rest of the slip mostly left blank.<sup>20</sup> None of

**18** Information provided personally by Peng Hao 彭浩, who was among those responsible for restoring and publishing these source texts. The Zhangjiashan 336 cache was finally published in late 2022, almost forty years after its discovery in 1985: *Zhangjiashan Han mu zhujian (336 hao mu) 2022*, preface, 1.

**19** The entire batch (allegedly having formed one roll) of 526 extant slips and slip fragments—of which these five specimens are a part—contains an original title slip that refers to the “second year” (*ernian* 二年). As most ancient rulers' reign periods contained a ‘second year’, there has been some debate as to exactly which ruler this refers. But the case being made for the year 186 BCE is rather strong. For this and other rich information on and translation of these materials in English, see: Barbieri-Low/Yates 2015.

**20** Near the bottom of the third slip from the right, which is the title slip for the Statutes on Robbery, we find an unusual record of the name of the scribe, who in this case—even more unusually—seems to have been female.

告律	奴婢自訟不審斬奴左止黥婢顏頰界其主	子告父母婦告威公奴婢告主父母妻子勿聽而棄告者市	盜律	吏智而出之亦與盜同法	盜出財物于邊關徼及吏部主智而出者皆與盜同法弗智罰金四兩使者所以出必有符致毋符致
			鄭放書		
136	135	133	81	75	74

**Fig. 4:** Schematic representation of three select stipulations (slip nos. 74–75, 133 and 135) and two title slips (nos. 81 and 136) from the 526 slips long roll originally entitled *Ernian lüling* 二年律令, “Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year”, found in tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan, Hubei Province. The position of the presumed three binding strings is indicated by thick horizontal lines. The slip numbers at the bottom are indicated for convenience.

the other slips—inscribed with the actual statutes—have blackened slip heads and all the writing starts below the top binding string. Three binding strings that originally held this roll of slips together, have already decayed; but clear traces of them can still be seen at both ends and in the middle of the slips.

Thievishly taking valuable items out through a checkpoint at the border or the frontier, as well as cases of officials in charge of the area knowingly [letting persons] take [such items] out: in every case the same law as for thieves [applies]. When they do not know it (viz., that contraband is being taken out): fine four ounces of gold. Envoys leaving with [valuable items] must have an authorisation tally and an order form [for the items]. If they do not have these (slip 74) and the officials know of this yet let [them] out [with the items: in this case], too, the same law as for thieves [applies]. (slip 75)

■ Statutes on Robbery

Written by Zheng Xian (slip 81)

A child denouncing the father or mother, a consort denouncing her mother-in-law or father-in-law, or a male or female slave denouncing the master or the master's father, mother, wife or children: do not listen to it (viz., the denunciation), but rather execute the denouncer publicly. (slip 133)  
Male and female slaves carelessly initiating property lawsuits about themselves [to contest their slave status]: sever the male slave's left foot and tattoo the female slave on the cheekbone area of the face and return each to his or her master. (slip 135)

■ Statutes on Denunciations (slip 136)<sup>21</sup>

While these layout features are simply pragmatic and are also found in literary texts on silk sheets,<sup>22</sup> the mark-up or highlighting of titles of imperially proclaimed legal statutes using a feature—similar to, but not entirely the same as bullet points—that juts out above the top of the first register of writing leads us to the method of indentation, which is perhaps the apogee of layout authority in early China. Before we discuss this in the final section below, however, there is one more striking aspect resulting from the multi-piece writing material that should be duly noted.

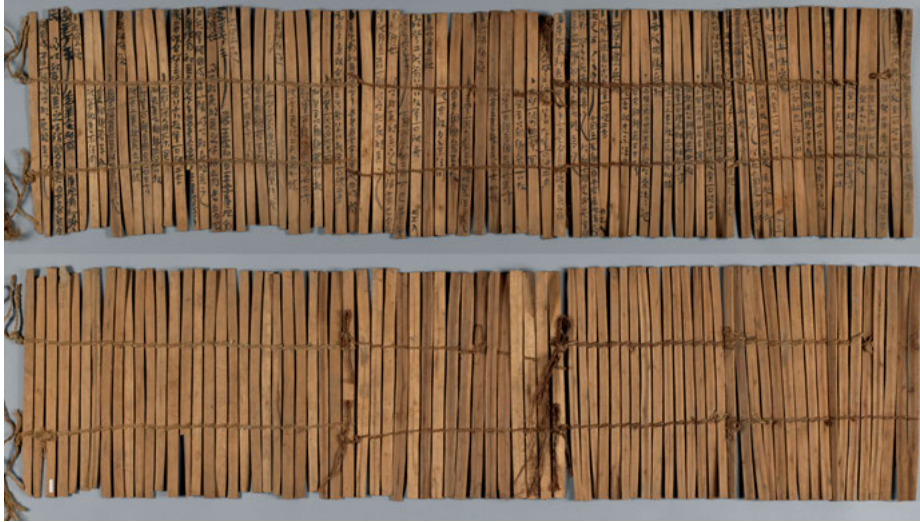
## Unclear Definition of 'Manuscript'

Even if it would have made little sense that the ancients would reorganise the layout of a multi-piece manuscript by rearranging its components after the completion of the inscription process, the section above has demonstrated that sometimes this nevertheless may have happened inadvertently. This possibility lingers uncomfortably in the minds of modern scholars who are often frustrated in their attempts to restore the ancient documents to their presumed original state from haphazardly preserved fragments.

Often, because the building-block principle of multi-piece manuscripts could be extended almost without limits, we are not even certain whether what we have

<sup>21</sup> Translation adapted from: Barbieri-Low/Yates 2015, 469, 473, 549.

<sup>22</sup> Compare the use of bamboo-slip-like, over 50 cm long columns and black section markers in the upper margin on the silk manuscript from Han tomb no. 3 of Mawangdui, Hunan Province. This carries short cosmological texts such as *Cheng* 稱 (“Weighing”) or *Dao yuan* 道原 (“Source of the Basic Principle”). The titles of these are inscribed at the end of the texts together with a character count: “*Cheng*, 1,600 [characters]” and “*Dao yuan*, 646 [characters]”; see: *Changsha Mawangdui Hanmu jianbo jicheng* 2014, vol. 1, 40–41.



**Fig. 5:** Recto and verso of the lists of the *Yongyuan Era Ledger* (Juyan document A27–128.1, 91 × 23.1 cm).

before us are the remains of one, two or more manuscripts. In other words, the potential of this specific manuscript form for accretion complicates our notion of manuscript integrity, while the marks of textual hierarchy are usually sufficient to allow the users to preserve their sense for the structure of the manuscript. This is demonstrated nowhere better than with a document labelled *Yongyuan Era Ledger of Equipment (or Weapons)* (*Yongyuan qi[bing]wu bu* 永元器[兵]物簿) by the Academia Sinica in Taipei where it is kept (see Fig. 5). The text of this document consists of five checklists taking stock of heavy equipment at two beacon stations at the north-western frontier of the Han Empire in what is now westernmost Inner Mongolia.

The scientific designation of the document may be given as A27-128.1, which means that it is item no. 1 that was placed in box no. 128, when it was found at the ruins of an ancient beacon station designated A27 by the Sino-Swedish Expedition in 1931–1934—or Tsakhortei in the local Mongolian vernacular.

The ledger is unique because it constitutes by far the longest multi-piece document we have to date in a more or less original state of preservation, with 77 wooden strips that still retain the original binding.<sup>23</sup> It is also highly instructive because the

<sup>23</sup> There definitely seems to have been much longer rolls in Chinese antiquity, such as the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* mentioned above. But none of those longer rolls—as far as their remnants have been archaeologically retrieved—retain any intact binding strings. We just *think* they once formed rolls bound together by strings because of similar textual content and/or because some caches of inscribed writing slips are found forming a bundle that looks like a roll. However, it could very well be that those bundles represent several shorter rolls being rolled into one another, not actually bound into one large roll.

binding, especially on the verso, shows that three of the five individual checklists were originally separate monthly lists and have simply been tied together, whereas two additional lists were originally seasonal lists, each of which must be summarising three monthly lists that are no longer extant.

Although the ductus of the writing is very cursive throughout, it seems likely that the three monthly lists were written by the same hand, while the two seasonal lists were written by a different hand—or even two different hands. At the very least, we may conclude that the end of the entire ledger is characterised by much broader brush-strokes than the rest, which may also have been effected by using a different, worn-out brush (see Fig. 6 below). However that may be, the two seasonal lists had already been incorporated into one unified checklist before being combined with the three monthly lists and made into one ‘super-document’ that now covers three individual months during the years 93 and 94 CE and the first half—months one through six—of the year 95 CE.

Each of the five individual textual units follows each other from right to left and is headed by a title strip. Judging from the binding, these constituted only four rolls that were tied together at some point to form the single roll that we have now. The two seasonal inventories are separated from the preceding monthly inventories by a blank strip. This structure is a veritable challenge for our conception of what constitutes a ‘manuscript’: is physical cohesion a key criterion? Or textual contingency? Does a manuscript change its nature when two manuscripts are physically joined? Depending on the answers to these questions we either face one, two, four or five manuscripts: one large roll in its present (tertiary?) state; two types of lists, monthly and seasonal, that probably had been secondarily joined as a type before being joined together; four primary rolls; or five primary checklists, which certainly reflect the original state of documentation.

The following transcription and translation of the title strips tries to represent the overall binding structure, with ∞ representing the knotting together of two primary rolls, [ ] symbolising the blank strip and ■ original brush strokes functioning as bullet points (see below).

■ 廣地南部言永元五年六月官兵釜磑月言簿 (slip 1)

– Inventory with monthly report on the official weapons, kettles and millstones<sup>24</sup> in the Southern section of Guangdi [company] of the year Everlasting Origin (*yongyuan*) 5 (corresponding to 93 CE), sixth month.

∞

■ 廣地南部言永元五年七月見官兵釜磑月言簿 (slip 17)

– Inventory with monthly report on the inspected official weapons, kettles and millstones in the Southern section of Guangdi [company] of the year Everlasting Origin (*yongyuan*) 5 (corresponding to 93 CE), seventh month.

<sup>24</sup> Or axes and grindstones? But details mentioned below, such as *fu yikou* 釜一口, “one (mouth-like) *fu*”, and *wei yihe* 磑一合, “one set of *wei*”, seems to fit kettles and millstones better.

∞

■廣地南部言永元六年七月見官兵釜磗月言簿 (slip 33)

– Inventory with monthly report on the inspected official weapons, kettles and millstones in the Southern section of Guangdi [company] of the year Everlasting Origin (*yongyuan*) 6 (corresponding to 94 CE), seventh month.

[

]

∞

■廣地南部言永元七年正月盡三月見官兵釜磗四時簿 (slip 49)

– Inventory with seasonal report on the inspected official weapons, kettles and millstones in the Southern section of Guangdi [company] of the year Everlasting Origin (*yongyuan*) 7 (corresponding to 95 CE), first through third month.

■廣地南部言永元七年四月盡六月見官兵釜磗四時簿 (slip 63)

– Inventory with seasonal report on the inspected official weapons, kettles and millstones in the Southern section of Guangdi [company] of the year Everlasting Origin (*yongyuan*) 7 (corresponding to 95 CE), fourth through sixth month.

Like these titles, the internal structure of each of these reports is very repetitive, indeed mostly identical. They detail the partly broken heavy equipment at two beacon stations that belonged to the purview of the Southern section of Guangdi company, comparing the situation with the preceding month (in the monthly inventories), giving totals and registering that there were no changes. In the end, a cover letter written by the section leader on the first or second day of the respective month—or of the last month of the season—concludes the individual roll.

What interests us here in the first place, however, is the layout. While not exactly a grid-like structure of the calendrical or *Shiji*-table kinds mentioned above, the writing does make very good use of the difference between the first—top of strips—and second-plus-third register to highlight hierarchical levels of the text. Like in the *Principles for Functionaries* and the *Edict of Monthly Ordinances for the Four Seasons in Fifty Articles*, ‘bullet-points’ are amply used, even though they are rather carelessly executed, often being short awry dashes. But several of them are added above the top-most binding string, making them very easy to spot.

Another rather prominent element is the use of conspicuously elongated last strokes in individual characters to demarcate certain parts of the text, such as the date—with elongation of the word for ‘year’, *nian* 年—or the parenthetical formula “this [i. e., the following/preceding] I dare to report” (*gan yan zhi* 敢言之) that brackets and thus highlights the beginning and end of a report in direct speech (elongation of *zhi* 之). This can be seen in the enlarged photo of the first and the fourth of the five lists (see Fig. 6).

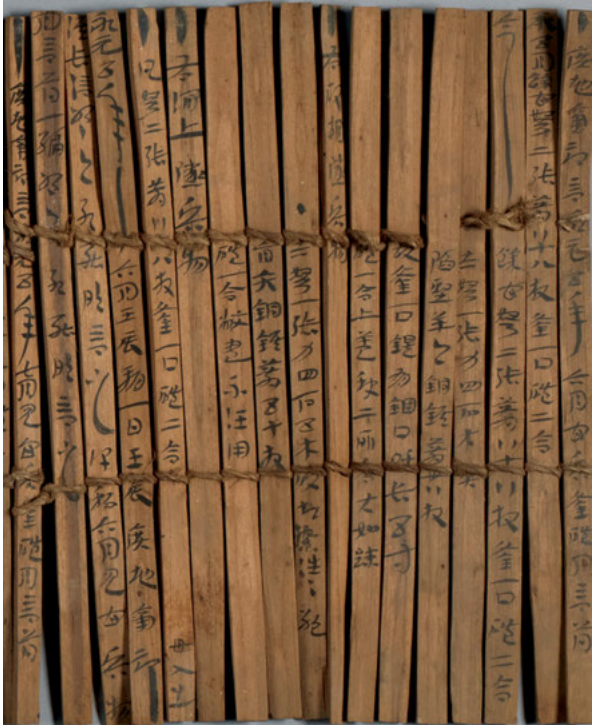
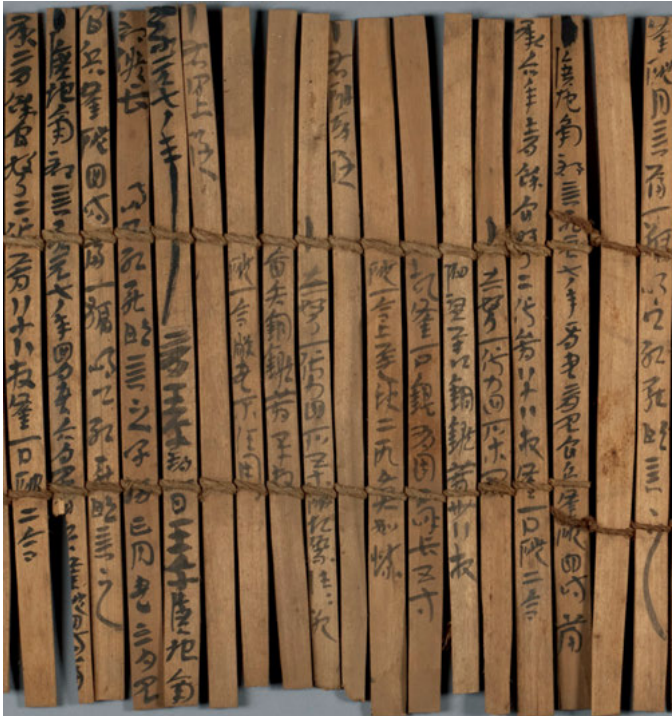


Fig. 6: First (top) and fourth (bottom) inventory of heavy equipment within the Yongyuan Era Ledger.

**Tab.1:** Transcription and translation of the first and fourth inventory of heavy equipment within the *Yongyuan Era Ledger*. Elongated characters are denoted by bold typeface.

Transcription		Translation	strip no.
above upper binding strings	below upper binding strings		
■廣地南部言永元五年六月官兵釜磑月言簿		– Inventory with monthly report on the official weapons, kettles and millstones in the Southern section of Guangdi [company] of the <b>year</b> Everlasting Origin ( <i>yongyuan</i> ) 5 (corresponding to 93 CE), sixth month:	1
承五月餘官弩二張箭八十八枚釜一口磑二合		Received as stock from the fifth month: 2 official crossbows, 88 [crossbow] quarrels, 1 kettle, 2 millstones.	2
今	餘官弩二張箭八十八枚釜一口磑二合	<b>Presently</b> in stock: 2 official crossbows, 88 quarrels, 1 kettle, 2 millstones;	3
	• 赤弩一張力四石木關	– 1 red (or: assembled?) crossbow with a stretching force of 4 stone, wooden trigger;	4
	陷堅羊頭銅鏃箭卅八枚	38 armour-piercing (?) quarrels with bronze heads in the form of a sheep's head;	5
	故釜一口鋌有銅口呼長五寸	1 old kettle, the ... ( <i>ti?</i> ) has a hardened opening (?), the spout (?) is 5 <i>cun</i> (c. 12 cm) long;	6
	磑一合上蓋缺二所各大如踈	1 set of millstones, on the upper part there are two places where pieces as huge as a cabbage (?) are missing.	7
■右破胡隧兵物		– Above [lit. on the right] are weapons and equipment of the Pohu watchtower.	8
	• 赤弩一張力四石五木破起繳往=絕	– 1 red (or: assembled?) crossbow with a stretching force of 4.5 stone; wooden [trigger] broken; ... wrapping (?) ripped in many places;	9
	盲矢銅鏃箭五十枚	50 quarrels with bronze heads;	10
	磑一合敝盡不任用	1 millstone, completely broken and unusable.	11
■右澗上隧兵物		– Above are weapons and equipment of the Jianshang watchtower.	12



Transcription		Translation	strip no.
above upper binding strings	below upper binding strings		
■凡弩二張箭八十八枚釜一口 磑二合		– Total: 2 crossbows, 88 quarrels; 1 kettle; 2 millstones.	13
毋入出		No changes [compared to before].	
永元五年六月壬辰朔一日壬辰廣 地南部		(Era of) Everlasting Origin, <b>year 5</b> (93 CE), sixth month, that is beginning with [a day] <i>renchen</i> , first day <i>renchen</i> : Guangdi [company], Southern Section	14
候長信叩頭死罪敢言之謹移六月 見官兵物		Platoon Leader Xin kowtows and insolently dares to report <b>the following</b> : “Sincerely, I submit for the sixth month about the inspected official weapons and equipment	15
月言簿一編叩頭死罪敢言之		one roll with the monthly report.” <b>This</b> I insolently dare to report, kowtowing.	16
		(blank slip)	48
■廣地南部言永元七年正月盡三 月見官兵釜磑四時簿		– Inventory with seasonal report on the inspected official weapons, kettles and millstones in the Southern section of Guangdi [company] of the year Everlasting Origin ( <i>yongyuan</i> ) 7 (corresponding to 95 CE), first through third month:	49
承六年十二月餘官弩二張箭八十 八枚釜一口磑二合		Received as stock from the twelfth month of the 6th year: 2 official crossbows, 88 quarrels, 1 kettle, 2 millstones.	50
•	赤弩一張力四 石木關	– 1 red (or: assembled?) crossbow with a stretching force of 4 stone, wooden trigger;	51
	陷堅羊頭銅鍬 箭卅八枚	38 armour-piercing (?) quarrels with bronze heads in the form of a sheep’s head;	52
	故釜一口鋌有 固口呼長五寸	1 old kettle, the ... ( <i>ti</i> ?) has a hardened opening (?), the spout (?) is 5 <i>cun</i> (c. 12 cm) long;	53
	磑一合上蓋缺 二所各大如踈	1 set of millstones, the upper part is missing two pieces, each as big as a cabbage.	54
■右破胡隧		– Above are weapons and equipment of the Puhu watchtower.	55
•	赤弩一張力四 石五木破起繳 往=絕	– 1 red (or: assembled?) crossbow with a stretching force of 4.5 stone; wooden [trigger] broken; ... wrapping (?) ripped in many places;	56
	盲矢銅鍬箭五 十枚	50 quarrels with bronze heads;	57

Transcription		Translation	strip no.
above upper binding strings	below upper binding strings		
	磑一合散盡不任用	1 millstone, completely broken and unusable.	58
■右澗上隧		– Above are weapons and equipment of the Jianshang watchtower.	59
永元七年三月壬午朔一日壬午 廣地南		(Era of) Everlasting Origin, <b>year 7</b> (95 CE), <i>third month</i> , that is beginning with [a day] <i>renwu</i> , first day <i>renwu</i> : Guangdi [company], Southern	60
部候長 叩頭死罪敢言之謹 移正月盡三月見		Section Platoon Leader ... .. kowtows and insolently dares to report the following: “Sincerely, I submit for the first through the third month about the inspected	61
官兵釜磑四時簿一編叩頭死罪 敢言之		official weapons, kettles and millstones one roll with the seasonal ledger.” <b>This</b> I insolently dare to report, kowtowing.	62

The fact that the inventory entries did not change over the course of two years can only mean that the equipment in this backwater, forlorn region was not repaired or replaced during this long period—unless one wants to speculate that these are not actual reports but writing exercises that consisted of copying the same text repeatedly without relation to the actual state of the equipment. Considering the fact that care is given to change the dates in each individual cover letter, this does not seem very likely. On the other hand, it is also conspicuous that the name of the section leader, Xin 信, is only spelt out in the first cover letter, in the four following ones there are one or two blank spaces instead of a name (marked by ‘.....’ in the translation above). Also, some of the dates in the cover letter of the seasonal lists (on strips 60 and 74), especially the sexagenary designations that specify the day—and in one case the ordinaly numbered month—were apparently entered by a different hand, as signified by cursive script in the transcription and translation of strip 60 above. These elements may indicate that these reports—or at least the concluding letters—were partly pre-written as a fill-in form to be used when the time was due.

## Indentation as Primary Tool for Layouting Imperial Authority

There is, finally, a type of layout in ancient China that has perhaps the best claim to embody political authority through writing. This is what has been variously called “awaiting a head” (*xutou* 需頭) in ancient sources or literally “raised head” (*taitou*

抬頭) in modern Chinese research.<sup>25</sup> Among the received sources, the *Dudian* 獨斷 specifies:<sup>26</sup>

章者，需頭。稱「稽首...」、「上」、「以聞」，謝恩陳事。詣闕通者也。

Petitions await a 'head' (i. e., they are left blank at the top.) They address [the emperor] with "I bow my head [to the floor], [and so on]," [contain the formula] "I submit [this letter]," and [conclude with] "... in order to inform [Your Majesty]," so as to repay [the imperial] kindness with gratitude, [before] presenting the matter [of concern]. [These] are [submissions] that are communicated [to the emperor] by being brought [personally] to the [palace] gate towers.

奏者，亦需頭。其京師官但言「稽首言」，下(言)「稽首以聞」。其中有所請，若罪法劾案。公府送御史臺，卿校送謁者臺也。

Memorials also await a 'head' (i. e., they are left blank at the top just like petitions). [Because they are submitted by] capital officials [who are personally present, they] simply write "Bowing my head [to the floor], I report: ... [instead of 'I submit this letter,' or 'I transmit my salutations' from far away]. Below (i. e., at the end of their memorial), they write, 'I bow my head [to the floor] to inform [Your Majesty].' In between comes a request or materials for [legal] investigations [stating someone's] crimes and [the appropriate] punishments. The offices of the executive council send [their memorials] to the office of the prosecutors; the ministers and military officers send [them] to the office of the receptionists.

表者，不需頭。上言「臣某言」，下言「誠惶誠恐，頓首頓首，死罪死罪。」左方下附曰「某官臣甲乙上」。文多，用編兩行，文少，以五行。詣尚書通者也。

Presentations do not await a 'head' (i. e., they are not left blank at the top). At the beginning, those [who submit them] state, 'Your servant so-and-so reports [the following].' At the end, they state, 'Truly fearful and terrified, I keep knocking my head [to the floor], doubly [deserving] capital punishment.' At the end [of the text] on the [accompanying] board(s) [appended] to the left they add, 'Submitted by Your servant XY from such-and-such office.' If the text is long, one uses [writing slips with a width of] two columns bound together; if the text is short, one uses [boards with a width of] five columns. These are [submissions] that are communicated [to the emperor] by being brought [personally] to the imperial secretaries.

While "awaiting a head" basically describes indentation of the text, the particular issue at stake is that this was done in order to elevate and emphasise any mentioning of imperial titles such as 'emperor' (*huangdi* 皇帝), 'empress' (*huanghou* 皇后) or their imperial utterances, including imperial 'decisions' (*zhi* 制) at the top of the next column. In effect, this is not about indentation but about protrusion of authoritative words, which come to tower above the surrounding lower level of indented text. Whether this was done in order to create a kind of aura of blank space around the reference to the ruler—and thus enhance his authority—or perhaps simply to highlight the important nature of a document—or both—is perhaps not so crucial. What is important is that this layout feature can actually be observed in numerous excavated

25 For the latter, see: Wang 1999, 106–111 ('Taitou zhidu' 抬頭制度 [System of textual protrusion]).

26 For details on the following three quotes, see: Giele 2006, 100, 118, 135.

early manuscripts, as well as on later stone inscriptions, but these are not the focus here.<sup>27</sup>

The most prominent examples among the administrative documents of the north-west shall be introduced here. Among those, two manuscript fragments in particular are valuable: EPT59:536 (Fig. 7) from Juyan and I90DXT0116②:4 (Fig. 8) from the Xuanquan relay station at Dunhuang.<sup>28</sup> Though they constitute only a small part of what originally must have been much longer multi-piece documents, each of the strips fortuitously preserves the last column of an indented memorial and protruding imperial decision on one piece of wood. In contrast to single-column writing strips the joining of which can be problematic, these double-column strips leave no doubt about the layout. Moreover, the fragment from Dunhuang may represent a ‘double-column strip’ (*lianghang* 兩行) in a stricter or more formal sense—a piece with a triangular cross-section where the two columns are separated by a slight ridge running along the middle of the strip:

長秩官吏員。丞相請許。臣收罷官印，上御史，見罔自詞。臣昧死以聞。

制 曰：「可」。 (EPT59:536)

... staff members of offices with senior emoluments. The Chief Minister asks for [imperial] consent. Your Subject [the Director of the Imperial Secretariat] will receive the seals from the

<sup>27</sup> Comparable stone inscriptions are the *Stele of Yi Ying* (Yi Ying bei 乙瑛碑) dated to 153 CE, the *Stele of Han Chi* (Han Chi bei 韓勅) dated to 156 CE, and the *Stele of the Temple at Mount Hua, the Western Summit* (Xiyu Huashan si bei 西嶽華山寺碑) dated to 165 CE; see rubbings and transcriptions in *Kandai sekkoku shūsei* 1994, nos. 70, 75, 87. Especially the *Stele of Yi Ying* with a protruding “The imperial decision says: approved!” (*zhi yue: ke* 制曰可) and the *Temple Stele at Mount Hua* with consecutive addresses to the “Exalted Founder” (Gaozu 高祖) of the Han dynasty, its second prominent emperor (taizong 太宗) being the Civilized Emperor (Wendi 文帝), the famous “Devout Martial Emperor” (Xiao wu huangdi 孝武皇帝) and the prominent Generous Emperor (Xuandi 宣帝) from the middle of the Early Han period (zhongzong 仲宗, i. e., 中宗) are noteworthy, since here not only the preceding columns are indented, but also the following—something that I have not yet seen in manuscripts so far. Occasionally, the imperial authority is only accorded a column change without any indentation, so that the revered term is at the top of the next column, but is not jutting out. This is the case, for instance, with the *Stele of Yuan An* (Yuan An bei 袁安碑) which mentions the “Devout Harmonious Emperor” (Xiao He huangdi 孝和皇帝) and dates to 117 CE; the *Rock Inscription Eulogy at the Stone Gate* (Shimen song moya 石門頌摩崖) which mentions the “Exalted Founder” and dates to 147 CE; the *Stele of Scribe Chen* (Shi Chen bei 史晨碑) which elevates the “dynastic court” (*chaoting* 朝廷) and the “imperial secretariat” (*shangshu* 尚書) and dates to 169 CE; and the *Stele of the Executive Council* (Sangong zhi bei 三公之碑), which addresses the “enlightened Sire” (*minggong* 明公) twice and dates to 181 CE; see *Kandai sekkoku shūsei* 1994, nos. 39, 65, 98, 120, 128. Another possible example involving the grandmother of an emperor (*taihuang taihou* 太皇太后) is seen in the above-mentioned *Edict of Monthly Ordinances for the Four Seasons in Fifty Articles* written on a plastered wall at the Xuanquan relay station in Dunhuang, but since that wall writing was scattered into many pieces, the reconstruction of this particular element of layout may not be entirely reliable.

<sup>28</sup> For photos and transcription, see *Juyan xinjian jishi* (5) 2016, 186, no. EPT59:536; *Xuanquan Hanjian* (1) 2019, 548, no. I90DXT0116②:4.



Fig. 7: Juyan document EPT59:536  
(22.3 × 1.8 cm).



Fig. 8: Dunhuang doc. I90DXT0116②:4  
(23 × 1,5 cm).

dismissed officials and hand them to the [Chief] Prosecutors, so that, if anything wrong shows, it may become self-evident. Your Subject risks capital offense so that [Your Majesty] may take note of this.

The [imperial] decision: 'Approved.'

制 曰：「下丞相、御史」。•臣宣、臣駿前奏，林隆使案驗逐捕商等首匿者……  
捕斬渠率一人為尤異。奏可。林隆發起商等從迹，過樂成侯去疾，臧匿，在四月甲辰  
赦令前。臣宣、臣駿…… (I90DXT0116②:4)

The [imperial] decision: 'Hand this down to the Chief Minister and the [Chief] Prosecutor.'  
– Your subject [Xue 薛] Xuan and your subject [Wang 王] Jun previously memorialised: 'Lin Long [should] be sent to search and investigate and pursue to apprehend [the non-Han chieftain (?) Hao 浩] Shang and the other fugitive ring leaders ... to apprehend and behead [that] one chieftain (i. e. Hao Shang) would be excellent.' [Our] memorial was approved, and Lin Long did [actually] find the tracks of [Hao] Shang and his party leading past the [fief of] the Marquess of Lecheng, [Gong 恭] Quji, where they had gone into hiding before the general amnesty on the *jiachen* (i. e. third day) of the fourth month (equivalent to 3 April 18 BCE). Your subject Xuan and your subject Jun ....<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Marquess of Lecheng, Gong Quji 恭去疾 (Gong Qubing 恭去病 according to traditional sources), whose fief was situated southeast of the capital, in Nanyang 南陽 province, close to modern Deng 鄧 County, died in 18 BCE, see: Wang 1984, 384, no. 739. On the interpretation of this document including

Multi-piece documents that show the indention/protrusion feature are preserved only as incomplete reconstructions from fragments, and the unity and/or sequence of the reconstructions is never without a certain amount of doubt. However, the following three examples of imperial edicts found at either the ruins of the Jianshui 肩水 company fort (A33) or of the Jianshui Jinguān 金關 checkpoint area (EJ) in northern Gansu nevertheless shall serve as examples in this context.

Since the focus here is on layout, I will only illustrate the general outlook of the documents without supplying a lengthy translation. The structure (read from right to left) is the same or similar in all three cases. An indented prologue, marked by self-deprecating terms as a petition or memorial presented in writing or in person to the emperor, was approved or specified per (imperial) decision (*zhi yue ke* 制曰可 or *zhi yue ...* 制曰···...) and a record to this effect was appended to the memorial (on the left) in such a way that the *zhi* protruded over the writing area of the memorial. The entire text now was an imperial edict. But in order to make it known throughout the empire, it had to be disseminated downwards through the echelons of agencies that received it, copied it and sent the copies to the agencies under their command. At each juncture, a record of dissemination would be appended. This is what we can observe in most documents on the left hand side after the *zhi yue ke*.<sup>30</sup>

The first example contains the remnants of a report on the activities of the Xiongnu 匈奴 Khans Huhanye 呼韓邪 and Zhizhi 郅支 who during the time were the most formidable enemies of the Chinese court. The document originally consisted of at least thirteen wooden strips.<sup>31</sup> Seven of them are still intact or mostly complete and show the same length of about 23 cm. All strips and fragments are roughly 1 cm wide and carry what seems to be the same handwriting. This could in fact be the same hand as in the second manuscript, where it can be identified with the hand of a certain Directing Scribe De (*lingshi* De 令史得), who must have been stationed at Jianshui Company. What is notable in this first example is that except for *zhi yue ke* (on the last strip on the left), the term “imperial majesty” (*huangdi bixia* 皇帝陛下)—or rather just the *huang* 皇, “imperial”—also protrudes above the rest of the writing (on the fifth

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the identification of the full names of the chief minister, chief prosecutor and the fugitive Hao Shang, as well as the date of the general amnesty, see: Zhang 2013, 115–116.

**30** It will be noticed that the *zhi yue ke*-strip for the first and second example is in fact one and the same, namely A33-332.26. Naturally, one of these two reconstructions must be wrong in this respect. However, given the many examples of this format, it is likely that—if not this very strip—a very similar one with the same wording had been part of the document to which this strip does not belong.

**31** Strip nos. A33-387.12+564.17, 407.2+562.9, 407.3+564.13, 403.19+433.40+564.28, 387.19+562.27, 562.4, 387.1, 387.10+387.17+387.26+407.14, 387.16, 387.24+25, 387.7+564.15, 387.22+407.4+565.1 and 332.26. For photos and transcriptions, see: *Juyan Hanjian* 2014–2017. For a nearly complete transcription and translation see: Giele 2011, 59–60 (only the two tiny fragments A33-387.10+26, “... people in order to attack ...”, are not included there, which have no influence on the overall meaning). Most strips had already been assembled and translated by Loewe: Loewe 1967. However, Loewe has assumed these belong to two different documents, which he designated as UD6 and UD9 respectively.



Fig. 9: Reconstructed edict (?) containing a report on the activities of the Xiongnu Khans Huhanye and Zhizhi from Jianshui, Gansu.

strip from the right). In addition, there are some inexplicable blank spaces on several of the strips apart from the indentation.

The second example is an edict concerning ritual provisions (the resting of weapons, draining of wells etc.) to be taken during the summer solstice of 61 BCE. It consists of two strips with an indented memorial by Chief Prosecutor Bing Ji 丙吉 followed by the above-mentioned protruding line of imperial approval (*zhi yue ke*)—or a similar strip that is no longer extant—and the record of consecutive transmission of the edict on five further strips that are not indented.<sup>32</sup>

The third and final example are the remains of an edict against usury dated to 14 BCE found at the site of the ancient Jianshui Jinguan checkpoint. Although none of the fifteen extant wooden strips retains its full length—all are charred and/or broken at the bottom—and there is at least one slip missing, the overall structure of indented memorial, imperial approval and record of transmission is neatly visible.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Strip nos. A33-10.27, 5.10, 332.26, 10.33, 10.30, 10.32, 10.29 and 10.31. For photos and transcriptions, see: *Juyan Hanjian* 2014–2017. The memorial of Bing Ji has been translated and studied by Bodde 1975, 297–298; for a translation of the record of transmission, see: Giele 2005, 367–370.

<sup>33</sup> Photos and transcription in *Jianshui Jinguan Hanjian* (4) 2015, strip nos. 74EJF1:1–15. The sequence of strips shown here has been adapted.

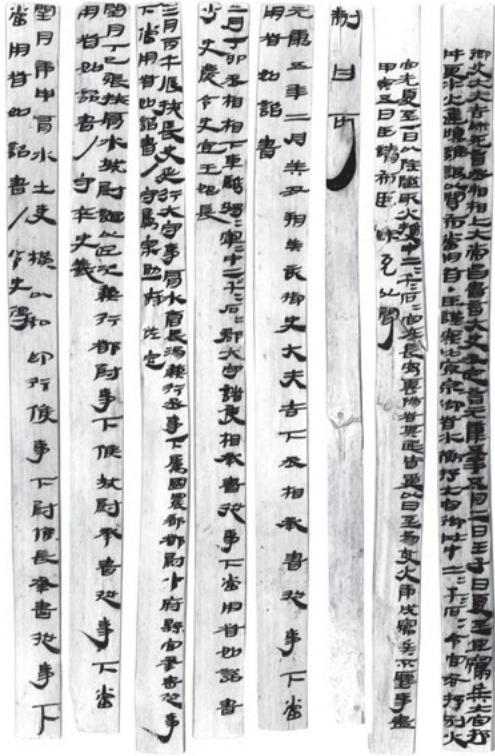


Fig. 10: Reconstructed edict on the summer solstice in 61 BCE from Jianshui, Gansu.



Fig. 11: Reconstructed edict against usury, dated to 14 BCE, found in Jianshui, Gansu Province.



## Conclusion

Reviewing the evidence of multi-piece manuscripts from the realm of early Chinese administration, we can confirm that two of the, seemingly, most natural means of garnering authority in writing were not very prominent in Chinese antiquity: large size characters and illumination. Although on ancient Chinese wooden boards (and stone inscriptions) examples of large characters in titles, addresses and labels may be found,<sup>34</sup> their volume and quality are not very impressive. Perhaps this is a difference of materiality of writing supports, since writing on silk and on paper was at times more ornate and artful. But expensive silk does not seem to have been used very much in the ancient administration, and writing on paper started only from the early Chinese Middle Ages around the third–fourth century onwards. The famous Chinese mandarin and his calligraphic skills are an even later development. In antiquity, however, when most of the official correspondence in China was written on multi-piece documents of wood or bamboo, authority and hierarchy were expressed in a positional rather than dimensional way. The grid-like nature of the writing material and the uses of binding strings to mark registers made it most efficient to structure writings, to orientate oneself within the texts and to express authority by using indentation and protrusion of terms or columns within the writing. Illustrations in texts were not unknown, but were rarely, if at all, used to enhance the ruler's authority in ancient China. Like with the design differences of early coins that were devoid of any portraits in China—but were much more standardised than western coins—the authority of the ruler and his administration lay in and was expressed by making the tools of communication as uniform and therefore as effective as possible.

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<sup>34</sup> See *Yinwan Hanmu jiandu* 1997, 13. See also the contribution of Chun Fung Tong in this volume.

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Matthias J. Kuhn

# Enrolling Lines of Power: Yorkist Pedigree Rolls as Material Evidence of Kingship

## Depicting Royal Authority through Genealogical Reasoning

To rule successfully, kings in late medieval Europe needed authority. One of the main sources of this authority was the ruler's legitimate descent from the throne.<sup>1</sup> In order to exhibit his legitimate right to rule, a king could implement genealogical reasoning. There were three ways that genealogical descent was used to stress a ruler's right to rule: firstly, having the right ancestors. The king had to be able to demonstrate that he was a descendant of the last legitimate king to justify his own accession. Secondly, a long, uninterrupted lineage. The longer the direct line of descent, the more authority stemmed from being a member of that ruling dynasty. Thirdly, being related to prestigious ancestors. Authority could also be heightened further by connecting the current king to prominent and exemplary kings of the past, ancient heroes and saints.<sup>2</sup>

These genealogical arguments were generally outlined in two different approaches: in written texts or as diagrams. Chronicles and histories were a common method of legitimising rule. Scribes would update and adapt famous and widely spread texts to meet the needs and circumstances of the time.<sup>3</sup> These texts were not necessarily genealogies in themselves but could contain genealogical information. One drawback to the diffusion of the message contained within texts, however, was literacy and the need to be able to read. The second method of genealogical reasoning through diagrams could be more easily and widely understood, as a visual representation of lineage and descent.<sup>4</sup>

The genre of genealogical manuscripts existed for centuries. England had an especially long tradition of genealogical reasoning.<sup>5</sup> In the chronicle form, Geoffrey

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1 Given-Wilson 2004, 89.

2 Melville 1987, 427.

3 Matheson 1998, 6; Kennedy 1998, 28.

4 Norbye 2008, 96.

5 Kössinger 2020, 53.

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This publication originated in the Collaborative Research Centre 933 'Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies' (subproject B10 'Rolls for the King. The Format of Rolls in Royal Administration and Historiography in the Late Middle Ages in Western Europe'). The CRC 933 is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). I would like to thank Prof. Jörg Peltzer, Dr. Abigail Armstrong, Chun Fung Tong 唐俊峰, Sarah Kupferschmied, Linda Mosig and Vivien Schiefer (all Heidelberg) for their feedback on various drafts of my paper. I further want to thank the participants of the 'Keeping Record' Workshop for the enriching discussions.

of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* tried to show in the twelfth century that the English kings were direct descendants of Adam and Eve. Furthermore, Geoffrey connected the Trojan foundation legends of Britain to the kings of the Heptarchy and the Norman conquerors.<sup>6</sup> A short time later, the genealogy of Christ by Peter of Poitiers was adapted for this concept to show the descent of the English kings from Adam and Eve.<sup>7</sup> The genealogy of Christ and the direct descent from the first man and woman was utilised to enhance the genealogical authority of the English kings.<sup>8</sup> This "iconography of power" aimed to impress the viewer and to persuade them that the depicted king was the rightful ruler.<sup>9</sup>

The other form of genealogical reasoning involved diagrams, visually charting the hierarchy of descent. These diagram-based genealogies consist mostly of circles or other geometric forms, which are connected through various lines. Usually, the oldest ancestor to whom it is wished to demonstrate descent from is depicted at the beginning of the diagram—the top of the tree—and the current king at the end or bottom. Since the current king is at the bottom of these lists, his importance may be diminished by his low visibility. In fact, the reigning king is depicted in an unusual way on many rolls: his circle, portrait or coat of arms might be framed in a larger or more colourful manner than those of the other kings to emphasise his importance and draw the viewer's attention to the reigning king.<sup>10</sup> The lines of descent were drawn to reiterate their illustrious heritage and prove the legitimacy of their inheritance of the throne.<sup>11</sup> Whereas texts deliver these messages explicitly, the genealogical diagram could suggest, allude and imply various meanings. Creators of genealogical diagrams could play with lineage, descent, legitimate and illegitimate claims. Often the lines on a diagram could express both rulership and descent; sometimes these lines were separated but on other occasions there was no clear distinction between rule and descent.

These genealogies were produced in both the roll and codex forms.<sup>12</sup> The decisive difference between a text-based genealogy in the form of a codex and a diagrammatic roll, is that the roll shows its users the arguments through visual design, whereas the book is meant to be read.<sup>13</sup> The roll form was an ideal instrument to display a genealogical diagram to an audience in order to relate a ruler's authority, kinship and

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<sup>6</sup> Radulescu 2008, 9. The concept of the Heptarchy—the division of the United Kingdom into seven realms—was established by Henry of Huntingdon in the eleventh century: Berenbeim 2015, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Studt 1992, 52.

<sup>8</sup> Holladay 2019, 28–29.

<sup>9</sup> Scott 1960, 61.

<sup>10</sup> For example: Philadelphia, Free Library of Philadelphia, "Edward IV roll" Lewis E 201; Los Angeles, University of California Library, Department of Special Collections, Rouse MS 49.

<sup>11</sup> Sutton/Visser-Fuchs 1997, 135–136.

<sup>12</sup> Monroe 1978, 92; Baker 2014, 125.

<sup>13</sup> There are also noteworthy exceptions: codices like the Chicago, University of Chicago Library, Wigmore Abbey chronicle and Brut chronicle. Codex MS 224 or the Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (BSB), *Vita monachi monasterii Eberspergensis chronicon Bavariae* (Clm 1229) contain sections where a

descent. In the roll form, the diagram could be shown without interruption. The line of descent was not broken by the need to turn the page—as in the codex form. Instead, the user simply had to unwind the roll.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the diagram could inhabit all of the available space on the membrane, rather than being bounded by the page. Furthermore, if the line of descent needed to be extended, additional parchment or paper membranes could easily be added to include further descendants. The roll, therefore, held far more advantages for the depiction of genealogical diagrams than codices.<sup>15</sup>

As the roll was unrolled, the viewers could trace the lines of power and descent and see the entire royal lineage unfold before their eyes. The diagram embodied this transition and the message was clear without the need for texts that could be complicated and repetitive.<sup>16</sup> The diagrams would be illustrated with royal portraits or coats of arms to facilitate the identification of individuals and to further impress the viewer. The depiction of a king led to an intermediate connection between the genealogy and the viewer, as not only the name of the king appeared, but his image as well as those of his ancestors. This intuitive means of presentation made the genealogical roll the ideal medium for public propaganda.<sup>17</sup> This is also the reason why, in general, genealogical rolls were often produced during dynastic crises.<sup>18</sup> The diagram, with its coloured lines, the coat of arms and other pictorial devices deliver the core message that the king depicted at the end of the roll is the only legitimate candidate for the throne. While the texts further describe and clarify some connections and deliver an overall narrative, the viewer can understand this message just by looking at the diagrammatic representation.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in England the roll form possessed a royal aura in itself because it was the preferred medium for royal administration.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the form of the document enhanced the royal authority depicted on it.<sup>21</sup>

The purpose of this article is to investigate the different visual strategies that could be utilised in genealogical rolls to express royal authority. This is done by examining two Yorkist rolls, which were created as propaganda during the Wars of the Roses. This article explores how connecting lines, colour codes and the structure of a diagram provide subtle, yet complex and meaningful messages that are at the same time easily understood. In these manuscripts, arguments to justify and defend royal authority were made predominantly with visual elements, while the text on these rolls play only a supplementary role to reinforce the message depicted in the design. The especial

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genealogical diagram rather than a text delivers the main message. In fact, in both cases these sections are the core of both manuscripts.

**14** Doublier/Alberzoni/Johrendt 2020, 11.

**15** Holladay 2010, 120–121.

**16** A purely genealogical representation quickly repeats itself: x is the son of y, y begets z, etc.

**17** Allan 1979, 175.

**18** Ailes 2002, 100; Radulescu 2003, 64.

**19** In that sense, the diagram itself is at least as important as the text: Norbye 2019, 233.

**20** Skemer, 1995, 198; Laborderie 2013, 79.

**21** Peltzer 2019, 9.

propagandistic value of both the form (roll) and the design element (diagram) lies in its accessibility, aesthetics, clarity and visual impact.

The Wars of the Roses (1455–1487) were a series of conflicts in late medieval England in which questions of legitimate power and royal authority were at its core. War broke out between the houses of Lancaster and York over conflicting claims to the throne. These dynastic tensions stemmed from the reign of Edward III (1327–1377) (see the family tree in Fig. 1). Edward's eldest son had died before his father, so his grandson, Richard II, succeeded him. In this case, the direct line of descent prevailed over the claims of Edward III's other sons. However, when Richard II also remained childless, the question became increasingly urgent as to which of his numerous relatives should succeed him. While the House of Lancaster initially asserted itself in 1399—*not without conflict*—the House of York claimed the throne from the 1450s onward. Genealogical reasoning was naturally a crucial element of these conflicting claims.<sup>22</sup>

As the conflict was a dispute over inheritance and lineage, genealogical rolls were a key part of the propaganda produced to win public support and demonstrate the legitimacy of one side's claim over the other.<sup>23</sup> The Wars of the Roses did not mark their inception nevertheless. The Lancastrian kings had earlier used pedigree rolls to defend their rule after Henry IV, the first Lancastrian king, deposed the former king Richard II in 1399.<sup>24</sup> Yet during the Wars of the Roses, pedigree rolls were produced on a large scale. In particular, they were a key aspect of the attempts to justify Yorkist rule. In 1461, Edward IV claimed the throne after he deposed Henry VI. Having dethroned a crowned and anointed king—as the Lancastrian Henry IV had done before him—the new Yorkist king needed to try to defend and legitimise his rule.<sup>25</sup> He had to rely heavily on a system of political propaganda to plead his case and genealogical arguments were presented to support his reign.<sup>26</sup> From the Yorkist perspective, Edward had the strongest claim to the throne: his father Richard, duke of York, was a descendant of Edward III through both his mother and his father. Because his mother was a daughter of Lionel, duke of Clarence, the second son of Edward III, he could maintain that he had a stronger claim to the throne compared to Henry VI who, through his father, descended from John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, the third son of Edward III. Moreover, Richard, duke of York, was also the grandson of Edmund of Langley, duke of York, the fourth son of Edward III. Therefore, Edward IV, son of Richard, duke of York, could state that he had a far stronger genealogical right to the throne through both his parents than the Lancastrian king.<sup>27</sup> These claims were depicted in a series of genealogical rolls.

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<sup>22</sup> Hicks 2010, 43.

<sup>23</sup> Griffith 1979, 13–14; Hicks 2010, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Shirota 2015, 40.

<sup>25</sup> Coote 2008, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Allan 1986, 149; Shirota 2019, 281.

<sup>27</sup> Given-Wilson 2003, 68.

Both Yorkist kings, Edward IV and Richard III, like their Lancastrian counterparts and predecessors, sought to depict a long and illustrious heritage to show themselves not only as possible legitimate kings, but as the *only* legitimate kings. The first step was to trace their own line of descent through an agnatic line back to Adam

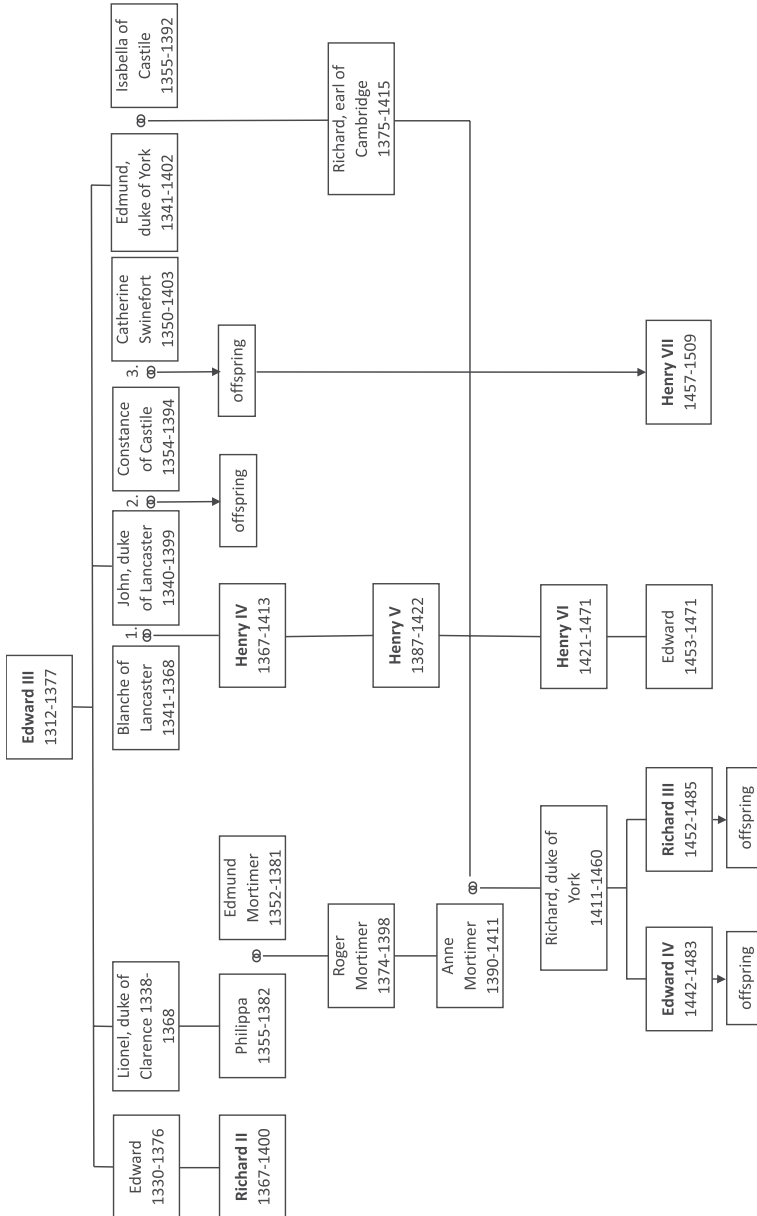


Fig. 1: Simplified pedigree of Edward III's descendants.



and Eve. It sought to include all former English kings, the historical ones as well as the mythical figures. In this sense, the propagandistic efforts of both the Lancastrians and the Yorkists were nothing new, as they adopted common principles that had been widespread since Geoffrey of Monmouth. Over time, the scribes developed some means of standardisation regarding how to depict a royal genealogy. Nevertheless, this familiarity with the narrative was what helped to enhance the reader's ability to understand the argumentation behind the genealogical diagram.

Not only did the Yorkist kings adopt previous practice, they also brought in new genealogical arguments to further their claims. They added a new idea to legitimise the rulership of Edward IV and Richard III: by celebrating them as successors of the British kings via their Mortimer ancestors. Geoffrey of Monmouth proclaimed that the first British king Brutus and his direct descendant, the legendary king Arthur, had descendants in Wales, who would one day return to the English throne. Edward IV's paternal grandmother was of Mortimer descent, a family who could trace its pedigree back to Welsh princes who were held to be descendants of Arthur and Brutus.<sup>28</sup> In this sense, the Yorkist kings fulfilled the prophecy that the Britons — through a Welsh line of descent — would return to claim the throne and restore peace.<sup>29</sup> Fifteen of the surviving 22 royal pedigrees of the reign of Edward IV exemplify this notion of British descent and therefore argue that only with the Yorkist king was the rightful king back on the throne.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, this legitimisation strategy of the British-Welsh descent did not end with the Yorkist rule in 1485. Henry VII similarly claimed that he was the true heir of the British kings and therefore the rightful English king.<sup>31</sup> Even though Henry VII had gained the crown in battle by defeating the last Yorkist king, Richard III, his use of this innovative Yorkist genealogical argument indicates it was considered useful for garnering public support and noble admiration, as its use was otherwise unnecessary.

## **Genealogical Rolls as an Instrument of Yorkist Propaganda**

Rolls depicting royal genealogies have been the subject of much scholarly research.<sup>32</sup> Alison Allan and Maree Shiota have categorised the Yorkist rolls (predominantly those concerned with Edward IV) into different groups based on language, framework and methods of genealogical legitimisation.<sup>33</sup> However, the two rolls that are the

<sup>28</sup> Giffin 1941, 109.

<sup>29</sup> Radulescu 2003, 64; Sutton/Visser-Fuchs 1997, 188.

<sup>30</sup> The actual number of these pedigrees was apparently much higher: Radulescu 2003, 65.

<sup>31</sup> Giffin 1941, 111. The Yorkists traced their line back via the Mortimers to Lewelyn ap Iewerth, who was thought to be the direct descent of Arthur, Brutus and Cadwalader, the last British king. Henry VII via his father also claimed descent of Lewelyn ap Iewerth: Anglo 1961, 19.

<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the state of research into royal genealogical rolls, see: Shiota 2019, 273–274.

<sup>33</sup> Allan 1979, 173; Shiota 2018, 30.

focus of this article are omitted by both scholars as they are difficult to fit into their respective proposed categories. In both the rolls, their creators have not simply added the Yorkist kings to existing exemplars of royal diagrams, as often happened,<sup>34</sup> but instead have each developed independent and new concepts to promote and defend the Yorkist claim to the throne. Because both have a unique and innovative concept of design, which provides further insights into royal propaganda, it is worth analysing and comparing them. The aim is not to show that the Yorkist kings used genealogical rolls for propaganda, but rather how this propaganda actually worked through the combination of visual elements—namely the utilisation of a colour code—and what role the different elements of design played.

The first is roll Lewis E 201—the “Edward IV roll”—held by the Free Library of Philadelphia. It is written in Latin and is 479 × 46 cm in size. It was made sometime between 1461 and 1464 during the reign of Edward IV.<sup>35</sup> The second roll, Bodleian Roll 5—MS Bodl. Rolls 5—is held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and was produced between 1483 and 1485 during the reign of Richard III. Its unfinished status indicates that it was still in progress when Richard III died at the Battle of Bosworth.<sup>36</sup> It is almost twice the length of the Philadelphia roll, measuring 900 × 36 cm.<sup>37</sup>

Both rolls show a high level of creativity and innovation in a medium that was well known to contemporary viewers. Specifically, the various differences in the diagrams of the two rolls, such as their appearance, the position and assemblage of miscellaneous visual elements on the rolls make interesting comparison. The most important element of design to deliver the message of legitimate rule on both these rolls are the coloured lines. A comparison between the two sheds light on the similarities and differences in the legitimisation strategies implemented by the two Yorkist kings. Moreover, both rolls can deepen our understanding of the imagery associated with the expression of rulership and authority as they utilise richly coloured, unique diagrams, which are further supported by pictorial devices including coats of arms, heraldic badges, portraits, swords, crowns and other signs of royal rulership and power.

Both rolls commence by depicting the Yorkist kings as being directly descended from Adam and Eve. As mentioned earlier, this is not a very innovative concept. Initially it does not even seem to be necessary for the Yorkist kings to trace themselves back to Adam and Eve because—as outlined above—their claim to the throne could be sufficiently expressed by showing their descent from Edward III.<sup>38</sup> The inclusion of this biblical foundation is part of the core concept of the diagram of both rolls, to demonstrate that no one else could be the legitimate king of England. The Yorkist kings not only descended from Edward III, but they could also trace their lineage

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<sup>34</sup> Coote 2008, 43.

<sup>35</sup> Scott 1960, 288.

<sup>36</sup> Sutton/Visser-Fuchs 1997, 142.

<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, compared to other rolls this is not that long: Norbye 2019, 239.

<sup>38</sup> Shirota 2019, 267.

back to the old British kings who reigned before the Heptarchy and beyond, unlike the House of Lancaster. These illustrious British royal ancestors were depicted next in the genealogies. The Heptarchy was a time when England was divided into seven kingdoms before their unification by Alfred the Great. It was portrayed as a time of turmoil before peace and prosperity was restored when the country was unified. The inclusion of this history was to mark Yorkist rule as almost a second coming of Alfred, whereby—with the Yorkist king on the throne—the realm would yet again be reunited, restored and prosper, because the Yorkist kings could trace their genealogical line back to the kings even before the Heptarchy—a claim and ancestry that could not be matched by the Lancastrians.<sup>39</sup> That was the overall promise of the Yorkist reign. Therefore demonstrating descent from Edward III—from whom both Lancastrians and Yorkists descended—was not decisive or sufficient. Rather the crucial argument was the descent from the ancient British kings.

Besides this mythical aspect, the diagrams also told a rather prosaic message. Both rolls not only show the royal genealogical line but also include sub-diagrams of various other noble families of the English kingdom. The royal diagram on Bodleian Roll 5 is accompanied by a genealogy of the Percy family, who held the earldom of Northumberland at that time. Their inclusion on the roll is why it was said to have been made by the Percys as a gift for Richard III.<sup>40</sup> With the inclusion of the lines of various noble families, both rolls demonstrated that the king was not isolated from the elites he ruled but that both were intertwined and shared the same genealogical roots. It was especially important to show a deep and rich connection between the ruler and his magnates because the Yorkist rule was in its infancy, unestablished and challenged by the Lancastrians. If the king and his nobles appeared to be a single genealogical unit, challenging the legitimacy of the king meant questioning the rule of the whole nobility, because—as everybody could see on the roll—both shared a line of descent.<sup>41</sup> By grouping the noble families together with the line of the British kings, all these families not only shared various lines of descent but also built a genealogical framework. The king and his magnates appear as an elite group connected through family ties. The inclusion of the highest ranks of the nobility helped to emphasise the power of the king. Nevertheless, despite their common origin, both diagrams made it clear that only the Yorkist kings—not the Lancastrians or other noble lines—had a legitimate claim to the throne.

Roll Lewis E 201 seems to have been created as a gift for Edward IV on his coronation and is remarkable in a number of elements of its design.<sup>42</sup> A portrait of the king

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<sup>39</sup> Hughes 2002, 128.

<sup>40</sup> Tscherpel 2003, 95.

<sup>41</sup> In fact, around 200 nobles could claim to be descendants of the English kings during the Wars of the Roses, which shows how close the ties between the royal family and the nobility were: Hicks 2010, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Because his wife, Elizabeth Woodville, does not appear on the roll it seems to have been made before their wedding in 1464: Scott 1960, 289–290.



Fig. 2: Head of roll Lewis E 201: Edward IV as a riding knight with the coats of arms of France, England, Castile and Leon displayed.

appears at the head of the roll, depicting him as a fully armoured knight riding a horse (Fig. 2). His horse is covered in a tabard emblazoned with the arms of France, England and Castile and Leon.<sup>43</sup> The main element of the genealogy's design, however, is the colourful diagram, which starts with Adam and Eve and ends with Edward IV. Thus Edward IV is shown both at the head and at the foot of the roll, making the roll a unique sign of power and rulership.<sup>44</sup> While circles are normally used as geometric units for genealogical diagrams, the creator of roll Lewis E 201 chooses rectangles, which can hold more text (Fig. 3).<sup>45</sup> This shape is rare in late medieval genealogical rolls, only becoming more common in the fifteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the roll is exceptional because of its rich side program, which depicts heraldic badges, banners, coats of arms and symbols of power such as crowns, swords and the garters worn by members of the Order of the Garter (Fig. 3 and 4).<sup>47</sup> The predominant presence of the House of York over the whole roll in various forms (portraits, names, coats of arms and badges) clearly marks the royal genealogy as a Yorkist one.<sup>48</sup> The heraldic badges and banners of the king and various noble families help to illustrate further the deep connection between the king and his nobles. The noble families and the king appear as a powerful unit symbolised through richly coloured heraldic devices. The message of the roll is clear: the House of York controls every part of the roll and, by extension, every part of the English past.

The royal ancestors of Edward IV also appear as half portraits. Instead of depicting one straight line, the diagram is divided into various sub-diagrams, each of which is coloured differently. At first, there are three lines coloured green, blue and gold, respectively; later there are five lines coloured green, white, blue, gold and red.<sup>49</sup> Every colour stands for a different line of power. As the diagram progresses, the lines unite and are joined together: a green and a red line merge to become a green-red line, blue and yellow become blue-yellow and so on. The combination of colours reflects the unification of the various genealogical descent and ancestral claims, culminating in Edward IV. Over the course of the roll, as the centuries were depicted, various lines of other families are added eventually merging into the line of the kings of England representing additional entitlements. Thus, the line of the counts of Anjou, as well as the line of the kings of Castile are added. Nevertheless, all these sub-diagrams have no

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Hughes even describes this depiction as a direct reference to King Arthur: Hughes 2002, 166.

<sup>44</sup> Scott 1960, 288.

<sup>45</sup> Even though it is not very convenient to write texts in circles, genealogical diagrams regularly consist of circles and connecting lines. Scribes often had problems to keep to the space provided within the circle.

<sup>46</sup> Baker 2014, 130.

<sup>47</sup> There are also other rolls on which badges and signs of allegiance appear—for example, Los Angeles, University of California Library Rouse Ms. 49; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodl. Rolls 5—but the visual program of roll Lewis E 201 is especially rich.

<sup>48</sup> For the Yorkist badges, see: Ailes 2002, 97–100.

<sup>49</sup> For the beginning of the diagram see Fig. 3, for its end see Fig. 4.



Fig. 3: Beginning of the diagram on roll Lewis E 201; start of the green, blue and yellow lines of descent.

connection with Adam and Eve; this lineage is reserved for the English kings, giving them a special and most prominent line of descent.

The introduction of the lines of other ruling families of Europe is used to promote Edward IV's claim to the English throne, but also shows him as the rightful heir of the thrones of France and Castile.<sup>50</sup> Isabella, duchess of York, the daughter of Pedro I, King of Castile, was the great-grandmother of Edward IV. The roll stated not only through a short text but also visually through the diagram that Isabella and her descendants were the rightful heirs to the Castilian throne. Although the Yorkists repeatedly articulated their rights to Castile, the main purpose was not necessarily to make a claim upon the kingdom, but rather as a disparagement of the Lancastrians. Their ancestor, John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, had married Isabella's sister Constance, duchess of Lancaster but the couple did not produce a surviving male heir.<sup>51</sup> While John and Constance abandoned their claim to the Castilian throne and accepted the Trastámara King Henry II as the rightful heir in 1388, the House of York showed continuous interest in its potential claim to Castile. In doing so, they could demonstrate that their line of descent was more legitimate and powerful, because they could still uphold the English claim to the Castilian throne.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the York-line had been genealogically successful because they still had offspring, whereas the Lancastrian line ends on the diagram with Henry VI. Both these messages are delivered not only through text but also through a colour scheme: Pedro I, the Castilian king and his daughters are framed with a red band. This red line, representing the claim to the throne of Castile, runs through the descendants of Isabella to Edmund, duke of York, his three sons and from Richard, earl of Cambridge, to his son Richard, duke of York. Through that red-coloured line, it is clear that no one other than the Yorkist descendants had the right to proclaim themselves as true kings of Castile. This claim is reinforced through the omission of the marriage between Constance and John of Gaunt in the diagram, eradicating any visual signs of a potential Lancastrian claim.<sup>53</sup>

For the claim to the French throne, the strategy is more complex. The mother of the last Lancastrian King Henry VI was a daughter of the French king. Through her, the Lancastrians could therefore also make a claim to the French throne. However, the side text of the sub-diagram rules this out. It states that this line of descent from the French kings had been closed and thus could make no claim to the French throne because it was merely a side line. The main line—according to the diagram—went through Edward II's wife Isabella, daughter of the king of France. However, this meant, that both the Lancastrians and the Yorkists were descendants of Isabella and Edward II.

<sup>50</sup> Coote 2008, 43. The same claim can be found in the codex: MS Cotton Vespasian E VII fols. 70, 71.

<sup>51</sup> Their only daughter Catherine later married Henry III, King of Castile.

<sup>52</sup> Goodman/Morgan 1985, 61.

<sup>53</sup> The marriage between John of Gaunt and Constance is mentioned only in her field of text, whereas his description only mentions his son Henry, styled the earl of Derby, without mentioning any of his three wives.

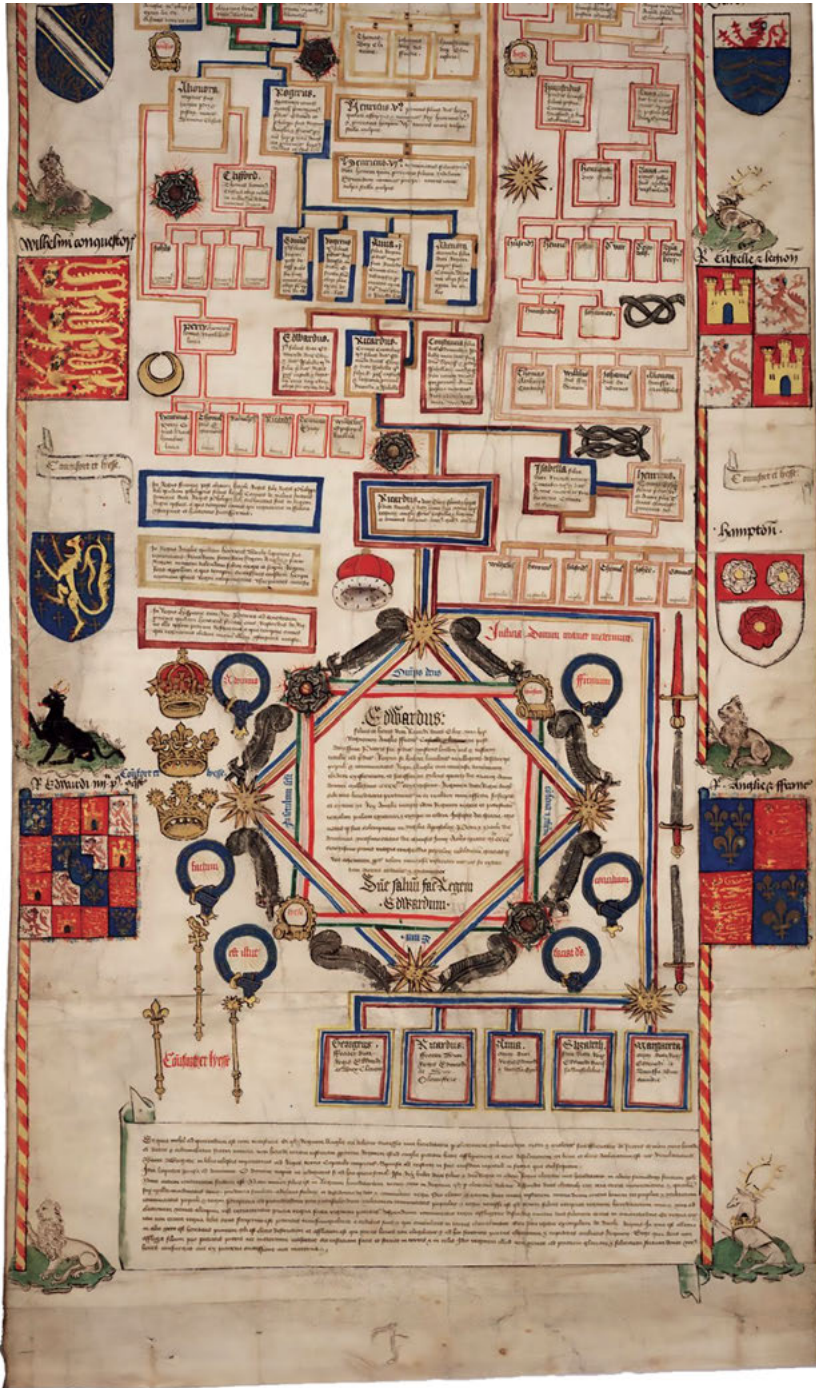


Fig. 4: End of the diagram with the star-shaped frame of Edward IV coloured blue, yellow, red and green and white and red.



To remove the Lancastrians from the line of the French royal inheritance, the diagram again works with a colour scheme: the line of the French kings is blue and the line of the English kings is yellow. The colour blue can be explained by the main colour of the royal arms of France. The colour yellow seems to refer to the golden sun of York, a visual sign which appears repeatedly in the roll.<sup>54</sup> After the marriage of Edward II and Isabella, the lines of their children and grandchildren are coloured blue and yellow until the generation of the sons of Edward III. Afterwards, only the frames of Edward, William and Lionel bear the blue and yellow frame, which shows that they had a claim to both the thrones of France and England. It is also stated in a marginal note that the other sons of Edward III were cut out of the line of succession.<sup>55</sup> After that generation, only King Richard II—who died without an heir—and the descendants of Lionel, duke of Clarence, ancestor of the House of York, are depicted with a blue and yellow frame; the House of Lancaster lacks such a frame. Without providing any real argument, the diagram eradicates or omits any potential Lancastrian claims to state that the Yorkists, as descendants of Edward II, exclusively had the rightful claim to the throne, not the Lancastrians. The colour code is the key driver of that message.

The alternating blue-yellow line ends with Richard, duke of York, which is where the red line of the Castilian claim also ends. According to the diagram, Richard, duke of York, is the rightful claimant to all three thrones of France England and Castile, although he was unable to fulfil any of these claims. Instead, as depicted in the diagram, his son was capable to do so. Again, this important message is demonstrated in the colour scheme of the diagram. In Edward IV, for the first time, the rightful heir to the thrones of France, Castile and, most importantly, England sat on the English throne. His name is framed by two three-coloured rectangles, which form an eight-pointed star. One frame bears the colours blue-yellow-red, standing for the claim to the thrones of France, England and Castile, whereas the other frame bears the colours green-white-red. The colour white represents the line of descent from Obertus, an ancestor of the de Clare family. Elizabeth de Burgh, countess of Ulster, was—according to the diagram—the last representative of this line. She is mentioned as the wife of Lionel, duke of Clarence, second son of Edward III and, according to the roll, the rightful heir to the French and English throne in his descriptive text. The narrative text is helpful because her rectangle is at some distance from Lionel's rectangle, obscuring the message visually. The colour white therefore stands for the direct line of descent from Obertus, an ancient and most noble line, which ends with the marriage of Elizabeth and Lionel. This colour is re-embodied in the frame of Edward IV as well.

Green and red show another source of Edward's legitimacy due to another illustrious ancestor. Philippa, countess of Ulster, the daughter of Lionel, duke of Clarence,

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<sup>54</sup> The golden sun was a royal badge used frequently by Edward IV and also Richard II. Additionally, Edward III had allegedly used the sun symbol before: Siddons 2009, 230–232

<sup>55</sup> This was also a common tactic in French genealogical rolls: Norbye 2008, 97.

had married Edmund Mortimer, earl of March. Mortimer was the last descendant of the old Welsh kings who ruled before the Saxons came to England, stemming from Cadwalader, Arthur and Brutus. That line bears the colours red and green. Through Philippa's marriage to Edmund Mortimer the red-green Welsh line was united with the blue-yellow royal line. The Mortimer line further connects the House of York to Brutus. As with the colour white, the red-green line reappears at the star-shaped frame of Edward IV. The colour code green, white and red makes it clear that Edward IV directly descends from the British Kings Cadwalader, Arthur and Brutus.<sup>56</sup>

The coats of arms and banners of these three legendary kings further emphasise the visual association between them and the Yorkist king.<sup>57</sup> The coat of arms of Brutus even appears as an escutcheon on the banner of Edward IV at the end of the roll, emphasising the connection between Brutus and the Yorkist king even further.<sup>58</sup> The colours blue, yellow and red show that Edward is the legitimate claimant to the kingdoms of France, England and Castile. These claims are also depicted on the horse's tabard in Edward's portrait at the head of the roll. Every claim to a throne is expressed not only through one visual element but at least two: the colour code of the diagram and further decorative elements.

The visual elements express that Edward IV is the true and rightful king to the English throne because through him all lines of legitimate power are for the first time reunited as one. The viewer of the roll does not have to understand every filiation or line of power but can understand through the multi-coloured frame around Edward IV that he is the true king, the legitimate ruler not only of England but also of France and Castile. The illustrations further emphasise that message. Although it was common for the Yorkist genealogical rolls to depict the House's various claims to the different European thrones,<sup>59</sup> the colour-coding of the lines of descent was a new way of showing this claim in this particular roll.

In addition to the colour code and illustrations, the arrangement of other images supports the Yorkist rule. Directly over the depiction of God is Edward IV as the consummate knight on horseback. Two divine hands, rising out of a cloud lift two fingers in blessing the only true king.<sup>60</sup> Both God and Edward IV appear first in picture then

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<sup>56</sup> Cadwalader was meant to be the last British king before the Saxons came to England: Sutton/Visser-Fuchs, 1997, 196.

<sup>57</sup> Hughes 2002, 166–168.

<sup>58</sup> Ailes 2002, 100. It is interesting to note that on other depictions of Edward IV's arms the escutcheon shows different heraldic elements. In the Wigmore Chronicle the escutcheon displays the Mortimer/de Burgh coats of arms, emphasising the descendants of Edward IV from the Mortimer family: Wigmore Chronicle Codex MS 224 fol. 62v. Nevertheless, the coat of arms with the three crowns is used by Edward IV frequently: Hughes 2002, 168.

<sup>59</sup> Kennedy 1989, 2677.

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Scott describes them as *nota bene* signs: Scott 1960, 288. Nevertheless, because the hands rise out of two clouds raising two fingers, it is more appropriate to describe them as blessing hands.

in text at the beginning and at the end of the roll.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, only Edward IV and his father stand in the middle of the roll and in a direct visual line to God. It is clear for all who see the roll that God chose Edward IV to be king.<sup>62</sup> In that sense, Yorkist rule is a fulfilment of a divine prophecy, which is both stated explicitly in the text and illustrations.<sup>63</sup> The connection to God and the display of chivalry were both aspects of a new “iconography of power” that developed over the course of the fifteenth century.<sup>64</sup>

The size of the various elements of design also seeks to enhance the authority of Edward’s reign. Both the star and the riding depiction of Edward IV are the biggest illustration on the manuscript, which take up a central position. Even without knowledge of every person mentioned in the diagram or text, it is clear to the viewer’s eye that Edward IV depicted at the end of the diagram is the only true king. In the star-shaped frame around Edward IV all the gathered colours are assembled around him, marking him as the unifier of all genealogical lines and therefore as the legitimate king.

In the layout of the diagram, every element of design has a clear place and role in the portrayal of this message, which can however, change as the roll is unrolled. The main part of the diagram is entered in four columns. The columns at both edges of the roll contain images of heraldic badges and banners, the two in the middle depict the genealogical diagram and the corresponding fields of texts respectively. At first glance, the text and the diagram seem to be equally important as they occupy the same amount of space. But on the lower part of the roll the diagram takes up increasing space and, even though the rectangles always contain more information than just the name of the depicted person, the amount of text decreases. Nevertheless, the position and layout of the text is at no point chaotic and remains well-structured throughout; it always has a clear position—unlike Bodleian Roll 5 discussed below. The task of the accompanying texts is to support the message displayed in the diagram by providing various genealogical arguments, although they predominantly consist of superfluous narrative episodes that contribute little to the genealogy. Instead, the argument that Edward IV has a unique and unprecedented claim to the throne is made solely through the diagrammatic element.

The second roll of this study, Bodleian Roll 5, follows a similar diagrammatical scheme to roll Lewis E 201. Rather than ending with Edward IV, the roll continues into the reign of his brother, Richard III, who was king at the time of its construction. Like roll Lewis E 201, Bodleian Roll 5 also contains portraits of kings and coats of arms, but the diagram plays a more integral role, dominating the whole manuscript.<sup>65</sup> The

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<sup>61</sup> The Yorkist king was not the first one to connect his reign to a messianic hope. Similar depictions can be also found on rolls of Henry VI: Klapisch-Zuber 1991, 127–128.

<sup>62</sup> There were also various other manuscripts which delivered that exact message: Radulescu 2003, 65.

<sup>63</sup> Sutton/Visser-Fuchs 1997, 139; Scott 1960, 289.

<sup>64</sup> Scott 1960, 61.

<sup>65</sup> For a description of both the cities and the portraits, see: Scott 2000, 82.

elements of design are also less consistent and the membranes of the roll are less strictly structured in comparison to roll Lewis E 201. A key feature of Bodleian Roll 5 is the use of an elaborate colour scheme, although it is much more complicated than roll Lewis E 201 because the scribes give much more attention to biblical and ancient times. Even though there are the same types of visual elements on both rolls, the illustrations are used less coherently to support the royal authority of the House of York. The legendary king Brutus and William the Conqueror (Fig. 5) both appear as knights on horseback in their rondels, whereas at the end of the roll, only Richard III's face is drawn in his rondel (Fig. 6). He is depicted like any of the other kings, except Brutus and William.



**Fig. 5:** William the Conqueror as a riding knight on Bodleian Roll 5.



**Fig. 6:** The portrait of Richard III on Bodleian Roll 5.

In comparison to roll Lewis E 201, the staging of the king is much more restrained with no large portrait. The text of the roll is also unique, unlike any other Yorkist roll.<sup>66</sup> As on the Philadelphia roll, the genealogy of Bodleian Roll 5 starts with the divine context. The scribe opens with a general reflection on the mortality of man before the genealogy starts. With this beginning, the diagram becomes not only a genealogical sequence, but also a salvation-historical narrative which culminates in the reign of Richard III. Compared to roll Lewis E 201, this approach to put the genealogy of the English kings in a religious perspective is more limited and not lavishly celebrated, but the scribe of the roll still emphasised this connection.<sup>67</sup> Rather than proposing the argument of divine legitimacy, Bodleian Roll 5 stressed the role of Richard III as the unifier of the kingdom under a new just and peaceful rule.

The narrative of the Heptarchy is far more important, more so than the connection to God. This part of the diagram takes up considerably more space and is accompanied by long texts. The detailed presentation of the Heptarchy is intended to further

<sup>66</sup> Kennedy 1989, 2678.

<sup>67</sup> Sutton/Visser-Fuchs 1997, 141.

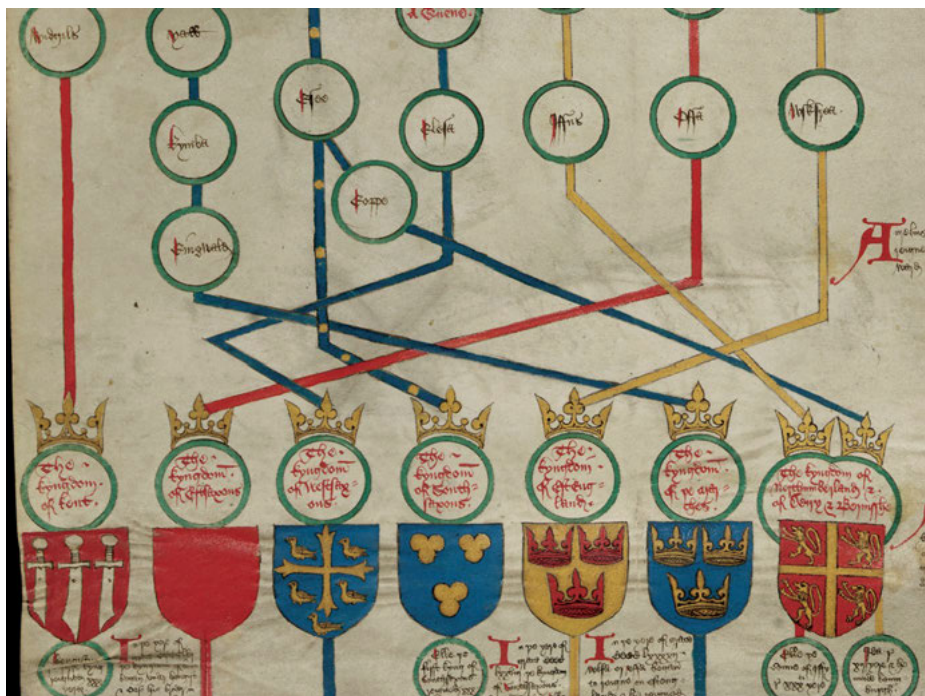


Fig. 7: The Heptarchy depicted as diagrammatic chaos on Bodleian Roll 5.

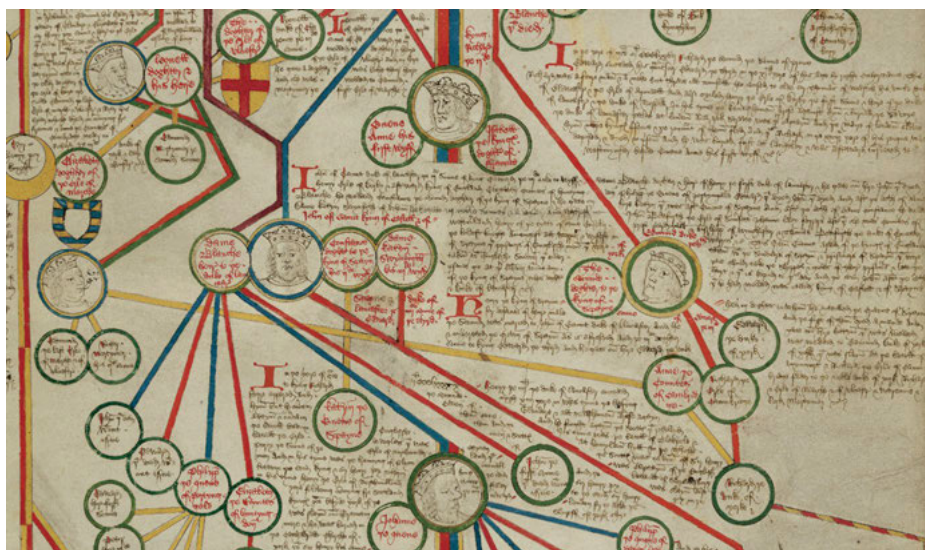


Fig. 8: The shift to the left after the death of Richard II on Bodleian Roll 5. The green-red line depicting the descendants of Brutus switches to yellow after the roundel of Roger Mortimer. On the lower right side, the unique red-yellow striped line of the House of York after the roundel of Richard, duke of York.

legitimise the Yorkist kingship by depicting a turbulent history of division with multiple kings brought to an end with the unification of England by a sole king.<sup>68</sup> The scribe alludes to this narrative of instability during the Heptarchy through the chaotic layout of the diagram and connecting lines (Fig. 7). Nevertheless, sufficient space is left to ensure both text and diagram complement each other. This early turbulence in English history is then repeated when depicting the Lancastrian kings, with similarly disorganised lines on the diagram. It is also compressed in a small space on the roll causing disharmony with the text, thus further emphasising the turmoil of Lancastrian rule. The Yorkist kings fulfilled the role as righteous rulers who ended a period of disturbance and instability. Whereas the lines of the seven kingdoms appear in many different colours, the Yorkist line at the end of the diagram appears united. Just like Alfred the Great ended the era of the Heptarchy, Richard III brings a new era of peace.

As the diagram progresses, the number of secondary and sub-diagrams continues to increase. In particular, the line of the dukes of Normandy and further down the Percy genealogy provide a great variety of lines, persons and colours. With these lines, the complexity of the diagram also increases, taking up more space resulting in less accompanying, explanatory text.

There are fewer coats of arms and no banners on Bodleian Roll 5. In comparison to roll Lewis E 201, Bodleian Roll 5 differentiates between the main line of kingship and side lines. The main line is twice as wide as the side lines and has a frame drawn in contrasting colours. Whereas roll Lewis E 201 lacks a central line, Bodleian Roll 5 always depicts the king in the centre of the roll, which is a common characteristic of many genealogical rolls. That does not mean that the Philadelphia roll does not use the centre of the roll to convey special messages. Every important figure, starting with God, Adam and Eve and ending with Edward IV has its place in the centre of the roll. However, through the central line of Bodleian Roll 5, all English kings are in the same position. They therefore have the same authority and depict a neater line of continuity; each successive king continues that line and by that receives authority from his ancestors. Furthermore, the central line on Bodleian Roll 5 makes it easier for the viewer to follow the main line of power, which is particularly important given the great complexity of the diagram. Not only the colour code but also the position and size of a rondel and its portrait tells the viewer something about the importance and power of the depicted kings. In this sense, both rolls deliver an interesting message as they place God, Adam and Eve and the current king in one line, reiterating this divine connection as a source of legitimacy. In comparison, all English kings, even the Lancastrian ones, have a position in the middle of Bodleian Roll 5.

Whereas the central line gives all English kings the same authority, it is the colour code on Bodleian Roll 5 that makes the Yorkist kings' special claim to rule clear. The main line of power of the English kings starts with William the Conqueror. The royal

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68 Hughes 2002, 128.

line after him bears the colour red with a golden frame. A green or blue line connects the kings of England before the Conquest. This line reappears after William the Conqueror, because his son Henry I married Maud, a descendant of the Saxon kings of England. Maud's line of descent is blue, but instead of changing the main line of power, which connects the English kings, the colour—red with a golden frame—stays the same. This makes it clear that a new rule started after the Conquest. Nevertheless, the diagram emphasises the continuity of the English kings before and after the Conquest. The colour code changes with the marriage between Edward II and Isabelle of France. As on roll Lewis E 201, the colour code expresses the claim to the French throne. The line of power is heraldically quartered in red and blue, but is still framed by a golden outline.

Instead of delegitimising the Lancastrian kings by denying them the claim to the French throne, the colours of the rightful heirs also connect to the Lancastrian kings. All English kings after Edward II apparently have the same right to the French throne. The line of the Lancastrian kings takes the same position and uses the same colour scheme as the former and later kings. Unlike roll Lewis E 201, Bodleian Roll 5 concedes equal claim to the throne to both the Houses of York and Lancaster. Nevertheless, the Yorkist kings are depicted as having the better claim to the English throne in other ways. Henry IV, the first Lancastrian king, for example, appears only as the earl of Derby, not as king. The structure of the diagram also delegitimises Lancastrian kingship in another subtle way. After Richard II, the diagram shifts away from the single central line of descent. The main line of English kings is interrupted and the entire diagram drifts towards the right to where Richard, duke of York, is depicted (Fig. 8).<sup>69</sup> Comparatively large fields of texts are placed in the spot where, under normal circumstances, the royal line of succession should be continued. Even though substantial texts can still be found on the roll, it is clear that they have a rather secondary role, as the various lines of the diagram repeatedly cross the fields of texts. The scribe had to fill in the text in the spaces that remained after the diagram had been produced. Whereas at the beginning of the roll the diagram and text have both their own space in the overall layout, by the end of the roll the diagram clearly dominates. Only with the succession of Edward IV to the throne does the diagram revert back to the central line. The roll also does not use the Castilian claim to legitimise the Yorkist kingship. Instead, John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster—the Lancastrian ancestor—bears the title as King of Castile. Overall, the diagram not only defends the legitimacy of the Yorkist king but of all English kings. It seems as if the distinction between the Lancastrian and Yorkist rule was not that much of an issue anymore after Edward IV had successfully ruled for twelve years. During the reign of Richard III, other narratives were more important than delegitimising the claim of the Lancastrians to the throne of Castile.

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<sup>69</sup> Diagrams with a similar structure appear on various other Yorkist rolls: Shirota 2019, 268.

The crucial design to legitimise the Yorkist reign is the same. Only Richard, duke of York, and his sons can claim to be the successors of all British kings because they unite all genealogical roots of British kingship. Interestingly the colour code of the ancestry from Brutus, the legendary first king of Britain, is also green and red. The line of descent of Brutus is red, that of Hugh Mortimer green and both are united through marriage to a green and red line. Until the rondel of his grandfather Richard, duke of York, this line meanders through the diagram, from the left to the right side of the roll. After the rondel of Roger Mortimer, earl of March, it switches to gold. Through his mother Anne Mortimer and his father Richard, earl of Cambridge, Richard, duke of York, unites the red line of the Norman and the Saxon kings together with the golden line of the ancient British kings. Because of that, the connecting line to his children is striped red and yellow (see Fig. 8). This element of design is completely new on the roll and shows that Richard's children have a unique and unprecedented right to the throne. This line runs along the far left edge, splits and then bends to the centre of the roll to show the Yorkist brothers Edward IV and Richard III as legitimate rulers.

## Heraldry and Colour Codes as Genealogical Messengers

Overall, both roll Lewis E 201 and Bodleian Roll 5 use an elaborated colour scheme to deliver the message that the descendants of Richard, duke of York, are the true kings of England. It is striking that they even use the same colours for the various lines of power: green-red for the mythical roots of the British kings, red-blue for the post-Conquest English kings and the claim to the French throne, and yellow as a general sign for legitimate rulership. The colours red and blue can be easily explained because they are the main colours of the royal coat of arms of England and France.<sup>70</sup> The combination of green and red requires some explanation. English scribes were sure that the descendants of the original British king Brutus had survived in Wales and had a unique claim to the English throne. It is important to see that the legitimisation strategies via the British-Welsh line were not a piece of obvious counter-factual political propaganda, but that contemporaries believed it to be true.<sup>71</sup> Green and red seem to be the ancient colours of Wales. Green even appears on Lancastrian rolls for the Welsh lines.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, it can be assumed that the colour codes were so common—and therefore recognisable—that everyone could understand the implications. The Tudors also used the colours green, white and red on their banners to mark their

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<sup>70</sup> Shirota 2015, 41.

<sup>71</sup> The Mortimer connection from British descent was already vivid during the fourteenth century and even during the Tudor age, contemporary historians thought the Yorkists were descendants from this genealogical line: Anglo 1961, 22. The Welsh descent was celebrated lavishly in the Wigmore chronicle: Chicago, MS 224.

<sup>72</sup> Shirota 2015, 41.



descent from Cadwalader, the descendant of Brutus.<sup>73</sup> Henry Tudor rode with a banner depicting the red dragon on a white and green field on the Battlefield of Bosworth. With these colours, he showed his Welsh descent. His contemporaries and followers, be they Yorkists or Tudors, would recognise these colours. Otherwise, it would have made no sense to use the exact same colours for the same message on different rolls.

In addition to the heraldic connections, colour also held other connotations. Red was frequently used in genealogical diagrams to denote power and rulership.<sup>74</sup> Many lines of succession of the English kings are red in colour. The same principal can be found on German genealogical rolls with the colour red primarily denoting continuity of rule and genealogical succession.<sup>75</sup> Green is another frequently encountered colour, often combined with red.<sup>76</sup> It indicates a connection to natural growth. On some rolls, decorative leaves support this tree-like association.<sup>77</sup> In the context of genealogies, the tree symbolises not only natural growth and strength, but also has a religious connection because the oldest genealogies depict the descent of Jesus and express a messianic hope in such a manner.<sup>78</sup> In comparison, both roll Lewis E 201 and Bodleian Roll 5 use a heraldic colour code most of the time.<sup>79</sup> By utilizing heraldic colour schemes, the creators could deliver messages visually that are even more complex.

The use of coloured lines to depict the legitimate line of power and claims to the throne can also be seen in other genealogical rolls such as Manchester, John Rylands Library Latin MS 113, which portrayed John de la Pole, earl of Lincoln, as the legitimate heir to Richard III.<sup>80</sup> It was commissioned by the de la Pole family and read by an aristocratic audience.<sup>81</sup> Whereas the direct line of the English kings is painted in a thick red colour, as well as the connection between Richard III and his potential heir, after 1485 another line was added to the roll on its far right-side.<sup>82</sup> A black line leads from the rondel of Owen Tudor to that of Henry VII—which contains a black crown—the Tudor king who defeated Richard III and made it impossible for John de la

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**73** Millican 1932, 11.

**74** For example: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole Rolls 39; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS lat misc b 2 (r); Christchurch, University of Canterbury MS 1; Manchester, John Rylands Library Latin MS 113.

**75** Studt 2005, 242. Birgit Studt works with examples of the dukes of Bavaria, but the margraves of Baden also had a pedigree coloured in red: Karlsruhe, Generallandesarchiv 47 Nr. 516,1–3.

**76** For example: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodl. Rolls 6 and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodl. Rolls 7; London, British Library Add MS 21219 and London, British Library Harley T 12. Another roll also uses red but the royal line is green: London, British Library Royal 14 B VIII.

**77** For example: London, British Library Add MS 21219.

**78** Klapisch-Zuber 2004, 79; Norbye 2008, 98.

**79** Apart from the possibility to allude to genealogical strength by using colours like red and green, there are also many other rolls which use heraldically coloured lines for their diagram. Blue is used for the line of royal succession because it is the main colour of the coats of arms at the head of the roll in: New York, Public Library Spencer Collection Ms 193).

**80** Morgan 1998, 114; Andrews 2019, 157.

**81** Radulescu 2003, 70.

**82** The red line marks the legitimate line of the English kings: Morgan 1998, 112.

Pole to become king. Black can be associated with death, evil and badness.<sup>83</sup> The use of the black colour for the Tudor pedigree shows that the de la Poles did not consider Henry the legitimate king. This example shows us that colour codes and lines of power on genealogical rolls could both legitimise and delegitimise kingship. In comparison to the rather elaborate heraldic colour code on Bodleian Roll 5, the Ryland Roll has a more simplistic approach to colour use to deliver a clear message.<sup>84</sup>

Additionally, the structure of the diagram and the persons mentioned could bear political implications. On Bodleian Roll 5 the quartered line of power, which marks the line of the English kings, reappears beneath the rondel of Edward IV, but Edward is not directly connected to his brother representing the unusual transition of power. Edward IV died unexpectedly in 1483 and even though he had two sons who survived him, they were both minors and so their uncle Richard seized the throne and became Richard III. It would be interesting to see how or if the scribes of the roll had planned to deliver the rather unflattering story of Richard's accession, but unfortunately the roll remains unfinished. The final membrane remains blank, apart from the diagram. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the diagram of the roll did not omit the children of Edward IV even though this would have been a clever solution to further legitimise Richard III's claim to the throne. The non-emphasis on Richard, the rather restrained divine reference and the lack of manipulation of the descendant lines of Edward IV demonstrate further that the roll was not designed to unconditionally legitimise Richard's claim to the throne, but rather to legitimise the Yorkist kings as part of the long line of English kings. This made sense because the roll did not exclusively show the royal genealogy but also the ancestry of the Percy family, the earls of Northumberland. Apparently, there was no interest or need to delegitimise Edward IV in favour of Richard. This political partisanship could be expressed by the diagram.

In comparison, Ryland Roll Latin Ms 114 actually did delegitimise Edward IV and his natural heirs.<sup>85</sup> The statement, that the sons of Edward IV had no claim to the throne, is delivered in a field of text. Nevertheless, the sons of Edward IV appear in the diagram. A further text states that Richard III decided that after his own son had died, his nephew from the de la Pole family should be his heir. It is noteworthy that the full message on that roll was expressed through text rather than the diagram. In comparison to roll Lewis E 201 and Bodleian Roll 5, the political implication could be understood only by receiving both the diagram and the accompanying text. In light of these circumstances, it is all the more remarkable that the text fields of the Ryland

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**83** Black for connecting lines was also used on other Yorkist rolls for the Lancastrian line to mark them as illegitimate: Hughes 2002, 135.

**84** The Rouse roll also has a rather simple colour code. Here the colour of the diagram changes every time an agnatic line or dynasty ends. The bright yellow and green colours do not seem to have a special meaning: Roll Rouse Ms. 49.

**85** Manchester, John Rylands library Latin Ms 113. In addition, the majority of the rest of the offspring of Edward IV do not appear on the roll: Morgan 1998, 112.

Roll, like those of Bodleian Roll 5, are repeatedly intersected by connecting lines. Even though the text plays a crucial role to help the viewer understand the argumentation of the manuscript, the diagram has priority in the overall layout.

While the lines of power on Bodleian Roll 5 did not connect all English kings and roll Lewis E 201 lacks a central line, all English kings occupy an equal position on the Ryland Roll. The roll does not emphasise a unique claim of the House of York to the English throne, but they joined the ranks of the English kings. Continuity and legitimate rule were the main message of the genealogical diagram, which made it necessary to also include the Lancastrian kings.<sup>86</sup> The concept of the roll was therefore less focused on legitimising a single king. Rather, the entire House of York was to be legitimised and their claim to the throne transferred to the de la Pole heir. The diagrams on all three rolls were thus made for different purposes, each nuancing its own political messages, yet the main carriers of this meaning were common throughout: the colour code and the structure of the diagram.

## Conveying Genealogical Argumentation through Visual Elements of Design

In conclusion, the overall advantage of delivering genealogical information through a diagram was that it was easy for every viewer, even if they could not read, to understand the message of the roll.<sup>87</sup> Apart from the specific strategies the scribes used to show the genealogical claims of the Yorkist kings, both roll Lewis E 201 and Bodleian Roll 5 demonstrate that the English kings could trace their roots back to Adam and Eve in a direct line.<sup>88</sup> This underpinned the great dignity of kingship; the continuity of English kings legitimised their claim to rule.<sup>89</sup> By using a colour code, pictures, figures and symbols of power, the viewers could not only understand the messages of the roll by sight, but the messages were also delivered much faster compared to a text. The visual elements were not only illustrations; they were indispensable for the whole concept of the roll. The medium of the roll itself also supported the main idea. Without the need to turn a page—which is an interruption of the reception process—the eye of the viewer followed the lines of descent and with every new element of design could learn more down to the current, legitimate king. By unrolling the roll on a table, the viewers could easily see the connection between the creation of Adam and Eve and the current king, in addition to all his ancient and legendary forebears. As a result,

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**86** Some Lancastrian rolls have the same approach by avoiding any controversial points about recent political issues but instead concentrate on the line of descent and show royal continuity: Shirota 2015, 53.

**87** Clanchy 2013, 144.

**88** The diagram of the Ryland Roll starts with King Brutus, mentioning the deluge in an introductory text: Manchester, John Rylands Roll Latin Ms 113.

**89** Not only the English kings used rolls for that purpose but also the French kings: Norbye 2007, 308.

the viewer could only conclude that the current king was the sole legitimate ruler. The history of the English kings, their descent and therefore their legitimisation to rule unrolled itself in front of the viewer's eyes.<sup>90</sup> Visual elements such as colour codes, coats of arms and other illustrations were able to convey complex ideas and arguments about the authority of royal rule that were still easily accessible and appealing to the viewer at the same time. The importance of this strategy of legitimisation through the rolls can be proved by the fact that such rolls were also sent to France, Flanders, Germany and Rome to emphasise the legitimacy of the English kings.<sup>91</sup> They were not only visually appealing but also a part of royal propaganda to show the authority of the English king through his unique descent. The lines of power on a royal pedigree roll were part of the "diagrammatic backbone" to legitimise kingship and show royal descent.<sup>92</sup> In that sense, they were part of a much bigger discourse to establish and defend authority, power and legitimisation.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Norbye 2019, 253.

<sup>91</sup> Sutton/Visser-Fuchs 1997, 140. The number of French genealogical rolls that defended and legitimised the French kingship is also quite high: Norbye 2007, 317.

<sup>92</sup> Sutton/Visser-Fuchs 1991, 343.

<sup>93</sup> Radulescu/Kennedy 2008, 1.

- Oxford, Bodleian Library  
 MS Ashmole Rolls 39.  
 MS Bodl. Rolls 5.  
 MS Bodl. Rolls 6.  
 MS Bodl. Rolls 7.  
 MS lat misc b 2 (r).
- Philadelphia, Free Library of Philadelphia  
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Fig. 2–4: Free Library of Philadelphia, "Edward IV roll" Lewis E 201. Copyright: Public Domain.

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Jörg Peltzer

# The Cartulary as a Visual Representation of Rulership

King Henry IV of England (1399–1413) and the Great Cowcher (London, TNA, DL 42/1–2)

To Chris Given-Wilson

Cartularies were a wide-spread phenomenon in the central and late European Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> They contained transcriptions of documents—predominantly charters (hence the name)—from the original records preserved in the archive(s) of a particular institution or individual. These documents usually related to the institution’s or individual’s property, privileges, rights and claims. It is important to note that cartularies did not necessarily contain all the materials of the archive(s) in question. Often, they represented a conscious selection. Moreover, while cartularies share the general feature of containing copies of documents, they can differ in their materiality, i. e. the materials used (e. g. parchment or paper as the writing support, sumptuous or frugal covers and bindings, with or without illumination), their form (codex or roll) and format (large, small, type of binding), their layout etc.;<sup>2</sup> they could also differ in the way they organise their records (e. g. by the rank of the issuer of the charter, in alphabetical order of the possessions recorded, by lordships etc.);<sup>3</sup> finally, they could differ in the concrete reasons for their making and hence their purposes beyond serving as a convenient archive.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, each cartulary has its own story to tell.

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1 Useful starting points to the large body of literature on medieval cartularies are: Guyotjeannin 2000; Guyotjeannin/Morelle/Parisse 1993; Kosto/Winroth 2002; and more recently Furtado/Moscone 2019; Smith 2020; Tucker 2020, esp. 4–33.

2 For definitions of these terms, see: Meier/Ott/Sauer 2015; Peltzer 2019a, 2–3.

3 For the various ways to organise the charter material in French and English cartularies, see: Müller 2011; Walker 1971; Genet 1977; Bouchard 2002. For some late medieval German cases, see: Peltzer (2023).

4 A point recently also stressed by Joanna Tucker in relation to the Scottish cartularies: Tucker 2019, 156–161; Tucker 2020, 4–33.

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The initial research for this paper was supported by the European Research Council under the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013)/ERC grant agreement no 204905 (RANK). The research was carried further and completed within the framework of the Collaborative Research Centre 933 ‘Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies’ (subproject B10 ‘Rolls for the King. The Format of Rolls in Royal Administration and Historiography in the Late Middle Ages in Western Europe’). The CRC 933 is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). For their help in writing this paper I am indebted to Abigail Armstrong (Heidelberg), Adrian Jobson (Norwich), Linda Mosig (Heidelberg) and Nicholas Vincent (Norwich).



In what follows, the focus is directed on late medieval England, more precisely on the story of the so-called Great Cowcher, a two-volume cartulary today preserved among the records of the Duchy of Lancaster at the National Archives, London, UK. It was commissioned by King Henry IV (1399–1413) in the spring of 1402. Henry's accession to the English throne was the result of a revolt. In 1399, after the death of his father John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, the exiled Henry had been denied accession to his rich inheritance by King Richard II (1377–1399). In response, Henry returned at the head of an army to England, attacked the king, removed him from the throne and had himself crowned king on 13 October 1399 (the feast day of St Edward the Confessor, itself also the eve of the anniversary of the Battle of Hastings). As a result, in subsequent years, he was busy defending his rule against various opponents.<sup>5</sup> The making of the Great Cowcher needs to be placed within this context of Henry's fight for the Lancastrian inheritance and his—at times—unstable kingship.

### **The King's Order and the Purpose of the Great Cowcher in Modern Historiography**

On 1 May 1402, Henry made known that because the charters, other evidences and muniments of his duchy of Lancaster were dispersed and improperly arranged among various places in his "inheritance" (i. e. the duchy), he had assigned to John Leventhorpe,<sup>6</sup> his receiver-general, the task "to search and to view the charters, other evidences and muniments of our said inheritance" and to have as many of them as he deems necessary brought to London for transcription in one or two volumes. These volumes, Henry's letter continues, were to remain in London or wherever the king ordered them to be, to serve as evidence and information for the Council of the duchy so that once the charters and muniments had been copied, they could be put in order and stored in any of his castles to be preserved in a safer way than hitherto. Henry's constables, receivers and other men in charge of guarding his charters and muniments were ordered to make them available to John, whose expenses were to be taken in hand by the Council of the duchy.<sup>7</sup> The king's orders were obeyed and the result was two volumes whose outstanding quality has long been noted by historians. Almost a hundred years ago in 1927, James F. Baldwin observed that they "are probably the most elegant of any books ever compiled in the service of government, and as a compendium of charters they have

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<sup>5</sup> On Henry, see: Given-Wilson 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Leventhorpe is also spelt Leventhorp by Somerville: Somerville 1936. Presumably derived from Leventhorpe near Bradford, Yorkshire W. R.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix; Somerville 1936, 598–599, referring to Henry's letter to John Ashford, constable of Kenilworth Castle, concerning this matter: London, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], DL 42/15, fol. 123v (modern pencil numbering).

never been surpassed”.<sup>8</sup> The first detailed examination of the Cowcher’s making was published nine years later by Robert Somerville,<sup>9</sup> the great expert on the history of the duchy of Lancaster. His article is still the starting point for any discussion on the Cowcher and my debts to his findings are evident throughout what follows. In his study, Somerville did not engage with the theory, proposed since the nineteenth century, that the Cowcher originally consisted of three volumes instead of two. He may, as David X. Carpenter suggests, simply not have been aware of this suggestion, as it had originated from discussions on twelfth-century charters that were outside the scope of his interests.<sup>10</sup> Yet, due to work on these charters in the second half of the twentieth century, the idea of a lost third volume regained some currency and in 2010, made it into the revised edition of Davis’ *Catalogue of Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain and Ireland*.<sup>11</sup> However, four years later, in 2014, David X. Carpenter took on this issue and showed very clearly that such a third volume had never existed.<sup>12</sup> The cartulary always consisted of the two volumes still extant today, as originally envisaged by Henry IV himself.

Despite its prominence, the cartulary has been subject to surprisingly few historical investigations. Its charters have obviously been mined by historians for a long time, but as a document per se, it has not received the attention it deserves. It is telling that William Hardy drew heavily on the Cowcher for his edition of the Duchy’s charters published in 1845,<sup>13</sup> but that the Cowcher itself has not yet been edited. Somewhat ironically, this relative lack of attention may be due to the fact that the identification of its purpose seems very straightforward. Henry’s notification informs us, that the cartulary should serve “for evidence and information” for the Council of the duchy and that, as consequence of its making, the original documents could be better protected and stored in a more systematic way.<sup>14</sup> In his book on the duchy of Lancaster published in 1953, Somerville seemingly sealed the matter by concluding that the Cowcher “had a strictly practical purpose—to preserve a convenient record of the title deeds of the Lancaster inheritance”.<sup>15</sup> In other words, it had a purely administrative purpose. What mattered was the content of the charters, not how they were presented. The manuscript therefore merited no further detailed investigation.

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**8** Baldwin 1927, 140.

**9** Somerville 1936. Somerville argued that the singular “Cowcher book” for the two-volume cartulary is incorrect and should be replaced by the plural “Cowcher books”: *Ibid.*, 601. I follow the terminology used by the National Archives that continue to use the term “Cowcher book” for both volumes of the cartulary.

**10** Carpenter 2014, 2–5.

**11** Carpenter 2014, 4; Davis, rev. Breay/Harrison/Smith 2010, 264 no. 1269.1. Davis did not refer to it in his edition of 1958, see: Davis 1958, 147.

**12** Carpenter 2014, *passim*.

**13** *The Charters of the Duchy of Lancaster*.

**14** See Appendix; also quoted by Baldwin 1927, 140; Somerville 1936, 598, refers again to Henry’s letter to John Ashford containing the same information; London, TNA, DL 42/15, fol. 123v.

**15** Somerville 1953, xi.

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with identifying the Cowcher's purpose in this way. There is no reason to argue against Henry's letter that it was intended to serve practical administrative or judicial purposes. The king was very aware of the use of charters to justify claims to land. In 1391–1392, long before his accession to the throne, he had his men search the royal records preserved in the Tower of London for evidence in support of his claim to receive in full the Welsh lordship of Brecon as part of the inheritance of his wife, Mary de Bohun. As a result, charters of Kings Edward I and Edward II, as well as financial accounts relating to Brecon, were copied out and exemplifications of charters purchased.<sup>16</sup> This was no isolated incident. Also in 1392, this time in pursuit of the inheritance of Thomas, earl of Lancaster (d. 1322), his men again searched the Tower for supporting evidence, which they duly found.<sup>17</sup> It may have been in the context of such claims that a register was compiled that contained charters found in London and at various Lancastrian archives such as Kenilworth, Leicester, Tutbury, Bolingbroke, Pontefract and Pickering.<sup>18</sup>

The man orchestrating the legal case concerning Earl Thomas' inheritance was Henry's receiver-general, John Leventhorpe.<sup>19</sup> Thus when Leventhorpe was charged by the king a decade later "to search and view all our [i. e. Henry IV's] charters and other evidences and muniments of our aforesaid inheritance [i. e. the duchy of Lancaster]",<sup>20</sup> he knew what would and could be useful to justify claims to titles, lands, rights etc. He was a man of administrative and judicial practice and his charter collection was to serve such purposes. Yet, this does not explain why so much effort went into ensuring that the Cowcher ranks as "probably the most elegant of any books ever compiled in the service of government" to quote Baldwin's characterisation once more. After all, within ten years of its completion a copy was made that was much cruder in appearance. Just to compare their costs is telling; the Cowcher cost three times more than its copy. The Cowcher volumes cost £ 118 7 s in total, with the majority — £ 115 12 s 1 d — being spent on its writing, materials and illumination, compared to just £ 35 12 s 9 d spent on the production of the copy.<sup>21</sup> If it had been intended merely as a register of charters to use in court or elsewhere, such a simpler, more cost-efficient version would have been entirely sufficient. It is therefore plausible to suppose that the Cowcher was more than just a piece of administrative record-keeping and that it also conveyed a more abstract message relating to Henry IV's kingship and the Lancastrian inheritance. In order to verify this hypothesis and to identify that message, it is necessary to reopen the question of the Cowcher's purpose by turning to the manuscript itself and in the process to ask: what do the organisation of the documents and

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<sup>16</sup> Given-Wilson 2016, 82.

<sup>17</sup> Given-Wilson 2016, 83–84.

<sup>18</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/11; cf. Somerville 1953, xi.

<sup>19</sup> Given-Wilson 2016, 84.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix; Somerville 1936, 598–599, referring to: London, TNA, DL 42/15, fol. 123v.

<sup>21</sup> Somerville 1936, 599, 612–613.

the cartulary's materiality reveal about the Cowcher's programme beyond its practical use as an archive of legal titles?

## The Organisation of the Material

Somerville's findings show very clearly that the Great Cowcher was the result of a concerted and well-planned campaign of action.<sup>22</sup> Due to the sheer size of the task, it took a couple of years to be completed, but it always remained a specific task to be carried out in a precisely planned manner. Only a small number of entries were added later in spaces originally left blank. Thus, in its final form the Great Cowcher did not represent a 'living text' passing through several hands over many years and potentially developing different narratives serving different purposes. Instead, the Great Cowcher represents the vision of Henry IV and how John Leventhorpe interpreted that vision.

Leventhorpe went through the Lancastrian archives in the spring and summer of 1402.<sup>23</sup> The charters were brought to London where he arranged them for transcription. The ordering of the c. 2420 selected deeds took him a total 17 days spread over the months of May, July and November 1402.<sup>24</sup> In order to uncover the principles according to which Leventhorpe organised his material, the tables of contents he devised for each volume are of great use. It becomes apparent that volume two is not a simple continuation of volume one. There is no running text or section ending abruptly at the end of the first volume to be continued in the second. Instead, both volumes appear as distinct entities whose respective bodies of texts are headed by a table of contents exclusively referring to that volume. The table of contents to volume one lists ten parts (*partes*) in the following order:

- I. Charters of Henry III and Edward I. Documents relating to the lordships of Monmouth and the three castles of Grosmont, Skenfrith and Whitecastle
- II. Documents relating to Wales
- III. Documents relating to the county of Chester
- IV. Documents relating to the county of Lancaster and the confirmation [charter] by Henry IV
- V. Documents relating to the counties of Northumberland and Cumberland
- VI. Documents relating to the county of Yorkshire
- VII. Documents relating to the earldom<sup>25</sup> of Richmond
- VIII. Documents relating to lands overseas [i. e. France].
- IX. Charters of liberties, warrens, markets and fairs
- X. Royal charters in various counties

<sup>22</sup> Somerville 1936, 598–599.

<sup>23</sup> Somerville 1936, 599.

<sup>24</sup> Somerville 1936, 599. For the number of deeds, see: *Ibid.*, 607.

<sup>25</sup> In this case, the ambiguous term *comitatus* (county/earldom) means earldom.

The second volume begins with sixteen banners, each on a single recto folio. Then follows the table of contents, which lists the thirty-three parts:<sup>26</sup>

- I. Muniments relating to the estates of Earl Ferrers
- II. Muniments relating to the county of Lincoln with specific mention of four deeds:
  - a. an exemplification relating to Cowick and Snaith (Yorkshire)
  - b. the royal licence granted to William, earl of Salisbury, to transfer to John, duke of Lancaster, and his wife Blanche £ 200 of lands and revenues
  - c. a royal licence to Thomas, earl of Lancaster, to give John de Warenne, earl of Surrey, 1000 marks of lands in Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire
  - d. another exemplification relating to Trowbridge and Aldbourne [both in Wiltshire]
- III. Muniments relating to the county of Leicester
- IV. Muniments relating to the county of Warwickshire
- V. Muniments relating to the county of Nottingham
- VI. Muniments relating to the county of Derby
- VII. Muniments relating to the county of Stafford, and the charters relating to the lordship of Shenton in the county of Stafford
- VIII. Muniments relating to the county of Northampton
- IX. Muniments relating to the county of Buckingham
- X. Muniments relating to the county of Oxford
- XI. Muniments relating to the county of Bedford
- XII. Muniments relating to the county of Berkshire
- XIII. Muniments relating to the county of Southampton [i. e. Hampshire]
- XIV. Muniments relating to the county of Wiltshire
- XV. Muniments relating to the county of Gloucester
- XVI. Muniments relating to the county of Somerset
- XVII. Muniments relating to the county of Dorset
- XVIII. Muniments relating to the counties of Devon and Cornwall
- XIX. Muniments relating to the county of Hereford
- XX. Muniments relating to the county of Middlesex
- XXI. Muniments relating to the counties of Kent and Sussex
- XXII. Muniments relating to the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk
- XXIII. Muniments relating to the counties of Cambridge, Hertford, and Essex.
- XXIV.–XXXIII. Muniments relating to the honour and soke of Bolingbroke in the county of Lincoln with reference to the place-names dealt with in each part

Within these parts, there are sometimes subsections. Their arrangement was dictated by different criteria. This could be the subject matter, as in the large sections of forest

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<sup>26</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fol. unnumbered (preceding fol. 1).

pleas in the parts on Lancaster and York.<sup>27</sup> Or this could be the location of their archive, such as for the charters preserved in the castle of Pontefract in the part on Yorkshire<sup>28</sup> or for the group of four charters for John of Gaunt found in a box marked “S” copied right at the end of the part on Lancaster.<sup>29</sup> In these cases, the relevant header made no reference to the subject matter of the charters. In other cases, however, both the location and the subject matter were mentioned to mark a subsection. This was the case for the documents relating to the chapel of St Mary Magdalen at Preston, the hospital of Preston, and the manors of Ulnes Walton and Bracebridge Walton, all in the part on Lancaster.<sup>30</sup>

The tables of contents do not show a single straightforward pattern according to which Leventhorpe organised his material. Somerville considered it “[a] kind of clock-wise progression round England, followed by an excursion to the Home Counties and East Anglia”.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, the counties are a prominent organising principle and geographic proximity may also have played a factor in arranging them in the Cowcher, even though the fact that the “clock-wise progression” was interrupted by a trip to France and ended with an “excursion” suggests that this was not the only criterion for arranging the charters. In fact, Leventhorpe did not simply present a perambulation of England governed by geographic convenience. At least the beginning of his tour appears to have been heavily influenced by the hierarchy of titles. The principality of Wales—the highest ranked dignity after the royal title and assigned to the heir of the throne—came first followed by Chester—the old palatine county which also counted among the titles of the heir to the throne—followed next by Lancaster. Other than this hierarchy, there is no compelling reason why Leventhorpe should have chosen that order instead of, for instance, placing Lancaster first as indeed he begins the cartulary with the part dealing with the foundation of the Lancastrian inheritance by Henry III and Earl Edmund in the second half of the thirteenth century. In the case of this very first part, the criterion for arranging the material was a thematic one. A similar logic was applied to the opening section of volume two dealing with the rich estates of Robert Ferrers, earl of Derby, that had come into Earl Edmund’s hands in 1269. In the case of Bolingbroke and its ten parts concluding volume two, the criteria combined seigneurial and archival factors. Somerville is most certainly right to suggest that Leventhorpe simply included the Bolingbroke charters, which were preserved in ten chests lettered A to K, *en masse*.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the king as issuer was considered by Leventhorpe as an

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<sup>27</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fols. 98v, 99r–141v (Lancaster); *Ibid.*, fols. 199v–388v (York). The header of the forest pleas in Yorkshire is not written in the same size as in the part on Lancaster (fol. 99r), but in the same size as the regular text. This was probably an oversight facilitated by the fact that the header opens the verso of fol. 199.

<sup>28</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 394v.

<sup>29</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 141v.

<sup>30</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fols. 80r–98v.

<sup>31</sup> Somerville 1936, 604.

<sup>32</sup> Somerville 1936, 604.

organising principle, when he formed the two parts of royal charters at the end of volume one. At least indirectly, the king was also crucial for the formation of the first part of the volume, for it was the king (Henry III) who issued the grants establishing the earldom of Lancaster. This was reflected in the entry in the table of contents and the running header of that first part referring to “charters of the king and confirmations” (*carte regum et confirmaciones*). As a consequence, royal charters framed the content of volume one. Within the sections, the rank of the issuer of the charter only played a role when he was the king. His documents usually come first.

The multitude of factors determining Leventhorpe’s arrangement was—as we have seen—replicated in the subsections. It remained nonetheless a substantial challenge to place c. 2420 charters into these categories. In one case, as Somerville discovered, Leventhorpe himself was unable to identify the place-name mentioned in the charter. At first, he decided not to consider this charter but then solved the problem by placing it among the royal charters of the first part in volume one.<sup>33</sup> In another case, also spotted by Somerville, Leventhorpe deemed it necessary to include a royal charter in two sections dedicated to such charters, the first and the second to last parts of volume one.<sup>34</sup> Just how arbitrary his decisions could be is shown by the following example where he included Edward I’s charter issued on 5 May 1277 remitting to Earl Edmund debts due to the king from the previous lord of the castle and honour of Monmouth (Wales), now in Edmund’s hands, in the first part of volume one. Edward’s charter issued on 13 May 1277 making a similar concession to Edmund concerning the castles of Skenfrith, Grosmont and Whitecastle, however, was classified in the Welsh part.<sup>35</sup>

As complicated as it may have been to classify individual charters, the categories chosen by Leventhorpe are nonetheless instructive concerning the cartulary’s narrative. Unsurprisingly, Lancaster takes a very prominent role. As we have seen, the first part of the cartulary deals with the foundations of the earldom of Lancaster. Its very first charter, thus the opening charter of the entire cartulary, is Henry III’s grant of the honour, county, castle and town of Lancaster to Edmund dating from 30 June 1267 and marked out by an illuminated initial. The part explicitly dedicated to the county of Lancaster—the first volume’s fourth part—also emphasises Lancaster as the cartulary’s key theme by setting apart Henry IV’s confirmation charter for the Lancastrian estates, issued on 14 October 1399—thus one day after his coronation—from the other charters. In this charter, which was also highlighted by an illuminated initial, the king decreed that the estates and the liberties of the Lancastrian inheritance were not to be diminished or changed by his accession to the throne. While the king and his heirs were to rule the Lancastrian inheritance, it should remain intact as an independent

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<sup>33</sup> Somerville 1936, 604–605; London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 14r, no. 40. The original is: London, TNA, DL 10/148, with Leventhorpe’s notes on the dorse.

<sup>34</sup> Somerville 1936, 605; London, TNA, DL, 42/1, fol. 4v, no. 18 (with a cross-reference to the second entry); fol. 440r–v, no. 37.

<sup>35</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 6v, no. 25; fol. 17r, no. 1.

entity and not be merged with the crown estates.<sup>36</sup> In this context it is remarkable that the charters granting Lancaster to Henry's father, John of Gaunt, were copied at the very end of the Lancastrian part,<sup>37</sup> thus in maximum distance from Henry's confirmation charter at the beginning. In assembling the Lancastrian inheritance, the cartulary emphasised the roles of Henry III, his son Edmund and Henry IV as key figures, almost as founding fathers of the duchy. John of Gaunt, by contrast, was reduced to a merely background role. In part, this was certainly also due to the fact that three of the four charters had been issued by Richard II. While Leventhorpe upheld the principle that Richard's charters were valid unless explicitly declared otherwise, unsurprisingly he had no inclinations to provide Richard with a prominent platform. Shortly after Henry's successful rebellion against Richard and his accession to the throne, Leventhorpe may have had reservations in ascribing to John of Gaunt—and thus to Richard—a more central place in the cartulary. After all, it was Richard's confiscation of the Lancastrian inheritance after John's death in 1399 that had provoked Henry to take up arms against the king. By focussing in particular on the origins of the Lancastrian estates under Edmund and their most recent confirmation by King Henry IV, Leventhorpe developed a narrative strengthening the long-established claims to those lands and titles. In regard to Henry's disputed succession to the Lancastrian estates, the prominent place of Henry's confirmation charter was reminder enough of these troubled times; any events that might raise doubts over the legitimacy of Henry's kingship were best ignored, by passing over in silence Henry's role as John of Gaunt's heir or Richard II's role as the man who had confirmed Lancaster to John.

Leventhorpe's careful planning to ensure that the Cowcher became a treasury of all present and future Lancastrian claims can also be shown by his handling of another charter Henry IV had issued on 14 October 1399. Here the king dealt with the inheritance of his wife, Mary de Bohun, daughter and co-heir of the last earl of Hereford, Humphrey de Bohun (d. 1373), stating that during his lifetime his wife's inheritance should remain as it had been before his accession to the throne.<sup>38</sup> Even though—strictly speaking—this charter did not touch the Lancastrian inheritance, Leventhorpe included it in the Cowcher. By placing it at the beginning of the royal charters in the penultimate part of volume one,<sup>39</sup> he emphasised its importance, without, however, setting it apart from the other charters. Unlike Henry IV's confirmation of the Lancastrian inheritance, the charter on the Bohun inheritance was not illuminated or in any other way marked out. Its inclusion nonetheless followed a clear administrative logic as it reflected the fact that Mary's inheritance was administered together with the duchy's estates. As a consequence, it is probably fair to say that this

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<sup>36</sup> The charter is edited in: *The Charters of the Duchy of Lancaster*, no. 17, 102–140; cf. Somerville 1953, 141.

<sup>37</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fols. 141v–144v.

<sup>38</sup> *The Charters of the Duchy of Lancaster*, no. 16, 99–101; Somerville 1953, 140–141.

<sup>39</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 423r–v, no. 1.



administrative practice—and the Cowcher more generally—prepared the way for the formal incorporation of Mary’s inheritance into the Lancastrian estates after Henry IV’s death, which their son Henry V accomplished.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Leventhorpe’s arrangement pays a particular homage to his patron Henry IV by dedicating ten parts to the honour of Bolingbroke.<sup>41</sup> This was a rich lordship, but the extraordinary detail with which its possessions were recorded was almost certainly due to the fact that Henry took his name from that place before he became king. It was the place where he had been born and it was the honour he had been given by his father John of Gaunt.<sup>42</sup> That this was the cartulary of Henry of Bolingbroke, now king of England, seems to be the message between the lines of the concluding parts of the Cowcher.

Yet, to consider Leventhorpe’s ordering principles simply in the context of the Lancastrian inheritance is to overlook various wider complexities. The Cowcher’s arrangement of charters also contains elements referring to the king and the kingdom. While the significance of royal charters as the principal source of legitimacy in regard to titles and lands in England is to be expected, their positioning at the beginning and the end of volume one provides a particularly prominent royal framing of the Lancastrian holdings. Moreover, the ranking of Wales, Chester and Lancaster, as well as the choice of the counties as geographical units for the Lancastrian possessions, reflect a distinctly ‘royal’ view of the English kingdom. Leventhorpe’s territorial grid was by and large a royal one. It is as if he focused on the Lancastrian inheritance through royal lenses. Obviously, based on this relatively thin evidence alone, ours cannot be more than a merely first impression. It is now time to expand the scope of the investigation and to look at the execution of the Cowcher and its materiality.

## The Materiality of the Great Cowcher

Leventhorpe charged the clerk Richard Frampton, a freelance commercial scribe, with the making of the cartulary.<sup>43</sup> It took him about five years to finish the job. His account, that included the costs for parchment and illuminations, was settled in 1406–1407. The accounts of 1406–1407 also record payments for a London goldsmith called Herman, who provided four silver gilt clasps displaying the Lancastrian coat of arms, and payments to Margaret Strawson, who specialised in silk, for tissues and stripes. Somerville is certainly right in assuming that the stripes were used for the binding while the tissues were for the green silk covers that still protect the larger illuminated initials and banners.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For this process, see: Somerville 1953, 177–181.

<sup>41</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fols. 231r–491r.

<sup>42</sup> Given-Wilson 2016, 11, 76 note 58.

<sup>43</sup> On Frampton, see: Parkes 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Somerville 1936, 599.

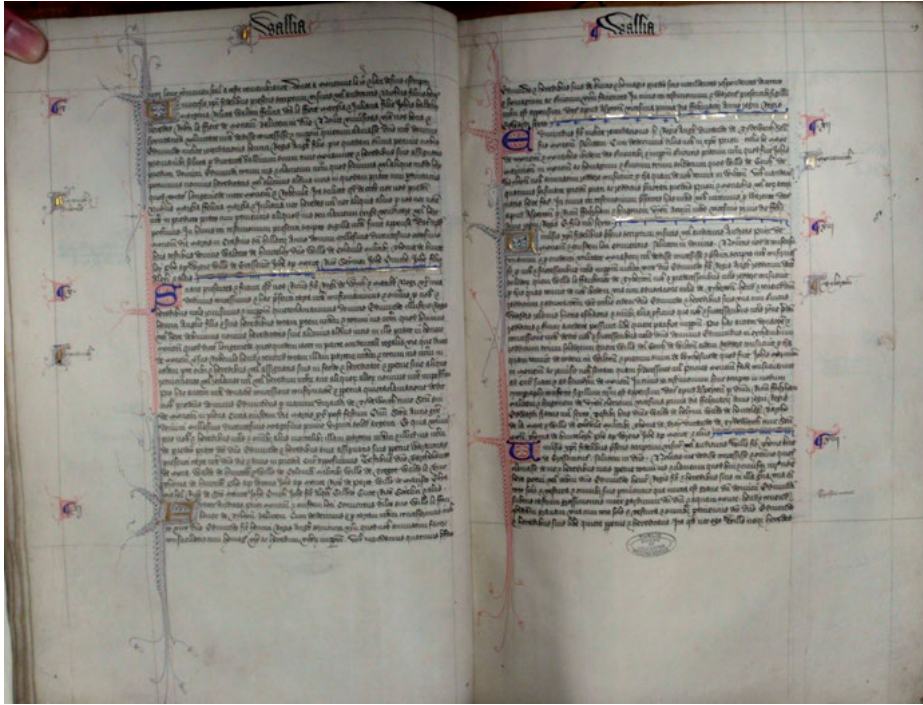


Fig. 1: London, TNA, DL 42/1 fol. 18v–19r.

The duration of the Cowcher's making alone suggests a work executed with great care. This is confirmed by its appearance. For the parchment, the finer-looking vellum (calfskin) was chosen over sheepskin. The 457 folios of volume one and the 513 folios of volume two are generally of good quality and regularly cut.<sup>45</sup> No economies were made in using this parchment. Each part begins fresh on a recto and “contained a complete gathering or series of gatherings”.<sup>46</sup> As a consequence, there are sometimes several blank pages at the end of a part. The layout of the page is also very generous, leaving ample space at the outer margins (Fig. 1).<sup>47</sup> The body of the text is written in a single column on previously drawn lines that also delineated the margins. Except in the first part of volume one where the text runs to 42 lines per page, it runs to a generous 40 lines throughout. Short lines of text at the end of an entry are filled by two parallel running and slightly decorated lines in gold (upper) and blue (lower). The Lombard-style initial letters of the charters generally alternate between blue on a red ground and gold on a blue ground. Depending on the colour of the ground, red or blue

<sup>45</sup> For a more detailed description of the folios, see: Somerville 1936, 601.

<sup>46</sup> Somerville 1936, 601.

<sup>47</sup> Vol. I: folio: 405 × 275 mm; text: 253 × 160 mm; vol. II: folio: 415 × 275 mm; text: 253 × 165 mm; Somerville 1936, 601.

borders from the initial letter are drawn flowing up and down the margin until they meet the borders extending from the previous and subsequent initial letter (if there is more than one charter on a page). Thus to some extent, they frame the heraldically ‘dexter’ or right-hand side of the text. As a consequence, the shape and appearance of the text appears very regular and uniform. A similar uniformity applies to the content and design of the margins. The top margin contains a rubric referring to the contents of the part. It could link up the facing pages. In the first part of volume one, for example, it reads on the verso *carte regum* continuing on the facing recto with *et confirmaciones*. If the rubric consists of one word only, such as *Wallia*, it is repeated on each folio on both recto and verso. The rubric is preceded by a marking sign, which again alternates in its colouring between gold on blue on the verso and red on blue on the recto. The left- (on a verso) or right- (on a recto) hand margins contain two, occasionally three separate pieces of information. First, they show the number of the charter in roman numerals. The numbering begins anew with each part. Second, they provide key words as to the content of the charter. Most of the times these are place-names, but sometimes a short calendar of the charter is given. Occasionally, the margins also contain information on where the charters were stored and, very rarely, cross-references. The entries in the margins are again marked by preceding signs. Just like the initial letters of the charters and the rubrics, these signs are coloured alternatively in blue on red and gold on blue. Preserving this pattern throughout, the margins are not used for glosses, later additions or doodles. This suggests that while the Cowcher may have been used as a point of reference, it was not in any sense a ‘working’ copy. As to the copying and the writing of the texts itself, Frampton, who may have had some help with the second volume,<sup>48</sup> worked with great care and again in a very regular way.<sup>49</sup> As Parkes observed “the style of Frampton’s handwriting is more formal than that used in registers at this time, and verges on the Bastard Anglicana used in books for display purposes”.<sup>50</sup> Thus the writing style, too, served first and foremost the Cowcher’s neat appearance, but—if needed—made its reading a straightforward task.

Frampton used a graphically multi-tiered system to distinguish different levels of his text. The first level matched Leventhorpe’s table of contents and marked the individual parts. A new part almost always starts on the recto page (Fig. 2). Its large initial is a *fleuronnée* on golden ground except in two cases, when figures are shown: the very first charter of the Cowcher portraying Henry III granting Lancaster to the kneeling Edmund and Henry IV’s confirmation charter for the Lancaster estates depicting the standing king (Fig. 5 and 6). In addition, the starting page of each part usually also contains a coloured bordure framing the text and including a series of coats of arms. These are the coats of arms of England, Lincoln, Derby, Leicester and Lancaster. Occa-

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<sup>48</sup> Somerville 1936, 601.

<sup>49</sup> The quality of Frampton’s work as a copyist of the original charters is described in detail by Somerville: Somerville 1936, 605–607. His writing is described by Parkes: Parkes 2004, 119–120.

<sup>50</sup> Parkes 2004, 119.



Fig. 2: London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 40v–41r.

sionally a further coat of arms is introduced relating to the contents of that specific part. This was the case on the opening page of the part on the overseas lands, where the bordure included the coats of arms of Bergerac,<sup>51</sup> or in the case of Northampton and Southampton, where the Chaworth arms were added.<sup>52</sup>

This pattern to mark the starting page of a part applied to both volumes, but there are exceptions. In some cases, this may have been the result of mere oversight, such as in part nine of volume one (charters of liberties, warrens, markets and fairs),<sup>53</sup> which is not marked at all, or in part two of volume two (Lincoln), where the coats of arms are missing.<sup>54</sup> Some confusion governed the marking of starting pages among the ten parts dedicated to Bolingbroke. Four follow the regular pattern,<sup>55</sup> others start at the verso and show a variety of patterns: two show the full programme,<sup>56</sup> one case shows only

51 London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 417r.

52 London, TNA, DL 42/2, fols. 123r, 167r.

53 London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 423r.

54 London, TNA, DL 42/2, fol. 21r.

55 London, TNA, DL 42/2, fols. 231r (part 24), 255r (part 25), 302r (part 27), 445r (part 32).

56 London, TNA, DL 42/2, fols. 284v (part 25), 475v (part 33).

the large initial and an L-shape border,<sup>57</sup> three consecutive cases (one of which starts on a recto) show nothing at all except for a heading.<sup>58</sup> Most puzzling is the arrangement of the consecutive parts on Buckingham and Oxford in volume two. Both start on a verso and while Oxford contains the full decorative programme, Buckingham is missing the coats of arms.<sup>59</sup> If this was not a further case of oversight, it might have been due to the relative brevity of the part on Buckingham: it covered two facing pages only.<sup>60</sup> This argument can perhaps also be applied to the appearance of the consecutive parts on Kent and Sussex in volume two, which cover three and one pages respectively. In their cases, the marking is even sparser as not only the coats of arms are missing, but also a different border pattern is used which covers only three sides of the text.<sup>61</sup> The same pattern appears in volume one to mark the subsection of Cumberland. In this case, however, its use follows a different logic. The part is dedicated to Northumberland and Cumberland and is opened by the regular pattern, but Frampton saw the need to mark out the beginning of the charters relating to Cumberland in a specific way and thus turned to this less prominent pattern.<sup>62</sup> A clear deviation from the scheme provided by the table of contents is evident in the part(s) on Cambridge, Hertford and Essex in volume two. Indicated as part 23 in the table of contents, this is divided into two separate entries: Cambridge on its own followed by Hertford and Essex grouped together. While the two charters relating to Cambridge are dealt with on a verso page showing an initial, a full border, but no coats of arms,<sup>63</sup> Hertford and Essex are provided with the regular pattern.<sup>64</sup> The reason for this separation was perhaps the fact that the counties of Hertfordshire and Essex were administered by the same sheriff. The reason for a deviation from the table of contents in volume one would appear much more straightforward. The table lists Henry IV's confirmation charter of Lancaster as a subsection of part four (Lancaster). However, it is placed at the very beginning of that section and—more significantly—it is marked like a starting page of a part.<sup>65</sup> In terms of its design, therefore, it does not appear as a subsection of part four, but as a part of its own—a design clearly underscoring the significance of the charter.

Within a part up to four further levels could be distinguished by graphic design. The first such marking differs from the starting page of a part only by beginning on a verso instead of a recto. This is the case for the sections on Pontefract in the part on Yorkshire in volume one, whose borders also include the arms of Pontefract and the section on Shenton in the part on Stafford in volume two. Their prominence becomes

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<sup>57</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fol. 441v (part 31).

<sup>58</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fols. 387v (part 28), 420v (part 29), 436r (part 30).

<sup>59</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fols. 133v (Buckingham), 134v (Oxford).

<sup>60</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fols. 133v–134r.

<sup>61</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fols. 220v–221v (Kent), 222r (Sussex).

<sup>62</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fols. 147r (Northumberland), 161v (Cumberland).

<sup>63</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fol. 227v.

<sup>64</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/2, fol. 228r.

<sup>65</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 51r.

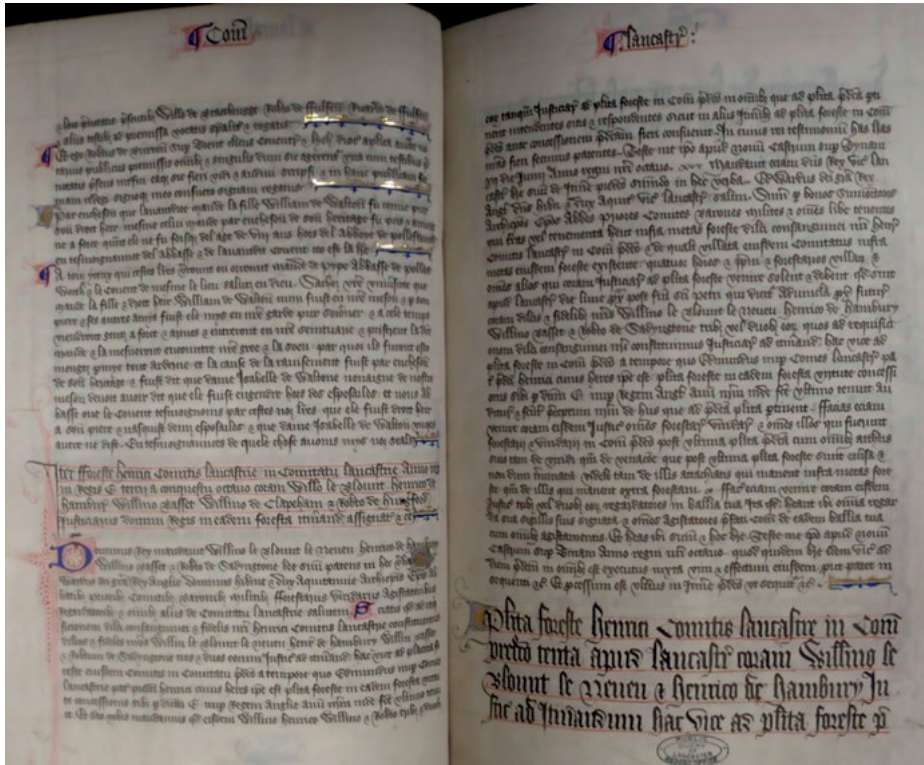


Fig. 3: London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 98v–99r.

even more evident in comparison to the way in which Cumberland was marked up as subsection (no coats of arms, borders covering three sides of the text only) in the part on Northumberland and Cumberland, even though Cumberland should have been treated on the same level as Northumberland (thus either the full decorative programme or nothing at all). The other, less significant levels within subsections are not marked out by borders, coats of arms or initials. They are identified by the headers, their size and their placing (Fig. 3). The second level is indicated by centred headers underlined in red that are roughly double the font size of the regular text.<sup>66</sup> The third level follows the same pattern, but is only about one and a half times the font size of the regular text.<sup>67</sup> The fourth level are labels written in the margins, as in the case of the chapel of St Mary Magdalen in Preston.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> A random example is: London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 99r (within the part of Lancaster). This example provides a good opportunity to compare it with the facing header of the third level: *Ibid.*, fol. 98v.

<sup>67</sup> See preceding note and another random example: London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 193r (within the part of York).

<sup>68</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 80r (within the part of Lancaster).

Even if we take into account the inconsistencies in applying the pattern to distinguish the individual parts of the Cowcher (perhaps partly explained by its long gestation), this overview of the Cowcher's execution and its materiality shows that no costs were spared and that great care was exercised to present an impeccable and lavishly decorated cartulary. Perhaps the most striking proof of this is supplied by the pieces of green silk attached on their upper horizontal borders of the parchment, intended to protect the large initials and the sixteen banners opening volume two and to ensure that they did not rub against their facing (hair side) pages. The Cowcher's exquisite appearance was intended to last as long as possible.

## Initials, Coats of Arms and Banners

Somerville suggests that the Cowcher reflected the contemporary style of illumination, without investigating the matter further.<sup>69</sup> Yet, was its application simply a matter of decoration on a scale befitting a king? Or did some of the illuminated parts convey a more concrete message? To answer these questions, it is useful to look back a century or so, and to very briefly consider another cartulary made in the royal chancery. In 1300, Edmund, earl of Cornwall, died without children. His earldom and his lands fell into the hands of King Edward I, who was Edmund's cousin and heir. To gain a better sense of this rich inheritance a cartulary was made shortly thereafter that copied the charters found in Edmund's archives.<sup>70</sup> It consisted of one volume of about 80 folios containing some 300 charters, which were not grouped into specifically marked parts.<sup>71</sup> While certainly not identical, the circumstances leading to this so-called cartulary of Edmund of Cornwall shared various common traits with those of the Great Cowcher. Yet, in terms of their materiality—in particular the use of illumination—the differences are considerable (Fig. 4). While they share the type of writing material (parchment), a regular layout of the folios, a regular writing style, a table of contents and the numbering of the charters by roman numerals,<sup>72</sup> they could hardly be more different in their use of colour and illumination. Edmund's cartulary contains nothing of that sort. While for the first 40 folios it was planned to have coloured initials at the beginning of each charter—perhaps alternating in red and blue according

<sup>69</sup> Somerville 1936, 610.

<sup>70</sup> London, TNA, E 36/57. The cartulary is currently being prepared for edition within the framework of my British Academy Global Professorship at the University of East Anglia, Norwich.

<sup>71</sup> It currently contains iii + 71 folios, but some of the original folios are missing. The table of contents lists 297 entries.

<sup>72</sup> As the Cornwall-cartulary does not contain parts, the numbers run continuously from the first to the last charter. There is a clear break though between fols. 40v and 41r. The last entry on fol. 40v ends midway through the page. The next entry begins in a different hand on fol. 41r. This suggests that the cartulary was written in at least two different steps; see also the following note. Folio: 295 × 200 mm; text: 230–235 × 145–150 mm, the number of lines per page varies.

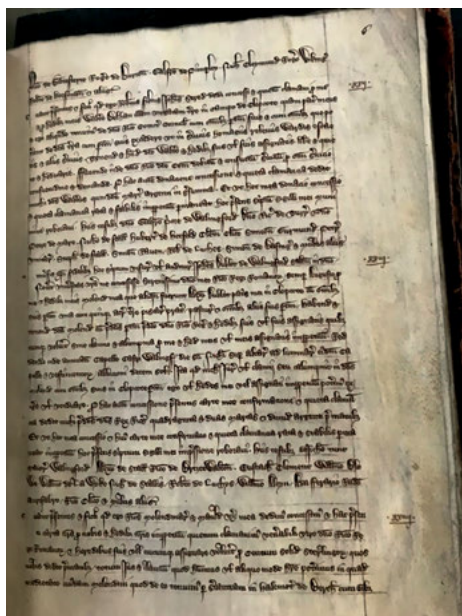


Fig. 4: London, TNA, E 36/57, fol. 6r.

to the widespread practice at the time—this was never executed.<sup>73</sup> As a consequence, the cartulary just features brown ink on parchment. Compared to the Cowcher, that ink covered more space on the page and left few blank spaces between the entries. As a result, the cartulary makes a very business-like impression. It could be described as a classic product of administrative writing.

Studying illuminations on royal charters, Elizabeth Danbury has shown that after their appearance c. 1250, the space reserved for decoration slowly but steadily increased across the following 250 years or so.<sup>74</sup> Even though illuminated initials by no means became a mass phenomenon and remained the exception rather than the norm,<sup>75</sup> they were a regular feature of high quality manuscripts containing copies of charters or treaties, originating at or near the royal court in the late-fourteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, prayer books were frequently illuminated. Indeed, Henry of Boling-

<sup>73</sup> The scribes left blank the first letter of each charter but noted that letter in the left-hand margin so that the illuminator knew which letter to insert. From fol. 41r onwards this was no longer practiced. The first word was copied completely; no colours were used. This practice may have caused the abandonment of the idea to insert coloured initials on the first 40 folios. For the work of scribes in the exchequer around 1300 and in particular their use of drawings to help navigate their codices, see: Luxford 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Danbury 1989, 163.

<sup>75</sup> Danbury 1989, passim; Danbury 2011; Danbury 2018.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example: London, British Library, Royal MS 20 D X, which contains copies of documents relating in particular to the peace of Brétigny of 1360; London, British Library, Cotton Nero D VI, which contains a variety of documents relating to the royal court and which was perhaps made for Thomas Mowbray, the earl marshal: Pronay/Taylor 1980, 20.



broke's wife Mary de Bohun and her family were among the more active aristocratic patrons of high-quality psalters and books of hours in the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>77</sup> Prominent features of these richly illuminated manuscripts were coats of arms. They were not chosen incidentally but served a programmatic purpose. The heraldic shields of Mary and Henry, for example, were linked in psalters made to celebrate their marriage in 1381.<sup>78</sup> Analysing the entire heraldic programme of the books made for Mary de Bohun or Mary and Henry of Bolingbroke, Lucy Freeman Sandler concluded that they represented the view of Joan, Mary's mother, on the place of the Bohuns in the social and political order of the English realm, stressing in particular the family's connections with the monarchy.<sup>79</sup> Just as no one had to explain to King Henry the advantages of archives and quick and easy access to charters, no one had to explain to him the power of images to convey political messages.

In light of this, it is certainly correct to argue that the decoration of the Great Cowcher reflected more recent developments in the courtly writing culture of high-profile manuscripts. Yet, this tells only part of the story. A closer look shows that the coats of arms, the two initials depicting respectively Henry III/Edmund of Lancaster and Henry IV and the sixteen banners play a key role in reinforcing the Cowcher's narrative. As shown above, the coats of arms displayed on the opening page of a part follow a common pattern, sometimes complemented by a coat of arms indicating the specific context of that part or subsection. The coats of arms represent invariably England, Derby, Lincoln, Leicester and Lancaster. In all cases except one, England is represented by the arms adopted by Edward III after his assumption of the French royal title in 1340, when he quartered the French golden *fleurs-de-lys* on blue with the English blazon of the three golden leopards on red, or and gules. The exception is the very first display of heraldic shields on the opening page of part one of volume one. Here the English arms shown are those in use before 1340: the three golden leopards on red. This must reflect a conscious decision to indicate the period of the duchy's origin, for this part contained the charters of Kings Henry III and Edward I, which laid the foundation of the Lancastrian estate. It is also possible that this was a specific reference to Henry III, the issuer of the opening charter. In general, however, the royal arms are not explicitly displayed for the first charter of any part. They simply represented the kingdom and—as a consequence—also Henry IV. As to the other coats, it is noteworthy that their reference point is not the titles borne by Henry at the time of his coronation, when he was styled duke of Lancaster, earl of Derby, Lincoln, Leicester, Hereford and Northampton and steward of England.<sup>80</sup> Instead, they refer to those English ducal and

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<sup>77</sup> For the Bohun manuscripts in this context, see in particular: Sandler 2002; Sandler 2003; Sandler 2004. For further studies, see Lucy Freeman Sandler's collected essays on the Bohun manuscripts: Sandler 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Sandler 2003, 224–227; Given-Wilson 2016, 78–79.

<sup>79</sup> Sandler 2003, 230–232.

<sup>80</sup> *Foedera, conventiones, litterae*, 90.

comital titles borne by his father John of Gaunt (after he had given up the earldom of Richmond) and his grandfather Henry of Grosmont, John of Gaunt's father-in-law.<sup>81</sup> These coats of arms represented the Lancastrian inheritance. Hence the wider heraldic programme of the Cowcher symbolised the kingdom in combination with the Lancastrian inheritance.

This narrative is fully confirmed by the two initials showing first Henry III and Edmund of Lancaster and secondly Henry IV. Both mark their charters as the two cornerstones of the Lancastrian inheritance and, certainly in the case of Henry III's charter—the original of Henry IV's charter is unfortunately lost—the illumination was entirely the creation of those responsible for the cartulary, for the original charter and its duplicate were not in any way illuminated.<sup>82</sup> Filling the initial of the Cowcher's first charter, the image of Henry III and Edmund is like the opening scene of the cartulary.<sup>83</sup> It shows Henry III enthroned, crowned and vested with a royal mantle in blue, handing over the sealed grant to the kneeling Edmund wearing a circlet and portrayed slightly smaller in relation to the king (Fig. 5).<sup>84</sup> The motif of the king handing over a sealed charter to the kneeling beneficiary was recurrent in initials.<sup>85</sup> It is a scene that conveys in a very concentrated way a number of important messages. It visualises the hierarchical relationship between the king and the kneeling recipient. Furthermore, it portrays the king as the source of the grant handed over. This is done with full royal authority. As a consequence—and this is the crucial message from the beneficiary's point of view—it is a fully legitimate grant given and authorised by the king himself. In the specific case of Henry and his son Edmund, it meant that the grant of the honour, county, castle and town of Lancaster and all its appurtenances was the result of the royal will and enjoyed full legitimacy. The same, of course, held true of the dignity of an earl of Lancaster, because even though the charter did not explicitly state this, Edmund became earl of Lancaster as a result of it.<sup>86</sup> In short, the origins of the Lancastrian inheritance are shown to be royal. They could not have been built upon better or sounder foundations.

The second image stands in some contrast to the first. Illustrating Henry IV's confirmation charter, it shows only the king: standing, crowned, vested with a royal

<sup>81</sup> For their titles, see: Cokayne 1929, 409 note f (Henry); Armitage-Smith 1964, 196 (John).

<sup>82</sup> London, TNA, DL 10/113; *Ibid.*, DL 10/114 (duplicate, less elaborately written). The charter was copied from the duplicate, even though it contained a dorsal note saying that it should not be transcribed, because it was the duplicate; cf. Somerville 1936, 609. Given the prominence of these two images it seems likely that Leventhorpe was at least consulted before Frampton went to work on them.

<sup>83</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 1r.

<sup>84</sup> For circlets used by earls, see: Peltzer 2019b, 34–35; Crouch 1992, 210–211.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Danbury 2011, 168; Danbury 2018, 264–265. Well-known examples are London, British Library, Cotton Nero D VI, fols. 31r (copy; Edward III invests his son Edward as prince of Aquitaine), 85r (copy; Richard II grants Thomas Mowbray the office of marshal of England); cf. Peltzer 2019b, 20–26.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Cokayne 1929, 381.



Fig. 5: London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 1r.



Fig. 6: London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 51r.

mantle in blue and carrying a sceptre (Fig. 6).<sup>87</sup> No other person is present and indeed no action is shown; it is simply the king. Again, the image closely corresponds with the charter's content. Henry, as king, confirms the Lancastrian inheritance. He grants it the special status to be vested in the king and yet to remain an entity independent from the crown estate. As a consequence, the rulership of kingdom and duchy are brought together in the person of the king. This central and unifying character of the king is very forcefully and yet peaceably expressed by this image of royal sovereignty. This interpretation confirms Somerville's conclusion from his analysis of the administrative and legal records that the kings—even if not so styled—were also “considered to be dukes of Lancaster”.<sup>88</sup>

The sixteen banners opening the Cowcher's second volume have long been acknowledged as amongst “the finest extant examples of English medieval heraldic painting”.<sup>89</sup> Each banner occupies the recto of a folio and has a border in the Lancastrian colours argent (silver) and azure (blue), that are shown in an alternating pattern.<sup>90</sup> As stated above, they are protected by tissues of green silk, whose upper borders were stitched above the upper end of the banners. The banners are headed by titles except for three (numbers two, fifteen and sixteen). Their order is as follows:

- 1) Banner of England [post 1340] (Fig. 7)
- 2) Banner showing the coat of arms of the heir to the English throne<sup>91</sup> [untitled] (Fig. 8)
- 3) Banner of Lancaster
- 4) Banner of Derby
- 5) Banner of Lincoln
- 6) Banner of Leicester
- 7) Banner of Hinckley
- 8) Banner of Pontefract
- 9) Banner of Halton
- 10) Banner of Brecknock
- 11) Banner of Pevensey
- 12) Banner of Chaworth
- 13) Banner of Beaufort
- 14) Banner of Bergerac
- 15) Banner showing three silver ostrich feathers on black ground<sup>92</sup> [untitled] (Fig. 9)
- 16) Banner showing per pale the colours argent (diapered) and azure [untitled] (Fig. 10)

<sup>87</sup> London, TNA, DL 42/1, fol. 51r.

<sup>88</sup> Somerville 1953, 144–153, quotation at 153.

<sup>89</sup> Somerville 1936, 611.

<sup>90</sup> Their folios are unnumbered. I refer to them by their numbers of sequence as provided in the text above.

<sup>91</sup> Full description: Royal arms of England differenced by a label of three points argent.

<sup>92</sup> Full description: Sable, three Ostrich feathers Ermine, quill Or, scrolls on points Or, no letters; Powell Siddons 2009b, 28.



**Fig. 7:** London, TNA, DL 42/2, unnumbered folio: first banner: England [post 1340, France and England quarterly].



**Fig. 8:** London, TNA, DL 42/2, unnumbered folio: second banner: untitled; crown prince.

The banners represent a variety of titles, claims and affiliations that are all significant for the understanding of the Lancastrian inheritance, the Cowcher and thus of how Henry IV wished to portray himself. Banner numbers two, fifteen and sixteen have probably been left untitled, because they do not directly refer to specific lordships. The royal dignity again plays an important role, represented by the king's banner and that of his son and heir, the future Henry V, prince of Wales, duke of Aquitaine, duke of Cornwall, duke of Lancaster and earl of Chester (Fig. 7 and 8). Then follow the titles of the Lancastrian inheritance with Lancaster forming the link between the two sections. Again, the reference point for the ducal and comital titles are dukes John of Gaunt and Henry of Grosmont, while the newly acquired titles by Henry IV prior to his coronation were not included. The sequence of the ducal and comital banners follows the hierarchy used by the dukes in their titles. The first six banners are thus ranked

in descending order. To what extent hierarchy played a role in arranging the subsequent banners is less certain, but the seventh banner certainly followed that logic. It referred to the manor of Hinckley in Leicestershire and, as a consequence, it referred to the stewardship of England, a title the dukes usually put at the end of their list of honours. Over time, the possessions associated with a certain court office became so closely entangled with that office that the argument could be turned on its head by deriving the claim to the office from the possession.<sup>93</sup> In the case of Hinckley this logic was carried to an extreme, for Harcourt has shown that prior to the claim that the stewardship derived from the manor, Hinckley was not in any way attached to the office of steward. The connection was invented to secure John of Gaunt's claims to the office after the death of Duke Henry of Grosmont in 1361.<sup>94</sup> The following banner of Pontefract was probably included because of its great territorial significance for the Lancastrians in general and for Henry IV in particular. Pontefract, which Sanders classified as a probable barony,<sup>95</sup> was the gate to the North and the substantial Lancastrian possessions in Yorkshire. It was the castle where Henry imprisoned Richard II and where the latter met his death.<sup>96</sup> The banner of Halton, in turn, serves a purpose similar to that of Hinckley. The manor was attached to the office of Constable of Chester and was chosen to represent that dignity, which had come to the Lancastrians as part of the inheritance of Alice de Lacy, wife of Thomas of Lancaster and heiress of Henry de Lacy, earl of Lincoln (d. 1311).<sup>97</sup> Fittingly, the part of the Cowcher dealing with Chester includes Duke Henry of Grosmont's claim to the constableness and marshalcy of Chester based on the possession of Halton.<sup>98</sup> The subsequent inclusion of Brecknock with its centre Brecon followed a rather different rationale. It referred to the rich Welsh possession belonging to the inheritance of Henry's deceased wife, Mary de Bohun, which Henry had been fighting to secure for many years and for which the charters had already been collected in 1391–1392. Just like the inclusion of Henry's charter dealing with that inheritance in the first volume of the Cowcher, the inclusion of the banner of Brecknock indicated not only Henry's claims to that lordship, but also that it was ultimately intended to become part of the Lancastrian estate.<sup>99</sup> The banner of the honour of Pevensay, which Sanders also classified as a probable barony,<sup>100</sup> and which had been acquired from the Crown as part of an exchange for the earldom

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**93** Peltzer 2020, 140, 149.

**94** Harcourt 1907, 173–175, 192–197.

**95** Sanders 1960, 138.

**96** Saul 1997, 424–426; for the significance of Pontefract, see: Maddicott 1970, 57–58; Somerville 1953, 22 and index 'Pontefract'.

**97** On the rich Lacy inheritance, see: Maddicott 1970, 114–115; Somerville 1953, 21–23.

**98** London, TNA, DL 42/1, fols. 45v–48r, at fol. 46v.

**99** Eventually it did not, for Henry V exchanged it with the duke of Gloucester, co-heir to the Bohun heritage by his wife Eleanor, sister of Mary de Bohun, for other lands of the Hereford heritage, see: Somerville 1953, 178–180.

**100** Sanders 1960, 136–137.

of Richmond during John of Gaunt's tenure, was perhaps included because it was the only significant possession of the Lancastrians on the south coast of England.<sup>101</sup> Whether its history as the landing place of William the Conqueror also played a role must remain a subject for speculation rather than certainty.<sup>102</sup> The banner of Chaworth, by contrast, did not refer to a specific honour or dignity, but to the rich inheritance of the Chaworth lands, which came to Earl Henry of Lancaster through his marriage to Matilda de Chaworth, sole heiress to her father Patrick and her uncle Payne de Chaworth.<sup>103</sup> The subsequent banners of Beaufort and Bergerac were titles the dukes Henry of Grosmont and John of Gaunt bore and which symbolised the continental possessions of the Lancastrians, even though Beaufort had long been lost to the king of France.<sup>104</sup> It is possible that the display of the Beaufort banner also served to deny Henry's step-siblings—the children of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swyneford who had assumed Beaufort as their surname—any claims to those lands. This would tie in very neatly with the general line taken by Henry towards the Beauforts. While he maintained cordial and close relations with his half-brothers, in particular with John Beaufort, he was very clear on excluding them from the succession to the royal dignity when he confirmed their legitimacy in 1407.<sup>105</sup> The final two banners then close the line up in a similar way as it was opened: with a royal and a Lancastrian symbol (Fig. 9 and 10). The first banner shows three silver ostrich feathers, each with an empty field for a motto, on a black ground.<sup>106</sup> This was the badge of Edward III's first born son and heir presumptive Edward the Black Prince, whose feathers were decorated with the motto *Ich diene/dene*.<sup>107</sup> As Edward was Prince of Wales, the badge also became a sign of that principality and thus pointed more generally to the heir to the throne. The inclusion of this badge in the Cowcher probably served a double purpose. Henry IV held his popular uncle in high esteem and the inclusion of his badge may be further evidence for this. Chris Given-Wilson has pointed out that the Black Prince and Henry IV shared a particular devotion to the Trinity and that Henry's tomb within the Trinity Chapel of Canterbury Cathedral "complemented that of the Black Prince, England's lost warrior king and another devotee of the Trinity, on the south side".<sup>108</sup> By including Edward's badge in the Cowcher, Henry associated himself closely with him. Probably of even greater significance, however, was the reference of the badge to

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**101** For its acquisition as part of the exchange for the earldom of Derby, see: Somerville 1953, 53.

**102** The same holds true for the idea that Henry's return to England and subsequent conquest of the kingdom was paralleled with William's conquest.

**103** Somerville 1953, 17–18.

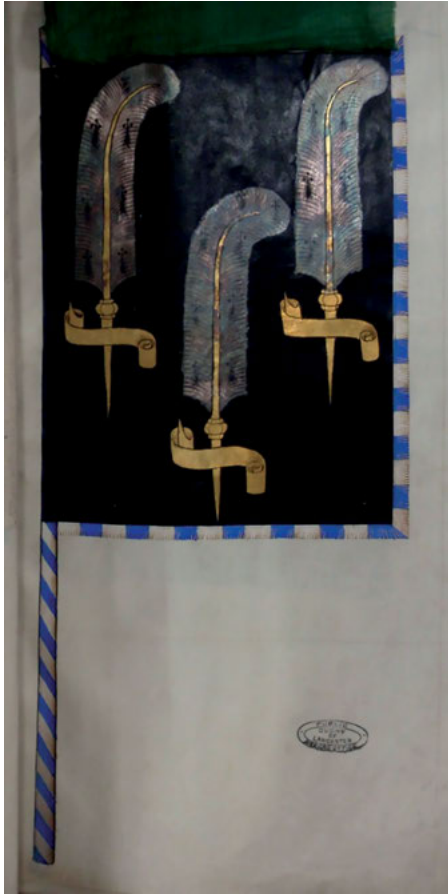
**104** Armitage-Smith 1964, 197–199; Goodman 1992, 189.

**105** Given-Wilson 2016, 439–440, 450; Harris 2004; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1405–1408*, 284.

**106** See note 92 for full description.

**107** Powell Siddons 2009a, 63; Powell Siddons 2009b, 36, 179; and see London, TNA, E 30/1105, where this badge is shown on the letter patent conferring the title of a prince of Aquitaine to Edward (19 July 1362).

**108** Given-Wilson 2016, 381, 519 (quotation).



**Fig. 9:** London, TNA, DL 42/2, unnumbered folio: fifteenth banner: badge, untitled; Edward the Black Prince.



**Fig. 10:** London, TNA, DL 42/2, unnumbered folio: sixteenth banner; badge, untitled; Lancaster.

the principality of Wales and therefore to Henry's son and heir, the future Henry V. By associating the symbol of the heir to the throne with the Lancastrian badge shown by the final banner—per pale argent (diapered) and azure—the combination between the royal dynasty and the Lancastrian inheritance was once more achieved.

## Conclusion

What has been suggested by our analysis of Leventhorpe's ordering principles is only confirmed by our investigation of the Cowcher's illuminations. Far from being merely decoration befitting the status of a king, they are central to conveying the Cowcher's key messages. They narrate a story of the royal foundations of the Lancastrian inher-



itance by Henry III and his son Edmund, expanding over time to include one duchy, three further earldoms, the stewardship of England and the constableness of Chester, further lands spread over the entire realm and even extending to France and the continent. They point to the duchy's creation by Henry IV as an integral entity vested in the king, but not merged with the Crown estates—a variety of second foundation. They carefully avoid Henry's titles at the time of his coronation that had no Lancastrian tradition and yet, the Cowcher prepares the way for the future inclusion of the inheritance of Henry's deceased wife, Mary de Bohun. The recurring feature of the illuminations, however, is the combination of the king and the Lancastrian inheritance, be it the coats of arms, the images or the banners. They appear as two sides of the same coin. This is a remarkable and certainly intentional coincidence with the new royal seal Henry IV commanded to be made for himself in 1406, thus during the final phase of the Cowcher's production. This "iconographically [...] finest great seal of the late Middle Ages in England"<sup>109</sup> also displayed shields referring to Cornwall, Wales and Chester,<sup>110</sup> and thus included Prince Henry. It was, to quote Given-Wilson once more, "a fusion of national and dynastic identity".<sup>111</sup> This can also be said of the programme of the Great Cowcher. Just as the royal great seal was not just an administrative tool to confirm and authorise royal charters, but a major visual representation of kingship, the Great Cowcher was not just a cartulary serving administrative and judicial purposes, but a testimonial of Henry's vision of a united royal and Lancastrian future. This future was by no means guaranteed. The magnificence and lavishness of the Great Cowcher were therefore less a sign of the financial means available to the king, but of the insecurity of the Lancastrian rule. The Great Cowcher was first and foremost a means to reassure to Lancastrians themselves of their landed power and royal dignity. The Great Cowcher thus had its own role to play in promoting Henry's vision of Lancastrian rule in the face of widespread scepticism, criticism and outright armed resistance.

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**109** Given-Wilson 2016, 405.

**110** *Catalogue of Seals*, 30–31, no. 259; Cherry 2003, 19–21.

**111** Given-Wilson 2016, 405.

## Appendix

*Notification from Henry IV that he has charged John Leventhorpe, receiver-general of the duchy of Lancaster, with searching all the charters, evidences and muniments of the said duchy—his inheritance—and to have as many of them as he deems necessary brought to London for transcription in one or two volumes. These volumes are to remain in London or wherever Henry orders them to be, to serve as evidence and information for the Council of the duchy so that the charters and muniments can be put in order and stored in any of his castles to be preserved in a safer way than hitherto. The king demands his constables, receivers and his other men in charge of guarding his charters and muniments to make them available to John. John's expenses are taken care of by the Council.*

Westminster, 1 May 1402

B: London, TNA, DL 42/15, fol. 37r<sup>112</sup> (modern pencil numbering) (contemporary copy), in the margin: *p(our) Johan Leventhorp de transcriure to(utes) les evidences en livres*

Henry et c(etera). A touz et c(etera) saluz. Sachiez nous considerantz les ch(a)r(t)es et autres evidences et munimentz de n(ost)re duche de Lancastre estre sevez et nient duhement arraiez es div(er)ses lieux de n(ost)re dit heritage p(ar) laffiance que nous portoms env(er)s le p(er)sone de n(ost)re t(re)sch(e)r escuer Johan de Leventhorp(e) n(ost)re receivour gen(er)al de n(ost)re duchie de Lancastre luy avon assigne pur chercher et veoir touz noz ch(a)r(t)es et autres evidences et munimentz de n(ost)re dit heritage quelle p(ar)te qils soient deinz mesme n(ost)re heritage et aillours et de yceulx atantz come luy semble busoignables solonc sa discrec(i)on faire carier iesques a n(ost)re citee de Londres et iceulx ovesq(ue) aut(re)s aup(arava)nt esteant en sa garde en mesme n(ost)re citee faire t(ra)nsescrire en un ou deux livres adem(or)er en n(ost)re d(i)c(t)e citee ou aillours a n(ost)re ordonnance pur evidence et enformac(i)on a n(ost)re conseil de mesme n(ost)re duchie au fyn q(ue) mesme noz ch(a)r(t)es et munimentz ap(re)s qils soient ensi t(ra)nsescriptz nous p(ou)rons faire arraier et mettre en aucun de noz chastiels de n(ost)re heritage suisd(i)te pur y estre plus seurement gardez qils ont este p(ar)devant donantz en mandement a tous <sup>noz</sup> conestables et receivo(ur)s de n(ost)re d(i)c(t)e heritage et aut(res) noz foialx et liges en qui garde les ditz ch(a)r(t)es et munimentz sont q(ue) au dit Johan ils facent lyvree de yceulx p(ar) endent(ur)e p(ar)entre eulx et luy eut affaire de ceulx qils luy ferront lyv(er)e et voloms q(ue) des coustages quelles le dit Johan ferra ento(ur) cestes noz busoignes il ait reasonable allowance en son accompte p(ar) avys de n(ost)re conseil de n(ost)re s(us)dite. En test(imoi)n et c(etera) don(ee) et c(etera) a Westm' le primer iour de may lan et c(etera) tierce.

<sup>112</sup> The folios of the enrolment book have been numbered four times. I refer to the latest numbering carried out in the twentieth century.

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Hanna Nüllen

# The Power of Bookkeeping in Late Medieval Friedberg and Gelnhausen

## Codices in Conflict

In 1365, a special privilege reached the Friedberg court of lay judges (*Schöffengericht*). Emperor Charles IV granted them the right to write down all verdicts in a designated book, which was supposed to ensure that all further decision-making would be just and fair. The book should guarantee future access to previous judgements for all parties involved, as well as the judges themselves.<sup>1</sup> Privileges like this were sometimes issued by local rulers.<sup>2</sup> However, the reception of the charter in Friedberg is more unusual, as three years later Charles IV sent another document to the Friedberg court and council insisting on the production of a court register. According to this second charter, the judges' verdicts had not been documented as instructed and their refusal to keep a court register had damaged the court's ability to maintain justice.<sup>3</sup> This is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, while there are some instances in which privileges concerning bookkeeping were issued, the second charter urging the court and council to produce such a book appears to be singular. Secondly, the receiving parties would usually have to pay for charters like this to be engrossed.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, the original charter had been drawn up by the imperial notary Rudolph Rule, a member of a prominent family in Friedberg, which also points towards a distinctly local interest in the inception of such a book.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it is unclear why such a privilege was granted in the first place when the judges appeared to be unwilling to install a court register. This might point to a faction within the city that had amassed enough financial and social capital to be in a position to petition and pay for such a charter and yet lacked the political agency in the council or the court to see the project through.

It is unknown, whether or not a court register was actually produced following the charter of 1368. However, the evidence from two further charters concerning the ongoing struggles between Friedberg Castle and the city of Friedberg suggest the opposite. This conflict might also shed some more light on the curious case of the 1365 and 1368 charters. As an imperial city (*Reichsstadt*),<sup>6</sup> Friedberg was in theory only beholden to

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1 Foltz 1904, 240–241.

2 Krey 2015, 100; Speer 2018, 334.

3 Foltz 1904, 254.

4 Isenmann 2014, 174.

5 Waldemar Küther has also shown that Rudolph Rule would often represent the interests of his hometown at court: Küther 1979, 123.

6 Imperial cities were cities that paid their taxes to the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire. They did not



the ruler of the Empire himself, but feeling (and very likely being) threatened by the nearby imperial castle, the city had attempted to free itself from said danger by mostly unsuccessful means. This had led to the semi-permanent presence of six castle representatives in the city council, as well as the appointment of the *Schultheiß* (i. e. the head judge) by the burgrave of Friedberg castle.<sup>7</sup> In the second half of the fourteenth century, the legal battle between castle and council had escalated. The lay judges, who were themselves part of the city council,<sup>8</sup> were regularly accused of deferring too many court cases to the council, which then supposedly denied the castle representatives access to the proceedings.<sup>9</sup> As an apparent reaction to this accusation, two settlements—one in 1378 and another in 1387—suggested keeping a written record.<sup>10</sup> The codex was supposed to be stored in a chest with two locks, one belonging to the lay judges and one to the castle representatives.<sup>11</sup> While this whole affair does not prove the castle's involvement in the demand for a court register back in the 1360s, it does demonstrate that the lay judges probably still refused to keep such a book. The castle on the other hand had been documenting the proceedings of its own court since 1369.<sup>12</sup> This might indicate that the initiative of installing the registers could, at the very least, have aligned with castle interests. In this light, the attempts of enforcing new practices of record-keeping appear to be a crucial element in the power struggles between the city and the castle. The codex, and with it the specific materiality of legal documentation, not only became a matter of conflict but appear to be entangled with the expression of rulership.

In general, researchers have often pointed to the close ties between conflict and forms of urban record-keeping regarding decision-making as well as communal spending and taxation.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the inception of statute books and other normative texts has been linked to a popular demand for a fixed set of norms that could ensure the accountability of the ruling entities.<sup>14</sup> The codex is then deemed to be the response to a growing need for writing as a means of distance-communication which was supposed to allow urban communities to store and retrieve information without having to rely on memory alone.<sup>15</sup> By using the codex and other book-type formats,

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depend on local rulers, but received their rights and privileges straight from the respective emperor and/or king. Additionally, they could send their representatives to the Imperial Diet.

<sup>7</sup> Press 1986, 10–11.

<sup>8</sup> In the late-fourteenth century, the council consisted of the lay judges and several additional council members.

<sup>9</sup> Foltz 1904, 290, 309.

<sup>10</sup> Foltz 1904, 313, 363.

<sup>11</sup> Reinhard Scharl proposed a slightly different interpretation of this conflict: namely, that more and more cases were actually deferred to the council due to the pressure exacted by the castle: Scharl 2019, 113.

<sup>12</sup> Hessisches Staatsarchiv, Darmstadt (hereafter HStAD), F3, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hartrich 2020, 206.

<sup>14</sup> Mihm 1999, 59–60.

<sup>15</sup> Keller 1999, 39; Speer 2018, 341.

information could be gathered, organised, linked and stabilised in a much more complex fashion than in single-sheet documents, such as charters, letters or notes.<sup>16</sup> While single-sheet documents—especially the charters and contracts occasionally produced by the local courts—were often kept by the parties involved or kept in multiple locations, the books could collect legal information in one place. This, at least in theory, made these texts less prone to loss or forgery and systematically provided access to the people in charge of keeping the books.<sup>17</sup> These books offered a centralised space for the city and its inhabitants to collect information intended to outlast the memory of the individuals present.<sup>18</sup> Eric Ketelaar and Brigitte Bedos-Rezak have argued that certain documents such as charters or cartularies did not remove information from circulation by locking it in the form of writing, but instead created “textual communities” in which forms of written and oral communication of collective memory were inexorably intertwined.<sup>19</sup> The specific materiality of the codex allowed for complex arrangements and attachments of meaning.

In the following article, I intend to trace the production and use of books by administrative and judicial entities within towns as manifestations and media of power relations. The ways in which urban rulership shaped a variety of books and used them to express and enact power lies at the heart of this article. As the above outlined example has shown, the struggle surrounding the establishment of court registers makes Friedberg a particularly interesting case study for the role of bookkeeping within conflict settings. Thus, the most significant developments of administrative writing in Friedberg form the basis of the following paper. The findings from Friedberg will then be compared with the records from the nearby imperial city of Gelnhausen to emphasise the different roles of bookkeeping. Rather than following the chronology of codex creation, these chapters will hone in on the specifics of three different kinds of books, namely the already mentioned council registers, as well as council protocols, account books and, finally, compilations, specifically the compilatory works of one particular scribe from Gelnhausen. The examination of different kinds of codices demonstrates the effects of the book form in general and of individual types of books on the exercise of power and the structure of rulership.

Despite the late-fourteenth-century demands to establish a court register, no such volume survives until the mid-fifteenth century. This does not necessarily mean that no court register or other forms of written documentation existed; earlier codices may have been lost, such as in the devastating fire of 1447.<sup>20</sup> Among the very few surviving books from the early fourteenth century, however, one volume does contain legal matters settled by members of the court, as well as the council in some instances.

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<sup>16</sup> Petter 2006, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Aumüller 2010, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Bertrand 2019, 420–421.

<sup>19</sup> Ketelaar 2010, 202–203; Bedos-Rezak 1994, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Stobbe 1992, 123.

The so-called *Insatzbuch* documents the legal transfer and mortgaging of personal properties and can therefore be seen as a collection of contract-like texts detailing the conditions of these transactions.<sup>21</sup>

The two oldest extant fragments of court registers documenting a wide range of cases brought before the Friedberg city court for judgement were produced in 1455—almost one hundred years after the court had first received the privilege to keep a court register. The surviving booklets are mainly structured by the regular sessions of the court and contain fairly short entries. They do not appear to have been bound into any kind of cover and it is unclear whether or not they were parts of larger volumes. Whereas the first fragment—the *Klagebuch*—mainly documents the names of the parties involved, as well as the financial demands of the accusers,<sup>22</sup> the second book—the *Aufschlags- und Eidbuch*—appears to have been set up in parallel to document both the oaths being taken on a given court date, as well as postponements of certain cases.<sup>23</sup> What is most striking about these books, however, is not their content, but the date of their creation in 1455.

At the beginning of this particular year, the *Gemeinde* (i. e. the commons) had deposed the Friedberg city council. The merchants and guild members had taken its failure to secure safe passage to the Frankfurt fairs, as well as the city's precarious financial situation, as justification for their actions.<sup>24</sup> In a short and undated document, the central accusations and demands of the commons were summarised. This list contains several charges of supposedly illegal dealings of the old city council, which had been undertaken without the consent of the commons or the castle.<sup>25</sup> In the weeks following the uprising, several members of the old council left Friedberg entirely and the keys to the city were entrusted to the burgrave of Friedberg castle until a new council was installed. Not only was at least half of the new council supposed to comprise of people representing the commons but the conflict between commons and council had also served the castle's interests.<sup>26</sup> Once again, the alignment of groups initially without clear representation on the council and within the castle arises in the background of a conflict which coincides with the production of a court register. However, the issue of a court register is distinctly absent from the extant documents regarding this case. Over the course of 1455, the old town scribe, Johannes Brune, followed the old council to Frankfurt and was replaced by the person whose handwriting can be detected in the new registers.<sup>27</sup> Even though the installation of court registers could predominantly be attributed to a change in the writing personnel, the curious

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21 HStAD, C4, 89, 1.

22 HStAD, C4, 89, 2.

23 HStAD, C4, 89, 3.

24 Stobbe 1992, 125–161.

25 Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Frankfurt (hereafter ISG), RS I, 4827, fol. 59r.

26 Stobbe 1992, 143–144.

27 ISG, Stadtkanzlei: Akten, 10.

coincidence with a similar configuration of interests as seen in the conflicts of the previous century is remarkable. The creation of court registers and thus the implementation of a medium that recorded the actions before the court could have worked as a signifier of change within the city's ruling body. The codices held the potential of making the court's decisions accessible to itself and potentially others who might either have grounds to be given insight (such as the burgrave) or who could demand access in the context of civic unrest. It also enabled the court to demonstrate its reliance on the written word and thereby on signs that could, at least potentially, be read by anyone rather than relying on memory alone. However, enforcing the production of new books as an expression of shifting power dynamics between the city council and the castle reached an entirely new level about thirty years later.

In 1483, after the councilmen had unsuccessfully attempted to rid themselves of the castle's control one last time, they had been forced to issue a charter detailing new council statutes. This time, the six castle representatives that had been present at some council meetings would become a more permanent fixture than ever before. It was declared that no further dealings ought to be made without their knowledge or consent. Additionally, a new codex—the *Ratsbuch*—would be introduced. This book was supposed to contain the laws of the city in the form of copied legal documents from the previous years, as well as the oaths taken by city officials and citizens alike. All further decision-making was supposed to be documented within this volume.<sup>28</sup> The book-form provided a central space where all legal information deemed relevant by its producers could be gathered.

Even though this book did not survive the nineteenth century,<sup>29</sup> Karl August Schatzmann, an eighteenth-century official and historiographer, quoted a now unknown source concerning its production.<sup>30</sup> On 27 September, several high-ranking officials from the castle, including the castle scribe Johannes Zane, supposedly entered the city hall and added a third lock to the chest belonging to the city council that could henceforth only be opened in their presence. Five days later, the six castle representatives appeared at the council session once again with the castle scribe in tow. They brought a new codex made from parchment, in a format reminiscent of contemporary missals and bound in wooden covers to the council chambers. The castle scribe then proceeded to add the newly issued order of the council on the first pages of said volume before placing it into the recently modified chest.<sup>31</sup>

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**28** *wyr soln und woln eyn gemeyn raittsbuche [...] haben. Darinn alle ordenung und gesetz der stadt [...] auch sol man darinn hinfurters alle uberkommung, abescheide, sache und hendell [...] schreiben.* Translation: “we ought to and want to possess a common council book. Therein, all statutes and laws of the city as well as all future agreements, decisions, affairs and actions shall be written”: HStAD, A3, 111/629.

**29** Dreher 1910, 12–19.

**30** Waas 1937, 89.

**31** *Haben die sechs burgmann [...] das nuw raittsbuch, ist ganzz byrment, Messbucher maiß, jn bredder gebunden, jn die raittsstobe in gemelt kiste gelegt und haib obgenand Johannes unser schriber die nuw*

Both the addition of the third lock and the role of the castle scribe in the production of the parchment codex appear to be demonstrations of the castle's fully established sovereignty over the city council.<sup>32</sup> Not only were they now involved in all decision-making, but they also held the literal key to central documents, which from that point on could only be accessed with their consent. Every time the box would be opened, the hard-won concord and unity between city and castle would be reaffirmed. The materiality of the codex, namely its missal-like format (*Messbucher maiß*) and parchment pages (*ganzz byrment*), probably enhanced the symbolic quality of the book as a demonstration of power. The use of parchment specifically set it apart from most other forms of administrative texts at the time, which were mainly written on paper. This marked the codex as special and its contents as particularly important.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, it probably served as a sign of durability and its potential for future use. This codex, more than any other, was meant to embody the city's legal past, present and future. Perhaps more than its contents, its materiality and means of storage worked as demonstrations of rulership. The codex functioned as a physical manifestation of the city's laws and the council's power to make and enact them. It was dominated in a physical and metaphorical sense by the castle's authority as it had been the castle scribe, not the town scribe, who was tasked with its initial setup. By producing a book such as the *Ratsbuch*, the castle literally inscribed itself into the city's history and its future.

The domination of the castle over the city is exemplified further in the council minute books.<sup>34</sup> The weekly council sessions were documented in separate volumes by both the city and the castle scribes. In the extant fragments of these protocols, beginning in 1486, the number of entries written by the castle scribes significantly overshadows those written by his colleague of the council. The castle's supremacy becomes visible on the very pages of the minute books: every new session was headed by a short note stating the date, as well as a list of the most important castle representatives. Even though sometimes a number of other council members would be added, the burgrave would always be named. His role as the *de facto* head of the council was thus inscribed and repeated on every page. It was a key element in the structure of these texts for decades to come. The minute books themselves still serve as the main source for the history of the Friedberg council due to their very regular production at the time, as well as their comparatively complete coverage of the council's dealings

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*ordination des gefollen raiten darjnns geschrieben*. Translation: "the six castle representatives put the new council book, which is made entirely from parchment in the format of a breviary and bound in wooden boards, in the chest in the council chambers and our scribe Johannes, who was mentioned above, inscribed it with the new council statutes": HStAD, C 1, C, 74, fol. 152r.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Stobbe 1992, 189–208.

<sup>33</sup> On the continued use of parchment in urban administrations, see: Kluge 2014, 260–265; Arlinghaus 2015, 188.

<sup>34</sup> Stadtarchiv Friedberg (hereafter StA Friedberg), ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/1.

starting in the 1490s. They documented lawsuits brought before the council as well as its rulings, new decrees and the election of new officials and council members.

The council minute books contain many entries indicating a steady increase of additional record-keeping in the form of books, as well as the council's increasing control over documents in general. The 1490s, for example, saw the creation of books documenting capital punishments<sup>35</sup> and an overhaul of the guild regulations.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the council gained further control over the financial records of the guilds, the hospital and the parish churches by inspecting their account books. The city scribes were tasked with adding the total at the end of each book, probably as a form of verification. The council also attempted to install a separate locked chest containing the debt certificates belonging to the parish church that could only be opened in their presence.<sup>37</sup> Finally, after the struggles of 1525 in the context of the peasant wars, the council ordered the production of a book to register debt certificates as an added measure of security and control.

Writing, specifically writing in the book-form, appears to have been a relevant, if not a central, concern in all kinds of power struggles within the city of Friedberg. The establishment of books allowed specific parties—the castle in particular—to control how the administrative past and present were documented and communicated over time. In some cases, prestigious codices, as well as extensive protocols, could thus be seen as the manifestations of attempts to dominate the practices of administrative knowledge production. The Friedberg court registers and council minute books cannot only be viewed solely as administrative records, but appear to be the results and perpetrators of the shifting power dynamics between the castle, commons and council.

## Documenting Procedures

While the oldest surviving court registers from Friedberg were produced in the mid-fifteenth century, the oldest extant register from Gelnhausen dates back to 1411.<sup>38</sup> Even though Gelnhausen—just like Friedberg—was not only an imperial city but also the location of the entirely separate entity of an imperial castle, the tensions with the castle never reached similar levels. At first glance, the court registers from Gelnhausen appear to be very different to their counterparts from Friedberg. They did not document oath-taking and postponement procedures separately from the charges and verdicts. The entries are slightly longer and provide a greater level of detail. The gen-

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<sup>35</sup> StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/2, fol. 21v.

<sup>36</sup> StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/3, fol. 20v; Stobbe 1992, 95f.

<sup>37</sup> The council's attempts at controlling these documents can be traced back to an entry in the minute books dating to 1503: StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/6, 4v. The issue regarding the creation of a chest appears in the minute books beginning in 1517: Grein 1893, 127.

<sup>38</sup> Hessisches Staatsarchiv, Marburg (hereafter HStAM), 330 Gelnhausen, 58.

eral structure of the books, however, is fairly similar and it mirrors many other contemporary court registers: rather than focusing on individual cases, the books were organised around the court sessions themselves.<sup>39</sup> Every section would be headed by the date of the respective session and all relevant proceedings would then be documented with usually one entry per case. While these entries were probably not made during these sessions, it is reasonably likely that they were added after the sessions had ended and were based on notes taken during the proceedings.<sup>40</sup> The entries still tend to produce a sense of immediacy by employing temporal markers and words such as *hude* (today) or verbs in the present tense.

Even though there do not appear to be consistent formulas used for the different case types brought before the court or indeed the subsequent procedures, the language is highly formulaic. While the structure of the entries tended to be rather fixed, most scribes in the oldest court register from Gelnhausen would switch between Latin and vernacular terminology and phrasing. Individual pieces of information, such as the names of the accusers and defendants, tended to appear in similar places in every entry allowing the reader to scan the pages much more quickly.<sup>41</sup> In some instances, marginalia and sigla would be added to the entries to facilitate identification. Among these signs was the letter “I”, which represented *innocens* and marked cases in which the defendant was declared to be innocent.<sup>42</sup> The mostly formalised and structured writing practices point towards the selection of a specific kind of information that was only marginally dependent on the individual scribes. Looking at the content, most—if not all—entries indicate that the focus did not lie in detailed descriptions of the cases or even the reasoning for individual rulings, but something else entirely.

Most cases were broken up into several steps over a long period of time and thus appear in multiple court sessions. Consequently, the individual cases have to be tracked across several sessions and often simply just drop out of the registers without any explanation—perhaps due to out-of-court settlements. Even though it is technically possible to trace the procedures and potentially even the basis of decision-making in some cases, the registers do not appear to have been produced to provide detailed insights into individual cases. Instead, they tend to highlight the formal aspects of the ongoing procedures.<sup>43</sup>

The earliest court registers from Gelnhausen show clear evidence of a record-keeping system that focused especially on adding a sense of formal stability to the proceed-

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Blattmann 2007, 155–161.

<sup>40</sup> This is indicated by a set of six entries that were copied to the wrong session. The scribe noticed this error and added a comment concerning this mistake. It is likely that he had turned to the wrong page while he was copying his notes: HStAM, 330 Gelnhausen, 58, fols. 112r, 114v. Marita Blattmann observed a similar phenomenon in nearby Ingelheim: Blattmann 2008, 69–70. On the practices of documentation, see: Speer 2018, 355–356.

<sup>41</sup> Ziegler 2003, 223.

<sup>42</sup> HStAM, 330 Gelnhausen, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Blattmann 2007, 157; Wetzstein 2008, 23.

ings. In cases, where the plaintiffs had already appeared before the court, the scribe would not only record the number of previous appearances but sometimes add a note stating that these instances were documented in the same volume.<sup>44</sup> This demonstrates that previous entries could be used to satisfy the formal requirements of ongoing procedures and thereby add to the legitimacy of legal procedures in terms of their formal correctness.<sup>45</sup> The high level of standardisation across time not only indicates established writing practices but might also have worked to create a sense of formal administrative stability.

The separation of the oldest extant court registers from Friedberg into two volumes, each containing entries regarding different steps in the legal proceedings—such as charges or oaths—probably enabled an even more targeted practice of tracking formalities. This is mirrored in the average length of the entries, which were reduced to naming the claimant, the defendant and the sum of money at stake. The number of times the claimants had previously appeared at court was indicated by Roman numerals. Both the lay judges of the court and potentially the parties involved in these conflicts could thus have accessed information that was mainly relevant and in some cases only intelligible in the short term.

There is very little evidence pointing towards the individual parties involved in the court cases using these books for their own gain. Instead, they tended to rely on oaths and oral testimonies in their favour, as well as smaller written documents such as *briefe* (letters or charters) or *zedel* (notes).<sup>46</sup> These documents were sometimes stored in the chests of the council but also often kept by the individual parties themselves.<sup>47</sup> By the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries this became increasingly problematic as their authenticity was brought into question.<sup>48</sup> In Friedberg, there are several entries in the council minute books stipulating that specific legal documents had to be drawn up by an official scribe.<sup>49</sup> Whereas in the earlier protocols, the authenticity of the written documents was not usually discussed and the registers were not

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**44** *Henne von Gaudern dut sine drytte clage uff Herman Gnade, als vorgeschriben stet ym buche.* Translation: “Henne of Gaudern is charging Herman Gnade for the third time as has been documented above and in this book”: HStAM, 330 Gelnhausen, 58, fol. 84v.

**45** Concerning the role of form and formulaic communication in late medieval courts, see: Arlinghaus 2021, 96.

**46** Cf. Litschel 2014, 192; Hitz 2019, 80.

**47** The *Insatzbuch* refers to a letter of authority kept in the *bürgermeister laden*, i. e. the mayor’s chest: HStAD, C4, 89, 1, fol. 43v.

**48** Cf. Litschel 2014, 192–196.

**49** *Die brieff [...] iß sey kauffbrief, gültbrieff odder insetze, das ein statschreiber die schreiben und machen soll.* Translation: “The letters, be it charters of purchase, charters of debt or mortgages, shall be written by the town scribe”: StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/3, fol. 83v. *sol auch hinfur kein brieff gesigelt oder zulassen werden, ein statschreiber hab jn dan gemacht.* Translation: “in the future no letters shall be sealed or accepted if they have not been written by a town scribe”: StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/6, fol. 55r.



regularly accessed by individual parties, yet certain groups documented their own dealings in the court registers as a measure of additional security. The older Gelnhausen court registers contain several entries that were apparently added at the special request of one or more of the parties involved. They detail entire settlements and do not reflect the individual stages of the negotiations. Additionally, several of these long-form entries contain explicit references to their inscription in the court registers. In one case, this was explicitly done to provide more security.<sup>50</sup> In another instance, one party requested to read the entry after it had been inscribed.<sup>51</sup> This is the only time anyone other than the scribe is explicitly mentioned as having accessed the register. The people asking for their dealings to be recorded in the court register belonged to the more notable families in Gelnhausen and were potentially able to pay for this privilege.<sup>52</sup> Thus, while the registers might have given a sense of additional security to some, they certainly were not structured around the legal needs of most participants in the proceedings. Generally speaking, the use of books in judicial proceedings does not appear to be a practice associated with the individual members of the civic community. The books were instruments of the court and thereby a medium associated with the power of administering justice.

However, a second type of register that was not written to reflect court or council sessions, but instead focused on dealings between parties mainly concerning the transaction or mortgaging of properties, appears to have been of more use in future conflicts. In the so-called *Insatzbuch* from Friedberg, there are instances in which earlier entries were explicitly cited.<sup>53</sup> The judges involved would then reiterate the validity of previous settlements. This allowed the judges to forego additional decision-making, which might have produced the need for legitimisation and further stabilised the position of the register in the hands of the judges as a source of legal knowledge.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, these books provided a centralised space in which the most important legal transactions could be inscribed. By collecting a large amount of individual cases over multiple decades, they produce a sense of a wider legal community. After all, it is reasonable to assume that the motivation behind recording larger transactions and mortgages in a codex such as the Friedberg *Insatzbuch*—or the now lost *Währschafsbücher* from Gelnhausen—might also have lain with the parties involved. Still the books were mainly accessed by the judges.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> HStAM, 330 Gelnhausen, 58, fol. 164r.

<sup>51</sup> HStAM, 330 Gelnhausen, 58, fol. 176r.

<sup>52</sup> There is no concrete evidence for fees in connection with these entries in Gelnhausen. This practice is attested to in other cities such as Lübeck: Höhn 2021, 90. In late-fourteenth-century Friedberg, scribes were supposed to be paid *eyn alt heller* (“a half-penny”) for every charge brought before court: Foltz 1904, 363.

<sup>53</sup> HStAD, C4, 89, 1, fol. 44r.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Pfister 2019, 18; Höhn 2021, 68–69.

<sup>55</sup> Mihm 2007, 353.

While entries in the *Insatzbuch* were probably still linked to the interests of the individual parties, the Friedberg *Ratsprotokolle* (i. e. council minute books) were mainly used by the council to reaffirm its decision-making.<sup>56</sup> They were structured around the weekly council sessions, just like the court registers. Their contents were more varied with entries ranging from short, almost unintelligible notes regarding the immediate future, to much more detailed issues of legal concern. However, this structure appears to have made the location of relevant matters at a later date difficult as some of the most important decrees were documented and indexed in a new codex.<sup>57</sup>

The protocol books themselves, once again, appear to have been geared for more direct usage. Entries of more immediate concern are regularly repeated almost verbatim in several sessions, indicating multiple postponements and a need for repetition and continuous updating. This is particularly striking in the case of entries beginning with the word *Gedenck* (i. e. remember). These notes would sometimes be so short that they appear almost meaningless to most readers. Rather than being accessible to a larger audience, they could only be understood by a very select group of people—namely those that were present when the entries were drafted and would be present again when they were read.<sup>58</sup> Short notes such as *Item gedenck der schumecher zunfft* (“remember the shoemaker’s guild”) did not convey much information in and of themselves but perhaps served as reminders to the councilmen.<sup>59</sup> Thus the protocols seem to have provided the council with a kind of short-term, externalised memory. The books were structured to fit the council’s needs and mainly reflected its perspective. This provided the council with a narrative of its own dealings, that was both independent from individual memory and still controlled by the councilmen. This control not only extended to the actual books but also included the ways in which the written texts could re-enter oral communication. However, books and writing, in general, may not always have provided security and could instead have produced additional layers of insecurity regarding correct interpretations.<sup>60</sup> Thus, controlling the way in which books would re-enter societies was as essential as controlling their production.<sup>61</sup>

In general, the surviving protocols and registers worked in congruence with the proceedings of the very entities they observed through the lens of formal procedures. They provided a material manifestation of a proto-organisational memory. Additionally, their means of production and structures reflect and produce a linear timeline that is entirely dependent on the rhythms of the regularly scheduled court or council

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56 StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/3, fol. 155r.

57 StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 11/7.

58 There is no direct evidence of the protocols being read aloud in Friedberg. This appears to have been done in other cities such as Cologne, see: Huiskes 1990, XXVI. Comments in the Friedberg minute books such as *noli legere* (“do not read”) also point in this direction.

59 StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/1, fol. 15r.

60 Cf. Möller/Rehling 2016, 246; Höhn 2021, 63.

61 Hildbrand 1995, 371–376.

sessions. The individual codices—specifically the session-focussed registers and protocols—were not only structured chronologically but written in such a way as to produce a history of entities such as the city court or the council. It should hardly be surprising then, that the Gelnhausen council brought up their minute books when their legal decision-making was questioned in 1568. They argued that the rebellious populace did not possess the capabilities of understanding the intricacies of Gelnhausen’s laws, whereas the council had consulted the old minute books and therefore was the only entity with an accurate sense of right and wrong.<sup>62</sup> In the hands of the council, books—specifically minute books—could become a means of ensuring and stabilising their continued rule.

## Accounting for Books

The connection between civic unrest, the political participation of the commons and the introduction of record-keeping, usually in book-form, has also been observed in the case of account books.<sup>63</sup> Even though economic concerns played heavily into the Friedberg uprisings of 1455, their effect on the practices of record-keeping are unknown. The oldest extant fragments of account books documenting tax revenue as well as the council’s expenses survive from the 1360s. While this is the same decade in which demands for court registers appear, the assumption of a correlation between the appearance of account books and court registers—or the lack thereof—is speculative at best. Even the massive overhaul of the entire system of record-keeping of the 1480s appears to have only marginally affected accounting. However, the very fragmentary survival of documents restricts the ability to draw unambiguous conclusions.<sup>64</sup>

Despite no Gelnhausen account books surviving from the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the link between conflict and financial record-keeping can nonetheless still be identified.<sup>65</sup> In his *Stadtbuch*, the early-fifteenth-century scribe Hartmann Brell compiled documents of legal relevance. However, among the many letters, contracts and charters, he also outlined the dire financial situation of the city.<sup>66</sup> The 1420s were marked by an ongoing dispute between the council and the winemakers’ guild. The guild’s refusal to pay the so-called *Geschoß* (a property tax) had put the somewhat already problematic financial situation under additional strain. The council had attempted to remedy its financial difficulties through the imposition of a second tax. This second tax, as well as a description and summary of the accounting process of

<sup>62</sup> HStAM, 330 Gelnhausen, 2, fol. 91r.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Hartrich 2020, 198–202; Kirchgässner 1977, 35.

<sup>64</sup> Only two account books from the late-fifteenth century—dating to 1482/83 and 1495—are extant: StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 13/3; StA Friedberg, IX A1.

<sup>65</sup> The oldest surviving account book dates to 1516: HStAM, 330 Gelnhausen 28.

<sup>66</sup> Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (hereafter StBB), ms. germ. fol. 850, fols. 156v–157v.

1426 was also documented by Brell.<sup>67</sup> He recorded the main expenses and revenues of the city and referenced the actual account books several times.

The deliberate inclusion of the accounting process for the year 1426 in Brell's book is striking. Not only does it prove the existence and use of account books in Gelnhausen, but he also explicitly uses the opening of the account books as an opportunity to frame the actions of the winemaker's guild as harmful to the common good in the long run and to justify further taxation. Brell thus placed the blame for the large amount of debt on the winemakers instead of the treasury. The account books mentioned in Brell's *Stadtbuch* documented the financial dealings of the city's officials and might even have been written with potential accusations of financial mismanagement in mind.<sup>68</sup> Brell does not, however, appear to have trusted the account books alone to provide the council with the necessary legitimisation and chose a different codex, namely a compilation of all manner of documents, to properly reflect his line of argument.

The assumption that the commons would indeed consult account books is not unfounded and, as evidence from other cities shows, this was exactly what tended to happen.<sup>69</sup> The occurrence or even threat of civic unrest might have shaped account books to some degree. However, regular production and use of the books in annual sessions involving council members point towards the importance of demonstrating financial accountability both in the short-term—as oral communication among the council—and the long-term—as account books providing written records for archival purposes and were often kept for centuries.

To produce account books that could serve as documents of accountability, the treasurers and the tax collectors had to keep a record of their financial activities throughout the year. This could take the form of small written notes or books and booklets in which every relevant transaction would be documented. In fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Friedberg, there were separate volumes recording expenditure (*Ausgaberegister*), revenue (*Einnahmeregister*) and several different taxation manuals. In comparison, the scribes in Gelnhausen did not keep separate records of expenses and revenue but instead used one volume—the *Rentbuch*—for this purpose. Taxes and specialised expenses concerning the city's buildings, roads and churches would be recorded in separate books. In both cities, a network of different books were required to track all finances. Moreover, financial information could be processed through a series of books and thereby change its meaning. For example, an entry regarding the taxes paid by an individual for the amount of wine they had sold during the week would first be recorded alongside and added to other payments of this tax in the *Weinungeldregister*. These payments would, in turn, be divided between the

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<sup>67</sup> StBB, ms. germ. fol. 850, fol. 161r.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Hartrich 2020, 203.

<sup>69</sup> Schwab 1990, 170–172; Butt 2015, 100–101.

castle and the city.<sup>70</sup> Such a book could then have multiple different uses depending on the user: individual taxpayers could use it as a proof of payment whereas the tax collectors might have pointed to it as a manifestation of their accountability. The data from this book would then be transferred into the revenue register, where it would be added to the wider annual income. The year's expenditure would then be subtracted to calculate the financial standing of the city as a whole.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast to the court and council registers—which tended to only be self-referential in some isolated cases—the account books formed an entire network of books that structurally and systematically referred to each other to produce more complex sets of data. This is especially obvious in the practices of additions and subtractions that not only linked several books to each other, but were also explicitly entwined with the materiality of the page. Both in Friedberg and Gelnhausen, the sums at the bottom of each page would refer not to categories of revenue or spending, but to the individual entries on the pages themselves regardless of their classification. These kinds of page-based sums were fundamentally a result of book-based practices of accounting and emerged comparatively late.<sup>72</sup>

Nonetheless, the structure of these books was based on categorising sums of money. While the Friedberg expense registers would be kept and added to throughout the year, the scribes of early-sixteenth-century Gelnhausen would collect expenses and revenue in a single volume, which was most likely compiled at the end of each year. In terms of spending, both the account books from Gelnhausen and Friedberg would open with a list of generalised expenses (*Gemeine Ausgabe*), which usually consisted of comparatively detailed entries, and continued with much more specific lists and more formalised entries. These categories of expenditure, as well as their position in relation to the other sections, remained relatively stable over long periods and they would still be included even when no revenue was collected in a certain category.<sup>73</sup>

Following the lists of income, outgoings were recorded using different methods in the two cities. In Gelnhausen the salaries for officials and contractors were ordered chronologically, whereas in Friedberg every recipient or group of recipients were dealt with individually. The Freiberg method was potentially preferred as it allowed for more efficient tracking of payments made to different people. In Gelnhausen, the salaries of particular individuals would be more difficult to track and reckon. Yet, the order of in which the Freiberg officials' were entered is telling; the mayors, treasurers and scribes—those directly involved with the council—are listed first before others outside the circle of the council. The account books did not only contain financial information. They also reproduced the structural relationships and hierarchies of the city administration in the very organisation of the volume itself. Any potential reader

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70 StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 13/8.

71 Cf. Sander-Berke 1995, 352. Regarding book-use in accounting practices, see: Arlinghaus 2000, 119.

72 Vogeler 2003, 288.

73 Cf. Butt 2015, 91.

seeking to locate specific financial information would need to understand and navigate the hierarchy of the individuals listed as being paid by the treasurer which was replicated in the order of the accounts.

However, in both cities, the account books would only have been accessible to a restricted number of people under regular circumstances. Once they had been used in the annual process of reviewing the city's finances, which usually coincided with the inauguration of new mayors and treasurers, they would be locked away.<sup>74</sup> The very limited accessibility of the council's financial dealings had already been the cause of tension in many cities before the inception of account books. Their very existence appears to be intimately related to demands of increased transparency regarding these matters in some cities. In addition to the account books, many cities installed semi-permanent committees with representatives from groups outside the city council or—as practised in Friedberg—set up quotas for a certain amount of guild members within the council itself.<sup>75</sup> By locking up the books and drawing guild members into the council, information regarding the city's finances remained structurally in the hands of the council as a separate and potentially increasingly secretive entity.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the financial records of other urban entities, such as the hospital, the parish church and even the guilds themselves would have to pass through the hands of the council and, quite literally, the town scribes.<sup>77</sup> While others were usually responsible for their production, the last pages and the official recording of the total would fall to the town scribe. He and the council were the ones systematically closing and keeping the books.

## Cartularies and Other Compilations

In Gelnhausen, the growing tensions with the winemaker's guild were not the only threat to the council during the 1420s. Local noble families were feuding with the city—probably due to its role in the destruction of several castles in the decades prior.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the city appeared to be slowly losing its rights and privileges in the nearby Büdingen Forest and the village of Haitz to the neighbouring county of Isenburg.<sup>79</sup> For the contemporary scribe Hartmann Brell, these were more than enough reasons to compile a book containing copies of the kinds of documents he considered useful and important for the future leaders of Gelnhausen regarding their rights. The resulting book mainly contained contemporary correspondence, usually about

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<sup>74</sup> In Gelnhausen, they were stored in locked shelves: HStAM, 81, D 1/307, fol. 394r.

<sup>75</sup> Stobbe 1992, 143.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Isenmann 2014, 517.

<sup>77</sup> StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 5b/2.

<sup>78</sup> Heitzenröder 1978, 77.

<sup>79</sup> Ackermann 2006, 18.

legal issues, contracts and charters, as well as the aforementioned report of the city's finances. He asked his son to copy several documents predating his tenure as town scribe and added his comments and interpretations in the margins. He argued that his effort of preserving and explaining the actions of the past would serve future generations as a guideline.<sup>80</sup> By using a book, Brell could not only collect important documents together but this enabled him to put them into a specific order and add his own interpretations of the material in the form of introductory texts. The book-form allowed for the creation of an overarching narrative of the council's power and its dealings with other entities.

Otherwise, this compilation seems to work like a collection of material tailored to potential legal conflicts, which might explain the focus on documents concerning contemporary and previous engagements of this sort, as well as contracts and charters. Brell does occasionally take care to note the location of the corresponding originals, perhaps with an eye towards their potential future roles as evidence. On the second page of the book, he even provides a list of people whose letters—usually regarding feuds—were kept by the city council.<sup>81</sup> The entire book seems to double as a miniature archive and as a first attempt at indexing relevant material from the council's chests and households throughout the city. However, rather than drawing attention to the original material, it almost appears to have replaced it entirely.<sup>82</sup>

The evidence from Friedberg points to a similar development: in the late-fourteenth century, the city produced two cartularies. While both were written on parchment, one codex appears to have been more prestigious than the other. The so-called "Red Book" (*Rotes Buch*) contained copies of charters with small introductory notes written in red ink.<sup>83</sup> When another scribe in the late-fifteenth century produced another cartulary with excerpts of the most important charters, he noted that a page had been removed from both the earlier cartularies.<sup>84</sup> Rather than going back to the original charter, which survives in pristine condition to this day and even carries a small note referring to the corresponding page in the cartulary,<sup>85</sup> the scribe left his excerpt incom-

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**80** StBB, ms. germ. fol. 850, fol. 127r; Kluge 2017, 44.

**81** Heitzenröder 1978, 74.

**82** This may simply have resulted from the convenience provided by these collections. However, the people producing the cartularies were very likely aware of this and may have created them with this purpose in mind: Cf. Bouchard 2002, 31–32. The process of replacement is also apparent in Friedberg, where a cartulary and an archival index only refer back to older compilations, even though the original charters were—and still are—extant. This phenomenon has been observed in other contexts as well: Cf. Resl 2002, 222; Maisch 2014, 193.

**83** A fragment of the Red Book is extant: HStAM, Urk. 145, 93. The existence of codices known as red books is attested in a large number of medieval cities within the Empire. While their contents could vary, their name almost invariably implied their special significance: Kluge 2014, 186–188.

**84** *Nach dissem wort ist ein gantz blat usß dem roten buch geschnitten.* Translation: "After this word an entire page has been cut out of the red book": HStAD, C 1 B, 30, fol. 3r.

**85** HStAD, A3, 111/200.

plete. The original charter was intentionally or unintentionally forgotten as books had become the centralised institutions of legal knowledge. The book-form, it appears, was now the favoured medium of record among civic administrations.

This tendency to rely on codices instead of the charter was not entirely unproblematic, which became very clear when the Gelnhausen syndic attempted to use two cartularies in a court case against Count Antonius of Isenburg in the mid-sixteenth century. One of these codices was also known as the “Red Book”. Not only did it contain rubricated paratexts—like its Friedberg counterpart—but it was apparently bound in red leather and the cover was fitted with brass buckles. While the other books were stored in the council chambers, the “Red Book” was kept in the local Franciscan church, apparently because the council had considered it to be particularly important.<sup>86</sup> This separated the book from its contexts of everyday administration and moved it into an entirely different realm of meaning. The placement of the book into this other, sacred space may have added to its quality as a symbol of urban identity and power that took the form of a cartulary. However, according to the Isenburg lawyer, Caspar Fichard, this did not serve as a sign of its trustworthiness. He argued that the church should not be counted as an *archivum publicum* (i. e. an official archive from which legally admissible evidence could be taken).<sup>87</sup> Additionally, other subsequent important charters had been added to the book after its initial production, resulting in a variety of different handwritings present in one codex, which the Isenburg lawyer pointed to as signs of potential tampering. More importantly, the books were generally inadmissible as evidence for the city’s rights and privileges as they only contained copies of the relevant charters, rather than the original documents. The prioritisation of the codex over single-sheet documents thus became a convenient point of weakness ready for exploitation. Nonetheless, the use of these books in a legal case approximately one hundred years after their initial inception, the practices of adding to them in the intervening years and the high-status storage location of the “Red Book” point towards a continued tradition of reception. Certainly, their creator Hartmann Brell might have foreseen similar usage, as many of the conflicts that were brought before the imperial chamber court in the sixteenth century had already started during his lifetime.

The lasting impact of the “Red Book” became even more visible in the late-eighteenth century, when the codex disappeared and an entire commission was formed to investigate and find the book.<sup>88</sup> This was not done out of antiquarian interests but because the book was still considered to contain pertinent legal information. The ongoing prestige of these kinds of codices in the centuries after their production is similarly attested in Friedberg. In the late-sixteenth century, the town scribe produced

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<sup>86</sup> HStAM, 81, D 1/306.

<sup>87</sup> HStAM, 81, D 1/306.

<sup>88</sup> Two large files concerning this case remain in the Marburg State Archive: HStAM, 81, 9315; HStAM, 81, 9316.



a new index for the “Red Book” that still survives today. Furthermore, in 1724, the syndic Johann Friedrich Schwalb compiled a new codex containing the most important charters and explicitly named it *Rotes Buch* and thus placed it within the tradition of “Red Books”. Whilst this book is extant, its medieval predecessor is not. The same is true for its counterpart from Gelnhausen. This seems almost ironic, considering the measures put in place to ensure the codices’ survival, including the use of parchment and their secure storage locations. While the red writing and covers once visibly marked them as special objects and signifiers of power, their lasting importance due to their prestigious contents, and also perhaps as symbols of urban identity, is still demonstrated by the various surviving documents referencing them.<sup>89</sup>

### Codex Communities and the Codification of Rulership

Generally speaking, in Friedberg and Gelnhausen, books—or the lack thereof—appear on multiple occasions in connection with conflicts involving the council and inner-city or external opposing parties. The Friedberg court was initially rather hesitant when it came to the production of books and many codices appear to be the result of the council’s weakness. In comparison, the Gelnhausen scribe, Hartmann Brell, viewed books as essential in ensuring the security of future generations and the council more specifically. Even though other scribes added further entries to codices such as Brell’s *Stadtbuch* or the *Rote Buch* and reworked them extensively, the written word and writing in the book-form could be considered as providing stability and the potential for control. As such, the connection between moments of instability and the emergence of books in administrative settings is hardly surprising. However, as the initial resistance of the Friedberg court towards the installation of books—as well as the later attempts of controlling access to such records—show, codices might have posed a latent threat: they could read by others.<sup>90</sup>

The potential for holding the court and council accountable might have initially attracted certain factions within civic communities to force the court and council to document their financial and legal decision-making. However, the books ended up in locked chests. Instead of providing check and balances on their power, these books could only be opened and interpreted by the court and the council.<sup>91</sup> In 1525, when several citizens from Friedberg attempted to steal and destroy their letters of debt from the churches, the council promptly reacted by producing a register of all available letters in book form.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to the original documents, the books and thus

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<sup>89</sup> Kluge 2014, 186–188.

<sup>90</sup> Rohmann 2001, 65.

<sup>91</sup> Litschel 2014, 202–204.

<sup>92</sup> StA Friedberg, ehemaliges Depositum, Konv. 12/7, 72r.

records of debts remain in the Friedberg archive to this day.<sup>93</sup> By producing and keeping books, the council could not only control an increasing amount of information but also sought to limit and shape the ways it re-entered their surrounding societies.<sup>94</sup>

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the case of the council minute books. The session protocols produced in Friedberg from the 1480s onwards are a physical manifestation of the council's interpretation of its environment that continue to dictate the historical narrative nowadays. By potentially being read aloud during the council sessions, both their production and reception was tied to the council. At the same time, their very manner of production, as well as the structure of every page, was intimately linked to the power structures between the city and the castle. Additionally, many entries mainly concerned council minutiae and as such appear to be of little informational value outside the immediate setting provided by the council sessions. The community beyond the council only ever appears in the registers when their actions require regulation and control. So when an early-sixteenth-century scribe quoted Cicero's *De officiis* on the title page of the 1539 minute books, the moral argument concerning the government of the *res publica* communicated one thing: namely, that the council members (i. e. the potential readers of the registers) were the ones legitimately tasked with and capable of good government. These books were framed as potential demonstrations of accountability with regards to the common good. They were, nonetheless, only accessible to the very same group of people whose actions they recorded.<sup>95</sup> While codices focussing on legal agreements between individuals tied them to the book as a centralised space of an emerging legal community with court and council at its centre, the minute books worked as a medium of communication for and within the council. They produced a much smaller community that did not extend much further than those who opened them regularly.<sup>96</sup> For everyone outside the council, the minute books would quite literally remain closed.

However, the specific materiality of the books allowed for multiplicities of meaning, ranging from the symbolic manifestation of power in the *Ratsbuch* or the "Red Books", to the quite concrete demonstration of administrative and judicial power that lay within the contents of the court, council and account books. This worked even in their unopened state. The books sit firmly at the intersection of what could be termed "rulership writing" and "administrative writing". Even though the "Red Books" and the *Ratsbuch* appear to be the most obvious expressions of power both in

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<sup>93</sup> StA Friedberg, XII.

<sup>94</sup> With regards to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century archives, Markus Friedrich has emphasised their role as places of intentional forgetting or memory loss. As the archives contained potentially dangerous information, limiting their use became essential: Friedrich 2013, 103–104.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Hartrich 2020, 206.

<sup>96</sup> With regards to the Cologne Statute Book of 1437, Franz Josef-Arlinghaus argued that the group that could meaningfully access the book was even smaller than the council and really only included the scribes: Arlinghaus 2004, 400–401.

terms of their content and their materiality while still being of practical use in many settings, the other administrative books still worked as signifiers of the power structures within the city. The codex-form gathered the legal and financial concerns of the community and re-affirmed the unity of civic society in the hands of court and council. Even books apparently only intended for short-term use would be stored over long periods of time and could thus not only be used in future legal cases, but—perhaps more importantly—they were physical manifestations of administrative power and urban community.<sup>97</sup> Power could thus be expressed on every level, starting with the arrangement of the text on an individual page and ending with restricting access to the information held between the closed covers of the city's books.

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<sup>97</sup> Arlinghaus emphasised the commemorative function of private account books as well: Arlinghaus 2000, 350.

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