

# Manuscripts and monuments: the ten contracts of Djefai-Hapi and economies of knowledge

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**Abstract:** Reconfigured and recontextualized several times, the ten contracts inscribed on the walls of the monumental tomb of the regional governor Djefai-Hapi I at Asyut (c. 1920 BC) are a particularly striking example of how different material and different contexts generate new meaning. Originally written on papyrus or leather, the ten contracts between Djefai-Hapi and the priests of the main deities of his city and the necropolis staff ensured that Djefai-Hapi would be able to participate in the local cult(s) on a regular basis after his death. Put in a new context, the ‘tomb edition’ of the ten contracts went beyond Djefai-Hapi’s insistence on later successors honouring his agreements. It exercised a powerful effect on Djefai-Hapi’s deification in a dynamic interplay of monumental tomb-architecture, high-quality statues, elegant language used in the tomb-inscriptions, and Asyut’s local cults. After more than two millennia, the contracts were stored in a temple more than 200km away from Asyut and did not have legal meaning any more. Instead, they had changed to a commemorative text written on papyrus. Defining and reconstructing actors, institutions, materials, and working processes provides insight into the colourful history of knowledge transfer in Ancient Egypt.

**Keywords:** Asyut, Tebtynis, knowledge transfer, materiality, epistemic sites, tomb inscription

## Introduction

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In antiquity as well as in modern times, Ancient Egypt and its more than three thousand years of history have promoted ideas of stability, durability, and immutability. Ancient writers, as for example Herodotus, Plato, or Pliny the Elder, were already impressed by this long time-span and assigned the above-mentioned properties to Ancient Egypt. Nowadays, these ideas are still widespread, even if modern scholarship draws a different picture. In particular, the relatively high number of preserved tombs and temples made of stone and inscribed with hieroglyphs led to the assumption that Ancient Egyptian culture was stable and resistant to changes. However, it is noteworthy that the use of air-dried bricks contributed to the fact that comparatively few settlements, palaces, libraries, and library-like institutions originally housing papyri and leather scrolls have been preserved. Humidity, high groundwater levels, fluvial sediments, modern overbuilding, and the transient nature of the writing material itself caused an immense loss of these documents and their wide variety.

One well-preserved stone monument is the rock-cut tomb of the local governor Djefai-Hapi I at Asyut. A text, written on one of the tomb walls and at first glance purely juridical, suggests durability and stability. A close examination of the text, however, using the concept of economies of knowledge and focussing on materiality, textual transfer, and epistemic sites, reveals its eventful history.

## Economies of knowledge

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During the more than 3000 years of Ancient Egyptian history, one can observe a living textual tradition in the realm of *epistemic knowledge*, that is, the wide spectrum of institutionalized knowledge that comes with a universal claim to validity attached to it, knowledge that would, in many cases, qualify as either scientific or semi-scientific from a modern point of view (Johnston and Uhlmann 2021). It applies to fields such as theology, rituals, medicine, mathematics, astronomy and astrology, divination, botany, geography, zoology, annals, literature, and the law.

The producing, studying, copying, compiling, excerpting, updating, collecting, and preserving of texts of these fields, the shifting and redeploying of older strata of knowledge, and the selective but also expansive transmission of individual epistemic texts that was taking place at the same time, are all markers of a living textual tradition. Epistemic changes and recontextualisations are evident in these texts, even though their contents seem invariable, if not ossified, by (and as) tradition. As it turns out, even a so-called

‘reproductive transmission’ (Assmann 1983: 7–10) is characterized by a constant engagement with, reshaping, and reinterpretation of the texts involved.<sup>1</sup> It is by no means merely a reproductive and ultimately self-exhaustive process (Assmann 1983: 7), but one that allows for an active continuation of tradition within a framework of controlled and tolerated variation.

Therefore, we should refocus our attention on the dynamic aspects of the process of *knowledge transfer*. This dynamic approach has a momentous impact on the perception of Ancient Egyptian processes of textual transfer, allowing the value and independence of textual variants to be appreciated to a far greater degree. Every textual witness on the long and winding path of knowledge transfer is understood as a distinct, historically relevant entity which is capable of providing a wide range of information pertaining to processes of knowledge transfer. Textual change, especially the latent processuality that is the inevitable result of continuous textual work, plays a creative role. Movement instead of stasis, change instead of corruption, productivity instead of reproductivity—these are the core principles that the concept of transfer brings to the fore. As a consequence, copying and reproducing do not necessarily mean a steady deterioration of texts—supposedly evidenced by corruption, unintelligibility, and a general loss of quality—and do not correlate with the paradigm of inexorable social, political, and cultural decadence.<sup>2</sup> The establishment of a textual tradition as a link between past and future through actively controlled processes of transfer called for specialist expertise and for philological competence (Cancik-Kirschbaum and Kahl 2018: 251–311). It is thus preferable to replace the concept of reproductive transmission with that of *iterative transmission*, a concept which accommodates the renewed usage of existing content, formats, and contexts of use (cf. Cancik-Kirschbaum and Traninger 2015: 6–7). Contrary to the idea of compulsive copying and perseveration connected with reproductive transmission, iteration implies newness through repetition.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of *economies of knowledge* (developed in the Collaborative Research Center 980 *Episteme in Motion. Transfer of Knowledge from the Ancient World to the Early Modern Period*) draws attention to the dynamic nature and to the complexity and multicausality of processes of transfer. Applied to the texts of Ancient Egypt, which date back millennia, the concept of economies of knowledge provides a solid methodological tool capable of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. for the Pyramid Texts: Morales (2017); Morales (2018); for the Book of the Dead: Stadler (2009: 44–45); for the terminology Knigge (2006: 7); for the general phenomenon of reproduction cf. Gillen (2017).

<sup>2</sup> For the concept of variants and textual variation understood as a positive quality, see Ragazzoli (2018); Ragazzoli (2019); for the textual transmission and the close attention to individual textual witnesses exemplified in Egyptology by the Material Philology school, see, in the last decade, the works of R. B. Parkinson, S. Quirke, F. Hagen; cf. the earlier work of Kahl (1999) focussing on texts attested at Asyut.

<sup>3</sup> This approach is similar to Gilles Deleuze’s or Judith Butler’s positive assessment of repetition (Deleuze 1992; Butler 1993: 2).

establishing links between phenomena which have been noted only individually in previous research and analysed in isolation from each other. The concept of economies of knowledge is a holistic approach that allows us to take all facets of knowledge transfer into consideration: diachronic, geographical, social, material, cognitive—and to consider actors, institutions, materiality, techniques, and tools together. The scope of inquiry is no longer confined to superficial issues ('the way from A to B at the time of C') but is widened to encompass the multiple important points just mentioned.

## The ten contracts in the tomb of Djefai-Hapi I at Asyut

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Even texts that appear to be the most resistant to change, such as legal contracts, could be reconfigured and recontextualized in Ancient Egypt. The ten contracts of Djefai-Hapi I are an example of such recontextualisation and a fascinating and uniquely detailed piece of evidence that sheds light on Ancient Egypt's legal history (Théodoridès 1971: 109–251; Théodoridès 1973: 439–66; Allam 2010: 29–63). Djefai-Hapi lived during the 12th Dynasty under the reign of King Senwosret I (1956–1910 BC). In his capacity of nomarch (a kind of regional governor), Djefai-Hapi was also the mayor of Asyut in Middle Egypt and the overseer of the priests serving at the temples of Wepwawet and Anubis, the city's two main deities.

The ten contracts between Djefai-Hapi and the priests of the main deities of his city and the necropolis staff on Gebel Asyut al-gharbi (the western mountain at Asyut) ensured that, after his death, Djefai-Hapi would be able to participate in the local cult(s) on a regular basis. Six contracts concerned the priests of the temple of Wepwawet, two those of the temple of Anubis, and two the necropolis staff of Asyut. Djefai-Hapi established an endowment to enable the payment of the contractual partners. He appointed a *hm-k*, a Ka-servant (Allam 1985; Sánchez Casado 2018), to monitor—and if necessary to enforce—compliance with the contracts. This Ka-servant and his descendants had the task of ensuring that the contractual obligations were fulfilled as stipulated. In return, they received generous compensation for their services in the form of farmland, servants, livestock, and gardens. Crucially, the office of Ka-servant was hereditary, but it could only be passed on to a single descendant. This was meant to keep the estate from falling apart, and it also increased the incentive to honour the contract. This is what the relevant provisions says:

The nobleman, mayor, overseer of the priests of Wepwawet, Djefai-hapi, he says to his Ka-servant: 'Behold, all these things, for which I have contracted

with these wab-priests are under your supervision. For, behold, it is the Ka-servant of a man, who causes his possessions and his offerings to perpetuate. Behold, I have brought to your knowledge these things which I have given to these wab-priests, as compensation for these things which they have given to me, take heed lest anything among them be lacking. Therefore, every word of my list, which I have given to them, let your son hear it, your heir, who shall act as my Ka-servant. Behold, I have endowed you with fields, with people, with cattle, with gardens and with everything like any exalted man of Asyut in order that you may make offerings to me with contented heart. You shall stand over all my possessions, which I have put under your hand. Behold, they are before you in writing. These things will belong to your particular son, whom you love, who shall act as my Ka-servant, before your (other) children, as consumer (of the revenues) who does not do mischief, without permitting that he divides them to his children, according to this speech which I have given to you.’ (Siut I, 269–72)<sup>4</sup>

Placed on the eastern wall of the Great Transverse Hall of Djefai-Hapi’s tomb, the monumental inscriptions containing the ten contracts served as a further reminder to the priests and the necropolis staff to fulfill their obligations: this part of the tomb was open to visitors on feast days, with the contracts clearly visible in a prominent position. Immediately preceding the description of the Ka-servant’s responsibilities and the ten contracts that come after it, Djefai-Hapi put the following sentence: ‘I remembered that I should make my way to god on that day of dying, so that he may find me [...]’ (Siut I, 267).

This sentence reveals the impetus behind the contracts: it was Djefai-Hapi himself who initiated them with the goal of ensuring his cultic veneration. He emphasized twice that the acts to be performed by priests and necropolis staff were financed (privately) from the revenue generated by his father’s house, and not from public funds (Siut I, 288, 301).

As a matter of fact, Djefai-Hapi was deified soon after his death, and it is very likely that his status of nomarch, his self-professed erudition, his monumental tomb, and the contracts just mentioned were major contributing factors to his elevation to the status of a deity (Kahl 2012: 163–88). He was still honoured 400 years after his death, as is shown by twelve visitors’ dipinti—painted graffiti—in another tomb in the Gebel Asyut al-gharbi that mention a temple of Djefai-Hapi and describe its beauty (Kahl 2012; Verhoeven 2020: 286–87).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the translations by Breasted (1906: 260); Reisner (1918: 81–82); Théodoridès (1971: 171–78); Théodoridès (1973: 459–61); Allam (2010: 55–56); Kahl (2012: 179–80).

Given their status as legal texts, the terms of the contracts were presumably first negotiated orally (Allam 2007: 12). Then the ten contracts were written down on leather or papyrus in order to make the arrangements between Djefai-Hapi and the priests and officials legally binding. This text no longer exists, but legal texts from this period are known to have contained a date as well as the signatures of witnesses. Probably these texts were stored at Djefai-Hapi's house and the temples.

What we find preserved in Djefai-Hapi's tomb (Tomb I) is a new contextualized and reconfigured version of the legal texts. Placed on the eastern wall of the Great Transverse Hall of Tomb I (Figs. 1, 2), the monumental inscription covers an area of approximately 40m<sup>2</sup> (c. 4m × 10m).<sup>5</sup> The lower part of the inscription is framed by a horizontal line c. 8cm in height and painted in red. The area between this boundary line and the floor of the Great Transverse Hall is about 2m high and is painted in yellow with red dots to imitate precious granite.

## The working process of the contracts in the tomb of Djefai-Hapi

Asyut is situated c. 375km south of modern Cairo and was a regional centre during the pharaonic period. High-quality artwork, craftsmanship, and architecture are significant in the city (Kahl 2007: 3–20, 151–4). The ancient necropolis as well as the modern cemetery are situated on the west bank of the Nile in the western mountains of Asyut, the Gebel Asyut al-gharbi (Kahl 2007: 59–106) (Fig. 3).

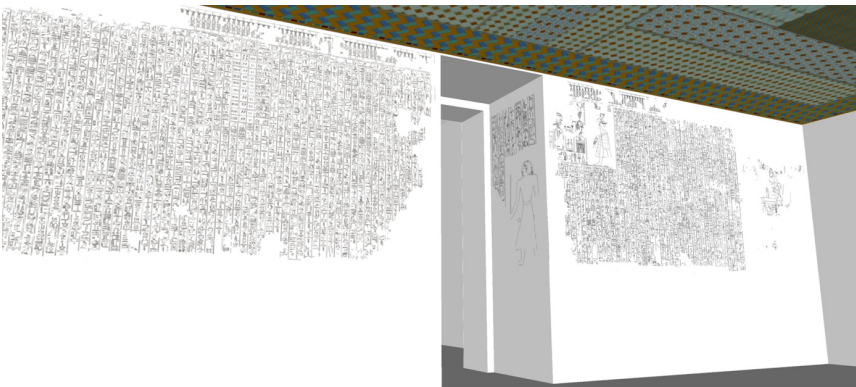
The mountain peak rises to over two hundred meters above sea level, and the necropolis extends over several kilometers along the cultivated land. Several thousand tombs were hewn into the limestone mountain, making it look strikingly similar to a honeycomb. Due to their monumental size, the tombs of the nomarchs of the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom were and still are visible from the city.

The tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I; Tomb P10.1) is the largest amongst the Asyuti rock cut tombs. It shows a sequence of six rooms hewn into the mountain and originally measuring more than 70m in length and 11m in height, as well as a substructure 28m deep (Fig. 4).

<sup>5</sup> Already in c. 1830, the British architect and painter Francis Arundale copied the inscriptions while joining Robert Hay on his travels through Egypt. Unfortunately, however, these copies remained unpublished until 2013 (Kahl 2013: 373–4, figs. 44–5). Francis Llewellyn Griffith made a reliable hand copy of the tomb inscription from 1886 to 1888 and published it in 1889 (Griffith 1889: pls. 6–8). It has become standard up until now. Adolf Erman (1882), George Andrew Reisner (1918), Aristide Théodoridès (1971, 1973), Shafik Allam (2007, 2010), and Jochem Kahl-Kahl (2012) contributed substantially to the understanding of the text.



**Fig. 1:** Asyut, Tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I; P10.1), Great Transverse Hall, east wall, hieroglyphic version of the ten contracts. Photograph: Fritz Barthel 2006 © The Asyut Project.



**Fig. 2:** Asyut, Tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I; P10.1), Great Transverse Hall, east wall with the ten contracts on the left (northern) part of the wall. Computer reconstruction: Philipp Jansen, 2016 © The Asyut Project.



Fig. 3: Gebel Asyut al-gharbi. Photograph: Fritz Barthel 2012 © The Asyut Project.

The tomb is situated in the lower part of the mountain, which consists of karst caves of generally poor-quality rock. These caves, however, provided the structure for rooms of monumental dimensions. After the rooms were hewn out, still existing caves and cracks were filled with a white mortar consisting of limestone and gypsum; the wall-surfaces were then smoothed. Subsequently, the tomb walls were coated with plaster to get an even surface. A thin layer of limewash was applied on the wall-plaster before the intended decoration was outlined in red colour (Fig. 5).

For that purpose, some specialist ‘wall-designers’ had already created the layout for the complete wall on papyrus or another writing surface in order to draw the hieroglyphs fitting precisely line by line on the wall. This layout, hereafter referred to as the ‘integrated model’, was presumably copied on ostraca (limestone or pottery shards) and/or on papyrus and taken to the construction site. The term ‘integrated model’ (*integrale Vorlagen*) denotes the more or less finished drafts of either an inscription, a pictorial decoration, or a combination of both prepared for a specific purpose, monument or location, regardless of whether they were actually implemented as intended (cf. Osing 1998: 60; Kahl 1999: 294–5; Der Manuelian 1994: 55). There seem, however, to have existed several models with minor differences: a first one with the layout of the text for the complete wall and a second one with minor changes to the wording (see below).



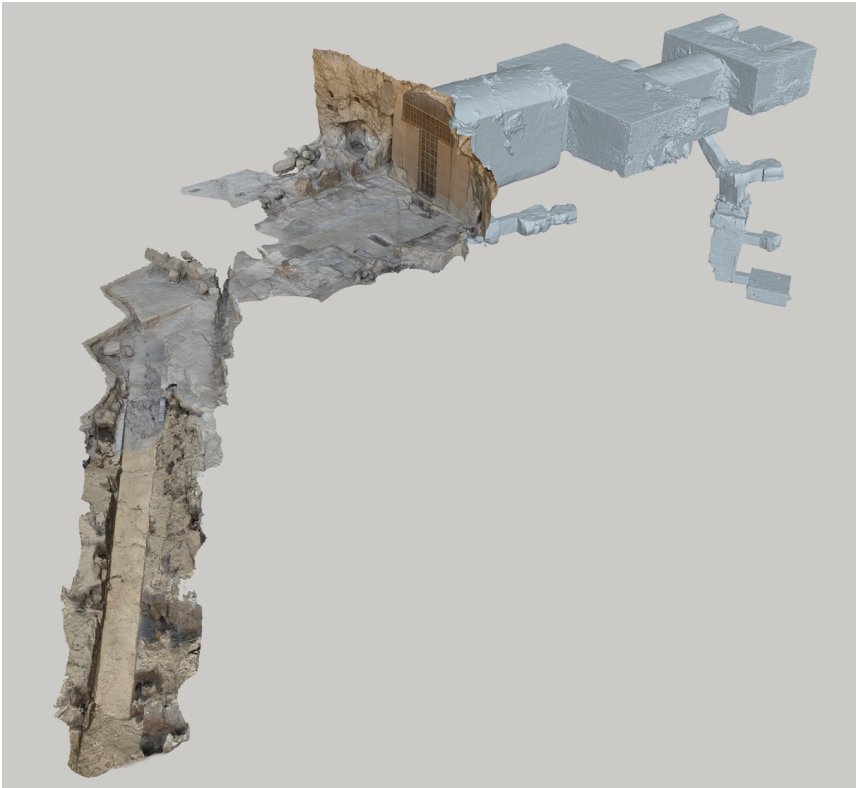


Fig. 4: Asyut, Tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I; P10.1). 3D-model: Philipp Jansen 2017 © The Asyut Project.

Even if the models for the layout of the tomb of Djefai-Hapi are not preserved, the hypothesis that models of texts were used at Ancient Egyptian construction sites is supported by the finds of ostraca in several tombs, such as TT 29 (Tallet 2005, 2010), TT 71, TT 79, TT 85, TT 87, and TT 131 from the 18th Dynasty (cf. Lüscher 2013: 25–6, notes 2, 3). Barbara Lüscher (2013), who published the ostraca from TT 87, has demonstrated beyond doubt that they served as models for the inscription on one of the tomb's walls. These ostraca and the corresponding texts on the walls of TT 87 were inscribed with cursive hieroglyphs in red and black ink (for the expected congruency of the script on the model and the monument see Haring 2015). The robust ostraca would be more resilient when handled at the construction site than papyrus. One can thus conclude that the routine process for the production of a monumental tomb-inscription involved a change in media and format. It would have moved from a relatively small format copied in a writing



**Fig. 5:** Asyut, Tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I; P10.1), Great Transverse Hall, east wall, cols 293–4 with red outlines of the hieroglyphs. Photograph: Fritz Barthel 2010 © The Asyut Project.

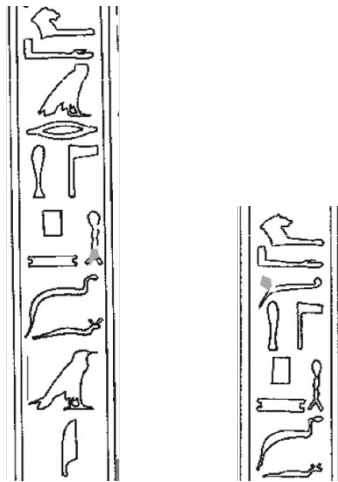
room on leather or papyrus, to several limestone or pottery ostraca inscribed in a relatively small format (used at the construction site), to the monumental inscription on the stone walls in the tomb.

Such a model, with detailed arrangement, would have been used to transpose the texts to the walls of Djefai-Hapi's tomb. In his tomb, the hieroglyphs and the dividing-lines of the text columns were incised into the wall-surface up to a depth of 0.3–0.6cm. After chiselling these out, the wall surface was coated again with a limewash around the hieroglyphs using a brush. The incised hieroglyphs and dividing-lines were then filled with blue paint (Fig. 6), presumably Egyptian Blue [ $\text{CaCuSi}_4\text{O}_{10}$ ], as was used for the ceiling of the Great Transverse Hall (cf. Mohamed Salah Mohamed et al. 2016).

A remarkable feature of the text is the variations in the spelling of the title *im.i-r* 'overseer': in contracts 1–4 and 10, the title is rendered with the monoconsonantal phonograms  $\text{m}$  and  $\text{r}$  (Fig. 7a); in contracts 5–9, on the other hand, the sign 'tongue of ox'  $\text{r}$  is used (Fig. 7b). The same distribution emerges in regard to the spelling of the suffix personal pronoun of the first-person singular in Djefai-Hapi's name: in contracts 1–4 and 10, it is rendered with the 'flowering reed'  $\text{f}$ , but it is not spelled out at all in contracts 5–9. One explanation for these orthographic differences is that three different scrolls of



**Fig. 6:** Asyut, Tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I; P10.1), Great Transverse Hall, east wall, detail of the hieroglyphic version of the ten contracts. Photograph: Fritz Barthel 2010 © The Asyut Project.



(a) In contract 1-4 and 10. (b) in contract 5-9.

**Fig. 7:** Asyut, Tomb I, spelling of the the word 'overseer' and of the suffix pronoun of the 1st person singular.

leather or papyrus written by different scribes served as sources for the inscription: the first scroll for contracts 1–4, the second for contracts 5–9, and the third and final scroll for contract 10. Another possibility is that two scribes took turns writing out the model for the tomb inscription: in that case, the chances are that only one scroll of leather or papyrus was involved, but that scribes had different habits. It is unlikely, nonetheless, that the orthographic idiosyncrasies only arose when the inscription was applied to the walls of the tomb.

In the case of the ten contracts written on the tomb wall, a portion of the text is palimpsest (especially visible in the lower part to the south) (Fig. 8). That means that the working process was repeated after the removal of a first inscription with blue painted incised hieroglyphs. The content of this first inscription cannot be reconstructed since there are not enough traces of it preserved. However, the removal of the initial inscription for the ten contracts for Djefai-Hapi emphasizes their great importance.



**Fig. 8:** Asyut, Tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I; P10.1), Great Transverse Hall, east wall, cols. 276–80 (lower part) showing remains of an older inscription. Photograph: Fritz Barthel 2010 © The Asyut Project.

## Scheme and function of the contracts in the tomb of Djefai-Hapi

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The basic format of the contracts in the tomb of Djefai-Hapi is as follows (cf. [Erman 1882: 166](#); [Lippert 2008: 40](#)):

Contract which A made with B,  
for the gift of *x* (from B) to A,  
(while) A gave *y* to B,  
a direct speech from A to B,  
B was satisfied therewith.

There can be additions to this formula such as ‘Behold, “A” says to “B”’, which serve as further comments on and explanations of the transaction. ‘A’ always refers to Djefai-Hapi himself, ‘B’ to his various contractual partners.

The following translation provides an example of the format of such texts. Contract no. 8 is about the arrangements concerning the *wnw.t*-priesthood (lay priests) of the Anubis-Temple:

Contract which the mayor, overseer of the priests, Djefai-Hapi, the righteous, made with the *wnw.t*-priesthood of the temple of Anubis, whereby it is agreed that he is to be given white bread, by every one of them, for his Khenti-stature, in the first month of the Akhet-season, on the seventeenth day, the night of the feast of Wag, and that they follow (in procession) behind his Ka-servant, after the lights have been kindled for him at his glorification (ceremony) until they have reached the lower stairway of his tomb, just as they glorify their noble (deceased) on the day of the kindling of the lights, and that the *wab*-priest, who performs monthly services, shall give: one *niw*-basket(?) of *p;k*-bread and one *čwiw*-jar of beer for his statue, which is by the lower stairway of his tomb, after he has come forth from performing the ceremonies in the temple every day.

That which he has given them in return: wide barley from the first (fruits) of the harvest from every field of the mayor’s house, as every common man of Asyut does from the first (fruits) of his harvest. For it is known that it was him who began to ordain that every one of his farm workers gives it from the first (fruits) of his field to the temple of Anubis.

The mayor Djefai-Hapi spoke: Behold, you know that, concerning every digitary and every common man who gives the first (fruits) of his harvest to the temple, it is undesirable to deviate from this practice; (and that) no future mayor can breach the contract of another mayor with the future wab-priests; (and that) this wide barley belongs to the *wnw.t*-priesthood of the temple as a share for each Wab-priest who will give me this white bread, without sharing it with the priests who perform monthly services, because they are to give this white bread, each by himself.

Then they were satisfied with it. (Siut I, 307–11)<sup>6</sup>

The contracts regulate the performance of religious ceremonies and the provision of offerings for the benefit of Djefai-Hapi I on specific feast days, with one or more statues serving as recipients/addressees of the cultic acts *in lieu* of the deceased. What is missing from this version, however, are the typical attributes of a legally binding contract such as the date, oaths, and a list of witnesses and their signatures (cf. already Erman 1882: 166; Devauchelle 1996: 162; Lippert 2008: 40). Instead, the seated tomb owner is depicted in the part of the wall-decoration closely connected with the contracts. The version on the wall of the Great Transverse Hall constitutes neither a protocol nor a certification of the conclusion of the contract (Erman 1882: 166), but rather it serves as a kind of (auto)biographical testimony and as a reminder to posterity to respect the stipulations of the contracts. Instead of using the hieratic cursive script that was customary in legal contexts, the inscription was executed in monumental hieroglyphs. Nor do lexis and grammar fully reflect the usage attested for legal texts of the Middle Kingdom, recalling instead the language typical of an (auto)biographical text or literary narrative, especially the use of the narrative constructions (*ḥr.n*).<sup>7</sup> The text incorporates the reactions of the respective contractual parties in the conclusion of the contracts: ‘Then they were satisfied with it’. The latter sentence is based on an *ḥr.n*-construction, a very common narrative tense (Gardiner 1957: 392) used not only in literary but also in (auto)biographical texts. The use of this grammatical construction as well as the use of the formula ‘passing from life to death’<sup>8</sup> in the composition (see below) clearly show that the legal contractual texts were turned into an (auto)biographical narration in Tomb I. The position of the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the translations by Erman (1882: 180–81); Breasted (1906: 267–69); Reisner (1918: 86–87); Théodoridès (1971: 142–46); Allam (2010: 61).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lippert (2008: 40): ‘... andererseits wirken die narrativen Formulierungen (*ḥr.n* ...) für ein Urkundenformular merkwürdig’. Devauchelle (1996: 163) even saw purely literary fictional texts in the contracts written on the tomb wall. This assumption, however, has to be rejected, since there is clear evidence of Djefai-Hapi’s cult, which is the subject matter of the contract and which even led to his deification (Kahl 2012); for further arguments against this assumption cf. Lippert (2008: 41).

<sup>8</sup> This formula introduced (auto)biographical inscriptions during the Old Kingdom. It is a standardized phrase which refers to the transition of an individual from his/her hometown to the tomb, hence ‘passing from life to death’ (Goedicke 1955: 233; Kloth 2002: 54–6).

ten contracts to the right side of the entrance to the Great Transverse Hall corroborates the interpretation that they were reworked according to the genre of (auto)biographies: it corresponds to the position of (auto)biographical inscriptions from the First Intermediate Period and Dynasty 11 at Asyut (to the right side of the inner hall: Tomb III, IV, Northern Soldiers-Tomb).

The inscription on this tomb wall not only mentions the contractual agreements between Djefai-Hapi and the priests of the Wepwawet-Temple, the Anubis-Temple, and the necropolis personnel. It also becomes part of a larger composition consisting of the following elements (Fig. 9):

1. A horizontal heading with the titles and name of Djefai-Hapi (line 260) identifying the texts in columns as  $\text{𓂏}=\text{𓂏}$  'will instruction' (*wč.t mṯw.w*) (Fig. 9, marked in yellow).
2. An address to the visitors of the tomb beginning with the titles and name of Djefai-Hapi (vertical cols 261–68) and including the formula ('passing from life to death') which introduced (auto)biographical inscriptions during the Old Kingdom (Goedicke 1955: 233; Kloth 2002: 54–6) (Fig. 9, marked in red).
3. Practically as a preamble to the contractual agreements, this section consists of a speech by Djefai-Hapi to the Ka-servant. There, Djefai-Hapi describes the significance of the activities of the Ka-servant. The titles and name of Djefai-Hapi occur also at the beginning of this section (cols 269–72) (Fig. 9, marked in blue).
4. The ten contracts (Fig. 9, marked in green) consisting of:
  - Contracts nos. 1–6: contracts made with the priests of the temple of Wepwawet (cols 273–304).
  - Contracts nos. 7–8: contracts made with the priests of the temple of Anubis (cols 305–11).
  - Contracts nos. 9–10: contracts made with the personnel of the necropolis (cols 312–24).
5. A depiction of Djefai-Hapi seated on a chair in the upper-left corner (Fig. 9, marked in white).

The text on the tomb wall is neither a protocol of the conclusion of contracts nor an official certification of what has already been completed. Taking into consideration that the inscription on the left side of the entrance to the Great Transverse Hall addresses the visitors of the tomb,<sup>9</sup> one may assume that the text was read publicly during the

<sup>9</sup> The inscription addresses 'any man, any scribe, any scholar, any common man and any inferior' (Siut I: 223, 225; Kahl 1999). There is also general evidence that tomb visitors included family members involved in the cult of the deceased, wab-priests, lector-priests, embalmer-priests, and other members of the temple who happened to

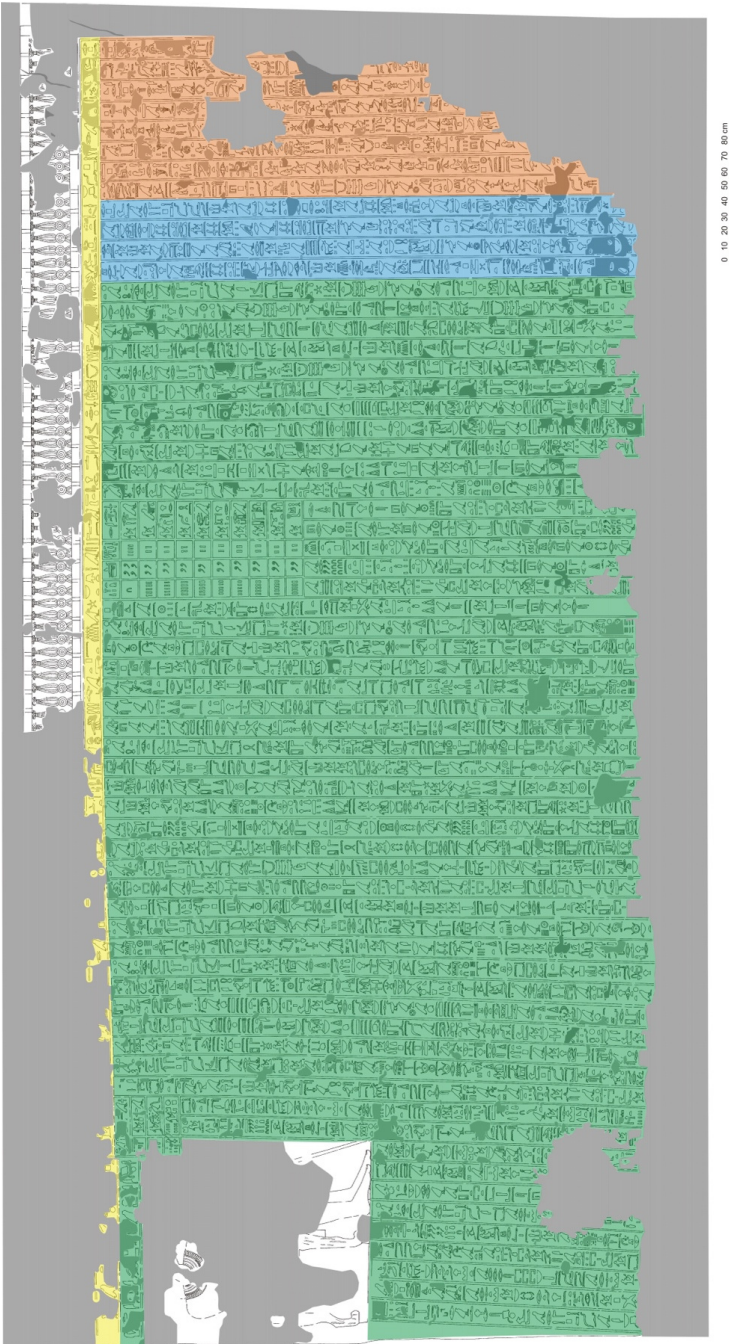


Fig. 9: Asyut, Tomb of Djefai-Hapi I (Tomb I; P10.1), Great Transverse Hall, east wall, hieroglyphic version of the ten contracts cols 260–324. Facsimile: Sameh Shafik © The Asyut Project.



city's festivities or, at least, that the content of the text was explained by the Ka-servant or another official. Contract numbers 8 and 9 mention that Djefai-Hapi's tomb was a stopping point of festive processions during the night of the Wag-festival (first month of the inundation, 17<sup>th</sup> day), the festival of the last day of the year, and the New Year festival (Siut I, 307–8, 312–13):

In the eighth contract it is agreed that the *wnw.t*-priesthood of the Anubis-Temple move behind Djefai-Hapi's Ka-servant during the night of the Wag-Festival until they reach the lower staircase of his tomb where an offering is to be given to his statue.

In the ninth contract it is agreed that the supervisor of the necropolis workers and the *tp.iw-čw*-necropolis officials attend the tomb of Djefai-Hapi with candle-wicks on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the Epagomens, on New Year's night, and on the first day of the year in order to transfigure Djefai-Hapi. It is furthermore determined that these officials were to follow the statue of Djefai-Hapi, which is located in his chapel ('garden') when they move out to the temple of Anubis at the time of each feast celebrated at the temple.

These passages explicitly mention the incorporation of Djefai-Hapi's tomb in the landscape and in the celebrations of Asyut. Reconfigured and set in a new context, the ten contracts were now an integral part of the posthumous self-presentation of Djefai-Hapi. The juridical text was transformed into a text commemorating Djefai-Hapi himself and intending to guarantee his funerary cult. As a result, the text was no longer a true legal contract, but rather a permanent monumental reminder to respect the contracts, which simultaneously presented (auto)biographical features (e.g. Siut I, 279–80).

Certainly, one motive for inscribing the contracts on the tomb wall was Djefai-Hapi's concern that his successors in the office of regional governor should honour his agreements and that all contractual partners should continue to be bound by the contracts after his death. It is precisely in this respect that the monumental 'tomb edition' of the contracts might have functioned as a constant reminder to the officials involved. Contextualized in the sacred landscape of Gebel Asyut al-gharbi, however, the purpose of the 'tomb edition' goes beyond Djefai-Hapi's insistence that later successors honour his agreements. Contrary to the original contracts written on papyrus or leather and stored in an archive,

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come by on feast days, but also learned men, employees of the House of Life, and artists or potential tomb-owners in search of inspiration for future monuments (cf. Assmann 1987: 213). Tomb N13.1, dating to the time of King Mentuhotep II, was visited more than 500 years later by learned men, who wrote classical literary texts on the tomb walls. Since it is possible to establish thematic links between the tomb's original decor and the classical texts quoted in the visitors' dipinti, one may assume that the original inscriptions were thus actually read and understood (cf. Verhoeven's contribution in Kahl et al. 2008; Verhoeven 2020).

the ‘tomb edition’ of the contracts exercised a powerful effect on Djefai-Hapi’s deification in a dynamic interplay of monumental tomb architecture, high quality statues, elegant language used in the tomb inscriptions, and Asyut’s local cults (for more detail see [Kahl 2012](#)). Djefai-Hapi describes himself in other sections of his tomb-inscriptions as ‘son of (the god) Wepwawet’, as ‘his great offspring’ (Siut I, 183), referring to the local god Wepwawet as his father (Siut I, 236) and his own Ka-houses (cultic structure) as ‘divine’ (Siut I, second corridor, south wall). He further refers to himself in the contracts as ‘god’ (*nčr*: Siut I, 296) and uses an epithet otherwise restricted to the god Thot (*pg; hr rꜥ mꜥwꜥ trf*; ‘an astute one, who caused the writings to speak’: Siut I, 269). Contextualized in the necropolis and thus in the realm of the dead, the contracts became an essential part of Djefai-Hapi’s deification process. The results of this are still visible in dipinti of the 18th Dynasty ([Kahl 2012](#); [Verhoeven 2020](#)) that mention a temple (*ḥw.t-nčr*) of Djefai-Hapi, and nearly two millennia later during the Ptolemaic Period, when, as a result of his deification, his name was still remembered and in use ([Becker 2006](#)).



## The ten contracts on papyri from the Roman Period

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While the original contracts on leather or papyrus and the reconfigured inscription in the tomb were composed in the twentieth century BC, papyrus manuscripts of these contracts are known from the city of Tebtynis, approximately 220km north from Djefai-Hapi’s tomb in Asyut. They are dated to the second century AD ([Osing 1998](#): 55–100; [Kahl 2014](#))—a staggering temporal distance of about 2100 years. These manuscripts were part of discarded materials ([Quack 2006](#); [Ryholt 2013, 2019](#)) from a library that belonged to the temple of the local god Sobek. It was later abandoned in the early third century AD [Ryholt \(2013: 26\)](#).

The manuscripts in question have come down to us in more than 40 papyrus fragments ([Osing 1998](#): pls 6, 10). Their layout and orthography are quite different from the version in Djefai-Hapi’s tomb, especially the spelling, which seems to have undergone a process of modernization in the course of time. The vertical columns are arranged in retrograde order (from left to right), while the inscription in Djefai-Hapi’s tomb is inscribed from right to left. Other notable features are that the pictorial representation of Djefai-Hapi is missing from the papyri and that the papyri show some seemingly original readings in comparison to the tomb inscription. Therefore, they qualify neither as a model for the tomb wall, nor as a copy of it ([Kahl 2014](#): 159–72; [Osing 1998](#): 65). The papyrus manuscripts seem to be a copy of the integrated model (*integrale Vorlagen*) for the Great Transverse Hall in the tomb of Djefai-Hapi.

The fragments from Tebtynis can be attributed to two different papyri (Papyrus A and B), one displaying fine calligraphy executed with a rush pen (Papyrus A; Fig. 10), and a second with coarser signs lacking fine detail written with a reed pen (Papyrus B; Osing 1998: 55). According to Osing (1998: 58), Papyrus B seems to be a copy of Papyrus A. In addition to the contracts, these two papyri contain excerpts of other tomb inscriptions from Asyut dating back to the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom. These texts in Roman Period Tebtynis were used presumably as reading texts and testimonies to famous individuals of the past (Kahl 2014: 172).

These fragments show some minor changes and mistakes at the level of individual words and signs, as would be expected after more than 2000 years (e.g. I, 291: *hr š:ḥ.t* present; Pap. A, fr. 15b: *r š:ḥ[...]* future; I, 270: *rč̄i* written as ; Pap. A, fr. 12d: *rč̄i* written as ) but they also show some seemingly 'better' readings (Osing 1998: 57), so that one can exclude the idea that they are a direct copy from the wall in the tomb of Djefai-Hapi.

What is particularly interesting in this context is that the original format of the papyri can be reconstructed. Their height of 40cm is quite unusual for the Roman Period (Osing 1998: 58) and could be an indicator that the papyri hark back to copies made at the time of the New Kingdom, which would mean that they constitute at least partial evidence for the existence of yet another intermediary version that is now lost.

## The textual transfer of the ten contracts

The Tebtynis papyri are the end of a far-reaching and extensive transfer process. The vicissitudes of transfer have left us with a lopsided view of Ancient Egyptian bodies of knowledge: tombs and temples made from stone are better preserved than structures made from mud bricks, such as residential buildings, palaces, even entire cities including library-like or academy-like institutions such as Houses of Scroll and Houses of Life, which have survived only rarely, if at all. Therefore, there are copious amounts of scholarship on everything to do with religious beliefs concerning the dead and the afterlife. It is thus predominantly the field of theology and religion—and to be even more precise, the sphere of the afterlife—where the phenomenon of knowledge transfer in Ancient Egypt becomes tangible.

For the timeframe between the twentieth century BC and the second century AD, stemmata<sup>10</sup> and textual comparative methods provide evidence for a transfer of epistemic texts from the Middle Egyptian city of Asyut to Thebes in Upper Egypt (Kahl 1999). On

<sup>10</sup> Stemmata are self-contained diagrams which represent the historical relationship of the manuscripts (West 1973: 14).

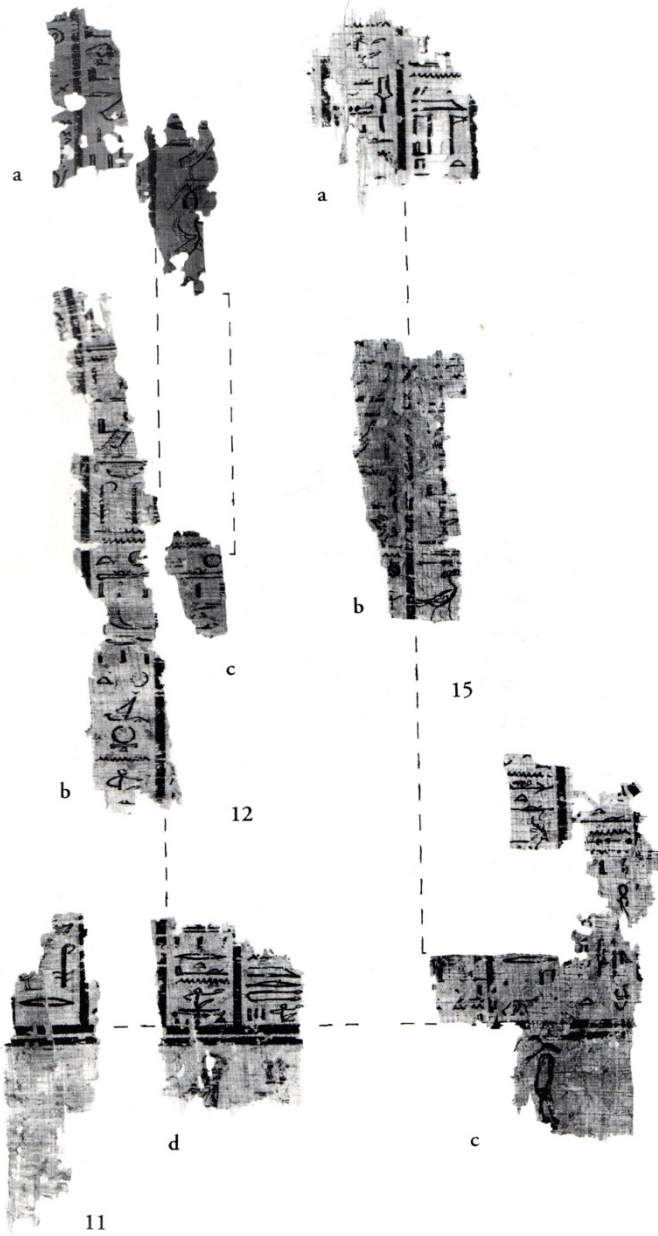


Fig. 10: Tebtynis, Pap. A, fr. 11, 12, 15 (after Osing 1998, pl. 6).

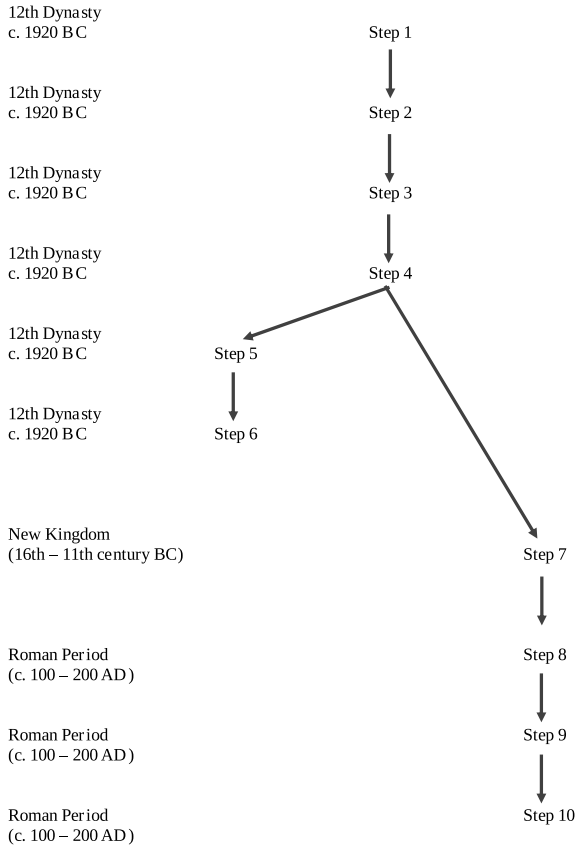
closer examination, it becomes apparent that this is a scenario in which numerous instances of knowledge transfer combine, constituting, as it were, an economy of knowledge that comprises Asyut, Thebes, and Tebtynis (Kahl 1999, 2014). The textual corpus in question contains glorification spells<sup>11</sup> (the so-called Mortuary Liturgy no. 7) and other texts related to the afterlife, astronomical lists, offering formulae, (auto)biographical texts, protective formulae, idealizing (auto)biographical epithets, titles of persons, and epithets of deities. In addition, an architectural floor plan, a ceiling decoration, and pictorial scenes were also transferred (Kahl 2016). Transfer of these various textual and pictorial elements took place via scrolls of leather or papyrus, and, in all likelihood, increased the collection of an already existing Theban House of Scroll. Usage of the texts was exclusive to the Theban region until the middle of the seventh century BC; only after that point were they utilized in other regions of Egypt, notably in Memphis/Saqqara, Nag' el-Hasaya (near Edfu), Sais, Athribis during the Late Period (Kahl 1999: 314), and Tebtynis in the second century AD.

As an ensemble, the ten contracts provide a wonderful example of textual transfer associated with reconfiguration and recontextualization.

The following steps can be reconstructed (Fig. 11):

1. Oral conclusion of the contracts (c. 1920 BC).
2. 'Notarial' record of the contracts (in hieratic script on leather or papyrus) containing legally relevant information such as the date and the signatures of witnesses (c. 1920 BC).
3. Reconfiguration of the content of the contracts and their inclusion in a broader textual composition for the tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I) at Asyut (c. 1920 BC).
4. Production of an integrated model (in hieroglyphs on leather or papyrus) for the northern part of the east wall of the Great Transverse Hall in the tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb I) at Asyut (c. 1920 BC).
5. Copy of the layout for the construction site of Tomb I (slightly changed version of the integrated model; in hieroglyphs on ostraca, leather, or papyrus; c. 1920 BC).
6. Inscription (in carved hieroglyphs on the stone walls) of the contract texts in the Great Transverse Hall of Tomb I at Asyut (hieroglyphs; c. 1920 BC).
7. Copy from the integrated model, perhaps on papyrus, in the New Kingdom(?).
8. Transfer of a (New Kingdom?) copy of the integrated model as reconfigured for Tomb I to the temple of Sobek at Tebtynis (Tebtynis Papyrus A; hieroglyphs; c. AD 100–200 or earlier).
9. Copy of Papyrus A at the temple of Sobek at Tebtynis (hieroglyphs; c. AD 100–200).

<sup>11</sup> The purpose of these spells is the transformation of the deceased into an Akh, that is, into an effective being having the proper offerings and knowing the efficacious spells (Friedman 2001: 47).



**Fig. 11:** The transfer of the ten contracts.

10. Copy of Papyrus B (from Papyrus A) at the temple of Sobek at Tebtynis (hieroglyphs; c. AD 100–200).

## Djefai-Hapi I as customer and philologist

In textual transmission, which involves transfer across time and space, two groups of actors have to be distinguished. On the one hand, there are the persons who commissioned a certain version of a text, such as for the tomb decoration, because their knowledge was not sufficient to handle the task on their own. On the other hand, there are the specialists, that is, the actors with an expertise in script and text that could be considered as ‘philological knowledge’ (Cancik-Kirschbaum and Kahl 2018: 93–4). They were able to

delve into a text, to interpret and to comment on texts.

Where intellectual ability and access to abundant material resources coincided, as in the case of Djefai-Hapi, it is conceivable that the responsible philologist and the person who commissioned the tomb were actually one and the same. This is certainly the exception rather than the rule, but there can be no doubt that Djefai-Hapi's professional position as high-priest at the temples of Wepwawet and Anubis meant that he was part of the intellectual elite of his city.

In the New Kingdom, training for the position of overseer of the priests took about eleven years (Feucht 1995: 237–8). As we know from the 'Book of the Temple', certainly compiled before 237 BC and probably even as early as the second millennium BC (Quack 2005: 105–15), the children of high priests received special training (Quack 2002: 159–71). Quite obviously, this training was geared towards the requirements of the temple activities. The training was conducted in four stages:

1. gaining access to the mystery of the traditional sacred texts, with an introduction to the country's geography, social and political organisation, and probably also instruction in ritual practices (customs of Upper and Lower Egypt, specifics of the administrative districts; royal customs and ceremonial)
2. instruction in philology, hinting at a distinct Egyptian tradition of translation and/or textual commentary (learning texts by heart; commenting on texts)
3. instruction in medicine and medical remedies
4. instruction in astrology and perhaps astronomy (ecliptical omnia etc.); practices of embalming may be mentioned in this context as well.

If we assume that instructions were similar when Djefai-Hapi became a high priest at the temples of Wepwawet and Anubis during the 12th Dynasty, we can infer that he was not only an initiate, but also an intellectual and a trained philologist. It is thus very likely that he selected the appropriate decorative composition for his tomb, that he had access to the texts used in the tomb's inscriptions, and even that he compiled these texts himself. He would then have designed the decoration for the individual sections of the walls in collaboration with architects and layout specialists. A comparable case indicating a high level of agency in decorating one's own tomb is Anu, the 11th Dynasty high priest of the temples of Wepwawet and Anubis at Asyut, who asserted in his tomb inscription that he wrote the inscription himself (Roccati 1974).

## Epistemic sites and the anonymous rank-and-file scholars

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The spatial and temporal span between Djefai-Hapi's tomb, a Middle Kingdom writing-room at Asyut, and the Roman Period temple at Tebtynis leads us into the domain of institutionalized knowledge and '*episteme*' (cf. 'Economies of knowledge' above). Episteme 'encompasses 'knowledge' as well as 'scholarship' and 'science', defining knowledge as the 'knowledge of something', and thus as knowledge which stakes a claim to validity' (Johnston and Uhlmann 2021).

Corpora of epistemic texts were organized in distinct functional contexts that can be referred to as *epistemic sites*. Epistemic sites are places that house collections of manuscripts, but the term could also include images, mock-ups, architecture, and even performative acts (Cancik-Kirschbaum et al. 2021: 1). Epistemic sites 'did not only stand for the act of collecting and preserving as such, but also connected practices and processes such as transfer and diffusion, control and negation, and—last but not least—they allowed for the generation of new knowledge' (Cancik-Kirschbaum et al. 2021: 1–2).

In Ancient Egypt, the most significant epistemic sites were the House of Life (Per-Ankh), the House of Scroll (Per-Medjat) or the House of the God's Scroll (Per-Medjat-Netjer), as well as tombs and temples (cf. Ryholt 2013, 2019; Jasnow and Zauzich 2014; Kahl 2021). These are the sites where textual transfer and textual work took place in particularly concentrated form.

The ten contracts of Djefai-Hapi lead into the epistemic site of the temple at Tebtynis. Even if one cannot say how many philologists and institutions were involved during more than 2000 years of transfer, and even if one does not know the anonymous rank-and-file scholars who might have dealt with these texts, there were scholars at the temple at Tebtynis who still collected and preserved information about Djefai-Hapi—presumably because of interest in ancient languages and in biographies of people from the past (Kahl 2014). These scholars had philological competence and linguistic knowledge as is suggested by the addition of glosses and corrections (cf. Osing 1998) in the papyri.

There is a high probability that the transfer of the ten contracts to the temple at Tebtynis took place via library-like institutions, such as the House of Scroll or the House of Life, and not via the tomb itself. Although an address to visitors in the Great Transverse Hall of the tomb of Djefai-Hapi encouraged visitors to look at the inscriptions and to protect them (Siut I, 225–6), it is unlikely that the text would have been copied directly from the walls.



The conditions in the Great Transverse Hall of the tomb of Djefai-Hapi were hardly ideal for efficient copying. The height of the room was around 6.30m, and the tomb decoration was obscured by the thick layers of soot left by visitors' candles and the ubiquitous excrement of bats. Any copying process would have required the cleaning of the surface and the erection of scaffolding, or the use of high ladders, in order to access all the details of the text. A visit to the House of Scroll (potentially after having discovered the text in the tomb) would have been the more efficient and thus the more plausible approach.

Thanks to Djefai-Hapi and the unknown rank-and-file scholars and their abilities, a unique example of textual transfer over more than two millennia has been preserved: changing from a purely legal text to an autobiographical text and eventually a commemorative text, the ten contracts of Djefai-Hapi take an outstanding position within Egyptian text culture. Reconfigured several times, the ten contracts are a particularly striking example of how different material and different contexts generate new meaning. The juridical document, written on papyrus or leather, established an endowment before it was changed into the monumental 'tomb edition'. The tomb edition not only reminded the tomb visitors to honour the contractual agreements, but amendments to the text also gave it an (auto)biographical character and fostered Djefai-Hapi's deification in a dynamic interplay of architecture, statues, cult, and language (Kahl 2012). The seemingly high interest of later generations in Djefai-Hapi resulted in the collecting, preserving, and copying of manuscripts which were related to the integrated model of the 'tomb edition' after more than two millennia.

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