

BURKARD, GÜNTER

Studies in the Textual Criticism of Egyptian Wisdom Literature of the Old and Middle Kingdoms

[“Textkritische Untersuchungen zu ägyptischen Weisheitslehren des Alten und Mittleren Reiches”]

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Textual criticism in the sense in which the term has developed in classical, New Testament and medieval philology has, oddly enough, only recently gained admission to Egyptology, although there are numerous texts worth examining from this standpoint. The Würzburg dissertation by Günter Burkard here reviewed is thus also based on a narrow concept of textual criticism which has a certain tradition in Egyptology. This Egyptological textual criticism deals mainly with the typology of textual corruptions. It has a double purpose: firstly, to determine the form of transmission of a text, and secondly, to determine by conjecture the original reading in corrupt passages.

In order to illustrate the various kinds of corruption, the author has assembled a wealth of material from five works of Egyptian literature (Ptahhotep, Merikare, Amenemhet, Duacheti, The teaching of a man for his son). He distinguishes 1. Mistakes in reading, 2. Mistakes in remembering, 3. Mistakes in hearing, and – as a kind of remainder, mistakes due to carelessness. Editors’ alterations are not included among the mistakes.

The author is undoubtedly right to infer from mistakes in the reading of characters (1) that a text was transmitted by copying and from changes in word-order, a result of mistakes in remembering (2), that a text was transmitted orally. In the case of the texts studied here, it can be generally said that oral transmission is attested only in the early period (Old Kingdom – early tradition of Ptahhotep); otherwise written transmission dominates.

One remark: in his treatment of (3) – mistakes in hearing – the writer falls into a common misconception (see W. Schenkel, *Kritisches zur Textkritik: Die sogenannten Hörfehler*, in *Göttinger Miszellen* 29, 1978, pp. 119–126). To draw conclusions concerning the form of transmission (dictated or otherwise) from “mistakes in hearing” as the author understands them, or from the lack of “mistakes in hearing”, is incorrect. The treatment of Egyptian or Coptic phonological forms, upon which the author relies in his treatment of mistakes in hearing, is also erroneous. This reservation, however, does not affect the treatment of the other types of mistakes and the conclusions drawn from them.

In a final chapter the author brings together the corrections to be made in individual passages of the texts examined by him. The value of the work lies principally in that it makes the material available. This is useful not only for research into the types of transmission, but also for the reconstruction of the original wording of the texts examined.

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