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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,[1] while Evelyn Rawski offered us an in-depth analysis of what she called "popular literacy" in late imperial China.[2] 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 transcultural 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

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.

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).

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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.[3] 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.[4]

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,[5] layout, languages, scripts, ornamentation, elements of verification or validation and standardisation.

3 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.

4 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.

5 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.[6]

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-

6 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.[7]

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.[8] 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.[9] 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".[10] 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,[11] 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.[12]

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

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".[13] 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.[14] 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.[15] The ARTEM (*Atélier 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.[16] One of the major projects of this work was to create a database of all original acts preserved in France pre-dating 1121.[17] 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.[18] 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.[19] 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.[20] 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

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 diplomatique 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.[21] Similarly inspired studies focussing on the material expressions of authority include the use of decoration in charters as symbols of royal power.[22]

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.[23] This approach had previously and successfully been utilised in the study of the diplomatic and memorial functions of cartularies.[24] The first fruits of the group's codicological analysis of medieval accounts were published in a special issue.[25] 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.[26] 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.[27]

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,[28] but also stimulated work on literacy in ancient China. Harris in turn knew of Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record*,[29] 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",

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.[30] Additionally, efforts have been dedicated to the different types of functional literacy acquired by commoners such as soldiers, women and artisans.[31] 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,[32] 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).[33] 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.[34] 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.[35]

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-Hsuin 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-

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.[36] 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).[37] 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".[38] 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,[39] the reconstruction and contextualisation of different types of administrative manuscripts based on material and archaeological evidence,[40] as well as attempts to discern the different hands that potentially produced and handled them.[41] 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

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.[42]

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,[43] 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.

Tomiya Itaru 冨谷至, 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 Tomiya rightly pointed out, a written artefact's material substrate, size, layout and form all conveyed meanings supplementary to and independent of its textual content.[44] 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.[45]

While Tomiya 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-

42 Zhang 2019a and 2019b.

43 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.

44 Tomiya 2010, 102–103.

45 Tomiya 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.[46] 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* 単独簡), meaning that each *du* constituted an independent codicological unit.[47] 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.[48] 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.[49] 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 髙村武幸, who generalised six ideal types of manuscript forms based entirely on their respective material traces.[50] 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

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.[51]

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.[52] 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.[53] 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.[54] 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.[55] As a

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.[56] 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.[57]

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.[58]

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.

56 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).

57 Armstrong et al. 2023.

58 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.[59] 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

59 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.[60]

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-

60 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.[61] 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.

61 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 intergenerational 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 Chinse 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.[62] 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.[63]

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

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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