Exactly how much, if any, autonomy was in the hands of a scribe at the commencement of the historical period is a topic of considerable interest to the question of Early Chinese literacy, and one that, hitherto, has not been adequately examined in scholarship. Technologies employed by a newly discovered organization of Shang oracle bone scribes—China’s first scribes—not only confirm advanced training in recordkeeping, but also more importantly, attest to a relative control to edit and produce their own written and aesthetically stylized version of a divination event. I propose that a more complete methodology to extract identity and verify proficiency levels of literacy at Anyang uses mechanics and habits of documentary expression in addition to orthographic analysis.

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