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## Cyphering Books in the Archive

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The author of *Distinctive Styles and Authorship in Alternative Comics* (De Gruyter, 2021), Lukas Etter holds a postdoctoral position at the University of Siegen. Recent work has focuses on the cultural aspects of mathematical word problems in antebellum America; the current project *Clandestine Calculation* will circle around similar phenomena in the archive of eighteenth-century North America.

Coupling documented artifacts and methodological reflection, this paper will center around cyphering books (alternative spelling 'cipheryng books') from archives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North American education. It will present excerpts from these hand-written mathematical exercise books and reflect upon the productive paradox that the cultural historian faces when studying them. On the one hand, these books often testify to the idea of officialism and longevity; they may be several hundred pages long and exhibit rather rigid genre elements (verbatim noting what the schoolmasters read out; adhering to calligraphic precision). On the other, cyphering books may also document social history, as when the exercises of simple and advanced arithmetic are enriched with personal marginalia, including doodles, puns, poems, spontaneous penmanship exercises, and invectives against other individuals in the classroom.