



CHAPTER 5

The Ancient Owners of the Papyri

FOR THE MOST PART, MODERN SCHOLARLY FOCUS on the Joseph Smith Papyri has been on their content and their travels in modern times. Anciently, however, the papyri were made for specific individuals who have left some record about themselves. Knowing something about those individuals helps us understand the papyri better.

The papyri were buried with mummies and so are called “funerary” papyri, even though the label is somewhat misleading. Many different texts—including collections of proverbs or temple rituals, and sometimes financial accounts—could be buried with an individual. It took time, effort, and money to have a papyrus document made, and to be buried with an illustrated document meant that the individual (or his or her family) had a great deal of money.

An entire industry of minor priests called choachytes arose to provide services connected with burials. Certain priests called tarycheutes would be responsible for the mummification of the deceased.

The body was then given to the choachytes, who placed the mummies in tombs. The choachytes would periodically visit the tomb and give offerings and libations to the deceased and offer prayers. This continued as long as the family funded the activity. Generally only the wealthy could afford the services of choachytes.

The term *priests* is ambiguous, for it can refer to both those who strictly held the office of priest and those who held any sort of priestly office. There were generally three levels of priestly personnel: prophets, divine fathers, and priests. Prophets and divine fathers were full-time positions and were paid significantly better wages than priests. Priests were a part-time office that served one month in four with the other three devoted to another occupation. Prophets had administrative responsibilities over an entire region or *nome*. Divine fathers had administrative responsibilities over a town.

In Ptolemaic Egypt, prophets and divine fathers were often extremely wealthy. They typically had two sources of income. The first was their own land holdings, which were usually in the middle level of such holdings, which alone placed them in the upper middle-class. The second was their salaries for exercising their priestly offices. These were considerable as the temples owned huge tracts of land that they leased out to farmers in return for a share (usually a third) of the produce. Priestly offices were generally hereditary, and although one had to pay a fee to become a priest, the earnings from the office usually repaid the fee.

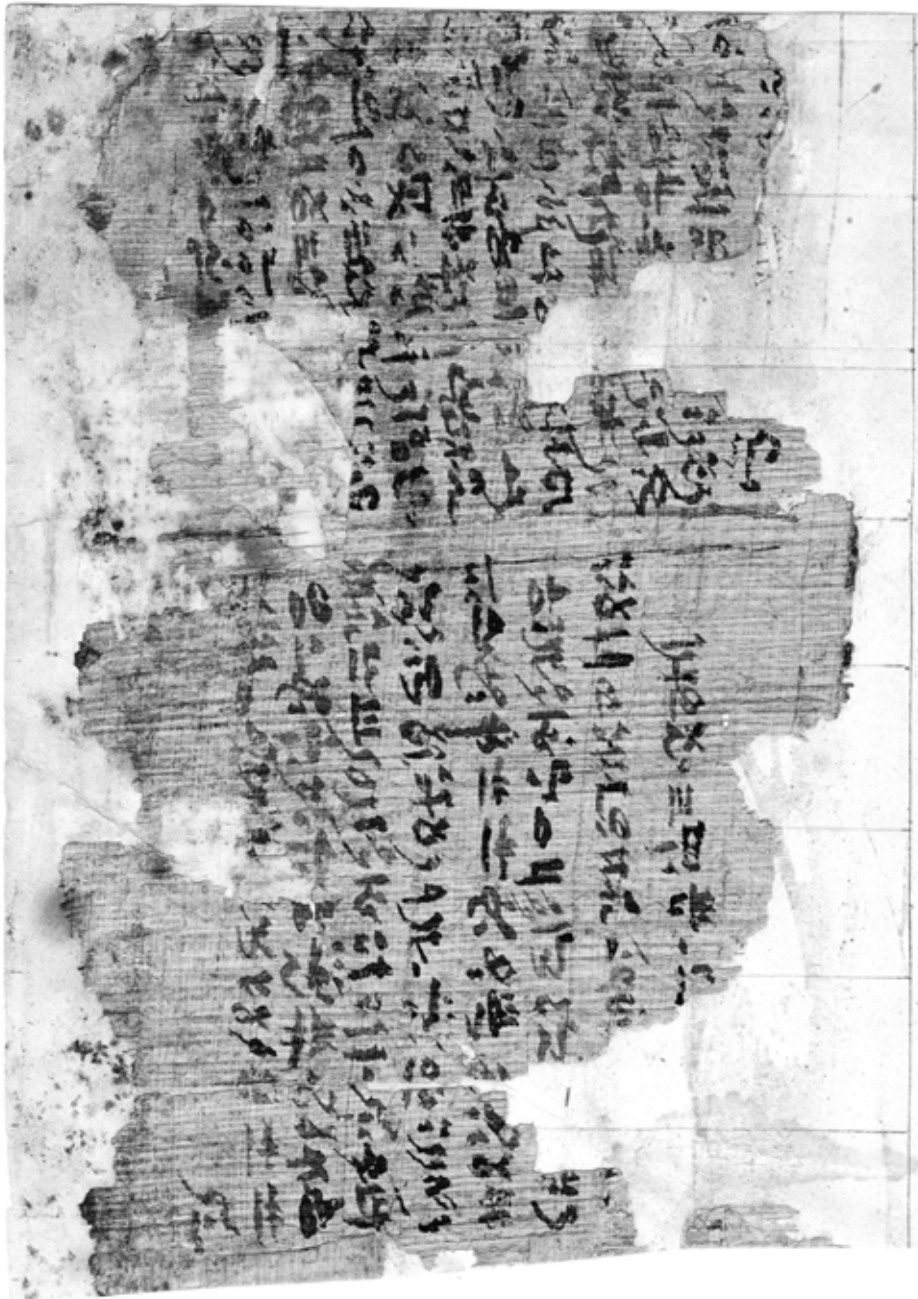
From the names, titles, and genealogies written on the Joseph Smith Papyri, we know their ancient owners were Egyptian priests who lived in Thebes in Egypt. The surviving fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri come from two papyrus rolls. Only one of these preserves the beginning of the manuscript which contains the name, titles, and full genealogy of the owner. His name was Horos. The other document, belonging to Semminis, is missing both its beginning

and end and so we have neither a full list of titles nor a full genealogy for her. The genealogy and list of titles along with other documentation allows us a fuller understanding of the owners.

The owner of Joseph Smith Papyri I, XI, and X was Horos. He left enough information to identify himself as a specific individual, because although his name was common, he had a very unusual title. Another papyrus that he owned is now in the Louvre. Other texts allow the reconstruction of Horos's family for many generations, from his great-grandfather to his great-great-great-grandson who lived during the reign of Cleopatra the Great. This reconstructed genealogy allows for some rough dating of the family over a two-hundred-year period. Horos himself dates to about the same time period as the Rosetta Stone, and his papyri show the use of three different scripts—hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic—two of which appear on the Rosetta Stone. Horos would thus have lived, and perhaps died, during the civil war which is mentioned in the Rosetta Stone, when Horonnophris and Chaonnophris rebelled against the Ptolemies.

The documents also permit us to say something about Horos. He served as prophet in three different temples in the Karnak temple complex. He was prophet of Amonrasonter at the main Karnak temple, prophet of Min-who-massacres-his-enemies at the Montu temple on the north of the main complex, and prophet of Chespisichis to the southeast of the main complex. As prophet, he was a spokesman for various gods, who interacted with prophets on a regular basis. As a prophet, Horos had been initiated into the temple's sacred places, which represented heaven, and had promised to maintain strict standards of personal conduct and purity. He also would have had administrative functions over the cult of those deities in that district.

The ancient owners of the papyri were among the most literate and educated people of Ptolemaic Egypt. They had access to the great



JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRUS XI. THE BEGINNING OF HOROS'S DOCUMENT OF BREATHINGS MADE BY ISIS. THE RIGHT-HAND COLUMN CONTAINS THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE USE OF THE DOCUMENT. THE LEFT-HAND COLUMN CONTAINS THE BEGINNING OF THE TEXT. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

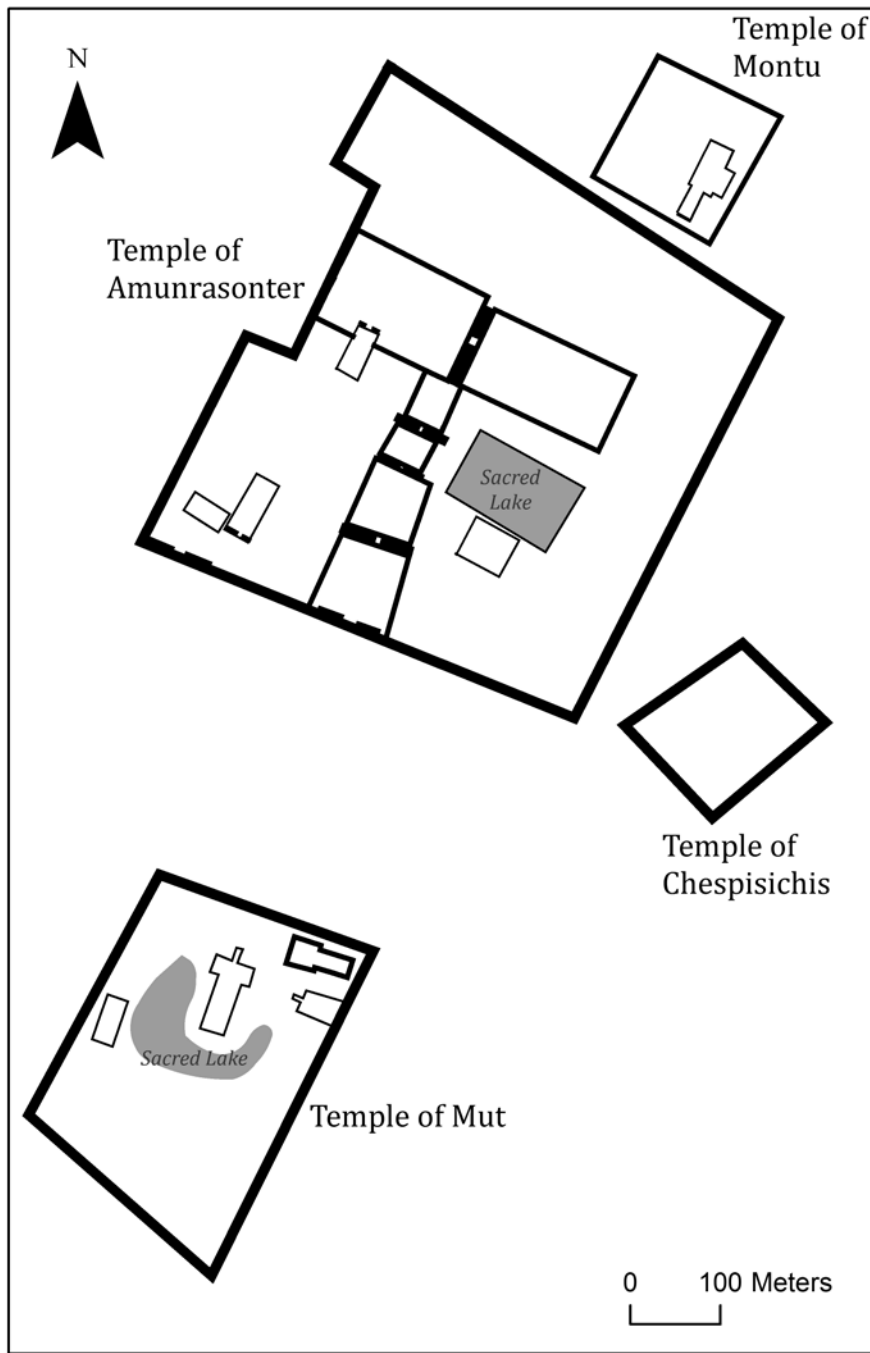
Theban temple libraries, containing narratives, reference works, and manuals, as well as scrolls on religion, ritual, and history. Ptolemaic Thebes had a sizable Jewish population; some of them served as the tax collectors. The Egyptian religion of the time was eclectic. Foreign elements like deities and rites—including those from the Greek religion and Judaism—were added to Egyptian practices. The papyri owners also lived at a time when stories about Abraham circulated in Egypt. If any ancient Egyptians were in a position to know about Abraham, it was the Theban priests.

As prophet of Amonrasonter, Horos would have gone into the holy of holies and would have encountered the statue of the deity face to face. He also would have participated in the daily execration ritual, in which a wax figure of an enemy was spat upon, trampled under the left foot, smitten with a spear, bound, and placed on the fire. He also would have known a creation account that starts with God creating light and then separating out the dry land from the water, followed by the creation of multiple gods who together plan the creation, cause the sun to appear, and vanquish evil.¹

As prophet of Min-who-massacres-his-enemies, Horos was a prophet of a foreign deity, Resheph, adopted by Egyptians. This deity was worshipped by performing human sacrifice in effigy. Two rituals are known for certain: one involves the subduing of sinners by binding them, and the other involves slaying enemies and burning them on an altar. These rituals seem to have also been part of the execration ritual that Horos would have performed as prophet of Amonrasonter.

As prophet of Chespisichis, Horos was involved in a temple that dealt with healing people and protecting them from demons.

1. For the use of the Esna cosmology (Esna III 206) at Karnak in Ptolemaic times, see *Urk.* VIII 105.



Ryan Shields, Think Spatial, BYU Geography

THE MAIN TEMPLE COMPLEXES AT KARNAK. HOROS WAS A PROPHET IN THE TEMPLE OF AMUNRASONTER AND THE TEMPLE OF CHESPISICHIS AND A PROPHET OF ONE OF THE DEITIES IN THE TEMPLE OF MONTU.

The founding narrative of this temple deals with a pharaoh who had extensive contact with far-flung foreign lands, who takes any woman he thinks is beautiful as a wife, and who asks for and receives directions from God. The narrative also deals with the appearance of angels and God appearing in dreams to give instructions.

Egyptian priests of the Ptolemaic period were often buried with a variety of different texts all written on the same papyrus roll, one after the other, or with different texts on different rolls. Such is known to be the case with Horos. We know that he was an innovator, interested in new and unusual textual compositions. He was buried with two scrolls that had various vignettes (the term that Egyptologists use for the illustrations accompanying texts on papyrus scrolls). We know that more than half of the vignettes he included were placed with texts that did not go with them. At the time, artists occasionally mismatched the genders of the figures in the vignettes. The vignettes in Horos's papyri are known to have that specific feature.

The other owner of surviving texts from the Joseph Smith Papyri (II–IX) was Semminis, whose mother was Eschons. Semminis was the chantress of Amonrasonter at Karnak, which seems to be the highest female priestly office at Karnak but may mean merely that she was married to a prophet. Lack of positive unique identifiers makes it difficult to distinguish Semminis from or identify her with any other Semminis in Ptolemaic-period Thebes. So, ironically, though more of her papyrus is preserved than Horos's, we actually know less about her.

Knowing something about the ancient owners for whom the papyri were made puts us in a better position to understand what was actually on their papyri.

FURTHER READING

THE OWNERS OF THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI

Coenen, Marc. “The Dating of the Papyri Joseph Smith I, X and XI and Min who Massacres his Enemies.” In *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years*, ed. Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors, and Harco Willems, 2:1103–15. This classic article first reconstructed the genealogy of Horos. Though Coenen makes a valiant attempt to get the Mormon details straight, he does not always succeed.

———. “Horos, Prophet of Min Who Massacres His Enemies.” *Chronique d’Égypte* 74, no. 148 (1999): 257–60. This was the first published notice that Horos’s Book of the Dead was in the Louvre.

———. “On the Demise of the *Book of the Dead* in Ptolemaic Thebes.” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 52 (2001): 69–84. Although this article is mainly concerned with looking at how the Book of the Dead disappeared, it does so by looking at papyri owned by the family of Horos, and thus illuminates that subject.

———. “Owners of Documents of *Breathing Made by Isis*.” *Chronique d’Égypte* 79, nos. 157–58 (2004): 59–72. This is a list of the basic prosopographical information about all owners of the Document of Breathing Made by Isis including Horos.

Gee, John. “The Cult of Chespsichis.” In *Egypt in Transition: Social and Religious Development of Egypt in the First Millennium BCE*, edited by Ladislav Bareš, Filip Coppens, and Květa Smoláriková, 129–45. Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, 2010. This article looks at another of the titles of Horos, that of prophet of Chespsichis, and attempts to gather all the information about that obscure deity.

———. “Execration Rituals in Various Temples.” In *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Interconnections between Temples*, edited by Monika Dolińska and Horst Beinlich, 67–80. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010. This article further explores the relationship between Horos as prophet of Min-who-massacres-his-enemies



THE BENTRESH STELE, ONE OF THE ONLY SURVIVING DOCUMENTS FROM THE TEMPLE OF CHESPSICHIS IN KARNAK. THE STELE PROBABLY DATES TO THE REIGN OF PTOLEMY IV. IT TELLS HOW A PAST PHARAOH HAD DEALINGS WITH FAR-FLUNG FOREIGN COUNTRIES AND TOOK AS WIFE ANY WOMAN WHO CAUGHT HIS FANCY. IT ALSO TELLS ABOUT HOW HE WAS VISITED WITH PLAGUES, DREAMS, AND ANGELS TO PERSUADE HIM TO RETURN THINGS TO THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE. LOUVRE C 284, LOUVRE MUSEUM, COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

and execration rituals, and Facsimile 1. The article gets technical and presumes, in parts, an understanding of Egyptian.

———. “History of a Theban Priesthood.” In «*Et maintenant ce ne sont plus que des villages*»: *Thèbes et sa région aux époques hellénistique, romaine et byzantine*, edited by Alain Delattre and Paul Heilporn, 59–71. Bruxelles: Associations Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 2008. This is an exploration of what can be known about one of the titles of Horos. The article also addresses the issue of dating the Joseph Smith Papyri.

———. “Horos, Son of Osoroeris.” In *Mélanges offerts à Ola el-Aguizy*, ed. Fayza Haikal, 169–78. Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2015. This article sorts out all known individuals named Horos, son of Osoroeris from Greco-Roman period Thebes.

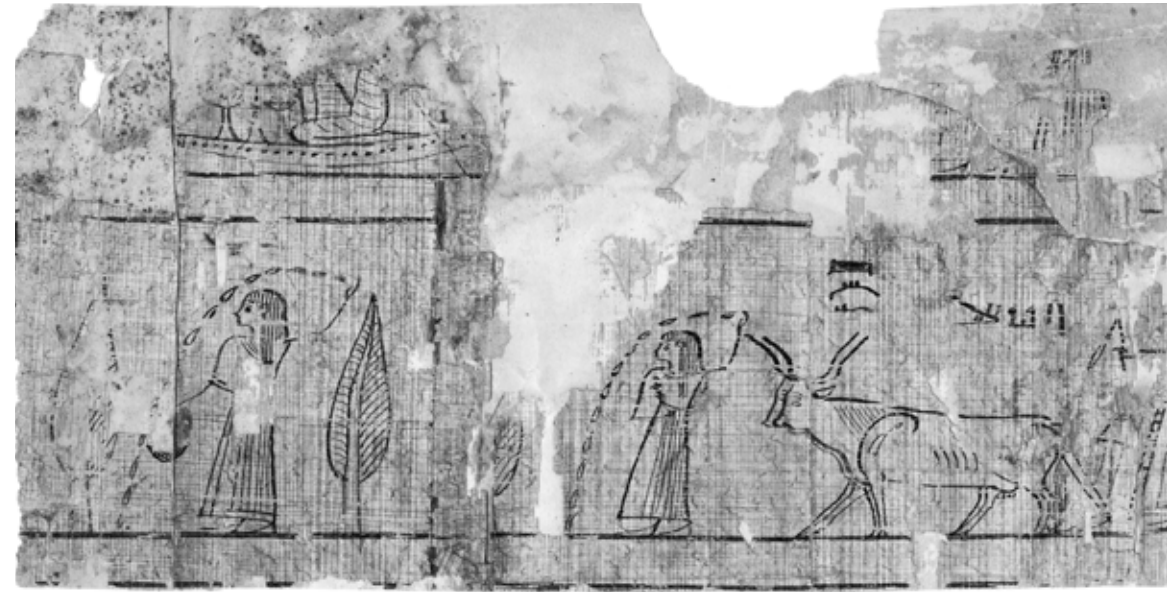
———. “Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *FARMS Review* 20, no. 1 (2008): 113–37. Part of this article discusses generally what we can know about the ancient owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri.

Töpfer, Susanne, and Marcus Müller-Roth. *Das Ende der Totenbuchtradition und der Übergang zum Buch vom Atmen*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011. This is the publication of two of the last known copies of the Book of the Dead, which happen to belong to some of the family of Horos.

THE LIFE OF PTOLEMAIC-PERIOD PRIESTS

Coppens, Filip. “Ptolemaic and Roman Thebes.” In *Thebes: City of Gods and Pharaohs*, 196–205. Prague: Národní Muzeum, 2007. The article provides a concise overview of Thebes in the Greco-Roman period.

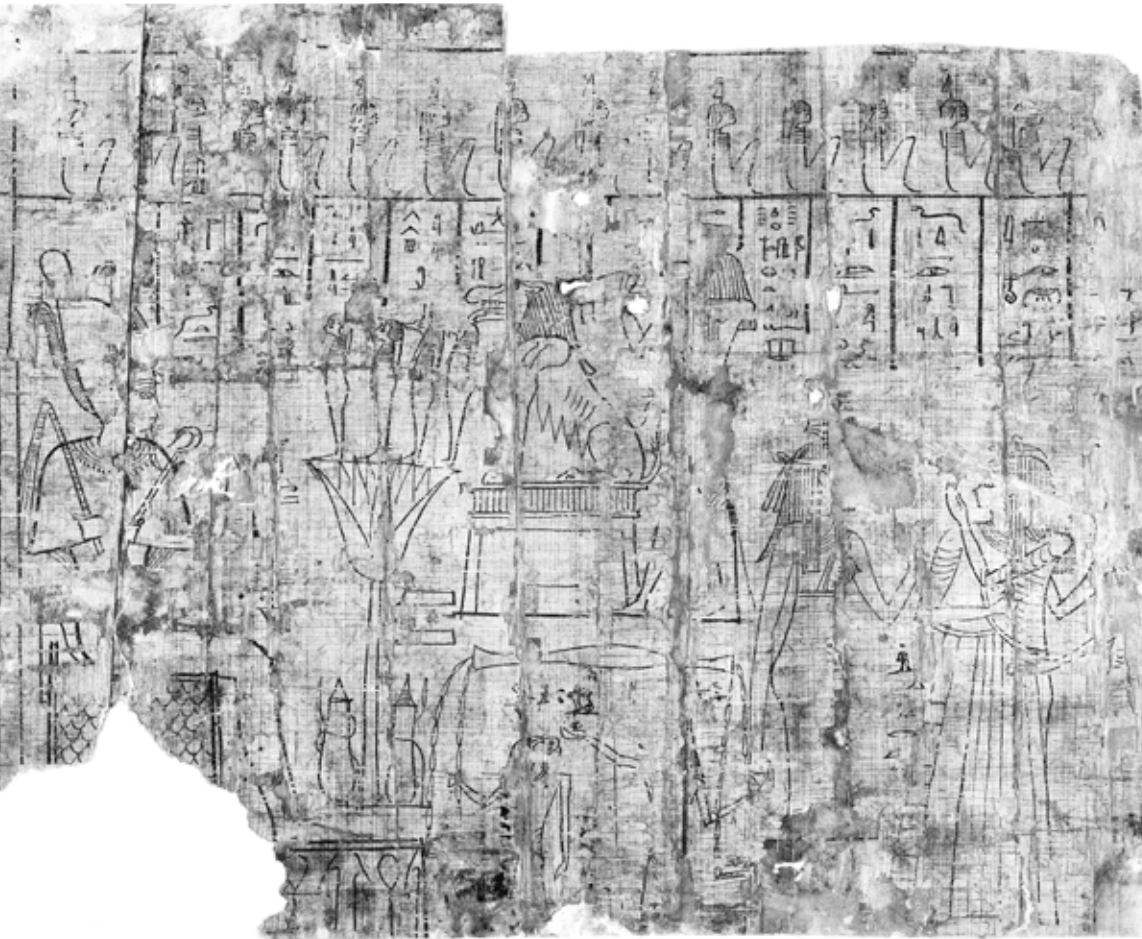
Donker van Heel, Koenraad. *Djekhy & Son: Doing Business in Ancient Egypt*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012. This is a readable account of life in ancient Egypt during the first millennium BC and of the role of the choachytes.



JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRUS II. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

Johnson, Janet H. “The Role of the Egyptian Priesthood in Ptolemaic Egypt.” In *Egyptological Studies in Honor of Richard A. Parker*, ed. Leonard H. Lesko, 70–84. This examination of the economic activity of priests in Ptolemaic Egypt deals with the sources of their income.

Kaplony-Heckel, Ursula. “Rund um die thebanischen Tempel (Demotische Ostraka zur Pfründen-Wirtschaft.” In *Res Severa Verum Gaudium*, ed. F. Hoffmann and H. J. Thissen, 283–337. Leuven: Peeters, 2004. Reprinted in Kaplony-Heckel, Ursula. *Land und Leute am Nil nach demotischen Inschriften, Papyri und Ostraka*, 2:1279–1337. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2009. An informative look at the practices of loaning priestly offices at Thebes in Greco-Roman times, this study publishes a number of loan documents in Demotic.



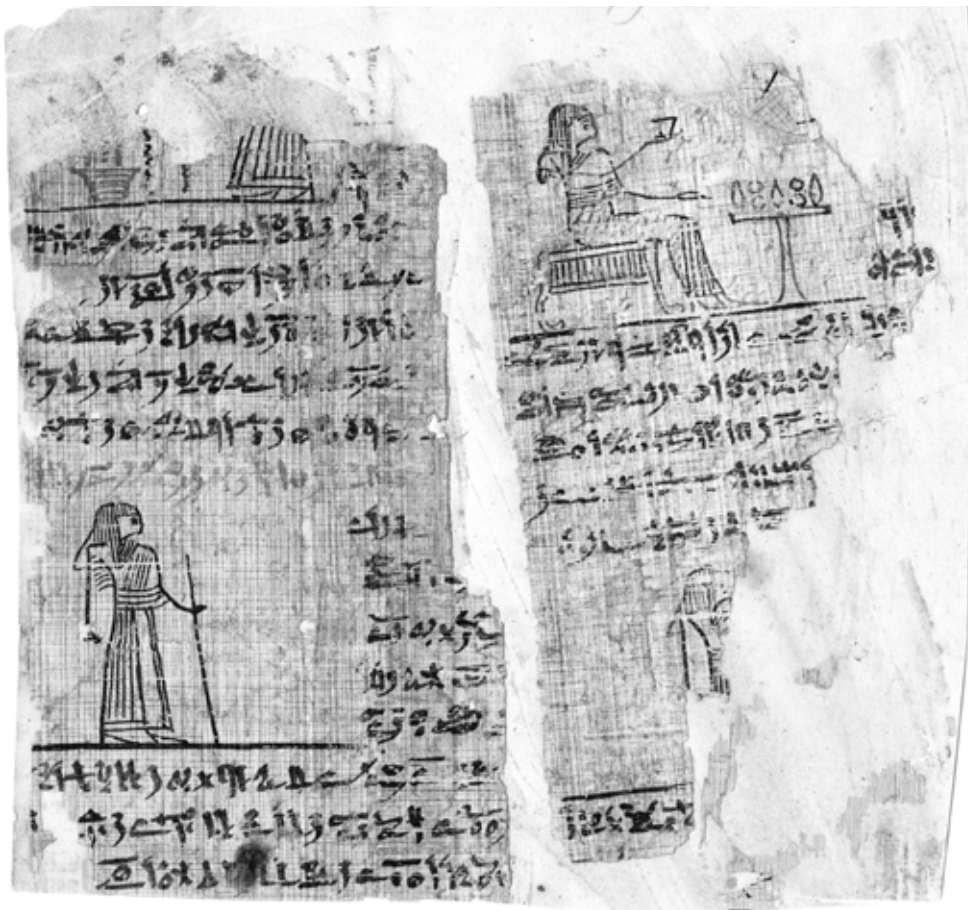
JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRUS III. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

Martin, Cary J. *Demotic Papyri from the Memphite Necropolis*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis, 2009. This publication of a choachyte archive from Memphis sheds light on Egyptian funerary practices.

Pestman, P. W. *The Archive of the Theban Choachytes (Second Century B.C.)*. Leuven: Peeters, 1993. This is a classic study of the documentation left behind because of a decades-long lawsuit involving an association of choachytes in Thebes, detailing their activities.



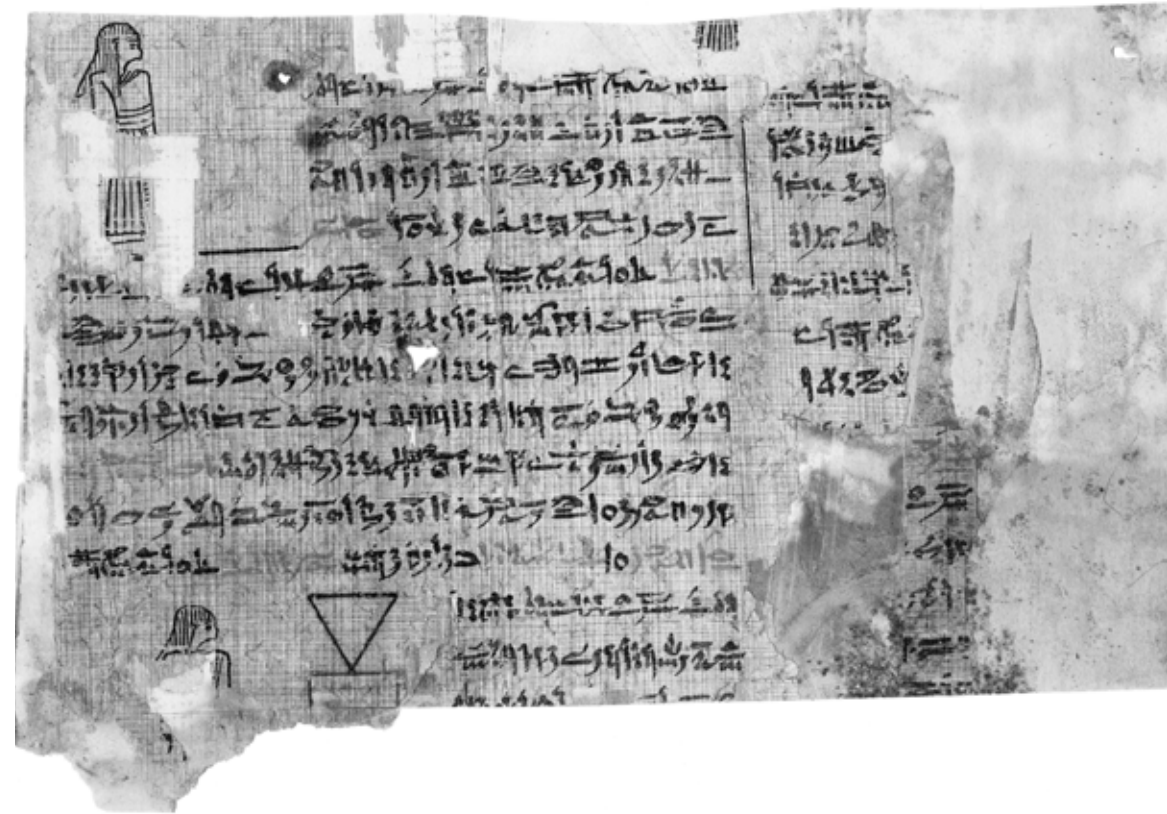
JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRUS IV. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.



JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRUS VII. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

———. “Haronnophris and Chaonnophris: Two Indigenous Pharaohs in Ptolemaic Egypt (205–186 B.C.).” In *Hundred-Gated Thebes*, ed. S. P. Vleeming, 101–37. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995. The classic article assembles the evidence pertaining to the revolt of Haronnophris and Chaonnophris.

Thissen, Heinz J. *Die demotischen Graffiti von Medinet Habu*. Sommerhausen: Gisela Zauzich Verlag, 1989. Though the volume is principally a translation of Demotic graffiti at the Temple of Medinet Habu, it also contains a number of important observations about priests in Ptolemaic Thebes and their families.



JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRUS VIII. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

Vittmann, Günther. *Ägypten und die Fremden im ersten vorchristlichen Jahrtausend*. Main am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2003. This book discusses the various foreign groups that could be found in Egypt during the first millennium BC, based on inscriptions.

Winnicki, Jan Krzysztof. *Late Egypt and Her Neighbours: Foreign Population in Egypt in the First Millennium BC*. Warsaw: Warsaw University, 2009. This study gathers the documentation of foreigners in Egypt mentioned in papyri.

