

Koenraad Donker van Heel. *Mrs. Tsenhor: A Female Entrepreneur in Ancient Egypt*. Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014. Pp. 229. Paper. \$29.95.

Koenraad Donker van Heel, Professor of Demotic Papyrology at the University of Leiden, Netherlands utilizes Egyptian papyrological archives in *Mrs. Tsenhor: A Female Entrepreneur in Ancient Egypt*, to tell the story of Tsenhor, a female businesswoman living during Egypt's Late Period (712-323 BC). Van Heel recounts Tsenhor's life, detailing her background as part of a family of choachytes, or "water pourers," whose business entailed leaving offerings for the deceased on behalf of their families as their mummies were transported to a vast Theban necropolis. Van Heel consults papyri to tell Tsenhor's life story from birth, family upbringing, marriage, and eventual death and offers insight into her life as a business owner, wife, and mother. The author utilizes the story of Tsenhor to augment historical views of ancient Egyptian women that were formed primarily through the study of famous queens and elite women, such as Hatshepsut and Nefertiti. Van Heel argues that Tsenhor's story puts ancient historians more closely in touch with everyday Egyptian women, placing their lives into the wider context of Egyptian history.

Mrs. Tsenhor serves as a history of ancient Egypt during the Late Period, as well as a history of Egypt under Persian Rule and a chronicle of funerary and business practice. Perhaps most importantly, van Heel's work is a history of women entrepreneurs and the middle class, separating it from more commonly found Egyptian histories of royal women. The book is organized both topically and chronologically as it follows the major events in the life of Tsenhor, from her birth and adolescence, up through her marriage and motherhood, and to her eventual death as an elderly woman of sixty years old.

Van Heel utilizes the Tsenhor papyrological archive, a collection of around twenty Demotic language documents recorded on papyrus and ostraka, originally published in 1994. The archive consists of legal documents and business transaction records written and received by Tsenhor and her immediate family. The sources shed light not only on Egyptian business

practices during the Late Period, but give valuable insight into the life of a female entrepreneur and property owner. These rare documents illustrate the economic agency held by some middle-class Egyptian women who were part of business owning families, illustrating how wealth and property remained in the hands of the women of families like Tsenhor's.

Van Heel's strong use of the Tsenhor papyrological archive is exemplified in the chapter "Bricks: Tsenhor, Psenese, and Nesamunhotep, 512-506 BCE," as he traces division of inheritance among Tsenhor and her siblings. Upon her father's death, Tsenhor received equal share of money and property to her brothers; this was uncommon in Egypt as women usually received significantly less than male siblings. Tsenhor followed suit in her own will, leaving an equal share of her business and property to both her son and daughter, Ruru. These legal documents give van Heel access to a detailed picture of family economics, allowing for such specifics as the precise amount of money paid by Tsenhor in her marriage contract and the exact number of storehouses Tsenhor inherited from her father's business. Van Heel highlights Tsenhor's agency through these archival documents and paints a picture of a family of successful businesswomen, fully in charge of their own economic and social agencies.

While the book is intended for scholars of Egypt and the ancient world, it is written in accessible language, providing important historical context to familiarize the reader with even the more obscure details of Egyptian life during the Late Period. Its thoroughness with the papyrological sources is intriguing to the casual reader while also contributing new routes of study to the scholar of Egypt and of ancient women. Finally, van Heel's work opens many more questions and opportunities for further scholarship in the field using the Tsenhor papyrological archive. *Mrs. Tsenhor* invites scholars to further seek out ancient women's archives to answer the question of whether Tsenhor and her family were unique female entrepreneurs, or whether they represented a more common occurrence of female economic agency across Egypt's Late period.

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