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# Priestly Scholars in Late Egypt: The Theoretical Side

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on literary and sub-literary texts which present Egyptian scholars. I first look at outsider's views (like the church-father Clement of Alexandria), borderline views (like the Egyptian priest Chairemon), and insider's views. For the latter examination, two compositions are studied in more detail. The first is the *Book of the Temple*, which is a manual of the ideal Egyptian temple, including sections about the duties of several of its intellectual specialists. The second is the *Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness*, which is a difficult text about the initiation to arcane religious knowledge and the mysteries of writing.

**Keywords:** Egypt, Late Period, Priests, Book of the Temple, Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness, Clement of Alexandria, Chairemon

## 1 Introduction

The subtitle I have chosen, the 'the theoretical side,' should make it clear that I do not intend to look at the documentary evidence for the real life of individual priests and scholars, although that would certainly be a worth-while enterprise. Instead, I will focus on texts of a literary or sub-literary nature that present Egyptian scholars as they were understood to exist in an ideal state. Such texts emanate from both foreign observers as well as the native Egyptians themselves. These various views will be explored, along with a close reading of the *Book of the Temple* and the *Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness* to determine the expected roles of Egyptian priests in the Late Period.

## 2 The Outside View

A well-known case of the outside view is the church-father Clement of Alexandria, who in his treatise *Stromateis* gives rather detailed indications about Egyptian

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priestly specialists and their different areas of expertise (VI, 4, 35, 3–37, 3).<sup>1</sup> Since he lived in the later second and early third centuries CE, he is likely to have encountered Egyptian priests, so his testimony is of considerable value. In short, he indicates the following specialists and their domains of knowledge: The singer (ᾠδός) has two books, one with hymns to the gods, the other one with accounts concerning the life of kings. The astronomer (ἠροσκοπός) has four books of Hermetes about astrology. The scribe of the divine book (ιερογραμματεὺς) has hieroglyphic books about cosmography and geography, the chorography of Egypt and the description of the Nile, prescriptions about the sacred rituals and the places made sacred for them, and knowledge about measures and what is appropriate to use in sacred rituals. The stolist (στολιστής) knows about teaching and calf-inspection. Here Clement mentions 10 books about Egyptian gods and veneration, though it is not completely clear if he means them to belong specifically to the domain of the stolist. Finally, the prophet has in his control 10 hieratic books about laws and gods and all training of the priests.

Perhaps the most striking point of the list is that of 42 extremely necessary books, six are sundered apart by being in the custody of the *pastophoroi*. At this point, some clarification about the title *pastophoros* might be necessary because it has been misunderstood by modern scholars for a long time. Recent research by Friedhelm Hoffmann and myself has established that it corresponds to the Egyptian title ‘door-guardian’.<sup>2</sup> So, they are separate from the priests and are of lower rank. The books for which they are responsible concern medicine, the structure of the body, illnesses, organs, drugs, eyes, and gynecology.

Normally, modern scholars focus mainly on the question of correlating these indications with preserved manuscripts from Late Egypt. By now, it has been well established that there is a good overall match, so I won’t go into more detail about this point. What is more relevant for my topic is the question of which rank is responsible for which sort of knowledge and in which script. For some works at least, it is explicitly indicated that they are in hieratic. For the rest, we do not get any positive indications. The realities of the Egyptian documentation for sub-literary texts show, for the Roman period, a few hieroglyphic papyri, somewhat more hieratic ones, and definitely most in demotic. Still, I am not sure to which degree narrative literature (one of the best-represented groups in the demotic texts) would form part of Clement’s 42 hermetic books.

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<sup>1</sup> The most important recent Egyptological commentaries on this passage can be found in Sauneron 1988, 156–191; Osing 1999; Ryholt 2005, 159–162; von Lieven 2007, 297–298; Winkler 2016, 271–272.

<sup>2</sup> Hoffmann 2014.

The ranks which Clement enumerates are familiar and will be encountered below in Egyptian texts. However, quite a number of specialists of knowledge do not turn up in Clement's list at all. So we have to ask ourselves if his list is complete, or at least representative, and if in the particular place and time he has observed, some offices were subsumed under one single incumbent while different Egyptian titles were linked to him.

### 3 The Borderline View

There is also something which can perhaps best be termed 'borderline view'. This is the description of the life of Egyptian priests as given by Chairemon who lived in the first century CE.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, its Greek language makes it stand out as not being purely Egyptian. Still, we should not forget that its author was an Egyptian priest as well as a stoic philosopher, so in some ways he is likely to have held a mediating position, trying to present the indigenous traditions to the Greeks in a way which he felt to be true to the Egyptian heritage, but also in a terminology understandable to Greek readers. To complicate matters, we should keep in mind that we have Chairemon only filtered through a citation by Porphyry (*De Abstinencia* IV, 6–8) who is known to twist his sources in order to make them fit better with his aim of propagating vegetarianism.<sup>4</sup>

According to this source the Egyptian priests lived a contemplative life devoted to visions of the divine and produced knowledge. Specifically, he mentions arithmetic and geometric speculations. However, not very much detail is indicated. We have to assume that Porphyry (and perhaps already Chairemon himself) was more interested in sketching in broad strokes an ideal image than to give details of scholarly work. Furthermore, it is likely that this description is sort of an alternative vision to the Graeco-Roman reality of scholars seeking patronage from rich sponsors.

### 4 The inside View

For the native Egyptian view, I will restrict myself to two texts which, to judge from the number and find-context of the preserved manuscripts, were of fundamental importance for Egyptian priests at least in the Roman period. I cannot guarantee that they originate from the Late or Graeco-Roman period, and indeed there are

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<sup>3</sup> Van der Horst 1987, 16–23.

<sup>4</sup> Bouffartigue & Patillon 1997, XXV–XXXVII; Patillon & Segonds 1995, XV–XIX.

good reasons for placing their origin quite a bit earlier. However, regardless of historical origins, their continued use gives them high relevance for the question of theoretical ideals about priestly scholars and knowledge.

#### 4.1 The Book of the Temple

The first text is the *Book of the Temple*.<sup>5</sup> This is an enormous manual of the ideal Egyptian temple, comprising a description of the architectural layout as well as enumerations of the duties of all priests and temple employees. At this point, I have identified about 50 different manuscripts with many hundred fragments. The duty-sections are ordered hierarchically, going from the highest to the lowliest of persons. They give us the number of title-holders. For most positions, a monthly rotation operating on a system of four phyles is discernible. Only few jobs seem to be year-round. At the very beginning, we have the governor and overseer of the priests, acting as an interface between the central civil administration and the internal affairs of the temple. Next come the prophets and other priests of a specifically ritual affiliation. Unfortunately, several sections are poorly preserved. When the fragments can be joined together again into a relatively coherent text, we encounter several priests of so to say ‘intellectual specialization’ whom I intend to discuss more in detail. Further in the text, we also meet craftsmen and technical personnel. Scribes of different branches represent the inner-temple administration. Probably quite near the end, the more menial professions turn up, among them people grinding the grain. It might give an impression of the size of the temple to know that their numbers are set at 50 men each month, making altogether two hundred composing the phyles.

The four duty-sections I intend to discuss in detail concern the scribe of the God’s book, the priest of Sakhmet, the scorpion charmer, and the schoolmaster. The relation between those ranks<sup>6</sup> is already evident from the order in which they follow each other in the text, besides the explicit mention of co-operation. The duty-sections have a highly fixed style of expression as well as quite fixed thematic blocks, showing considerable formalisation. Invariably, they begin with the title

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<sup>5</sup> For previous preliminary reports, see Quack 1999; Quack 2000; Quack 2002; Quack 2003; Quack 2004; Quack 2005a; Quack 2005b; Quack 2005c; Quack 2007a; Quack 2009; Quack 2010; Quack 2013; Quack 2016.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that those ranks seem to be mentioned closely together in the Assyrian annals of Esarhaddon Bu 91-5-9,218, Kol. a 10’f., lastly edited by Onasch 1994, vol I., 32–33; vol. II, 20; Leichty 2011, 54–56, where the mention of ‘veterinary surgeons’ and ‘snake charmers’ should correspond to Egyptian *w’b n Shm.t* and *ḥrp Srk.t*, with the *sh.w mč.t-nčr* probably corresponding to the ‘Egyptian scribes’. See Radner 2009, 223–226.

and the number of persons involved. Then the body of the duty-section follows, stylised normally as a chain of participial statements. Notes on equality with other ranks come towards the end, which is taken over by stipulations for succession, and sometimes also for mummification. In the case of the scribe of the God's book, the text meanders a bit, giving the impression that it is a later addition; however, one that is present in all the manuscripts.

Here, I present a draft translation of the relevant sections of the book of the temple, based upon pCarlsberg 313, 16, 7–17, 7 and 17, 10–17, supplemented by a number of parallel manuscripts.

Scribe of the God's book, two men.

One goes in, [and the other goes out (in the service). ...] is the name of one, scribe-[...] is the name of the other.

[It is him] who writes in the book of the God in question. He is of equal rank with the priest of Sakhmet and the scorpion charmer. [...] the twelve hours of the day [...] of the nome in question. [It's he] who overthrows Apopis and the 'children of rebellion', in overthrowing the enemies of the God [... written upon] papyrus leaf, wax [...] written [...] of clay, acacia-wood, almond(?) -wood and of all substances in order to [...].

It is him who performs each *n.t'-w*-ritual at all its times of the year, at every festival with its (fixed) date, at all feasts of the sky and the Earth which occur in the sanctuary [..... clo]thes, a *mn.t* of seven [...] on his neck, two ostrich's feathers on his head and a *kn*-stomacher spread over his shoulders. [.....the] great [priest]s in their duties.

It is him who 'gives face'<sup>7</sup> to everyone, every man and every priest in his time. It's he who enters before [the persons allowed access] to the temple [It is he who] introduces the king to the [god] when he stands with the ennead. It is him who occupies himself with the temple's staff in order to inspect them, to ban leprosy from [the temple and] to chase away all abominations of priests and temple's personnel.

It is him who occupies himself with every cattle and every small cattle entering the temple and set into the cattle-pen (and the poultry-court)<sup>8</sup> or put into the slaughtering-house, together with the staff of the scriptorium of the king's house, and the priest of Sakhmet and the scorpion charmer, in order to protect divine animals and avert 'impure' ones. It is him who gives [... ...] temple.

Everything is done for him, which is done for the ['chief'], when [he] dies and his [son is installed] in his place.

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**7** The exact meaning of this probably idiomatic expression is not clear; it might mean 'to take care of', see WB III, 15–16.

**8** Only certainly given in one of three manuscripts, and certainly omitted in one; the third one is broken in a crucial place.

It is him who makes writings [...] all his doings in the temple, [together with] the ‘chief’. He is of equal rank [with ...] in all his [duties]. They are the ones who conduct [...] in all things when divine statues are made in the gold-house.

Priest of Sakhmet, [four men], one in his month.

It is him who pacifies Sakhmet [... protection]n of the house, protection of the town, pacification of the gods of the months. It is him who makes a great oblation in order to pacify [...] in Sepa, thrice a year, the same in Memphis and in the field of rushes, by the overseer of priests of Sakhmet of the king’s house on New Year’s Day, [year]’s beginning, first month of summer and fourth month of summer.

It is him who cleans the God’s [vessels] in the temple. It is him who conducts [the inauguration(?) of the year. It is him who observes everything observable occurring in the sky (and on Earth),<sup>9</sup> who sees all pestilence(?) in men and all animals, together with the staff of the scriptorium of] the king’s house which is in the temple, announcing their condition to the residence by two priests of Sakhmet and the king’s eldest son and the *sꜥb tꜥy.tꜥ*.

It is him who occupies [himself with] all [cattle] and small cattle in order to recognise divine animals among them and to prevent them from going to the slaughter-house, in order to know [those who are ‘impure’ and to prevent] eating from them. It is together with the great of the ten that he stands after [...] cattle in order to recognise divine animals among them, together with the scorpion [charmer]. It is him who [makes] all [...] of protection of(?) his role(?), in order to recognise divine animals with ‘impurity’, tremor and fever.

[... He is of equal rank] with the great priests [in all their duties ....] deputy of the priest of Sakhmet and the scorpion charmer. For him is done everything which will be done when one stands and installs [his son in his place.]

Scorpion charmer, four man, one in his month.

It is him who recites spells for cleaning the temple, to remove ‘obstacles’, to pacify the moon, uns[een, unheard. It is him who removes] what is to be driven off(?). It is him who recites the Book [of] Overthrowing Apopis, the enemy of Re. It is him who overthrows the enemies of Osiris and the enemies of [Pharaoh] in the course of each day.

It is him who makes [writings] of everything which is done by the priest of [Sakhmet,] and the indications of the flood, be it great or small, together with the staff of the scriptorium of the king’s house who [are in the temple, together with the staff of the scriptorium] of the king’s house, the king’s eldest son and the *sꜥb tꜥy.tꜥ*. It is him who throws the Nile-book and a great oblation in Sepa as something thrown into the [water by] the overseer of scorpion charmers, in the residence, in Heliopolis beside the gods, in the [re]d lake, in the marshes, in Babylon, in the field of rushes in all their dates of the year according to the [old] writings. They shall [notify] him on the flowing of the inundation and what it has taken in the course of every day in the whole

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<sup>9</sup> ‘And on Earth’ is only present in one of three preserved manuscripts.

year, putting it in writing in order to notify the overseer of scorpion charmers, as well as to know what has been added or taken away from one nome to the other from south to north.

The staff of dairy-men is serving under him who pacify those who are in their mounds<sup>10</sup> and drive away their abominations. It is him who charms every biting ‘mouth’, specifies their biting and makes them jump out of their dens in every nome in order to know the abomination among them. It is him who makes protections in the entire nome in order to close the mouth of every vermin. It is him who enters the God’s shrine before the prophets to close the mouth of every vermin. It is him who makes protection of the water in order to drive off the aquatic enemies. It is him who makes protections in the desert in order to ward off every lion and all ‘mouths.’ It is him who makes protection in the boat in order to ward off dangerous winds when the God descends to his barque.

It is him who bans leprosy from the town, in order to prevent its traces from clinging to any place and to clean every place where it will be found. It is him who treats *mḥr.w wḥ šḥ mšštw šmm.t srf(.t) s.t-‘ pš.t*. He is one together with the great priests in all their duties.

For him is everything done which is done for them on the day when one stands and installs his son in his place.

Schoolmaster, four men, one in his month.

It is him who reads the writings of the children of the prophets, the lector-priests and the high-ranking priests, in selecting the one among them who is capable for the position of his father in the temple. As for the one among them who is initiated into the place of his father, it is him who instructs him about the tremolo (?) of the adulations, the intonation of songs and the screeching. It is them who teach them all [rules] of the temple concerning the behaviour<sup>11</sup> and the going in and out in all their doings in all their services in the temple, concerning all rules for performing the daily cult ritual. He is of equal rank with the high-ranking priests. [For him is done] everything [which will be done on the] day when one stands and installs his son in his place.

Regulation which is mandated to the overseer of instruction to guide the children of the prophets in order to introduce them to the ‘God’s words’, to let them grasp [all] customs of Upper and Lower Egypt, all specifications of the nome in question, together with all customs of the king’s palace in the first module.

They are the ones who ‘receive heart’ as a child in his moment, without wanton [garbling], who preserve the festival scroll and strengthen the customs which are their instructions of every day, who solve problems of all writings in the second module.

All scrolls with prescriptions for pa[tients] in the third [module].

Concerning eclipse-omina and all writings of the embalming workshop and of the house which is on duty [...] priest of Sakhmet and the scorpion charmer in the [fourth module].

<sup>10</sup> A designation for snakes.

<sup>11</sup> Literally: ‘standing and sitting’.

[...] of the scroll to be read afterwards, to adhere to it. It is very beneficial, but woe to the one who transgresses it.”

I provide the entire text of these duties in order to better allow full insight into the range of activities of the persons in questions. It should be obvious that they combine actions which we today would still consider as worthy scholarly endeavours with activities we might look upon as suspicious, especially as being linked to magic.

The scribe of the God’s book<sup>12</sup> has a lot of work to do concerning those parts of the ritual which require writing, including the execration rituals where the names of potential and actual enemies of the gods and the king were written on figurines of ephemeral materials to be ritually destroyed.<sup>13</sup> The inspection of individuals is the set of activities that we would most likely identify as scholarly. Some parts of the text are badly preserved, but we can suppose that it was about possible body marks and imperfections that would make candidates unfit to become priests. We know already from Greek documents that the *ἱερογραμματεὺς* plays an important role in such inspections.<sup>14</sup> Another, better preserved point is inspecting people for leprosy and banning infected ones. Obviously, recognising the early signs of this dangerous and infectious malady requires special training. We have rather limited information about leprosy in Ancient Egypt,<sup>15</sup> but some other sources suggest the practice of banishing infected people.

Furthermore, the scribe of the God’s book collaborates with the priest of Sakhmet and the scorpion charmer in order to inspect cattle that are to be slaughtered. This corresponds clearly to the calf inspection Clement gives as a competence of the stolist, although this title normally corresponds to the *ḥrī-sšṯ* and related titles.<sup>16</sup> Other ancient authors also note that there were detailed regulations about the marks and outwards signs on the basis of which sacred animals could be recognized.<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, remnants of probable Egyptian manuals about sacred animals, how to identify them and where to bury them, have recently been identified.<sup>18</sup>

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**12** For him and his special dress, see Ryholt 1998, 168f.; von Recklinghausen 2018, 236–239.

**13** Quack in press d.

**14** Otto 1905–1908, 85–86 and 221; Pestman 1977, vol. 1, 111–115; vol. 2, 117–123.

**15** See mainly Fischer-Elfert 2005, 33–90.

**16** Pfeiffer 2004, 77.

**17** Vos 1998.

**18** One text has already been published in Quack 2012a. Unpublished candidates are pCarlsberg 136 and especially pBM 10050 – the last one is crucial for a better understanding of the contents of this whole group of manuscripts.



The priest of Sakhmet<sup>19</sup> is mainly responsible for rituals of purification and protection. However, he is also the expert at recognising sick animals, and he collaborates in recognising the markings of animals in order to prevent sacred specimens from being slaughtered.

The scorpion charmer also has a number of obligations in the area of protective magic, as well as curative magic concerning the harm caused by dangerous animals like snakes and scorpions.<sup>20</sup> This is coupled with the inspection of people for leprosy, which we have already seen in connection with the scribe of the God's book. The charmer is the specialist concerning a great variety of other skin diseases as well, the lexical details of which often remain unclear to modern observers.

Summing up these three specialists, they combine skills in areas we would classify as magic and partially also temple ritual with special knowledge in some branches of healing. We should stress here the degree of specialisation within the Egyptian medical profession. All those topics indicated by Clement as being the domain of the *pastophoroi* are obviously not covered by the duties of the three priests discussed here.

The duties of the schoolmaster are probably the most detailed source for the different branches of knowledge supposed to be present at an Egyptian temple. One of his main jobs is to teach basic competence in reading and writing, and this serves also as a means of quality control for the choice of the next generation of priests. Furthermore, certain techniques of song and intonation are commonly taught to all pupils. The rules of behaviour in the temple must also, for obvious reasons, be learned by all the children of priests.

More directly relevant for scholarly activities are the following sections of the text that define a specific syllabus intended for the children of the prophets. If we take this indication literally, it would imply that higher education in certain areas of knowledge was restricted to persons of a certain social status.

The subjects to be taught are broken down into four different modules (*sp*), each devoted to some circumscribed branches of competence. The first one concerns religious geography, as well as the customs of the king's palace. There is indeed strong evidence that religious geography was an important topic in elementary schooling. More specifically, I can pinpoint several manuscripts covering such topics that show material features like bad writing, or re-use of the back of a papyrus, or empty spaces in between previous texts.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For him see von Känel 1984; Engelmann & Hallof 1996; Quack 2018, 91–95. Concerning veterinary treatment, see also the unsatisfactory study by Lord 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Some indications which are closely parallel to the Book of the Temple can be found in pTurin CG 54051 rt. 5, 7 and parallels (see Roccati 2011, 145–146).

<sup>21</sup> Quack 2020a; Quack in press a.

Ryholt has proposed that the ‘customs of the king’s palace’ indicated in the *Book of the Temple* should not be court etiquette but correspond to the, as he understands it, ‘regulations for the king’s life’ mentioned by Clement,<sup>22</sup> which he supposes to be spells for the purification and protection of the king.<sup>23</sup> However, his counter-argument that it would be curious to find instructions for court etiquette in the basic training for the priests, especially at a time when there had been no king in Egypt for more than a century, and that no text has so far been identified which may have provided the relevant information on court etiquette does not hold up to close scrutiny.

Firstly, for the *Book of the Temple* there are good arguments that its date of origin is substantially before the Roman period,<sup>24</sup> so it can hardly come as a surprise if it presupposes an indigenous Egyptian kingship. As a matter of fact, there are other sections of the *Book of the Temple* that presuppose an interaction between the governor and overseer of prophets and the royal residence, especially the king’s eldest son, which would be equally anachronistic in the Roman period. Secondly, the Geographical Papyrus from Tanis preserves a section on courtly ranks,<sup>25</sup> and recent discoveries include a hieratic papyrus fragment of a somewhat similar manual on ranks and titles at the royal court (pCarlsberg 204 rt.).<sup>26</sup> Finally, concerning the ἐκλογισμός βασιλικού βίου mentioned by Clement, if this really means an enquiry about the life the king should live,<sup>27</sup> it is likely to correspond to the regulations for the king mentioned by Diodorus I, 70–71<sup>28</sup> – and Diodorus indicates (I, 70, 2) that the person of the king was attended to by the sons of the most distinguished priests. I recently identified a Ptolemaic-period demotic Egyptian papyrus fragment (pMilan Vogl. D 8) which is likely to contain regulations of the sort Diodorus mentions.<sup>29</sup> Still, for the Clement passage, given that this textual genre is allotted to the singer, it is more likely that it comprises eulogies than rituals for purification and protection, and even more so court etiquette. Summing this discussion up, I think that the area of competence mentioned in the *Book of the Temple* is really about court etiquette and should be kept different from the genres indicated by Clement as well as Diodorus.

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22 Ryholt 2005, 161.

23 Ryholt 2005, 160.

24 See lastly Quack 2016.

25 Yoyotte 1961, 137.

26 Quack 2020b.

27 Osing 1999, 127 has understood it as narratives about the life and exploits of kings (‘gestes royaux’).

28 The commentary of Burton 1972, 209–211 hardly exhausts the content of this passage.

29 Quack in press c.

The connection of courtly etiquette with scholarly knowledge about the world can also be seen in a sequence of wisdom sayings:

Know how to send (letters) to the palace of Pharaoh!

Know how to sit in the presence of Pharaoh!

Know the constitution of the sky!

Know the constitution of the Earth! (Instruction of Khasheshonqi, 25, x+10–13)

The second module for teaching from the *Book of the Temple* appears to aim for global competence in memorizing texts and commenting upon difficult passages rather than covering a specific textual genre. The third module seems exclusively dedicated to some sorts of recipes, but unfortunately the only manuscript for this passage has a partial lacuna, so the specific type of recipes is not completely clear. They might be globally about medicine, or more specifically for people suffering from certain kinds of illness. The fourth module comprises several quite unrelated topics, like omens and embalming procedures. Overall, this passage not only gives valuable information about the subjects taught in a temple school, but also about the organisation of teaching in modules.

## 4.2 The Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness

Now I would like to turn to my second main case study, namely the *Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness*, which was less appropriately called ‘Book of Thoth’ by its first editors.<sup>30</sup> This is also represented in numerous papyrus copies mainly of the Roman period, even if probably slightly fewer than are extant for the *Book of the Temple*. In the *editio princeps*, the survival of 44 different manuscripts was supposed, but this is certainly too high, and I could demonstrate that many fragments counted as different manuscripts could be subsumed under one single item.<sup>31</sup> The most recent count indicates approximately 30 different manuscripts,<sup>32</sup>

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**30** See Jasnow & Zauzich 2005; Jasnow 2011; Jasnow 2012. See the review by Hoffmann 2008 and Quack 2007b; Quack 2007c; see also Stadler 2012, 177–187; Butler 2013 (who unfortunately does not take into account my philological notes in Quack 2007b); Laisney 2014, 82–88; Pereira 2014. New English translation in Jasnow & Zauzich 2014, see the review of Quack 2016/2017 (where it is explained in detail why ‘Book of Thoth’ is not an appropriate designation of the composition). A new German translation will be given by Quack in press b.

**31** Quack 2007b, 262–263.

**32** Jasnow & Zauzich 2014, 15.

and this still makes it the second-most frequently attested non-funerary text of late Egypt, after the *Book of the Temple*.

Basically, the text is an initiatory dialogue. On the one hand, we have a candidate called *mr̄-rḥ* ‘the one who loves knowledge’ – that corresponds lexically fairly well to Greek φιλόσοφος. On the other hand, there are several examiners. A crucial part of the text is certainly about the acquisition of arcane knowledge,<sup>33</sup> but the details are more often than not lost behind a thick wall of impenetrably obscure vocabulary or weird metaphors. We can at least note that activities like agriculture, fishing and fowling – subjects traditionally depicted in the decorated tombs of the elite – are applied here to the intellectual pursuit.

The candidate for wisdom is inserted into a long genealogical chain of scholars – at least on a metaphorical level he is spoken of as son of Wen-Ima, a title specifically used for the divinized wise Imhotep; Neb-wenenef, the high priest of Amun under Ramses II, is linked to the candidate as well.

Some questions of terminology are in order. The term *sl* (and variations) which plays an important role in the text was identified in the *editio princeps* as derivation of the verb *sr* ‘to announce’ and thus understood as a noun ‘prophet’.<sup>34</sup> I have disagreed and proposed to derive it from the root *sꜣr* ‘to be knowledgeable’, of which a nominal derivation is indeed attested as epithet of Thot.<sup>35</sup> As a matter of fact, the verb *sr* ‘to announce’ is written clearly differently in this composition in its only safe attestation in verse 452 (B02, 10/15).

In the temple of Edfou (IV, 56, 17–57, 2), this word *sꜣr* comes up within a passage absolutely saturated with key words from the Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness. There the king is designated as ‘The heir of the baboon (Thot), beneficent son of Isdes (Thot), the wisest (*sꜣr*) of the wise ones of the one who is wise (Thot), the most excellent one of the excellent ones of the excellent one (Thot), who conducts the ritual like the Lord of the Heden-plant, the Lord of the souls-of-Re, Ptolemy, living eternally, beloved of Ptah.’ The baboon (“*n*), Isdes and the ‘Lord of the Heden-plant’ (*nb ḥṯn*) are all used in the Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness as designations for Thot; and the ‘excellent ones’ (*iḳr.w*) turn up there in the demotic form *ḳr.w* (and phonetic variants). The ‘souls-of-Re’ as a designation of the important books is frequent in the Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness. *Sꜣr*, then, should also be a key word of the Ritual, and demotic *sl* is the only candidate for this correspondence. This is just one of a

<sup>33</sup> For the acquisition of knowledge expressed in that text, see Pries 2016, 455–458.

<sup>34</sup> Jasnow & Zauzich 2005, 29–31; see also Cannuyer 2010, 539–542 who has overlooked my new interpretation of the word but still rightly stresses that the equation of *sl* with *sr* is nowhere clearly confirmed.

<sup>35</sup> Quack 2007b, 277.

number of passages where close links between temple inscriptions and the *Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness* can be found.

The term *rh-ihy* used a few times in this composition is of particular interest because it continues the older word *rh-ih.t* ‘the one who knows things’ which seems one of the most likely candidates for an Egyptian equivalent to ‘scholar’.<sup>36</sup> It occurs in four preserved instances in this composition.<sup>37</sup>

The first passage comes relatively near the beginning of the composition, where still the basic parameters are settled. ‘... apprent[ic]e(?) of scholars, destined for (?) the supreme office of king of Lower Egypt’ (61 (B06.12/10)). While the context is quite broken, the association of scholars with the royal sphere seems quite certain. Another attestation is ‘If a scholar mounts upon . . . , the books are spread out around him’ (308 (B01 2/3)). Regardless of the mutilated state of transmission, we can see that books and reading them is important. More difficult to understand is ‘The scholars who came into existence previously, did they not have a second body?’ (310 (B01 2/6)). Finally, we have ‘After having been a child, may they make my name endure, may I enter among the knowledgeable ones, may they put me upon the way of the divine souls, the scholars who were in the first primeval time’ (411–412 (B02 8/8–9)). This describes quite nicely the progress from pupil to master. Also, like the previous case, a strong historical depth is attributed to the tradition of scholarship.

A lot of other passages speak about pupils who have to work strenuously, may even suffer serious hardship, in order to get access to knowledge, but the text is quite tantalizing about what really constitutes the knowledge in question. The wisdom is understood as being conveyed by writings called ‘the souls of the sun-god’ – sometimes abbreviated as simply ‘the souls’. This designation is also known from other Egyptian texts especially of the Late Periods. I cite one passage below that serves as an example of the difficulties of the composition as well as of the ways the acquisition of knowledge is expressed, here with some more specific details:

‘As soon as the one who has come will receive them (the candles), he will grope in the chambers of the Lord of the heden-plant.

Enchant his heart; may its lightness remove itself, may it become heavier than granite!

May he put sandals upon his feet, may he gird himself in the darkness, may he forget the light of his life!

<sup>36</sup> Another demotic rendering can be found in the demotic label to a Book of Breathing manuscript pBM 10110 + 10111 vs. (Herbin 2008, 90, pl. 59), see Quack 2012b, 276. In the graffito Dakke 30, l. 4, *rh-ih.t* occurs in a partially hieroglyphic text.

<sup>37</sup> The alleged example in C07.5, 9 has to be considered a misreading; as I have shown in Quack 2007b, 273, it is to be read as *[wnw].t hm.t*, as confirmed by a direct parallel.

May he grasp the oar of the rudder-post with his strong arm, may he fix the hand upon the handle!

May he sail upon the sea of the nets (?), may he row in the river of coals!

United (?) with the house of the souls, may he take for himself the treasury of the spirits!

May he open his throat, may he adore the one of many names, the chapel of the souls!

May he know the number of the occurrences of calling to her, the portal of the great mother of copies!

Full has become for him the teaching, may he look at the star, may he recognise the cosmos of the sky at night!

May his fingers work on the house of the lion, the singular one, the strong one upon the roof

until he finds the control of eye, ear, heart, tongue, hand and sole of the foot

and he learns 'insight', 'awe', 'annals', 'education', 'explanation', '...' and '...',

and he drinks<sup>38</sup> 'order', 'the adorations', 'praise', her father who is mighty,

and he finds the 'secret', and he explains the adoration, and he becomes an apprentice of the majesty of Thoth. (325–338; B02, 3/2–15).

With all its complicated expressions, difficult wording, but also enumeration of branches of knowledge and the final access to the divine wisdom, this seems to me to be a fitting conclusion of my presentation on the ideal image of scholars in late Egypt.

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<sup>38</sup> Variant: 'is saturated with'.

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