Koenraad Donker van Heel. *Djekhy & Son: Doing Business in Ancient Egypt*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2013. xvii + 193 pp. ISBN 9789774165696, $17.95 (paper).

"Ancient Egypt," an influential survey once observed, "has proved remarkably resistant to the writing of history which is not traditional in character; which is not, in other words, concerned primarily with the ordering of kings and the chronicling of their deeds."[1] This resistance is only partly attributable to the limited content of vainglorious pharaonic annals and elite biographies; it is equally due to the limited survival of other sources for economic and social history and the limited number of scholars trained to analyze those rare sources.

Koenraad Donker van Heel's *Djekhy & Son* examines one such corpus: a group of private contracts written in the Abnormal Hieratic and Early Demotic scripts during the sixth century BCE; these texts were then stored in the archive of Djekhy and his son, Iturech, two ancient Egyptian businessmen who worked alternately as priests, undertakers, landlords, and trustees. Donker van Heel is careful to warn his reader throughout the book that the documents that constitute the focus of his study belonged to the archive of a single ancient Egyptian family and likely represent less than 1 percent of the textual output of *that family*, much less of the nation as a whole—an insufficient basis for biography, let alone for any grand historical survey of the ancient Egyptian economy (p. 91, also cf. pp. 31, 95). Nevertheless, the book's microhistorical approach illuminates a wide range of economic activity, from the loaning of silver at interest, the standardization of weights, and the sometimes violent conflicts between local enterprise and national revenue, to the leasing of agricultural land, the sale of cattle, the provisioning of funerary services, and the negotiation of prenuptial agreements and adoptions. Much of this material will have comparative utility for economic and social historians studying other periods and regions, and some facets of Djekhy and Iturech's world may well surprise the nonspecialist reader—for example, the practice of putting up one's own children as security for a loan, the financial security guaranteed to certain divorcées, and the power of immigrants in ancient Egyptian society during the first millennium BCE.

The book's chapters are organized around small sets of interrelated transactions that can be traced across multiple papyri. In some cases, the business in question unfolded across a span of decades, in other

1. B. G. Trigger, B. J. Kemp, D. O'Connor, and A. B. Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. xi.

cases over just one year. The periods covered in successive chapters frequently overlap, so the author has cleverly sequenced the chapters with a hybrid scheme of both chronological order and shrinking temporal scope; as a result, early chapters provide background for the more episodic purview of later chapters. The inclusion of multiple excurses within these chapters results in a very wandering narrative thread, but the author's frequent digressions into other textual genres (e.g., ancient wisdom texts and works of historical fiction) are essential for situating individual business transactions into a broader societal context. The thematic outline within each chapter is clearly conveyed by the table of contents, where related discussions and excurses are structured into a hierarchy of indented subheadings; the same outline is unfortunately less transparent during a continuous reading of the book, where all subheadings are left-justified and their thematic relationships indicated only by changes in font. The book is enhanced by six indices, the first five most helpful for Egyptologists, and the final, more general, index a service for the comparative historian.

Donker van Heel is an ideal scholar to bring these economic microhistories to a broader readership. Not only is he one of perhaps a dozen specialists worldwide with true facility in Abnormal Hieratic, and the first to publish primers for this "least accessible of all ancient Egyptian scripts,"[2] but his work also displays an affection for humanizing and even humorous details in the workaday lives of both ancient Egyptians and modern Egyptologists (e.g., pp. xii, 24, 49, 91–93, 124, 159). This combination of specialized expertise and authorial sensibility greatly enriches the book, yielding ingenious deductions about scribal training (pp. 23, 32), a vivid image of their local landscape (p. 78), and some helpful suggestions for future research (p. 118). Readers of *Djekhy & Son* should not be distracted by the author's brief speculations about scribal mood (pp. 161–163), because other discussions in the book are models of rigorous source criticism and contextualization (e.g., pp. 79–83). In fact, Donker van Heel's reconstruction of social and economic worlds from the details of handwriting bears comparison beyond Egyptology to such historical classics as Brinkley Messick's *The Calligraphic State* (1993) and Kathryn Burns's *Into the Archive* (2010).

The author's similar attention to the daily affairs of modern Egyptologists is no small addition to the book; readers will gain from Donker van Heel's telling a fuller appreciation for research in the discipline (e.g., pp. 92–93, 152). His riveting account of the discovery and modern transmission of ancient papyri—from market

2. Koenraad Donker van Heel, *A Very Easy Crash Course in Abnormal Hieratic* (Leiden: Papyrologisch Instituut, 2013); Koenraad Donker van Heel, *An Abnormal Hieratic Reading Book*, fascicles I–III (Leiden: Papyrologisch Instituut, 2013–2014).

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to museum to publication—illustrates a fallibility in professional scholarship that is at once endearing and unnerving (pp. 16–17, 45–46, 153). Yet the explication of this theme throughout the book is consistently respectful: past errors are described in instructive detail, but the translators who produced those errors are tactfully left unnamed (e.g., pp. 104–106). In homage to the pioneers of Egyptian philology, the author quips that the funerary priests Djekhy and Iturech "would have turned your memory into a business case" (p. xi). Donker van Heel has achieved a reciprocal feat with this book, rendering ancient Egyptian business cases more amenable to integration within the historical memory of modern scholarship.

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Brett Christophers. *The Great Leveler: Capitalism and Competition in the Court of Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. 348 pp. ISBN 9780674504912, $45.00 (cloth).

At the turn of the last century, economic debates in the industrializing world revolved around what Americans termed "the Trust Question," known generally as the problem of monopoly. Both experience and theory (prominently but not exclusively Marxian) suggested that capitalism held within it the seeds of its own instability and, depending on how you read the tea leaves, its own destruction. Under conditions of free competition, certain firms grew dominant, consolidating and concentrating their market power and extending a monopolistic grip over both the processes of production and the mechanisms of exchange, curtailing the very freedoms that brought them into being. "Free markets," in other words, inevitably led to their own extinction. Antimonopolists proposed a wide range of remedies—from regulatory reform to trustbusting to revolution—but all understood this inexorable trend toward monopoly as capitalism's defining feature.

More than a hundred years later, that intellectual tradition persists. From the pens of theorists to the Facebook posts of armchair activists, debates over political economy largely recapitulate the notion that capitalism is, and always has been, inherently monopolistic.