

**News Release**  
Public Information  
Department

December 2001

**A Peaceful Coexistence Seen in *Jewish Life in Ancient Egypt* Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, February 15–May 12, 2002**

Eight hundred years after Moses led the Exodus, Jews were once again settled in Egypt. In this remarkable period, Jews, Egyptians, Persians, and Greeks lived together in relative peace. Through the nearly miraculous preservation of ancient papyri from one Jewish settlement on Elephantine Island, and other ancient works of art, visitors to the **Brooklyn Museum of Art** can look back at *Jewish Life in Ancient Egypt*.

*Jewish Life in Ancient Egypt* focuses on the Brooklyn Museum of Art's collection of fifth century b.c.e. Aramaic papyri, revealing Egyptian daily life during Dynasty 27 (525–402 B.C.E.) - the period of Persian rule in Egypt and the Near East. In addition to 8 of the best-preserved papyri, the exhibition includes 41 works of ancient Egyptian and Persian art from the Museum's collection that are related to the topics addressed in the papyri.

The objects include life-size statues, reliefs, bronze statuettes, silver vessels and gold jewelry. The papyri are a family archive that belonged to a Jewish temple official, Ananiah, his wife, Tamut, an Egyptian slave, and their children. The exhibition illustrates their family life from their marriage in 447 B.C.E. to the final payment on their daughter's wedding gift in 402 B.C.E. In between these events we learn about marriage, labor conditions, real estate, religion, and burial in a multi-cultural community comprising Egyptians, Jews, and Persians.

The papyri in the exhibition were written in Aramaic, the daily language of the Jews and Persians of Egypt. Professional scribes, familiar with the legal formulas

## **Jewish Life**

page 2

that were used in real estate transfers, marriage documents, and loan documents wrote the body of these documents using the same materials and reed pens familiar to Egyptian scribes. A close look at the bottom of the papyri shows that the witnesses signed the documents in their own hands.

Among the papyri included in the exhibition are the *Marriage Document of Ananiah and Tamut*, dated July 3, 449 B.C.E.; *Freedom for Tamut*, dated June 12, 427 B.C.E.; *Ananiah Gives Tamut Part of a House*, dated October 30, 434 B.C.E.; and *Ananiah Sells a House to His Son-in-Law*, dated December 13, 402 B.C.E.

In addition to papyri, the exhibition *Jewish Life in Ancient Egypt* contains a number of statues of royalty, priest, soldiers, and officials. Among these include a statue of the renowned Greek conqueror Alexander the Great, from the first century B.C.E.; a statuette of King Necho from the Late Period, Dynasty 26 (ca. 610 – 595 B.C.E.); a *Ram-Headed Egyptian God Seated on a Throne*, from Dynasty 26 or later, an *Egyptian Priest Kneeling with Offering Table*, from the New Kingdom (1539–1075 B.C.E.); a scribe statue of Amenhotep, Son of Nebiry, from Dynasty 18, Reign of Amenhotep II (1426–1400 B.C.E.); and a *Lid of a Sarcophagus*, from the Late Period.

The exhibition also illustrates the historical background and culture of the period. The community, located on Egypt's southern border, was surprisingly modern in its tolerance of diverse ethnic groups. Inter-marriage was common and people had many of the same concerns then as now. The papyri also reveal details of Egyptian slavery and the practice of Judaism in ancient times.

The Persians, conquered Babylonia in 539 B.C.E. and Egypt became part of their empire in 525 B.C.E. The Persians permitted Jews in Babylon to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, while other Jews remained in Egypt. In Elephantine, these Jews were members of the mercenary forces guarding Egypt's southern frontier. They lived peacefully among the native Egyptians, the Persians, and Greek mercenaries in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual society.

## **Jewish Life**

page 3

The curator of *Jewish Life in Ancient Egypt* is Edward Bleiberg, Associate Curator of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art at The Brooklyn Museum of Art.

*Jewish Life in Ancient Egypt* is made possible, in part, by The Joseph S. and Diane H. Steinberg Charitable Trust, The Judy and Michael Steinhardt Foundation, and the Leo and Julia Forchheimer Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Barbara and Richard Debs Exhibition Fund of the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

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[www.brooklynmuseum.org](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org)

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

#### **Admission:**

Contribution \$6; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$3. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits can be arranged through the Education Division, ext. 234.

#### **Directions:**

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop. Bus: B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.

#### **Museum Hours:**

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.;  
First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.;  
Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.