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## Royal temple land? : Temple land management strategies in the Ptolemaic Fayum

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Andrew Connor

**ROYAL TEMPLE LAND?  
TEMPLE LAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES  
IN THE PTOLEMAIC FAYUM\***

INTRODUCTION

IN THIS PAPER, I WISH TO TAKE UP the question of temple land management. While there is a growing number of excellent studies about the management of private estates in Egypt, it has proven more difficult thus far to reconstruct the management of *temple* estates in the Ptolemaic or Roman period. We can say something about the offices that directed the temples' affairs, and something about the men who filled those offices, but we can say less about the sort of decisions they made than about those made by the men controlling private estates.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will survey some of the evidence for active, hands-on control of temple property in the

\* I am grateful to the editors and readers of the *JJP*. An early version of this paper was presented at the 27th International Congress of Papyrology in Warsaw in 2013. I am grateful to Andrew MONSON, Peter VAN MINNEN, and Arthur VERHOOGT for discussing aspects of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> For the Zenon papyri, see P. W. PESTMAN, *A Guide to the Zenon Archive*, Leiden 1981 or W. CLARYSSE & Katelijn VANDORPE, *Zenon, een Grieks manager in de schaduw van de piramiden*, Leuven 1990. For the Apion estate, see T. HICKEY, *Wine, Wealth, and the State in Late Antique Egypt*, Ann Arbor 2012.

Ptolemaic period, focusing on the Fayum. Finally, I will examine one particular example drawn from the Menches papers. The so-called ‘royal temple land,’ that is, temples acting as crown tenants in late second century BC Kerkeosiris, can be seen as the product of a particular time and place, in which the land of the god Petesouchos was temporarily put out of cultivation and the temple administrator turned to crown tenancy to survive the lean years until the land was restored to production. Based on this evidence, then, I argue that temple administrators, given personal responsibility for the tax payments from the temple’s property, took dramatic, perhaps even innovative steps to ensure the economic well-being of themselves and of the temples in their charge.

Management, even in the modern world, can be a difficult concept to define. For the study of ancient Egyptian temples, then, we can ask what the resources – mineral, vegetable, animal (including human) – available to the temples were, and thus gain a basic grasp of the situation. We can also examine what stress the administrators faced, and how these might cause them to break out of the generally path-dependent course they tended to plot.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the relative paucity of accounts bearing on the question, we are unable to say to what degree some of the responses we will see below were the work of individual temples (or even individual administrators), or if they were or became widespread, but we might assume that a successful strategy might be adopted elsewhere, if the local conditions were similar. The Ptolemaic period is particularly suited for a study of this kind, since we know that the administrative structure of the temples in this period gave one-man final responsibility for temple affairs. The priests had as their head the *lesonis* or *mr-šn*, who was elected to the office on a yearly basis by his fellow priests, either the entire body of the priests or the ‘councilor priests’ (*bouleutai hiereis*) to whom an unpublished Demotic bid for the *lesonis*-ship is addressed.<sup>3</sup> However he came to the

<sup>2</sup> For path dependence, see S. PAGE, ‘Path dependence,’ *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1 (2006), pp. 87–115.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Andrew MONSON for sharing a draft of his forthcoming publication of this document. In the absence of further documents of this type, it is difficult to say whether we should say that the *lesonis*-ship was elected or purchased.

office, the *lesonis* was individually responsible for the tax payments and offerings from the temple for the year. In the early Ptolemaic period, another official was added, probably at royal insistence: the *epistates* or *nty-šn*, a post that seems to have been intended as an outside auditor of sorts and that was initially held by Greeks.<sup>4</sup> By the second century BC, however, the men holding the position tend to be Egyptian, not Greek.<sup>5</sup> While the evidence is slight, the *epistates* seems to have fit into a system of control, with *epistatai* on the nome level and perhaps above that, given a reference to an *epistates* of the South (e.g., Upper Egypt) in the Milon archive.<sup>6</sup> The tax burden for the temples was assessed not collectively on all the priests and temple staff, but on the *lesonis* individually, and this could have serious drawbacks for him during a crop failure or economic upheaval. This system placed significant pressure on a *lesonis*, since his decisions could strengthen the temple under his control, pad his own personal accounts, or lead to ruin for them both.

#### DECISION POINTS: REACTING TO TROUBLES WITHIN AND WITHOUT

If we are to approach management – *active* management – of temple estates in this period, we must consider some of the pressures to which *lesones* had to react. A decree of Ptolemy VIII Physcon, issued in 140/39 to all provincial officers, describes a number of ways in which temple income was diminished, lumping together squatters on sacred land, embezzlers of temple funds, those not paying their full rent, and those performing rituals for money who were not supposed to be performing rituals.<sup>7</sup> The decree

<sup>4</sup> W. CLARYSSE, 'The archive of the *praktor* Milon,' [in:] Katelijjn VANDORPE & W. CLARYSSE (eds), *Edfu, an Egyptian Provincial Capital in the Ptolemaic Period*. Brussels, 3 September 2001, Brussels 2003, pp. 21–22.

<sup>5</sup> CLARYSSE, 'The *praktor* Milon' (cit. n. 4), pp. 21–22.

<sup>6</sup> *P. Bürgsch*. 14 (Edfu, 225 BC), l. 18. For *epistatai* of nomes, see e.g., *P. Paramone* 7 (Antaiopolis, 2nd cent. BC), ll. 8–9, or *BGU VI 1214* (*meris* of Herakleides, 2nd cent. BC), l. 7.

<sup>7</sup> I intend to address the question of the *aphrodisia* mentioned in lines 29 and 37 in a separate article.

also calls for the safety of the ‘agents of the priests’ (τοὺς παρὰ τῶν ἱερέων) and notes that the protective decree was requested by the priests themselves, presumably on the grounds that, as Ptolemy notes, a poor temple is a temple unable to offer services in honor of the Ptolemies. We can assume that these problems – squatters on temple land, under-payment or non-payment of rent, attacks on tax-collectors, and so on – were common all across Egypt, and probably across all periods.<sup>8</sup> Many of them were no doubt common on other estates as well.<sup>9</sup> Less common, but presumably not unique, is the complaint filed by priests in Oxyrhyncha (in the southern Fayum) in the late second century BC (*P. Tebt.* III 790 [Oxyrhyncha, 127–124 BC]). There, they sought the enforcement of a royal order protecting their sanctuary from attacks by ‘taxpayers and others’ (l. 7: ὑποτελῶν καὶ ἄλλων). These villagers, the priests say, did not restrict their outrages to bursting into the sanctuary, but shook down the priests and carried off goods (ll. 8–11). In both of these cases, the apparent response by the temple was to seek royal protection, which came in the form of a decree that could be publicly displayed, as the priests of Oxyrhyncha note, on the outer walls of the temple itself (ll. 32–33: τὸ ἀντίγραφον ἐπιγραφῆναι ἐπὶ τοῦ ἕξω προπύλου τοῦ τεμένους).

We have ample evidence for royal protective decrees, but these formed only part of the temples’ responses to troubles and pressures. If the ‘taxpayers and others’ assaulting the temple of Arsinoe in Oxyrhyncha were responding to the temple not for its religion but for its role in the economic landscape of the Ptolemaic Fayum, then we can compare this to other attacks on economic institutions in the Fayum in this period. Indeed, the second century BC was, for the Ptolemies, a particularly rebellious time and, while most attention is focused on Upper Egypt (especially, with good reason, the Great Theban Revolt), there are clear signs of trouble in the Fayum as well. One document, concerning priests but not temples, notes that a certain Condylus was compelled ‘by the Egyptian rebels’ (ὑπὸ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἀποστατῶν), probably in Krokodilopolis, to burn property records, an act that was presumably not directed at Condy-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. T. E. PEET, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty*, Oxford 1930.

<sup>9</sup> *P. Col. Zen.* I 54 (Arsinoite?, 250 BC).

lus or the priest whose property was affected by the burning, but rather against the general administration of the region.<sup>10</sup> The destruction of property records and general chaos surrounding rebellions could affect religious institutions more directly, as with the famous struggles of the Theban choachytes to defend their claim against a certain Hermias, who claimed that his father had abandoned the property.<sup>11</sup> None of this suggests that temples in particular were targeted, but neither should we be surprised if temples were attacked or affected.<sup>12</sup> Temples formed part of the local administrative and economic landscape and could just as easily fit into the role of local elite, greedy landlord, or government proxy.

One consequence of the irregular (and non-random) selection of papyri that were preserved over the centuries is an abundance of legal proceedings and petitions to Ptolemaic officials. Whatever attempts might have been made on an informal or personal basis are not preserved, but the countless requests for official intervention were recorded on papyrus, (perhaps) responded to by government officials, and, if granted, could be recorded on stone. When we examine temple management strategies, therefore, it seems that the first, last, and sometimes only recourse for a temple administrator was to run directly to the competent government office. There was no doubt a concurrent process of non-governmental crisis management, as well as numerous conversations between the *lesonis* and the councilor priests, who, we might expect, came into their title in this fashion. Indeed, our best evidence for dissension in the ranks comes from an instance where informal discussion broke down and the priests had recourse to the state. Another document from Soknopaiou Nesos (*P. Amb.* II 35 [132 BC]) stems from such a breakdown: the *lesonis* in 132 BC personally collected the grain rents due in Dionysias

<sup>10</sup> *P. Amb.* II 30 (Soknopaiou Nesos, 2nd cent. BC). The burning of property records is far from unique to Egyptian revolts – there are occurrences in the Hellenistic Peloponnese (Sarah JAMES, pers. comm.), and the chaos from such an event created significant issues for transfers of property and civil administration.

<sup>11</sup> For the case, see P. W. PESTMAN, *The Archive of the Theban Choachytes (Second Century BC)*, Leuven 1993, pp. 361–384. See also the struggles of the *taricheutai* from Tanis to claim rights formerly held by the rebellious Psenephmous, as described in *P. Tarich.*

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the introduction to *P. Amb.* II 30, discussing ‘the quarrels between the two nationalities.’

and absconded with them, taking a significant amount (225 artabas) with him. The priests, having presumably exhausted their patience for gentle cajoling, sent a petition to the *strategos* Apollonius.<sup>13</sup> While we do not know the result of this dispute – or if this petition was even sent, as it was found in Soknopaiou Nesos<sup>14</sup> – the priests’ discussion of terms placed on the *lesonis* before he took office clearly shows the priests placing checks on his independence as manager. Another instance of temple staff (or friends) pulling in different directions also reveals another weapon in the administrative arsenal. This document (*P. Amb.* II 40), also found in Soknopaiou Nesos and dated to the second century BC, records a letter from a certain Epiodorus to the *lesonis* of the temple of Soknopaios in Soknopaiou Nesos, recounting the efforts he undertook to amend the terms of a gift of land, some of which was earmarked for a certain Arius and some for the temple, but which had been, according to Epiodorus, divided unfairly. Since, as Epiodorus wrote to the *lesonis*, the priests had ‘made no provision for [their] interests’ (ll. 12–13: ὑμῶν μηδεμίαν πρόνοιαν ποησαμένων), Epiodorus was compelled to step in to right the wrong, and the first division could be overturned for the price of eight staters handed out to various officials, whether as a *douceur* or as payment for administrative costs. To reconstruct the events, it would seem that a preliminary division of a gift of forty-six arouras had been made, with a certain Arius taking the twenty-one best and leaving the remainder, twenty-five arouras of ‘the worst land’ (ll. 9–11: τῆς χειρίστης καταλελειμμένας τὰς πάσας (ἀρούρας) κε). While the process by which this was achieved – the first division was probably only a proposal, with the final determination made at the delineation of the borders, which a number of local officials apparently attended (ll. 13–15) – our particular interest rests in the mech-

<sup>13</sup> B. KELLY, *Petitions, Litigation, and Social Control in Roman Egypt*, Oxford 2011, notes the cost of petitioning, which would keep it, even for the literate priests, from being a first resort.

<sup>14</sup> Quite possibly near the temple, given the focus in excavation (and, unfortunately, looting) on the temple. Paola DAVOLI, ‘New excavations at Soknopaiou Nesos: The 2003 season,’ [in:] Sandra LIPPERT & M. SCHENTULEIT, *Tebtynis und Soknopaiou Nesos. Leben im römischen Fajum*, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 30, places the areas of greatest looting in the southwest area of the *kôm* and inside the temple itself, and excavations have generally focused on the temple *temenos*.

anism by which the unnamed *lesonis* was overruled by this Epiodorus, whose relationship to the temple is left unclear. In this case, we have yet another direction from which decisions made on behalf of the temple could originate. While we might expect most decisions to be made by the *lesonis*, perhaps after discussion with the councilor priests, *P. Amb.* II 35 shows the priests acting independent of the *lesonis*, and *P. Amb.* II 40 shows temple land being reorganized by a third party, with the *lesonis* and priests informed after the fact. Without any further documents about this case, we cannot tell if the priests were glad for this intervention – they may have preferred the twenty-five arouras of lesser quality to the twenty-one of better quality, for reasons Epiodorus did not know and thus did not record in his letter.<sup>15</sup>

#### ROYAL TEMPLE LAND

The last, and perhaps most significant, example I wish to discuss is that of what some have called ‘royal temple land.’ While recent work is broadening our understanding of the occasional overlaps between temple and royal land,<sup>16</sup> the best evidence for this so-called ‘royal temple land’ can be found in Kerkeosiris, in the Menches papers. One document (*P. Tebt.* I 93 [113 BC]), a list of crown tenants with ‘the extent of their plots and the rents due from them,’ offers a clear example for us to unpack. Here, among the tenants on royal land, we find the following entry:

55 Πετεσοῦχος θε(ὸς) διὰ Μαρρείου[ς  
θε( ) ς, καὶ γεω(μετρίας) ς, (γίνεται) α, (γίνονται) ι γ´ [

<sup>15</sup> It should also be noted that our knowledge of the conditions of the 21 and 25 arouras is entirely reliant on Epiodorus’ description. The difference may have been quite slight.

<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Andrew MONSON for sharing an advanced draft of a report of seed distribution from the late third century in the village of Kerkeneith, in the Themistos *meris*, which discusses temple-controlled farming on royal land. This has been published as A. MONSON, ‘Landholders, rents and crops in a Ptolemaic village: P. Heid. dem. inv. 46,’ [in:] A. DODSON, J. JOHNSTON & W. MONKHOUSE (eds), *A Good Scribe and an Exceedingly Wise Man*, London 2014, pp. 229–240. For some key differences between the situation in Kerkeneith and our example here, see below.

The three following entries also record land nominally farmed by Petesouchos *theos*. While *P. Tebt.* I 93 is the clearest example, there are a number of other cases in the property records from Kerkeosiris of land supposedly cultivated by the gods, almost always Petesouchos.<sup>17</sup> The tenant list in *P. Tebt.* I 93 is organized alphabetically, with tenants listed by their name, followed by their father's name, the amount of land, and the rents due on them, thus:

ᾠρ[ο]ς Πετεσοῦχου ιζ (ἀρτάβαι) ν, κδ' < δ' (l. 32).

In the case of Petesouchos *theos*, however, this formula is amended by the inclusion of the name of the man paying the taxes on behalf of the god. In the above cited case, a certain Marres was responsible, presumably as the actual tenant on the land. There is little we can say about the various men paying taxes on this land: they tend to have Egyptian, theophoric names, though this is not unique to these men. It is probable that some of them are the same as tenants listed elsewhere in the records from Kerkeosiris.<sup>18</sup> In other words, there were men who were cultivating royal land for themselves and also for the temple of Petesouchos. This is not surprising, as priesthood was usually a part-time job in Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>19</sup> Whether or not the men working the god's land in *P. Tebt.* I 93 were priests is somewhat beside the point, as we can see from other documents, such as *P. Grenf.* II 33 (Thebaid, 103/2 BC), where a group of lay business partners lease temple land and subsequently sublease it to another individual, who happens to be a priest.

If we accept that the land in question is being leased in the name of the god, that is, by the temple, then the next question we come to is one found

<sup>17</sup> Mestastutmis also appears, especially in *P. Tebt.* I 94 (Kerkeosiris, 112 BC), ll. 33–34. See the appendix below for temples as crown tenants in Kerkeosiris. Alexandra VON LIEVEN, 'Of crocodiles and men: Real and alleged cults of Sobek in the Fayyûm,' [in:] Carolin ARLT & M. A. STADLER (eds), *Das Fayyûm in Hellenismus und Kaiserzeit*, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 87–93, has argued for Petesouchos' place not as an aspect of Sobek but as a cult of a local holy man.

<sup>18</sup> See Table XI in Dorothy CRAWFORD, *Kerkeosiris. An Egyptian Village in the Ptolemaic Period*, Cambridge 1971, pp. 176–181.

<sup>19</sup> W. CLARYSSE & Dorothy THOMPSON, *Counting the People in Hellenistic Egypt, II: Historical Studies*, Cambridge 2006, p. 184.

in the original publication, and discussed since: is this royal land leased by a temple or is this temple land managed by the state? Grenfell and Hunt argued in their publication that the land was in actual fact temple land, but that ‘the rent was collected by the government and subsequently paid to the state.’<sup>20</sup> Crawford, meanwhile, argued that the land was royal land of some sort, and that ‘different administrative categories of land, therefore, appear attached to the same god.’<sup>21</sup> Finally, Shelton (and Keenan and Shelton in *P. Tebt.* IV) argue that the land was royal land and that the land leased there was ‘not different in size or planting from ordinary tenancies of Crown land.’<sup>22</sup> In this, I must agree with Shelton and, to a degree, with Crawford. On a basic level, this land must be royal land, for two reasons. First, and somewhat less significant, we note that this document was written by Menches as a list of royal land, and that temple land, if that is what this land was, would have to have been tucked in without any further comment or discussion.<sup>23</sup> Second, and more significant, we see that the tenant, the god Petesouchos, was responsible for various taxes generally incumbent on royal land, and royal land in particular. In line 56, payments made for the *geometria* tax are listed, in 58, payments for the *thesaurophulakikon* and the *grammatikon*, and so on.<sup>24</sup> The land appears, as Shelton noted, equal to the rest of the crown land, in taxes paid, in planting, and in treat-

<sup>20</sup> *P. Tebt.* I 93, 55 sqq note.

<sup>21</sup> CRAWFORD, *Kerkeosiris* (cit. n. 18), p. 100. This is followed by the suggestion that these lands are equivalent to the Roman period βασιλική ἱερευτική land, a suggestion I would reject, though both the royal lands leased by temples here and the so-called ‘royal sacred land’ of the Roman period do, I believe, stem from very local circumstances and not Egypt-wide categories of land tenure.

<sup>22</sup> *P. Coll. Yout.* I 15, introd. (J. SHELTON), p. 122.

<sup>23</sup> The land of Petesouchos in *P. Tebt.* I 93 was added outside of the otherwise alphabetical organization of the rest of the papyrus, but this is probably a notation *within* the context of royal land tenants and not the beginning of an entirely different list, without any notice. Land of this type does appear in mixed contexts, as *P. Bagnall* 46 (*Kerkeosiris*, 119 BC), ll. 47–48. Cf. *P. Bagnall* 46, ll. 28–29 for temple land.

<sup>24</sup> The temple tenant from Monson’s third century Demotic land register from the Fayum seems to have had more freedom than the other tenants on royal land, suggesting that it might be something different than Petesouchos and company, who act in every way (at least in the state records) as an ordinary royal tenant. Compare with *P. Tebt.* IV 1117, which registers all types of land and does not record tax payments.

ment by the state.<sup>25</sup> It is, therefore, extremely likely to have been royal land that happened to be leased by the temple, without particular concessions to the temple or recognition that Petesouchos *theos* might differ in some fashion from, say, Horus, son of Petos.

If we accept that in the late second century BC, the temples of the gods Petesouchos and Mestasutmis were taking on royal land as tenants of the king – and further assigning the actual cultivation of it to pre-existing *basilikoi georgoi* – we must therefore ask why. In the previous section, we focused on one particular implement in the temple administrator’s ‘tool-kit,’ the appeal to authority. While that particular strategy was frequently applied, by temple administrators as well as private individuals, temple crown tenancy is something else entirely. Despite Shelton’s suggestion that temple tenancy on crown land is so well attested in the Ptolemaic period as to preclude surprise at its appearance, instances of this practice are primarily clustered in and around Kerkeosiris, probably due to the peculiar nature of our evidentiary record from that village. Temples acting as crown tenants was *not* a common tactic outside of the southern Fayum, and much of our evidence derives from Kerkeosiris itself. This should give us pause. We are much better informed about the Kerkeosiris region in this period than almost anywhere else in Ptolemaic Egypt, especially when we make broad-based conclusions concerning land tenure.<sup>26</sup> The existence of other documents, such as P. Heid. dem. inv. 46 (see n. 16), shows that temples being involved in some fashion with royal land was not unique to the temples of Kerkeosiris. At the same time, however, the privileges granted to the temple in P. Heid. dem. inv. 46 set that situation quite apart from that of Petesouchos or Mestasutmis, who appear in the documents as ordinary royal tenants. While we must wait for further evidence to determine whether or not the royal land farmed in the name of the god in Kerkeosiris was only one set in a much larger practice or not, we can offer a suggestion as to the value of the practice for the temples in (and near) Kerkeosiris. Given the choice between sacred land – a little more than five

<sup>25</sup> P. Coll. Yout. I 15, introd. (J. SHELTON), p. 122.

<sup>26</sup> A monograph like CRAWFORD’s *Kerkeosiris* (cit. n. 18) would be quite a bit shorter if written about nearly any other village in Ptolemaic Egypt.

arouras of which Petesouchos held in the vicinity of the village – and crown land, a temple would, all other things being equal, clearly prefer sacred land, as their rate of return would be quite a bit higher. In addition, holding a property as part of their own endowment rather than as part of a lease of royal land would fit much better the temples' preference for long-term security over short-term risk.<sup>27</sup> By acting as a crown tenant, Petesouchos *theos* would have been acting as a middle-man and would therefore have been relying on the fairly thin margins between the taxes and rents due to the state and the amount needed by the farmers to survive. As crown land already demanded a significantly higher percentage of a crop for the state, the amounts accruing to the temple as crown tenant and subsequent sub-lessor would have been thin indeed.

The value for the temples in taking on crown land was not necessarily in piling up vast surpluses. The temple of Petesouchos officially controlled five and three-eighths arouras of sacred land in and around Petesouchos, that is, a shade over one per cent of the known land in the village. The crown land listed just in *P. Tebt.* I 93, meanwhile, totaled at least eighteen and three quarters arouras – the entry listed above (ll. 55–56) does not list an amount of land – taking the total amount of land controlled by Petesouchos at one time to more than twenty-four arouras, or around five per cent of the known land in the village. Clearly, Petesouchos *theos* was one of the smaller players in the local religious landscape, especially when compared to the temple of Soknebtunis in Tebtunis, which held 130 arouras just in Kerkeosiris, and could face a property dispute concerning 500  $\frac{1}{4}$  arouras (*P. Tebt.* II 302), or 100 times the size of Petesouchos *theos*' entire endowment, with something less than existential angst. It seems likely, then, that the crown tenancy of Petesouchos derived not from rebellion, land confiscations, angry villagers, or state management of temple land, but rather from the scarcity of unclaimed land in the later second century BC and a disinclination among high-ranking officials to devote substantial endowments to the lower-ranking temples. Indeed, Petesouchos seems to have missed out on the large endowments offered to Soknebtunis in 130/29, and was solidly in the lesser rank of religious institutions in the

<sup>27</sup> Far from unique to the temples, of course.

region.<sup>28</sup> Probably more from economic necessity than a desire for a grander or more prestigious standing, the administrator(s) of the temple of Petesouchos quadrupled the amount of land under the god's (nominal) responsibility. As the temple was fairly well-equipped with 'a ceremonial entrance way, *δρόμος*, and a granary of its own,'<sup>29</sup> it was nevertheless set up for both grandeur and agricultural production. This can be contrasted with Keenan and Shelton's note that 'we have no record of crop production on the  $5\frac{3}{8}$  arouras of *ἱερά γῆ* belonging to Petesouchos.'<sup>30</sup> This is probably not to say that the land was never productive, since it is not listed as flooded, dry, salted, or unflooded,<sup>31</sup> but the land is described as  $5\frac{3}{8}$  arouras of *ἄσπορος* land in 116/5 BC. Shelton calls the land 'distinctly poor' on this evidence, but Crawford notes that the land was productive in 119/8 and again in 112.<sup>32</sup> Land that was *ἄσπορος* could be permanently barren, but it could also have gone unsown in that particular year (and the following), for a host of reasons. If Petesouchos' land was unsown in 116 BC, there are any number of possible causes that do not require the land itself to be 'distinctly poor.' A dyke collapse in Thegonis in 117 BC, for instance, temporarily put out of cultivation land on the borders of Kerkeosiris, and this was far from the only breakdown in the irrigation and water control systems.<sup>33</sup> That the land of Petesouchos was back in cultivation (and paying taxes) in 112 suggests that the land itself was perfectly functional and the lack of cultivation in 116–114 may have been a temporary condition.

In most cases, the offerings made at the *Soucheion*<sup>34</sup> – at least five artabas a year in 'required donations'<sup>35</sup> – in combination with whatever

<sup>28</sup> CRAWFORD, *Kerkeosiris* (cit. n. 18), pp. 96–98; *P. Tebt.* IV, introd., p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> *P. Tebt.* IV, introd., p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> *P. Tebt.* IV, introd., p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> *P. Tebt.* I 63 (Kerkeosiris, 116/5 BC), ll. 25–26.

<sup>32</sup> *P. Coll. Yout.* I 15, introd. (J. SHELTON), pp. 121–122; CRAWFORD, *Kerkeosiris* (cit. n. 18), p. 99.

<sup>33</sup> CRAWFORD, *Kerkeosiris* (cit. n. 18); *P. Tebt.* I 61b, ll. 166–177; *P. Tebt.* I 72, ll. 78–79. The land of Orsenouphis *theos* also declined after 119/8, being listed as 'waterlogged and unsown' in 116/5 before being brought back into useful (and tax-paying) cultivation in 112, for which see CRAWFORD, *Kerkeosiris* (cit. n. 18), p. 102.

<sup>34</sup> See *P. Tebt.* IV, introd., p. 13 for the terminology.

<sup>35</sup> See *P. Tebt.* IV, introd., p. 14 and *P. Tebt.* I 88, ll. 4–15.

income was derived from the  $5\frac{3}{8}$  arouras of sacred land, would have ensured that the priest(s) of Petesouchos in the time of Menches were probably not impoverished. That the temple acted as a crown tenant may have been a reaction to a temporary condition on the  $5\frac{3}{8}$  arouras of land. In other words, if the endowment of Petesouchos was rendered uncultivable for a certain number of years, signing on as a royal tenant may have been a way to bridge the gap until the land could be drained, properly irrigated, or whatever was required to bring it back into cultivation. That the temples were acting as crown tenants before and after the chaos of the 'strike' of crown tenants suggests that this policy was not done in reaction to a lack of royal tenants or any resulting economic chaos resulting from that.<sup>36</sup> Instead, our best evidence for Petesouchos' crown tenancy seems to coincide with the period during which the  $5\frac{3}{8}$  arouras of properly sacred land was ἄσπιρος.

## CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, the particular administration of a temple could have an effect on the success of a temple. Different *lesones* might pursue different strategies. For Soknebtunis, as Crawford has pointed out, the large amount of property under their control encouraged a successful strategy of keeping those fields as much in cultivation as possible,<sup>37</sup> while Petesouchos in Kerkeosiris turned to royal land to compensate for the temporary unsuitability of its own endowment, allowing it to survive what would otherwise be very lean years for the priests. In addition to particular approaches to land, the *lesonis* could also affect the temple in a more direct way. We can see from accounts of an embezzling *lesonis* in Soknopaiou Nesos or a massively indebted priestly family in Edfu that a bad administration could have disastrous effects on the temple.<sup>38</sup> In the

<sup>36</sup> For the revolt, see A. VERHOOGT, *Menches, Komogrammateus of Kerkeosiris* [= *Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava* 29], Leiden 1998, pp. 167–175.

<sup>37</sup> CRAWFORD, *Kerkeosiris* (cit. n. 18), p. 96.

<sup>38</sup> *P. Amb.* II 35; CLARYSSE, 'The *praktor* Milon' (cit. n. 4).

case of Petesouchos, then, if what we see is not innovation *per se*, then we at the very least see in the temple tenancy on crown land a rare reaction to a particular problem. Faced with the problem of an extremely small endowment, one that could be put out of cultivation by one particular flood or breached dyke, the administrator took steps to offset the temporary loss of that property by taking on a larger, but less lucrative amount of royal land. It seems to have been a success, since the temple survived the crisis and the staff of the temple of Mestautmis also gave it a try. As we have seen, the margins involved for the temple would have been fairly small, and the administrative burden comparatively high. The examples examined here, from the priests of Oxyrhyncha and Soknopaiou Nesos to the land of Petesouchos in Kerkeosiris, show the sometimes significant effects of particular events and particular men on the temples and on the evidence that survives today. The example of the god Petesouchos of Kerkeosiris is especially interesting for the look it gives us at the activities of a temple at the margins. Faced with a small endowment, and perhaps one that was temporarily unfit for cultivation, the administrator of the temple stepped outside the path-dependent ‘playbook’ of temple administration and took on royal land as a middleman, ensuring the survival of the temple as it met the crisis.

## APPENDIX

### CROWN TENANCY BY TEMPLES IN KERKEOSIRIS

With the possible exceptions described below – where the type of land is not listed, in contrast to most other appearances of royal land outside of registers of specifically crown land<sup>39</sup> – all dated examples fall into the period during which the land of Petesouchos was (or may have been) unsown.

*P. Tebt.* I 87: 108–109      late second century BC  
Phembroeris, crocodile god

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., *P. Tebt.* IV 1120, where temple crown tenancy is clearly marked.

<i>P. Tebt.</i> I 93: 55–69 Petesouchos	<i>ca.</i> 112 BC
<i>P. Tebt.</i> I 94: 33–36 Mestasutmis	<i>ca.</i> 112 BC
<i>P. Tebt.</i> IV 1103: 172–179 (= <i>P. Coll. Yout.</i> I 15) Petesouchos	116/5 BC
<i>P. Tebt.</i> IV 1104: 1–9 Petesouchos	late second century BC
<i>P. Tebt.</i> IV 1118: 6, 74–75 Petesouchos	117/6 BC
<i>P. Tebt.</i> IV 1120: 31–32, 40, 92–93	113/2 BC
Possible or purported crown tenancy:	
<i>P. Tebt.</i> IV 1117: 9–10 Petesouchos	120/19 BC
<i>P. Tebt.</i> IV 1120: 121 Petesouchos	113/2 BC
<i>P. Bagnall</i> 46: 9, 47, 97–98 Petesouchos, Petesouchos, and Soknebtunis	119 BC

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