

# Manetho

**Manetho** (/ˈmæniθoʊ/; Koinē Greek: Μανέθων *Manethōn*, *gen.*: Μανέθωνος) is believed to have been an [Egyptian priest](#) from [Sebennytos](#) (Coptic: Ⲭⲉⲙⲛⲟϥⲧ, romanized: *džemnoutj*<sup>[2]</sup>) who lived during the [Ptolemaic Kingdom](#) in the early third century BC and authored the *Aegyptiaca* (*History of Egypt*), a major chronological source for the reigns of the ancient [pharaohs](#).

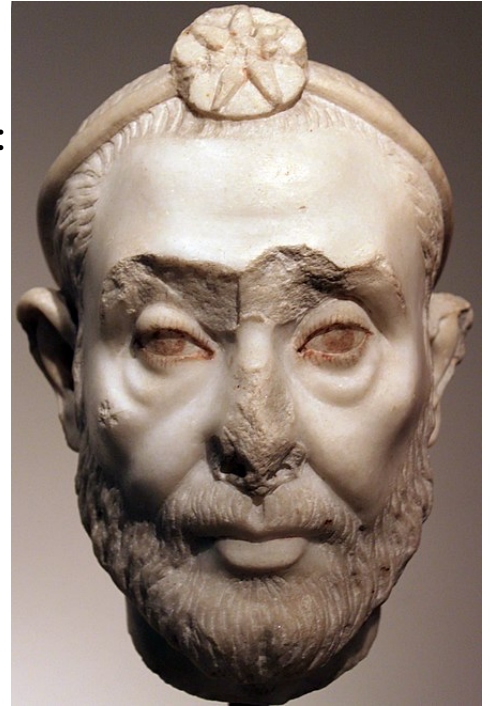
## Name

The original Egyptian version of Manetho's name is lost, but some speculate it means "Truth of [Thoth](#)", "Gift of Thoth", "Beloved of Thoth", "Beloved of [Neith](#)", or "Lover of Neith".<sup>[3]</sup> Less accepted proposals are *Myinyu-heter*

("Horseherd" or "Groom") and *Ma'ani-Djehuti* ("I have seen Thoth"). In the [Greek language](#), the earliest fragments (the inscription of uncertain date on the base of a marble bust from the temple of [Serapis](#) at [Carthage](#)<sup>[4]</sup> and the [Jewish](#) historian [Flavius Josephus](#) of the 1st century AD) writes his name as Μανέθων *Manethōn*, so the Latinised rendering of his name here is given as Manetho (the same way that *Platōn* is rendered "[Plato](#)"). Other Greek renderings include *Manethōs*, *Manethō*, *Manethos*, *Manēthōs*, *Manēthōn*, and *Manethōth*. In [Latin](#) it is written as *Manethon*, *Manethos*, *Manethonus*, and *Manetos*.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## Life and work

Although no sources for the dates of his life and death remain, Manetho is associated with the reigns of [Ptolemy I Soter](#) (323–283 BC) by [Plutarch](#) (c.



Head of an anonymous priest of [Serapis](#). [Plutarch](#) linked Manetho with the [Ptolemaic](#) cult of [Serapis](#).<sup>[1]</sup> [Altes Museum](#), [Berlin](#).

46–120 AD) and according to [George Syncellus](#) Manetho links himself directly with [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](#) (285–246 BC).

If the mention of someone named Manetho in the *Hibeh Papyri*, dated to 241/240 BC, is in fact the celebrated author of the *Aegyptiaca*, then Manetho may well have been working during the reign of [Ptolemy III Euergetes](#) (246–222 BC) as well but at a very advanced age. Though the historicity of Manetho of Sebennytus was taken for granted by Josephus and later authors the question as to whether he actually existed remains problematic. The Manetho of the *Hibeh Papyri* has no title and this letter deals with affairs in Upper Egypt not Lower Egypt where our Manetho is thought to have functioned as a chief priest. The name Manetho is rare but there is no reason *a priori* to assume that the Manetho of the *Hibeh Papyri* is the historian from Sebennytus who is thought to have authored the *Aegyptiaca* for Ptolemy Philadelphus.



*Ptolemy Philadelphus in the Library of Alexandria*, by [Vincenzo Camuccini](#) (1813). Manetho links himself directly to Pharaoh Ptolemy II.

Manetho is described as a native Egyptian and Egyptian would have been his mother tongue. Though the topics he supposedly wrote about dealt with Egyptian matters, he is said to have written exclusively in the Greek language for a Greek-speaking audience. Other literary works attributed to him include *Against Herodotus*, *The Sacred Book*, *On Antiquity and Religion*, *On Festivals*, *On the Preparation of Kyphi*, and the *Digest of Physics*. The treatise *Book of Sothis* has also been attributed to Manetho. It is important to note that not one of these works are actually attested during the Ptolemaic period when Manetho of Sebennytus is said to have lived. In fact, they are not mentioned in any source prior to the 1st century AD. This would be a gap of three centuries between the time the *Aegyptiaca* was

supposedly composed and its first attestation. The gap is even larger for the other works attributed to Manetho such as *The Sacred Book* which is mentioned for the very first time by [Eusebius](#) in the 4th century AD.<sup>[5]</sup>

If Manetho of Sebennytus was an historical figure he was probably a priest of the [sun-god Ra](#) at [Heliopolis](#) (according to [George Syncellus](#), he was the chief priest). He was considered by Plutarch to be an authority on the cult of [Serapis](#) (a derivation of [Osiris](#) and [Apis](#)). Serapis itself was a Greco-Macedonian version of the Egyptian cult, probably started after [Alexander the Great](#)'s establishment of [Alexandria](#) in Egypt. A statue of the god was imported in 286 BC by [Ptolemy I Soter](#) (or in 278 BC by Ptolemy II Philadelphus) as [Tacitus](#) and [Plutarch](#) attest.<sup>[6]</sup> There was also a tradition in antiquity that [Timotheus of Athens](#) (an authority on [Demeter](#) at [Eleusis](#)) directed the project together with Manetho, but the source of this information is not clear and it may originate from one of the literary works attributed to Manetho, in which case it has no independent value and does not corroborate the historicity of Manetho the priest-historian of the early 3rd century BC.

## ***Aegyptiaca***

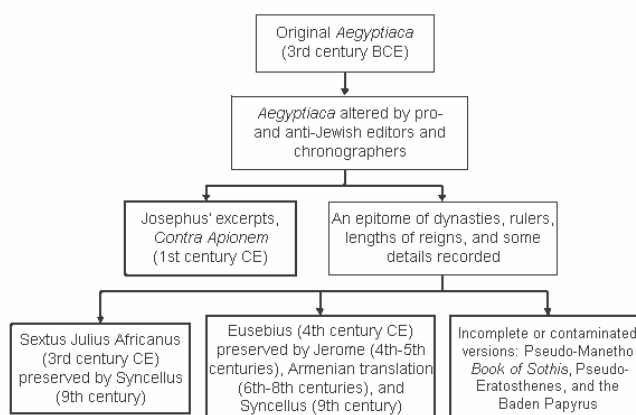
Manetho is believed to have authored the *Aegyptiaca* (Αἰγυπτιακά, genitive Αἰγυπτιακῶν)<sup>[7]</sup>, or *History of Egypt*, at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.<sup>[8]</sup> The work is of great interest to [Egyptologists](#) for evidence of the [chronology of the reigns](#) of the ancient [Pharaohs](#). It may have been the largest of all the works attributed to Manetho, and it is certainly the most important. It was organised chronologically and divided into three books (see below). The division of rulers into dynasties was an innovation. The term "[dynasty](#)" (Greek: δυναστεία *dynasteía*, abstractly meaning "governmental power") is employed to refer to a group of kings with a common origin. Thus, the author did not use the term in the modern sense, by bloodlines, but rather, introduced new dynasties whenever he detected some sort of discontinuity whether geographical ([Dynasty IV](#) from

[Memphis, Dynasty V](#) from [Elephantine](#)), or genealogical (especially in [Dynasty I](#), the author sometimes refers a successive pharaoh as the "son" of the previous to define what he means by "continuity"). Within the superstructure of a genealogical table, he fills in the gaps with substantial narratives of the Pharaonic kings. Some have suggested that *Aegyptiaca* was written as a competing account to [Herodotus' \*Histories\*, to provide a national history for Egypt that did not exist before. From this perspective, \*Against Herodotus\* may have been an abridged version or just a part of \*Aegyptiaca\* that circulated independently. Unfortunately, neither survives in its original form.](#)

## Authorship and date of composition

The earliest known mention of the *Aegyptiaca* is by the Jewish historian [Josephus](#) in his work [Contra Apionem](#) ("Against [Apion](#)"), which can be dated after AD 94. Before this, no writer whose work survives mentions the

*Aegyptiaca* in at least 300 years; this raises a serious question and legitimate doubt as to its real date and authorship. The notion that an official and authoritative history of Egypt composed in Greek at the request of [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](#) could go unnoticed or ignored by several professional scholars and Alexandrian librarians for centuries until Josephus is hardly credible. The work may have instead been written in the Roman period and not that long before it is first mentioned. If so, the real author, who some scholars speculate was the historian [Ptolemy of Mendes](#),<sup>[9]</sup> an educated Greek who was born and raised in Egypt and became a priest, may have attributed the contents of the three-volume history to Manetho in order to give the work credibility. According to [Clement of Alexandria](#) (c. 150 – c. 215 AD), Ptolemy of Mendes composed a history of Egypt in three books, during the time of [emperor Augustus](#).<sup>[10]</sup> Clement cites numerous



The transmission of the manethonian text.

authors in his writings and he had access to the library of Alexandria but he never mentions Manetho or Manetho's history in three books. The same may be said for [Tatian](#) (c. 120 – c. 180 AD), another extremely well read Christian author of the 2nd century AD. In his *Oratio ad Graecos* (Address to the Greeks), Tatian mentions only Ptolemy of Mendes as "the interpreter of their [Egyptian] affairs." He mentions virtually every writer who touched upon his subjects of interest, such as historical chronology, but no direct mention of Manetho is ever made. Tatian writes:

Of the Egyptians also there are accurate chronicles. Ptolemy, not the king, but a priest of Mendes, is the interpreter of their affairs. This writer, narrating the acts of the kings, says that the departure of the Jews from Egypt to the places whither they went occurred in the time of king Amosis, under the leadership of [Moses](#). He thus speaks: "Amosis lived in the time of king Inachus." After him, Apion the grammarian, a man most highly esteemed, in the fourth book of his *Aegyptiaca* (there are five books of his), besides many other things, says that Amosis destroyed [Avaris](#) in the time of the [Argive Inachus](#), as the Mendesian Ptolemy wrote in his annals.<sup>[11]</sup>

The name *Amosis* (Ἀμωσις) is the Greek rendering of the royal Egyptian name of Ahmose and it was used for the [first king](#) of the [18th Dynasty](#) in the edition of the *Aegyptiaca* that Eusebius consulted in order to make his epitome of the work.<sup>[12]</sup> According to [Tertullian](#) (c. 155 – c. 240 AD), Ptolemy of Mendes wrote later than and "followed" Manetho.<sup>[13]</sup> This statement has usually been taken to mean that Ptolemy of Mendes consulted and commented on Manetho in his writings. It may also mean that Ptolemy of Mendes is responsible for everything we currently think we know about Manetho. It is very unlikely that Tatian, Apion, and Clement were unaware of Manetho's history in three books, but according to Tatian Apion read and followed Ptolemy of Mendes when he wrote his own history of Egypt in five books. Hence it may be plausibly suggested that Tatian, Apion, and Clement all understood that Ptolemy of Mendes was the actual

composer of the work entitled the *Aegyptiaca* in three books and that Ptolemy of Mendes claimed to be the transmitter of Manetho's words. In this case the work was not an anonymous or pseudonymous work, but one wherein Ptolemy of Mendes explicitly claimed he was reproducing the words of an important Egyptian high priest who lived three centuries earlier.

The above theory of authorship and date of composition is further supported by a confusion in the *Suda*, a massive Byzantine encyclopedia made during the 10th century. According to the *Suda*, there were two authors named Manetho: one from [Mendes](#) and one from either [Sebennytus](#) or Diospolis ([Thebes](#)). Yet the *Suda* does not attribute the *Aegyptiaca* to either one. The Mendesian Manetho wrote about the preparation of *kyphi*, while the Manetho of Sebennytus or Diospolis wrote "*Enquiries into Nature; Apotelesmatica* in verse; and other astrological works." The *Suda* mentions authors who composed works in Greek during the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (such as the comic poet [Aristonymos](#)) but does not include Manetho. Hence the most that can be said is that the author of the *Suda* confused Ptolemy of Mendes with Manetho of Sebennytus and that he did not agree with the story repeated by [Syncellus](#) that the *Aegyptiaca* dates to the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus in the 3rd century BC. The work is first attested in the [Roman period](#). Nor are any of the other literary works in Greek that have been attributed to Manetho ever attested during the Ptolemaic period.

## Content and Structure

**Book 1** of Manetho's history began with an introduction or preamble that undoubtedly gave a brief biography of Manetho and stated the purpose for writing the work. In the preamble the author stated that the first [Hermes](#) who is identified as the god [Thoth](#) invented [writing](#).<sup>[14]</sup> The writings of this first Hermes were then translated into a new script called [hieroglyphics](#) by his son [Hermes Trismegistus](#) who is the second Hermes. The books written by this second Hermes were later collected and arranged by his son, the

god [Agathodaemon](#). According to the author, Agathodaemon only finished his editorial work of arranging the "sacred books" written by his father Hermes Trismegistus *after* the accession of Ptolemy Philadelphus. It was only at this point that Manetho was given access to these sources and then he utilized them to write his own detailed history of Egypt in Greek for the reigning Ptolemaic king. Syncellus writes:

In the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus he was styled high-priest of the [pagan temples of Egypt](#), and wrote from inscriptions in the Seriadic land, traced, he says, in sacred language and holy characters by Thoth, the first Hermes, and translated [by the second Hermes] in hieroglyphic characters. When the work had been arranged in books by Agathodaemon, son of the second Hermes and father of Tat, in the temple-shrines of Egypt, Manetho dedicated it to the above King Ptolemy II Philadelphus in his *Book of Sothis* ...<sup>[15]</sup>

- **Deities mentioned by Manetho in his preamble**

- [Thoth](#) — from the [ramesside](#) Temple of [Abydos](#).
- [Hermes](#) — [Capitoline Museums, Rome](#).
- [Hermes Trismegistus](#) — from the [Siena Cathedral](#).
- [Agathodaemon](#) — [Altes Museum, Berlin](#).

By *Book of Sothis* Syncellus must mean the *Aegyptiaca* by another title, for the actual [Book of Sothis](#) does not discuss the mythic reigns of the gods, demigods, and the spirits of the dead. Nor does it group the kings of Egypt into thirty dynasties as Syncellus says the *Book of Sothis* does. It appears Syncellus preferred to call Manetho's *Aegyptiaca* by the alternative title *Book of Sothis* but the reasons are not clear. A close study of the material in the actual [Book of Sothis](#) reveals that its author relied upon but intentionally deviated from the *Aegyptiaca* and is likely a forgery or hoax of unknown

date. Every king in the *Book of Sothis* after [Menes](#) is irreconcilable with the versions of Africanus and Eusebius.

Despite this confusion caused by Syncellus, the inferences being made in the preamble of the *Aegyptiaca* are nonetheless clear: the accession of Ptolemy II Philadelphus was considered by the author to be a major turning point in Egypt's history because it was only during this king's reign that the god Agathodaemon completed editing the "sacred books," and this was a prerequisite for Manetho to compose a history of Egypt in Greek. The chain of cultural transmission spans three generations of gods (Thoth, Hermes Trismegistus, and Agathodaemon) to the priest Manetho and the Greek script is now on a par with the hieroglyphs. Greek has now become the language and script through which Egypt's entire history is to be officially recorded in three books for Ptolemy II Philadelphus. It is as if the goal of Egyptian civilization was that it was destined to become the property of Greek civilization and be eclipsed by Hellenism. The author depicts Manetho as having helped facilitate this transfer in a most significant way by translating the contents of the "sacred books" of supernatural authorship into Greek, something which had not been done in any of the languages spoken by the various foreigners who dominated Egypt before the Greek conquest. Greek is now Egypt's new language and divinely ordained for translating the hieroglyphic writings of the god Hermes Trismegistus.

After this the author reproduces a letter supposedly written by Manetho to Ptolemy II Philadelphus:

To the great King Ptolemy Philadelphus Augustus. Greeting to my lord Ptolemy from Manetho, high-priest and scribe of the sacred shrines of Egypt, born at Sebennytus and dwelling at Heliopolis. It is my duty, almighty king, to reflect upon all such matters as you may desire me to investigate. So, as you are making researches concerning the future of the universe, in obedience to your command I shall place before you the



sacred books which I have studied, written by your forefather, Hermes Trismegistus. Farewell, I pray, my lord King.<sup>[16]</sup>

The letter is obviously a forgery, because in it Manetho addresses Ptolemy Philadelphus with the title [Augustus](#), which was not used for [Ptolemaic kings](#). This slip of the pen allows one to determine the *terminus post quem* or earliest possible date of composition, which is the reign of emperor [Augustus](#) (28 BC-[AD 14](#)) when Ptolemy of Mendes was active. After this letter the author proceeded to discuss the earliest times in Egypt, listing the reigns of the gods and [demigods](#) and the spirits of the dead as kings of Egypt. There were seven god-kings, then four lines of demigods, and then the spirits of the dead (evidently another type or different class of demigods) but the number and their names are not preserved in the fragmenta.

## GODS<sup>[17]</sup>

- [Hephaestus](#) ([Ptah](#))
- [Helios](#) (son of Hephaestus)
- Sosis ([Shu](#))
- [Cronus](#)
- [Osiris](#)
- [Typhon](#)
- [Orus](#) (son of Osiris and [Isis](#))

Total: 13,900 years

## DEMIGODS

- Demigods for 1255 years
- Demigods for 1817 years
- 30 Demigods of Memphis for 1790 years
- Demigods of This ([Thinis](#)) for 350 years

Total: 5,212 years

## SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

- Spirits of the dead for 5,813 years

Total: 5,813 years

Total for gods, demigods, and spirits of the dead: 24,925 years

The author does not transliterate the names of the gods, demigods, or the spirits of the dead but gives the [Greek equivalents by a convention](#) that predates him: (Egyptian) Ptah = (Greek) Hephaestus; [Ra](#) = Helios; Shu, son of Ra = Sosis; [Geb](#) = Chronos; [Asar](#) = Osiris; [Isis](#) = Demeter; [Set](#) = Typhon; [Horus](#) = Orus; [Thoth](#) = the first Hermes; etc. Stories about each of these gods, and possibly others, most likely would have been found here. This is one of the clues as to how [syncretism](#) developed between seemingly disparate religions.

As for the dynasties that followed the spirits of the dead, the author states that Egypt was ruled by five native or indigenous Egyptian tribes, and further that the country was ruled by a total thirty mortal dynasties (but in subsequent editions the number is thirty-one) prior to the Greek conquest by Alexander the Great. Book One discussed the first eleven dynasties: [Dynasties I–XI](#). These dynasties fall into the periods of Egyptian history Egyptologists refer to as the Old Kingdom, the First Intermediate Period, and the early Middle Kingdom.

**Book 2** covered [Dynasties XII–XVIII](#) in the first edition which grouped the kings of [Dynasty XIX](#) in with [Dynasty XVIII](#). Book Two discussed the end of the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period, the [Hyksos](#) invasion, and then their expulsion and the establishment of the New Kingdom by [Ahmose I](#), the founder of [Dynasty XVIII](#). This dynasty, in the first edition of the work, would have ended with Thouoris (Egyptian:

[Twosret](#), Twosre, or Tausret) who is erroneously mistaken by the author for being a male king and the same person as the [Polybus of Thebes](#) mentioned by Homer ([Odyssey](#) IV, 126). The author dates the fall of Troy to the reign of Thouoris.

Book Two was also of particular interest to Josephus, where he equated the [Hyksos](#) or "shepherd-kings" with the ancient [Israelites](#) who made their exodus out of Egypt (*Apion* 1.82–92). Josephus even includes a brief etymological discussion of the word "Hyksos" by noting that the term is defined differently by Manetho in the conflicting editions of his history. Josephus favored Manetho's "captive shepherds" (*Apion* 1.91), apparently from the first edition, over his "shepherd-kings" (*Apion* 1.82–83) in the subsequent second and third editions. Evidently in the first edition the Hyksos were suspected by the author of being invaders from Arabia, but in the second and third editions they are confidently identified as Phoenicians (i.e. Canaanites).

According to Manetho, they were the builders of Jerusalem (previously known as Salem) after their expulsion from Egypt. This tradition may suggest that the Hyksos were the same as the [Jebusites](#) (a Canaanite tribe) of the biblical record.

Book Two also included the Leper Story, at least in the earliest edition, which Josephus quoted and criticized at considerable length.<sup>[18]</sup> The Egyptian grammarian Apion (BC 30–20 – c. 45–48 AD) knew a modified version of this story but he dated the episode not to the New Kingdom but to the first year of the 7th Olympiad (i.e. 752 BC).<sup>[19]</sup> Since it is difficult to believe Apion would contradict "Manetho" it is reasonable to assume that the author of the *Aegyptiaca* revised this tale and moved it into the reign of



Queen [Twosret](#) (c. 1191–1189 BC), erroneously mistaken by Manetho for being the homeric [Polybus of Thebes](#).

one of the kings listed in Book Three in the subsequent editions of his work. Apion would thus have been relying upon the revised second or third edition of the *Aegyptiaca* for the Leper Story and his dating the episode to the 8th century BC.

**Book 3** continued with the "XIXth dynasty" of Egypt (i.e. [Dynasty XX](#) in the second and third editions) and concludes with the "XXXth dynasty" (i.e. [Dynasty XXXI](#) in the second and third editions). The [Saite](#) Renaissance occurs in the "XXVth dynasty" (i.e. [Dynasty XXVI](#)), while the "XXVIth dynasty" (i.e. [Dynasty XXVII](#)) involves the Persian Anshanite rule of Cambyses and then Barziya, sons of Cyrus the Great. Barziya was denounced as a Magian (the Magians were a tribe of Medes) fraud by his successor who overthrew him and the author accepted this charge and chose to call him simply *Magi*.<sup>[20]</sup> This king is omitted altogether in the author's third edition which Africanus used.<sup>[21]</sup> The Persian [Achaemenid](#) regime of Darius Hystaspes and his descendants follow. Three more local dynasties are mentioned, though they must have overlapped with [Persian](#) rule despite the sequential order in Manetho. The "XXXth dynasty" consisted of three more Persian rulers, and some have suggested this dynasty was added to Manetho's history by a later editor. Both [Moses of Chorene](#) and [Jerome](#) end at [Nectanebo II](#) ("last king of the Egyptians" and "destruction of the Egyptian monarchy" respectively), but the Persian Dynasty XXX = XXXI fits within the author's schemata of narrating Egyptian history from the earliest times down through the *dynasteia* to the eve of the Greek supremacy and is most likely original.

The numbering system for the dynasties used in the first edition was revised by the author in subsequent editions but he almost certainly concluded Book Three with Darius III. He also mentioned the capture and execution of Darius III by Alexander the Great,<sup>[22]</sup> but this was an error on the author's part and removed by him in the final edition.<sup>[23]</sup>

Three editions of this work by a single author is further evidenced in the

names given to the founder of [Dynasty XVIII](#). In the first edition his name is erroneously and curiously called *Tethmosis* (Τέθμωσις).<sup>[24]</sup> In the second edition the author revised this to *Amosis* (Ἀμωσις).<sup>[25]</sup> Finally, in his third edition he corrected this to *Amos* (Ἀμως)<sup>[26]</sup> which is the most accurate of all three Greek renderings of the name *Ahmose* in ancient Egyptian.

For more exact composition dates, if 28 BC is taken as the earliest date possible for the first edition then the second and third editions were probably made in ca. 18 BC and ca. 8 BC, respectively. These dates can be backed up by the story of the oracular prophetic lamb. According to a Demotic text dated to the reign of emperor Augustus a "talking lamb" in the time of Bocchoris (Egyptian: [Bakenranef](#)) predicted a 990-year period of hardships in Egypt following an invasion from Assyria. It is possible this story has much older antecedents but positing a 300-year gap in the record would not be erring on the side of caution. One should rather argue that the composition of the *Aegyptiaca* of Manetho and its subsequent revisions were made by a single author during the lengthy reign of emperor Augustus. This author, who is very likely to be Ptolemy of Mendes, evidently claimed he was reproducing the words of a high priest named Manetho of Sebennytus who supposedly lived three centuries earlier and wrote at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

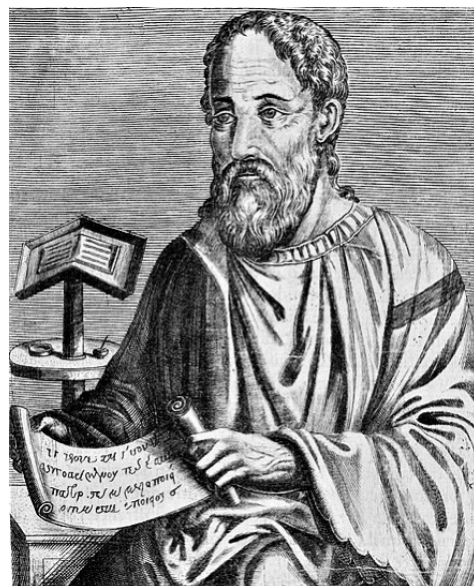
## Transmission and reception

The greatest problem with a close study of Manetho's history, despite the reliance of Egyptologists on him for their reconstructions of the Egyptian dynasties, is that not only was the *Aegyptiaca* not preserved as a whole, but it is believed to have become involved in a rivalry between advocates of Egyptian, Jewish, and Greek histories in the form of supporting [polemics](#), although there is actually no direct evidence for this. It is however true that during this period disputes raged concerning the oldest civilizations, and so Manetho's history was probably excerpted during this time for use in this argument. Material similar to what has been attributed to Manetho's has

been found in Lysimakhos of Alexandria, a brother of [Philo](#), and it has been suggested that this material may have been modified and inserted into Manetho. Again this suggestion is without any real evidence to support it.

As mentioned, the earliest attestation of Manetho's writings is found in Josephus' [Contra Apionem](#) ("Against Apion") nearly three centuries after the history of Egypt was supposedly commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Even here, it is clear Josephus knew and consulted different editions of the same work and he constructed a [polemic](#) against Manetho by exploiting some of these differences. For example, the earliest edition of the work did not treat the kings of [Dynasty XVIII](#) and [Dynasty XIX](#) as two separate regimes but as one dynasty. *Apion* 1.95–97 is a list of kings with no narratives until 1.98, while running across these two dynasties without any hint of a break. Josephus accuses Manetho for interpolating a fictitious king in this dynasty named *Amenophis* (Ἀμένωφίς), fictitious because he is listed immediately after the 66-year reign of Ramesses II (Ραμψής) but Manetho did not give him a reign length, which is something he did for every other king. Even if this king is the same Manetho's *Ammenephtis* in XIX.3 who is credited with 40 years of reign in the edition Eusebius used and 20 years in the edition Africanus used, Josephus seems to have a legitimate point that inconsistencies between the various editions cast doubt on the validity of the Leper Story.

After Josephus wrote, an [epitome](#) or summary of Manetho's history was made by [Sextus Julius Africanus](#) in the 3rd century. [Eusebius of Caesarea](#) later made his own summary as well, but he used a version of the work that differed from the one Africanus used. Both summaries involved preserving the outlines of the "Manethonian" dynasties and a few details deemed significant. For the first ruler of the first Dynasty, [Menes](#), we learn that "he was snatched



and killed by a hippopotamus". The extent to which the epitome preserved the author's original writing is unclear, so caution must be exercised.

[Eusebius of Caesarea](#) († 339/340 AD) summarized Manetho's work.

The version of the epitome in Africanus is usually considered more reliable than the one made by Eusebius, but there is no assurance that this is always the case. Eusebius in turn was preserved by [Jerome](#) in his Latin translation, an [Armenian](#) translation, and by [George Syncellus](#). Syncellus recognized the similarities between Eusebius and Africanus, so he placed them side by side in his work, *Ecloga Chronographica*. These last four copies are what remains of the epitome of Manetho. Other significant fragments include [Malalas'](#) *Chronographia* and *Excerpta Latina Barbari* ("Excerpts in Bad Latin").

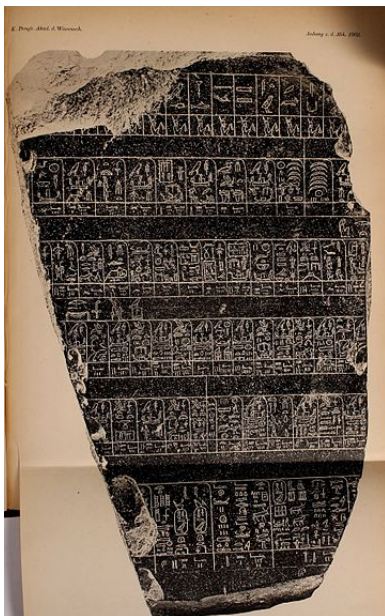
## Sources and methods

The methods of the author of the *Aegyptiaca*, although he claims "sacred books" composed by the god Hermes Trismegistus were his primary source, involved the use of king-lists to provide a structure for his history. There were precedents to his writing available in Egypt (plenty of which have survived to this day), and his [Hellenistic](#) and Egyptian background would have been influential in his writing. Josephus records him admitting to using "nameless oral tradition" (*Apion* 1.105) and "myths and legends" (*Apion* 1.229) for his account, and there is no reason to doubt this, as admissions of this type were common among historians of that era. His familiarity with Egyptian legends is indisputable, but how the author came to know Greek is more open to debate if we are dealing with a priest who lived in the early Ptolemaic period. In any case, the author must have been familiar with Herodotus, and in some cases, he even attempted to synchronize Egyptian history with Greek (for example, equating King [Memnon](#) with [Amenophis](#), and Armesis with [Danaos](#)). This suggests the author was also familiar with the Greek [Epic Cycle](#) (for which the Ethiopian Memnon is slain by [Achilles](#) during the [Trojan War](#)) and the history of Argos (in [Aeschylus'](#) *Suppliants*). Because it is difficult to believe these could be

from the hand of a native Egyptian priest from as early as the 3rd century it has also been suggested that they were later [interpolations](#), particularly when the epitome was being written. However, if the author was really an educated Greek from Mendes who lived and wrote in the time of Augustus (BC 28-14 AD) then we could expect him to be interested and thoroughly familiar with the Greek Epic Cycle. He wrote in fluent [Koiné](#) Greek which would be somewhat unexpected for a native Egyptian who lived in the early 3rd century BC but not for an educated Greek born in Mendes in the 1st century BC.

## King lists

The king-list that the author of the *Aegyptiaca* had access to is unknown to us, but of the surviving king-lists, the one most similar to his is the [Turin Royal Canon](#) (or *Turin Papyrus*). The oldest source with which we can compare to Manetho are the [Old Kingdom Annals](#) (c. 2500-2200 BC). From the [New Kingdom](#) are the [list at Karnak](#) (constructed by order of [Thutmose](#)), two at [Abydos](#) (by [Seti I](#) and [Ramesses II](#)— the latter a duplicate but updated version of the former), and the [Saqqara list](#) by the priest Tenry.



The [Palermo stone](#) (25th century BC).

The provenance of the *Old Kingdom Annals* is unknown, surviving as the [Palermo Stone](#). The differences between the *Annals* and Manetho are great. The *Annals* only reach to the fifth dynasty, but its pre-dynastic rulers are listed as the kings of [Lower Egypt](#) and kings of [Upper Egypt](#). By contrast, Manetho lists several Greek and Egyptian gods beginning with [Hephaistos](#) and [Helios](#). Secondly, the *Annals* give annual reports of the activities of the kings, while there is little probability that Manetho would have been able to go into such detail.

The New Kingdom lists are each selective in their



listings: that of [Seti I](#), for instance, lists seventy-six kings from Dynasties I to XIX omitting the [Hyksos](#) rulers and those associated with the [heretic Akhenaten](#). The [Saqqara list](#), contemporaneous with [Ramesses II](#), has fifty-eight names, with similar omissions. If Manetho used these lists at all, he would have been unable to get all of his information from them alone, due to the selective nature of their records. Verbrugghe and Wickersham argue:

[...] The purpose of these lists was to cover the walls of a sacred room in which the reigning Pharaoh (or other worshiper, as in the case of Tenry and his Saqqara list) made offerings or prayers to his or her predecessors, imagined as ancestors. Each royal house had a particular traditional list of these "ancestors," different from that of the other houses. The purpose of these lists is not historical but religious. It is not that they are trying and failing to give a complete list. They are not trying at all. Seti and Ramesses did not wish to make offerings to [Akhenaten](#), [Tutankhamen](#), or [Hatshepsut](#), and that is why they are omitted, not because their existence was unknown or deliberately ignored in a broader historical sense. For this reason, the Pharaonic king-lists were generally wrong for Manetho's purposes, and we should commend Manetho for not basing his account on them (2000:105).

These large [stelae](#) stand in contrast to the Turin Royal Canon (like Saqqara, contemporaneous with Ramesses II), written in [hieratic](#) script. Like Manetho, it begins with the gods, and seems to be an epitome very similar in spirit and style to Manetho. The opposite side of the papyrus includes government records. Verbrugghe and Wickersham suggest that a comprehensive list like this would be necessary for a government office "to date contracts, leases, debts, titles, and other instruments (2000:106)" and so could not have been selective the way the king-lists in temples were. Despite numerous differences between the Turin Canon and Manetho, the format must have been available to the author. As a priest (or chief priest), he would have had access to practically all written materials in the temple. This was true of Manetho assuming he existed and was an historical chief

priest of the 3rd century BC, and of Ptolemy of Mendes, a priest in Egypt during the 1st century BC and the early years of the 1st century AD.

While the precise origins for Manetho's king-list are unknown, it was certainly a Northern [Lower Egyptian](#) one. This can be deduced most noticeably from the author's selection of the kings for the [Third Intermediate Period](#). The author consistently includes the [Tanite Dynasty 21](#) and [Dynasty 22](#) lineage in his *Epitome* such as [Psusennes I](#), [Amenemope](#) and even such short-lived kings like [Amenemnisu](#) (5 years) and [Osochor](#) (6 years). In contrast, he ignores the existence of [Theban](#) kings such as [Osorkon III](#), [Takelot III](#), [Harsiese A](#) and [Pinedjem I](#) and kings from [Middle Egypt](#) like [Peftjaubast](#) of [Herakleopolis](#). This implies that the author derived the primary sources for his *Epitome* from a local city's temple library in the region of the River [Nile Delta](#) which was controlled by the Tanite-based Dynasty 21 and Dynasty 22 kings. The Middle and Upper Egyptian [Pharaohs](#) did not have any effect upon this specific region of the Delta; hence their exclusion from Manetho's king-list.

## Transcriptions of Pharaonic names

By the Middle Kingdom, Egyptian kings each had [five different names](#):

- The "Horus" name
- The "Two Ladies" name
- The "Gold Horus" name
- The *praenomen* or "throne name"
- A *nomen*, the personal name given at birth (also called a "Son of Ra" name as it was preceded by *Sa Re'*).

Some Pharaohs also had multiple examples within these names, such as [Rameses II](#) who used six Horus names at various times. Because Manetho's transcriptions agree with many king-lists, it is generally accepted that he was reliant on one or more such lists, and it is not clear to what

extent he was aware of the different pharaonic names of rulers long past (and he had alternate names for some). Not all the different names for each king have been uncovered.

The author of the *Aegyptiaca* did not choose consistently from the five different types of names, but in some cases, a straightforward transcription is possible. Egyptian *Men* or *Meni* (Son of Ra and king-list names) becomes *Menes* (officially, this is Pharaoh I.1 [Narmer](#)—"I" represents Dynasty I, and "1" means the first king of that dynasty), while *Menkauhor/Menkahor* (Throne and king-list names, the Horus name is *Menkhau* and the Son of Ra name is "Kaiu Horkaiu[...]") is transcribed as *Menkheres* (V.7 [Menkauhor](#)). Others involve a slight abbreviation, such as *A'akheperen-Re'* (Throne and king-list names) becoming *Khebron* (XVIII.4 [Thutmose II](#)). A few more have consonants switched for unknown reasons, as for example *Tausret* becoming *Thouoris* (XIX.6 Twosre/[Tausret](#)). One puzzle is in the conflicting names of some early dynastic kings— though they did not have all five titles, they still had multiple names. I.3/4 [Djer](#), whose Son of Ra name is *Itti* is considered the basis for the author's I.2 Athothis. I.4 Oenephes then is a puzzle unless it is compared with Djer's Gold Horus name, *Ennebu*. It may be that Manetho duplicated the name or he had a source for a name unknown to us. Finally, there are some names where the association is a complete mystery to us. V.6 Rhathoures/Niuserre's complete name was *Set-ib-tawi Set-ib-Nebty Netjeri-bik-nebu Ni-user-Re' Ini Ni-user-Re'*, but the author writes it as Rhathoures. It may be that some pharaohs were known by names other than even just the five official ones.



Part of the [royal titulary](#) of Pharaoh [Psamtik II](#) (595–589 BC) with his "Horus" name, *praenomen* and *nomen* — in [Aswan](#). From pharaoh to pharaoh, Manetho mixed, shortened or [hellenized](#) these distinct names.

Thus, how the author of the *Aegyptiaca* transcribed these names varies, and as such we cannot reconstruct the original Egyptian forms of the

names. However, because of the simplicity with which the author transcribed long names (see above), they were preferred until original king-lists began to be uncovered in Egyptian sites, translated, and corroborated. The author's division of dynasties, however, is still used as a basis for all Egyptian discussions.

## Similarities with Berossos

Most of the ancient witnesses group the author together with [Berossos](#), and treat the pair as similar in intent, and it is not a coincidence that those who preserved the bulk of their writing are largely the same (Josephus, Africanus, Eusebius, and Syncellus). Certainly both adopted the historiographical approach of the Greek historians Herodotus and [Hesiod](#), who preceded them. While the subjects of their history are different, the form is similar, using chronological royal genealogies as the structure for the narratives. Both extend their histories far into the mythic past, to give the [gods](#) rule over the earliest ancestral histories.

Syncellus goes so far as to insinuate that "Manetho" lived later than Berossos and copied his date for the beginning of history:

If one carefully examines the underlying chronological lists of events, one will have full confidence that the design of both is false, as both Berossos and Manetho, as I have said before, want to glorify each his own nation, Berossos the [Chaldean](#), Manetho the Egyptian. One can only stand in amazement that they were not ashamed to place the beginning of their incredible story in each in one and the same year.<sup>[27]</sup>

Manetho of Sebennythus, chief priest of the accursed temples of Egypt, who lived later than Berossos in the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus, writes to this Ptolemy, with the same utterance of lies as Berossos...<sup>[28]</sup>

While it does seem an incredible coincidence, the reliability of the report is unclear. Syncellus rejected the reasoning for assuming the period from the



***Berosus Caldaeus***

Imaginary portrait of [Berossus](#).

creation down to the Flood was the same number of years in both histories according to the contortions on the part of Christian writers who came after Eusebius, writers who rejected Eusebius' interpretation of Manetho. Berossos described the period from the first human-king Aloros to the tenth king Xisouthros who survived the [Flood](#) as having lasted 120 *saroi* (3,600 year periods), giving an estimate of 432,000 years from Aloros to the Flood in the days of Xisouthros.<sup>[29]</sup> This was unacceptable to all

Christian commentators, but it was assumed by scholars who lived later than Eusebius that Berossos meant solar days. 432,000 divided by 365 days gives a rough figure of 1,183½ years before the Flood. According to Syncellus this was nonsense.

For Manetho, even more numeric contortions ensued. With no flood mentioned, the monk Pandorus assumed that Manetho's first era describing the gods represented the part of the ante-diluvian age beginning with the Watchers who descended from heaven. Secondly, Pandorus took the period of the gods and demigods for a chronological count and omitted the spirits of the dead. Six dynasties of gods totalled 11,985 years, while the nine demigods came to 858 years. Again, this was too long for the Biblical account, so two different units of conversion were used. The 11,985 years were considered to be synodic months of 29½ days each (a conversion used in antiquity, for example by [Diodorus Siculus](#)), which comes out to 969 years. The latter period, however, was divided by Pandorus into seasons, or quarters of a year, and reduces to 214½ years (another conversion attested to by Diodorus). The sum of these comes out to 1,183½ years, a coincidence with Berossos which Syncellus condemned as being forced.

Although Syncellus rejected both Manetho's and Berossos' incredible time-spans he did not dismiss the efforts Eusebius to harmonize their numbers

with the [Bible](#). He only dismissed the efforts of commentators who disagreed with Eusebius. Ironically as we see, Syncellus believed that Manetho used the same starting point for history as Berossos did. It is not clear how he reached this conclusion. We know Syncellus did not accept that Egypt and Babylon were ruled by any kings prior to the biblical Flood. Nor that Egypt was even inhabited before the Flood. He apparently assumed that the number of years Berossos stated in Book One of his history, i.e. the years that had elapsed from creation down to the Aloros, the first of ten mortal kings who ruled for a combined total of 120 *saroi* (432,000 years) in the ante-diluvian period, was identical to the years Manetho gave to the mythic kings. Book Two of Berossos's history began with the reign of Aloros and went down to the reign of Nabonassaros (747–734 BC).

Now the edition of the *Aegyptiaca* that Eusebius used stated that the period of the gods, demigods, and spirits of the dead was 24,925 years. It is possible that a different edition gave a different duration for this period, one that agreed with the number of *saroi* Berossos assigned to the period before Aloros. If this is correct, Syncellus would have understood that the first mortal king in Manetho's list, Menes, began his reign in the same year as Aloros, the first mortal king in Berossos' list. Hence Syncellus' charge that "Manetho" copied Berossos for the year date in which mortals began to be kings in Babylonia and Egypt, respectively.

## **The effect of the *Aegyptiaca***

If it is true that Manetho wrote a major history of Egypt at the royal request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus the *Aegyptiaca* was a massive failure. Herodotus' *Histories* continued to provide the standard account in the Hellenistic world, that is until [Diodorus](#) wrote his voluminous history. It may also have been that some nationalistic sentiments in Manetho provided the impetus for his writing, but that is conjecture. It is clear, however, that when it was written, it would have proven to be the authoritative account of the history of Egypt,

superior to Herodotus in every way. The completeness and systematic nature in which he collected his sources was unprecedented. This points to the Roman period for the original date of composition, for Diodorus makes not the slightest mention of Manetho in his history and he visited Alexandria in 60/59 BC. This is not so much an argument from silence since a professional scholar like Diodorus could not possibly have intentionally ignored, or been completely ignorant of, such an important contribution had it existed at the time of his visit to Egypt. His lengthy and detailed discussion of Egyptian history and chronology contradicts Manetho's *Aegyptiaca* at virtually every turn. Thus one may safely conclude that the work was not composed until after Diodorus' visit to Egypt in 60/59 BC, and after his history ends in 30 BC.

Syncellus recognised its importance when recording Eusebius and Africanus, and even provided a separate conflicting witness from the [Book of Sothis](#). But the author of the *Aegyptiaca*, whether he is genuinely Manetho of Sebennytus of the 3rd century BC, and this is unlikely, or Ptolemy of Mendes of the 1st century BC claiming to reproduce the words of the celebrated Manetho from three centuries earlier, more likely, he should not be judged on the factuality of the [Book of Sothis](#) but on the method he used to record history, and in this, he was as successful as Herodotus and Hesiod.

Finally, in modern times, the effect of this work is still visible in the way Egyptologists divide the dynasties of the pharaohs. The French explorer and Egyptologist, [Jean-François Champollion](#), reportedly held a copy of Manetho's lists in one hand as he attempted to decipher the [hieroglyphs](#) he encountered (though it probably gave him more frustration than joy, considering the way the Egyptian author transcribed the names in Greek). Most modern scholarship that mentions the names of the pharaohs will render both the modern transcription and Manetho's version, and Manetho's names are even preferred to more authentic ones in some cases. Today, his division of dynasties is used universally, and this has permeated

the study of nearly all royal genealogies by the conceptualization of succession in terms of dynasties or houses.



- Drawing of the [cartouches](#) in the [Abydos King List](#) (1280s BC): the manethonian [partition into dynasties](#) is clearly absent and the rulers follow each other without interruption.

## See also

- [Berossus](#)
- [History of Ancient Egypt](#)
- [List of lists of ancient kings](#)
- [Plutarch](#)
- [Ptolemaic dynasty](#)

## Notes

1. *Manetho* (2018). [Delphi Complete Works of Manetho](#). Delphi Classics. p. 251. [ISBN 978-1-78656-394-1](#).
2. <https://st-takla.org/books/pauline-today/coptic-language/egyptian.html>
3. Waddell (1940), p. ix, n. 1.
4. [Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum](#) viii. 1007: "MANEΘΩΝ"
5. Waddell (1940), pp. 188-189.
6. Tacitus, *Histories* 4.83; Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 28.
7. *Manetho with an English translation by W. G. Waddell* (part of *The*



*Loeb Classical Library: Manetho – Ptolemy, Tetrabiblos*), 1964, pp. xiv, 98f.

8. Waddell (1940), pp. 10-11; 210-211.
9. Palmer (1861), pp. 417 ff.
10. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*, 1.21; cf. Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 10.10.490C.
11. Tatian, *Or. Contr. Graec.* 38.
12. Waddell (1940), pp. 114-115.
13. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol III, Part I: Chapter XIX.
14. Waddell (1940), pp. 208-209.
15. Waddell (1940), pp. 208-209.
16. Waddell (1940), pp. 210-211.
17. This listing of gods, demigods, and spirits of the dead derives from the edition of Manetho's history which Eusebius used, cf. Waddell (1940), pp. 2-9. Syncellus (*Ecloga Chronographica*, p. 32) writes that a different listing, one that omitted the spirits of the dead, appeared in a different edition of Manetho, cf. Waddell (1940), pp. 10-17. Syncellus accepted the former list as given by Eusebius, and also Eusebius' theory that the Egyptian years were schematic lunar months of 30 during the period of the immortals, but Syncellus rejected the other list of immortals which omitted the spirits of the dead. He also rejected the attempts of Christian writers such as the Egyptian monk Pandorus (c. 395-408 AD) to manipulate its total of 11,985 years for the gods and 858 years for demigods to be a period of only 1,183½ solar years.
18. *Apion* 1.227-287.
19. *Apion* 2.2 §17.
20. Waddell, pp. 176-177.
21. Waddell (1940), pp. 174-175.
22. Waddell (1940), pp. 186-187.
23. Waddell (1940), pp. 184-185.
24. *Apion* 1.94, 231.
25. Waddell (1940), pp. 114-115.

26. Waddell (1940), pp. 110-111.
27. Syncellus, *Ecloga Chronographica*, p. 30.
28. Syncellus, *Ecloga Chronographica*, p. 32.
29. Syncellus, *Ecloga Chronographica*, pp. 53-56.

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- [Chronologie de Manéthon](#) showing the names given by Manetho and the names used now
- [Manetho: History of Egypt, Sacred Book, etc.](#)
- [Who's Who in Ancient Egypt: Manetho](#)
- ["The First Egyptian Narrative History: Manetho and Greek Historiography", ZPE 127 \(1999\), pp.93-116 by J. Dillery](#)