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Adoption Contract

Edward Bleiberg: This is one of the Brooklyn Museum's Aramaic papyri. The papyri were found on Elephantine Island and are written in a language that's called Aramaic, in an alphabet similar to Hebrew. Papyrus is made from a plant that grows along the banks of the Nile. And you can see, if you look closely, the individual stalks of the papyrus plant, which have been cut very thin and then pressed together to make, essentially, a sheet of paper.

The papyri that we have from Elephantine all belong to one family. And it represents their family archives. The family was not your typical ancient Egyptian family, because the husband was Jewish and the wife was Egyptian, a woman named Tamut. And they lived in a community that was made up of Jews and Persians and also Egyptians.

We have their marriage contract. We have the deed from when they bought their house. We have the deed from when they sold their house. We have also objects that have to do with the fact that Tamut, the woman in this couple, was a slave originally. We have the document that finally gave her her freedom.