Announcer:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap:

Dr. Julia Troche is an Egyptologist who delves into the realm of ancient Egypt and Assyria. One of her main research areas examines the intersection of religion and society in the ancient world. It involves thinking about how religious and social practices, norms and ideology confronted each other or worked together.

Last December, Troche, who’s an assistant professor of history at Missouri State University, published her first book. It’s titled *Death, Power, and Apotheosis in Ancient Egypt: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*. The time period of these kingdoms is about 2,700 to 1,700 B.C. I’m Emily Yeap.

Troche joins me today to discuss her book.

Dr. Julia Troche:

The book title is actually pretty “on the nose” for what the book is about. It's based on my dissertation research that I did at Brown University, but it really took on a whole new life onto itself and I changed quite a bit of it into making this book.

Emily Yeap:

Troche explains the books three main pillars: death, power and apotheosis.

Dr. Julia Troche:

Apotheosis is the term that people maybe aren’t as familiar with, and that really just means the process of becoming deified, of becoming a god. In ancient Egypt, the dead were active efficacious beings, meaning they could cause you illness and they can haunt you. They’re basically sort of an equivalent to ghosts, but also, the ancestors could protect you and help you.

And so, they’re not too dissimilar, the ancestors of ancient Egypt from the ancestors we encounter today. In some ways, some people would become particularly sort of famed and popular and would become something more akin to saints. And I found that really interesting and intriguing and I wondered what allows for somebody who was mortal, who was man—and we are talking here about all men—to become a god and how does that happen? That's a pretty big transition. So, I was really interested in exploring that further, and that’s how I got into the topic of the book; it was just this interest in the role of the dead and the daily lives of ancient Egyptians, and in particular, how this process of deification could happen.

The book looks at death and it talks about mortuary culture and the sort of “average” mortuary culture that is everything to do with the funeral, and death, and worshipping the dead, and venerating the dead in ancient Egypt. Power, then, talks about the role that the king played in mortuary culture and how some of these deified dead, or what I call “esteemed dead,” can subvert that power and challenge, at times, the king’s royal power. And then apotheosis, that’s the last component, which is, again, deification and that’s speaking to examples and case studies of deification of dead individuals from ancient Egypt.

Emily Yeap:

By reading the book, Troche hopes readers can relate to the similarities with ancient Egyptians.

Dr. Julia Troche:

I think one of the things I really hope people take away from my book is the fact that the ancient Egyptians are very similar to us in so many ways and the way that they engaged with their dead, with their ancestors, is actually very similar and reminiscent of how many cultures today engage with their ancestors and their dead.

I really hope people get a sense of familiarity and that they think of ancient Egypt as a little bit more accessible after reading the book. I think about feasting with the dead is a practice that happened in ancient Egypt but also happens at Dio de los Muertos and is seen as part of lots of modern traditions today throughout the world. And so, this isn’t something quite so far away and esoteric as one might think.

Emily Yeap:

Readers will find the characters highlighted in the case studies particularly engaging.

Dr. Julia Troche:

There were some deified dead that had just these huge, robust, complicated, interesting practices of worship, and then some individuals, like this individual I look at named Mahu, has very limited evidence that speaks to his deification. But what he does have,d is he has a whole bunch of people who name their sons after him, and they don’t just name their sons Mahu, but they name their sons things like “Mahu is praised” or “may Mahu be satisfied” or “Mahu is great.” This is what we call theophoric name constructions. They're basically just names that invoke or call upon a deity, and in this case, the deity is this local man who is worshipped and revered and honored by his community named Mahu. And so, everybody in that town or in that village wanted to name their kids after this great, local folk hero.

Emily Yeap:

She believes readers will appreciate the diverse types of materials used to access the deified dead.

Dr. Julia Troche:

We’re looking at epigraphy which are inscriptions, we’re looking at graffiti, we’re looking at temples and tombs. The whole, sort of, world of ancient Egypt is drawn upon in a book, and so, if you’re interested in Egyptian texts or material culture or religion or literature, it’s all in there.

Emily Yeap:

You can find *Death, Power, and Apotheosis in Ancient Egypt: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* online at Cornell University Press or Amazon. I’m Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer:

For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.