Women and society in Greek and Roman Egypt
A sourcebook

A wealth of evidence for the lives of ordinary men and women – from texts (including personal letters) written on papyrus and other materials to objects of everyday use and funerary portraits – has survived from the Graeco-Roman period of Egyptian history. But much of this unparalleled resource has been available only to specialists because of the difficulty of reading and interpreting it. Now eleven leading scholars in this field have collaborated to make available to students and other non-specialists a selection of over three hundred texts translated from Greek, Latin and Egyptian, as well as more than fifty illustrations, documenting the lives of women within this society, from queens to priestesses, property-owners to slave-girls, from birth through motherhood to death. Each item is accompanied by full explanatory notes and bibliographical references.

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Mummy portrait of Eirene
Women and society in
Greek and Roman Egypt

A sourcebook

Edited by

JANE ROWLANDSON

with the collaboration of
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Frontispiece: Mummy portrait of Eirene
Portrait of a young woman, dressed in a vermilion mantle over a green tunic, wearing hooped earrings decorated with pearls and crowned with a wreath of gold leaves and berries. Her hairstyle, with close curls and curled tresses behind her ears, suggests a date in the mid-first century AD, although the earrings and dress may point to the reign of Trajan (see Walker and Bierbrier, 1997, cat. 111). The strongly Greek style of portraiture contrasts with the inscription in Egyptian Demotic script across her neck, which appears to read: ‘Eirene, daughter of Silvanus, whose mother is Senpnoutis. May her soul rise before Osiris-Sokar, the great god, lord of Abydos, for ever’ (cf. 6.279(b)). The subject’s name is rendered in Demotic ‘Hrn’, which possibly represents Greek ‘Helene’ rather than ‘Eirene’. Her father’s name, if correctly read as ‘Silvanus’ (Slwns), is Roman, supporting the later of the possible dates. Traces of bitumen imprinted with linen cloth show where the portrait on its wooden panel was inserted into the mummy wrappings. See also Borg (1996), 30, 151.
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Preface

This sourcebook originated from an idea of Deborah Hobson to make available to non-specialists some of the extraordinary range of evidence for women’s lives in Graeco-Roman Egypt. In the making, it has grown in length and complexity. The editorial material and bibliographical references may, it is hoped, be of use to readers capable of reading Greek sources in the original, as well as to those completely dependent on the translations.

All eleven contributors have collaborated closely on its construction, criticising one another’s work at every stage. Deborah Hobson coordinated the earlier stages of assembly until administrative responsibilities obliged her to withdraw from her editorial role. Each main chapter was initially compiled by a pair of contributors: Chapter 2, Dominic Rathbone and Dorothy Thompson; Chapters 3 and 6, Ann Hanson and Peter van Minnen; Chapter 4, Roger Bagnall and Jim Keenan; and Chapter 5, Alan Bowman and myself; I also drafted Chapter 1. The texts in Egyptian were provided by Willy Clarysse (Demotic) and Terry Wilfong (Coptic), with additional contributions by John Baines and W. John Tait. For most of the completed text, it would be impossible to identify a single author, but each chapter retains a distinctive ‘flavour’ imparted by the initial compilers, despite the later additions, alterations and rearrangements of material.

We have also received assistance or advice from many other colleagues, including Antti Arjava, Sally-Ann Ashton, Jean Bingen, Euphrosyne Doxiadis, Bernard Gredley, Michael Sharp, Michael Trapp, and Susan Walker. To these, and to John Baines and John Tait for their help with the Egyptian texts, we are immensely grateful. Girton College Publications Fund generously contributed towards the cost of illustrations for chapter 2. Finally, I must add my personal thanks to the other contributors, whose expertise, on which I have frequently drawn during my editorial work, has enriched my own understanding of Graeco-Roman Egypt. The book’s remaining shortcomings are my responsibility.

Jane Rowlandson
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The Egyptian Museum, Cairo Plates 33(a), 36
The Syndics, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge Plates 1, 6, 8
The Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge Plate 34
The Syndics of Cambridge University Library Plate 15
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Revel Coles Plate 15
Euphrosyne Doxiadis Plate 39
Machteld Mellink Plate 3
Abbreviations

Full details of works cited by author and date may be found in the Bibliography. Most ancient texts are cited by their standard abbreviations: for papyri and related works, see J. F. Oates et al., Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets, fourth edn (BASP Supp. 7, 1992), available on the internet: http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html. The Checklist also lists (pp. 88–9) the full details of the Proceedings of the International Congresses of Papyrology. Abbreviations used for periodicals may also be found in the Checklist (76–8), or in L’Année Philologique (Paris, 1927– ). For editions of Greek inscriptions, see Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum (Leiden, 1923– ), or e.g. Austin (1981).

In addition, the following abbreviations are used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Äg.Abh.</td>
<td>Ägyptologische Abhandlungen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.Alex.</td>
<td>F. Kayser, Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines (non funéraires) d’Alexandrie impériale (lVI–III s. apr. J.-C.) (Cairo, 1994).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations


OMH E. Stefanski and M. Lichtheim, Coptic Ostraca from Medinet Habu (Oriental Institute Publications 71; Chicago, 1952).

Pack2 The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt (2nd edn, Ann Arbor, 1965).

P.Cairo dem. see Spiegelberg (1956–8).

P.Count. W. Clarysse and D. J. Thompson, Counting the People (forthcoming).

PDM Demotic Magical Papyri, as translated in Betz (1992).


SAK Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur (Hamburg, 1974–).

Notes for the reader

Transliteration of words and names

This book is intended primarily for readers who do not know ancient Greek (or Egyptian); Greek words are quoted in transliteration except in a few cases where the significance of a passage depends on the use of the Greek alphabet, and in titles of works cited in the Bibliography (readers should be warned that many works listed in the Bibliography do assume a knowledge of Greek). A few Egyptian words are also quoted in the standard transliteration.

To achieve complete consistency in the spelling of proper names, which might be Egyptian, Greek, Roman, or a combination of these, is a doomed task. In general, we have rendered names as closely as possible to their Greek form (using ‘k’ not ‘c’ for κ, etc.), except for Roman names, which are Latinised (so ‘Aurelius’, not ‘Aurelios’), and when it would seem pedantic not to use the Latinised or anglicised form by which the individual is commonly known (so ‘Ptolemy’ for the kings, but ‘Ptolemaios’ for other individuals of that name).

A note on the presentation of the translated sources

Brackets occurring within the passages from the sources are of three kinds. Round brackets (thus) enclose matter additional to the original text, supplied for explanation (when italicised, thus), expansion or connection. Brackets <thus> indicate text which the editors think has been accidentally omitted by the scribe. Square brackets [thus] indicate text ‘restored’ by modern scholars where the document itself is fragmentary or illegible; it should be noted, however, that restorations are indicated only where the translator regards them as substantial or doubtful. ‘NN’ (=No Name) represents a name which is lost or illegible.

Egyptian dating systems

Various different calendars and methods of dating were employed in Egypt during the period covered by this book. The Egyptian year consisted of twelve months of thirty days, followed by five intercalary (‘epagomenal’) days. From the reign of Augustus, a sixth intercalary day was added every fourth year to preserve the correct
relationship with the astronomical solar year, fixing the first day of the Egyptian year (1 Thoth) at 29 August. The Macedonian calendar, also used in the early Ptolemaic period, was progressively assimilated to the Egyptian year, so that after the third century bc, the Macedonian months became equivalent to Egyptian months. In the Roman period, some months acquired honorific names connected with the Imperial house; the most common are given in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date by Julian calendar</th>
<th>Egyptian date</th>
<th>Macedonian month name</th>
<th>Roman honorific month name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 29</td>
<td>Thoth 1</td>
<td>Dios</td>
<td>Sebastos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 28</td>
<td>Phaophi 1</td>
<td>Apellaios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 28</td>
<td>Hathyr 1</td>
<td>Audnaios</td>
<td>Neos Sebastos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 27</td>
<td>Choiak 1</td>
<td>Peritos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 22</td>
<td>Tybi 1</td>
<td>Dystros</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 26</td>
<td>Mecheir 1</td>
<td>Xandikos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 25</td>
<td>Phamenoth 1</td>
<td>Artemisios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>Pharmouthi 1</td>
<td>Daisios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26</td>
<td>Pachon 1</td>
<td>Panemos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>Pauni 1</td>
<td>Loios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 25</td>
<td>Epeiph 1</td>
<td>Gorpiaios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 25</td>
<td>Mesore 1</td>
<td>Hyperberetaios</td>
<td>Kaisareios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 24–28</td>
<td>Intercalary days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The year is expressed most commonly as the regnal year of the current ruler (whether Ptolemaic monarch or Roman emperor); a new ruler’s first year lasted only from accession to the end of the current Egyptian year, the next 1 Thoth beginning his second year. Latin documents employ the Roman system of dating, by ‘consular’ years (i.e. by the names of the current consuls at Rome); see 4.139 for an example of both consular and regnal year dating. Latin documents express days by counting backwards from the Kalends, Nones or Ides of the month (1st, 5th and 13th; except that in March, May, July, and October, the Nones are the 7th, and the Ides the 15th); also see 4.139.

From the reign of Diocletian (AD 284–305), consular dating became normal for all official documents (or post-consular dating, by the names of the previous year’s consuls, if the current names were not yet known), and other ways of dating years also appear. Indiction dates identify a year of the current induction cycle (a series of fifteen-year tax cycles starting from AD 312); without further information, they do not supply an absolute date (e.g. 5.178). For the so-called ‘era of Oxyrhynchos’ also used in dating, see 2.61.

**Money, weights and measures**

In Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the standard coin was the tetradrachm (4-drachma piece, or *stater*). In the Ptolemaic period, this was a silver coin weighing c. 14 g, and
remained relatively pure. From the late third century BC, however, monetary values are normally expressed in the papyri in the token bronze money, which underwent successive depreciations in relation to the silver. In Egyptian texts, the deben and the kite were employed: 1 deben = 10 kite = 20 drachmas.

By the early Roman period, the ‘silver’ tetradrachm had become a billon coin, consisting of an alloy of silver and base metal which became increasingly debased; by the mid-third century AD, it was almost completely bronze. The tetradrachm was treated as equivalent to the Roman denarius (which did not circulate in Egypt), although it contained less silver.

1 talent = 60 minas = 1,500 staters (tetradrachms) = 6,000 drachmas
1 drachma = 6 or 7 obols

After Diocletian’s reforms of the imperial currency (between c. 295/6 and 300), the coinage of Egypt was assimilated to that elsewhere in the Roman empire. The gold solidus (4 g) was divided into 24 carats. Payments also continued to be made in the debased billon currency, expressed as multiples of the denarius (i.e. the tetradrachm): talents and myriads (1 myriad = 10,000 denarii); see 2.61.

The drachma and its multiples and subdivisions were units of weight as well as of money.

Most dry and liquid measures varied in capacity according to the size of the container used to measure them. The main dry measure was the artaba. The government artaba of the Roman period was c. 40 litres, containing 40 choinikes, but artabas of other sizes were also used.
Glossary

agonanomos A municipal official responsible for the marketplace, who also in Ptolemaic and early Roman Egypt functioned as a notary in a wide variety of transactions.

annona A requisition or tax in kind.
apomoira A tax on vineyards and orchards.
archidikastes A judicial official.
aroura The standard unit of area; equivalent to 0.68 acre or 0.275 hectare.
athlophoros The title of the priestess of Queen Berenike II; ‘prize-bearer’, referring to her Olympic victory.

chiton Greek tunic, worn by both men and women.
choinix Sub-division (⅑ or ⅛) of the artaba; approx. 1 litre in capacity.
chora The hinterland of Egypt (including the metropoleis), as opposed to the city of Alexandria.
deben An Egyptian monetary unit, equivalent to 20 drachmas.
deme A sub-division of the citizen body in a Greek polis.
dorea Revocable gift-estate granted by the Ptolemies to their high officials.
epistates A local superintendent in the Ptolemaic period.
epistrategos In the Ptolemaic period, regional governor of the Thebaid. In the Roman period, four epistrategoi provided a tier of administration between the nome officials and those of the province.
epoikion Farmstead, or ‘tied’ estate village.
exegetes A municipal official.
gymnasiarch The chief official of a gymnasium.
himation Greek cloak or mantle, worn over the tunic by either sex.
indiction Year in the series of tax cycles of fifteen years beginning in AD 312.
iuridicus A Roman official of equestrian status, concerned with legal matters.
kanephoros The title of the priestess of Queen Arsinoe II; ‘basket-bearer’.
katoikic land The category of land assigned in the Ptolemaic period to high-status kleruchs (cavalrymen). In the Roman period, it became a category of private property, taxed at one artaba per aroura.
kite An Egyptian monetary unit; 1 kite was equivalent to 2 drachmas.
kleros A parcel of land assigned to military settlers during the Ptolemaic period. In the Roman period, the term was often simply a topographical description (‘in the kleros of so-and-so’).
kleruch A military settler in the Ptolemaic period, assigned a kleros of land.
kleruchic land The category of land assigned to kleruchs in the Ptolemaic period.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>komarch</td>
<td>A village official.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kosmetes</td>
<td>A municipal official.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyrios</td>
<td>The male guardian required for women in Greek legal contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>logistes</td>
<td>The main nome official from the fourth century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metropolis</td>
<td>The chief town of a nome, granted full civic status by Septimius Severus in AD 200.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mina</td>
<td>A unit of currency (= 100 drachmas), and of weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nome</td>
<td>One of the approximately forty districts into which Egypt was divided for the purposes of regional government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obol</td>
<td>A subdivision (⅙ or ⅐) of the drachma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pagarch</td>
<td>A local government official.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian (of the epigone)</td>
<td>The exact origin and significance of the term is disputed. In the early Ptolemaic period, 'Persian' seems to designate persons with some sort of privileged status without a claim to a more specific ethnic designation; for the meaning of 'epigone', see 5.183 note 4. In the late Ptolemaic and Roman periods, the term refers to the legal status of an indebted party who had relinquished certain personal rights in order to secure the collection of the debt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>polis</td>
<td>A Greek city, normally possessing the institutions of political self-government: citizen assembly, council and magistrates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>procurator</td>
<td>A Roman financial administrator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prytanis</td>
<td>The ‘president’ of a city council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quarter</td>
<td>A weight, ⅙ of a mina, ⅑ of a ‘gold piece’ (chrysos).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sesterius</td>
<td>Roman coin: 4 sesterii were worth 1 denarius.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sistrum</td>
<td>A rattle used by worshippers in the cult of Isis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solidus</td>
<td>A gold coin in the period after Diocletian’s currency reforms between c. 295/6 and 300.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stater</td>
<td>A weight of approximately 14 g. Also a denomination of money (4 drachmas).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategos</td>
<td>The chief administrative official of a nome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subscription</td>
<td>The ‘signature’ normally appended at the bottom of a document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Map 1  Egypt in the Graeco–Roman period