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INTRODUCTION

Egypt by the end of the second century B.C. was in decline. This was universally recognized by those ancient authors who commented on the period; there was less agreement over the cause. The inclusion of Egyptian soldiers into the state army during the Fourth Syrian War in 217 B.C. had been the beginning. So Polybius.¹ The natives recognized their potential as a meaningful force. Nationalism increased; rebellion followed. The rulers, especially from the reign of Philopator, were weak and degenerate themselves.² Palace faction could turn into civil war and any successful form of control over these forces was lacking. Foreign wars and domestic strife, the break-up of Macedonian control and the absorption of Greek elements into the native Egyptian culture were part of the process.

Such is the background. In the following study I shall attempt to show what effect national events might have on a small and, on most accounts, insignificant village in the Egyptian countryside. This village is Kerkeosiris.

Life throughout the ancient world was predominantly village life. An agricultural society was the norm and, though political life was inevitably concentrated in the more important city centres, the everyday existence of the majority of the population was bounded by the village, κώμη, in which they were born, passed their lives and died.³ There were of course exceptions, the merchants and traders, the pirates and mercenaries, and the period of great wars during the lifetime and following the death of Alexander probably witnessed more movement of populations than any previous period. This general dislocation of peoples brought its own problems, arising in areas newly settled by the Hellenistic armies and those who followed in their wake. The effect of these problems on the small villages is generally undocumented. As often, however, Egypt is the exception. The dry desert sands have preserved in their thousands records on wood, stone and papyrus from which it is possible to draw this sort of information.

1. Polybius, v 107, 2–3.

2. Polybius, v 34; Strabo, xvii 1, 11; Justin,

xxix 1. Livy, xxxviii, 17, blames the climate.

3. Swoboda, κώμη 937–76.

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It is with papyrological evidence that I am mainly concerned in this study. Both the possibilities and limitations of this class of material are enormous. The possibilities are obvious. Papyri can form a record for that part of the socio-economic, cultural and religious life of a people which in the ancient world is rarely recorded on durable material. As a body of material it increases yearly and there is always hope that problems may be resolved with the discovery of fresh evidence.

The severest limitation is that imposed by chance—the chance nature of the survival, provenience and the contents of the documents. Evidence is scattered in both time and place. A second limitation is that of language. After Alexander's conquest of Egypt in 331 B.C., Greek was adopted as the official language and most official documents were written entirely in Greek. In the country or *chora*, however, the native Egyptian presumably remained the predominant language. A large number of Egyptian demotic texts have been discovered but comparatively few have been edited. The material, therefore, which can be used to form a picture of Egyptian society consists mainly of official documents and of the writings of the literate section of the community who formed a minority. Though occasionally the illiterate employed scribes to write for them, for many Egyptians all that has survived is their names. Their way of life, activities and beliefs can only be partially reconstructed from a study of the material remains of the society of which they were part, from the villages, houses, temples, the terracotta figurines, agricultural implements and household utensils, the painted representations and burials revealed through both chance find and systematic excavation.

As the body of evidence increases, its limitations become more obvious. Whilst in A.D. 1870 Giacomo Lumbroso was able to write a comprehensive study of the political economy of the Ptolemies¹ it has since become clear that although in Egypt, with its centralized royal control, a greater uniformity of institutions, procedure and administration is to be found than in many states, a document is nevertheless relevant only to one particular place at one moment of time. With scattered information a very wide selection of examples is necessary to allow any generalization, schematization or broader application. Questions arising from the limited validity of most information will be frequently brought to notice. Recognition of this is important in any study of Egypt.

And yet within this variety some uniformity emerges. It is a uniformity which can

1. Lumbroso, *Recherches*.

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perhaps best be explained in terms of a strong bureaucratic administration. The land of Egypt belonged by conquest to the Ptolemies, inheritors to the Pharaohs of an earlier period, and if this land was to be exploited successfully some uniformity in administration was desirable. Royal fiscal concern provided one important unifying force.¹ The king could dispose of his land in whatever manner he pleased,² and the material from Kerkeosiris illustrates many different forms of land use. But the need for efficient irrigation and agriculture led to a centralized control which, in spite of local differences, covered the whole country.

This control was exercised by a large body of officials. Officialdom, self-perpetuating and invariably corrupt, is a constant factor of such administration. The large number of officials in Kerkeosiris is typical. Ten land-holding officials are recorded in the village and the existence of many more is well documented. I do not propose to attempt individual studies of these officials and their functions in Kerkeosiris. The differing local functions of the various government representatives have been studied many times and these studies, based on more extensive material, may be referred to where necessary. The Ptolemaic official is simply to be recognized as a constant fact of life.

At the end of the second century, however, this administration was breaking down. Official concessions were continually being made, often to ratify an already existing situation; decrees were disregarded. Change and developments during this century were frequent in all spheres and the material from the Kerkeosiris documents illustrates not simply the 'small beer of Egyptian villagers'³ but, for one village in a limited period of time, the details of this process of change and decay.

On 16 January A.D. 1900, one of the workmen excavating for the Egypt Exploration Fund and the University of California in the South Fayum, in the cemetery of Umm el-Breigât, the ancient Tebtunis, in disgust at finding a row of crocodiles where he had expected sarcophagi, broke one of them in pieces and revealed a wrapping

1. Perhaps the most illuminating example of this is *P. Amh.* 33 (c. 157) mentioning a decree forbidding the employment of advocates in trials concerning the revenue.

2. An exact parallel to the position of the Ptolemies with their control over the land of Egypt is to be found in a speech of King Andrianampoinimerina, founder of the modern state of Madagascar (A.D. 1787–1810): 'Je vous rappelle que le sol de ce pays m'appartient ainsi

que le pouvoir, je vais donc vous distribuer des terres. Vous vivrez sur les parcelles que je vous aurai assignées, mais la lettre reste à moi . . . je vous établis donc à l'origine des sources, dans les terres irriguées dont je suis seul maître.' G. Condominas, *Fokon'olona et collectivité rurale en Imérina* (Paris 1960) 29, quoted by Vidal-Naquet, *Annales* (1964), 549 n. 1.

3. Bell, *JEA* (1920), 237.

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of papyrus rolls.¹ The excellent publication of these papyri dating mainly from the end of the second and from the first century B.C., by Grenfell and Hunt with the collaboration of Smyly in 1902, was one of the major steps in the advance of our knowledge of Ptolemaic Egypt. A large proportion of the texts in the volume *Teb-tunis Papyri I* are from the single archive of Menches, village scribe of Kerkeosiris from 120–111 B.C.,² and they provide for the second century the sort of material represented in the third century by the Petrie Papyri and the Zenon archive. Indeed they provide a sufficient number of consecutive documents to form the basis for an investigation into the distribution of population, the types of landholding and forms and methods of cultivation in this small agricultural Fayum village at the end of the second century B.C.

But besides providing detailed and specific information for the village of Kerkeosiris, documents of the Menches archive also illustrate a system. The land survey records show in detail one aspect of the Ptolemaic administration with all its weaknesses and defects. The empirical nature of the system, the duplication of official responsibilities, the differences in period and locality and the supreme fiscal interest of the state all appear in clear relief. A general examination, therefore, of survey documents and the system they illustrate will precede the more detailed study of Kerkeosiris which is largely based on this class of document.

After placing Kerkeosiris in its geographical and administrative setting the different administrative categories of land in the village together with those who cultivated it will be examined in a series of detailed studies. In these, and in the studies on agriculture and population that follow, I hope to draw attention to the importance of the historical background to this material and, from the detailed evidence of this one village, to consider the extent to which the Ptolemaic economy may be said to be in decline at this period. The concluding study on the names of the inhabitants of Kerkeosiris gives some indication of the various elements composing the body of villagers and of the religious sympathies and loyalties of these people.

1. *P. Tebt.* I preface pp. v–x. The excavations which led to the discovery of these papyri are reported in *Athenaeum* (1900), 600–1; *APF* (1901), 376–8.

2. Those contained in crocodiles nos. 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 27, 28.

II

THE LAND SURVEY

Regular land surveys and the preparation of registers according to both estates and their holders are a common feature of the fiscal and juridical administrative machinery of most highly organized states. Such governments are not content merely to know the numbers of their population; the division and cultivation of the land and the state of possession are of equal interest. The compiling of a cadastre, therefore, based on declaration or survey (or on a combination of the two), is a common activity in many states both ancient and modern. For Ptolemaic Egypt surviving survey documents to some extent illustrate the process of this operation and in doing so illuminate many aspects of the Ptolemaic administration.¹

In Egypt some form of control over land and population was exercised from the earliest times though the first example of an actual survey document is from the late Ramesside period.² Control of the Pharaoh over the irrigation, agriculture and economic administration of his country, in which cadastration would probably play a part, may be signified by the scenes on the pre-dynastic mace-head of the Scorpion King now in the Ashmolean Museum.³ From the second dynasty (c. 3000–2700 B.C.) the Palermo Stone provides sure evidence of a two-yearly census serving as a base for both taxation and chronology.⁴ The same stone records the annual height of the Nile, which vitally affected the yearly state of cultivation. Actual cadastral operations are known from the third dynasty.⁵

The New Kingdom tombs of the nobles in the necropolis of Shêkh 'Abd el-Kurnah at Thebes show measurements of crops by officials prior to harvesting in

1. General bibliography for land surveys: Lyons, *Surveying; Cadastral survey*; *JEA* (1926), 242–4. Weiss, *Kataster. Délégé, Cadastres* 84–111. Hombert-Préaux, *Recherches* 40–5. Lewald, *Grundbuchrecht. Eger, Grundbuchwesen. W. Grund.* 175–9. Kupiszewski, *JJP* (1952), 257–68. Rostowzew, *Kornerhebung. P. Tebt.* I appendix I pp. 538–80. O. Wilck. I 173–7.

2. Gardiner, *Wilbour Papyrus*. The Pharaonic chronology followed is that of Gardiner, *Egypt* 429–53.

3. Ashmolean Museum Inv. no. E 3632; Quibell-Green, *Hierakonpolis* I 9–10, pl. 25 c, 26 c; II 31, 38–41.

The Scorpion King does not appear in Manetho's king list and is conjecturally dated before c. 3100.

4. Breasted, *Records* I 51–72.

5. Pirenne, *Institutions* I 123. Moret, *Rec Trav* (1907), 68 discussing the inscription of Methen at Saqqara from the fourth dynasty, c. 2600 B.C. His land is recorded on a 'charte royale' which Moret describes (p. 63) as 'une tablette en bois sur laquelle les scribes écrivaient les pièces de comptabilité et les actes'. But this was not a comprehensive survey.

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clear and lively scenes.¹ In an eighteenth-dynasty record of a campaign of Thutmosis III (c. 1490–1436) there is mention of a survey and valuation of conquered land, the purpose of which was clearly fiscal.² The Ramesside inscription of Mes from Saqqara tells the story of a lawsuit in which the mother of Mes appeals to official registers,³ and a register of lands and springs in the Oasis of Dakhla is referred to in an inscription dated c. 900–850 recording a lawsuit over the ownership of a spring.⁴ In the New Kingdom statues of chief land measurers are common; they were always important officials.⁵

The most detailed Pharaonic survey document is the Wilbour Papyrus, a late Ramesside hieratic document (c. 1150 B.C.) from Middle Egypt, which in two texts gives details of measurement and income accruing to the temples and other public institutions from lands sown with a summer crop.⁶ Information contained in this papyrus illustrates the closely interwoven obligations of temples, Crown and smallholders, and the control exercised over all of these by one supreme fiscal authority. There are many parallels between the two texts of this papyrus and its Ptolemaic successors⁷ and it forms a clear example of the way in which the Greek conquerors of Egypt took over the existing administration of the country. The main Greek innovation would seem to have been the change in the administrative language.⁸

Three different elements are already to be distinguished in these various records of survey operations, elements which recur also in the later Ptolemaic documents: the delimitation of plots of land which would frequently be necessary following the

1. The tombs of Menna (69), Khâembât (57), Zeser Karasonb (38), Amenhotepsasi (75), Menkheperrasonb (86) and the unpublished tomb 297. See Berger, *JEA* (1934), 54–6.

2. Maspero, *RecTrav* (1880), 149.

3. Gardiner, *Untersuchungen* 4, 3. The inscription dates from around 1300 B.C.

4. Spiegelberg, *RecTrav* (1899), 16; Gardiner, *JEA* (1933), 19–30.

5. Borchardt, *ZÄS* (1905), 70–2.

6. Gardiner, *Wilbour Papyrus*; Fairman, *JEA* (1953), 118–23; Baer, *JARCE* (1962), 40–2. Information from this papyrus can be supplemented from other sources, Gardiner, *JEA* (1941), 19–73; Smither, *JEA* (1941), 74–6.

7. Heichelheim, *Historia* (1953–4), 129–35. The author discusses parallels between the Wilbour papyrus and the Ptolemaic survey but without the caution of

the original editor. It is interesting that the land was classified according to its agricultural capacity but the categories are no more than rough approximations of the Ptolemaic system, see *Wilbour Papyrus* II 178–81. Other interesting parallels not noted by Heichelheim are in the form of compilation of the document, giving information on the cultivator *lhty*, sometimes previous holders, and showing later additions to the original text.

8. The Greek used in the Ptolemaic surveys is often difficult to understand, owing probably to the translation of demotic terms which are not fully understood.

Several new words occur which are presumably translations of the Egyptian; e.g. ἀβροχος, ἐμβροχος, ἀπηγμένον, γενισμός, are words not known to have been used before in a technical sense.

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annual flood (boundary stones were used to distinguish the plots),¹ the fiscal interest of the Crown, illustrated, for instance, in the Theban tombs showing crops measured as a preliminary to taxation,² and the effect of identification, that the results of the survey could be called upon in legal disputes.³

Some form of land measurement is an integral part of cadastration and in discussing the origins of geometry classical authors agree in attributing the invention of this skill to Egypt. According to Herodotus (II 109), in an account followed by Diodorus Siculus and Heron of Alexandria,⁴ it was a semi-mythical king, Sesostris, who first divided up the land of Egypt, which was then surveyed and remeasured yearly by the king's officials, ἐπισκεψομένους καὶ ἀναμετρήσοντας, for taxation purposes. Herodotus appears to refer specifically to lands close to the Nile (the *hod el-gezirah*), which might be changed by the annual flood and required constant remeasurement, but Strabo in his account of the origin of Greek geometry refers to a more widespread process, to a general redefinition of boundaries following the inundation.⁵

There was a need for accurate and detailed division. Through the frequent confusion of the boundaries which the Nile causes in flood-time, removing, adding, changing the shapes and obscuring the other indications by which one man's land is distinguished from another's it is necessary to measure up again and again.

But a redefinition of boundaries does not preclude a fiscal aim.

Whilst, therefore, a Pharaonic cadastral survey appears well-attested, there are neither classical Greek examples of this operation nor examples from the Hellenistic Near East. A tablet of the third millennium from Ur, showing diagrammatic land divisions and giving details of measurement and seed amounts, is evidence for cadastral operations among the Chaldeans⁶ and a seventh-century Assyrian document

1. Griffith, *JEA* (1926), 204 from the teaching of Amenophis the son of Kanakht 6, 12–13, 'Remove not the landmark on the boundaries of the sown, nor shift the position of the measuring-cord'; the inscription of Khnumhotep II in his tomb at Beni Hasan, Breasted, *Records* I 624, 626, 632; Fisher, *Rev. d'égyptologie* (1961).

2. In the tomb of Menna (69) the payment of taxes from grain is illustrated immediately above the harvest scene.

3. Pirenne-van de Valle, *AHDO* (1937), 44, document 12 from the reign of Osorkon I or II, twenty-second dynasty (945–730), '... tandis qu'il faisait apporter les pièces cadastrales des champs de la

Maison d'Amon du Sud entier'. This appears to be a survey of sacred land covering a large area similar to the Wilbour Papyrus.

4. Diodorus Siculus, I 77, 5

προσετέτακτο δὲ καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις ἀπογράφεσθαι πρὸς τοὺς ἄρχοντας ἀπὸ τίνων ἕκαστος πορίζεται τὸν βίον, καὶ τὸν ἐν τούτοις ψευδάμενον ἢ πόρον ἄδικον ἐπιτελοῦντα θανάτῳ περιπίπτειν ἦν ἀναγκαῖον.

(Diodorus' use of ἀπογράφεσθαι is probably due to the influence of the Roman practice of κατ' οἰκίαν ἀπογραφαί). Heron of Alexandria, *Geometrica* 2.

5. Strabo, XVII I, 3.

6. Thureau-Dangin, *RAss* (1898), 13–27.

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gives census information for the kingdom of Ḫarran which is similar in form to Egyptian examples.¹ It is not, however, necessary to posit influence in either direction; similar forms of control can arise naturally in similar geographical and political contexts. The Seleucid cadastral operations² were never as developed as those of the Ptolemies, for whom the state of the annual inundation as affecting the lands of Egypt was of supreme importance. Babylonian references and those from the papyri of Dura-Europus in the second century B.C. are only to details of the boundaries of property and contain no traces of measurement.³

In classical Greece there is no trace of a record of landed properties based on a regular survey.⁴ In Athens the *eisphora*-tax was estimated on a voluntary assessment (*timema*) with the check of *antidosis*, and the only record of property boundaries were the actual *horoi*-stones on the land.⁵ In particular circumstances naturally a survey might take place, in the first land distributions of new colonies, as at Kerkyra Melaina in c. 385 B.C.,⁶ or during a land reclamation project like that of the temple lands of Dionysus and Athene Polias at Heraclea in South Italy in the fourth century B.C.⁷ The extreme detail of the Laureion leases of mining rights giving boundaries on four sides of the mines presumes some sort of rough chart for reference purposes,⁸ and a measuring operation must have preceded a fifth-century description of Athenian sacred property on Euboea.⁹ From Tenos a problematical register of sales of the third century B.C. giving boundary details¹⁰ perhaps supposes some sort of land survey, though the information could well have been provided from declarations. These examples, however, are all exceptions and nowhere in classical Greece is there evidence for a regular cadastral survey, an institution which would in its very

1. Johns, *Assyrian Doomsday book*.

2. Buckler-Robinson, *AJA* (1912), 11–82. These texts are discussed by Westermann, *CPh* (1921), 12–19. In spite of Westermann's comparisons with the Ptolemaic system these inscriptions provide no evidence for any form of central land register but merely show reference being made to detailed boundary descriptions, *προσορισμοί*, through the local registries.

3. Schorr, *Urkunden* 386, 'im Kataster (?) des Samas'; Welles-Fink-Gilliam, *Dura Europus Papyri* no. 15, 2 κατά τῶς προνπαρχούσας γερνιά[ς . . .].

4. Finley, *Land and credit* 207 n. 19.

5. Finley, *Land and credit* 1; Thomsen, *Eisphora* 64–5.

6. *Syll.*³ 141 without the list of settlers. For similar

examples see Finley, *Land and credit* 254 n. 61.

7. Dareste, *Inscriptions juridiques* 193–234. On 222–3 the editors have drawn up a diagrammatic plan of the two sanctuaries on either side of the river Aciris and an actual document of this nature is easy to imagine. The inscriptions are republished by Arangio-Ruiz-Olivieri, *Inscriptiones* 3–46 with diagrams 40–1. The land was recovered from squatters (table 2, lines 24–8), remeasured and redistributed.

8. See Crosby, *Hesperia* (1950), 197; Hopper, *ABSA* (1953), 217–24.

9. *IG* 1² 376 + a fragment published as no. 6 by Raubitschek, *Hesperia* (1943), 28–33.

10. *IG* XII 5, 872 + *IG* XII supp. 312.

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existence have been opposed to all that is known of the realities of the Greek political economy.¹

From this résumé of precedents and parallels to the Ptolemaic land survey several questions already pose themselves. Surveys and registers were not all the same. Their forms differed according, one supposes, to their purpose and they were drawn up at different times of the year. The Theban paintings show the measurements of ripened crops before the harvest which is in March–April in Upper Egypt; the Wilbour Papyrus was drawn up at the end of July, just as the Nile flood would be covering the land. Herodotus, however, describes the survey as immediately following the flood. How are the various forms of survey distinguishable and to what extent is their form influenced by their purpose? At what time of the year did the various measuring operations take place and who was responsible for them? A close examination of the Ptolemaic cadastral documents may help towards answering some of these questions.

CLASSIFICATION OF DOCUMENTS

Any classification of Ptolemaic documents must make allowances for the local differences in administrative practice which existed even between neighbouring villages.² The documents which we possess are almost exclusively from the Fayum, and the majority of these, published among the Tebtunis documents, is from the second century B.C. The Fayum was clearly an exceptional area of intensive military settlement and agricultural development during the Ptolemaic period and examples from this area are not necessarily typical.³ To judge, however, from Pharaonic

1. *IG XII 3*, 180–2 from Astypalaea and 343–9 from Thera are Greek examples from a later date.

2. Differences in the compilation of the survey: *P. Tebt.* 826 (172) introduction; *P. Tebt.* 83 (late second century) from Magdola, in the reverse order to the Kerkeosiris surveys, e.g. *P. Tebt.* 62; 63. In *P. Tebt.* 74, 3 (114–113) from Kerkeosiris the *amixia* of 131 is used as a dividing point in the reports on derelict land whereas in *P. Tebt.* 827, 3–4 (c. 170) Year 12 is used, probably 170–169.

Different practices in the treatment of land: *P. Tebt.* 79 (c. 148), cleruchic land grants from pasture land ἐκτος μισθώσεως, a practice never recorded for Kerkeosiris. Rulings on grants made from desert rather than cultivated land differ in *P. Tebt.* 61 b,

225–30 (118–117), Kerkeosiris, and *P. Tebt.* 79, 47–59 (c. 148).

Different measurements used: *P. Cairo Zen.* 59132 (256), a dispute about local standards of measurement; *P. Cairo Zen.* 59188, 2–5 (255), land in Tapeptia to be measured with the schoenion used in the Memphite nome; *P. Tebt.* 105, 40 and 109, 20, the 6-choenix measure of the *dromos* of Souchos at Kerkeosiris.

Differences in official titlature: van 't Dack, *Studia Hellenistica* 7, 34.

3. See van 't Dack, *Studia Hellenistica* 7, 7; Rostowzew, *Kolonat* 29, on the differences between the Arsinoite nome and the Thebaid as shown in the papyrus archives from the end of the second century.

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Excerpt

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precedents and the few examples from outside the Fayum, there are some basic similarities in the different forms of the survey.

In the following classification I have separated the Kerkeosiris reports from other Ptolemaic examples for easier reference.

TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEYS (*KATA PERICHOMA*)

These are the most straightforward form of survey and they proceed on a topographical basis from one holding to the next. The lands of a village could be divided into *perichomata* (a word with the original meaning of dyke but used also in an extended sense to describe the whole area contained within one dyke),¹ and these were used as divisions in the compilation of the topographical survey.

In their barest form (e.g. *P. Tebt.* 1005 from Oxyrhyncha) *kata perichoma* surveys consisted of:

- (1) the orientation of the landholding in reference to the previous plot,
- (2) the name of the holder,
- (3) the area.

But very often further details were given such as the occupation of the holder (*P. Tebt.* 830), the rent assessment on crown land, the measurements of the individual sides of the plot and area calculations, crop details and a list of the neighbouring plots.

EXAMPLES OF TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEYS

(Those marked * are specified as *kata perichoma*).

<i>P. Strassb.</i> II 109	third century	Tremenouis, very fragmentary
<i>P. Lille</i> I 2	third century	North Fayum ²
<i>P. Petrie</i> II 36 I	third century	North Fayum
<i>P. Tebt.</i> 1005	mid second century	Oxyrhyncha
<i>P. Tebt.</i> 830	second century	? Oxyrhyncha
<i>P. Tebt.</i> 831	second century	Ibion Argaiou
<i>P. Tebt.</i> 86	late second century	Arsinoe
<i>P. Tebt.</i> 87	late second century	Berenikis Thesmophorou
Edfu hieroglyphic inscription	82	ed. Brugsch, <i>Thesaurus</i> III 531–604

1. περίχωμα *P. Lille* I, 27 (259–258); *P. Tebt.* 62 of an Egyptian term.

introduction; *P. Merton* 5, 23 (second century). For 2. The results of a *metresis*. Each large unit is called the original meaning see *P. Tebt.* 61 b, 167. This is a ἡ γῆ, but this appears to be the same as the second-century *perichoma* from the South Fayum.