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978-0-521-03763-1 - Economic Rationalism and Rural Society in Third-Century A. D. Egypt: The Heroninos Archive and the Appianus Estate

Dominic Rathbone

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This book reconstructs the life and workings of the Appianus estate in the Fayum district of Egypt under Roman rule in the third century A.D. Basing his study on the extensive documentary evidence of the Heroninos archive, consisting of hundreds of letters and accounts on papyrus, Dr Rathbone examines first the nature of rural society at the time, and in particular the status of estate owners, their relations with their upper-class managers and the social and economic position of the estate's workforce and outside contacts. He then looks at the organisation and running of the estate, the production and marketing of its crops, its centrally directed transport system and, above all, its use of credit arrangements and its system of accounting. This was one of the most sophisticated yet known in the ancient world and the author uses this example of economic rationalism to challenge the common belief that economic thought and practice were uniformly 'primitive' in the ancient world.

Appendices include an index of all the published texts of the Heroninos archive, and two of Heroninos' accounts with an English translation.

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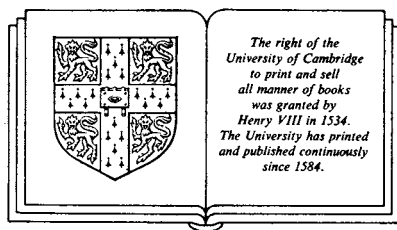
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**ECONOMIC RATIONALISM AND RURAL
SOCIETY IN THIRD-CENTURY A.D. EGYPT**

The Heroninos archive and the Appianus estate

DOMINIC RATHBONE

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To my parents

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PREFACE

This book is a much revised and expanded version of my Ph.D. thesis, submitted in April 1986. Some of the many alterations and additions are the result of changes of mind or new ideas, others come from consideration of texts published in the meantime, in particular the new texts from Prague. I am now all the more conscious that this is a preliminary study, and that there is much more to be learned from new documents as yet unpublished as well as from reinterpretation of old ones.

In the course of writing the thesis and converting it into this book I have received help of various kinds from many people. Special thanks are due to Professors J.A. Crook and K. Hopkins, to Professors F.G.B. Millar and R. Macve who have read and commented on Chapters 2 and 8 respectively, to Dr J.R. Rea and Professor R. Pintaudi for generous papyrological assistance, and to Dr A.K. Bowman and Dr P.D. Garnsey for constant advice and encouragement over many years.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTES FOR THE READER

Abbreviations

Schnebel, *Landwirtschaft*: M. Schnebel, *Die Landwirtschaft im hellenistischen Aegypten* (1925).

Stanghellini, *Corrispondenza*: M. Stanghellini, *La corrispondenza di Heronino nei papiri fiorentini (osservazioni e note critiche ai testi)* (Tesi di Laurea; Florence, 1957/8).

Papyri

See Appendix I Section A.

Measures

The following measures occur frequently, and are normally abbreviated as follows (see further Appendix 2):

- ar. = aroura: the standard measure of land area in Roman Egypt, equivalent to about 2,760 m.
- art. = artaba: the normal dry measure of Roman Egypt, equivalent to almost 40 litres.
- mon. = monochoron: the main wet measure and size of wine-jar used on the Appianus estate, roughly equivalent to 7 litres.
- dich. = dichoron: a wine-jar twice the size of the monochoron.
- oxyrh. = oxyrhynchition: a wine-jar one and a half times the size of the monochoron.
- kot. = kotule: a wet measure of which there were 36 to the monochoron.
- dr. = drachma: the normal unit of monetary account in Roman Egypt.
- ob. = obol: a monetary unit of which there were 7 to the drachma.

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Dates

Documents in Greek from Roman Egypt were normally dated by the regnal year of the current emperor(s), with the Egyptian month and day. The year began with Thoth 1, equivalent to our 29 August (or 30 August in leap years). The months match ours roughly as follows:

Thoth	September	Phamenoth	March
Phaophi	October	Pharmouthi	April
Hathyr	November	Pachon	May
Choiak	December	Pauni	June
Tybi	January	Epeiph	July
Mecheir	February	Mesore	August

Technical terms and titles

As far as possible technical terms and titles used on the Appianus estate have been rendered into English. In some cases the lack of an exact equivalent or the danger of misleading connotations has led me to transliterate the Greek term.

The majority of cases concern labourers on the estate: the reader will frequently meet the terms *paidarion*, *oiketes* and *metrematiaiios*, all types of long-term labourer (explained in Chapter 3), and *epoikiotes* and *prostates*, types of lessee (explained in Chapter 5).

Also common are the terms *phrontis* (plu. *phrontides*) and *phrontistes* (plu. *phrontistai*) which denote the village-based managerial units of the Appianus estate and the men who ran them; I often use ‘unit’ and ‘manager’ in place of these terms. To avoid confusion, while I call Alypius the ‘general manager’ of the Appianus estate, I refer to all the other managerial staff in the estate headquarters at the town of Arsinoe as ‘administrators’. I reserve the word ‘estate’ for the totality of *phrontides* (‘units’) and other economic interests within the Arsinoite nome of Appianus, Posidonios, Herakleides and their like.

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Main characters in the Heroninos archive

This is a quick reference list for the convenience of the reader of the main characters attested in the Heroninos archive. For full details about them the relevant parts of Chapter 2 should be consulted.

Appianus: prominent citizen and councillor of Alexandria; owner of the Appianus estate until his death in 260.

Posidonios: father-in-law of Appianus; himself a councillor of Alexandria and large landowner in the Arsinoite nome.

Diodora: daughter of Appianus; heiress of his Arsinoite estate.

Antonius Philoxenos: husband of Diodora; himself an imperial procurator and large landowner in the Arsinoite nome.

Alypios: general manager of the Appianus estate; himself an imperial procurator and large landowner in the Arsinoite nome.

Herakleides: *oikonomos* ('steward') of the Appianus estate; himself a councillor of Arsinoe and local landowner.

Eirenaios: *phrontistes* ('manager') of the 'unit' of the Appianus estate at the village of Euhemeria; author of several extant accounts and letters.

Heroninos: *phrontistes* from 249 to 268 of the 'unit' of the Appianus estate at Theadelphia; author of most of the extant accounts and recipient of most of the extant letters which make up the Heroninos archive.

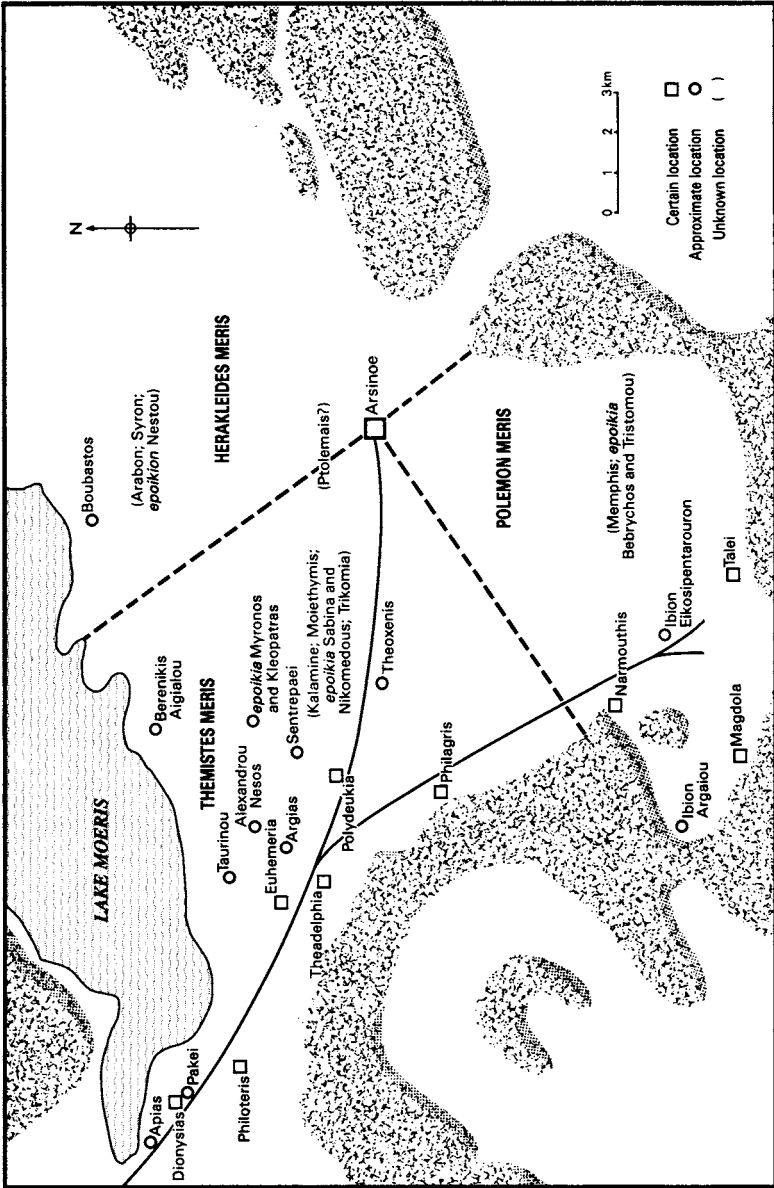
Heronas: son and successor of Heroninos; author of some extant accounts.

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Map. The Appianus estate in the Arsinoite nome