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I

Egypt under Roman rule: the legacy of ancient Egypt

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The death of Cleopatra the Great (VII) in 30 BC marked a pivotal moment in Egyptian history and indigenous culture. Long accustomed to foreign political domination after a succession of Libyan, Nubian, Assyrian, Persian and Macedonian rulers, Egyptian society had nonetheless proved remarkably resilient, assimilating its resident conquerors to varying degrees, while patiently enduring the brief ascendancy of those who ruled from a distance. When, however, the conquering Octavian “added Egypt to the empire of the Roman people,”¹ Egypt was forever relegated to the periphery of political power, and pharaonic society could no longer command extraordinary accommodation from alien rulers. If the Ptolemies were compelled to mollify Egyptian sensibilities for fundamental reasons of national stability, the Romans might do so for mere political expediency.

Although there is now some dispute regarding the degree to which Egypt differed from other Roman provinces,² certain unique features have long been noted. Octavian specifically excluded Egypt from customary senatorial control. Rather, he placed the province under the direct “dominion [*kratēsis*] of Caesar,” a phrase traditionally interpreted to indicate Egypt’s status as a “personal estate” of the emperor.³ Unlike other provinces, Egypt was administered by a prefect (Latin *praefectus*; Greek *eparchos*) of equestrian rank, accountable exclusively to the emperor, rather than by a proconsul of senatorial rank, with potentially divided loyalties.⁴ Indeed, senators or even prominent equestrians were formally prohibited from entering Egypt

¹ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 27. For a translation of this passage of the “Acts of Augustus,” see A. H. M. Jones, *A History of Rome through the Fifth Century* (London, 1970), 21.

² N. Lewis, “The Romanity of Roman Egypt: A Growing Consensus,” in *On Government and Law in Roman Egypt, Collected Papers of Naphtali Lewis*, American Studies in Papyrology 33 (1984; reprint, Atlanta, 1995), 298–305.

³ See also A. Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs* (Berkeley, 1986), 37 (with caveats); N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Oxford, 1983), 15.

⁴ For the administration, see Tacitus, *Annals*, XII.60, and Strabo, XVII.1.12.797, in Jones, *History of Rome*, 135, 179.

I

without the explicit approval of the emperor. As in the Ptolemaic regime, Egyptian currency remained a closed system, isolated within the empire. Until the reforms of Diocletian (AD 296), the export of Alexandrian coinage was prohibited, and the exchange of all foreign currency obligatory.⁵

The administrative isolation of the province is most likely to be explained by Egypt's designated role as the imperial granary, responsible for providing approximately one-third of the annual grain supply for the city of Rome.⁶ The need to ensure the consistent production and delivery of the harvest determined virtually all aspects of Roman policy in Egypt. If restrictions on suspect visitors safeguarded Egypt's great wealth from potential imperial challengers, so the establishment of a particularly large, permanent garrison at Nikopolis near Alexandria was necessitated less by the threat of foreign invasion than by the fear of a Roman insurgent.⁷ By the death of Augustus in AD 14, Egypt housed two of the three African legions. Moreover, a variety of social restrictions on local inhabitants enforced a governmental policy of keeping the natives "down on the farm" without the possibility of disruptive social advancement.

Long-standing assumptions regarding the unique status of Egypt have been based upon a perceived uninterrupted continuity of agricultural life for the great mass of the Egyptian peasantry:

The passing of Ptolemaic rule was probably unmourned, perhaps even largely unnoticed, by the majority of the inhabitants of the Nile valley for whom the replacement of a Macedonian monarch by a Roman emperor heralded no obvious or dramatic change.⁸

Always primarily an agricultural society, Egypt was uniquely dependent for its survival upon the Nile flood waters, harnessed by an extensive network of local irrigation canals. Across the millennia of Egyptian history, even the most disruptive changes in regime and religion brought only minimal impact upon the daily work of the peasant farmers, or fallahin. Some innovations do appear late in pharaonic history, and these persist throughout Roman and medieval times and still survive in contemporary rural Egypt. Thus the saqia, an ox-driven water wheel of likely Persian origin (ca. 525–404 BC),⁹

⁵ See Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 92–93.

⁶ So explicitly Tacitus, *Annals* II, LIX. See Geoffrey Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1980), 61, 67–71; Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 165; cf. Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 38–40.

⁷ R. C. C. Law, "Egypt and Cyrenaica under Roman Rule," in J. D. Page (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. II (Cambridge, 1978), 192, 194; cf. Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 40. See further Michael P. Speidel, "Augustus' Deployment of the Legions in Egypt," *Chronique d'Égypte*, 57, no. 113 (1987), 120–24. Pertinent documents on army life appear in Jones, *History of Rome*, 148, 151–53, 179. Nikopolis was located about four miles east of Alexandria.

⁸ Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 37.

⁹ See the sources gathered in Karl W. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt*

and the Archimedes screw introduced in the Ptolemaic era (ca. 287–212 BC)¹⁰ continue to assist Egyptian farmers in company with the ancient *shadūf*, a simple water-hoist attested from New Kingdom times (ca. 1346–1334 BC).¹¹ In the fields of modern Naj‘ Ḥammādī (Nag Hammadi), each of these devices has been repeatedly captured by tourist photographs, as have the wooden ox-drawn plows seemingly identical to those depicted in ancient tomb representations. The static necessities of existence in the Nile valley overwhelm each of its conquerors, as even later Arab settlers would discover.¹²

There can be little doubt that the essential features of this agrarian lifestyle exerted great influence upon the resident Greco-Roman population in Egypt, as is made evident by the predominant calendrical system, one of the few instances where an Egyptian institution effectively displaced its Greek counterpart. Closely associated with the rural life of the countryside, the ancient calendar comprised three seasons, corresponding to the recurring agricultural cycle: “Inundation” (ḥ.t), “Seed-time” (pr.t), and “Harvest” (šmw). Each season contained four thirty-day months, making a total of twelve months with five intercalary days. So pervasive was the influence of this calendar that it survived repeated attempts at modification by foreign conquerors, easily replacing the Macedonian calendar for both Greeks and Egyptians in Ptolemaic Egypt,¹³ and serving as the basis for the Roman (Julian) calendar introduced by Julius Caesar on the advice of the Alexandrian scientist Sosigenes.¹⁴ Despite preserving the names and festivals of ancient deities, the month names survived the transition to Coptic Christianity as well.¹⁵ Regardless of language, ethnicity or religion, scribes of Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine Egypt utilized almost exclusively the indigenous system. Although the Muslim lunar months were introduced

(Chicago, 1976), 46. Fitted with a series of stationary pots (*qadus*) on a rotating wheel, the *saqia* can lift a continuous supply of water over 3.5 m in elevation.

¹⁰ Diodorus V.37.3; see P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford, 1972), vol. I, 399, vol. II, 577–78, n. 174.

¹¹ Earliest attestations in the Theban tomb of Neferhotep from the Amarna period; see Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization*, 44, 46. By use of a weighted counter-pole, the *shadūf* can lift individual buckets of water over 1 m in elevation. For the *saqia* and *shadūf* in nineteenth-century Egypt, see Edward W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1860; reprinted, New York, 1973), 327–28.

¹² Succinctly stated, “the Arab settlers were absorbed into the age-old pattern and way of life of the Nile valley”; Bernard Lewis, “The Contribution to Islam,” in J. R. Harris (ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1971), 458–59.

¹³ See M. David and B. A. van Groningen, *Papyrological Primer*, 4th edn. (Leiden, 1965), 34*–36*.

¹⁴ Richard A. Parker, “The Calendars and Chronology,” in Harris, *The Legacy of Egypt*, 13.

¹⁵ Walter C. Till, *Koptische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1955), 87–88.

during the Islamic conquest and are cited in early rural documents,¹⁶ the same pattern still prevails in the colloquial Arabic of modern Egypt.¹⁷ A table of the Egyptian months follows:

Arabic	Coptic	Greek	Egyptian
tūt		Θουθ	Dḥwty
bāba		Φαωφι	Pn-ḥp.t
hatūr		Αθυρ	Ḥw.t-ḥr
kiyahk		Χοιακ	K3-ḥr-k3
tūba		Τυβι	T3-'b.t
amshīr		Μεχειρ	Mḥr
baramhāt		Φαμενωθ	Pn-'lmn-ḥtp
barmūda		Φαρμουθι	Pn-Rnnwt.t
bashens		Παχων	Pn-Ḥnsw
baūna		Παυνι	Pn-'n.t
abīb		Επιφι	'lp'lp
misra		Μεσορη	Msw.t-R'

The five intercalary days are simply described as “added” to the year:

aiyām en-nasi < αἱ επαγωμεναι < 5 ḥry.w rnp.t

As the basic patterns of humble village life seemed unaffected by the change from Ptolemaic to Roman rule, so Rome’s social impact was deemed minimal. Recent studies, however, have recognized that Ptolemaic society comprised far more than rural peasants, and have emphasized the distinct impact of Roman authority upon the urban Greek population and its institutions.¹⁸ However, the corresponding impact upon the elite Egyptian class has not been investigated thoroughly. For these individuals, the formal custodians of native Egyptian culture, the change from Ptolemaic to Roman authority was surely notable, dramatic and a cause for mourning.

Deprived of most civil and military offices during the long centuries of foreign domination, prominent Egyptian families had turned instead to the temples as their source of income and prestige. In marked contrast to earlier practice, priestly elites of the “Late Period” accumulated a multiplicity of real or nominal temple offices, with corresponding financial benefices. By

¹⁶ E.g., within tenth-century private contracts from the Faiyum; see Nabia Abbott, *The Monasteries of the Fayyum*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations (SAOC) 16 (Chicago, 1937), 15, 21 (Jumādā; 946–947 AD).

¹⁷ For the Arabic forms, see Till, *Koptische Grammatik*, 87–88. The anglicized transcriptions that follow are derived from Karl Baedeker, *Baedeker’s Egypt 1929*, (1929; reprint, London, 1974), xl.

¹⁸ N. Lewis, “Romanity of Roman Egypt”, 300–01. Contrast the received opinion stated by Law, “Egypt and Cyrenaica”, 194: “Roman rule did not involve any considerable degree of ‘Romanization’ for Egypt.”

this stratagem such priests retained both wealth and authority in the face of foreign control and the intrusion of an alien, supposedly dominant, class.

Far from being cloistered, otherworldly mystics divorced from their surrounding communities, Egyptian sacerdotal elites actively participated in the economic and political life of the kingdom. It is these individuals who comprise the bulk of the parties engaged in the often brisk land and property speculation recorded in the numerous Demotic contracts.¹⁹ Generally ignored in older studies of Ptolemaic society compiled by classicists, the Egyptian elite was sharply distinct from the rural fallahin, and hardly a second-class citizenry cowed by the perception of a Greek “master race.” Taking these privileged Egyptians into consideration, the very notion of official ethnic discrimination becomes quite dubious for the Ptolemaic period.²⁰ Upper-class Egyptians often were fluent in the administrative language of Greek, an expediency that should not be mislabeled “assimilationist,” as the same individuals did not need to forsake either an Egyptian identity or a fluency with native Demotic, also accorded official recognition as an administrative language.²¹

Mixed marriages between Egyptians and Greeks were increasingly common, particularly in the countryside, and the resulting families maintained conscious connections to both ethnicities, often expressed in the form of double names (one Greek, one Egyptian) accorded their children. By late Ptolemaic times, a number of such Hellenized Egyptians – or Egyptianized Hellenes²² – had risen to prominence in civil and military positions, and the accelerating process would surely have continued but for the harsh decrees of social separation imposed by Octavian himself.

As recorded in a surviving second-century copy of the regulations of the *idios logos*, or imperial “private account”²³ established by the deified

¹⁹ Janet H. Johnson, “The Role of the Egyptian Priesthood in Ptolemaic Egypt,” in L. H. Lesko (ed.), *Egyptological Studies in Honor of Richard A. Parker* (Hanover, NH, 1986), 70–84.

²⁰ See Robert K. Ritner, “Implicit Modes of Cross-Cultural Interaction: A Question of Noses, Soap, and Prejudice,” in J. H. Johnson (ed.), *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society*, SAOC 51 (Chicago, 1992), 283–90, esp. 289–90.

²¹ Contra N. Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oxford, 1986), 154, there is no reason why exalted Egyptians should need or desire Greek status. For middle-class Egyptian indifference to Greek status, see J. H. Johnson, “Ptolemaic Bureaucracy from an Egyptian Point of View,” in M. Gibson and R. D. Biggs (eds.), *The Organization of Power. Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, SAOC 46, 2nd edn. (Chicago, 1991), 123–31.

²² Unconsciously following the racial distinctions imposed by Octavian, classical historians invariably designate the descendants of mixed Greco-Egyptian parentage as Hellenized *Egyptians*, rather than Egyptianized *Greeks*. A corrective is found in Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 124.

²³ BGU 1210; see A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri II* (Cambridge, MA, 1934), 42–53; Jones, *History of Rome*, 262–66; N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 32–34; Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 127–28.

Augustus, the government now enforced a strict hierarchy of ethnic classes, divided into privileged Roman citizens, favored urban Greeks, and disenfranchised Egyptians. Only those able to demonstrate citizenship in the exclusive “Greek cities” (*poleis*) of Alexandria, Naukratis, Ptolemais, and, after AD 130, Antinoopolis, were eligible for the status of Greek. Greco-Egyptian families were all stigmatized as Egyptian, a class burdened by extraordinary restrictions and fines:

- §43. If Egyptians after a father’s death record their father as a Roman, a fourth (of the estate) is confiscated.
- §44. If an Egyptian registers a son as an epebe [of a polis], a sixth is confiscated.
- §45. If an urban Greek marries an Egyptian woman and dies childless, the fisc appropriates his possessions; if he has children, it confiscates two-thirds. But if he has begotten children of an urban Greek woman and has three or more children, his possessions go to them . . .
- §49. Freedmen of Alexandrians may not marry Egyptian women.
- §53. Egyptians who, when married to discharged soldiers, style themselves Romans are subject to the provision on violation of status.²⁴

No Egyptian could attain Roman citizenship without first acquiring elusive Alexandrian citizenship,²⁵ and the normal route to Roman citizenship, service in the legions, was effectively barred to all Egyptians. Any Egyptian who might enter the legion by ruse was denied this standard retirement benefit upon discovery.

- §55. If an Egyptian serves in a legion without being detected, he returns after his discharge to the Egyptian status.²⁶

As Roman or Greek citizenship conferred exemption from certain taxes, obligations and punishments, some restrictions on social advancement could be justified on a purely practical basis. However, the unparalleled severity of this “veritable ancient apartheid” has suggested to many a more sinister interpretation, deriving from Octavian’s personal animosity to Cleopatra and all things Egyptian.²⁷ More charitably, the system could be viewed as a dispassionate guarantee of generations of serf labor for the critical grain supply. As once noted by Milne, “Egypt supplied corn, not men, to

²⁴ N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 33; Jones, *History of Rome*, 265.

²⁵ See the letter of Pliny the Younger imploring Trajan on behalf of his Egyptian chiropractor, cited in N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 18; and Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 127.

²⁶ Hunt and Edgar, *Select Papyri II*, 50–51; Jones, *History of Rome*, 265.

²⁷ N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 33–34.

Rome.”²⁸ In any case, there can be little dispute that the Augustan social regulations effectively served as “an instrument of fiscal oppression.”²⁹

For the native sacerdotal elite, fiscal and social restrictions came quickly. Under the Ptolemies, the wealthy Memphite family of high priests had dominated ecclesiastical bureaucracy and economy and maintained intimate relations with the royal house. Like medieval popes, these Egyptian “pontiffs” crowned the succeeding rulers and controlled extensive territories attached to religious institutions. At the moment of Octavian’s invasion, the Memphite priesthood was held by Petubast IV, whose sudden death in 30 BC at the age of sixteen is quite suspicious, particularly since his official interment was delayed by some six years. His successor, Psenamoun II, disappears after this ceremony in 23 BC, and the line comes to an abrupt end.³⁰ Thereafter, temple matters were subject to the secular authority of the imperial “private account.” By the reign of Hadrian, religious authority was centralized under an appointed civil bureaucrat of equestrian rank, “the High Priest of Alexandria and all Egypt.”³¹

The regulations of the *idios logos* provide a clear picture of the new arrangement. Priesthoods are reduced in number, temple holdings are decreased, and the civil bureaucracy now monitors the order and tenure of the hierarchy, their duties, dress and personal finances. Higher clergy were forbidden to engage in any financial activities outside their designated religious duties. All priests were required to wear linen (but never wool) and to be circumcised, unblemished and, subject to a 1,000-drachma fine, shaven bald.³² As early as 4 BC, the prefect Gaius Turranius had demanded a registry of temple functionaries, their duties and their children, with the expressed intent of removing all individuals “not of priestly origin.”³³ A further registry of the property of individual priests was introduced in the reign of Nero, becoming an annual report on temple and priestly finances (*graphai hieron*).³⁴ Admission to the priestly caste now required official

²⁸ J. G. Milne, *A History of Egypt under Roman Rule* (London, 1898), v.

²⁹ T. Rice Holmes, as cited in Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 33.

³⁰ E. A. E. Reymond, *From the Records of a Priestly Family from Memphis* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 220–21, 231; with corrections in Jan Quaegebeur, “The Genealogy of the Memphite High Priest Family in the Hellenistic Period,” in Dorothy J. Crawford, Jan Quaegebeur and Willy Clarysse (eds.), *Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis*, *Studia Hellenistica* 24 (Leuven, 1980), 43–81.

³¹ M. Stead, “The high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt,” in R. S. Bagnall et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the XVIth International Congress of Papyrology 1980* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1981), 411–18; vs. Milne, *A History of Egypt under Roman Rule* (2nd revised edn., London, 1924), 11, 181, who attributes this title to the reign of Augustus.

³² N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 92–93; Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 179–81.

³³ BGU 1199; N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 180.

³⁴ J. E. G. Whitehorn, “P. Lond. II, 359 and Tuscus’ list of temple perquisites,” *Chronique d’Égypte*, 53 (1978), 321–28; O. Montevecchi, “*Graphai hieron*,” *Aegyptus*, 12 (1932), 317–28.

certification before the provincial administrator (*strategos* of the nome) that the candidate was of priestly descent and unblemished, and thus entitled to the restricted rite of circumcision.³⁵ In return for such social isolation, the temple hierarchy was provided with a government subvention (*syntaxis*), and the upper echelons were exempt from taxation and compulsory public service.³⁶ From these Roman restrictions derives the later stereotyped image of cloistered, ascetic Egyptian priests, devoted to purity and contemplation and “enduring hunger and thirst and paucity of food during their whole life.”³⁷

The restricted acceptance accorded the native clergy parallels that granted to Demotic, the indigenous language and script. Unlike the Ptolemies, the Roman emperors never authorized trilingual decrees, which would have certified the official legitimacy of the Egyptian language. While no formal policy against Demotic is known, the use of Demotic contracts declines precipitously after AD 50, with only isolated examples continuing into the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Roman administration, conducted in Latin and Greek, probably discouraged the recognition of documents in a third language incomprehensible to imperial officials. To be valid in cases of lawsuit, contracts had to be registered with the official archives, and such registries operated exclusively in Greek. Native courts were also discontinued, so that legal proceedings and relevant instruments were necessarily in Greek, or in Greek translation. For purely practical reasons, Egyptians increasingly switched from Demotic to Greek scribes. “Demotic documentation was a victim, or casualty, of the Roman annexation of Egypt.”³⁸

Despite bureaucratic restrictions, written Demotic flourished, and in some genres actually expanded, until the Christianization of the province in the late fourth century. Religious texts, formerly confined to hieroglyphs or hieratic, first appear in the “secular” Demotic script in the final years BC.³⁹ The second century in particular witnessed a resurgence of Demotic writings in religious, literary, and scientific fields associated with temple scriptoria.⁴⁰

³⁵ David and van Groningen, *Papyrological Primer*, 127–28.

³⁶ Richard Gordon, “Religion in the Roman Empire: the civic compromise and its limits,” in Mary Beard and John North (eds.), *Pagan Priests* (Ithaca, 1990), 241–42.

³⁷ Chaeremon, frags. 10–11, in P. W. van der Horst, *Chaeremon*, *Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’Empire romain* 101 (Leiden, 1984), 16–23.

³⁸ See N. Lewis, “The demise of the Demotic document: when and why,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 79 (1993), 276–81 (quote on p. 277), and the present author’s comments therein. Further late Demotic documents in K.-Th. Zauzich, “Spät-demotische Papyrusurkunden III,” *Enchoria*, 4 (1974), 71–82; and idem, “Spät-demotische Papyrusurkunden IV,” *Enchoria*, 7 (1977), 151–80.

³⁹ For one of the first examples, see Mark Smith, *The Mortuary Texts of Papyrus BM 10507*, Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum III (London, 1987), 19.

⁴⁰ W. J. Tait, “Demotic Literature and Egyptian Society,” in Janet H. Johnson (ed.), *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society. Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond*, SAOC 51 (Chicago, 1992), 303–10.

Proficiency in Demotic and the older scripts was expected of priestly candidates, and the ancient hieroglyphic system was maintained beyond the prohibition of Pagan cults. During the reign of Trajan, in 107, the prominent town of Oxyrhynchus employed five hieroglyphic carvers for its temples to native deities.⁴¹ By the second century, priests of the Fayyum metropolis of Narmuthis (Medinet Madi), who provided services to smaller regional shrines, conducted internal business in mixed Demotic and Greek.⁴² Experimentation with the Greek and Egyptian scripts continued in priestly circles. Devised to record vowels in Pagan incantations, the resulting “Coptic” script was ultimately adopted by Christian writers to facilitate the spread of biblical literacy among the indigenous population.⁴³

The vitality of Egyptian religious culture in the face of official hostility or lack of interest is manifest in its contemporary penchant for adaptability. For the Latin state, the official cult of the Roman emperor was readily absorbed within pharaonic ruler worship.⁴⁴ For the Hellenistic population, Egyptian themes predominated in funerary contexts such as the Alexandrian catacombs of Kūm al-Shiqāf (Qom es-Shugafa),⁴⁵ while Greek residents in the Fayyūm and Oxyrhynchus revered as city patrons the crocodile Sobek (Souchos) and the hippopotamus Taweret (Thoeris).⁴⁶ For the native elite, Greek portraiture replaced traditional burial masks to produce the celebrated “Fayyūm portraits” of the first to fourth centuries.⁴⁷ Syncretistic terra-cotta figurines of deities occupied the household shrines of both sections of the population.

Not all religious reaction was so harmonious. Priestly rancor at Roman misrule appears both in isolated revolts (as in AD 71–175) and in apocalyptic literature like “The Potter’s Prophecy,” decreeing the downfall of Roman

⁴¹ P. Oxy. 1029; see Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 179.

⁴² Paolo Gallo, “The Wandering Personnel of the Temple of Narmuthis in the Faiyum and Some Toponyms of the Meris of Polemon,” in Johnson, *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society*, 119–31.

⁴³ R. K. Ritner, “Coptic,” in Peter T. Daniels and William Bright (eds.), *The World’s Writing Systems* (Oxford, 1996), 287–90.

⁴⁴ Elanor Huzar, “Emperor Worship in Julio-Claudian Egypt,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5 (Berlin, 1995), 3092–143; Heinz Heinen, “Vorstufen und Anfänge des Herrscherkultes im römischen Ägypten,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3144–80; and Jean-Claude Grenier, “L’Empereur et le Pharaon,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3181–94.

⁴⁵ Françoise Dunand, “Pratiques et croyances funéraires en Égypte romaine,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3216–32.

⁴⁶ Cf. John Whitehorne, “The Pagan Cults of Roman Oxyrhynchus,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3050–91.

⁴⁷ Lorelei H. Corcoran, *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt (I–IV Centuries AD)*, SAOC 56 (Chicago, 1995); idem, “Evidence for the Survival of Pharaonic Religion in Roman Egypt: The Portrait Mummy,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3316–32.

authority and the reinstatement of pharaonic rule.⁴⁸ Though of certain Egyptian origin, the prophesy circulated in Greek copies until the end of the third century.

All Egyptians had cause to resent the oppressive Roman system of taxation. At the instigation of Augustus, a new capitation tax was levied upon male Egyptians between the ages of fourteen and sixty. The full rate of this poll tax, or *laographia*, varied greatly between districts, from 12 drachmas in the Hermopolite nome to 40 drachmas in the prosperous Fayyūm. Only natives paid the full amount. Romans, citizens of Greek cities and certain priests were exempt, and nome metropolitans paid a reduced rate. Egyptians alone contributed an additional dike tax of $6\frac{2}{3}$ drachmas and a “pig tax” of about 2 drachmas. Such taxes were paid to the state, upon which most regional services were financially dependent. For purposes of collection, a formal “house by house” census was instituted at fourteen-year intervals, corresponding to the age of male majority. All individuals registered in their home districts, indicating heads of households, inhabitants and distinguishing marks.⁴⁹ Births and deaths required individual registration.⁵⁰

Corresponding cadastral surveys listed agricultural properties and owners, with tax and irrigation categories. Paid in kind, the land tax provided the primary source of revenue for the province and was often ruthlessly collected by zealous tax farmers, who profited personally from any surplus. To these basic taxes were added well over 100 further charges and surcharges upon individual goods and services, sales and transport. Further impositions came in the form of “liturgies,” compulsory acts of public service entailing either physical labor (“corporeal”) or payment (“patrimonial”). Roman use of liturgies in Egypt was unparalleled in the empire, affecting all residents except the privileged classes and fathers of five or more children. Elite priests, veterans, women, the aged and infirm were freed from corporeal liturgies. The liturgic system was expanded throughout the Roman era, replacing even tax-farming by AD 117.

In aggregate, the taxes were exceptionally burdensome upon the native cultivators, and in time affected even the prosperous elite. A distinctive response among the Egyptian population was the unusual custom of

⁴⁸ P. Oxy. 2332; in E. Lobel and C. H. Roberts, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part XXII*, Graeco-Roman Memoirs 31 (London, 1954), 89–99; Ludwig Koenen, “Die Prophezeiungen des ‘Töpfers’,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 2 (1968), 178–209; idem, “The Prophecies of a Potter: A Prophecy of World Renewal Becomes an Apocalypse,” in Deborah H. Samuel (ed.), *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology*, American Studies in Papyrology 7 (Toronto, 1970), 249–54; idem, “A Supplementary Note on the Date of the Oracle of the Potter,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 54 (1984), 9–13; and Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, SAOC 54 (Chicago, 1993), 152.

⁴⁹ Examples in Jones, *History of Rome*, 256–57, 259–60.

⁵⁰ Robert K. Ritner, “Poll Tax on the Dead,” *Enchoria*, 15 (1988), 205–07.