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978-0-521-58815-7 - Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook

Edited by Jane Rowlandson

Excerpt

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1 Introduction

I. The purpose of this book

Ancient Egyptian civilisation is striking for the wealth of the material remains it has left for posterity: the pyramids, temples and other monuments, statues and painting, written texts, even the bodies of both humans and animals preserved through mummification. Thus many people are familiar with the names, not only of many of its male rulers, but also of royal women, such as Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, and Kleopatra, the last queen of the Ptolemaic dynasty. It is this late period of ancient Egyptian history (332 BC–AD 641), when Egypt was subject first to the Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies, and subsequently incorporated into the Roman and later the Byzantine empire, with which this book is primarily concerned. This period has left a copious range of documentation about the lives of ordinary people in the country towns and villages, consisting of both written texts and archaeological and other material evidence (discussed further below in section 3). This evidence depicts a culturally heterogeneous society formed by the interaction of the traditional Egyptian civilisation, which had been subject both to Near Eastern and African influence and to classical Greek and Roman culture.

The material collected in this sourcebook, documenting the lives of women in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt,¹ reflects the complexity of this cultural interaction, and thus provides a body of evidence of great interest for students of ancient history (whether Greek, Roman or Near Eastern); social, cultural and gender history; and for anyone interested generally in the history of women or of ancient society. This introductory chapter, and the introductions and notes in subsequent chapters, are intended to make the

¹ Although not all the texts derive from Egypt (the texts of most Greek authors cited were preserved through the manuscript tradition, not through papyri from Egypt, and 6.238 is taken from a school book probably from the western Roman empire), they do all in some way bear on the lives of women in Egypt. Papyri or similar texts relating to women in other parts of the ancient world are not included; for examples which offer good parallels to the material collected here, see *P Babatha* (legal texts relating to a Jewish woman from Maoza at the south of the Dead Sea in Israel), the similar archive of Salome (Cotton, 1995), and *Tab. Vindol.* II 291–2 (a birthday invitation and letter from Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina from Vindolanda in Northumberland, England).

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book accessible to readers who have no previous knowledge of Ptolemaic or Roman Egypt.

All the sources collected in this book relate in some way to women. But is it right to concentrate on women as opposed to the other half of humanity? That women have traditionally been largely excluded from political and military history (distinctively 'male' spheres of action) is no justification for an exclusive concentration on women's behaviour in those spheres of society and economy in which both sexes participated and interacted. It has been argued, with much plausibility, that we can appreciate what it means to be female only in conjunction with an understanding of what it means to be male; that 'male' and 'female', 'men' and 'women' are relational terms, which can be defined only in contradistinction to one another. For this reason, it is preferable to write the history of 'gender', in which women's and men's behaviour is explored in relation to one another.²

In fact, one of the strengths of the sources collected in this book is that throughout women are shown not in isolation, but interacting with others, male and female, in contexts ranging from the immediate family to society at large. This material enables us both to identify cases in which women's behaviour was not sharply differentiated from men's (for instance, in the procedures for borrowing grain, or in casting a magical spell), and to see what was genuinely distinctive in women's experience.

Thus the texts, although chosen to illustrate aspects of women's experience, incidentally also throw light both on men's activities and on broader aspects of Egyptian society in this period, from demography to literacy, governmental structures to religious practices. The editorial material draws attention where appropriate to such matters, as well as to whether a particular text is typical of the overall range of evidence from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, or whether it is unusual or even unique. Although one purpose of a sourcebook is to allow the sources to 'speak for themselves', to enable readers to draw whatever conclusions they find appropriate from the material included, it is also incumbent upon the editors to provide, for a readership which may have little or no background knowledge, sufficient context for each item to ensure that its significance is not fundamentally misinterpreted.

The editorial material in this book is arranged in the following way. The rest of this chapter provides general background information on Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt: a brief survey of its history and of the changing structures of its government and administration and the rhythms of everyday life; and finally some general information on the kinds of source material used in the book. The sources are then grouped into five thematic chapters, each with an introduction explaining its arrangement and general issues relevant to the source material within it. Within chapters, the sources are grouped by

² See for instance Scott (1986).

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topic into sections. The precise arrangement of material, however, and particularly the extent to which arrangement is chronological, varies between the chapters to suit the nature of their subject matter. Naturally, many individual texts are relevant to several different themes, and may indeed be relevant to more than one chapter; cross-references³ in the introductions to the chapters or the sources themselves draw attention to the relevance of passages elsewhere in the book, while the index provides another way of following up themes illustrated by material arranged in disparate places.

2. Greek and Roman Egypt: historical background

In the mid-fifth century BC, the Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt. At this time Egypt was part of the Persian empire, and had been since its conquest by Cambyses in 525 BC. Thereafter, except for periods of rebellion when native pharaohs temporarily re-established control, it remained subject to rule by a succession of foreign powers. In his account of the conflict between Greece and Persia, Herodotus included a lengthy discussion of Egypt's history and social customs, one important theme of which is the 'otherness' of Egypt in comparison with the practices of the Greek world. The reversal of gender roles forms a prominent aspect of this comparison:

Not only is the climate different from that of the rest of the world, and the rivers unlike any other rivers, but the people also in most of their manners and customs exactly reverse the common practice of mankind. The women manage the marketplace and the shops, while the men weave indoors; and although other people push the woof upwards when they weave, Egyptians push it down. The men carry their burdens on top of their heads, but the women carry them on their shoulders. The women urinate standing up, but the men squat down. They do their eating outside in the streets, but defecate inside their houses; on the grounds that what is shameful yet necessary should be carried out secretly, while what is not shameful should be done in the open. A woman cannot serve in the priestly office of any deity, whether male or female, but men serve as priests to all, gods and goddesses. Sons need not take care of their parents unless they choose, but daughters must do so, even if they are unwilling.

While there is clearly more to this theme of reversal than mere literal description, some of the points of contrast reflect real differences of gender roles between traditional Egyptian and Greek society.⁴

³ References to texts in the same chapter simply give the number of the text (e.g. 236); those to texts in other chapters cite both chapter and text (e.g. 6.236). References to chapter 3 may be to an archive (see below) rather than a single text (e.g. Ch.3 Arch. H).

⁴ Herodotus, *Histories*, II.35; on the accuracy or otherwise of Herodotus' description, see Lloyd (1976), 146–52. For women in Pharaonic Egyptian society, see Lesko (1989) parts I and II, Robins (1993), Tyldesley (1994), Capel and Markoe (1996).

The climate and ecology would indeed also appear strange to a visitor from the Mediterranean. Since prehistoric times, rainfall in Egypt has been negligible; instead the country was totally dependent for water on the river Nile and its annual flood, which inundated the entire valley for a month or two in summer, leaving towns and villages raised on mounds like islands. As the water receded, depositing a layer of fertile silt on the fields, farmers sowed their seed in the damp earth for crops to be harvested the following spring. Thus the Egyptians divided the year into three, not four, seasons: *akhet*, the flood, *peret*, the sowing, and *shemu*, the harvest. The religious calendar of ritual and festivals also followed the rhythm of the Nile, reflecting anxieties that the flood might be insufficient or excessive.

The Nile, too, dictates the regional structure of Egypt, which has a long, narrow strip of cultivable land over 600 miles along the valley, fanning out in the north where the Nile splits into a broad delta. Despite the ease of transport and communication provided by the river, Egypt was perceived as the union of two distinct areas: Upper (southern) Egypt, focussed on the great religious centre of Thebes (modern Luxor), and Lower (northern) Egypt with its most important city, Memphis, just south of the apex of the Delta. To east and west, the boundary between valley and desert is remarkably sharp; immediately the ground rises, it turns from fertile green to barren rock or sand. Some towns and villages, as well as many tombs and necropoleis for the dead, lay just beyond the cultivated area on the desert edge. A little further out the monks of late antiquity sited their hermits' cells. Routes radiated from the valley across the desert: to the Red Sea (important for trade with the east), and the stone quarries in the mountains of the eastern desert, exploited by rulers from native pharaohs to Roman emperors; and to the oases of the western desert.

At the time of Herodotus' visit, there were already Greeks living in Egypt: since the seventh century BC, they had been attracted to the country as traders and mercenaries. Indeed, a Greek city called Naukratis had been founded in the Delta as a port of trade; from here, according to Herodotus (II.134–5), came a famous *hetaira* (courtesan) Rhodopis who was bought by the poet Sappho's brother. The city of Memphis, a major economic as well as religious centre, included many Greeks in its cosmopolitan population.

Persian rule seems to have been bitterly resented by the Egyptians, and Alexander the Great was welcomed as a liberator when he took control of Egypt in the winter of 332/1 BC during his conquest of the Persian empire. Alexander conciliated the Egyptians by sacrificing to the native gods, held games at Memphis, which would have pleased the Greeks living there, and found time to journey through the desert to the Siwah oasis, to consult the oracle of Ammon, from which (according to later accounts) he learnt that he was the son of Zeus. But for Egypt, the most substantial legacy of his visit was his foundation of Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast, destined to become for the next six centuries the largest city of the Greek world, a major political, cultural and economic centre. In spring 331, Alexander

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departed, to further conquests and a sudden and premature death at Babylon in Mesopotamia in June 323 BC.

Alexander's death precipitated a prolonged struggle among his generals for control of his empire. The initial allocation of governorships gave Egypt to Ptolemy son of Lagos, who immediately took physical control of the country, defending and consolidating his position throughout the bitter 'Wars of the Successors' against his rivals. At first, like the other generals, he ruled his territories in the name of kings Philip III, Alexander the Great's half-brother, and Alexander IV, Alexander's infant son, who succeeded him as Macedonian kings; but these two soon fell victim to the ambitions of the rival generals, and from November 305 Ptolemy himself took the royal title, as Pharaoh to the Egyptians and *basileus* ('king') to his Greek and Macedonian subjects.⁵

From the start, Ptolemy I was eager to attract immigrants to Egypt from the Greek world, both to Alexandria and to the Egyptian countryside, known in Greek as the *chora*. Alexandria was rapidly developed both as an economic centre, its three excellent harbours providing a link between the Nile valley and the Mediterranean sea, and as a cultural centre rivalling the prestige of Athens. Ptolemy was assisted by Demetrius of Phaleron, a pupil of Aristotle, in founding the famous Museum and Library within the area of the royal palace, which dominated the eastern quarter of the city.⁶ In order to maintain the loyalty of his troops in a period of volatile allegiances, as well as to develop a hellenised population in the *chora*, Ptolemy provided his soldiers with *kleroi*, allotments of land, in many parts of Egypt. This policy, continued by his successors, had a profound impact on Egyptian rural society, as the military settlers (*kleruchs*) and their families came into contact with the local Egyptian population, and often intermarried with them. Unfortunately we do not know exactly how many settlers came in total, even less how many women accompanied the *kleruchs*, but a rough estimate would suggest perhaps 100,000 *kleruchs* and active soldiers, in addition to many thousands of male civilians, settling in the *chora*, accompanied by probably rather fewer women.⁷ *Kleruchs* were settled throughout the Delta and Nile valley, although because of the survival of the *papyri* (see

⁵ The title 'Soter' (Saviour), by which Ptolemy I was known to later generations, was not used as an official title in Egypt during his lifetime. Hazzard (1992) argues against the common view that it was first granted to Ptolemy in 304 BC by the people of Rhodes in gratitude for his help during a siege.

⁶ The best description of the topography and organisation of Ptolemaic Alexandria is by Strabo (xvii.1.6–10), who himself visited Egypt shortly after the Roman takeover, during the 20s BC.

⁷ On settlement numbers in the *chora*, see Rathbone (1990), 113; also *P.Count.* (forthcoming). In addition, there must have been over 100,000 male immigrants to Alexandria, with perhaps a not greatly inferior number of women; we should expect some attempt to maintain the hellenic identity of its citizen population, although now evidence has come to light of a second generation Alexandrian citizen, Monimos son of Kleandros, who married an Egyptian woman, Esoeris (Clarysse, 1992).

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below, pp. 19–20), our knowledge of it is concentrated on two areas: the northern part of the Nile valley from Memphis south to around Hermopolis, and the Fayum, a fertile area adjacent to the Nile valley to the south-west of Memphis. Ptolemy I also founded a Greek city (*polis*), Ptolemais, in Upper Egypt, perhaps as a counterweight to the enormous regional influence of the priests of Amun in the old Pharaonic capital of Thebes.

Ptolemy's son, Ptolemy II (Philadelphos), who had been associated as joint ruler for the last three years of his father's reign, did much to consolidate and enhance the profile of the dynasty, as well as to develop the political and economic strength of his kingdom, which encompassed numerous overseas territories in addition to Egypt. In these policies, he is sometimes regarded as having been influenced by his second wife, his sister Arsinoe (see 2.2), and certainly the public image of Arsinoe, and of their parents, Ptolemy I and Berenike, was very important in legitimating Ptolemaic rule, both in Egypt and overseas, through the institution of festivals and of cults, both of the dynasty as a whole and of its individual female members.⁸ The practices of brother–sister marriage and of using cult to enhance the dynasty's image continued under subsequent generations of the family.

The reigns of Ptolemy II (285–246) and Ptolemy III (Euergetes: 246–221) have often been regarded as the apogee of Ptolemaic prosperity and power:

In Egypt, there is everything that exists anywhere in the world: wealth, gymnasia, power, peace, fame, sights, philosophers, gold, young men, the shrine of the Sibling Gods, a good king, the Museum, wine – all the good things one could want. And women – more of them, I swear by the daughters of Hades than heaven boasts stars – and their looks; like the goddesses who once induced Paris to judge their beauty!⁹

The praise of poets working under Ptolemaic patronage should not, of course, be taken literally, and recent assessments have in particular suggested that economic problems arose towards the end of Ptolemy II's reign, as the result of imperialistic over-extension.¹⁰ But the papyri written in Greek, which survive in large numbers from about 260 BC onwards, suggest a spate of activity by officials and other immigrants devoted to consolidating the economic and administrative organisation of Egypt, in the common interest of the royal revenues and the individuals themselves.

Over its long history, Pharaonic Egypt had developed a relatively complex and sophisticated administrative structure. The collection and distribution of revenues by officials were recorded meticulously by the scribes, who occupied a highly regarded position in Egyptian society. These procedures

⁸ See further 2.3–6. It is notable that several queens seem to have achieved some genuine popularity as goddesses, whereas cults were not established to individual male members of the dynasty. The cult of Ptolemy I and Berenike (the 'Theoi Soteres') was originally distinct from the main dynastic cult, but was joined to it under Ptolemy IV.

⁹ Herodas, *Mimes* 1, lines 26–35; cf. Theokritos, *Idyll* 17 for an encomium of Ptolemaic power. On Herodas, see 6.289; on Theokritos, 6.262. ¹⁰ Turner (1984).

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were facilitated by the division of the country into some forty administrative districts, called *nomes*. Like the Persians before them, the Ptolemies did not entirely replace this traditional bureaucratic structure, preferring to modify it to suit their needs. The nome remained the basic administrative area, while the traditional scribal and revenue-collecting functions were preserved in officials operating at the level of the nome or of its subdivisions, the toparchy and village; such as the *basilikogrammateus* (royal scribe), *komogrammateus* (village scribe) and komarch.¹¹ The names of these officials may suggest to the modern bureaucratic mind a clear demarcation both of function and of physical scope of competence, but the documents show that in practice the competence of officials was much more fluid than this implies, with several officials often co-operating in a particular task. At nome-level, new officials were also introduced: the *oikonomos* (steward), whose Greek title reminds us that from one perspective the Ptolemies could regard Egypt as their personal *oikos* (family estate); and the *strategos* (commander), whose role initially concerned only the military settlers, but gradually expanded to become the main nome official. The assessment and collection of royal revenues were a concern of all these officials to some degree, and also of the checking-clerks (*antigraphais*); one basic principle of this multiplicity of officials was that they should keep a check on one another's honesty and competence. Like other Hellenistic monarchs, the Ptolemies were absolute rulers, unchecked by any council or other elected body, and assisted by only their own appointees: the 'friends' (*philoî*), who were advisers, and various high officials based in Alexandria, such as the *dioiketes*, responsible for financial administration.

Under the early Ptolemies, the concern to maximise royal revenue and to create a kingdom which was at least partially hellenised led to significant economic developments. Major irrigation works in the Fayum (renamed the Arsinoite nome about 257 BC, after Ptolemy II's sister-wife Arsinoe) greatly expanded the cultivable area, providing land for development by settlers from the Greek world, assisted by a workforce attracted from other parts of Egypt (and abroad: Syrians and other Semites). The scale of this new development may have helped to minimise, although it certainly did not wholly prevent, resentment by the Egyptian population of their new neighbours and overlords. Two crop changes of major importance reflected Greek dietary preferences – for *puros* (durum wheat) as opposed to *olyra*, the traditional Egyptian grain (probably *triticum dicoccum*, emmer wheat), and for wine alongside the traditional barley beer. The tax revenue of $\frac{1}{6}$ (the *apomoira*) on the vast new areas of vineyard was devoted exclusively to funding the cult of Arsinoe.¹² On oil, however, the Greeks may have had to compromise their cultural preferences; although the cultivation of olives was

¹¹ Cf. Falivene (1991).

¹² Only the *apomoira* from non-temple land was devoted to the cult of Arsinoe; that from temple land continued to be paid to the Egyptian temples for the gods in general, as in pre-Ptolemaic times; Clarysse and Vandorpe (1998).

apparently expanded, particularly in the Fayum (cf. **5.169**), Egypt is not ideally suited to olive-growing, and it is clear from the surviving regulations concerning the monopoly of oil production that most oil in Egypt came not from olive trees, but from various field-crops.¹³

Perhaps the most important economic change was the monetisation of sectors of the economy; hitherto Egypt had issued no coinage for internal use, operating a 'natural' economy.¹⁴ Under the Ptolemies (and the Romans later) taxes on most grain production continued to be collected in kind, but money taxes were introduced on some agricultural produce (notably that from pasture), trades and manufactured goods, and for a bewildering variety of small personal taxes. Thus no one in Egypt, Greek or Egyptian, male or female, could have remained unaffected by these changes. The Ptolemies initially issued gold, silver and bronze coins, but ordinary monetary transactions attested in our documents refer only to silver and bronze: drachmas and their sub-divisions, obols and chalkoi. From the late third century onward, transactions were conducted only with reference to the bronze currency.¹⁵ The currency was a 'closed' system: Ptolemaic coins did not circulate outside Egypt and the Ptolemaic overseas possessions, while foreign currency was forbidden to circulate within Ptolemaic territory, and had to be exchanged (at a cost) for Ptolemaic coin.

By the late third century, new immigration seems to have tailed off; families who had been settled in the Egyptian chora for two generations or more would mostly have lost their links with their ancestral Greek cities, and some would have intermarried with local Egyptian families. From now until the end of the Ptolemaic period, it becomes increasingly difficult for the historian to establish an individual's ethnicity; certainly nomenclature is a poor guide, since one individual could have both an Egyptian and a Greek name, used in different contexts.¹⁶ Even persons described explicitly as 'Greek' might be of predominantly Egyptian ancestry. Ethnic identity had clearly become partly a matter of self-definition within the officially defined categories, reflecting one's social aspirations as well as cultural preferences. The ambiguities and tensions arising from such choices, which the historian can barely grasp, must have been much more immediate for the individuals themselves.

In 207 BC a major rebellion broke out in the Thebaid. For some twenty years two rebel pharaohs, Haronnophris and Chaonnophris, controlled parts of Upper Egypt. Egyptian documents from this area are dated by their reigns

¹³ E.g. sesame oil for food, castor oil for lights (called kiki or krotón; see **3.79, 86**). See the 'Revenue Laws of Ptolemy Philadelphos' (*P.Rev.*), partly translated in Austin (1981), nos. 236 (*apomoira*), and 235 (oil-crops); and Sandy (1989).

¹⁴ However, the deben and kite were used as accounting units; see Glossary.

¹⁵ While the gold and silver coins remained relatively pure, the bronze was a token currency, whose value dropped considerably against the silver and gold in the course of the third and second centuries. ¹⁶ Clarysse (1985).

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(see **5.163**), and work temporarily ceased on the great temple of Horos at Edfu, begun in 238 by Ptolemy III as an act of royal patronage.¹⁷ Worse, Ptolemy V Epiphanes was a young child when he succeeded to the throne on the premature death of his father (Ptolemy IV Philopator, 221–204 BC), and two aggressive rival kings, Philip V of Macedon and the Seleucid Antiochos III, seized the chance to dismember much of the Ptolemaic overseas empire. By an astute policy of alliance with the priesthood of Memphis, royal authority was gradually reasserted over the whole of Egypt.¹⁸ But a marriage link with Kleopatra I, daughter of Antiochos, failed to regain the crucial territory of Syria–Phoenicia, despite claims that it had constituted her dowry.

The dynastic problems worsened: Epiphanes also died young (in 180 BC), and his two sons on reaching adulthood spent much of their energies disputing the monarchy with one another, both seeking the support of Rome which from the early second century was an increasingly dominant factor in the politics of the Hellenistic East. But Rome showed little interest in Ptolemaic affairs apart from one celebrated occasion in 168 when the proconsul Popillius Laenas obliged the Seleucid king Antiochos IV to withdraw from an attempted takeover of Egypt.¹⁹ After the death of the elder brother (Ptolemy VI Philometor, 180–145), and of his son (Ptolemy VII, rapidly disposed of in 145), Ptolemy VIII, along with his second wife, his niece Kleopatra III, became embroiled in a civil war against his first wife, Kleopatra II (mother of Kleopatra III). The deleterious effect of this war on the whole country is reflected in the amnesty decree issued jointly by the three rulers after their reconciliation in 118 BC.²⁰ Kleopatra III remained a powerful figure after Ptolemy VIII's death (in 116 BC), ruling jointly with first her elder son, then her younger son, who eventually murdered her in 101 BC.²¹

In the first century, Egypt's fate became closely bound up with that of Rome. The Roman general Sulla's choice of Ptolemy XI as ruler in 80 BC failed to secure the approval of the increasingly vociferous Alexandrian populace. But the longer reign of his successor Ptolemy XII 'Auletes' (80–51 BC) was dogged by the need to resort to bribery to secure Roman support, firstly for recognition by Rome in the face of the plans of some politicians

¹⁷ Pestman (1995b).

¹⁸ D. J. Thompson (1988), ch. 4, esp. 118–21. The famous Rosetta stone contains a priestly decree of 196 thanking Epiphanes for restoring order in the country; several other similar decrees followed in the 180s.

¹⁹ Polybius, xxix.27; cf. Livy, xlv.12. The recent discovery at Saqqara of a group of ostraka written by an Egyptian priest called Hor, who claimed to have foreseen Antiochos' withdrawal in a dream, has confirmed our knowledge of these events, and added details: Ray (1976), texts 1–7; cf. pp. 124–30.

²⁰ *P.Tebt.* 15, translated in *Sel.Pap.* II 210 and Austin (1981), no. 231.

²¹ Ptolemies IX and X; see **2.8**, for Pausanias' account of these events.

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(notably Crassus and Caesar) for a takeover of Egypt, and secondly for restoration to his throne from which the Alexandrians had expelled him (58–55 BC). A Roman, Rabirius Postumus, was brought in as Auletes' financial minister (*dioiketes*) to help him in his financial straits, and the troops of Gabinius, the Roman governor of Syria, who had assisted in the restoration remained to support him. Egypt had become a Roman protectorate.

However, the final and most famous Ptolemaic ruler managed to seize the opportunity provided by civil war in Rome to restore a brief semblance of Ptolemaic greatness. Although the 'myth' of Kleopatra VII may be now easier to grasp than the historical realities, it does seem that an initial phase of insecurity culminated in her accompanying Caesar to Rome. On her return to Egypt after his murder in 44 BC, Kleopatra began consciously to devise policies and to project an image of herself designed to enhance her popularity in Egypt. In particular, she was able to influence Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), who as triumvir and governor of the eastern half of the Roman empire had the power to delegate authority to 'client rulers', and hence to grant her control of significant parts of the former Ptolemaic overseas empire.²² In 34 BC a massive public relations exercise, the so-called 'donations of Alexandria', was staged to divide the eastern territories (including some which Rome did not in fact control) among Kleopatra herself, her son (allegedly by Caesar) Ptolemy XV Caesarion, and her sons and daughter by Antony, Alexander Helios (Sun), Kleopatra Selene (Moon), and Ptolemy Philadelphos. But such displays merely made it easier for Antony's rival Octavian (Caesar's adopted son, the future emperor Augustus) to consolidate Roman public opinion behind him in a concerted campaign of vilification against Antony's liaison with the 'Eastern queen'. Octavian's victory in the war which followed owed almost as much to the effectiveness of this propaganda as to the military victories of his generals; at Actium in September 31 BC, Kleopatra and Antony managed to escape the enemy blockade with part of their fleet, to hold out in Egypt until their final defeat and death nearly a year later (August 30 BC) (see **2.14**). Caesarion (whose paternity made him a severe threat to Octavian) was rapidly eliminated, and Kleopatra Selene married off to a 'client king', Juba of Mauretania (the other two sons disappear from the historical record). Egypt, much too dangerous to remain a client kingdom, was made into a Roman province.

Roman Egypt was undoubtedly a 'province of the Roman people', and not (as some older views claim) a personal possession of the Roman emperor; nevertheless there were some anomalies in its administration.²³ Presumably because of its perceived threat to Roman stability (we must remember that Alexandria remained a great and cosmopolitan city,

²² See further **2.13**, and the works cited in its introduction. For a general narrative of this period, see Pelling (1996).

²³ See Bowman, Champlin and Lintott (1996), 676–702 for a general survey of early Roman Egypt.