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Women and society in Greek and Roman Egypt

A sourcebook

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

Jane Rowlandson is Lecturer in Ancient History at King's College London and the author of *Landowners and Tenants in Roman Egypt: The Social Relations of Agriculture in the Oxyrhynchite Nome* (1996).

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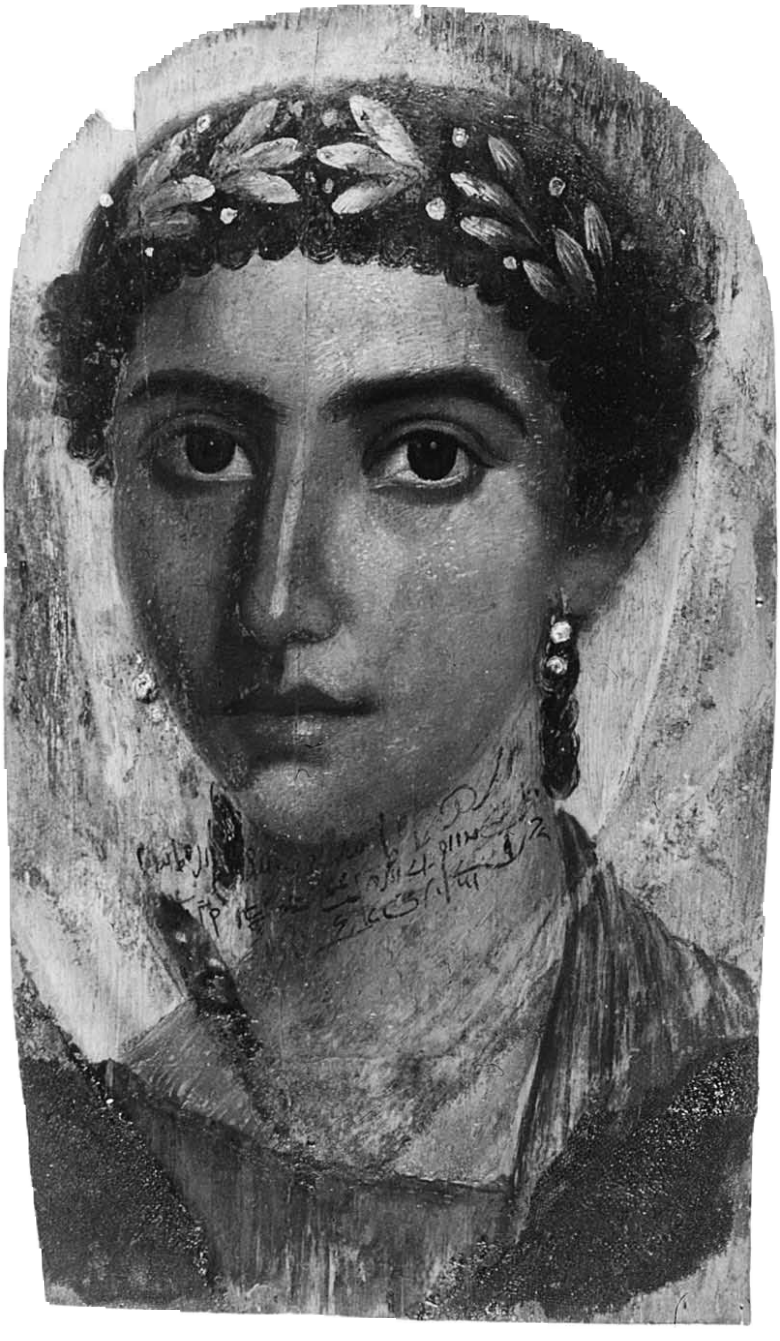

Mummy portrait of Eirene

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A sourcebook

Edited by
JANE ROWLANDSON

with the collaboration of
Roger Bagnall, Alan Bowman, Willy Clarysse,
Ann Ellis Hanson, Deborah Hobson, James Keenan,
Peter van Minnen, Dominic Rathbone,
Dorothy J. Thompson, and Terry Wilfong

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Edited by Jane Rowlandson
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of maps vii
List of figures vii
List of plates vii
Preface ix
Acknowledgements xi
Abbreviations xii
Notes for the reader xiv
Glossary xvii

1 Introduction
1 The purpose of this book 1
2 Greek and Roman Egypt: historical background 3
3 The nature of the source material 18

2 Royalty and religion
Introduction 24
I Ptolemaic Queens **(1–15)** 25
II Roman Imperial women **(16–20)** 41
III Goddesses **(21–26)** 46
IV Priestesses **(27–36)** 55
V Religion and the Individual **(37–48)** 62
VI Christianity **(49–68)** 70

3 Family matters
Introduction 84
I Perspectives on the family **(69–75)** 87
II Archives
A. The archive of Zenon, Philadelphia **(76–77)** 95
B. The Serapeum archive, Memphis **(78–83)** 98
C. The archive of Dryton and Apollonia alias Senmonthis, Pathyris **(84–87)** 105
D. The archive of Tryphon, Oxyrhynchos **(88–91)** 112
E. The archive of Apollonios the strategos and Aline **(92–99)** 118
F The archive of Kronion, farmer of Tebtynis, and his family **(100–103)** 125

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-58815-7 - Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook
Edited by Jane Rowlandson
Frontmatter
More information

G. The archive of Taesion/Taesis **(104–105)** 133
H. The archive of Gaius Julius Niger **(106–107)** 139
J. The archive of Satornila and her sons **(108–110)** 143
K. The archive of Paniskos and Ploutogenia, Philadelphia **(111–115)** 147
L. The archive of Flavius Dioskoros, Aphrodite **(116–117)** 151

4 Status and law
Introduction 155
I The Egyptian background **(118–121)** 156
II Greek and Egyptian in a colonial society **(122–130)** 162
III Roman transformations **(131–144)** 174
IV Freedom and responsibility in developed Roman society **(145–156)** 195
V Continuity and change in the Coptic texts **(157–161)** 212

5 Economic activities
Introduction 218
I Women and agricultural land **(162–181)** 218
II Women in the non-agricultural economy **(182–217)** 245

6 Being female
Introduction 280
I Birth, infancy and childhood **(218–235)** 282
II Education **(236–246)** 299
III Marriage and married life **(247–263)** 312
IV Sickness, death and burial **(264–279)** 335
V Weaklings or viragos? The ambiguities of womanhood **(280–289)** 354

List and concordance of texts 369
Bibliography 382
Index 398

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978-0-521-58815-7 - Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook
Edited by Jane Rowlandson
Frontmatter
More information

Maps

1	Egypt in the Graeco-Roman Period	*page* xix
2	The Arsinoite nome (Fayum)	xx
3	The Eastern Mediterranean	xxi

Figures

1	Family of Taous alias Heriobastis	58
2	Family of Dryton and Apollonia alias Senmonthis	106
3	Family of Tryphon and Thamounis/Thamounion	113
4	Family of Apollonios and Aline	120
5	Family of Kronion and Taorsenouphis	126
6	Family of Gaius Julius Niger and Ptollois	141
7	Family of Flavius Dioskoros	152

Plates

Frontispiece: Mummy portrait of Eirene

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

1	Arsinoe II (silver dekadrachm)	27
2	Arsinoe II (relief, temple of Isis, Philae)	29
3	Berenike II (faience oinochoe)	30

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-58815-7 - Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook
Edited by Jane Rowlandson
Frontmatter
More information

4	Kleopatra VII (votive relief)	38
5	Kleopatra VII and Caesarion (relief, temple of Hathor, Dendera)	38
6	Kleopatra VII and Antony (silver tetradrachm)	39
7	Bust of Livia	42
8	The goddess Taweret (Thoeris)	47
9	Statuettes of Sekhmet and Bastet (Boubastis)	48
10	Augustus and Isis (detail, the Kalabsha Gate)	50
11	Isis and Harpokrates (wall painting)	51
12	Marble statue of Isis	52
13	Clay figurine	70
14	Mother and child (stela)	71
15	Horoscope	114
16	Amulet of Isis and Harpokrates	129
17	Karanis: house of Taesion, showing letters as discovered	132
18	Karanis: plan of excavations	133
19	Karanis: plan of area G	134
20	Karanis: detailed plan of block with House B1	135
21	Karanis: view of street with steps leading into House B1	136
22	Karanis, area C: views and plan	137
23	Karanis: items found in House 5006	139
24	Karanis: children's toys	140
25	Dionysias: plan of the bath-house	173
26	Tomb of Petosiris: harvesting scene	219
27	Rent receipt in handwriting of Aurelia Charite	242
28	Statuettes of Aphrodite–Isis	258
29	'Coptic' textile depicting female dancers	278
30	Letter of Thermouthas to Valerias	285
31	Relief scene of the divine birth of Horos, Edfu	287
32	Hieroglyph denoting birth	288
33	Egyptian birth stools	288
34	Mummy portrait: Hermione	300
35	Statue of woman holding book roll	301
36	The handwriting of Sentia Asklatarion, a 'slow writer'	302
37	A school exercise	308
38	Mummy portrait of a young woman	314
39	Items of jewellery	315
40	Marriage agreement of Thais	323
41	Letter of Thermouthis to Nemesion	326
42	Mummy of woman, with grave goods and painted plaque	336
43	Wall paintings from tomb 21, Tuna el-Gebel	337
44	Book of the Dead: Judgement scene	338
45	Grave monument for Sarapous	349
46	Grave monument for two women and a girl	350
47	Mummy portraits of a woman and children	351
48	Mummy label on linen	353
49	Uterine amulet	359

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-58815-7 - Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook
Edited by Jane Rowlandson
Frontmatter
More information

Preface

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

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

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

Jane Rowlandson

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Edited by Jane Rowlandson
Frontmatter
More information

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The Egyptian Museum, Cairo Plates 33(a), 36
The Syndics, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge Plates 1, 6, 8
The Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge Plate 34
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Frontmatter
More information

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

In addition, the following abbreviations are used:

Äg.Abh.	Ägyptologische Abhandlungen.
CEML	F. Baratte and B. Boyaval, 'Catalogue des étiquettes de momies du Musée du Louvre', *CRIPEL* 2 (1974), 155–264 (nos. 1–259); 3 (1975), 151–261 (nos. 260–688); 4 (1976), 173–254 (nos. 689–999); 5 (1977), 237–339 (nos. 1000–1209).
Ep	W. E. Crum and H. G. Evelyn White (eds.), *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, Part II: Coptic Ostraca and Papyri; Greek Ostraca and Papyri* (New York, 1926).
Heitsch	E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit* vol. 1 (2nd. edn, Göttingen, 1963).
I.Alex.	F. Kayser, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines (non funéraires) d'Alexandrie impériale (I^{er}–III^{e} s. apr. J.-C.)* (Cairo, 1994).
I.Fay.	E. Bernand, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques du Fayoum* vols. I–III (Leiden–Cairo, 1975–81).
IGA v	G. Lefebvre (ed.), *Inscriptiones Graecae Aegypti* v. *Inscriptiones Christianae Aegypti* (Cairo, 1907; repr. Chicago, 1978).
I.Memnon	A. and E. Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines du colosse de Memnon* (IFAO: Bibliothèque d'Etude 31; Cairo, 1960).
I.Métr.	E. Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Egypte gréco-romaine* (Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon 98; Paris, 1969).
I.Port.	A. Bernand, *Les portes du désert: Recueil des inscriptions grecques d'Antinooupolis, Tentyris, Koptos, Apollonopolis Parva et Apollonopolis Magna* (Paris, 1984).
KRU	W. E. Crum and G. Steindorff (eds.), *Koptische Rechtsurkunden des achten Jahrhunderts aus Djême (Theben)* (Leipzig, 1912).

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More information

Mertens-Pack^3	M.-H. Marganne and P. Mertens, 'Medici et Medica, 2° édition', in I. Andorlini (ed.), 'Specimina' *per il* Corpus *dei Papiri Greci di Medicina* (Florence, 1997).
New Primer	P. W. Pestman, *The New Papyrological Primer* (2nd edn, revised, Leiden, 1994).
OMH	E. Stefanski and M. Lichtheim, *Coptic Ostraca from Medinet Habu* (Oriental Institute Publications 71; Chicago, 1952).
Pack^2	*The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (2nd edn, Ann Arbor, 1965).
P.Cairo dem.	see Spiegelberg (1906–8).
P.Count.	W. Clarysse and D. J. Thompson, *Counting the People* (forthcoming).
PDM	Demotic Magical Papyri, as translated in Betz (1992).
PGM	K. Preisendanz (ed.), *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, 2 vols. (revised by A. Heinrichs; Stuttgart, 1973–4).
P.Kellis	K. A. Worp et al. (eds.), *Greek Papyri from Kellis I (P.Kell.G.)* (Oxbow Monograph 54; Oxford, 1995).
P.Lond.dem. IV	C. A. R. Andrews, *Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum* vol. IV, *Legal texts from the Theban area* (London, 1990).
P.Lond.Lit.	H. J. M. Milne (ed.), *Catalogue of Literary Papyri in the British Museum* (London, 1927).
P.Oxf. Griffith	E. Bresciani, *L'Archivio demotico del tempio di Soknopaiu Nesos nel Griffith Institute Oxford*, I (Testi e documenti per lo Studio dell'Antichità 49; Milan, 1975).
P.Tor.Botti	G. Botti, *L'Archivio demotico da Deir el-Medineh* (Florence, 1967).
Pros.Ptol.	E. Peremans, E. Van't Dack et al., *Prosopographia Ptolemaica* vols. I–IX (Louvain, 1950–81).
Rec.dém.biling.	P. W. Pestman, J. Quaegebeur and R. L. Vos, *Recueil de textes démotiques et bilingues* (Leiden, 1977).
SAK	*Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* (Hamburg, 1974–).
Tab.Vindol. II	A. K. Bowman and J. D. Thomas, *The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses II)* (London, 1994).

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Frontmatter
More information

Notes for the reader

Transliteration of words and names

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

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

A note on the presentation of the translated sources

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

Egyptian dating systems

Various different calendars and methods of dating were employed in Egypt during the period covered by this book. The Egyptian year consisted of twelve months of thirty days, followed by five intercalary ('epagomenal') days. From the reign of Augustus, a sixth intercalary day was added every fourth year to preserve the correct

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relationship with the astronomical solar year, fixing the first day of the Egyptian year (1 Thoth) at 29 August. The Macedonian calendar, also used in the early Ptolemaic period, was progressively assimilated to the Egyptian year, so that after the third century BC, the Macedonian months became equivalent to Egyptian months. In the Roman period, some months acquired honorific names connected with the Imperial house; the most common are given in the table below:

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

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

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

Money, weights and measures

In Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the standard coin was the tetradrachm (4-drachma piece, or *stater*). In the Ptolemaic period, this was a silver coin weighing *c.* 14 g, and

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remained relatively pure. From the late third century BC, however, monetary values are normally expressed in the papyri in the token bronze money, which underwent successive depreciations in relation to the silver. In Egyptian texts, the *deben* and the *kite* were employed: 1 deben = 10 kite = 20 drachmas.

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

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

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

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

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

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Edited by Jane Rowlandson
Frontmatter
More information

Glossary

agoranomos	A municipal official responsible for the marketplace, who also in Ptolemaic and early Roman Egypt functioned as a notary in a wide variety of transactions.
annona	A requisition or tax in kind.
apomoira	A tax on vineyards and orchards.
archidikastes	A judicial official.
aroura	The standard unit of area; equivalent to 0.68 acre or 0.275 hectare.
athlophoros	The title of the priestess of Queen Berenike II; 'prize-bearer', referring to her Olympic victory.
chiton	Greek tunic, worn by both men and women.
choinix	Sub-division (1/40 or 1/48) of the artaba; approx. 1 litre in capacity.
chora	The hinterland of Egypt (including the *metropoleis*), as opposed to the city of Alexandria.
deben	An Egyptian monetary unit, equivalent to 20 drachmas.
deme	A sub-division of the citizen body in a Greek polis.
dorea	Revocable gift-estate granted by the Ptolemies to their high officials.
epistates	A local superintendent in the Ptolemaic period.
epistrategos	In the Ptolemaic period, regional governor of the Thebaid. In the Roman period, four epistrategoi provided a tier of administration between the nome officials and those of the province.
epoikion	Farmstead, or 'tied' estate village.
exegetes	A municipal official.
gymnasiarch	The chief official of a gymnasium.
himation	Greek cloak or mantle, worn over the tunic by either sex.
indiction	Year in the series of tax cycles of fifteen years beginning in AD 312.
iuridicus	A Roman official of equestrian status, concerned with legal matters.
kanephoros	The title of the priestess of Queen Arsinoe II; 'basket-bearer'.
katoikic land	The category of land assigned in the Ptolemaic period to high-status kleruchs (cavalrymen). In the Roman period, it became a category of private property, taxed at one artaba per aroura.
kite	An Egyptian monetary unit; 1 kite was equivalent to 2 drachmas.
kleros	A parcel of land assigned to military settlers during the Ptolemaic period. In the Roman period, the term was often simply a topographical description ('in the kleros of so-and-so').
kleruch	A military settler in the Ptolemaic period, assigned a kleros of land.
kleruchic land	The category of land assigned to kleruchs in the Ptolemaic period.

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komarch	A village official.
kosmetes	A municipal official.
kyrios	The male guardian required for women in Greek legal contexts.
logistes	The main nome official from the fourth century.
metropolis	The chief town of a nome, granted full civic status by Septimius Severus in AD 200.
mina	A unit of currency (= 100 drachmas), and of weight.
nome	One of the approximately forty districts into which Egypt was divided for the purposes of regional government.
obol	A subdivision (⅙ or ⅐) of the drachma.
pagarch	A local government official.
pastophoros	A low grade of Egyptian priest.
Persian (of the *epigone*)	The exact origin and significance of the term is disputed. In the early Ptolemaic period, 'Persian' seems to designate persons with some sort of privileged status without a claim to a more specific ethnic designation; for the meaning of '*epigone*', see **5.183** note 4. In the late Ptolemaic and Roman periods, the term refers to the legal status of an indebted party who had relinquished certain personal rights in order to secure the collection of the debt.
polis	A Greek city, normally possessing the institutions of political self-government: citizen assembly, council and magistrates.
procurator	A Roman financial administrator.
prytanis	The 'president' of a city council.
quarter	A weight, 1/16 of a mina, ¼ of a 'gold piece' (*chrysos*).
sestertius	Roman coin: 4 sestertii were worth 1 denarius.
sistrum	A rattle used by worshippers in the cult of Isis.
solidus	A gold coin in the period after Diocletian's currency reforms between *c.* 295/6 and 300.
stater	A weight of approximately 14 g. Also a denomination of money (4 drachmas).
strategos	The chief administrative official of a nome.
subscription	The 'signature' normally appended at the bottom of a document.

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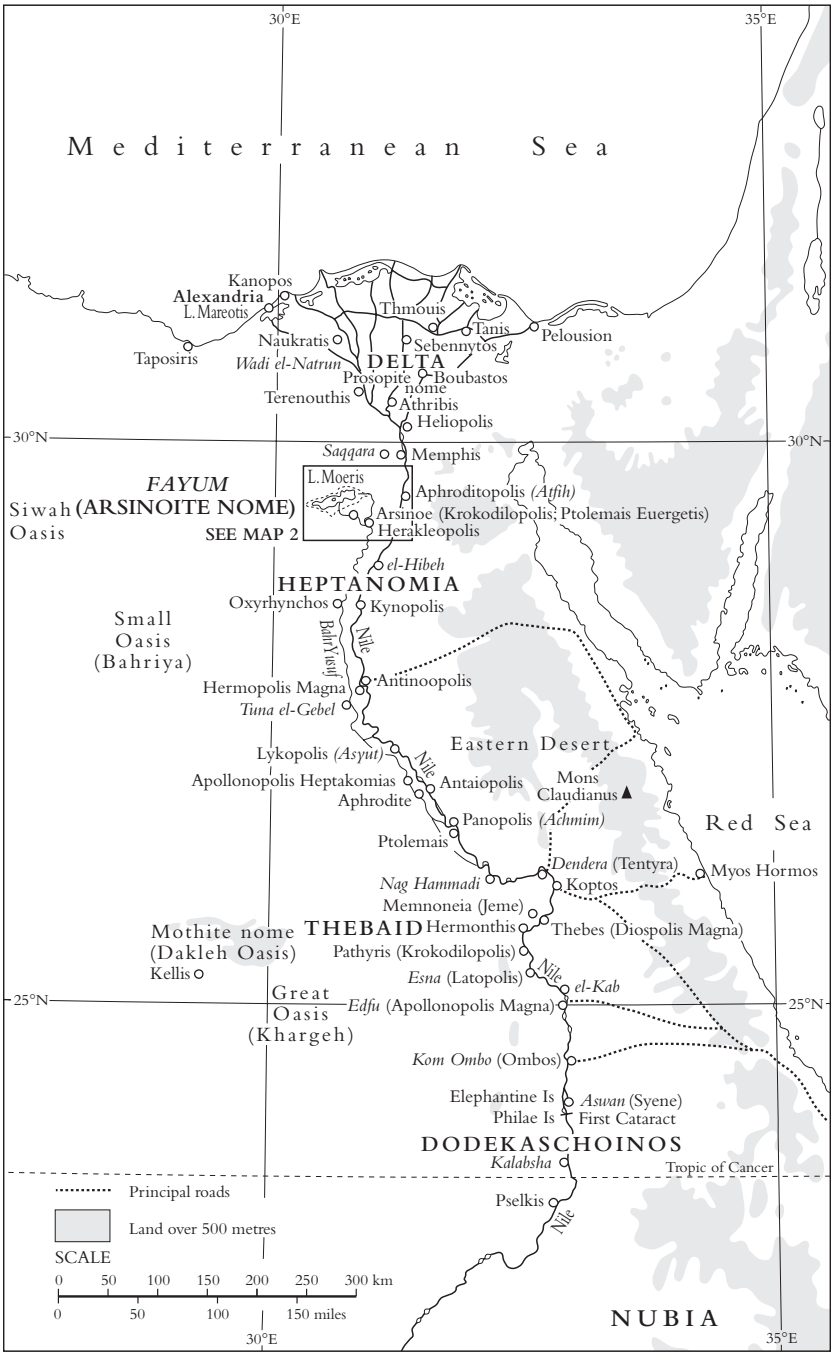

Map 1 Egypt in the Graeco–Roman period

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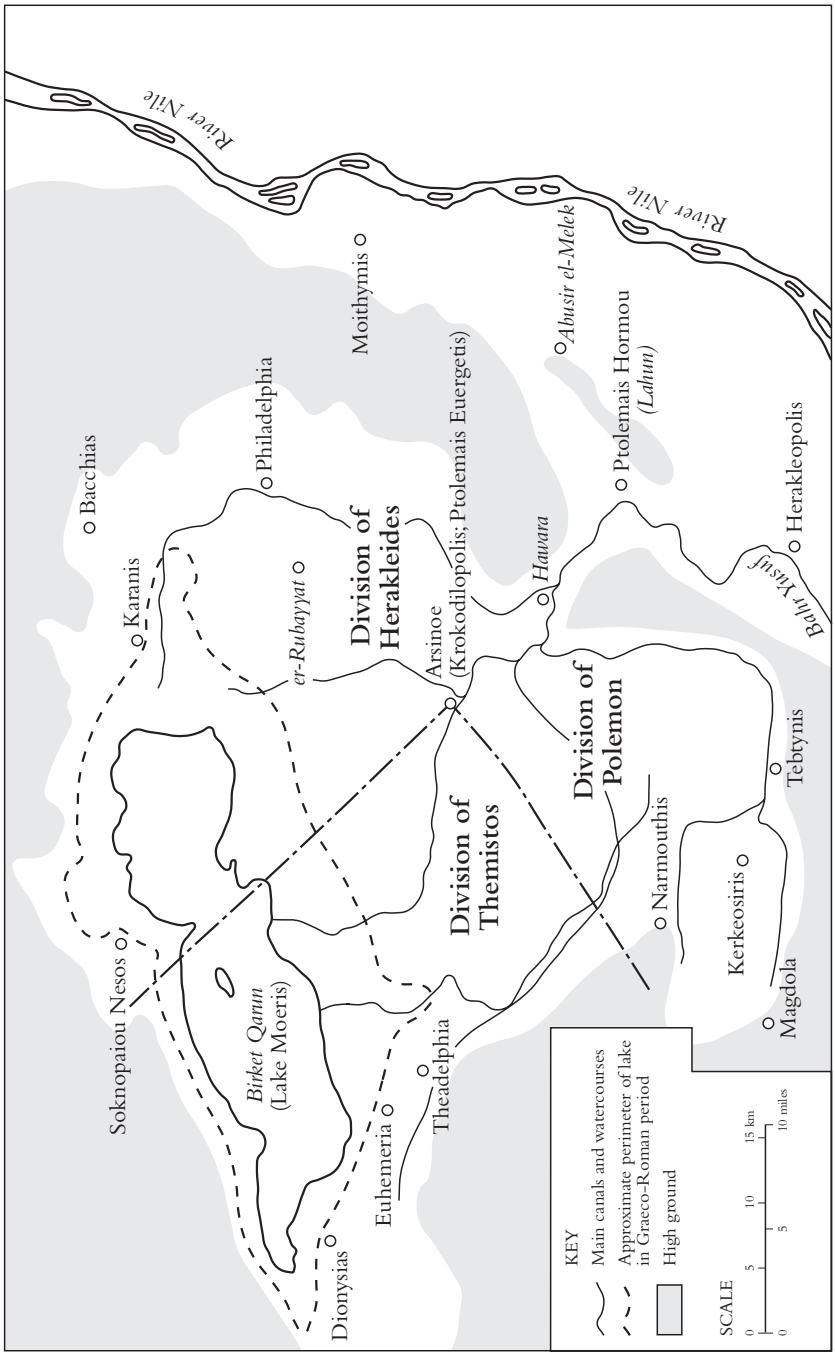

Map 2 The Arsinoite nome (Fayum)

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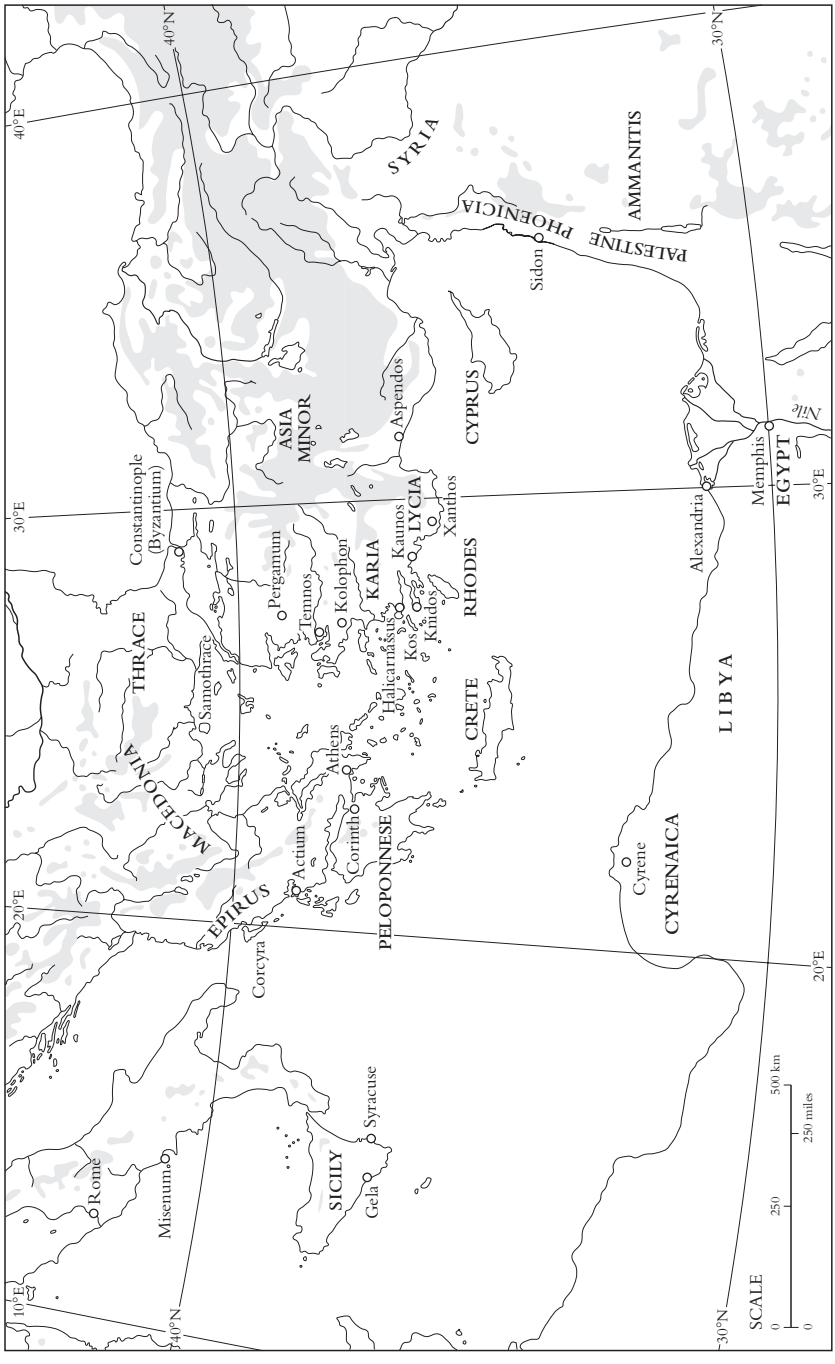

Map 3 The Eastern Mediterranean

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