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0521819245 - Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Structure of Land Tenure

J. G. Manning

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PTOLEMAIC EGYPT

This history of land tenure under the Ptolemies explores the relationship between the new Ptolemaic state and the ancient traditions of landholding and tenure. Departing from the traditional emphasis on the Fayyum, it offers a coherent framework for understanding the structure of the Ptolemaic state, and thus of the economy as a whole. Drawing for the first time on both Greek and demotic papyri, as well as hieroglyphic inscriptions and theories taken from the social sciences, Professor Manning argues that the traditional central state 'despotic' model of the Egyptian economy is insufficient. The result is a subtler picture of the complex relationship between the demands of the new state and the ancient, locally-organized social structure of Egypt. By revealing the dynamics between central and local power in Egypt, the book shows that Ptolemaic economic power ultimately shaped Roman Egyptian social and economic institutions.

J. G. MANNING is Assistant Professor of Ancient History at Stanford University. He has taught at Princeton University and held research fellowships at the American Research Center in Egypt, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. He has published *The Hauswaldt Papyri: A third-century BC family dossier from Edfu* (1997) and, co-edited with Ian Morris, *The ancient economy: Evidence and models* (2003), and is currently working, among other projects, on a history of Edfu in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, a handbook of demotic law, and, with Willy Clarysse, an edition of papyri from the collection at Stanford University.

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# LAND AND POWER IN PTOLEMAIC EGYPT

*The Structure of Land Tenure*

J. G. MANNING

*Assistant Professor of Classics and Ancient History  
Stanford University*



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*To the memory of  
Professor George R. Hughes  
(1907–1992)  
and  
Professor Klaus Baer  
(1930–1987)*

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## *Preface*

This book has its origins in a time and place far from where I am now sitting. Yet despite those distances, these origins seem very close in my memory. My interest in demotic papyri was fired when, as a young high school student, I visited the office of Professor George Hughes at the Oriental Institute in Chicago. It was a “Members’ Day,” a time when faculty opened their offices to the public. I entered the interesting-looking office of Professor Hughes, a warm and kind man as I quickly discovered, who showed such exuberance for his work. He took me over to a table where a demotic papyrus was laid out, and he explained that it was a house sale contract dating from the Ptolemaic period from a place called Hawara, and he began to translate the document. I was hooked for life on demotic legal papyri.

It has often been a criticism of the documentary papyri that the texts proffer only local or, more biting, merely parochial evidence. Perhaps true. But history *is* a composite of local histories, and in the new regime of the Ptolemies, local village-based social networks continued to be a factor in, and at times a focus of resistance against, the new economic realities of the Hellenistic world. For Greek-based Classical historians, the history of the Hellenistic world has been the study of the triumph of Greeks and Greek culture in the “East.” For Egyptologists and demotists who focus on the language of Egypt at the time, the continuity of Egyptian culture is stressed. The demotic texts often, it seems, reveal a different world than the Greek papyri, more remote in time and place from the center of history, but this apparent difference can be misleading. The use of documents from Hellenistic Egypt requires more subtlety, and at the same time a broader context in which to understand them.

The supremacy of the text, establishing new text editions and improving old ones, has been the mainstay of both Egyptology and papyrology, the science upon which most historical studies have been based for Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. And up until very recently the fields of Greek and demotic papyrology have intersected only tangentially. The larger fields of Classics,



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Egyptology and Ancient History (most often contained within Classics departments in American universities, if at all) have only begrudgingly acknowledged each others' existence, let alone importance, on account of the growth of what one recent scholar has called "disciplinary professionalization" (Gaddis 1997: 75).

This book, then, is unusual in that it attempts to synthesize the documentary evidence for land tenure and its administration. I have by no means taken account of all of the Ptolemaic papyri and ostraca, but I hope to have treated enough of them to establish a case study of the history of Ptolemaic institutions concerned with land. What I hope to gain by this more generalizing historical analysis is clarity in the concept of power as it is applied to Ptolemaic Egypt. I have two main goals in this book. The first is to provide historians with what one of my colleagues at Stanford, Professor Michael Jameson, has called a "roadmap" of the documents for Ptolemaic land tenure. The second and more important goal, I think, is to show what great historical value there is in using the demotic Egyptian evidence to help in understanding the development of the Ptolemaic state and the complexities of its economic structure.

It has been remarked by very good scholars that the time is not yet ripe to attempt synthetic history using the papyri; far more work remains to be done at the level of text editing (and re-editing), archival analysis, and prosopography. In part this book is a response to this, while at the same time it concurs with the belief that much basic work remains to be done, and new texts and other scholars will come along to refine, or refute my thesis. While any synthetic account using this complex material, written in Greek and demotic, on papyri and on ostraca, in hieroglyphic temple inscriptions and on stelae, must take leaps of faith, and is always subject to revision, I believe that such risks are important. For in order to understand any document, whether it is one isolated text, or an archive of hundreds of documents, one must have a conception of the historical context as well as an idea of the structure of the state. In this respect, I believe it is necessary to make explicit exactly what the set of questions are by the use of more general, theoretical considerations.

Any work in papyrology, whether it is text edition or a historical interpretation, relies on the very careful work of many other scholars who have sifted through texts in museums and libraries, and have painstakingly produced reliable text editions. Papyrologists are cautious by training, and often by nature. Many will, perhaps, shriek at a book that works at too high a level of generality and abstraction. In the end what I hope to accomplish in this study is the setting of a social and economic framework

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within which to discuss the papyri and ostraca, both Greek and Egyptian, and the evolution of Ptolemaic institutions. I am then practicing what Professor Bruce Frier (1989) has called the “new papyrology,” and I hope that this study provides a more global context for the Ptolemaic papyri and ostraca.

Demotic and Greek papyrology, both fields I admire greatly, are concerned with careful editions and re-editions of collections of texts, either organized around an archive or a corpus of a particular type of text. The historian’s task, explaining change over time, is different. The papyrological historian is faced with considerable challenges because there are vast gaps in the survival of the documents, and of course there is the matter of the amount of transactions which were never written down in the first place. I am not, therefore, covering all areas and all aspects of land tenure. The lacunae will be filled in part by forthcoming studies. But not even the use of every single source would cover all aspects of the economics and law of land tenure in the Ptolemaic period. Instead of attempting a comprehensive survey I shall aim rather at explaining historical change, using a combination of documentary evidence and theory.

I first began to think about the issue of state power and land tenure when I presented a précis of my thesis in a seminar in the Workshop for Ancient Societies organized by Professors Richard Saller and Martha Roth, both of the University of Chicago. I am grateful to both of these scholars for allowing me these first public steps. I am also very grateful to Professor Janet Johnson of the Oriental Institute in Chicago who gave me access to the files of the Chicago Demotic Dictionary Project and provided continued support as well.

Several of the chapters or parts of chapters in this book began life as papers presented to conferences at Vogüé, France, and the Universities of Tübingen, Oxford, and Stanford, and at the International Congress of Papyrology in Florence. I am very grateful to the many comments and criticisms I have received over the years. I am also indebted to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, which named me a National Fellow in 2000–2001, and to Tom Henriksen, the Associate Director, for his many kindnesses and support. This fellowship year allowed me time and very comfortable surroundings in which to rewrite parts of the final version of this book. My many friends at Stanford, including those in the very supportive environment that is the Department of Classics, were unflagging in their support and willingness to listen to my ideas, and to offer gentle criticisms. Professor Steve Haber, and others associated with the Social Science History Institute at Stanford, especially Professors Avner Greif and

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Barry Weingast, have been collegial and supportive far beyond the academic norm.

I owe personal debts to many people for their comments, advice and support. The following listing of those to whom I am most in debt serves as a down payment, but they are debts which I shall not be able to repay fully: Roger Bagnall, Peter Bedford, Alan Bowman, Stanley Burstein, Willy Clarysse, Karil Dobrovolsky, Steve Haber, Ann Hanson, Jim Keenan, Dennis Kehoe, Richard Martin, Ian Morris, Dominic Rathbone, Jane Rowlandson, Dorothy Thompson, Chris and Mayumi Walton, Jerry and Yae-Joong Watkins, Barry Weingast, and Terry Wilfong. I am especially grateful to Willy Clarysse and Dorothy Thompson who made available to me the manuscript of their forthcoming study of the Ptolemaic census. Willy Clarysse and Katelijn Vandorpe have hosted me on several occasions on my eagerly anticipated trips to Leuven. It is an exceptional place, and justifiably regarded as the center of Ptolemaic studies: the scholars in the Ancient History section have made it a most stimulating and enjoyable place in which to work and think.

In the department of Classics at Stanford University, I thank the outgoing Chair Susan Stephens. I benefited from a year's leave at the Stanford Humanities Center in 1998–99 and learned much while I was a fellow there. I'd like to thank Professor Keith Baker, at that time the Director of the Center, for his sage advice, and Dr. Suzie Dunn the Associate Director for her support. I am also grateful to my friend Dr. Thorolf Christensen for making available his transcription of P. Haun 407, and for recently sending to me his completed Cambridge University Ph.D. thesis on this important text. The wonderful discussions of this text in Leuven in the summer of 2000 made possible by Willy Clarysse and Katelijn Vandorpe were most helpful, and very memorable. I have tried to signal where this text has altered our picture of land tenure in the Edfu nome, but I leave the most significant conclusions of this text to its editor. I am also in the debt of Dr. Csaba La'da who kindly made available to me his Cambridge University Ph.D. dissertation. Professor Alan Lloyd graciously sent to me some of his forthcoming work, and I thank him very much for so doing. Dr. Michael Sharp of the Cambridge University Press has been wonderful seeing this book through the press, and the anonymous readers for the press have all added important comments and corrections, and have saved me from more than one howler. The final product, of course, is my own responsibility. And, finally, I am grateful for the wisdom of a man whom I have never met but whose writings have inspired me, President Daisaku Ikeda of the Soka Gakkai International in Tokyo, Japan.

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As I approached the end of this project, I have been reminded of the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, from the preface to his wonderful little book *Travels with a donkey in the Cévennes*: “Every book is, in an intimate sense, a circular letter to the friends of him who writes it. They alone take his meaning; they find private messages, assurances of love, and expressions of gratitude dropped for them in every corner.” Indeed. This is especially true for those closest to me, my parents and Angela. I shall conclude where I began my interest in demotic legal papyri, and dedicate this study to the memory of two professors at the Oriental Institute in the University of Chicago, Professor George Robert Hughes, and Professor Klaus Baer. From both men I learned much, and both are still much loved and sorely missed by me and by others who had the good fortune to know, and to learn from, these generous and gentle scholars.

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[More information](#)*Abbreviations and papyrus editions*

References to Greek and demotic papyri and ostraca follow the conventions in J. F. Oates et al., *Checklist of editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic papyri, ostraca and tablets*. Fifth edition. Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists, Supplement 9. 2001. Exceptions are listed below.

References to classical and other sources follow the system of abbreviations in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn., ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Exceptions are listed below.

## PERIODICALS, SERIES AND GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

Crum	W. E. Crum, <i>A Coptic dictionary</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press.
DELC	W. Vycichl, <i>Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte</i> . Leuven: Peeters, 1983.
dem.	demotic
<i>Description</i>	<i>Description de l'Égypte</i> . Paris, 1809–1829.
DN	<i>Demotisches Namenbuch</i> 1–16. Würzburg, 1980–
<i>Edfou</i>	E. Chassinat and M. de Rochemonteix, <i>Le temple d'Edfou</i> , 14 vols. Paris: Leroux, 1897–1934.
Eg.	Egyptian
FGH	F. Jacoby, <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Berlin, 1923–58.
Gr.	Greek
JdE	Egyptian Museum, Cairo. <i>Journal d'entrée</i> .
O	Ostrakon
OGIS 1–II	W. Dittenberger, <i>Orientalis Graeci inscriptiones selectae</i> . Leipzig, 1903.

- P Papyrus  
 PM *Topographical bibliography of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, reliefs, and paintings*, by Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, assisted by Ethel W. Burney. 2nd edn. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960: 7 vols.  
 PP *Prosopographia Ptolemaica*. Leuven.  
 S Stela  
 SAOC *Studies in ancient oriental civilization*. Chicago.  
 SB *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten*, 1–xvi, 1913–88.  
 SEG *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, vols. 1–25 (Leiden 1923–71), vols. 26 – (Amsterdam 1979–).  
 TT Theban tomb number, cited according to the catalogue in PM.

## MONOGRAPHS AND TEXT EDITIONS

- BGU Ägyptische Urkunden aus den königlichen Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden. Berlin.  
 P. BMFA Papyrus Boston Museum of Fine Arts. See Parker 1964.  
 P. Cairo II Wilhelm Spiegelberg, *Die demotischen Denkmäler*, II. Die demotischen papyrus 30601–31270. 50001–50022. Leipzig: W. Drugulin, 1980.  
 CD Walter Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939.  
 C. Ord. Ptol. *Corpus des Ordonnances des Ptolémées (C. Ord. Ptol.)*, ed. Lenger, Marie-Thérèse. Classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques, Mémoires, vol. 57. Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 1964.  
 DPB Demotische Papyri zu Berlin.  
 W. *Chrest.* Wilcken and Mitteis, *Chrestomathie*.  
 EG Wolja Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1954.  
 P. BM Thompson = Herbert Thompson 1934.  
 P. Survey = Pestman 1993.  
*Select Papyri 1* *Non-literary Papyri. Private Affairs*. Trans. A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar.

*Abbreviations*

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- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Select Papyri</i> II | <i>Official Documents</i> . Trans. A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar.   |
| Sinuri I                | L. Robert, <i>Le sanctuaire de Sinuri près de Mylasa</i> , vol. I. Les Inscriptions grecques. Paris, 1945. |
| <i>Urk.</i> II          | Kurt Sethe, <i>Hieroglyphische Urkunden der Griechisch-Römischen Zeit</i> . Leipzig, 1904.                 |

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one *aroura* (dem. *st* ⚡) = 100 × 100 cubits (*pēcheis*)  
 = 2756.25 m<sup>2</sup> = 0.68 acres = 0.275 hectares

one ground cubit (dem. *mḥ* - *itn*) = 27.5 m<sup>2</sup> (1/100<sup>th</sup> *aroura*)

one *schoinion* (dem. *ḥ* - *nḥ*) = 52.5 m

one *artaba* = normally *ca.* 40 liters



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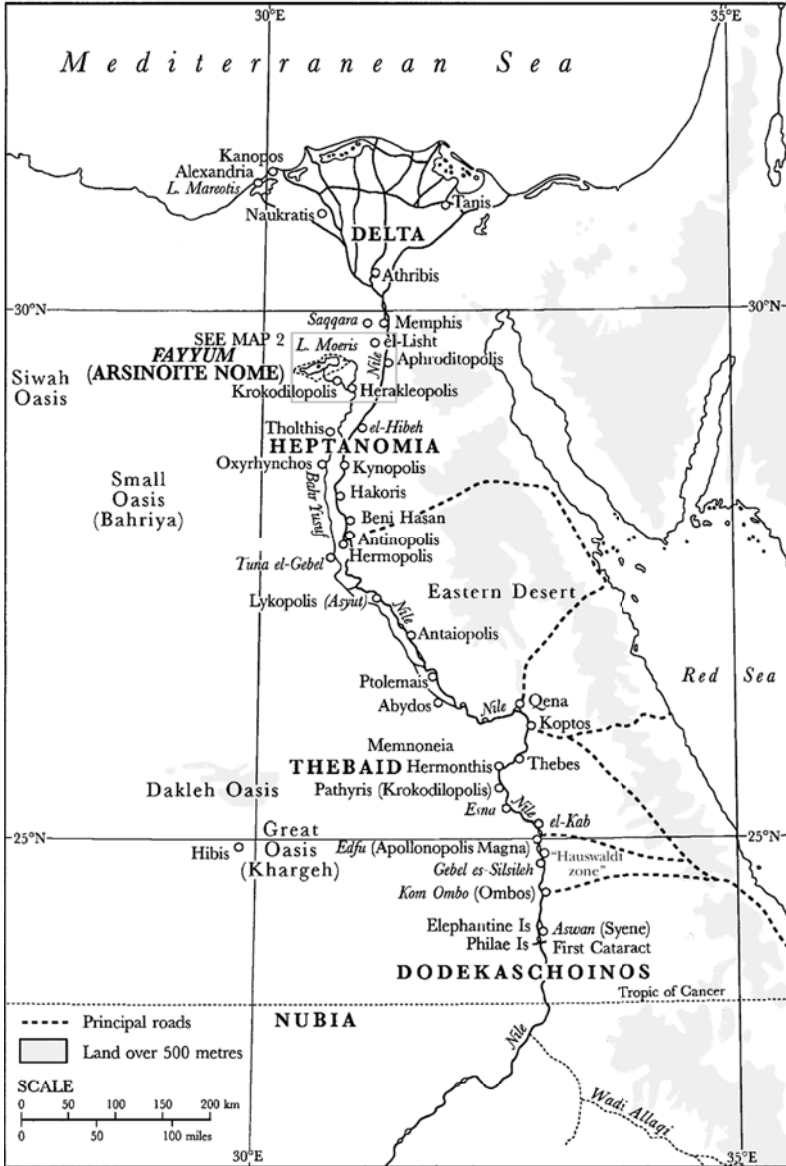
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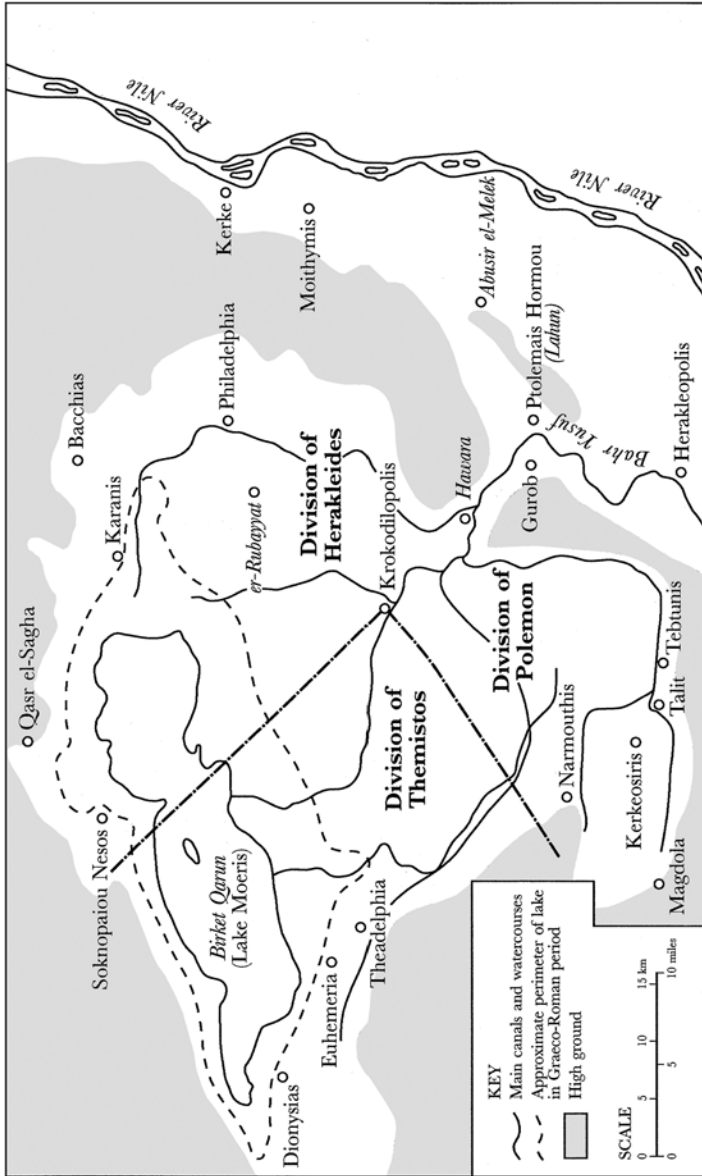
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*Maps*



Map 1. Map of Egypt during the Ptolemaic period



Map 2. Map of the Fayyum during the Ptolemaic period