

Chapter 6

The Ptolemaic State Organization

BAAG 75602
Alexander to Kleopatra:
History of the Hellenistic period
Giorgos Mitropoulos



Geographical Realities

- Egypt forms the nucleus of the kingdom
- Cyrenaica and Cyprus
- Palestine and Coele Syria
- Cities of Southern and Western Asia Minor
- Aegean Islands



Administrative Realities: the *nome*

- Egypt is divided in circa 40 *nomes*
- The centre of the *nome* is an urban settlement functioning as a religious, commercial and administrative center
- *Nomarches*: supervises the agricultural land and production
- *Oikonomos*: fiscal administration
- Royal secretary: register, keeping records



The duties of an *oikonomos* (P. Tebt. 703)

[. . .] (You must inspect) . . . and the water ducts which run through [the] fields, whether the intakes into them have the prescribed depth and whether there is sufficient space in them; the peasants are used to [leading] water from these to the land each of them sows. Similarly with the canals mentioned from which the intakes go into the above-mentioned water ducts, (you must inspect) whether they are solidly made and whether the entries from the river are kept as clean as possible <and> whether in general they are in good condition.... During your tour of inspection try as you [go] about to encourage everybody and make them feel happier; you should do this not only by words, but also should any of them have a complaint against the village scribes or the **village chiefs** (*komarchai*) about anything to do with agriculture, you should investigate the matter and as far as possible put an end to such incidents.

The *strategos* of the *nome*

- The *strategos*: initially in charge of military forces and of policing.
- Gradually acquires judicial competence.
- He handles the petitions addressed by the subjects to the king.
- *Strategoï* or *epistrategoï tes choras* with competence over several *nomes* take over the military duties of the *strategos*.



The *topoi* and the *komai*

- The *topoi* are subdivisions of the *nomes*, appearing from circa 230.
- *Toparches* and *topogrammateus*
- *Kome* (village) is the basic administrative and fiscal unit.
- *Komarches*, *komogrammateus* and several other functionaries with executive duties, following the orders of the superior administrative levels.

The ethnic background of the administrative personnel

- *Nomoi* and *topoi*: state dignitaries of Greek origin.
- *Komai*: native Egyptians performing compulsory public services.

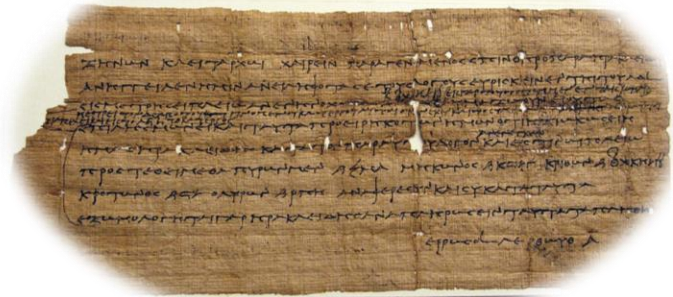
Justice



- *Chrematistai*: Greek courts
- *Laodikai*: Egyptian courts
- *Koinodikion*: cases between Greeks and Egyptians, vanishes after the 3rd century
- Criterion: language of contracts
- Other sources of justice
 - Egyptian priests
 - *Strategos* handling petitions

The central administration

- A *dioiketes* in Alexandria controls an elaborate fiscal service and supervises the *oikonomoi* of the *nomes*.
- *Eklogistes*: in charge of a service supervising the registration and the movement of the population and the progress of the agricultural production.
- *Epistolographos*



Aims of administration

- 1) The preservation of order
- 2) The fiscal exploitation of Egypt
- 3) The financing of the royal court and the royal army and navy





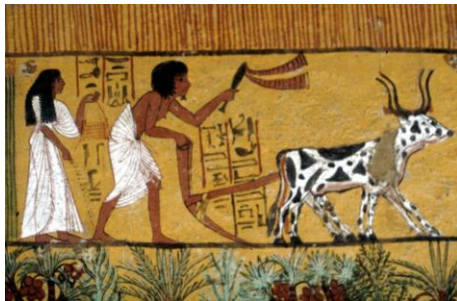
The agricultural land

- Basic distinction: land producing rent and land free from rent
- Sacred land (*hierakon*) controlled by the Egyptian temples and the elite of Egyptian priests (the king receives revenues in the form of taxes but gives back *syntaxeis*)



The royal land

- *basilike ge* cultivated by native royal farmers, not always poor.
- Short term contracts, payments of land rent and taxes (total c.a. 50%).
- Leases in partnership
- Protection from billeting and compulsory service during sowing and harvesting
- Royal farmers subject to Greek courts



The duties of an *oikonomos*, *P. Tebt. 703*.

You must consider it one of your most imperative duties to make sure that the *nome* is sown with the crops specified in the **sowing schedule**. ...

And if there are any who are in difficulties because of their **rents** or are even [completely] worn out, you must not [let the matter pass] without making an enquiry.



The sowing schedule



«The 'sowing schedule' (*diagraphe sporou*), an important institution in the economy of Ptolemaic Egypt, illustrates at once the extent of administrative control over agriculture in Egypt and the limited effectiveness in practice of that control (it is not clear whether it applied to all categories of land or only royal land). Every year at the time when the Nile flood was receding (i.e. when the surface of irrigated land could be precisely determined), a schedule was drawn up locally by government officials (toparchs, royal scribes, chiefs of police), but not by the cultivators themselves, laying down what surfaces were to be sown with what crops. The reports were then passed upwards to the *nome* level and then to Alexandria to enable forecasts of the expected tax revenue. Several papyri attest the importance attached to the schedule by the administration, including the *dioiketes* himself, but they also show clearly the reluctance of the Egyptian peasantry to be restricted to the prescribed crops and the difficulties of enforcing the schedule in practice.»

Preliminary reports for the sowing schedule (September 232), P. Yale 36

- Apollonius to Leon, greetings. Appended is a copy of the (letter) from Athenodorus the *dioiketes*. Complete therefore the sowing schedule with the usual officials and in conformity with his [instructions], and have it ready so that [we] ourselves may give it before the appointed time / to Leucippus the chief of police; (do this) in the knowledge [that should] a delay occur you will be sent before the *dioiketes*. Farewell. (Year) 15, [Mesore . . .]
- Athenodorus to Apollonius, greetings. Complete the sowing schedule of the land [in the district?] for the 16th (year) with the help of the [royal] scribe and other suitable persons, and send [it] preferably sooner, but at the latest [by the . . .] of Mesore, drawn up by individual and by village and in [summary], to Leucippus the chief of police. For we have written to him [that] you would send him [these] documents at that date, to be forwarded to us in the city (i.e. Alexandria) together with people [to] bring them back. (Year) 15, Epeiph . . . (August–September 232).



The duties of an *oikonomos* (P. Tebt. 703)

You must take care that the corn in the *nomes* – apart from the **corn which is used on the spot [for] seed** and that which cannot be **transported by water** – is conveyed . . . ;

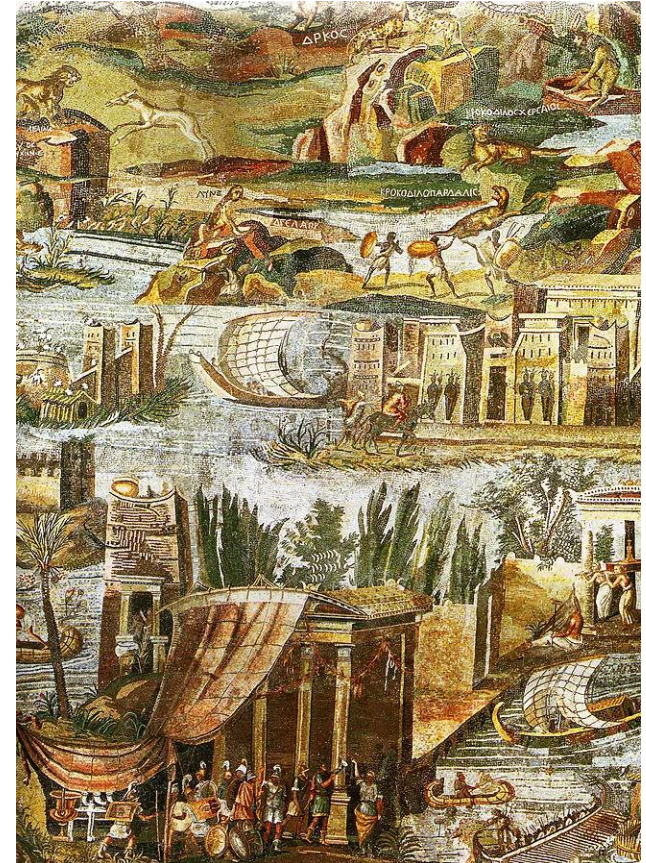
in this way [it will be easy **to load it onto**] **the first [ships] to arrive**, and you must [never] show any laxity in dealing with this matter . . . (3 fragmentary lines) . . . You must also take care that **the prescribed cargoes of corn, of which we are sending you a list, are brought down to Alexandreia** at the right time, [not] only in the right numbers but also tested and suitable for use...

The management of the corn produced on royal land

- The crown gives land and seed.
- The farmer cultivates the land and the crop is thrashed on the public threshing floor, before the cultivator and royal officers; both parties (farmer and crown) receive their due share.
- The royal corn is stored in royal barns and then transported to the nearest river harbour (guild of transporters)

The management of the corn produced on royal land

- At the Nile harbors the corn is loaded on ships (usually privately owned) and transported to Alexandria
- The system is managed by the state but private 'capitalists' are also involved.



Other categories of land

- *Klerouchike ge*: Land allotments given to military cleruchs, with smaller taxes.
 - sub-rented to farmers or entrepreneurs, cleruchs receiving the revenues.
 - Gradually becomes hereditary
- *Ge en dorea* given to royal dignitaries and friends who rent it out to other farmers
- **Private land**, usually owned by temples, but still subject to royal taxation

The gold coinage of Ptolemy II

Demetrius to Apollonius, greetings. It is well if you are in good health and everything else is as you wish. As for me, I am devoting myself to what you wrote me to do: I have received 57,000 (drachmas?) of gold which I minted and returned. We would have received many times as much, but as I have written to you before, the foreigners who come here by sea, the merchants, the forwarding agents, and others, bring their own fine local coins and the *trichrysa*, to get them back as new coins, in accordance with the ordinance which instructs us to take and mint them, but as Philaretus (?) does not allow me to accept them, we have no one to refer to on this matter, and are compelled not to accept them. The men are furious since we refuse (the coins) at the banks and at the . . . and they cannot send (their agents) into the country to purchase merchandise, but they say their gold lies idle and that they are suffering a great loss, since they brought it from abroad and cannot easily dispose of it to others even at a lower price.



Monopoly of coins

- Only Ptolemaic coins accepted in Egypt
- Foreign traders bring foreign coins to Alexandria
- Foreign coins reminted at a rate fixed by the authorities
- Ptolemaic coins returned to traders
- Transactions handled by royal banks



The management of royal monopolies

- The state buys the crop off the primary producer at fixed prices.
- The producer acquires cash to pay the taxes.
- The state raw materials are processed into manufactured goods in state workshops (oil from olives, beer from barley, linen from flax).



The management of royal monopolies

- Private entrepreneurs get permission from the state for the monopoly of selling these goods in the market.
- Again, the state control coexists with the involvement of private investors.
- Private investors also active in the collection of taxes.

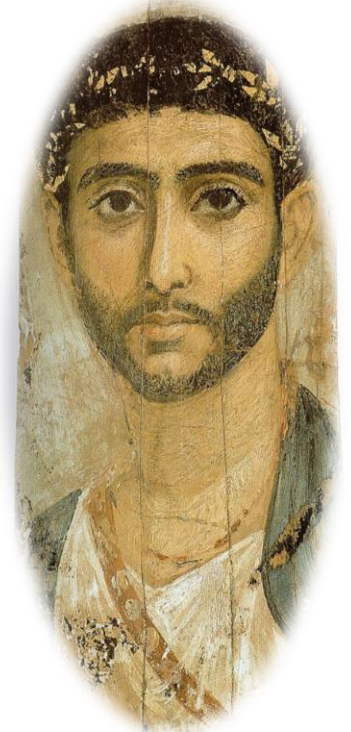
The Greek cities

- Naucratis, Alexandria, Ptolemais
- Ptolemais: *ekklesia*, *boule*, *prytaneis*.
- Alexandria: mixed population of Greeks, Jews, Egyptians and others
- The Greeks have political rights organized into *demes* (possibly *ekklesia* and *boule*)
- Royal officials: *epi tes poleos*
- *Politeuma* of Jews under an *ethnarches*



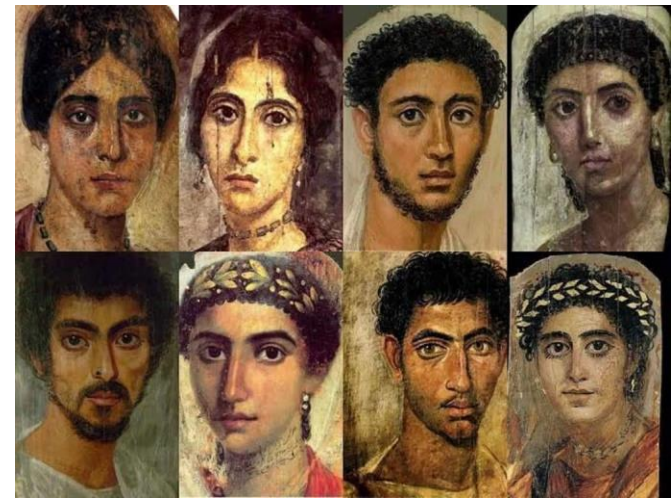
The population

- Greeks occupy the high administrative posts, form the nucleus of *klerouchoi* and of the private 'capitalists'
- Spread of *gymnasia*, clubs of *hoi apo tou gymnasiou*
- Egyptian elite of priests comes to terms with the crown
- Distance between Greeks and Egyptians



The population

- Complaints of Egyptians against state officials for being maltreated on account of their ethnicity
- On the other hand, evidence for mixed marriages and Egyptian participation in the court
- Cultural osmosis, Egyptian cults adopted by Greeks



Burdens and reactions

- Royal taxes, compulsory services for the state, and requisitions burden mostly the natives
- Social division between privileged and unprivileged acquires an ethnic character.
- *Anachoresis* is a form of reaction (peasants leave their farms and either seek refuge in temples or join bands of bandits)
- **Major revolts in Egypt:**
 - 207-186 a prolonged in time Egyptian uprising in Thebais (native Pharaohs),
 - 164 Revolt of the royal friend Dionysios Petosarapis and unrest in the Thebais (no taxes paid; no hymns in Egyptian temples for the kings; no eponymous priests in Alexandria),
 - 130 (Arsiesis)
 - 88 BC: Ptolemy X destroys Thebes after a revolt.
 - Ethnic or social character of rebellions?



Dynastic conflicts and the Roman factor

- The second century and especially the period after 162 is characterized by **endless dynastic rivalries** within the house of the Ptolemies.
- A palace coup in 204 BC leads to the death of Ptolemy IV and the coronation of his young son Ptolemy V.
- Conflict between Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII (sons of Ptolemy V) during the Sixth Syrian War (170-168 BC) and eventual reconciliation.
- **163**: Division of the Ptolemaic kingdom: Ptolemy VI in Egypt and Cyprus, Ptolemy VIII in Cyrenaica
- **145**: death of Ptolemy VI; Ptolemy VIII rules with sister-wife Kleopatra II and niece-wife Kleopatra III. War between the queens (132-130) who are eventually reconciled
- **116**: Ptolemy VIII dies: civil war involving his son Ptolemy IX, against his brother Ptolemy X and his mother Cleopatra III
- **107**: Ptolemy X in Egypt, Ptolemy IX in Cyprus, Ptolemy Appion in Cyrenaica
- **Insurance policies: wills leaving Ptolemaic territories to Rome** (the state is the personal property of the king)
 - In 155 Ptolemy VIII willed his kingdom (Cyrenaica) to Rome should he died childless
 - In 96 Ptolemy Appion willed Cyrenaica to Rome
 - In 87 Ptolemy X left Egypt to Rome
 - In 58 Rome annexed Cyprus (partial implementation of the will)
 - Ptolemy XII expelled from Alexandria and restored with Roman support: in 51 he wills his kingdom to Rome

The end of the Ptolemaic state

- Kleopatra VII, the last queen of the Ptolemaic house (47-30), allies with Caesar against her brothers and later with Mark Antony (territorial acquisitions in Cyprus, Coele Syria, Phoenicia e.t.c.)
- After Kleopatra's and Antony's defeat in Actium (31), Octavian annexes Egypt as a Roman province (30), Kleopatra having committed suicide

