CONTENTS

List of illustrations to chapter 13 ix
List of contributors x
Preface xvi
Note on transliteration xv
Maps xvi

1 Egypt under Roman rule: the legacy of Ancient Egypt 1
   Robert K. Ritner

2 Egypt on the eve of the Muslim conquest 34
   Walter E. Kaegi

3 Egypt as a province in the Islamic caliphate, 641–868 62
   Hugh Kennedy

4 Autonomous Egypt from Ibn Tulun to Kafur, 868–969 86
   Thierry Bianquis

5 The Isma'ili Da'wa and the Fatimid caliphate 120
   Paul E. Walker

6 The Fatimid state, 969–1171 151
   Paula A. Sanders

7 The non-Muslim communities: Christian communities 175
   Terry G. Wilfong

8 The non-Muslim communities: the Jewish community 198
   Norman A. Stillman
## Contents

9 The crusader era and the Ayyubid dynasty 211  
MICHAEL CHAMBERLAIN

10 The Bahri Mamluk sultanate, 1250–1390 242  
LINDA S. NORTHUP

11 The regime of the Circassian Mamluks 290  
JEAN-CLAUDE GARCIN

12 The monetary history of Egypt, 642–1517 318  
WARREN C. SCHULTZ

13 Art and architecture in the medieval period 339  
IRENE A. BIERMAN

14 Culture and society during the late Middle Ages 375  
JONATHAN P. BERKEY

15 Historiography of the Ayyubid and Mamluk epochs 412  
DONALD P. LITTLE

16 Egypt in the world system of the later Middle Ages 445  
R. STEPHEN HUMPHREYS

17 The military institution and innovation in the late Mamluk period 462  
CARL F. PETRY

18 The Ottoman occupation 490  
MICHAEL WINTER

_The rulers of Egypt, 254–922/868–1517_ 517

Glossary 521

Bibliography 540

Index 619

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## ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER 13

1. The mosque of al-Hākim. From _Description de l’Égypte_ (1820) 342
3. The mihrāb area in the mausoleum of Sultan al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyūb. With the permission of the German Archaeological Institute, Cairo 355
4. A minbar donated to the Friday mosque in Qūṣ by the Fāṭimid wazir al-Salih Tālā‘ī’ 356
5. The Lu’l’u’a mosque, Qarāfā 359
6. A Coptic screen (detail) 362
7. A metalwork door revetment from the mosque-madrasa of Sultan Hasan 364
8. A page of the Qur’ān, from the reign of Sultan Sha‘bān 366
9. The facade of the mosque of al-Aqmar 371
10. The lion emblem of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars, Citadel, Cairo. Photo: Nairy Hampikian 373
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The *Cambridge History of Egypt* attempts to fill a gap in English-language treatment of Egyptian history since the Arab conquest. Given the long and continuing outside interest in Egypt, that such a treatment is overdue seems surprising; the very length of Egyptian history has inevitably led to its compartmentalization and to the increasing specialization of scholars interested in it. Essential, underlying continuities have sometimes therefore been obscured, while superficial points of demarcation have sometimes been exaggerated.

Advances in research in the last half-century amply justified the editors in undertaking this task. An explosion of interest in Egypt, the development of new disciplines and methods of academic research and the increasing availability of Egyptian archival sources have led not only to important progress in the understanding of Egypt's past, but also to ever-increasing specialization in outlook, method, and, therefore, in the audiences to which historical writing has been addressed.

The *Cambridge History* is therefore an attempt to present a comprehensive survey for a general audience, to make use of recent advances in historical knowledge, and to synthesize from discrete sources – increasingly from fields beyond the traditional bounds of history – Egypt's political and cultural history since the coming of Islam.

Volume 1 of the *History* addresses the period from the Arab invasion in 640 to the Ottoman conquest of 1517. The volume proceeds according to the major chronological and dynastic episodes demarcating this lengthy era. The focus of individual chapters is not restricted to politics but questions of political process and reasons for changes of regime remain significant subjects of scholarly interest and debate, and continue to warrant explanation in the light of recent research. Chapter authors have been encouraged to conceptualize their topics under broad rubrics such as cultural pluralism, communal interaction, financial developments, military organization, diplomatic relations, intellectual controversy, popular culture and religious
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,” 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, 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. 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. Indeed, senators or even prominent equestrians were formally prohibited from entering Egypt

3 See also A. Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs (Berkeley, 1986), 37 (with caveats); N. Lewis, Life in Egypt under Roman Rule (Oxford, 1981), 15.
4 For the administration, see Tacitus, Annals, XII.60, and Strabo, XVII.1.12.797, in Jones, History of Rome, 135, 179.
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. 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. 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. 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.

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) continue to assist Egyptian farmers in company with the ancient shādīf, a simple water-hoist attested from New Kingdom times (ca. 1567-1334 BC). In the fields of modern Najm Hammādī (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.

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” (lh.t), “Seed-time” (pr.t), and “Harvest” (šmwt). Each season contained forty-three days, 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, and serving as the basis for the Roman (Julian) calendar introduced by Julius Caesar on the advice of the Alexandrian scientist Sosigenes. Despite preserving the names and festivals of ancient deities, the month names survived the transition to Coptic Christianity as well.

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 in

(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.


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 shādīf can lift individual buckets of water over 1 m in elevation. For the saqia and shādīf in nineteenth-century Egypt, see Edward W. Lane, An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians (London, 1860; reprinted, New York, 1975), 327–28.


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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Coptic</th>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Egyptian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tūt</td>
<td>ΘΟΘΥΤ</td>
<td>Θοθοθ</td>
<td>Δθωτυ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baba</td>
<td>ΠΒΠΕΣ</td>
<td>Φαουφι</td>
<td>Πν-ιπ.τ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hatūr</td>
<td>ΗΤΗΡ</td>
<td>Αθυρ</td>
<td>Ηωτ-βρ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kiyakh</td>
<td>ΚΙΙΙΑΚ</td>
<td>Κουεκ</td>
<td>Κι-κρ-κι</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tūba</td>
<td>ΤΒΕΣ</td>
<td>Τυβι</td>
<td>Τι-βτ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amshir</td>
<td>ΡΩΡΠ</td>
<td>Μεζειρ</td>
<td>Μηρ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baramhāt</td>
<td>ΡΡΩΡΟΤΠ</td>
<td>Φυμευοθ</td>
<td>Ρν-'ημ-βτρ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barmūda</td>
<td>ΡΡΜΟΤΥΕ</td>
<td>Φυμοουθ</td>
<td>Ρν-Ρνωτ.τ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bashens</td>
<td>ΡΩΨΝΕ</td>
<td>Πεονε</td>
<td>Ρν-Ηνσω</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba'ūna</td>
<td>ΡΩΨΝΕ</td>
<td>Πεονι</td>
<td>Ρν-'ην.τ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abib</td>
<td>ΕΤΗΠΤ</td>
<td>Ετηφι</td>
<td>Ιρ'-ρ'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>misra</td>
<td>ΜΕΣΟΡΗ</td>
<td>Μεσορη</td>
<td>Μσω-τ-ρ'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

a iyām en-nasi <ΕΤΙΔΓΟΜΕΝΗ <αι επεχωμενα <αι βρωων τ

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. 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 custodians of native Egyptian culture, the change from Ptolemaic to Roman authority was surely notable, dramatic and a cause for mourning.

Taking these privileged Egyptians into consideration, the very notion of official ethnic discrimination becomes quite dubious for the Ptolemaic period. 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.

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 Hellenes — 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” established by the deified

16 E.g., within tenth-century private contracts from the Faiyum; see Nabilia Abbott, The Monasteries of the Fayyum, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations (SAOC) 16 (Chicago, 1937), 15, 21 (Jumādā; 946–947 AD).
18 N. Lewis, “Romany 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.”
22 Abruptly 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, 114.
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 ephebe [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 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 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 Ptolemy, 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 registration.35

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, 117.
26 Hunt and Edgar, Select Papyri II, 50–51; Jones, History of Rome, 265.
27 N. Lewis, Life in Egypt, 33–34.
29 T. Rice Holmes, as cited in Lewis, Life in Egypt, 53.
32 N. Lewis, Life in Egypt, 92–93; Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs, 179–81.
33 BGU 1199; N. Lewis, Life in Egypt, 180.
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. 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. 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.”

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.”

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 genres actually expanded, until the Christianization of the province in the late fourth century.

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. 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. 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.

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. For the Hellenistic population, Egyptian themes predominated in funerary contexts such as the Alexandrian catacombs of Kûm al-Sîqâf (Qom es-Shugafa), while Greek residents in the Fayûm and Oxyrhynchus revered as city patrons the crocodile Sobek (Souchos) and the hippopotamus Taweret (Thoeris). For the native elite, Greek portraiture replaced traditional burial masks to produce the celebrated “Fayûm portraits” of the first to fourth centuries. 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 71–75) and in apocalyptic literature like “The Potter’s Prophecy,” decreeing the downfall of Roman

41 P. Oxy. I 1029; see Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs, 179.
47 Lorelei H. Corcoran, Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt (I–IV Centuries AD), SAOC 56 (Chicago, 1999); 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.\textsuperscript{48} Though of certain Egyptian origin, the prophecy 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 Fayyûm. 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\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{49} Births and deaths required individual registration.\textsuperscript{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 brother-sister marriage, specifically forbidden to resident Romans by regulation 23 of the "private account." Sibling marriage preserved inherited properties from fragmentation, ensuring some degree of family prosperity. While religious and other influences have been invoked to explain the custom,\textsuperscript{51} a neglected ancient Egyptian text makes the financial motive explicit. The "Chester Beatty Dream Book" explains that "if a man see himself in a dream copulating with his sister: Good. It means the transferal to him of property."\textsuperscript{52} Consanguineous marriage was ultimately prohibited throughout the empire by a decree of Diocletian in AD 295, as part of a general reorganization of an empire on the verge of political collapse.

On the political level, Roman efforts to enforce security in Egypt were largely successful until the third century, and an overview of the official history of the province is fairly straightforward. After the conquest of Egypt by Octavian in 30 BC, the first prefect, C. Corneliuss Gallus (30–29 BC), faced the only significant external threat to Roman authority in Egypt for three centuries. Inspired and abetted by the Meroitic kingdom to the south, a revolt in the Upper Egyptian Thebaid was rapidly suppressed. The prefect's subsequent arrogation of imperial prerogatives – including the erection of a trilingual victory decree at Philae following Ptolemaic royal precedent – resulted in his summary dismissal, disgrace and suicide.\textsuperscript{53}

Deriving from pretensions to the Egyptian crown extending back to the Nubian Twenty-Fifth Dynasty (ca. 751–656 BC), the Meroitic threat continued under Gallus's successor Petronius, when in 25 BC a force of 30,000 Meroitic troops captured the border settlements of Aswan, Elephantine and Philae.\textsuperscript{54} The counterinvasion by Petronius, with 10,000 infantry and 800 cavalry, extended as far south as the old Nubian capital of Napata above the Fourth Cataract and induced the enemy queen (Meroitic "kandake") to sue for peace. Petronius withdrew, stationing 400 men at the fortress of Premis (Qsar Ibrim). A new Meroitic assault on Premis brought Petronius south again in 23 BC, and his successful defense of that fort led to a formal treaty at Samos two years later. Rome maintained the "Dodecaschoenus" extending...
to Maharraqa (Hiera Sykaminos), 80 km south of the First Cataract, while Meroe controlled the greater portion of Nubia. With the conclusion of these hostilities, the southern border area of Egypt remained calm until the scattered raids of the nomadic Blemmyes, beginning under Decius (AD 249–51). Meroe itself became an active trading partner of Rome, maintaining a pharaonically inspired kingdom well after Egypt itself was largely Christianized.55

The disputed Nubian territory preserves most of the official construction projects credited to Augustus. At Kalabsha (Talmis), a small Ptolemaic shrine was completed in the name of the new conqueror, designated simply as “The Roman.” The larger adjacent temple, erected by the late Ptolemies, was first decorated under the emperor. With the developed titulary of “Autocrator Caesar, living forever, beloved of Ptah and Isis,” the cartouche of Augustus was added to sites at Philae and Debod, with variant forms at Dakka and Elephantine. A more elaborate undertaking was the newly erected Dendur temple, dedicated to two divinized “heroes” who had drowned in the Nile. In Egypt itself, Augustus appears at Armant, Dendera, Deir el-Medineh and Shenhûr.

Little need be said of the succeeding reigns of Tiberius (AD 14–37), Caligula (AD 37–41) or Claudius (AD 41–54), which are characterized by a relative tranquility marred only by simmering unrest between Greek and Jewish factions in Alexandria. An unauthorized visit to Egypt by the eastern governor Germanicus provoked censure from Tiberius.56 Caligula flirted with Egyptian religious cults in Rome, formally restoring the worship of Egyptian deities banished from the capital since the days of Augustus.57 Claudius tactfully rebuffed Alexandrian requests for a self-governing senate, while cautioning Greeks to tolerate Jewish customs and Jews to cease agitation for privileged status.58 The Greco-Egyptian reaction is preserved in the “Acts of the Pagan Martyrs,” emphatically anti-Roman tracts popular in both Alexandria and the countryside, which prefigure literary martyrdoms of the Christian persecutions.59 As patron of Egyptian monuments, Tiberius is well represented at Armant, Aswan, Athribis, Copptos, Debdor, Dendera, Diospolis Parva (Hû), Edfu, Karnak, Kom Ombo (Ombos), Luxor, Philae and Shenhûr. Caligula appears at Copptos and Dendera, as does Claudius, who is further attested at Aswan, Athribis, Esna, Kom Ombo and Philae.

The reign of Nero (AD 54–68) witnessed a “scientific” expedition to Meroe, perhaps intended as a scouting mission for an aborted military invasion.60 If so, any plans for conquest were halted by the Judean revolt of AD 66. Nero’s interest in the south may have been sparked by his tutor Chaeremon, an Egyptian priest, Stoic philosopher and extraordinary example of social advancement accorded to a member of the native Egyptian elite.61 Nero’s official sponsorship of the Egyptian elite is recorded at Aswan, Copptos, Dendera, Karanis, Kom Ombo, Tehneh (Akoris) and in the Dakhleh Oasis.

With the death of Nero and the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty in AD 68, local authority resided in the hands of the first Alexandrian-born prefect, Tiberius Julius Alexander, descended from a Hellenized Jewish family related to the theologian Philo. Securely in office during the brief reigns of Galba (68–69), Otho (69) and Vitellius (69), it was this prefect who formally proclaimed Vespasian emperor in Alexandria on July 1, 69. If somewhat diminished, the Egyptian harvest was still viewed as “key to the grain supply” (claustra annonae) of Rome, and Vespasian’s acquisition of this resource contributed to his victory and the establishment of the Flavian dynasty.62 In Egypt, the transitory Galba and Otho both appear in reliefs at the small Eighteenth Dynasty temple of Medinet Habu. Of Vitellius there is no trace.

During his momentous visit to Alexandria, the first by an emperor since Augustus, Vespasian (AD 69–79) was welcomed into the hippodrome as a proper Egyptian pharaoh, being proclaimed the son of the creator Amon and Serapis incarnate. The designation “son of Amon” evokes not only phar-
the Siwa Oasis. The identification with the Greco-Egyptian deity Serapis, chief patron of Alexandria and the former Ptolemaic kingdom, catered to a more local and contemporary taste. Vespasian demonstrated the validity of these claims by healing a blind and a crippled man by means of magical spitting and trampling, both traditional native ritual techniques. The family’s interest in Egyptian religion was demonstrated again by Vespasian’s spitting and trampling, both traditional native ritual techniques.

These claims by healing a blind and a crippled man by means of magical Apis bull at Memphis following his suppression of the Judean revolt and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Reprisal for the Jewish rebellion affected Egypt directly in AD 73, with the sacking of the Leontopolite temple, founded by the fugitive High Priest Onias in the reign of Ptolemy VI (180–145 BC). In contrast, Vespasian favored native temple construction at Esna, Kom Ombo, Medinet Habu, Siisileh and in the Dakhleh Oasis.

The succeeding reigns of Titus (79–81), Domitian (81–96) and Nerva (96–98) left a lesser imprint upon the country, though official Alexandrian coinage now recognized Egyptian deities of the provincial nomes, evidence of a pro-Egyptian policy attested in Italy as well. Domitian founded temples to Isis and Serapis in Benvenuto and Rome itself, utilizing pharaonic trappings to add further legitimacy to imperial pretensions. In Rome, Domitian’s emphasis on absolute authority, with scorn for the senate, led to his assassination and the end of the Flavian dynasty. The throne passed to the former consul and likely conspirator Nerva, who abandoned the principle of imperial heredity in favor of the adoption of qualified heirs. In Egypt, ongoing temple projects recorded the sponsorship of Titus at Dakhleh and Esna, Domitian at Akhmim, Arment, Dendera, Esna, Kom Ombo, Philae, and Sisileh, with Nerva attested uniquely at Esna.

With the accession of Trajan (98–117), native cults received continued support at Dendera, Esna, al-Jabalayn (Gebelein), Kalabsha, Kom Ombo, Medinet Habu and Philae. A temple at Dendera to Nea Aphrodite, identifying the empress Plotina with Hathor, represents the first direct association of the imperial family (beyond the person of the emperor) with native deities. More in evidence, however, was religious disharmony in the form of new Jewish revolts sparked by the appearance of a supposed “messiah” in Cyrene. An initial outbreak in Alexandria in 114 was quickly suppressed, but the transferal of troops in the following year for a Parthian campaign ignited three years of vicious guerrilla warfare throughout the countryside (115–17). Massacres of Greeks by roving Jewish terrorists led to the arming of the Egyptian peasantry, an act of desperation echoing Ptolemaic policy prior to the battle of Raphia in 217 BC. The revolt was crushed, and the

63 The practice parallels both ancient Egyptian healing techniques and that used by Jesus; see Ritner, Mechanics of Magical Practice, 90, nn. 429–30.

Jewish community in Egypt was effectively extinguished until the third century. So great was the social impact of the hostilities that the city of Oxyrhynchus still celebrated its deliverance from Jewish brigands more than eighteen years later. The end of Trajan’s reign marks as well the full development of the liturgy system, with its extension to tax collection and the elimination of tax-farming.

To Hadrian (117–138) fell the task of restoring stability to the country, and in 118 he decreed a reduction in land taxes in reaction to poor agricultural production during the insurrection (resulting both from destruction and conscription). A brief native revolt during the consecration of an Apis bull in 122, a far less successful counterpart to the native revolts against the Ptolemies after Raphia, may also be attributable to the arming of the peasantry. In his fourteenth and fifteenth years (130–31), Hadrian and his court paid a state visit to Egypt lasting some eight to ten months. Touristic aspects of the trip included a lion hunt in the Libyan desert, a Nile cruise, and a morning visit to the colossi of Memnon in western Thebes, where Balbilla, attendant of Empress Sabina, carved commemorative graffiti on the left leg of the “singing” colossus.

The most significant testament to the journey was the founding of the Greek city of Antinoopolis, memorializing the drowning of Hadrian’s youthful lover, Antinous. According to Egyptian theology, such a death entailed a special identification with the drowned Osiris, god of the underworld. Under Augustus, “deification by drowning” had provided the rationale for the native hero cults at the remote temple of Dendur, but Hadrian’s Egyptianizing cult of Antinous was extended throughout the empire. The receipt by Antinous of traditional rituals (“opening the mouth”) was duly recorded in hieroglyphs on the last commissioned obelisk, thereafter erected in Rome. Hadrian’s religious advisor was perhaps the Egyptian poet and priest Pancrates, later associated with the emperor in magical writings. Antinopolis became the fourth Greek polis with citizenship rights in Egypt, and its debt to indigenous religion seems acknowledged in a special privilege accorded its citizens, who were free to intermarry with Egyptians.

To ensure the financial success of his foundation, Hadrian in 137 ordered the construction of a road linking the new city with the Red Sea port of Berenike, in competition with the older trade route to the Nile at Coptos.
The “Via Hadriana” may well have diverted the valuable Indian spice trade from the Wadi Hammamat, as the associated Red Sea port at Quseir (probably to be identified with Myos Hormos) declined following the reign of Hadrian. Aside from Antinoopolis, Hadrian’s patronage is recorded at Armant, Dendera, Esna and Philae. Hadrian’s reign produced a contemporary vogue for “Egyptomania,” epitomized by the “Canopus” section of the emperor’s villa on the Tiber.

The reign of Antoninus Pius (138–161), first of the Antonines, began auspiciously with the “millenialist” celebration in 139 of a completed Sothic Cycle, signaling the return to accuracy of the wandering civil calendar. The substantial reign witnessed the last significant temple construction in Egypt, with additions at Armant, Dendera, Coptos, Esna, Medamud, Medinet Habu and Tod. Local peace was broken only by an Alexandrian riot in 153 that resulted in the unprecedented slaying of the prefect. Nevertheless, the emperor reportedly visited the city subsequently and sponsored the construction of a new hippodrome and city gates.

Alexandrian prosperity was enhanced by its control of the Indian mercantile trade, passing through the Red Sea and the Nile valley. In contrast, the countryside now entered upon a period of prolonged economic decline, owing to years of social disruption, over-taxation and desultory maintenance of critical irrigation systems. Liturgical service, theoretically a voluntary honor, was made compulsory for lack of willing volunteers. Impoverished nominees sought to evade the system’s financial burden by simply abandoning their agricultural property and fleeing, producing a downward spiral of declining production and population. Whole villages became abandoned, and the desert reclaimed once productive sites throughout the Faiyum. Conditions were set for a popular rebellion.

Social tensions erupted during the tenure of Marcus Aurelius (161–80) with a fierce revolt (171–75) waged by native “herdsmen” (boukolai) led by the priest Isidorus. Having routed the resident Roman forces, the Egyptians were subdued only after the arrival of fresh detachments under Avidius Cassius, governor of Syria and son of a former Egyptian prefect. Once successful, however, Cassius caused his troops to proclaim him emperor after a false report of his death. Recognized in Egypt and much of the east for three months in 175, Cassius was murdered by a centurion. Aurelius toured the repentant provinces and Alexandria in 176, granting pardon to the city and the family of Cassius. Revolutionary devastation was augmented by an outbreak of plague in Egypt, as in much of the empire, from 165 to 180. Physical evidence of the pestilence has now come to light in the Theban Valley of the Queens, where a mass grave (Tomb 53) contained some 276 bodies covered in quicklime. The dramatic fate of these individuals is in marked contrast to that of most Roman-era high-status native burials in the area, which give evidence of a sedentary population with little trauma and a prolonged survival of the elderly and infirm.

Despite the revolt of Isidorus, Egyptian religion had come to the aid of Aurelius during the Danube campaign of 172 in the person of Harnuphis, a priestly magician who reportedly brought rain to rescue the Roman troops. As Pharaoh, Aurelius is noted at Dendera, Esna, Kom Ombo and Philae. Perhaps in response to the native revolt, however, the reign of Aurelius marks the last use of Demotic ostraca to record official tax receipts; all subsequent receipts are in Greek.

The latest Demotic papyryus contract is attested in the same reign (175/76). Commodus (180–192), less gracious than his predecessor, promptly ordered the murder of the pardoned family of Cassius. The incident may be reflected in the last of the “Acts of the Pagan Martyrs,” in which the unpopular emperor is rebuked as “tyrannical, boorish and uncultured.”

68 Lacking a “leap day,” the native calendar strayed over time, so that its New Year’s day no longer coincided with the theoretical new year, marked by the heliacal rising of the star Sirius. The official and theoretical cycles intersected every 1460 years. Alexandria commemorated the Antonine celebration by issuing special coins displaying the phoenix.
70 N. Lewis, Life in Egypt, 183. For an example of avoidance of nomination from AD 192, see Jones, History of Rome, 250–31.
75 See Bowman, Egypt After the Ptolemies, 43; Milne, History of Egypt, 55.
The economic decline of the country, already noted under Antoninus, had become sufficiently critical that the annual grain supply to Rome required supplementation by a north African grain fleet. A lowered silver standard with a corresponding discontinuation of bronze coinage are yet further indications of financial ills. Commodus is the last emperor widely attested as subsequent decrease in pharaonic representations does not signal an official change in attitude toward native culture, but rather a general lack of resources available for clergy and temple construction, at first exacerbated by the murder of Commodus and uncertain succession.

In 193, as in 69 a year of four emperors, claim to the throne was made by Pertinax, Didius Julianus, Pescennius Niger and Septimius Severus. Though proclaimed emperor in Rome on January 1, Pertinax was recognized in Egypt only twenty-two days before his assassination on March 28, and news of his death did not reach the countryside until after mid-May. His Roman successor, Didius Julianus, was never acknowledged. By June, dating protocol and an issue of Alexandrian coinage show that local allegiance had been given instead to Piscennius Niger, general of Syria and former popular commander at the Egyptian border fortress of Aswan.

The successful contender to replace the Antonine dynasty was Septimius Severus (193–211), who occupied Rome, north Africa and Egypt before defeating Niger at the battle of Cyzicus on the Propontis. Egyptian adherence to the Severan cause was secured by February 13, as proved by a papyrus from Arsinoe in the Fayyum. Severus and his family toured the province in his eighth year (199–200), following the itinerary of Hadrian. The visit of Severus is recorded by a prominent relief at Esna, where the emperor is shown accompanied by his wife Julia and his sons Caracalla and Geta. The tour included the obligatory visit to the colossus of Memnon, which the emperor repaired so that it never sang again. More significant, if equally flawed, were the proposed administrative and legal reforms. Alexandrians and the nome capitals were granted long-desired senates, villagers were exempted from compulsory service in the Greek cities, and nominees to liturgies might avoid service without imprisonment or loss of status by ceding all real property to the state. The new senates had little independent authority, however, and the reforms seem rather an attempt to improve tax collection.

At the outset of the imperial visit (199), the prefect Q. Aemilius Saturninus issued a decree against processional oracles, banning a central feature of native temple cult. The ban was largely unsuccessful, though official condemnation ultimately did drive the procedure underground; later Demotic oracles are all private procedures disguised by cipher. The Greek tale of Thessalos recounts the events of such an oracle conducted secretly by a priest in Thebes. Immediately following the visit (201), a more portentous religious controversy erupted in Egypt, with the first of many anti-Christian persecutions. As chronicled by Eusebius, the martyred included not only Alexandrians, but converts “from the whole of Egypt and the Thebaid,” suggesting an initial spread of Christianity among the native population. The theologian Origen, orphaned during this Severan purge, is the first author to distinguish “Egyptian” and “Greek” Christians, and biblical papyri begin to appear upcountry about the same time. If the reign of Severus was characterized by increased social division within the Roman state, that of his son Caracalla (211–17) began with an unprecedented extension of Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the empire (212). Adopted by Caracalla as a sign of descent from Marcus Aurelius, the family name Aurelius (feminine Aurelia) was assigned as a hereditary forename to all new “Romans” and thus became particularly common among Egyptians. Aside from this formal dignity, citizenship now carried few prerogatives and some tax liabilities (such as the inheritance tax). Like his father’s extension of city councils, Caracalla’s grant seems more a matter of symbolism than substance.

The accession of Caracalla ignited a rivalry with his brother and joint emperor Geta, whose murder in 212 was followed by a general damnatio memoriae and the erasure of his image at Esna. References to Geta could prove a liability, as demonstrated during Caracalla’s Egyptian visit in 215. Alexandrians had mocked the emperor’s pretensions of heroism and publicly scoffed at his claim of self-defense in Geta’s murder. In retaliation, Caracalla ordered the death of the prominent delegation that had come out to welcome him and allowed several days of indiscriminate plunder and murder by his troops throughout the city. Thereafter, public gatherings were suspended, the police presence was increased, and native Egyptians were expelled from the city except on matters of business and religion. Earlier attempts to excuse Caracalla’s savagery for reasons of “public security” seem rather dubious, but the expulsion of natives was motivated less by

77 P. Yale inv. 299; see Ritner, Mechanica of Magical Practice, 217–20.
79 See Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs, 44, n. 41, 66; N. Lewis, Life in Egypt, 183. For typical acts of city councils, see Jones, History of Rome, 232–33.
80 see Roberts, Manuscript, Society and Belief, 64–73.
81 Milne, History of Egypt, 64.
simple racism than by the traditional desire to maintain rural productivity through serf labor:

The ones to be prevented are those who flee the countryside where they belong in order to avoid farmwork, not those who converge upon Alexandria out of a desire to view the glorious city or come here in pursuit of a more cultural existence or on occasional business.83

True rustics, Caracalla noted, could be detected by their rude speech, dress and manners. Caracalla’s naïve assessment notwithstanding, fugitive laborers had fled not from farmwork, but from ruinous taxation and prolonged governmental mismanagement.

Following the murder of Caracalla, the imperial throne was contested by his assassin Macrinus (217–18) and by Elagabalus (218–22), putative son of Caracalla and priest of the Syrian solar deity El-Gabaal at Emesa. More significantly, Elagabalus was the protegé of the influential Julia Maesa, his natural grandmother and Caracalla’s maternal aunt. Breaking the Augustan prohibition on senatorial interference in Egypt, Macrinus sent a prefect and senator to administer the ruined province, which was no longer relevant to Roman survival.84 News of the defeat and subsequent death of Macrinus at Antioch precipitated fierce rioting in Alexandria, in which the senator was killed and the prefect expelled. Macrinus is noted once at Kom Ombo;85 Elagabalus is unattested in native sources. Scandalizing Roman convention regarding religion, sexuality and dress, Elagabalus was murdered by the praetorian guard on the orders of his grandmother, and his cousin Severus Alexander (222–35) became emperor.

Aside from protocols in Greek papyri, the new ruler is unnoted in Egypt, although he might have visited Alexandria. Clearly signaling Egypt’s political insignificance, he appointed a mutineer from the Praetorian Guard as prefect (Epagathus, ca. 228). In the Persian war of 232, mutinous Egyptian contingents proved equally unreliable, reflecting the deteriorating state of the resident legions. Following a defeat by the Alamanni on the Rhine, Alexander was slain by his own troops, ending the Severan dynasty and beginning a succession of rival emperors of as little consequence to Egypt as was the province to them.

Elected by the army in Germany, Maximinus (235–238) was opposed for seventy-two days in 238 by the senatorial candidates Gordian I and his son Gordian II, and then by their successors, the co-emperors Balbinus and Pupienus (238). These last outlived the military assassination of Maximinus only to fall victim to Praetorian Guards after a ninety-nine-day reign. The throne then passed to the youth Gordian III (238–44), whose victorious campaign against Shapur I of Iran was cut short by his sudden death, probably at the instigation of his deputy Philip the Arab (244–49). As noted by Milne:

The only way in which Egypt exercised any influence on the course of imperial policy about this time was through its poverty; the inability of the central government to collect the revenues in the Eastern provinces compelled Philip to make peace with the Goths on the Danube.86

The cartouche of Philip appears unobtrusively on the inner rear wall of Esna temple, where it has been supplanted by the name of the next military usurper, Trajanus Decius (249–51).87 The last attestation of an emperor at Esna, this erasure constitutes as well the final instance of “surcharged cartouches,” a traditional feature of dynastic quarrels throughout pharaonic history.

In contrast to the waning instances of imperial temple sponsorship was the pervasive growth of rural Christianity, first evident under Severus. The Alexandrian Patriarch Dionysius (247–64) became notable for actively recruiting converts from the indigenous, or “Coptic,” inhabitants. Traditional cults were elaborate, expensive and increasingly arcane. Roman interference had crippled temple funding and marginalized the social role of the native priesthood and the written Demotic language. Projecting an enhanced status quo into the afterlife, Egyptian religion was inherently life-affirming, centered upon a royal intermediary equally human and divine. As life in Roman Egypt became increasingly onerous and the emperors remote and irrelevant, traditional theology proved less attractive. It is significant that the ancient pharaonic paradise became the Coptic Christian Hell (Amente). As temples were abandoned for economic or social reasons, Christianity filled the void with a comparable intermediary, a simplified theology88 and a rejection of earthly bonds. No practice underlines the

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distinction so sharply as the martyrdoms actively sought by fervent Christian converts. The profession of Christianity became a form of social protest, with pagans castigated as alien “Hellenes.”

Under Decius (250), an attempt was made to curtail the growing Christian disaffection by requiring proof of sacrifice before communal deities, stipulating that each citizen “made sacrifice and libation and tasted the victim’s flesh.” Numerous certificates of sacrifice (libelli) survive from Egypt, and while some Christians complied, many others were executed.99 External as well as internal disturbances threatened. For the first time since the reign of Augustus, the southern border of Egypt came under attack, with raids by the nomadic Blemmyes along the Dodecaschoenus of Lower Nubia.90 At Kalabsha, Roman occupation is last attested by an inscription dated to Philip.91 In 257, Decius was slain by the Goths and the anti-Christian persecution lapsed. St. Antony (ca. 251–356), the father of monasticism, was born about the same time in the Egyptian village of Coma (Qiman al-Arus), some 75 km south of modern Cairo. Despite the general impression of economic hardship, certain regions did prosper in the middle of the third century. The vast Heroninos archive (ca. 247–70) from Theadelphia in the Fayyûm documents the flourishing properties of Appianus, “the best attested large private estate from the Roman empire.”92

The turbulent reigns of Trebonianus Gallus (253–53) and Aemilian (253) are attested almost exclusively by Alexandrian coinage and Greek documentary protocols. In the final year of Gallus, an envoy of Meroe to Rome recorded his mission at Philae in the longest known graffito in Demotic.93 Beset by constant Germanic invasions in the West and by renewed assaults of the Persian Shapur I in the East, Valerian (253–60) effectively partitioned the empire with his son Gallienus (253–68), anticipating the formal division under Diocletian. To divert attention from external disasters, Valerian re instituted the Christian persecutions, requiring sacrifice and authorizing the seizure of clerical property.94 If demonized by the Christian clergy, Valerian appears as a proper Pharaoh at Arment, acting as patron of the burial of Buchis, the resident sacred bull of the Thebaid. Valerian’s capture by Shapur in 260 marks the nadir of Roman imperial history, thereafter styled the “Year of the Thirty Emperors,” an estimate only somewhat exaggerated. In Syria, the legions proclaimed Macrianus and Quietus (260–61), who were recognized in Egypt as far south as Coptos. With their defeat, the Alexandrian mob compelled the prefect Aemilianus to accept imperial honors. Aemilianus successfully repelled Blemmye raids, which now extended beyond Lower Nubia into the Thebaid. By August 262, he had been defeated by the forces of Gallienus in pitched street battles across Alexandria that devastated the city and reduced its population by approximately two-thirds.95

Following the murder of Gallienus, the reigns of Claudius Gothicus (268–70), Quintillus (270) and Aurelian (270–75) found Egypt a source of contention between Rome and Zenobia, Queen of the rebellious state of Palmyra. Zenobia’s son Vabalathus was proclaimed joint ruler in the East by Aurelian, but Palmyra declared independence in 271 and held Egypt for much of that year before it was recaptured by the Roman general, and future emperor, Probus. Palmyra and Alexandria revolted again in 272, now at the instigation of Firmus, a wealthy Alexandrian merchant with reputed economic ties to the Blemmyes.96 After reducing Palmyra, Aurelian besieged Alexandria and forced the suicide of Firmus. In gratitude, Oxyrhynchus presented a golden statue of victory to the emperor.97

The reign of Tacitus (275–76) is unnoted in Egypt, and the elevation of his brother Florian (276) was successfully contested by Probus (276–82), backed by the Egyptian legions. Blemmye raids continued to threaten Upper Egypt, penetrating as far north as Coptos and Ptolemais before they were defeated by Probus. The victorious Roman legions were then assigned to ignominious dike repair, reflecting the deterioration of the local infrastructure which continued unabated in the reigns of Carus (282–83), Carinus (283–85) and Numerian (285–84).

The first systematic reorganization was undertaken by Diocletian (284–305), who in 293 converted the empire into a “Tetrarchy” under two Augusti (Diocletian in the East, Maximian in the West) assisted by two Caesars (Galerius and Constantius Chlorus, respectively). Provinces throughout the empire were subdivided so that they doubled in number. These smaller units were grouped into thirteen dioceses under vicars (vicarii), with primary control granted to four praetorian prefects, each subject to a tetrarch. In Egypt, the Thebaid was made a distinct province. This fractioning of administrative units continued throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, while Egypt was reunited as a diocese of six provinces by about 371.98 With smaller provinces, traditional nomes lost their administrative significance, and by 528 these were supplanted by subunits labeled pagii.

96 So Milne, History of Egypt, 76.
95 Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs, 59–60 and 44.
98 Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs, 78–81.
Financial reform was also attempted on a wide scale. In an effort to combat inflation, Diocletian decreed maximum limits upon prices and salaries throughout the empire, and the system of taxation was revised to give consideration to differences in soil and harvest. Adopted in Egypt in 297, the new taxation system had a variable rate determined annually, “the first budget in the history of finance.”

After the reforms of Diocletian, Egypt lost much of the idiosyncratic character that it had retained since Augustus. For the first time in Roman Egypt, authority was divided between a civil administrator (praeses) and a military governor (dux), and Egyptian coinage was now integrated within the broader imperial system. Nevertheless, Egypt proved restive, and in 293, while Diocletian proposed his reforms, Copts revolted and was destroyed by Galerius, the new Caesar of the East.

An Alexandrian revolt followed (297–98), instigated by one Lucius Domitius Domitanus and his deputy Achilles. Diocletian personally supervised the eight month siege of the ravaged city. The conclusion of the revolt was commemorated by the erection of the column erroneously known today as “Pompey’s Pillar,” which once bore an equestrian statue of the emperor. Diocletian’s visit continued with an inspection of the southern frontier post at Philae, where a defensive gateway was constructed in his name. Acknowledging Rome’s inability to eradicate Blemmye razzias in Lower Nubia, Diocletian formally withdrew from the Dodecaschoenus, fixing the new border at Aswan. The lost territory, accompanied by annual subsidies, was ceded to the Noba tribe as a buffer against further Blemmye encroachment. A record of the emperor’s visit, and the inadequacy of the local administration’s preparations for it, survives in a papyrus from Panopolis dating to 298.

In 302, Diocletian returned to Egypt. In the last visit by a reigning emperor, he distributed free bread to the population of Alexandria and inveighed against the alien religion of Manichaem. The following year, the emperor’s fear of seditious cults prompted the bloodiest assault against the local administration’s preparations for it, survives in a papyrus from Panopolis dating to 298.

In 303, the Coptic church estimates of 144,000 to 800,000 martyrs may well be inflated but clearly reveal the intensity of the persecutions. From the sixth century to the present, the Coptic calendar has dated not from the birth of Christ, but from the “Era of the Martyrs,” calculated retrospectively from Diocletian’s accession in 284. In stark contrast, Diocletian received full pharaonic honors at Arment on the Buchis stela of 295, and in later years an artificial “Era of Diocletian” would be used reverentially to avoid mention of Christian emperors.

Following the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian in 305, the persecutions continued unrelentingly until a deathbed decree of religious toleration by Galerius (305–11).

After a generation, the fragile Tetrarchy rapidly succumbed to personal rivalries in both West and East. In Italy, Maxentius had ousted Severus II as Augustus in 307, before his own defeat by “Caesar” Constantine at the celebrated battle of Milvian Bridge in 312. Maximin Daia (310–313), who had been Eastern Caesar from 305 to 310, contested the office of Augustus with Licinius (308–314), a military associate of the deceased Galerius. Ruling from Egypt to Asia Minor, Maximin strongly encouraged traditional cults throughout the East, creating a new hierarchy of the Pagan clergy under provincial high priests. Although this clerical reform is often assumed to have been modeled upon Christian practice, strong Egyptian influence has been noted in the role of priestesses and the stipulation that clerical vestments be of white linen.

Such Egyptian influence in the broader Pagan defense is to be expected, as the native clergy increasingly dominated Alexandrian “Greek” philosophical schools, producing the hybrid “Hermetic” Corpus of theoretical speculation and the “Magical” collections of practical theology.

As the last aggressively Pagan emperor in the East, Maximin Daia is correspondingly the final emperor to be officially acknowledged in hieroglyphic texts. At the site of Tahta in Middle Egypt, blocks from a ruined temple preserve his cartouches beside a fragmentary offering scene.

100 Cf. the explanations in Milne, History of Egypt, 82, and Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs, 45.
101 P. Beatty Panop. 1.167–79; see Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs, 77–78. For the suggestion that this territory was ceded to Meroe, rather than to the Noba, see Welby, Kingdom of Kush, 71.
102 Reyon and Barns, Four Martyrdoms, 7, 145.
the full titulary Valerius Maximi(n)us Caesar, it is suggested that these blocks date from 305 to 310, before his proclamation as Augustus, but hieroglyphic texts are not scrupulous regarding titular distinctions of the Tetrarchy. A stela at Aberdeen (no. 16219) recording the burial of a mother of Buchis at Armant is dated to year eight of Caesar Maximi(n)us, his penultimate year as Augustus (312/13).111

In 313, Maximin crossed with his army into Thrace, but was defeated by Licinius at Tsirallum beside the Erghen river. Retreating to Tarsus, Maximin became ill and died, yielding authority to the first pro-Christian emperor in the East. The same year, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in the West, granting religious toleration for Christians and Pagans, and Licinius adopted the new policy that summer. For Egyptian Christianity, 313 marks the baptism of Pachomius (ca. 292–346), the former soldier who would devise the first coenobitic monastic regulations at the abandoned village of Tabennesi, a former cult site of the goddess Isis.

The reign of Licinius in Egypt (313–324), while relatively long, is little documented. It is during his rule that the Pagan “Era of Diocletian” is first noted in dates of the Buchis bull born in 316/317 (“year 33 of Diocletian”) and enthroned in 322/323 (“year 39 of Diocletian”). Diocletian’s Nubian strategy proved unsuccessful, and Blemmye plundering resumed, so that the new monastery of Tabennesi was harassed between 323 and 346. Licinius is said to have turned against the Christian clergy with restrictive measures in 320 and 321, and worsening relations with Constantine provoked open hostilities from 316. Defeated by Constantine in 324, Licinius was captured and executed.

During the reign of Constantine as sole emperor (324–337), the transformation of the “Roman” into the “Byzantine” empire was all but complete. The radical reforms of the army, finance and administration begun by Diocletian were pursued and extended, and the divide between East and West intensified. A new taxation system was introduced in 313, with fifteen-year tax-cycles termed “indictions” calculated retrospectively from 312. In 331, the emperor formally transferred the imperial capital from Rome to Constantinople, the former Byzantium, on the Bosphorus, and the Latin principate conceived by Augustus evolved into an empire increasingly Greek.

Most importantly, Constantine’s empire increasingly favored Christianity, though the emperor himself was baptized only a week before his death. In 325, shortly after his accession as sole emperor, Constantine acted as arbiter during the Council of Nicaea, convened to determine the divinity of Christ. The need for the council might have halted an intended visit by the emperor to Egypt, as suggested by texts from Oxyrhynchus detailing preparations for an imperial reception. Attended by 220 bishops, the council issued the Nicene Creed, thereby vindicating Athanasius of Alexandria against the “heretic” Arian, who had denied that Christ was “of one substance with the Father.” The subsequent refusal by Athanasius to reinstate the humbled Arian led to a feud with Constantine, exacerbated by reports that Athanasius had presumed to levy taxes for his church. The banishment of the Alexandrian bishop in 335, associated with a revolt led by one Philumenos, established a pattern of hostility that would characterize church–state relations in Egypt for the remainder of the Byzantine occupation. Athanasius would be expelled from his see five times before his death in 373. His zeal for orthodoxy further aggravated the local Meletian schism, concerning the rehabilitation of Christians who had recanted during the former persecutions.116

Notwithstanding the new doctrinal conflicts, Egyptian monasticism expanded with official patronage, and in 330 Macarius (“the Great”) founded the complex of monasteries still thriving in the Wadi Natrun. On the basis of onomastics, 330 has been considered a watershed year in Egypt, with Christianity claiming 50 percent of the population, increasing to 80 or 90 percent by the end of the century. This estimate seems excessive; other tabulations suggest less than 25 percent conversion by 350, with 50 percent by 388.117

Despite the rapid growth of Christianity under Constantine, centers of Paganism persisted in Alexandria and the Egyptian countryside. Thebes lost in stature to Panopolis, home of the philosopher Zosimos (floruit ca. 300) and several distinguished sacerdotal families.118 The religious complexity of the period is epitomized by the fortunes of the Panopolite family of Aurelius Petarbeschinis, whose eldest son, Aurelius Horion, was high priest of the ithyphallic local deity Min, while his brother Harpocrates was official paganist at the imperial court in Constantinople.119

110 Grégoire, “L’Énigme de Tahta,” 139.
111 For Augustus Diocletianus Caesar, see Grenier, “La stèle funéraire,” 203, n. 3.
113 Eusebius, History of the Church, X.5; see Jones, History of Rome, 336–39.
116 Bowman, Egypt After the Pharaohs, 49.
Constantius (337–61), the son and successor of Constantine in the East, was a committed follower of Arianism, and his repeated quarrels with Athanasius dominated imperial policy toward Egypt. The emperor’s non-conciliatory religious views did, however, affect the legacy of pre-Christian Egypt. At Armant, the Buchis bull who had been born in the unrecognised reign of Licinius was buried in 340, in “year 57 of Diocletian.” This is the last preserved royal cartouche and certainly the last interred Buchis as well. The catacombs were subsequently ransacked and this stela “exorcised” by the painted addition of three red crosses and the repeated name of Jesus Christ.120 While such outrages probably date from the proscription of Pagan cults under Theodosius I, it is under Constantius in 341 that official tolerance for Christianity devolves into formal persecution of traditional religions: “Let superstition come to an end, and the insanity of sacrifices be abolished.”122 From 353, a series of imperial edicts resulted in prohibitions on cultic ceremonies and enforced temple closings. In 359, an oracle of the god Bes at Abydos foretold the end of his reign, and Constantius decreed an (unsuccessful) abolition of oracles throughout the empire. He died two years later, marching against his rebellious cousin Julian.122

At the accession of Julian (361–63), Paganism regained the official patronage of the imperial court. In Egypt, the Alexandrian mob used the occasion to murder the Arian bishop George, who had been imposed upon the city by Constantius in 357. Throughout the empire, Julian attempted to defend and rehabilitate deteriorating temples. The military commander Artemius, accused of plundering the Alexandrian Serapeum, was recalled to court and executed. Athanasius was now banished not merely from Alexandria, but from the whole of Egypt. He withdrew instead into the Thebaid until the death of Julian while on campaign against the Persians.

The short reign of Jovian (363–64) allowed the return of Athanasius, who thereafter maintained his see despite the elevation of the Arian emperor Valens (364–78), co-founder of the Valentinian dynasty. Less daunting than preeminent Coptic stylist and zealot.

Thus then at the site of a shrine to an unclean spirit, it will henceforth be a shrine that is therein ... the dogs and cats, the crocodiles and frogs, the foxes, the other reptiles, the beasts and birds, the cattle, etc. . .. it is the soul-saving scriptures of life that will henceforth come to be therein.128

**Footnotes:**

120 Grenier, “La stèle funéraire,” 207–08.


123 David N. Bell, The Life of Shenute by Besa (Kalamazo0, MI, 1983), 7–8.

124 Perhaps encouraged by the Persian Shapur II, both Blemmyes and Saracens raided monasteries in the Sinai during the same year, Valens disappeared during a rout of the Roman army by invading Visigoths in Thrace.

125 Theodosius I (379–395) announced in 380 that the Nicene faith pronounced by Alexandria and Rome was the only true religion, thus ending imperial support for Arianism, which now spread among the Germanic tribes in the West. The emperor’s subsequent campaign against various “heterities” was championed in Alexandria by the Patriarch Theophilus (385–412). On February 24, 391, by an edict addressed to Rome from Milan, Theodosius abruptly banned all expressions of Paganism throughout the empire.122 A second edict of June 16 was addressed specifically to Alexandria and Egypt.

In an act of provocation, Theophilus attempted to convert a local temple into a church. Sacred relics were discovered and paraded in the streets, instigating riots between Christians and Pagans. Theophilus now sacked the prestigious Alexandrian Serapeum, into which the Pagans, led by the philosopher Olympius, had fled.126 The suburban Serapeum at Canopus (Abu Qir) was also pillaged, and monks settled amid its ruins. Later Coptic legends romanticized the bishop’s ability to reap gold from ruined temples.127 In time, the Serapeum was converted into a church of Saint John the Baptist, while the Canopus temple became the church of Saints Cyril and John. Throughout Egypt, the same fate was visited upon the ancient temples, and the remains of intrusive churches are clearly evident at Dendera, Esna, Luxor, Medinet Habu and elsewhere. The policy was officially sanctioned by Shenute and examples were extolled in Coptic legend:

**Endnotes:**


129 Jones, History of Rome, 345.

130 For the five versions of the story, see John Holland Smith, The Death of Classical Paganism (New York, 1976), 168–75. See also the papyrus illustration in R. E. Witt, Isis in the Graeco-Roman World (Ithaca, NY, 1971), 220, fig. 68.


The summer after the dismantling of the Serapeum there was an exceptionally high Nile and, in consequence of this perceived blessing, a large number of conversions.

Many of Alexandria’s Pagan intellectuals thereafter fled the city, including Ammonius, “priest of the ape (Thoth)” and the poet Claudian, whose work bears the stamp of native theology. Though proscribed, Paganism was not yet dead. On August 24, 394, the last dated hieroglyphic inscription was carved at the frontier temple of Philae, recording the birth festival of Osiris in year 120 (of Diocletian). Arcadius (395–408), the eldest son of Theodosius, further formalized the distinctions between the Eastern and Western empires and is often credited with being the first true Byzantine emperor. Traditional worship at Philae continued unabated, as evidenced by a Demotic graffito of year 124 of Diocletian (407/08) memorializing the worship of a “Chief of Secrets of Isis.” The reign of Theodosius II (408–50) was dominated by a new doctrinal struggle between Cyril “the Great” of Alexandria and the court prelate Nestorius, who denied to Mary the title of “Mother of God.” As a result of the rhetorical skills of Cyril and the physical backing of Shenute and his monks, Nestorius was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 and banished to the Kharga Oasis in 435. He died in Egypt after 451, having survived captivity during Blemmye raids that had sent 20,000 refugees to Shenute’s White Monastery. More significant for Coptic history was the “Monophysite” controversy at the Second Council of Ephesus in 449. Officially appointed to resolve a dispute regarding the humanity of Christ, the council was rather the setting for a political contest between Alexandria, Rome and Constantinople, whose protagonists included Flavian and his nephew Dioscorus I (444–458), who had initiated charges against a local archimandrite, Eutychus. Backed by the Alexandrian Patriarch Dioscorus I (444–454/58), Eutychus was vindicated over objections outlined in a tardily sent “Tome” following the council. The death of Shenute, whose “thirty-two wonders” included the reading of an ancient funerary scroll, prior to his conversation with a resurrected hero, Olympiodorus of Thebes, is suggested by his pleasant experiences (ca. 425), and the nomads are the subject of a fragmentary epic of the late fifth century.

Emperor Marcian (450–57) made two decisions pivotal for Egyptian history in 451. A peace treaty was concluded with the Blemmyes, allowing them yearly access to the temple of Philae and the right to borrow the cult statue for procession or oracles. Thus Philae was spared the ravages of conversion for almost a century. The Council of Chalcedon was convened in retaliation for the Second Council of Ephesus. Dioscorus was now condemned and exiled, ensuring the permanent schism with the Coptic Church that persists to this day. Disharmony among the victors of the conference led to the further break between Rome and Constantinople only thirty-three years later. In 452, the last dated Demotic inscriptions were carved at Philae. On December 2, in “year 169 of Diocletian,” Esset the elder and his like-named junior partner recorded their continued service in the temple, probably at the time of the Blemmye visitation. On December 11, the final Demotic inscription was carved, labeling “the feet of Petinakht junior,” who attended the festivities. Knowledge of Demotic may have lasted much longer, as suggested by hagiographies of the seventh-century bishop Piетnius of Quft, whose “thirty-second wonder” entailed the reading of an ancient funerary scroll, prior to his conversation with a resurrected monk in the church of Saint Michael, the official seat of the Patriarch. Pagan philosophy survived under the direction of the native Panopolite scholar Horapollon the elder (ca. 408–50) and his descendants Asklepiades, Heraekos (both ca. 425–90) and Horapollon the younger (ca. 450–500). In a Philae Demotic graffito of 435 (year 152 of Diocletian), one of the last known Egyptian priests, Esset the elder, first prophet of Isis, documented his role as “scribe of the divine books.” Among the clients of the ancient cult were the Blemmyes and the Noba, whose renewed military actions were recorded in barbaric Greek. At the temple of Kalabsha, Silko, king of the Noba, left a victory scene and text, while a letter from Qasr Ibrim preserves the boas of the Blemmye king Phonen to Abouni, king of the Noba. Though a scouge to Christians, the Blemmyes were romanticized heroes to traditionalists. Olympiodorus of Thebes visited them and wrote of his pleasant experiences (ca. 425), and the nomads are the subject of a fragmentary epic of the late fifth century.


mummy.\textsuperscript{138} The Demotic tale of Seta I was reportedly discovered in the grave of a Coptic Christian.\textsuperscript{139}

At the accession of Leo I (457–74), the Alexandrian mob tore to pieces the court-imposed bishop, Proterius, despised successor to Dioscorus. In conformity with the pattern now customary in the Coptic Church, a new Patriarch was selected from among the monks. Timothy ("the Cat") was rejected by Leo and Zeno (474–91), continuing the imperial rift with Alexandria heaped briefly during the interregnum of the monophysite Basiliscus (475–76). Zeno returned to power in 476, as the Western empire fell to the German Odoacer. In 482, Zeno made an attempt at reconciliation by promulgating the "Henoticon," which rejected both Chalcedon and the teachings of Eutychus. The edict was considered a rebuke to papal authority, and in 484 the pope excommunicated the Byzantine emperor. In the same year, a new revolt against Zeno by the general Illus implicated the nationalistic Egyptian intellectuels of Alexandria, leading to the interrogation of Heraiskos and Horapollo the younger, the probable author of the Hieroglyphica, a treatise on the symbolic value of hieroglyphs.\textsuperscript{140}

In the reign of Anastasius (491–518), the Persians invaded the Delta but failed to occupy Alexandria and withdrew. Pagan authority over the Alexandrian university ended in 517, when John Philoponus assumed its leadership.\textsuperscript{141} Blemmye raids resumed against Upper Egypt, continuing under Justin I (518–27). In 540, during the reign of Justinian (527–65), the Noba were converted to Christianity in a contest between the missionaries of the emperor and those of his monophysite wife, Theodora. Won to the Coptic cause, the Noba joined the Byzantine army in crushing the power of the Blemmyes. In 543, Justinian dispatched Nurses the Persarmenian to close the temple of Philae, imprison its priests, and carry off the divine statues to Constantinople. The final stronghold of Egyptian religion was rededicated as a church, by a ruse according to Coptic legend.\textsuperscript{142} As late as 552, a citizen of Ombos (Kom Ombo) was discovered repairing sanctuaries for the Blemmyes.\textsuperscript{143}

From the perspective of traditional Egypt, little need be said of the anarchic reigns of Justin II (565–78), Tiberius II (578–82), Maurice (582–602), Phocas (602–10) or Heraclius (610–41). Philae was refortified against the Blemmyes in 577, internal brigandage severed the grain supply to Alexandria under Maurice, and war returned to Egypt in 609, with the revolt of Heraclius against Phocas. In the seventh year of Heraclius (616), the Persians successfully invaded Egypt and held it for about ten years. The return of Heraclius in 627 ignites older doctrinal differences, which may have encouraged Coptic acquiescence or compliance during the Arab conquest directed by 'Amr ibn al-'As from 640 to 642. To the latter should be attributed the final destruction of the remnants of the Alexandrian library.

Following the conquest, the ancient Egyptian legacy survived through the intermediaries of Coptic art, eschatology, folklore, and particularly the Coptic language, which dominated most local environments even after 705 when the Umayyad viceroy 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Abd al-Malik required the use of Arabic in all state affairs.\textsuperscript{144} As a vehicle for literary and documentary texts, Coptic remained in use until the fourteenth century. In the symbolism of the modern Coptic Church, Egyptian features still live.


\textsuperscript{139} F. Ll. Griffith, Stories of the High Priests of Memphis (Oxford, 1900), 67.


\textsuperscript{141} Henry Chadwick, The Early Church (London, 1967), 172.

\textsuperscript{142} E. A. Wallis Budge, Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt (London, 1915), Part I, 443–47; Part II, 961–63.

\textsuperscript{143} P. Maspero 67004; see Ulrich Wilcken, "Papyrus-Urkunden," Archiv für Papyrologie, 3 (1913), 443–44.