

THE CAMBRIDGE
HISTORY OF
EGYPT

VOLUME I

Islamic Egypt, 640–1517

EDITED BY
CARL F. PETRY

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
<http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1998

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1998

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Sabon 9.5/12 pt [CE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 47137 0 hardback

CONTENTS

List of illustrations to chapter 13 ix

List of contributors x

Preface xiii

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 Ṭūlūn to Kāfūr, 868–969 86
THIERRY BIANQUIS
- 5 The Ismāʿīlī Daʿwa and the Fāṭimid caliphate 120
PAUL E. WALKER
- 6 The Fāṭimid 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 Ayyūbid dynasty	211
	MICHAEL CHAMBERLAIN	
10	The Bahrī Mamlūk sultanate, 1250–1390	242
	LINDA S. NORTHRUP	
11	The regime of the Circassian Mamlūks	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 Ayyūbid and Mamlūk 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 Mamlūk period	462
	CARL F. PETRY	
18	The Ottoman occupation	490
	MICHAEL WINTER	
	<i>The rulers of Egypt, 254–922/868–1517</i>	517
	<i>Glossary</i>	521
	<i>Bibliography</i>	540
	<i>Index</i>	619

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER 13

1	The mosque of al-Hākīm. From <i>Description de l’Egypte</i> (1820)	342
2	The mosque of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn. From Robert Hillenbrand, <i>Islamic Architecture</i> (Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 75	351
3	The <i>miḥrāb</i> area in the mausoleum of Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb. With the permission of the German Archaeological Institute, Cairo	355
4	A minbar donated to the Friday mosque in Qūṣ by the Fāṭimid wazīr al-Ṣāliḥ Ṭalā’i	356
5	The Lu’lu’a mosque, Qarāfa	359
6	A Coptic screen (detail)	362
7	A metalwork door revetment from the mosque- <i>madrassa</i> of Sultan Ḥasan	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-Zāhir Baybars, Citadel, Cairo. Photo: Nairy Hampikian	373

CONTRIBUTORS

JONATHAN P. BERKEY, Associate Professor of History, Davidson College, North Carolina, is the author of: “Women and Education in the Mamlūk Period” (1991), *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (1992), and “Tradition, Innovation and the Social Construction of Knowledge in the Medieval Islamic Near East” (1995).

THIERRY BIANQUIS is Professeur d'histoire et civilisation islamiques, Université Lumière-Lyon II. Among his publications are “Les derniers gouverneurs ikhschīdides à Damas” (1970), “L'Acte de succession de Kāfūr d'après Maqrīzī” (1974), *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide (359–468/969–1076)*, 2 vols. (1986, 1989), and “L'espace ismailien et le régime du vizirat militaire en Égypte, le Yémen ṣulayhīde et l'Ifrīqiya zīride” (1995).

IRENE A. BIERMAN is Associate Professor of Art History and Director of the Middle East Center, University of California Los Angeles. Among her publications are “Urban Memory and the Preservation of Monuments” (1995), “Inscribing the City: Fāṭimid Cairo” (1997), and *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (1998).

MICHAEL CHAMBERLAIN is Associate Professor of History, University of Wisconsin. He has written *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (1994).

JEAN-CLAUDE GARCIN is Professeur in the Centre des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université de Provence, Aix-Marseille I. His writings include “Histoire, opposition politique et piétisme traditionaliste dans le Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarat de Suyūfī” (1967), *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale: Qūṣ* (1976), *Espaces, pouvoirs et idéologies de l'Égypte médié-*

vale (1987), and “The Mamluk Military System and the Blocking of Medieval Muslim Society” (1988).

R. STEPHEN HUMPHREYS is ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Sa‘ūd Professor, Department of History, University of California Santa Barbara. His writings include *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193–1260* (1977), *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (1991), and *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in Recent Times* (in press).

WALTER E. KAEGI, Professor of Byzantine History at the University of Chicago, is the author of *Byzantine Military Unrest, 471–843: An Interpretation* (1981), “Byzantine Logistics: Problems and Perspectives” (1993), and *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (1995).

HUGH KENNEDY is Professor of Middle Eastern History, University of St Andrews. His publications include *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (1986), and *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (1996).

DONALD P. LITTLE is Professor of Arabic Language and Islamic History, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal. He is the author of *An Introduction to Mamlūk Historiography: An Analysis of Arabic Annalistic and Biographical Sources for the Reign of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalā’ūn* (1970), *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Ḥaram aš-Šarīf in Jerusalem* (1984), “Notes on the Early *naẓar al-khāṣṣ*” (1998), and “Documents Related to the Estates of a Merchant and his Wife in Late Fourteenth Century Jerusalem” (1998).

LINDA S. NORTHRUP, Associate Professor in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, is the author of “Muslim–Christian Relations during the Reign of the Mamluk Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun, AD 1278–1290” (1990), “Life in Jerusalem during the Mamluk Period as Portrayed in the Documents of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf” (in Arabic) (1994), and *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Mansūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamlūk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678–689/1279–1290)* (1998).

ROBERT K. RITNER is Associate Professor of Egyptology at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. His publications include *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Medical Practice* (1993) and “Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire: the Demotic Spells and their Religious Context” (1995).

PAULA A. SANDERS, Associate Professor of History, Rice University, Houston, is the author of *A Mediterranean Society*, VI (Cumulative Indices), with S. D. Goitein (1993), *Ritual, politics and the city in Fatimid Cairo* (1994), and “Writing Identity in Medieval Cairo” (1995).

WARREN C. SCHULTZ, Assistant Professor of History, DePaul University, Chicago, is the author of: “Maḥmūd ibn ‘Alī and the New *Fulūs*: Late Fourteenth-Century Mamlūk Egyptian Copper Coinage Reconsidered” (1998) and “Mamlūk Monetary History: The State of the Field” (in press).

NORMAN A. STILLMAN is Schusterman/Josey Professor of Judaic Studies, University of Oklahoma. Among his books are *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Sourcebook* (1979) and *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (1991).

PAUL E. WALKER is a research affiliate of the Middle East Center, University of Chicago. Among his publications are *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī* (1993), “The Ismaili Da‘wa in the Reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Ḥākim” (1993), and *The Wellsprings of Wisdom* (1994).

TERRY G. WILFONG is Assistant Professor of Egyptology in the Department of Near Eastern Studies and Assistant Curator for Graeco-Roman Egypt, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His publications include *Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt: From Prehistory to Late Antiquity* (1997), “Agriculture among the Christian Population in Early Islamic Egypt: Theory and Practice” (1998), “Constantine in Coptic: Coptic Constructions of Constantine the Great and his Family” (1998), and “Reading the Disjointed Body in Coptic: From physical modification to textual fragmentation” (1998).

MICHAEL WINTER, Professor in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History, Tel Aviv University, has written *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī* (1982) and *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule, 1517–1798* (1992).

PREFACE

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

Egypt under Roman rule: the legacy of ancient Egypt

ROBERT K. RITNER

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,”¹ 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,² 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.³ 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.⁴ Indeed, senators or even prominent equestrians were formally prohibited from entering Egypt

¹ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 27. For a translation of this passage of the “Acts of Augustus,” see A. H. M. Jones, *A History of Rome through the Fifth Century* (London, 1970), 21.

² N. Lewis, “The Romanity of Roman Egypt: A Growing Consensus,” in *On Government and Law in Roman Egypt*, *Collected Papers of Naphtali Lewis*, *American Studies in Papyrology* 33 (1984; reprint, Atlanta, 1995), 298–305.

³ See also A. Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs* (Berkeley, 1986), 37 (with caveats); N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Oxford, 1983), 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.⁵

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.⁶ 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.⁷ 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 unmentioned, 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.⁸

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),⁹

⁵ See Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 92–93.

⁶ So explicitly Tacitus, *Annals II*, LIX. See Geoffrey Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1980), 61, 67–71; Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 165; cf. Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 38–40.

⁷ R. C. C. Law, "Egypt and Cyrenaica under Roman Rule," in J. D. Page (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. II (Cambridge, 1978), 192, 194; cf. Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 40. See further Michael P. Speidel, "Augustus' Deployment of the Legions in Egypt," *Chronique d'Égypte*, 57, no. 113 (1987), 120–24. Pertinent documents on army life appear in Jones, *History of Rome*, 148, 151–53, 179. Nikopolis was located about four miles east of Alexandria.

⁸ Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 37.

⁹ See the sources gathered in Karl W. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt*

and the Archimedes screw introduced in the Ptolemaic era (ca. 287–212 BC)¹⁰ continue to assist Egyptian farmers in company with the ancient shadūf, a simple water-hoist attested from New Kingdom times (ca. 1346–1334 BC).¹¹ In the fields of modern Naj' Hammādi (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.¹²

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" (ḥ.t), "Seed-time" (pr.t), and "Harvest" (šmw). Each season contained four thirty-day months, 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,¹³ and serving as the basis for the Roman (Julian) calendar introduced by Julius Caesar on the advice of the Alexandrian scientist Sosigenes.¹⁴ Despite preserving the names and festivals of ancient deities, the month names survived the transition to Coptic Christianity as well.¹⁵ 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

(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.

¹⁰ Diodorus V.37.3; see P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford, 1972), vol. I, 399, vol. II, 577–78, n. 174.

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 shadūf can lift individual buckets of water over 1 m in elevation. For the saqia and shadūf in nineteenth-century Egypt, see Edward W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1860; reprinted, New York, 1973), 327–28.

¹² Succinctly stated, "the Arab settlers were absorbed into the age-old pattern and way of life of the Nile valley"; Bernard Lewis, "The Contribution to Islam," in J. R. Harris (ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1971), 458–59.

¹³ See M. David and B. A. van Groningen, *Papyrological Primer*, 4th edn. (Leiden, 1965), 34*–36*.

¹⁴ Richard A. Parker, "The Calendars and Chronology," in Harris, *The Legacy of Egypt*, 13.

¹⁵ Walter C. Till, *Koptische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1955), 87–88.

during the Islamic conquest and are cited in early rural documents,¹⁶ the same pattern still prevails in the colloquial Arabic of modern Egypt.¹⁷ A table of the Egyptian months follows:

Arabic	Coptic	Greek	Egyptian
tūt	ΘΟΥΤ	Θουθ	Ḏḥwtȳ
bāba	ΠΑΠΑ	Φαφα	Pn-ḥp.t
hatūr	ΖΑΘΥΡ	Αθυρ	Ḥw.t-ḥr
kiyahk	ΚΟΙΑΚ	Χοιακ	K3-ḥr-k3
tūba	ΤΩΒΕ	Τυβι	T3-‘b.t
amshir	ΜΩΙΡ	Μεχειρ	Mḥr
baramhāt	ΠΑΡΜΖΟΤΠ	Φαμενωθ	Pn-ḥmn-ḥtp
barmūda	ΠΑΡΜΟΥΤΕ	Φαρμουθι	Pn-Rnnwt.t
bashens	ΠΑΩΩΝΣ	Παχων	Pn-Ḥnsw
baūna	ΠΑΩΝΕ	Παυνι	Pn-ḥn.t
abīb	ΕΠΗΠ	Επιφι	ḥp’p
misra	ΜΕΣΟΡΗ	Μεσορη	Msw.t-R’

The five intercalary days are simply described as “added” to the year:
aiyām en-nasī < ΕΠΔΓΟΜΕΝΗ < αι επαγωμεναι < 5 ḥry.w rnp.t

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.¹⁸ 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 real or nominal temple offices, with corresponding financial benefices. By

¹⁶ E.g., within tenth-century private contracts from the Faiyum; see Nabia Abbott, *The Monasteries of the Fayyum*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations (SAOC) 16 (Chicago, 1937), 15, 21 (Jumādā; 946–947 AD).

¹⁷ For the Arabic forms, see Till, *Koptische Grammatik*, 87–88. The anglicized transcriptions that follow are derived from Karl Baedeker, *Baedeker’s Egypt 1929*, (1929; reprint, London, 1974), xl.

¹⁸ N. Lewis, “Romanity 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.”

this stratagem such priests retained both wealth and authority in the face of foreign control and the intrusion of an alien, supposedly dominant, class.

Far from being cloistered, otherworldly mystics divorced from their surrounding communities, Egyptian sacerdotal elites actively participated in the economic and political life of the kingdom. It is these individuals who comprise the bulk of the parties engaged in the often brisk land and property speculation recorded in the numerous Demotic contracts.¹⁹ Generally ignored in older studies of Ptolemaic society compiled by classicists, the Egyptian elite was sharply distinct from the rural fallahin, and hardly a second-class citizenry cowed by the perception of a Greek “master race.” Taking these privileged Egyptians into consideration, the very notion of official ethnic discrimination becomes quite dubious for the Ptolemaic period.²⁰ 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.²¹

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 Hellenes²² – 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”²³ established by the deified

¹⁹ Janet H. Johnson, “The Role of the Egyptian Priesthood in Ptolemaic Egypt,” in L. H. Lesko (ed.), *Egyptological Studies in Honor of Richard A. Parker* (Hanover, NH, 1986), 70–84.

²⁰ See Robert K. Ritner, “Implicit Modes of Cross-Cultural Interaction: A Question of Noses, Soap, and Prejudice,” in J. H. Johnson (ed.), *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society*, SAOC 51 (Chicago, 1992), 283–90, esp. 289–90.

²¹ Contra N. Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oxford, 1986), 154, there is no reason why exalted Egyptians should need or desire Greek status. For middle-class Egyptian indifference to Greek status, see J. H. Johnson, “Ptolemaic Bureaucracy from an Egyptian Point of View,” in M. Gibson and R. D. Biggs (eds.), *The Organization of Power. Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, SAOC 46, 2nd edn. (Chicago, 1991), 123–31.

²² Unconsciously 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*, 124.

²³ BGU 1210; see A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri II* (Cambridge, MA, 1934), 42–53; Jones, *History of Rome*, 262–66; N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 32–34; Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 127–28.

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 more 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

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*, 127.

²⁶ Hunt and Edgar, *Select Papyri II*, 50–51; Jones, *History of Rome*, 265.

²⁷ N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 33–34.

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 Ptolemies, 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

²⁸ J. G. Milne, *A History of Egypt under Roman Rule* (London, 1898), v.

²⁹ T. Rice Holmes, as cited in Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 33.

³⁰ E. A. E. Reymond, *From the Records of a Priestly Family from Memphis* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 220–21, 231; with corrections in Jan Quaegebeur, “The Genealogy of the Memphite High Priest Family in the Hellenistic Period,” in Dorothy J. Crawford, Jan Quaegebeur and Willy Clarysse (eds.), *Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis*, Studia Hellenistica 24 (Leuven, 1980), 43–81.

³¹ M. Stead, “The high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt,” in R. S. Bagnall et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the XVIth International Congress of Papyrology 1980* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1981), 411–18; vs. Milne, *A History of Egypt under Roman Rule* (2nd revised edn., London, 1924), 11, 181, who attributes this title to the reign of Augustus.

³² N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 92–93; Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 179–81.

³³ BGU 1199; N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 180.

³⁴ J. E. G. Whitehorne, “P. Lond. II, 359 and Tuscus’ list of temple perquisites,” *Chronique d’Égypte*, 53 (1978), 321–28; O. Montevecchi, “*Graphai hieron*,” *Aegyptus*, 12 (1932), 317–28.

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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.”³⁷

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.”³⁸

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 hieratic, first appear in the “secular” Demotic script in the final years BC.³⁹ The second century in particular witnessed a resurgence of Demotic writings in religious, literary, and scientific fields associated with temple scriptoria.⁴⁰

³⁵ David and van Groningen, *Papyrological Primer*, 127–28.

³⁶ Richard Gordon, “Religion in the Roman Empire: the civic compromise and its limits,” in Mary Beard and John North (eds.), *Pagan Priests* (Ithaca, 1990), 241–42.

³⁷ Chaeremon, frags. 10–11, in P. W. van der Horst, *Chaeremon*, *Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’Empire romain* 101 (Leiden, 1984), 16–23.

³⁸ See N. Lewis, “The demise of the Demotic document: when and why,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 79 (1993), 276–81 (quote on p. 277), and the present author’s comments therein. Further late Demotic documents in K.-Th. Zauzich, “Spätdemotische Papyrusurkunden III,” *Enchoria*, 4 (1974), 71–82; and idem, “Spätdemotische Papyrusurkunden IV,” *Enchoria*, 7 (1977), 151–80.

³⁹ For one of the first examples, see Mark Smith, *The Mortuary Texts of Papyrus BM 10507*, *Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum III* (London, 1987), 19.

⁴⁰ W. J. Tait, “Demotic Literature and Egyptian Society,” in Janet H. Johnson (ed.), *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society. Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond*, SAOC 51 (Chicago, 1992), 303–10.

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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴ For the Hellenistic population, Egyptian themes predominated in funerary contexts such as the Alexandrian catacombs of Kūm al-Shiqāf (Qom es-Shugafa),⁴⁵ while Greek residents in the Fayyūm and Oxyrhynchus revered as city patrons the crocodile Sobek (Souchos) and the hippopotamus Taweret (Thoeris).⁴⁶ For the native elite, Greek portraiture replaced traditional burial masks to produce the celebrated “Fayyūm portraits” of the first to fourth centuries.⁴⁷ 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 71–175) and in apocalyptic literature like “The Potter’s Prophecy,” decreeing the downfall of Roman

⁴¹ P. Oxy. 1029; see Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 179.

⁴² Paolo Gallo, “The Wandering Personnel of the Temple of Narmuthis in the Faiyum and Some Toponyms of the Meris of Polemon,” in Johnson, *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society*, 119–31.

⁴³ R. K. Ritner, “Coptic,” in Peter T. Daniels and William Bright (eds.), *The World’s Writing Systems* (Oxford, 1996), 287–90.

⁴⁴ Elanor Huzar, “Emperor Worship in Julio-Claudian Egypt,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5 (Berlin, 1995), 3092–143; Heinz Heinen, “Vorstufen und Anfänge des Herrscherkultes im römischen Ägypten,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3144–80; and Jean-Claude Grenier, “L’Empereur et le Pharaon,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3181–94.

⁴⁵ Françoise Dunand, “Pratiques et croyances funéraires en Égypte romaine,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3216–32.

⁴⁶ Cf. John Whitehorse, “The Pagan Cults of Roman Oxyrhynchus,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3050–91.

⁴⁷ Lorelei H. Corcoran, *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt (I–IV Centuries AD)*, SAOC 56 (Chicago, 1995); 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.⁴⁸ Though of certain Egyptian origin, the prophesy 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 Fayyūm. 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 $6\frac{2}{3}$ 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.⁴⁹ Births and deaths required individual registration.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

⁴⁸ P. Oxy. 2332; in E. Lobel and C. H. Roberts, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part XXII, Graeco-Roman Memoirs 31* (London, 1954), 89–99; Ludwig Koenen, “Die Prophezeiungen des ‘Töpfers,’” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 2 (1968), 178–209; idem, “The Prophecies of a Potter: A Prophecy of World Renewal Becomes an Apocalypse,” in Deborah H. Samuel (ed.), *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology, American Studies in Papyrology 7* (Toronto, 1970), 249–54; idem, “A Supplementary Note on the Date of the Oracle of the Potter,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 54 (1984), 9–13; and Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, SAOC 54 (Chicago, 1993), 152.

⁴⁹ Examples in Jones, *History of Rome*, 256–57, 259–60.

⁵⁰ Robert K. Ritner, “Poll Tax on the Dead,” *Enchoria*, 15 (1988), 205–07.

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,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.”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. Cornelius 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.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.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 (Qasr 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

⁵¹ See J. Černý, “Consanguineous Marriages in Pharaonic Egypt,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 40 (1954), 23–29; Schafik Allam, “Geschwisterehe,” in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. II (Wiesbaden, 1977), cols. 568–69; K. Hopkins, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980), 303–54; N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 43–44, 216.

⁵² P. BM 10683, col. 3/8, in A. Gardiner, *Chester Beatty Gift*. 2 vols. (HPBM 3) (London, 1935), 12, plate 5.

⁵³ H. G. Lyons and L. Borchardt, “Eine trilingue Inschrift von Philae,” *Sitz. Berl. Akad.* (1896), 469–82; H. Schäfer, “Zur Inschrift des C. Cornelius Gallus,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, 34 (1896), 91.

⁵⁴ For Meroitic–Roman relations, see Derek A. Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush* (London, 1996), 67–70; William Y. Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* (London, 1977), 338–44; and P. L. Shinnie, *Meroe: A Civilization of the Sudan* (London, 1967), 43–52.

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 Shenhūr.

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

⁵⁵ For the limits of Hellenization in Meroe, see S. Burstein, “The Hellenistic Fringe: The Case of Meroë,” in P. Green (ed.), *Hellenistic History and Culture* (Berkeley, 1993), 38–66. For Meroitic religion, see Inge Hofmann, “Die meroitische Religion. Staatskult und Volksfrömmigkeit,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 2801–68; and Janice Yellin, “Meroitic Funerary Religion,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 2869–92.

⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Annals*, II.LX–LXI. Cf. Hunt and Edgar, *Select Papyri II*, 76–79; Jones, *History of Rome*, 197–98, §86; and L. Kákosy, “Probleme der Religion im römerzeitlichen Ägypten,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 2908.

⁵⁷ E. Köberlein, *Caligula und die ägyptischen Kulte* (Meisenham am Glan, 1962); M. Malaise, *Les conditions de pénétration et de diffusion des cultes égyptiens en Italie*, *Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’Empire romain* 22 (Leiden, 1972), 397; Kákosy, “Probleme der Religion,” 2910.

⁵⁸ See Hunt and Edgar, *Select Papyri II*, 78–89; Jones, *History of Rome*, 223–26.

of the Christian persecutions.⁵⁹ As patron of Egyptian monuments, Tiberius is well represented at Armant, Aswan, Athribis, Coptos, Debod, Dendera, Diospolis Parva (Hū), Edfu, Karnak, Kom Ombo (Ombos), Luxor, Philae and Shenhūr. Caligula appears at Coptos 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, Coptos, 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-

⁵⁹ H. A. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs. Acta Alexandrinorum* (Oxford, 1954); N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 199–201.

⁶⁰ Accounts are found in Seneca (VI.8.3) and Pliny (*Natural History* VI. XXXV, 181–87). F. Hintze, “Meroitic Chronology: Problems and Prospects,” *Meroitica*, 1 (1973), 131, posits two expeditions, one in AD 62, another in 66 or 67. For interpretations, see Welsby, *Kingdom of Kush*, 70; Adams, *Nubia*, 341–42; and Karl-Heinz Priese, “Zur Ortsliste der römischen Meroe-Expedition unter Nero,” *Meroitica*, 1 (1973), 123–26. Pliny’s statement that Nero’s expedition was preparatory to “an attack on Ethiopia” (*Natural History* VI, XXXV, 181) has generally been interpreted as hostile to Meroe, but Milne, *History of Egypt*, 22–23, suggests that the expedition was intended to support Meroe against the rising power of Auxum.

⁶¹ van der Horst, *Chaeremon*.

⁶² Rickman, *Corn Supply of Ancient Rome*, 67.

aonic precedent, but the famous greeting accorded Alexander the Great at the Siwa Oasis. The identification with the Greco-Egyptian deity Serapis, chief patron of Alexandria and the former Ptolemaic kingdom, catered to 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.⁶³ The family's interest in Egyptian religion was demonstrated again by Vespasian's son Titus in AD 70, when he formally attended the consecration of a new 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, Silsileh 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, Armant, Dendera, Esna, Kom Ombo, Philae, and Silsileh, 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 eighty 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.⁶⁴ Hadrian's religious advisor was perhaps the Egyptian poet and priest Pancrates, later associated with the emperor in magical writings.⁶⁵ Antinoopolis 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.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ The Barberini Obelisk, see M. Smith, *Mortuary Texts*, 25–26.

⁶⁵ See Antonio Garzya, "Pancrates," in *Atti del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papyrologia*, vol. II (Naples, 1984), 319–25; H. D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri* (Chicago, 1986), 83 (PGM IV, 2446–55), and R. Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, §18.5, 3358. For the theme of the Egyptian magician, see Fulvio De Salvia, "La figura del mago egizio nella tradizione letteraria greco-romana," in A. Roccati and A. Siliotti (eds.), *La Magia in Egitto* (Milan, 1987), 343–65.

⁶⁶ OGIS 701; in Jones, *History of Rome*, 198–99, §88.

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.⁶⁷ 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 “millennialist” celebration in 139 of a completed Sothic Cycle, signaling the return to accuracy of the wandering civil calendar.⁶⁸ 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 (*anachorēsis*).⁶⁹ In 154, the prefect’s New Year’s edict denounced as outlaws those “who fled from certain liturgies because of the poverty all about them,” offering an amnesty to these delinquents “still living away from home in fear.”⁷⁰ As the government failed to lower the grain assessments against such shrinking villages, remaining families were increasingly unable to meet the state’s obligations and fled themselves, producing a downward spiral of declining production and population.⁷¹ Whole villages became abandoned, and the

⁶⁷ Sources and discussion in Donald Whitcomb, “Quseir al-Qadim and the Location of Myos Hormos,” *Topoi*, 6 (1996), 747–72.

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 1,460 years. Alexandria commemorated the Antonine celebration by issuing special coins displaying the phoenix.

⁶⁹ For the phenomenon, see N. Lewis, “Μερισμὸς ἀνακεχωρηκότων: an aspect of the Roman oppression in Egypt,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 23 (1937), 63–75; and idem, “A reversal of a tax policy in Roman Egypt,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 34 (1993), 101–18.

⁷⁰ N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 183. For an example of avoidance of nomination from AD 192, see Jones, *History of Rome*, 230–31.

⁷¹ N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 181–84, 203–04.

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 the death of Aurelius. 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.⁷² 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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ The latest Demotic papyrus contract is attested in the same reign (175/76).⁷⁵

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.”⁷⁶

⁷² André Macke and Christiane Macke-Ribet, “Paléopathologie osseuse de la population égyptienne d’époque romaine provenant de la Vallée des Reines,” in S. Curto et al. (eds.), *Sesto Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia: Atti*, vol. II (Turin, 1993), 299–306.

⁷³ J. Guey, “Encore la ‘pluie miraculeuse’, mage et dieu,” *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d’histoire anciennes*, 3me sér., vol. XXII, (Paris, 1948), 16–62. A belated attempt to “Christianize” the miracle was made by Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, v. 5.

⁷⁴ For private transactions, isolated examples of Demotic ostraca continue into the reign of Septimius Severus; see P. W. Pestman, *Chronologie égyptienne d’après les textes démotiques (322 av. J.-C.–453 ap. J.-C.)*, Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava, 15 (Leiden, 1967), 109–11.

⁷⁵ P. Tebtunis Botti 3; see N. Lewis, “Demise of the Demotic Document,” 276.

⁷⁶ See Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 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 pharaonic patron, appearing at Armant, Esna, Kom Ombo and Philae. The 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 Pescennius 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 Fayyūm. 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.⁷⁷ 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. Alexandria 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.⁷⁸ 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

⁷⁷ S. Sauneron, “Les querelles impériales vues à travers les scènes du temple d’Ésné,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale*, 51 (1952), 111–21.

⁷⁸ 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*, 232–35.

of native temple cult.⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹

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,⁸² but the expulsion of natives was motivated less by

⁷⁹ P. Yale inv. 299; see Ritner, *Mechanics of Magical Practice*, 217–20.

⁸⁰ Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, vi.1; see Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London, 1979), 5, 65. See further E. A. E. Reymond and J. W. B. Barns, *Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices* (London, 1973), 16.

⁸¹ See Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 64–73.

⁸² 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 protégé 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

⁸³ N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 202; see Hunt and Edgar, *Select Papyri II*, no. 215, 90–93. This critical passage is eliminated from the excerpted translation in Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 126, producing a somewhat distorted impression.

⁸⁴ One cannot accept Rickman's rejection of economic recession (*Corn Supply of Ancient Rome*, 233), loosely following Sherman L. Wallace, *Taxation in Egypt from Augustus to Diocletian* (New York, 1938), 350–52. Wallace does not deny the country's ruin, but reattributes the cause to corrupt officials rather than to inherent defects in the taxation system itself. See still J. Milne, "The Ruin of Egypt by Roman Mismanagement," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 17 (1927), 1–13.

⁸⁵ With his son Diadumenianus; see H. Gauthier, *Le Livre des Rois d'Égypte*, vol. V, "Les Empereurs Romains," MIFAO 21 (Cairo, 1917), 212.

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 Dionysus (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

⁸⁶ Milne, *History of Egypt*, 69.

⁸⁷ Sauneron, "Les querelles impériales," 118–21; R. Lepsius, "Der letzte Kaiser in den hieroglyphischen Inschriften," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, 8 (1870), 25–30.

⁸⁸ Robert K. Ritner, "Horus on the Crocodiles: A Juncture of Religion and Magic in Late Dynastic Egypt," in W. K. Simpson (ed.), *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), 114.

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.⁸⁹ 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 251, 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 Fayyūm documents the flourishing properties of Appianus, “the best attested large private estate from the Roman empire.”⁹²

The turbulent reigns of Trebonianus Gallus (251–53) 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 reinstated 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 Armant, 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

⁸⁹ Jones, *History of Rome*, 327.

⁹⁰ See Karim Sadr, *The Development of Nomadism in Ancient Northeast Africa* (Philadelphia, 1991), 121–25.

⁹¹ I. G. R. 1356.

⁹² Dominic Rathbone, *Economic Rationalism and Rural Society in Third-Century AD Egypt* (Cambridge, 1991), quote on p. 3.

⁹³ Philae no. 416, in F. Ll. Griffith, *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus* (Oxford, 1937), 114–19 (AD 253).

⁹⁴ See Jones, *History of Rome*, 327–30.

(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 Vaballathus 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 raiders 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 (283–84).

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 308 these were supplanted by subunits labeled *pagii*.

⁹⁵ See J. Grafton Tait, “Aemilianus the ‘Tyrant,’” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 10 (1924), 80–82.

⁹⁶ So Milne, *History of Egypt*, 76.

⁹⁷ Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 39–40 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.”⁹⁹ 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, Coptos revolted and was destroyed by Galerius, the new Caesar of the East.

An Alexandrian revolt followed (297–98), instigated by one Lucius Domitius Domitianus and his deputy Achilleus. 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.¹⁰⁰ 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 298.¹⁰¹

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 Manichaeism. The following year, the emperor’s fear of seditious cults prompted the bloodiest assault against Christianity, after a hiatus of some forty years. Known as the “Great Persecution” to Christian authors, the purge was particularly virulent in Egypt under prefects Sossianus Hierocles (310), noted by Eusebius, and Satrius Arrianus (304–07), the caricatured villain of numerous Coptic martyrdoms.¹⁰² Later Coptic church estimates of 144,000 to 800,000 martyrs may well be inflated but clearly reveal the intensity of the persecu-

⁹⁹ Jones, *History of Rome*, 267–68.

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 Welsby, *Kingdom of Kush*, 71.

¹⁰² Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms*, 7, 145.

tion. From the sixth century to the present,¹⁰³ 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 Armant 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.¹⁰⁴ Following the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian in 305, the persecutions continued unrelentingly until a deathbed decree of religious toleration by Galerius (305–11).¹⁰⁵

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 (308–24), 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.¹⁰⁶ 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 theurgy.¹⁰⁷

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.¹⁰⁸ With

¹⁰³ The earliest known use of the Era of the Martyrs dates to 522/23; see Jean-Claude Grenier, “La stèle funéraire du dernier taureau Bouchis (Caire JE 31901 = Stèle *Bucheum* 20),” *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale*, 83 (1983), 205, n. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Grenier, “La stèle funéraire,” 204–5; Bagnall and Worp, *The Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* (Zutphen, 1978), 43–49.

¹⁰⁵ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, VIII.17; see Jones, *History of Rome*, 335–36.

¹⁰⁶ Henri Grégoire, “L’Énigme de Tahta,” *Chronique d’Égypte*, 15, no. 29 (1940), 122, 123, n. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Cambridge, 1986), 167–68, 182–86; Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica* (Cambridge, 1992), li–lix; Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Hermès en haute-Égypte*, 2 vols. (Quebec, 1978–82); Ritner, “Egyptian Magical Practice,” 3358–71; Jean Maspero, “Horapollon et la fin du paganisme égyptien,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale*, 11 (1914), 163–95.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Capart, “L’Énigme de Tahta,” *Chronique d’Égypte*, 15, no. 29 (1940), 45–50; and Henri Grégoire, “L’Énigme de Tahta,” 119–23.

the full titular Valerius Maxi(mi)nus *Caesar*, it is suggested that these blocks date from 305 to 310, before his proclamation as Augustus,¹⁰⁹ but hieroglyphic texts are not scrupulous regarding titular distinctions of the Tetrarchy.¹¹⁰ A stela at Aberdeen (no. 1619) recording the burial of a mother of Buchis at Armant is dated to year eight of Caesar Maxi(mi)nus, his penultimate year as Augustus (311/12).¹¹¹

In 313, Maximin crossed with his army into Thrace, but was defeated by Licinius at Tzirallum 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.¹¹² 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”).¹¹³ Diocletian’s Nubian strategy proved unsuccessful, and Blemmye plundering resumed, so that the new monastery of Tabennesi was harassed between 323 and 346.¹¹⁴ Licinius is said to have turned against the Christian clergy with restrictive measures in 320 and 321,¹¹⁵ 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 Petearbeschinis, whose eldest son, Aurelius Horion, was high priest of the ithyphallic local deity Min, while his brother Harpocraton was official panegyrist at the imperial court in Constantinople.¹¹⁹

¹⁰⁹ Grégoire, “L’Énigma de Tahta,” 119.

¹¹⁰ For Augustus Diocletian as Caesar, see Grenier, “La stèle funéraire,” 203, n. 3.

¹¹¹ Capart, “L’Énigma de Tahta,” 47–50.

¹¹² Eusebius, *History of the Church*, X.5; see Jones, *History of Rome*, 336–39.

¹¹³ Grenier, “La stèle funéraire,” 197–208.

¹¹⁴ Jehan Desanges, “Les raids des Blemmyes sous le règne de Valens, en 373–374,”

Meroitic News Letter, 10 (1972), 34.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 206, n. 3.

¹¹⁶ Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 49.

¹¹⁷ R. Bagnall, “Religious conversion and onomastic change in early Byzantine Egypt,” *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, 19 (1982), 105–23; but cf. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (AD 100–400)* (New Haven, 1984), 156–57, n. 41; and Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 47.

¹¹⁸ For the decline of Thebes, see John Tait, “Theban Magic,” in S. P. Vleeming (ed.), *Hundred-Gated Thebes* (Leiden, 1995), 169–82. For Zosimos, see Howard M. Jackson, *Zosimos of Panopolis on the Letter Omega* (Missoula, MT, 1978), 3–5.

¹¹⁹ Sources in Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 174.

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 unrecognized 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 toleration for Christianity devolves into formal persecution of traditional religions: "Let superstition come to an end, and the insanity of sacrifices be abolished."¹²¹ 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 his predecessor, the next bishop, Peter, was imprisoned and replaced by an Arian. The ensuing schism was further compounded by an attempted military draft of monks. Among the new monks in 370/71 was Shenute of Atripe (ca. 348–466), a future abbot of the White Monastery at Sohag and preeminent Coptic stylist and zealot.¹²³ In 373, a Demotic inscription at the temple of Philae ("year 90 of Diocletian") recorded an incursion of the

Blemmyes into the Kharga Oasis.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.

Theodosius I (379–395) announced in 380 that the Nicene faith propounded 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 "heresies" 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.¹²⁵ 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:

Thus then at the site of a shrine to an unclean spirit, it will henceforth be a shrine to the Holy Spirit. And if previously it is prescriptions for murdering man's soul that are 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

¹²⁰ Grenier, "La stèle funéraire," 207–08.

¹²¹ Jones, *History of Rome*, 344; Pierre Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 36–38.

¹²² Ammianus Marcellinus, XIX.12. 3–16; see Alexandre Piankoff, "The Osireion of Seti I at Abydos during the Greco-Roman Period and the Christian Occupation," *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte*, 15 (1958–60), 125–49.

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

¹²⁴ Philae, no. 371; in Jehan Desanges, "Les raids des Blemmyes," 32–34. The graffito is one of four dated to 373 after a gap of a century; see Griffith, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti*, 10, 103–5 (nos. 369–372).

¹²⁵ Jones, *History of Rome*, 345.

¹²⁶ For the five versions of the story, see John Holland Smith, *The Death of Classical Paganism* (New York, 1976), 168–73. See also the papyrus illustration in R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca, NY, 1971), 230, fig. 68.

¹²⁷ László Kákosy, "A Christian Interpretation of the Sun-disk," in M. Heerma Van Voss, et al. (eds.), *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee* (Leiden, 1982), 70–75; Georgio Zoega, *Catalogus Codicum Coptiicorum Manuscriptorum*, 2nd edn. (Leipzig, 1903), 50–51.

¹²⁸ Dwight W. Young, "A Monastic Invective Against Egyptian Hieroglyphs," in Dwight W. Young (ed.), *Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky* (East Gloucester, MA, 1981), 348–60; quote on pp. 353–54. For legends of temple destructions, see François

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.¹²⁹ 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 110 (of Diocletian).¹³⁰

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."¹³¹ 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 "Theotokos," or "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 Patriarch Flavian had initiated charges against a local archimandrite, Eutyclus. Backed by the Alexandrian Patriarch Dioscorus I (444–454/58), Eutyclus was vindicated over objections outlined in a tardily sent "Tome" of Pope Leo. Marking the pinnacle of Alexandria's theological influence, the council would be repudiated by Rome and Constantinople in the following reign.

The intemperate fury directed against perceived heretics fell upon prominent Pagans as well. In 415, the philosopher Hypatia was dragged naked through the streets of Alexandria before she was murdered by a mob of

monks 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, Heraiskos (both ca. 425–90) and Horapollon the younger (ca. 450–500).¹³² In a Philae Demotic graffito of 435 (year 152 of Diocletian), one of the last known Egyptian priests, Esmet the elder, first prophet of Isis, documented his role as "scribe of the divine books."¹³³ Among the clients of the ancient cults 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 boasts of the Blemmye king Phonen to Abourni, king of the Noba.¹³⁴ Though a scourge 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.¹³⁵

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 processional 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," Esmet the elder and his like-named junior partner recorded their continued service in the temple, probably at the time of the Blemmye visitation.¹³⁶ On December 11, the final Demotic inscription was carved, labeling "the feet of Petinakht junior," who attended the festivities.¹³⁷ Knowledge of Demotic may have lasted much later, as suggested by hagiographies of the seventh-century bishop Pistentius of Quft, whose "thirty-second wonder" entailed the reading of an ancient funerary scroll, prior to his conversation with a resurrected

Lexa, *La Magie dans l'Égypte Antique*, vol. II (Paris, 1925), 217–22; Zoega, *Catalogus Codicum*, 533–34, 100–102; and Piankoff, "The Osireion of Seti I," 125–49.

¹²⁹ Philippe Derchain, "A propos de Claudien Eloge de Stilichon, II, 424–436," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, 81 (1956), 4–6; Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 183.

¹³⁰ Philae, no. 436; Griffith, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti*, 126–27, and pl. 69.

¹³¹ Philae, no. 364; Griffith, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti*, 102.

¹³² Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 184–86; Roger Rémondon, "L'Égypte et la suprême résistance au Christianisme (Ve–VIIe siècles)," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, 51 (1952), 63–78; Maspero, "Horapollon," 163–95.

¹³³ Philae, no. 366; Griffith, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti*, 103.

¹³⁴ T. C. Skeat, "A Letter from the King of the Blemmyes to the King of the Noubades," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 63 (1977), 159–70.

¹³⁵ Rémondon, "L'Égypte et la suprême résistance," 76–77; Ludwig Stern, "Fragmente eines griechisch-ägyptischen Epos," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, 19 (1881), 70–75.

¹³⁶ Philae, no. 365; Griffith, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti*, 102–03.

¹³⁷ Philae, no. 377; Griffith, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti*, 106.

mummy.¹³⁸ The Demotic tale of Seta I was reportedly discovered in the grave of a Coptic Christian.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 healed 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 intellectuals 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.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.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 Narses 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.¹⁴² As late as 552, a citizen of Ombos (Kom Ombo) was discovered repairing sanctuaries for the Blemmyes.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 ignited older doctrinal differences, which may have encouraged Coptic acquiescence or compliance during the Arab conquest directed by ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās 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-Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Malik required the use of Arabic in all state affairs.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.

¹⁴⁴ See Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, lxi–lxxii; Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (New York, 1994); and R. K. Ritner, “Egyptians in Ireland: A Question of Coptic Peregrinations,” *Rice University Studies*, 62 (1976), 65–87.

¹³⁸ Gawdat Gabra Abdel Sayed, *Untersuchungen zu den Texten über Pesyntheus Bischof von Koptos (569–632)* (Bonn, 1984), 309–10; E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, 1913), 326–30.

¹³⁹ F. Ll. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis* (Oxford, 1900), 67.

¹⁴⁰ Jürgen Osing, “Horapollo,” in W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. II (Wiesbaden, 1977), col. 1275; George Boas, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo* (New York, 1950).

¹⁴¹ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London, 1967), 172.

¹⁴² E. A. Wallis Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, 1915), Part I, 445–47; Part II, 961–63.

¹⁴³ P. Maspero 67004; see Ulrich Wilcken, “Papyrus-Urkunden,” *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*, 5 (1913), 443–44.