Egyptians and Citizenship from the First Century AD to the *Constitutio Antoniniana*

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1 Inclusion or Exclusion?

It has been often a topic of discussion whether, in the spring of AD 212, Caracalla had extended to the Egyptians of the chōra and of the nomói his ‘divine gift’, thereby including them among the cives Romani.

The same question has been asked since the end of the 19th century; in other words, before the discovery of the *P. Giessen 40* col. I. In recent years, this question has had a positive answer. Although there is no lack of indications to the contrary, even I would not contest the communis opinion. However, in light of a *decretum* (or an edictum) issued by Anastasius around the year AD 500, the distinction between Romans and Egyptians would appear even more clear-cut, as Santo Mazzarino previously noted. In any event, such a surprising circumstance should make us cautious:

ll. 46–51 That the soldiers stationed in the castles undertook guard duty with all due diligence, and for reasons of good commerce no one entered into barbarian territory nor had any exchange with them; but guarded the streets, so that neither Romans nor Egyptians nor anyone without a passport had free access to the barbarians; that instead those belonging to the éthnos of the Makoi, by a letter of the clear prefect, were allowed to enter the center of the Pentapolis.

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1 *Theía Dōreá: BGU* n. 655, Arsinoite nome, 15 August AD 215; see Buraselis (1989) and Buraselis (2007) for the German translation.
2 *Infra*, note 76.
3 Torrent (2012), including a bibliography; Purpura (2013a) to which should be added Kuhlmann (2011); Kuhlmann and Barnes (2012) 45–50. A summary is also contained in Corbo (2013) 36ff. See, *infra*, note 86, with further bibliography.
5 This is found in an epigraph preserved at the Louvre: *SEG* 19 356 = Oliverio (1933) no. 139.
An overall assessment of the first two centuries of imperial government in Egypt reveals that not only did the Romans not do anything to reconcile its native inhabitants with the Héllenes who lived in the chōra or in the nomói, but, in undertaking a general administrative rearrangement, laid the foundation for even more intense contrasts among these peoples. In fact, the gymnasía in the villages were closed and those in the métropóleis reformed, so that being part of these became, as a result of the regulations defined by the provincial government bureaucracy, a sought-after position of privilege and, at the same time, a distinctive mark of a high social class.

The entire population of Egypt was divided into Romans (immigrants or naturalized); astói (the citizens of Alexandria, Naukratis and Ptolemais), all those who belonged to a recognized politeuma; and, finally, on the last rung, the Egyptians who had to pay the tributum capitis (the laographía). However, still unresolved was the question of the legal status of Greeks in the province—residents in those ‘false cities’ that were the capitals of the nomói, called for emphasis métropóleis—who did not want to be confused with the Egyptians, an eventuality which, deep down, the Romans themselves did not want to occur.

Precisely for this reason, the Graeco-Macedonian élites of the chōra and nomói, though they had lost their previous undifferentiated status as Héllenes, were reorganized, with respect to the indigenous peasants who had to pay the pro capite in its entirety, into two privileged orders from the fiscal point

8 Once the traditional forms of the autonomy of citizens were entirely eliminated after AD 30, the identity of the politai of Alexandria, by order of Augustus and his successors, was decidedly linked with the institutions of the gymnasion and the ephēbeia (which is also revealed by a well-known epistle by Claudius: P. Lond. vi 1912, 52–55); see Modrzejewski (1997) 173ff., an additional bibliography in Klauck (2011) 89–103. On the other hand, the forms of citizen autonomy were maintained in Naukratis and Ptolemais.

9 One wonders if this was the condition of the Jews. In Egypt the politeuma is an ethnic community which continued to adopt its own law, though it was far from its country of origin: see Gambetti (2009) 43ff.


11 These were the districts (chōra) Egypt was divided into; each of these had a capital called a métropolis; see, for an initial summary, Lewis (1983) 36ff. part.