

Trust Networks and Village Life in Roman Egypt

A Case Study of Tebtunis

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INTRODUCTION

To write about villages across the regions of Egypt over a period of three centuries is daunting, as variation is the norm. We have therefore chosen to look at one aspect of social interaction that cuts across linguistic, cultural and geographical differences. We will look at trust networks as defined by Charles Tilly. In the more formal iterations they are the so-called associations that are of interest to modern biblical scholarship. It will be argued, contrary to the consensus view, that associations have their origin in the trust networks that lie at the heart of social interactions and that they accordingly do not need to be formalized by written contracts or agreements. They rely instead on the endeavour of peoples to build social capital where they can rely on their reputations and the reputations of known others to embark on cooperative enterprises. In the past the focus has understandably been on documented evidence for associations. John Kloppenborg,¹ for example, in his compendium of texts from Egypt uses a number of criteria, for example, use of specific terms to name a group (e.g. σύνοδος, κοινόν or πλῆθος), use of titles within a group, use of profession in the plural with its location in the genitive and so on. The texts show actions across the gamut of documented social interaction. Of particular interest are the rules of associations that were lodged with the administration annually and undersigned by its members.² The evidence shows that the existence of associations cuts across the ethnic and cultural divide. In turn, this suggests that the institution was not culturally unique but reflected a widespread cultural precedent and its practices.

¹John S. Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III. Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt: Texts, Translations, and Commentary*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 246 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), hereafter *GRA* for item, Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III* for interpretation.

²Gabriela Luchian, 'Aspects concernant l'organisation des associations professionnelles dans l'Égypte hellénistique et Romain. Règlements Statutaires', *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica* 19 (2013): 161, notes that annual reports were a long held feature of Egyptian economic administration.

The literature of the ancient world, as the product of the elite classes, valued landownership over any of the other means of production. Studies of the ancient economy such as Moses I. Finlay, *The Ancient Economy* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1973), in so far as they were based on the literary evidence, reflected the value judgement of the elite. The view they offered was top-down and they further postulated that such a view was widely accepted in the ancient world. As a result, the value attached to other means of production, such as the various trades and professions, was diminished and the existence of associations was seen as an attempt to ameliorate their members' perceived lack of status. The study of associations, which is now largely based on documentary evidence as opposed to literary evidence, offers a bottom-up view that seeks to address the inherent bias in earlier studies of the ancient economy.

THE ECONOMIC BASIS FOR ASSOCIATIONS

Cameron Hawkins³ observes that 'when transaction costs associated with contractual exchange tend to be high, and when the nature of the economic environment militates against the development of large and integrated firms – artisans and entrepreneurs in a variety of different historical settings have turned to bilateral or multilateral forms of network governance to coordinate the work of specialists'. In other words, associations, and more fundamentally trust networks, were formed as a response to the high cost of doing business in the ancient world arising from the need to 'contend with asymmetric information not only about goods, prices, market conditions, and labor costs and its supply but also about colleagues, customers, agents, and even market and port officials collecting customs and taxes, whose actions, though ideally bound by precedent and law in the Roman world, could be unpredictable'.⁴ Trust or social capital⁵ was established

³Cameron Hawkins, *Roman Artisans and the Urban Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 108. In his analysis, firms integrate the specialist skills required for the production of more complex goods (i.e. goods which require vertical divisions of labour) by employment of individuals with those skill sets. However, the vagaries of ancient markets that arise, for example, from seasonal factors affecting such things as the supply of materials or purchasing power in the market, as well as from the unreliable nature of demand especially for high and medium-end products, weighed heavily against the creation of firms due to the need for continuous financial outlays. However, the production of complex goods such as buildings, ships, chariots and sarcophagi still required the coordination of those with the required skill set. To achieve this end, artisans formed associations which acted as governance structures based on trust and reputation that coordinated production within the vertical division of labour and mitigated the sorts of transaction costs that arise from arms-length contracts, for example, production of substandard items by contracted party, the need to pass on altered specifications as required by the client, the cost credit arrangements between suppliers and clients or problematic enforcement of a contract. Unfortunately, Hawkins's analysis focuses mainly on Rome and on the production of high- and medium-end goods rather than what one might expect to apply at the village level. That said, he does use the charter of the association of salt merchants of Tebunis (*P.Mich.* 5.245) to argue for the sort of governance structures that one might expect in an association more generally. The only problem is that this document is somewhat atypical.

⁴Philip F. Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves: Craftsmen, Merchants, and Associations in Roman and Late Roman Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 2. Association formation was a means to address asymmetrical information. 'Relying on association membership and the benefits it provided was one method to overcome constraints on economic activity, including imperfect information and high transaction costs, and also to deal with a host of personal, legal, and social concerns no less vital to attaining economic success, because it allowed members to develop social capital with peers and the community' (4).

⁵Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 4: 'social capital has come to refer to trust, reputation, shared norms, and norm-supported social networks that facilitate access to scarce information about potential partners, customers, and goods, which gives individuals and groups "advantages in pursuing their ends".'

by the repeated interaction between members, for example, under the auspices of the association proper through monthly meetings and associated feasts, at members' funerals, dealings within the association⁶ or outside its auspices in personal dealings concerning such matters as the sale of property with right of carriageway, *paramone* (apprentice) contracts⁷ and loans with hiring out of a child in lieu of interest.⁸ Trust built on personal reputation allowed members to share vital information and provided them access to various other resources in their day-to-day situation, for example, access to credit,⁹ legal assistance,¹⁰ help when in distress,¹¹ dealing with authorities, cooperation across complex or large projects and so on.

As stated earlier, we distinguish between informal and formal associations. In terms of Roman Egypt, associations appear to have been formalized with charters of rules and a list of members registered annually. A special meeting of members was convened for this purpose with all members unanimously agreeing to the conditions laid out in the charter and voting unanimously¹² for a presiding officer with executive powers to enforce the agreed conditions,¹³ that is, by action against the person and/or his property. The presiding officer was also responsible for the monthly banquet and for the association's fiscal obligations to the regime. According to Luchian, new members could not join the association after it was signed and no member could voluntarily leave it.¹⁴

⁶Andrew Monson, 'The Ethics and Economics of Ptolemaic Religious Associations', *AncSoc* 36 (2006): 234.

⁷Hawkins, *Roman Artisans*, 109, singles out apprenticeship agreements as manifesting the features of a trust network: 'Apprenticeship is therefore a high-stakes transaction that exposes a particularly valuable "long-term enterprise" to the "malfeasance, mistakes, and failures" of others: namely, the apprentice's future long-term productivity and, in some cases, even his health.' However, Hawkins avoids describing the resulting relationship as an association. Rather, a contract with defined penalties was entered into between the instructor and the apprentice's *kyrios*, but since the quality of instruction was difficult to legally quantify, the *kyrios* was careful to select an instructor known to and trusted by him. Philip Venticinque, 'Family Affairs: Guild Regulations and Family Relationships in Roman Egypt', *GRBS* 50 (2010): 288–92, notes that sons of artisans were often apprenticed to other artisans and not their fathers. Due to the risks involved, these apprenticeships were probably facilitated by the trust and reputations established between members in an association.

⁸Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 82–5, cf. also 55: 'Charters thus defined the parameters for establishing a trustworthy reputation that was continually tested, measured, and evaluated not only at meetings, banquets, and funerals but also in private interactions and in public.'

⁹See, for example, *BGU* 4.1137 (Alexandria, 6 BCE) = *GRA* III.168, and *SB* 24.16296 (unknown, second century BCE) = *GRA* III.286.

¹⁰Cf. *P.Ryl.* 2.94 (Euhemeria, 14–37 CE) = *GRA* III.205, where the president and secretary of the weavers' association pledge surety on their behalf of five fellow weavers. See also *P.Mich.* 5.243 (Tebtunis, 14–37 CE) = *GRA* III.206, and *P.Mich.* 5.244 (Tebtunis, 43 CE) = *GRA* III.212, and Luchian, 'L'organisation des associations professionnelles', 176–7.

¹¹See *P.Mich.* 5.243 (Tebtunis, 14–37 CE) = *GRA* III.206 and below.

¹²Luchian, 'L'organisation des associations professionnelles', 161–2, suggests that the unanimity resulted from the self-selection of members based on their common interests.

¹³Luchian, 'L'organisation des associations professionnelles', 163–4: 'Le président, qui détenait le pouvoir exécutif, avait l'obligation de surveiller que les membres accomplissent les obligations assumées par le statut. Ainsi il surveillait le paiement mensuel des cotisations ou des taxes occasionnelles établies de commun accord par tous les membres, le paiement des amendes pour défaut de se conformer aux réglementations fixées par le statut et la collecte des cotisations, dues par le statut, pour le bon fonctionnement de la guilde. Le statut l'obligeait aussi de préparer le banquet mensuel et de fournir la bière ou le vin pour les fêtes mensuelles. Il avait aussi le pouvoir de saisir les biens des débiteurs ou de retenir le débiteur pour le faire arrêter par les autorités. Le président recueille les fonds monétaires, surveille l'accomplissement des obligations fiscales envers l'Etat, les taxes pour le monopole qu'ils louaient ou pour les quatre droits d'exercer le métier'.

¹⁴Luchian, 'L'organisation des associations professionnelles', 170.

The charter functioned, in Venticinque's view, as a contract that 'bound members to each other and reminded them of their obligations and responsibilities to abide by and to enforce the provisions among themselves'.¹⁵ The statement of obligations and responsibilities expressed the shared norms of the group and through their repeated performance reputations were built.¹⁶ And being able to rely on another's reputation in turn offered the means to lower the otherwise high transaction costs in ancient economies arising from uncertainty and asymmetrical information. Importantly, charters also tended to penalize more harshly infractions that damaged the interpersonal trust between members.¹⁷ Moreover, as reputations were jealously guarded, charters often expressed a preference for the internal settlement of a dispute between members. In such instances, enforcement was based on the social pressure of maintaining one's personal reputation where a failure to comply was interpreted by fellow members as a signal of untrustworthiness.¹⁸ Loss of reputation had potentially severe consequences such as the loss of future financial dealing within the association, exclusion from the association's social and religious benefits or expulsion altogether – the latter point indicating that membership was well demarcated and a valued privilege.¹⁹

ASSOCIATIONS AND TRUST NETWORKS

Discussion of associations has, to a large degree, focused on their functioning like trust networks. According to Charles Tilly, trust networks are 'sets of strong social ties among people carrying on consequential long-term collective activities at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of network members'.²⁰ As such they can take various forms; they can be religious sects like the covenanters of the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Pharisees; they can take the form of trade guilds or funerary/mutual aid societies found across the ancient

¹⁵Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 41. See also Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 3, and Luchian, 'L'organisation des associations professionnelles', 156: 'Les statuts des associations gréco-romaines (*vôvoi*, *lex collegii*, *decretum*, *pactio* ou *conventio*) sont envisagés comme des contrats conclus volontairement entre les membres, en vertu de leur propre consensus et à caractère obligatoire, après avoir été approuvés'. Luchian, 'L'organisation des associations professionnelles', 160, further notes: 'dans les structures associatives il y a plus de démocratie que dans les organismes civiques, comme le montre les dispositions législatives, où tout est accepté en commun accord par tous les membres'.

¹⁶Monson, 'The Ethics and Economics of Ptolemaic Religious Associations', 234, who considers religious associations to be examples of trust networks, observes: 'The rules of associations represent agreed norms of ethical behavior and embody shared values. The price of commitment such as membership fees and helping others in trouble as well as the threat of fines tended to eliminate unworthy members. Therefore, rules of associations institutionalize the boundary between trust networks and ordinary social networks. These institutions lower the costs of cooperation because members can be trusted.' On the shared norms which were approved by members and then actionable by the association, see also *GRA* III.188, 189, 191 (Ptolemaic period).

¹⁷Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 57–62, lists, for example, intrigue, plots against colleagues and corruption of another member's household. Cf. also Venticinque, 'Family Affairs', 285–8. See Monson, 'The Ethics and Economics of Ptolemaic Religious Associations', 230–3, on the hierarchy of rules and fines in two charters (*P.Prague* and *P.Lille dem.* 1.29) from the Ptolemaic period. Other relevant papyri include *P.Lond.* 7.2193 (Philadelphia, 69–58? BCE) = *GRA* III.199, *P.Mich.* 5.243 (Tebtunis, 14–37 CE) = *GRA* III.206, and *BGU* 14.2371.

(Herakleopolis, first century BCE) = *GRA* III.253.

¹⁸See, for example, *I.Egypte prose* I 49 ll. 46–55 (Psenemphaia, 5 BCE) = *GRA* III.170.

¹⁹Hawkins, *Roman Artisans*, 122: 'professional associations were appealing to artisans precisely because they provided a social context in which artisans converted the proceeds of their professional work directly into the symbolic capital that conferred status within the collegium and the broader civic world.'

²⁰Charles Tilly, *Trust and Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 91.

Mediterranean; and they can be groupings sharing a common interest, be it cultic, a trade, a locale and so on, in the local community of a village or larger towns. Trust networks arise in situations where there is limited access to external enforcement of mutual understandings and where information about the compliance with those understandings might be costly or difficult to achieve. Faced with such risks, trust networks rely on informal means to effect conformity by rewards, for example, personal reputation and trustworthiness and the benefits that go with them, and punishments, for example, loss of social standing by means of ‘shunning, shaming and denial of reciprocity’.²¹ Though trust networks tend to have ‘little or no formal organization’,²² exit from them is generally ‘rare and costly’ or the ‘stakes of exclusion high’.²³ Finding evidence of such informal networks in the ancient world is difficult. Accordingly, Kloppenborg adopts a set of criteria²⁴ to determine the presence of an association or trust networks in the extant documents and deduces from their application evidence for a sliding scale in types:

Those that were certainly constituted as guilds used recognizable associative terms; they had bylaws; they engaged in recognizable associative practices (having a common purse, a membership list, common meals, fines and disciplinary practices); they elected officers; and they owned property. Other less formal associations may have been subject collectively to certain taxes (e.g., the *χειρωναξίον*) but lacked other markers of associative life. And finally, there were informal groups of craftsmen sharing the same or related trades, but in no sense a formal guild.²⁵

In taking account of the need for evidentiary ‘proof’, Kloppenborg’s criteria highlight the presence of formal as opposed to informal networks. Moreover, the nature of the evidence, in so far as much of it concerns the interactions of associations with administrative structures and processes, offers a top-down understanding of them. Tilly, however, offers both a top-down and bottom-up understanding. Importantly, he observes that governing ‘regimes and trust networks often depend on the same resources – labor power, money, information, loyalty, and more’²⁶ and that ‘(t)o the extent that [trust networks] control visible, desirable resources such as land, labor power, or commercial wealth, they become objects of envy and greed’²⁷ by those regimes. A picture of contested interests emerges,²⁸ for which Tilly describes three generalized forms of accommodation:

²¹Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 13.

²²Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 66.

²³Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 13 and 42.

²⁴Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 5–7, lists the criteria as: (a) the use of an associative term such as *σύνδοξ*, *πλήθος*, *ἐργασία* (*συνεργασία*), *τέχνη*, (*συντεχνία*), *κοινόν* and so on, followed by the name of a craft or devotees in the plural; (b) the existence of a *nomos* or charter; (c) evidence of practices associated with formally constituted associations; (d) the existence of office holders (see p. 6 for titles); (e) common ownership of property, that is, a *τόπος*; (f) the interaction of groups of artisans with a city or administrative officials; and (g) formulae that designate artisans collectively as a group.

²⁵Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 7

²⁶Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 23.

²⁷Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 48. 1 Sam. 8.11–18 expresses the bottom-up view of the demands made by regimes. See also 1 Sam. 25:2–38 for the predation by David, the future king, against the trust network (i.e. patron–client chain based on kinship) of Nabal. Tilly is a little ambiguous on the place of patrons in relation to trust networks; for the most part they exist outside the trust network but use them to protect against predation by states and others.

²⁸The contest between the regime and trust networks is approached differently by each:

(a) from the regime’s perspective to achieve compliance it can employ: coercion (e.g. by means of physical force/sanctions or the employment of information damaging to a trust network); its capital or transferable

1. Segregation/isolation of trust networks from public politics.
2. Indirect integration where trust networks are politically engaged with each other and with the regime to negotiate benefits and obligations.
3. Direct integration where trust networks form part of the regime. An established religion can take this form and as one of the indicators of direct integration Tilly suggests: 'asking government agents to punish or prevent malfeasance by members of their own kin groups, religious sects, or economic networks'.²⁹

Broadly speaking, indirect integration appears to offer the best model by which to understand the relationship between trust networks and the Roman administration of Egypt. As we will see later, the lean nature of the administrative apparatus meant that the regime relied in part on the resources that associations afforded to govern the province.³⁰ At the same time, associations sought the benefits that the regime could offer and represented themselves as sharing common values and qualities. However, one should not suppose that there was only one model in operation at any one time. Some trust networks may well have been integrated into municipal administrations³¹ (one thinks here of the various *gymnasia*), while others sought to segregate and 'to fly under the radar' of the regime. The latter model will prove useful when one comes to consider trust networks within Herod Antipas's territory and the *ekklesiae* of third- and early fourth-century Egypt.

ROMAN EGYPT: ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROVINCE

Roman conquest brought subtle but important changes to the administration of Egypt. Under the Ptolemies, the land belonged nominally to the crown, and the kingdom was administered by royal officials. Rome, however, replaced the upper echelons of the administrative system with Romans of equestrian status, that is, a prefect, *epistrategoi* with oversight of a number of nomes, a judicial officer (*iuridicus*) and a financial officer (*idios logos*³²). The population of the province is estimated to have been between 3 and 5 million persons with 25,000 km² under cultivation. But population density

resources to benefits trust networks and win their compliance (often used in association with coercion); and commitment or shared cultural connection (e.g. of religion, language, ethnicity, narratives etc.) between the regime and trust networks. Regimes have variously sought accommodation, and the way in which they deal or interact with trust networks plays an important part in determining the nature of its public politics; and

(b) from the trust network's perspective to guard against predation they employ three principal strategies, namely, concealment, clientage and dissimulation. However, certain conditions or circumstances may prompt a network to seek some form of accommodation with a regime.

²⁹Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 10.

³⁰Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 34–5: 'highly centralized regimes always depend in part on illicit networks for the actual execution of top-down plans, because central planners can never anticipate variation in local conditions and because subordinates cope by working out their own accommodations.'

³¹Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 135: 'To the extent that people integrate their trust networks into public politics, they come to rely on governmental performance for maintenance of those networks. They also gain power, individual and collective, through the connections to government those networks mediate. They acquire an unbreakable interest in governmental performance. The political stakes matter.'

³²On the *Idios Logos* see Michael A. Speidel, 'Gnomon of the *idios logos*', in *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. R. Bagnall et al. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 3390. On its adaptation by Augustus as a means to lay claim to properties and revenues in Egypt as imperial *patrimonium* see Daniel Rathbone, 'Egypt, Augustus and Roman taxation', *CCG* 4 (1993): 99–110.

varied between nomes, though in the Fayum it is thought to be *c.* 120 persons/km².³³ Egypt was divided into some forty administrative districts or nomes each administered by a *strategos*, usually a member of the Hellenized elite. Nomes were subdivided into topoarchies consisting of villages (*komai*) and estates (*epoikia*).³⁴ But as Philip Venticinque notes: 'The Roman administrative structure in Egypt, as in other provinces, was lean'.³⁵ This meant that Rome relied heavily on provincials of sufficient means (εὐπόρος) and suitable reputation (ἐπιτήδειος) to carry the burden of day-to-day administration. To achieve this, Rome introduced a process of municipalization through the recognition of privileged Hellenic classes: in Alexandria, Naukratis, Ptolemais and later Antinoopolis organized as traditional Greek *poleis*, though without a *boule* in the case of Alexandria; and in the nome capitals or *metropoleis* with governing councils and local officials. Below Alexandrian citizens and the *metropolit*es of the nome capitals were the inhabitants of the *chora* and its villages.

Members of the *poleis* and *metropoleis* (perhaps averaging between 20 and 25 per cent of the province's population) were granted reduced rates of poll tax,³⁶ given limited communal self-administration including the ability as a body to petition the emperor, and controlled access to their hereditary memberships.³⁷ Subject to approval by the prefect or in the case of *metropolit*es by the nome *strategos*,³⁸ citizens from these classes, and especially those of the gymnasial class, filled various administrative posts throughout Egypt. For example, the village administrators or komarchs tended to be liturgists drawn from the metropolite elite with sufficient means (πόρος of 1,000–2,000 dr.). Another important change was the introduction of a proper system of private landownership

³³Daniel Rathbone, 'Villages, Land and Population in Graeco-Roman Egypt', *PCPhS* 36 (1990): 103–42.

³⁴In the case of the Fuyum or Arsinoite nome the topoarchies were themselves allocated instead to the three division or *merides*.

³⁵Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 138. At the local level Roman administration relied on cooperation between local officials/liturgists and the various associations that might provide the officials/liturgists themselves and fulfil the various services required of them: 'Roman prefects concerned themselves primarily with taxation, justice, and extracting vital grain – more than enough to keep a prefect and his staff busy for a typical three-year term. Managing cities and towns remained the purview of the local populations. Providing food, oversight of markets and temples, organizing public festivals, and general maintenance all proved to be complicated endeavors. As a result, the nature of municipal administration in the Roman world required cooperation between different stakeholders in the community' (163).

³⁶There were three levels of capitation tax: (a) citizens of the Greek cities and priests were exempt from the *laographia*; (b) citizens of nome capitals paid a reduced rate; and the inhabitants of the countryside or *chora* paid the full rate, though it varied between nomes. On the role of the census and its function in the calculation and collection of the poll tax and trade taxes, see Rathbone, 'Egypt, Augustus and Roman Taxation', 86–99. The census counted persons and houses (not landed property which was counted separately) and was a necessary step in a new province that lacked a municipal structure; that is, whereas in other provinces Rome relied on the city councils to collect revenues, there was no comparable system in place in Egypt. That said, Rome by the creation of the metropolite classes in the nome capitals started a process of municipalization.

³⁷See Alan K. Bowman and Dominic Rathbone, 'Cities and Administration in Roman Egypt', *JRS* 82 (1992): 108: 'a process of municipalization was definitely and deliberately begun in the Augustan period with the creation of urban communities with "Hellenic" landowning elites, who were put in a position of privilege and power over the "Egyptian" population and given forms of communal self-administration, and that these communities, despite their lack of *boulai* (councils) and of the duties of providing local justice and of collecting direct taxes on land, were increasingly allowed and encouraged to behave and function like the older Greek cities in other provinces.'

³⁸The *strategos* was the prefect's nome representative and in most cases in the first century a person from the gymnasial class of Alexandria appointed by the prefect. He was responsible for the collection of taxes on land and the administration of justice at the level of the nome. On the other hand, metropolit^{es} for the most part acted as *praktore*s (collectors of poll and trade taxes), *sitologoi*, *agoranomoi* and *bibliophylakes* in the nomes.

which allowed the alienation and amassing of landed wealth which in turn underwrote a system of compulsory public services or liturgies. Such service was based on a property/wealth qualification with the holder financially liable for the proper execution of his office.³⁹ Compulsory public service now replaced the role played by Ptolemaic salaried officials.

At the level of the village, changes were also made: village *gymnasia*, where they had formerly existed, were closed by the Romans; compulsory public services were introduced for propertied locals to facilitate village self-administration, such as markets, thoroughfares, water supply, policing and baths and other public structures, through boards of village elders consisting of between four and twelve members with means (πóρος) of between 400 and 1,200 dr. as well as appointed officials; such locals could rely on the support of the Roman administration, for example, through petitions to the *strategos* or prefect, and the assistance of Roman soldiers to collect taxes. We see a system where such individuals established rights and obligations to the government that profited them personally and tied them to it. Taking a particular instance, Bowman and Rathbone note:

Within two or three generations of the end of Ptolemaic rule some villagers of Philadelphia had done nicely by smart adjustment to the new world where power and prestige were conferred by private landownership and by public service under Roman rules and supervision. But the ambitions of such men were individual, and they did not try to advance the status of their community.⁴⁰

However, the system of liturgies extended far beyond the issue of self-governance and was the means by which the administration worked. Liturgists were involved in the collection of various taxes and duties; the collection, distribution and transport of grain; the supply of clothing to the army; and so on.

Councils and officials in the *poleis*, *metropoleis* and villages had numerous occasions to contract the services or expertise of associations and members of associations, as persons of means and reputation were in many instances members of such bodies or were known by officials as trustworthy and diligent.⁴¹ As is often noted, associations and their members sought to be part of the social order; they fostered ties of patronage with the local elites, as it helped win contracts and allowed access to rights of appeal. Both associations and members of the elite argued for a financially privileged position and tried to manipulate perceptions of each other's usefulness in the eyes of the Roman authorities. There is debate, however, over whether associations had to be officially recognized to be legal or not; the evidence is ambiguous. In terms of the literary evidence and jurists, it appears

³⁹On the Roman innovation of turning catoecic lands (i.e. Ptolemaic military allotments) and by sale some state land to private property to support a liturgical system see Rathbone, 'Egypt, Augustus and Roman Taxation', 84–6.

⁴⁰Bowman and Rathbone, 'Cities and Administration in Roman Egypt', 126.

⁴¹Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 133–65: 'shared business interests and municipal obligations brought the local liturgists and leading craftsmen and merchants together' (163). Cf. also 'Officials fulfilled compulsory obligations with the help of knowledge and information about the reputations of those involved (gained from repeated interactions with craftsmen and merchants) and reliance on previously established trust' (144). On the outward-looking performativity of associations through public display in such activities as funerals, commensality, celebrations of festivals and processions, affiliations with elite groups, erection of honorific monuments, dedications of temple structures and financial support of the priesthood (state support withdrawn by Rome), see pp. 99–131.

that there was among the elite Roman class a desire to restrict or regulate associations, no doubt out of fear that such groupings could give occasion to sedition and conspiracy.⁴² But as Venticinque⁴³ argues, there is little consistency across these sources and evidence at the local level indicating the contrary; that is, the alleged restrictions were seldom enforced. Thus, for example, local and imperial officeholders continued to act as patrons of associations;⁴⁴ in Egypt the code of regulations (the Gnomon of the *idios logos*) refers to past rulings against associations but as such does not appear to constitute a general ruling,⁴⁵ and the sheer proliferation of associations and their embeddedness in the social order indicates that if legislation did exist it was not applied.⁴⁶ Accordingly, Venticinque speaks of ‘a gap’ between the concerns of the Roman elite class and the actual situation at the local level.⁴⁷ Given the lean nature of Roman administration and the need to rely on local elites (i.e. likely members of associations), it would have been impracticable to apply any such law against an institution so integrated into the local social structure.⁴⁸ Rather, it was only when a disturbance arose that the government’s attention was turned against associations. As Hawkins⁴⁹ notes: ‘Although the Roman authorities were not enthusiastic about unlicensed *collegia* and sometimes took steps to suppress them, provincial and civic magistrates often tolerated them insofar as their members did not become involved in civic unrest.’

The question over the legal recognition of associations leads also to the question as to whether official registration was a requirement for recognition. Langelotti assumes that it was not a requirement but instead was prompted by the desire of members to

⁴²See Philo *Flacc.* 4, Pliny *Ep.* 10.34 and 93, Suetonius *Jul.* 42.3; *Aug.* 32.1, Gaius *On the Provincial Edict* 3 and Marcian, *Institutes* 3, and Ulpian *Dig.* 47.22.2. Documentary evidence can also be read in support of this, cf. *lex Imitana* §74 (Spain, 91 CE), *lex Ursonensis* §106 (Spain, Flavian copy of an earlier municipal charter of Julius Caesar), and a number of inscriptions, for example, *CIL* 14.2112 = *ILS* 7212 (136 CE) erected by an association that implies that its members had approval to meet together.

⁴³Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 167–98.

⁴⁴Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 172.

⁴⁵BGU 5.1210 l. 240 reads: οἱ σύνοδον νέμοντες κατέκ[ρίθ]ησ[α]ν ἐκ (δραχμῶν) φ, ἐνίστε μόν[οι] οἱ [π]ρο[σ]τάται – those fostering an association have been fined from 500 drachmae, sometimes the presidents alone. The use of the aorist passive, the use of the preposition ἐκ in relation to the fine and the variation in the party fined all indicate that the regulation summarizes a number of past rulings. As such the rulings may not have been initiated by any general law against associations but by the actions and behaviours of those associations on particular occasions. In other words, each ruling may represent, for example, the decision of a prefect or other Roman official hearing a case of disturbance instigated by an association. On the application of the rule, see Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 12: ‘It is more likely that the clause from the Gnomon of the Idios Logos was invoked only when it was needed, to control disorder or riot.’

⁴⁶Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 179. See also Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 9: ‘the large numbers of guilds and associations in Roman Egypt challenge the notions that guild membership was routinely suppressed, or that guilds required the formal permission of the Senate or Emperor or praefect to exist.’

⁴⁷Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 175: ‘the concerns with associations, sedition, and conspiracy-laden assemblies emanated from Rome, Roman elites, and provincial officials. Any municipal charter would have reflected more the concerns of the Roman administration than local concerns or policies regarding craftsmen, merchants, and their organizations. A scenario thus emerges in which a gap could develop between Roman interest in these groups and enforcement on the ground.’

⁴⁸Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 189, concludes: ‘Although general guidelines existed, each official could innovate and use a relatively free hand to deal with issues. Governors were essentially left to decide how to interpret and apply juristic discussions and legal statutes to situations that they confronted.’

⁴⁹Hawkins, *Roman Artisans*, 69. See also Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 10–11.

protect themselves against the malfeasance of fellow members.⁵⁰ But the argument may be problematic, as association charters, which were registered with the names of their members appended, gave preference to an internal resolution of disputes between members and empowered the president to take appropriate action (see *P.Mich.* 5.243 below).⁵¹ Two further issues are also in play: (a) if one considers associations from the perspective of trust networks, the function of social capital and a member's reputation would have been for the most part a sufficient guardrail against malfeasance; and (b) if one considers associations from the perspective of the regime and its desire to control and take advantage of the resources offered by trust networks,⁵² it seems highly likely that, as in the case of indirect integration outlined earlier, both coercion by the regime and perceived benefits for the association were involved in the requirement to register.⁵³ In other words, like the fourteen-year census, the annual registration of charters afforded Rome the means to keep its administration 'lean', but that is not to say that state registration did not confer benefits in a system that preferred collective access to person's in authority, for example, through petitions, and sought to harness a province's natural resources and professions through the sale of concessions to the highest bidder. As Venticinque observes: 'Associations were involved in the exchange and economy of trust, reputation, and esteem – not only for themselves, but also for the local and Roman elites. Ties with craft and merchant groups did not detract from one's status; in a way, it seems to have augmented it.'⁵⁴

TEBTUNIS

Micaela Langellotti argues that Tebtunis, a large village of perhaps 6,000 individuals located in the Fayum region of Egypt, was in the first century of the common era still Egyptian at its core.⁵⁵ There was a movement of persons who wished to identify as Greek from the

⁵⁰Micaela Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis in the First Century AD* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 124.

⁵¹Also *P.Wuerzb.* 4 (Philadelphia?, after 142 BCE) = GRA III.192; *P.Mich.* 5.244 (Tebtunis, 43 CE) = GRA III.212 on power of presidents to exact sureties against members.

⁵²For example, the resources offered by associations in the collection of capitation and trade taxes, and in the case of animal rearers the tax on their herds, as well as in the need to fill liturgies with persons of sufficient means and reputation.

⁵³See GRA III.222 and p. 293: 'although guilds were not created as fiscal instruments for the provincial administration, guilds paid taxes and licence fees collectively, which the provincial administration no doubt found more convenient than collecting from individual artisans.' See also GRA III.257 pp.414–15, GRA III.263 p. 429 and discussion on GRA III.284, esp. p. 522.

⁵⁴Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 162. On the outward-looking nature of associations, see Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 99–131, who views funerals, commensality, participation in the celebration of festivals and processions, affiliation with elite Hellenistic groups, erection of honorific monuments, dedication of temple structures and financial support of the priesthood when state support was withdrawn by Rome as performative means to build trust within the association and the community more generally. To serve this external audience public space, for example, temples, marketplaces and main roads, was sought for the display of the associations εὐνοια, εὐσέβεια, φιλοτιμία and ἀρετή. As Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 129, observes: 'A willingness to participate in a larger social, political, and religious system and to align themselves with community values, norms, and institutions was, of course, the ideal message that associations sought to communicate.'

⁵⁵Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 100. Tebtunis was a comparatively large village supporting both a religious centre with a stone temple to Soknebtunis and an administrative centre with its own *grapheion*. Rathbone, 'Villages, Land and Population', 124, works on the average village size of 1,000 inhabitants supported by a territory of 8 km².

villages and towns to the nome *metropoleis* in the first century of Roman rule as Greek *gymnasia* continued to operate there.⁵⁶ However, they still retained property in the *chora* and maintained a firm financial interest in it, for example, by leasing arable land to the local villagers to cultivate. In the case of Tebtunis, the nome metropolis was Ptolemais Euergetis, a distance of 14 miles away. The function of houses with their courtyards in the village is of interest here. From the census returns, it is estimated that the average occupancy was six inhabitants per house.⁵⁷ Most dwellings housed single or nuclear families, though a quarter were used by multiple families, for example, shared by siblings and their families. The latter was probably the result of partible inheritance. Even so, houses appear to have been an affordable asset with the result that most individuals owned one.⁵⁸ The ownership of houses also offered a vital means to raise capital as needed for short-term purposes.

Primary Agricultural Production

Agriculture, naturally, was the principal industry. There were various types of land tenure:

- a. Public lands (i.e. formerly royal lands of the Ptolemies) that were farmed by public tenants who might be organized collectively as associations and who held, according to Rowlandson, the lease on customary terms, that is, without written contracts, for returns of between 20 and 50 per cent of produce. The collective was represented by elders, and rent in kind was paid at a rate depending on the crop.⁵⁹ Public land might also be subleased by a public tenant. Pasture land was also subject to a bidding process perhaps handled by the village elders acting as officials. Payment was in cash. However, in the case of associations of animal rearers the state may have granted tenure directly.⁶⁰ The duration of some leases of public land was unusually long and Rowlandson suggests in such cases the lease ran until the next allocation of public lands.⁶¹ Even so, such tenancy could be transferred.
- b. Private lands that were farmed at a fixed tax of between 10 and 20 per cent of produce. Most holders of private land bear Greek names and their holding might be scattered over several villages.⁶² The larger holdings were more likely leased out to tenants by absentee metropolite owners. Private land could be fully or partly leased for a period usually of one year, with rents, paid either in cash or in kind,⁶³ perhaps as high as 50 per cent of produce.⁶⁴ In some cases

⁵⁶Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 105. Some 15 per cent of the population were classed as Greek.

⁵⁷Rathbone, 'Villages, Land and Population', 120.

⁵⁸Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 89.

⁵⁹Jane Rowlandson, 'Agricultural Tenancy and Village Society in Roman Egypt', *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1999): 148.

⁶⁰Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 143.

⁶¹Rowlandson, 'Agricultural Tenancy', 151.

⁶²Orchards, vineyards, olives and so on were also grown by the wealthier land owners.

⁶³The crop grown determined whether payment was in cash or kind. Land was rotated on a year by year basis between a cereal crop (wheat mainly) and fodder crop. Rent was higher for the cereal year and paid in kind. The rent on a fodder crop was much less and paid in cash. That said, demand for fodder was high, that is, to feed animals used in transport (donkeys and camels) as well as to feed cattle, oxen (for ploughing), sheep (for wool) and goats (for milk and hides). See Rowlandson, 'Agricultural Tenancy', 140–1, 144, 150.

⁶⁴Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 177.

leases were for a period of more than four years and Langellotti argues for a larger degree of trust between these landlords and their tenants in longer-term contractual arrangements.⁶⁵ That said, tenants sought not to rely or to depend on just one landlord and thus they entered into contractual arrangements with more than one landlord.⁶⁶ As noted earlier, Rome promoted private ownership in part because it offered a property qualification for various liturgies and the purchase by tax farmers of various indirect-tax concessions. Rowlandson suggests that as much as half the land in the Oxyrhynchite nome was either privately owned by villagers themselves or were public lands tenanted by them. However, the same villagers also leased land from absentee landlords. Absentee landlords besides leasing their lands to tenants might also cultivate the land by hired labour as well as sublease others' land to work.⁶⁷

- c. Imperial estates that were often assigned to imperial freedmen as managers who in turn leased the land out to be farmed.
- d. Temple lands.

Unfortunately, there is little information on the transactions involving the last two types of land tenure. Concerning the other types, contracts indicate that most transacted holdings were under 6 arouras (approx. 1.65 hectares),⁶⁸ with leases indicating the crops to be sown. Importantly, tenants of public land and farmers of imperial estates were grouped in associations each with an elder or president responsible for the administration of the association's rights and obligations. Such associations were registered with the local *grapheion* but as *P.Mich.inv.* 1277 indicates little might be said about the internal rules of an association.⁶⁹

Land was variously used for cropping (mainly wheat and fodder), for pasturage of sheep and goats, and in the case of wealthier metropolite landowners and where perennial irrigation was required, for gardens, orchards and vineyards. There is little evidence that flocks were leased out or that shepherds were hired, but as Langellotti notes, 'this probably occurred relatively often, but since this type of agreement did not require a formal contract we have no evidence of such practice in the *grapheion* documents'.⁷⁰ Be that as it may, associations of rearers (i.e. owners of sheep, goats, donkeys and cattle) are well attested (see *P.Mich.* 5.243 below), and this in turn suggests that shepherding and

⁶⁵Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 179.

⁶⁶Rowlandson, 'Agricultural Tenancy', 155.

⁶⁷Rowlandson, 'Agricultural Tenancy', 146 and 152. On the good return to absentee metropolite landlords and the difficulty faced by some villagers, see pp. 153–5.

⁶⁸An aroura was equal to 2756.25 square metres. See Roger S. Bagnall, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 186.

⁶⁹*P.Mich.inv.* 1277 is a charter of those exempt from liturgical service on an imperial estate in the Fayyum region of Egypt. The document concerns the common vote of the association's members, namely, the election of the annual superintendent with the following powers and obligations: (a) the collection of the poll tax; (b) the collection of expenses (fees?); (c) the calling of meetings and differential fines for non-attendance; (d) the right to execute against the person or slaves of a member who failed to meet their financial or other obligations; and (e) the duty to supply drinks for toasts at the monthly banquet. The members agree to (a) post security for a member (limited in the amount and duration), (b) pay the superintendent's poll tax from the association's common funds, (c) hold a monthly banquet on the day of divine Augustus and (d) attend funerals of members and their family members.

⁷⁰Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 193–4.

herding was conducted on the more informal basis of trust networks between the owners of livestock and their shepherds and herders.

Though the main source of income in Tebtunis was from agricultural pursuits, such income might also be supplemented by textile production (mainly a domestic industry involving women),⁷¹ by rental returns and by credit payments.⁷² With regard to the latter, there appears to be an ethnic differentiation in the village. The evidence of credit arrangements indicates that most creditors bear Greek names, while their debtors bear Egyptian names, which would tend to indicate that the former were better off.⁷³ Such loans were used for various purposes such as to pay those taxes required in cash, to establish a daughter's dowry, or to raise funds to invest in an agricultural or business pursuit. Langellotti notes the high incidence of credit agreements and sees this as creating 'relations based on credit and trust'.⁷⁴ However, the ethnic difference and the fact that creditors tended to act alone, while debtors often acted with another person should give one pause for thought here.

Slaves also appear to be owned by the Hellenized portion of the population and some of them may have functioned as estate supervisors for their absentee metropolite owners.⁷⁵ Slaves were, generally speaking,⁷⁶ not able to become association members, so in the cases when they are artisans, it is usually for the household. More fundamental is the lack of legal and social standing of the slave that rendered them beyond the defined boundaries of association membership.

A Charter of Livestock Owners (P.Mich. 5.243: Tebtunis, 14–37 CE)

[. . . ye]ar . . . of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Heron son of Orseus, with whom let them compulsorily feast monthly on the 12th (day), each (member) paying into the monthly account twelve silver drachmae which have been determined equally by name. Against the one failing with respect to these and ot[her] (matters) the president is authorised to exact surety. If one behaves in a drunken manner, let him be fined whatever the koinon decides. If a meeting is proclaimed to one and he does not attend, let him be fined in the village one drach(ma) but in the city four drach(mae).⁵ If one marries, let him pay 2 dr.; for (the) birth of a male, 2 dr.; for a female, 1 dr.; for (the) purchase of land 4 dr.; for flock of sheep 2 dr.; of livestock (donkeys?) 1 dr. If one overlooks another in trouble and does not assist with a view to helping him to resolve (the) trouble, let him pay 8 dr. Whoever at the banquets reclines beforehand in another's (place), let him pay an extra 3 obols (and let) each (recline) in his own place. If one brings a charge against another or slanders (him), (let him be) fined 8 dr.. If one devises intrigue against another or ruins his household, (let him be) fined 60 dr.. If one for a private (debt) has been handed over, let them stand surety for him for up to a hundred sil[ver] dr. for 30 day(s) within which (days) he shall release the men (from their pledge). May

⁷¹Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 224. Women owned land and were parties to most financial transactions, though they appear rarely in agricultural leases. Rowlandson, 'Agricultural Tenancy', 154, suggests that they were thought unsuitable for such work.

⁷²Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 131–3.

⁷³Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 134.

⁷⁴Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 134.

⁷⁵Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 126. It is estimated that about 8.5 per cent of the village population of Egypt were of servile status.

⁷⁶But see SB 3.7182 (Philadelphia, second to first century BCE) = GRA III.193.

health prevail! If one of the ¹⁰ associates (συνοδίταις) dies, let all shave themselves and hold a banquet for 1 day, each immediately contributing 1 dr. and two loaves; for other persons (i.e. family members), let them hold a banquet for 1 day. Whoever has not shaved his head, (let him be) fined 4 dr.. Whoever has not defiled himself for all nor placed a wreath at the tomb, (let him be) fined 4 dr.. The other (regulations are) whatever the koinon decides. Let the charter be valid when it has been undersigned by the majority. Valid, let it be returned to the president. Herakleios son of Aphrodisios, (about) 42, s(car) between his eyebrows. Orsees son of Kronidees, (about) 45, s(car) to eyebrow ¹⁵ Mieus son of Harmiusis, (about) 46, s(car) to fa(ce) on le(ft) Harmiusis son of Phasos, (about) 55, s(car) . . . ri(ght) ^{m.2} I, Heron son of Orseus, president, approve as proposed. ^{m.3} I, Soterichos son of Soterichos, approve. ^{m.4} I, Patron son of Patunis, approve. ^{20 m.5} I, Herodes son of Soterichos, approve. ^{m.6} I, Psenobastis son of Herodes approve. ^{m.7} I, Herodes son of Herodes also called Isidorus, approve. ^{m.8} I, Orsenouphis son of Harmiusis, approve. ^{m.9} I, Apollonios son of Aphrodisios, approve. ^{25 m.10} We, Herakles son of Aphrodisios and Harmiusis son of Phasos and Orses son of Kronides and Mieus son of Harmiusis, approve as proposed. Nikanor son of Heliodoros wrote for them because they do not know letters. ^{m.11} I, Orsenouphis son of Horos, approve. ³⁰ I, Orsenouphis son of Aphrodisios, approve. I, Herakles son of Ptolemaios, approve. Orsenouphis son of Horos, also (called) . . . wrote for them [because they] do not know [letters].

P.Mich. 5.243 is a charter of livestock owners/rearers of Tebtunis dated to the reign of Tiberius (14–37 CE). The opening lines of the charter are missing, but they would have contained the date (i.e. day, month and regnal year), place of meeting (Tebtunis) and a preamble indicating the nature or name of the association. Boak, the editor princeps, believes the charter to be for a religious or convivial association; however, work on associations since the time of its initial publication casts doubt on this suggestion and its uncritical acceptance of the elite view of ancient society based, as it is, on a reading of literary texts.⁷⁷ Given that the charter goes on to prescribe special contributions for the purchase of land, sheep and livestock (cattle according to Boak, donkeys according to Kloppenborg), one may suppose that it is an association (*koinon* here) of pastoralists (προβατοκτηνοτρόφοι).

The regulations (*nomoi*) of the charter are contractually agreed⁷⁸ by the undersigned members (lines 17–32) for the year of issuance in which the president, Heron son of Orseus, is authorized as the sole office holder with power to seize pledges (ἐνεχυράζειν) against delinquent members (line 3). As president (προστάτης), he was the first to undersign

⁷⁷A. E. R. Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis, Part II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1944), 92, does hold out the remote possibility that the association was formed for business purposes. However, he sees the contributions relating to births, marriages, livestock acquisition and so on as perhaps thank offerings to the deity or sharing good fortune with fellow members; that is, their motivation was religious and convivial (p. 93). See also A. E. R. Boak, 'The Organization of Gilds in Greco-Roman Egypt', *TAPA* 68 (1937): 215.

⁷⁸Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis*, 95: 'The validation of this *nomos* clearly reveals the legal character of such gild ordinances. They are in reality contracts voluntarily entered into by their members and binding upon them by virtue of their own consent, from which is derived the validity of the conventional fines and the right of personal execution enjoyed by officials of the associations.' Though *P. Mich.* 5. 243 is signed by all fifteen members of the association, it would appear that the president with another member might sign on behalf of the others, as in *P. Mich.* 5.244.

the charter (line 17). A relatively high annual due⁷⁹ of 144 dr. (12 dr. per month, line 2) is required of each member and this, with fines and special contributions (marriages, births, purchases of property), would have made up the income of the association. It was the president's duty to collect membership dues and fines. Though for other associations the president might also be responsible for the collection of trade taxes and/or the poll taxes (*laographia*) of members, this does not appear to be the case in *P.Mich.* 5.243.⁸⁰

P.Mich. 5.243 is a copy of the charter held by the scribal office (*grapheion*) in Tebtunis and another copy was held by the president once validated (line 13). The association is formed of fifteen members (lines 17–32), nine of whom sign in their own hand (m.2–m.9 and m.11) and six of whom are described as illiterate⁸¹ and have another sign for them. Above the signatures in lines 13–16 are the names and distinguishing features of four members, on whose behalf Nikanor son of Heliodoros later signs (lines 25–28). Boak⁸² suggests that these four act as sponsors for the drawing up and registration of the charter. The suggestion is problematic in that the four are later described as illiterate;⁸³ moreover, as it seems more than coincidental that the names agree with the four for whom Nikanor son of Heliodoros, a non-member, signs, the listing of distinguishing features could be construed to act as a proxy form of consent, perhaps indicating their presence at the signing, when a non-member acts on their behalf. If so, the same does not apply when a member signs on behalf of another member (lines 30–32). Following is a tabulation of the various fines and contributions mentioned in the papyrus (Table 6.1):

Fines are read as indicators of the seriousness of the offence to the association. Thus, for example, neglect of a member in trouble, that is, in difficulties with administrative authorities leading to arrest and prosecution,⁸⁴ is seen as more damaging to the association than missing a meeting or funeral.⁸⁵ Also, the higher fine for non-attendance at a meeting in the nome capital, Arsinoe, is understood by Boak⁸⁶ to indicate the particular importance of such sessions. Both Kloppenborg and Venticinque⁸⁷ suggest that the importance lay in the public display that such a meeting would occasion and the prestige this would afford the association; however, this is just speculation. One might equally argue that as Arsinoe was 14 miles away, the higher penalty acted as an incentive to attend. Be that as it may, one assumes illness and other reasonable factors might provide an adequate excuse for non-attendance.

Family connections between members can reasonably be assumed: (1) three apparent brothers, sons of Aphrodisios; (2) two brothers, sons of Harmiusis; (3) two brothers, sons of Herodes; and (4) three possible sets of father and son relationships, that is, Orses son of Kronides and his son Heron (president), Soterichos son of Soterichos and his son Herodes, and Harmiusis son of Phasos and his sons Mieus and Orsenouphis.

⁷⁹See Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 210. For a table of association dues see Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 204, and Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 225–6.

⁸⁰For the structure of the charters see Boak, 'The Organization of Gilds', 213, that is, (a) election of president, (b) regulation of dues, (c) provisions for meetings, (d) rules of conduct, (e) provisions for mutual assistance, (f) regulations affecting bereavement and funerals and (g) fines.

⁸¹Being illiterate may mean no more than that the members do not know Greek letters.

⁸²Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis*, 96.

⁸³The name of Herakleios son of Aphrodisios (line 13) is later spelled Herakles son of Aphrodisios (line 25).

⁸⁴Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis*, 93, and 'The Organization of Gilds', 218–19.

⁸⁵Venticinque, 'Family Affairs', 283.

⁸⁶Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis*, 93.

⁸⁷Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 57.

TABLE 6.1: Table of Fines and Special Contributions

<i>Special Contributions</i>	<i>Reason</i>	<i>Line</i>
1 dr.	Birth of daughter	5
1 dr.	Purchase of livestock	5
2 dr.	Marriage	5
2 dr.	Birth of son	5
2 dr.	Purchase of sheep	5
4 dr.	Purchase of land	5
<i>Fines</i>		
3 obols	Sitting in another's place ^a	7
1 dr.	Missing meeting in Tebtunis	4
4 dr.	Missing meeting in Arsinoe	4
8 dr.	Failure to help a member in trouble	6
8 dr.	Bring a charge or slandering another member	7–8
60 dr.	Intrigue and ruining another member's household	8
Determined by association	Drunken behaviour ^b	3
	Other misdemeanours	12

^a The nature of the offence is a little unclear. Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis*, 94, and 'The Organization of Gilds', 217, sees it as referring to 'usurping another's place on the banquet couch' or taking 'seats out of order at the banquets'. The translation seems to assume a prescribed order in seating which the document does not otherwise support, for example, monthly dues are equal among members. See Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 204, and Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 225, for variation in dues in Ptolemaic associations in the Fayum. Perhaps sensing the difficulty Venticinque, 'Family Affairs', 281, reads: 'taking seats at the banquets shoves in front of another'.

^b The fine for drunkenness at a banquet was determined by a vote and no doubt depended on the seriousness of the particular offence. See Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis*, 92, and 'The Organization of Gilds', 219.

Venticinque sees the communal celebration of births, marriages, deaths – *PMich.* 5.244, the charter of the *apolusimoi* even includes attendance at funerals of family members – as further indicators of familial connectedness.⁸⁸ Other regulations are also read to have implications for the family, for example, helping a member in trouble, providing surety (cf. *PRyl.* 2.94, 14–37 CE), and not corrupting the household or intriguing against other members. Venticinque holds that these refer to the ruin of property, adultery ('seduction

⁸⁸Venticinque, 'Family Affairs', 282; cf. also 284: 'Regular meetings, as well as feasts and funerals, offered fertile ground for the creation and maintenance of bonds of trust between members and between their families . . . Consistent participation and observance of guild rules likely marked someone out as a trustworthy business partner and brought certain rewards for oneself and his family.'

of a member's wife'⁸⁹) or the undermining of a home and that the high penalty indicates the significance of the offence.⁹⁰ At the same time, what affects the family is equally seen as affecting the reputation of the association within the larger community. Such a concern finds particular voice in regulations penalizing the slandering and accusing of a fellow member especially as these actions might entail redress through external judicial means.

One must also bear in mind that, as trust networks, the foregoing regulations and their fines speak to the seriousness of misdeeds for the fabric of the association, namely the trustworthiness and reliability of a fellow member. The fine for *bringing a charge against another or slandering him* is to be understood in light of this same concern for reputation. The verbal harm that a public action causes to a member's reputation, a valued commodity in trust networks, carries a fine of 8 dr., albeit an amount considerably lower than the actual harm that *devising intrigue against another or ruining his household* causes a member.⁹¹ The final regulation concerning fines, that is, *the other (regulations are) whatever the koinon decides*, is also informative here; it is not so much a regulation but an admission that the charter only reflects some regulations and that there were probably other unwritten regulations and customs that are in a sense understood by mutual agreement among the members. In other words, the charter thus functions as a partial and public disclosure of the *koinon*'s regulations.

Secondary Production and Associations

We have noted earlier that trust networks, whether constituted formally or informally, were formed by those employed in agricultural pursuits; however, professional occupations were also organized as associations. Early Roman Tebtunis had twenty-two registered associations covering such occupations as builders, brewers, coppersmiths, dyers, cloth beaters, tenant farmers exempt from liturgical service, cloak makers, farmers of public land, fishermen, fullers, goldsmiths, oil producers, salt merchants, cattle graziers, shepherds, weavers and wool sellers.⁹² Extant evidence indicates that the average size of an association was sixteen members, though this may underestimate the real size. Langellotti suggests the most likely size to be between twenty and thirty members, that is, between 7.3 and 11 per cent of Tebtunis' population or between 22.7 and 34 per

⁸⁹The verb οἰκοφθορέω can mean ruin or squander, but the cognate noun can refer to a seducer or adulterer. See Boak, *Papyri from Tebtunis*, 94, and 'The Organization of Gilds', 217. The suggestion is largely based on a comparison of the regulation in demotic charters of the Ptolemaic period.

⁹⁰Venticinque, 'Family Affairs', 285–6: 'The higher fines for transgressing these guild norms show that intrigue, corruption, and slander posed a much larger threat to the operations of the guild.'

⁹¹The charter of salt merchants (Tebtunis, 47 CE; *P.Mich.* 5.245 = *GRA* III.219) envisages the association taking public action against a merchant who infringes the rules. Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 60, has interpreted the high fine prescribed for the rule breaker, that is a total of 16 dr., and the fact that its payment had to be made not only to the common fund but also to the public treasury, as 'the group's intention to impose a penalty that inflicted damage to a member's reputation in a public way and exposed an individual offender as a rule breaker to those outside the group'. The charter of salt merchants is unusual in this respect and appears to show a movement along the cline from indirect to direct integration. Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 47, observes: 'The salt merchants apparently thought of themselves as more than a group that looked after tax payments and provided mutual aid to members. They attempted to monitor the particulars of the trade in salt and gypsum (a construction material) in Tebtunis and its surrounding area.' As well the association decided by lot the right to trade elsewhere in the nome. To regulate this trade they appear to have sought a greater involvement of the regime by implicating it in the awarding of fines.

⁹²Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 121. See also *P.Mich.* 2.123–124 (Tebtunis, 45–47 CE) = *GRA* III.21, (esp. p. 263).

cent of families with at least one member in an association.⁹³ As the age of members varies between twenty-nine and fifty-five years old, they were probably already persons of professional standing with the means and reputations to fulfil an association's contractual obligations.⁹⁴ Venticinque argues that 'guild and family membership overlapped' with some form of kinship (e.g. father, son or brother) accounting 'for a significant percentage of the overall membership'. He further draws attention to those regulations that mark private family events (e.g. births of children), require attendance at funerals of family members and penalize harshly those infractions that harm the family (see, for example, *P.Mich.* 5.243 above).⁹⁵ In other words, the interests of an association appear to extend beyond its immediate members to include their families also.

Langellotti assumes that membership in an association was 'a fundamental feature of the identity of a large number of individuals. . . . Members of associations were part of a relatively wide social network, of which conviviality, mutual support, and economic protection were essential components'.⁹⁶ In terms of ethnicity, perhaps all members in Tebtunis were Egyptian. Costs associated with membership, however, were considerable and placed the member well above subsistence level,⁹⁷ and as such membership indicated an elevated economic status within the village. The status of members within an association may also differ, as indicated by payment of higher fees, order of seating at banquets and celebration in honorific dedications.⁹⁸ As already indicated, associations show an internal structure with designated office holder(s) and rules of operation (see *P.Mich.* 5.243 above). Many such professions or occupations were subject to an annual licence fee.

Professions and their associations played a vital role in linking a village to other local villages as well as to the nome capital (see *P.Mich.* 5.243 above).⁹⁹ In Roman Egypt this commerce was further facilitated by improved means of transport, increased monetization of the economy (approx. 44 per cent of registered agreements in Tebtunis involve a cash transaction and these are found across all social strata),¹⁰⁰ the encouragement of private ownership of property and the replacement of state monopolies with state concessions.¹⁰¹

⁹³Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 125. See also Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 2 and 8.

⁹⁴Luchian, 'L'organisation des associations professionnelles', 165–6.

⁹⁵Venticinque, 'Family Affairs', 278–9, 282, 285–8.

⁹⁶Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 124–5.

⁹⁷Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 14–15, argues that the fees, as much as that needed to keep a family of four in grain, placed members uniformly above 'humble status' (51).

⁹⁸*P.Mich.* 5.246 (Tebtunis, 43–49 CE) = *GRA III*.210 and *P.Athen.* 41 (unknown, first century CE) = *GRA III*.290; cf. also Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 242–3, 341 and 346. See also Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves*, 70. Luchian, 'L'organisation des associations professionnelles', 169–70, postulates that hierarchical structures were more rigorous in sacerdotal associations and in associations of tenants on imperial estates. Associations of artisans were less so. In the latter case, 'on ne peut pas discuter d'une hiérarchie *stricto sensu*'.

⁹⁹Most economic links were constructed at the local level (between villages) and regional level (between *metropoleis* and villages), Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 222.

¹⁰⁰Langellotti, *Village Life in Roman Egypt Tebtunis*, 220–1.

¹⁰¹See Colin Adams, 'Natural Resources in Roman Egypt Extraction, Transport, and Administration', *BASP* 50 (2013): 265–81, on the Roman regulation of the supply and sale of natural resources. Ptolemaic monopolies became in the Roman period state regulated operations, for example, the production, transport and sale of salt. These were granted by state concession (auction to the highest bidder). *P.Mich.* 5.245 (*GRA III*.219) shows (a) the sale of the salt concession was at a fixed price, and (b) the right to sell was exclusive to association members. Salt was mined and transported to the metropolis and was an important condiment and preservative (esp. fish). As noted above, liturgical officials (metropolitane elite) oversaw the granting of concessions and the collection of revenue from them. They report to Roman officials at the nome level.

In the latter cases individuals grouped in an association were in a better position to offer a stronger bid to win a concession. But even so, most village industry was still domestically based.

THE *EKKLESIAE* OF THIRD AND EARLY FOURTH CENTURIES IN EGYPT

Tilly¹⁰² begins his study of trust networks by citing the instance of the Waldensians, a Christian religious movement of the twelfth to sixteenth/seventeenth centuries who worked among the poor seeking ‘to recover the simplicity of earliest Christianity’ and who for their endeavours were persecuted by the Catholic Church. He notes: ‘From the Catholic Church’s perspective, those primitive Christians qualified as heretics worthy of extermination. After all, they refused to swear oaths, opposed capital punishment, denied the existence of Purgatory, rejected papal authority including the pope’s right to canonize saints, and claimed that sacraments administered by sinful priests had no efficacy.’ Similarly, the early Christians were perceived as outsiders by Rome suffering persecutions under Decius, Valerian and Diocletian. They had good reason to operate clandestinely as segregated trust networks much as later trust networks like the Waldensians did.

To write about Christianity in Roman Egypt on the basis of documentary evidence we must now move beyond first-century Tebtunis, starting from other villages and then moving beyond them. And we must begin in a later period; for although Christian literary (e.g. biblical and patristic texts, homilies and commentaries) texts can reasonably be dated to the second century,¹⁰³ Christian documentary evidence does not begin to emerge until the second half of the third century and even then its presence is gradually felt.¹⁰⁴ It is recognized that Christianity was more prevalent in this period than the evidence itself suggests;¹⁰⁵ however, it remains unclear why this does not show up in the papyrological record. Perhaps the requirement to present as a Christian was in many instances felt to be irrelevant (e.g. in a letter between mutual friends and family members) or again, as perceived outsiders, it was thought by believers to be wiser not to disclose their affiliation. That said, various means are used to identify a text as Christian: use of *nomina sacra*; of isopsephism or cryptograms, for example, χμϣ, ϣθ, chi-rho and tau-rho; of personal names, for example, Peter, John, Isaac and Elijah; of ecclesiastical titles, for example,

¹⁰²Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 1–4.

¹⁰³Malcolm Choat, ‘Christianity’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Table 28.1 (second century) and Table 28.2 (third century), 478 and 479. For listing and discussion of Christian documentary texts, see Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, eds, *Christian Oxyrhynchus Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2015), 14 (LXX), and 17–372 (NT and other Christian literary texts).

¹⁰⁴Cf. Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 7–9. Lincoln H. Blumell (*Lettered Christians Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 79) gives an interesting century-by-century breakdown of Christian letters as a percentage of all letters from Oxyrhynchus. For listing of relevant papyri and their classification, see E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering, ‘Papyrus documentation of church and community in Egypt to the mid-fourth century’, *JbAC* 20 (1977): 48–50 and ‘Papyri from the Rise of Christianity in Egypt’, downloaded 2 July 2022, <https://areopage.net/PDF/PapyriFromTheRiseOfChristianityInEgypt.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵See E. A. Judge, ‘The Puzzle of Christian Presence in Egypt Before Constantine’, in *Athens and Jerusalem: Cultural Transformation in Late Antiquity*, WUNT 265, ed. Alanna Nobbs (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 140–1; and Judge and Pickering, ‘Papyrus documentation . . .’, 47.

anagnostes, *presbyteros*, *episkopos* and *monachos*; of monotheistic phrases, for example, ἐν/σὺν θεῷ and so on; or of the admittedly rare citation of or allusion to Scripture.¹⁰⁶

Christianity in the Village

In response to Decius's edict requiring inhabitants of the Roman world to offer libation and sacrifice to the traditional gods of the empire, persons who had complied with it sought certificates or *libelli* from officiating persons to that effect. *P.Oxy.* 3929 is one such *libellus* issued in the village of Thosbis (June 25–July 24, AD 250). The edict had dire consequences for those who professed to be Christians, and though many did comply with the edict (the so-called 'lapsed'), there is no extant evidence in the *libelli* of such Christians. Such is no doubt to be expected; however, to judge by the literary evidence the persecutions under Decius, Valerian and Diocletian had a profound effect on how the *ekklesiae* viewed their relation to the empire and justifies looking at them as trust networks which sought to segregate themselves from state politics.

We might consider two papyri that bear on Christianity's presence in the village:

- *P.Oxy.* 3035, a summons issued by the head of the boule in Oxyrhynchus, dated 28 February, AD 256, reads: 'From the *prytanis* to *komarchae* and superintendents of peace of the village of Mermertha. Immediately send up Petosorapis, son of Horus, chres<τ>ianos, or you yourselves come up. (Year) 3 of Augusti Valerianus and Gallienus, Phamenoth 3'. As the persecutions under Valerian were initiated in the following year (AD 257),¹⁰⁷ it seems unlikely that the summons was issued because of Petosorapis's religious status. Though the tau is absent in the papyrus, it is widely accepted that he was a Christian,¹⁰⁸ perhaps a cleric given the practice of placing one's occupation after the name.¹⁰⁹ At any rate his name and patronymic indicate his Egyptian ethnicity.¹¹⁰
- *P.Oxy.* 2673 (5 February, 304, village of Chysis in the Oxyrhynchite nome) is a declaration by Copres, the reader of the former *ekklesia* in the village of Chysis (Αὐρήλιος Ἀμμώνιος Κοπρέως ἀναγνώστης τῆς ποτε ἐκ(κ)λησίας κώμης Χύσεως), concerned with the confiscation of church property arising from Diocletian's

¹⁰⁶See Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 51–125, who is sceptical that any one word, name, title or expression is indicative of the particular belief of its user. Thus, even the use of ἐν θεῷ or of the *nomina sacra* does not exclude the possibility of Manichaean authorship (113, 124–5, 138). Cf. also AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord. Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, HTS 60 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 29–78; Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 36–78.

¹⁰⁷*P.Oxy.* 3119 contains a copy of a fragmentary letter written in the Saite nome. It survives from an official daybook from Oxyrhynchus in which the preceding letter is dated year 7. Lines 13–14 are restored to read περὶ ἐξετάσε[ε]ως [π]όρ[ων] . . .] Χρηστιανῶν – *concerning the inspection of Christian assets*. If year 7 is understood to refer to the reign of Valerian, the letter may be dated 259/260 CE and thus concern the confiscation of Christian assets ordered by him.

¹⁰⁸Cf. the same spelling in SB 12.10772 cited later.

¹⁰⁹See Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 180–1, 184.

¹¹⁰For an *ekklesia* in Mermertha some six decades later, see *P.Oxy.* 3787, a tax list of 313–320 CE that mentions Aphous, deacon of the *ekklesia* and his brother from the village of Mermertha (ll. 24–5), and Besarion, reader from the village of Tampetei (ll. 56–7). Choat, *Belief and Cult*, 68, notes the absence of *ekklesia* in the designation of Besarion and in view of Christianity's adoption of terminologies from 'secular and Jewish sources' (59) questions whether he was a church lector.

edict.¹¹¹ The declaration appears to follow a checklist of inventory to be confiscated, that is, gold, plate silver, money, clothes, livestock, slaves, lands/buildings and property whether gifted or bequeathed.¹¹² He only declares bronze materials which had previously been found and handed over. Judge notes: ‘The certificate of the “church reader” is the earliest precisely dated official document on papyrus to use the term *ekklesia* for a church, and the first in-house term (*anagnostes*) for one of its ministers’. Judge holds that as the *ekklesia* is declared to hold little in the way of assets, the term refers to the community rather than the building. But this is unclear, as Copres describes himself as the reader of the *former ekklesia*. Why the reader should make the declaration is unclear. Was he the only cleric? And why as a reader he should declare that he does not know letters and thereby avoids signing in person is also unclear; however, Luijendijk’s suggestion, namely, that it may display passive resistance to avoid swearing by the fortune of the emperors, is attractive. Such resistance may also account for the apparent poverty of the *ekklesia*. Had other properties been hidden?¹¹³ If so, it is the type of behaviour one might expect from a trust network that sought to avoid the predations of a hostile state.

From City to Village

Lincoln Blumell¹¹⁴ notes that travel for the most part was ‘undertaken for routine purposes, for work, to go to the market, or to undertake some pressing task’¹¹⁵ and thus local, that is, within the nome. Compared with literary letters, documentary letters show virtually no interest in religiously motivated travel. As to the growth of Christianity in the *chora*, Blumell observes that it

spread not so much via mass proselytisation, though doubtless there were direct missionary efforts, but that an important element in the spread of Christianity was the establishment of social networks whereby non-Christians came into contact with Christianity through everyday personal encounters with ordinary Christians. It was

¹¹¹*P.Oxy.* 2673 exists in three copies, perhaps intended for the various officials, which were written by different hands but found tied together. For other Christian papyri relevant to Diocletian’s persecution cf. *P.Oxy.* 2601, where the writer avoids making the sacrifice required of litigants by being represented by another; *P.Grenf.* 2.73 (Oasis magna); *P.Oxy.* 2665, where after search of official records Paul is declared to own nothing, though Judge and Pickering, ‘Papyrus documentation . . .’, 67, argue that, in an absence of the official descriptor ‘Christian’, Paul is perhaps not Christian. Lacking this, the only tentative indications of his religious affiliation are: (a) the name Paul, also a good Roman name; and (b) the mention of Satrius Arrianus, a known persecutor of the Christians. See Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 210–13.

¹¹²Note the absence of books in the checklist. As they were of no monetary value, they were found and possibly destroyed on the spot.

¹¹³Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 202–3 and 207. On passive resistance, see also *P.Oxy.* 2601 cited above where the litigant avoids making the obligatory sacrifice by having a pagan(?) friend do it instead.

¹¹⁴Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 89–161. See also Richard S. Ascough, ‘Translocal Relationships Among Voluntary Associations and Early Christianity’, *J ECS* 5, no. 2 (1997): 223–4, who conclude on p. 241: ‘Christian congregations and voluntary associations were both locally based groups with limited translocal connections. The elimination of the false dichotomy between local associations and translocal Christianity allows for a more profitable use of the voluntary associations as an analogy for understanding the formation and organization of early Christian groups.’

¹¹⁵Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 95

therefore Christians who were not acting as official missionaries who at times probably most effectively spread the Gospel message.¹¹⁶

A number of papyrus letters evidence the movement of Christians. As business concerns are evidently the motivating factor in most instances, one is justified in wondering the extent to which such travel occurred within trust networks:

- *P.Vind.Sijp.* 26 (second half III, Oxyrhynchus) is a private letter between two minor officials of adjoining nome metropoleis (Cynopolis and Oxyrhynchus) concerning payment and shipment of some poor quality wine. They are assumed to be Christian in view of the use of ἐν θεῷ in the final prayer for health. Since the official position of each is stated, it has been assumed that the writer, Asclepius, had travelled on administrative business. However, we note that the arrangement for the purchase of wine was a private matter and that both sender and recipient had dined together. It can thus not be ruled out that travel was motivated by personal business. More significantly, both official positions are named on the verso of the papyrus and thus in the letter's external and thus visible address. This may indicate no more than that they were so designated as the sender had availed himself of the *cursus publicus* to convey a private letter.¹¹⁷
- *Pap.Congr.* 15.20 (Oxyrhynchus, late III/early IV) is a Christian letter that (a) reprimands the recipient for his failure in a matter of hospitality and (b) informs of the receipt of a large quantity of olive oil. Such produce may have been imported and the large quantity suggests that the persons worked in the oil trade.¹¹⁸
- *P.Oxy.* 1495 (IV) is a Christian letter in which the recipient is told to pay a large sum (40 talents) to Zacaon, the pastry cook. The money is to be entered against the writer's account. The nature of the transaction is unclear but is consistent with the business dealings of a trust network.¹¹⁹
- *P.Giss.* 1.103 (Oasis magna) is a Christian letter from Ap[olloni]us to Stephanus, be[lo]ved de[acon] and dated to the fourth century. As Stephanus is addressed as 'son', he appears to have been of lower status in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The recto was a papyrus (SB 18.13852) containing copies of receipts submitted to Gelasius, *strategos* or *exactor* of Oasis magna, and issued in 309 CE. The verso was cut from that papyrus and contains Apollonius's letter. Both sender and recipient as well as the latter's brother all appear to have been involved in the textile industry that required them to travel possibly between the oasis and the Metropolis.¹²⁰ As Naldini reminds us, this was an industry traditionally exercised

¹¹⁶Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 159–60.

¹¹⁷We note that in the address the sender only gives his office (not his name). In the prescript, however, he gives his name with office but only the name of the recipient with the appellation 'my lord brother'. The office of the sender is thus only added to the prescript to help the recipient identify him. The next line makes this concern clear when the recipient is called to remember that they had dined together.

¹¹⁸Blumell and. Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 488.

¹¹⁹Cf. also *P.Oxy.* 1774 (mid IV), of which Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 469–525, note: 'Though the letter could certainly be read within a monastic context, it could just as easily be read within the context of lay Christian women engaged in business activities . . . it could suggest that one of the business activities undertaken by Didyme and her associates involved baking.'

¹²⁰Paul Meyer, *Griechische Papyri im Museum des oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins zu Giessen*, vol. 1 part 3 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1912), 102.

‘in centri comunitari, chiese o conventi’.¹²¹ Significantly, Stephanus is told to receive money from the *pastophoros*, a term that is only attested as belonging to an individual ministering in the ‘pagan’ cult.¹²² Choat observes: ‘the logical interpretation here sees Christians not only doing business with “pagans”, but using their cult titles as identifiers in letters between themselves.’¹²³

Travel further afield, though rarer, is also attested:

- *SB 6.9557 = P.Amh.* 1.3a ll.41, 45 (250–85 CE, Arsinoite) names Maximus, the bishop of Alexandria, and a reader (church official)¹²⁴ who are involved in commercial transactions between Alexandria and Rome. Choat observes: ‘A letter sent from Rome illustrates the economic links between Christian communities in Rome, Alexandria, and the Fayum.’¹²⁵ Judge and Pickering, on the other hand, note that ‘though religious status of parties is unknown, the papyrus refers to the use of the Alexandrian church as a “trusted institution”’.¹²⁶
- *SB 12.10772* (second half III, Oxyrhynchus) is a private letter that mentions Sotas the Christian through whom the writer, Sarapammon, sends the large sum of two talents (δι(ὰ) Σώτου τοῦ χρησια[νοῦ] τάλαντα δύο) from Antioch in Syria to his mother in Oxyrhynchus. Though it seems unlikely that the writer was a Christian (for why else add the identity marker ‘Christian’ that tended to be used by outsiders), it is of interest that Sotas travelled widely and was trusted by Sarapammon. Perhaps both belonged to an association or trust network. Judge and Pickering suggest Sotas was an ‘overseas trader. . . . Whose network involves the church in Alexandria’.¹²⁷ However, it can also be plausibly argued that Sotas was the bishop of Oxyrhynchus, who appears in a number of other papyri; if his travels were not for ecclesiastical reasons, they might be related to business dealing.¹²⁸ We turn to consider now some other papyrus letters that concern Sotas.

Three letters show Sotas, bishop of Oxyrhynchus,¹²⁹ recommending Christian travellers, including catechumens, to other Christian leaders/bishops (*PSI* 3.208; *PSI* 9.1041;¹³⁰ and probably *PAlex.* 29, all three from second half III);¹³¹ in another Sotas is asked by

¹²¹Mario Naldini, *Il cristianesimo in Egitto: Lettere private nei papiri dei secoli II–IV*, Stidi e testi di papirologia 3 (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1968), 198.

¹²²Naldini, *Il cristianesimo in Egitto*, 201.

¹²³Choat, *Belief and Cult*, 141.

¹²⁴Cf. *P.Oxy.* 2673.

¹²⁵Choat, ‘Christianity’, 482.

¹²⁶Judge and Pickering, ‘Papyrus documentation . . .’, 55.

¹²⁷Judge and Pickering, ‘Papyrus documentation . . .’, 69. Cf. *P.Hamb.* 4.267 (Oxyrhynchus, c. 336–48 CE) a business letter that speaks of sailors of the *ekklesia* (ναυτῶν ἐκκλησίας, l.14). Other papyri speak of the boat of a named bishop (τοῦ πλοίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ ἐπισκόπου, *P.Oxy.* 2729, mid IV) or of a named *ekklesia* (πλοίου καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς αὐτ[ῆς] Ἀλεξανδρείας, *PMuench.* 3.99, 390 CE). Cf. also *PSI* 4.311 (c. 330 CE, Oxyrhynchus) for correspondence between Christians in Oxyrhynchus and Laodicea (Syria).

¹²⁸Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 136–45. Other papyri that name Sotas are *PAlex.* 29, *P.Oxy.* 1492, *P.Oxy.* 36.2785, *PSI* 3.208 and *PSI* 9.1041. Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 139–42, relates it to a later episcopal exchange (*PSI* 4.311) between Oxyrhynchus and Laodicea.

¹²⁹See Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 80–102.

¹³⁰Both *PSI* 3.208; *PSI* 9.1041 are quite unique in being written on parchment rather than papyri. Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 469–70, suggest that the use of this material indicates the presence of a Christian scriptorium in Oxyrhynchus.

¹³¹There are, with the addition of *P.Oxy.* 1492, 2785 and *SB* 12.10772, probably six extant letters that concern Sotas. The reason for this group of letters at Oxyrhynchus that concern one individual is unclear, as they do not

the *presbyteroi* of Herakleopolis Magna to receive a ‘catechumen in Genesis . . . for edification’ (*P.Oxy.* 2785, second half III).¹³² The letters were given to the recommended person and carried by them for the recipient to read. It is therefore unsurprising that they lack an address on the verso. Choat notes that the letters of recommendation ‘demonstrate the expanding networks of hospitality and education among Christian communities in Egypt’.¹³³ Luijendijk points out that in these letters expressions such as ὡς καθήκει and κατὰ τὸ ἔθος indicate the customary nature of the request and that the wording of the final greeting extends to the communities as a whole.¹³⁴ Given the date of the letters of recommendation (post-Decian persecution) and the ecclesiastical disputes over accepting of the lapsed into full communion, they may vouch for the trustworthiness of the carriers.¹³⁵

Letters of recommendation might be compared with the Christian letter *P.Oxy.* 1493 (late III/early IV) informing the recipient that his son had arrived and assuring him that the writer will treat him as his own son. The writer goes on to say that he will not neglect to compel the boy to pay attention to the work. Many have seen this to refer to education or to employment of some form or other. The meaning is uncertain but one might also conjecture that it refers to some sort of apprenticeship and thus the presence of a trust network between the parties.

Ekklesia: From Community to Church

Christians are nominated for positions that require property qualification (*SB* 16.12497: III, Theadelphia) and are even found among the metropolite elite (*P.Bas.* 1.16: 200–50 CE, Theadelphia). *SB* 16.12497 is a list of persons subject to compulsory public service (funding of the water supply) with supplementary identification details. Choat notes the use of a Roman nomen (Antonius Dioscorus) and likely Alexandrian citizenship to conclude that he was ‘a higher social rank than most of the others listed’.¹³⁶ In addition, Dioscorus is designated ‘Christian’. Judge asks, ‘Is it conceivable that the churches were also providing a burden-sharing service? The term “Christian” might then refer to a

appear to be part of one find (which would indicate an archive) and the three letters of recommendation were issued by Sotas to those presumably travelling elsewhere. Were they copies kept by Sotas?

¹³²The punctuation of *P.Oxy.* 2785 may be significant. All letters written by Sotas place the manner of acceptance (i.e. in peace, as is fitting, etc.) after the verb. The letter received by Sotas places ‘for edification’ before the verb. Might one not read ‘accept Anos having been instructed in Genesis for edification’? For other Christian letters of recommendation, see *P.Oxy.* 1162; *P.Oxy.* 3857; *SB* 3.7269 (IV/V, provenance unknown); *SB* 10.10255 (III/IV; provenance unknown); and *SB* 16.12304 (late III/early IV, Panopolis).

¹³³Choat, ‘Christianity’, 483.

¹³⁴Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 106–7, 112 and 115.

¹³⁵Pseudo-Demetrius, *Form. epist.* 2, speaks of the letter of recommendation that a person issues to its carrier. Apart from praise, such letters vouch for the writers’ personal acquaintance with the carriers (τοὺς πρότερον ἡγνομένους λέγοντες ὡς ἐγνωσμένους). Thus, in the sample letter the writer states that the carrier has been approved of (pf. part.) by him and is now (pres. part.) held in affection because of his trustworthiness (ἡμῖν κε κριμένον καὶ δι’ ἣν ἔχει πίστιν ἀγαπώμενον). In fine the carrier’s usefulness and discretion in confidential matters (whether word or deed) are commended (οὐ μεταμέλησι γὰρ ἐν οἷς θέλεις εἶτε λόγον ἀπόρρητον εἶτε πράξιν εἰπεῖν – lit. *for you will not have regret in what you wish to speak, whether a secret word or deed*). In other words, the recipient can speak freely before the carrier in confidence that his secret would be kept. Note that the letter underlines throughout the tested trustworthiness of the carrier in the face of the recipients’ fear that he might overhear and disclose some private matter. The sentiments expressed by Pseudo-Demetrius are absent in Pseudo-Libanius: Συστατική. Τὸν τιμώτατον καὶ περισπούδαστον ἄνδρα τόνδε δεξάμενος ξενίσαι μὴ κατοχνήσης σεαυτῷ πρέποντα πράττων κάμοι κεχαρισμένα. Cf. V. Weichert, *Demetrios et Libanii qui feruntur ΤΥΠΟΙ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΙ et ΕΠΙΣΤΑΙΜΑΙΟΙ ΧΑΡΑΚΤΗΡΕΣ* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1910), 3–4, 22.

¹³⁶Choat, ‘Christianity’, 480.

person's financial security.¹³⁷ If so, the Christian community would be acting much like the trust networks found among the associations of first-century Tebtunis.

Over time, Christian communities were, no doubt, able to transform the support from such persons into physical assets. In the Christian letter, *P.Oxy.* 1492 (second half III), Sotas, the bishop of Oxyrhynchus (the same individual as earlier), attempts to solicit a donation of unencumbered land for the *topos* (δοῦναι τὴν ἄρ[ο]ύραν τῷ τόπῳ).¹³⁸ Blumell and Wayment argue that the term designates a church.¹³⁹ The precise referent of a general term like *topos*, however, is naturally problematic. Two arguments in support of it can be dismissed: (a) Blumell and Wayment list the use of the expression κατὰ τόπον in four Christian letters of recommendation (*P.Oxy.* 1162; *P.Oxy.* 3857; *SB* 3.7269; *SB* 16.12304) and two other letters of introduction (*P.Oxy.* 2603; *P.Oxy.* 4965, both IV) in support of it; however, any appeal to the term's anarthrous deployment in a propositional phrase like this is questionable; and (b) Lactantius, *Mort.* 48.7–9, uses the Latin equivalent, *locus*, in his recording of the Edict of Milan to indicate Christian property; however, it is clear that its usage here is determined by a need for a general term to cover all possible types of assets.¹⁴⁰ In other words, the use of *topos* for Christian property is not determined by the use of the term itself, but by the context within which it is used.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, the early use of the term in *BGU* 1.27 (a letter from Rome, II/III) and associated discussion is instructive. Lines 10–11 read παρεδέξατο ἡμᾶς ὁ τόπος ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἤθελεν (the *topos* received us as god wished) and as such give no clear indication that the letter is Christian. Since the letter goes on to speak of 'the grain people' (τῶν μετὰ σίτου, l.15), it is better to consider the *topos* here as the association of grain-shippers.¹⁴² In other words, like Graeco-Roman associations and trust networks the *ekklesia* could refer to itself by the same abstract concept. That said, by the end of the third century there is good evidence for the use of *ekklesia* for church buildings in Egypt.¹⁴³

¹³⁷Judge, 'The Puzzle of Christian Presence in Egypt Before Constantine', 146.

¹³⁸In the absence of nomina sacra and ἐν τῷ θεῷ with article, see Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 135. She argues that as the parties in the letter were known to each other there was no need for such Christian security signs.

¹³⁹Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 486. See also Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 133.

¹⁴⁰Cf. Lactantius *Mort.* 48.9, which reads: 'since the same Christians are known to have had not only those places (*ea loca*, Eusebius, *HE* 10.5, reads ἐκείνους . . . τόπους) where they were accustomed to meet but also other places (Lactantius lacks *loca*, Eusebius adds τόπους) by right of their corporate identity as churches (*ecclesiarum*, Eusebius χριστιανῶν), not individuals . . .'

¹⁴¹Cf. Ewa Wipszycka, *Les ressources et les activités économiques des églises en Égypte du IV^e au VIII^e siècle*, Pap. Brux. 10 (Brüssel: Fondation égyptologique Reine Elisabeth, 1972), 13: 'En outre, beaucoup de documents grecs et coptes emploient le mot *topos* qui peut signifier tout aussi bien église que monastère'. But as is previously noted with regard to the use of a personal name for a church or monastery, context, esp. shared knowledge and Sitz im Leben, is required here to disambiguate the term.

¹⁴²On the use of *topos* in relation to associations, see Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations III*, 419–21 and 613. See also Judge, 'The Puzzle of Christian Presence in Egypt Before Constantine', 146. See further Mario Naldini, *Il cristianesimo in Egitto. Lettere private nei papiri dei secoli II–IV* (Le Monnier: Florence, 1968), 425–6, who states: 'Che il problema non sia semplice, lo dimostra la discussione concentrata appunto sul termine τόπος'. For Naldini the interpretation of the term as a Christian reference is somewhat circular as it has relied on the evidence of *P.Oxy* 1492.

¹⁴³*P.Oxy.* 43, col. V (16 February 295 CE) attests two streets apparently named after the church building (*ekklesia*) that stood on it. So Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 409–10. See also Judge and Pickering, 'Papyrus documentation . . .', 60–1. *SB* 8.9902 (Panopolis, 298–341) speaks of 'house or (of) *ekklesia*'. Judge and Pickering, 'Papyrus documentation . . .', 61 suggest it is a tax-register recording 'a house that belonged in some way to a church'.

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