Demotic Ostraca from Elephantine*

By FRIEDHELM HOFFMANN

General

During the excavations of the German and Swiss Archaeological Institutes in Elephantine, about 850 Demotic ostraca were unearthed[1]. 200 of them are tiny fragments, which do not deserve full publication and which I will not consider further in my present article. In addition to the 650 ostraca that will be published in full by KARL-THEODOR ZAUZICH and myself, we know of more than 550 Demotic Elephantine ostraca housed in different museums all over the world, including Berlin[2]. The 650 or so better preserved ostraca from the German and Swiss excavations are distributed as follows:

	Early	Ptol.	Ptol./Rom.	Rom.
I. objectively-structured documentary texts				
1. receipts with 'Has brought'		60		
2. other receipts		14	3	10
3. accounts	1	55	108	78
4. lists		17	51	37
5. other			1	
II. subjectively-structured documentary texts				
1. letters and declarations		1	13	22
2. orders		6	2	1
3. religious	1	2	5	8
4. others	1	3	4	6
III. non-documentary texts				
1. astronomical/astrological				6
2. onomastica		1	1	
3. religious		1	2	6
4. others		1		1
IV. school texts/exercises				
1. legal formulae		1		
2. writing exercises	1	1	2	5
3. text in foreign language	1			
V. unclear texts	3	14	42	42
VI. texts on pots	2	5		

Pre-Ptolemaic Ostraca

The almost complete lack of pre-Ptolemaic ostraca is in contrast with the ample papyrus finds of Persian times. This does not necessarily mean that there are early ostraca that have not yet been excavated. For, generally speaking, early Demotic ostraca are rare. For some reason, ostraca became uncommon after the New Kingdom.

Ptolemaic Ostraca

In the early Ptolemaic Period we are again flooded with ostraca. It is difficult, however, to follow this 'tide' of ostraca into the later Ptolemaic Period. The reason is the type of texts. For the securely-dated Ptolemaic ostraca are all tax receipts. On Elephantine, they start with "Has brought (ini)", which is then followed by the name of the tax payer, the tax, the scribe and the date – the latter unfortunately without the name of the king. It is a difficult task to sort

[1] F. HOFFMANN, Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 21./22. Grabungsbericht. XII. Zu den demotischen Ostraka, in: MDAIK 51, 1995, pp. 185–187; ID., Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 25./26./27. Grabungsbericht. XXII. Zu den demotischen Ostraka, in: MDAIK 55, 1999, pp. 224–226; ID., Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 33./34./35. Grabungsbericht. IX. Zu den demotischen Ostraka, in: MDAIK 64, 2008, pp. 131–136.

[2] Ostraca from Elephantine are published inter alia by D. DEVAUCHELLE, Ostraca démotiques du musée du Louvre I: Reçus, BdE 92, Le Caire 1983; G. MATTHA, Demotic Ostraca from the Collections at Oxford, Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Cairo. Introduction, Texts and Indexes, Publications de la Société Fouad I de Papyrologie. Textes et Documents 6, Cairo 1945; S. P. VLEEMING, Ostraka Varia. Tax Receipts and Legal Documents on Demotic, Greek, and Greek-Demotic Ostraka Chiefly of the Early Ptolemaic Period from Various Collections, Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 26, Leiden/New York/ Cologne 1994; S. V. WÅNGSTEDT, Ausgewählte demotische Ostraka aus der Sammlung des Victoria-Museums zu Uppsala und der Staatlichen Papyrussammlung zu Berlin, Uppsala 1954.

the tax receipts in such a way that a term of office, which is as coherent as possible, can be attributed to each scribe. There is also the possibility that there could be different scribes with the same name, which could lead to wrong conclusions. The phenomenon of papponymy, the naming of a child after his grandfather, also causes particular problems. Rarely attested scribes can remain dangling chronologically. But extremely prolific scribes, who were active during more than one reign, confront us with yet another problem: What about a year date that is numerically in the middle? Does it belong in the earlier or in the later king's reign?

Research on all these problems is still developing rapidly. It seems to be clear, however, that most of the Ptolemaic Elephantine tax receipts belong to the period of Ptolemy I to Ptolemy IV, that is 304–204 BC. I do not know of Demotic tax receipts coming from later Ptolemaic Elephantine. Since there can be no doubt that the state kept collecting taxes, we have to look into the Greek corpus for the later Ptolemaic tax receipts.

Unless there are dates given in the texts themselves or unless there is a stratified archaeological context, the only means of dating Demotic ostraca is palaeography. I will come back to the specific problems this causes after my survey of the types of texts. I will still continue with the Ptolemaic material.

Apart from some rarer types of receipts, which start with "Has received ($\check{s}sp$) NN", there are many accounts dealing with all sorts of things: grain, other food, oil, wine, tools, money, land, etc. Often the items are not stated, because the scribe knew what was meant. In these cases, only names and numbers are given.

An even larger group is that of ostraca with just personal names. If there is no heading, we cannot know the purpose of such a list.

All the texts mentioned so far belong to the category we call objectively-structured, i. e., they are not written in the first or second person. Typically, subjectively-structured texts such as letters, declarations or orders are rare, but even accounts turn up in which a first person is used.

Another group is the non-documentary ostraca, i. e., literary texts in the broadest sense of the term. There are very few texts that can be assigned to this category. These would include a fragmentary ostracon, which is possibly a wisdom text (Ω 269).

One should also mention school exercises and scribal-training texts, including an ostracon, which

bears a divorce text (Ω 1880). Instead of the personal names of a real divorce document, in our text 'NN' is written.

Late Ptolemaic/ Early Roman Ostraca

As I said before, most ostraca can only be dated palaeographically, which is not, of course, a very precise approach. Thus a large number of ostraca 'hang' chronologically somewhere between the Ptolemaic and the Roman Periods. There are no tax receipts among them. Accounts and lists of people, on the contrary, are very frequent. New and occurring exclusively during this late Ptolemaic to early Roman epoch are three ostraca that give only the name of one single person. Similar ostraca are known from Roman Soknopaiou Nesos. They may have been used for voting or drawing lots[3].

As far as subjectively-structured texts are concerned, the number of letters increases. The same holds true for literary ostraca and school texts. I would like to single out here a geographical onomasticon (Ω 2612).

Roman Ostraca

Turning now to the Roman Period, we are faced with a lot of material. The diversity of Ptolemaic tax receipts, however, has come to an end. Only poll tax ostraca that begin with "Has paid ($w\underline{t}$) NN" are met. Since with these not only the year but, unlike the Ptolemaic tax receipts, also the name of the ruler is given, we can date the Roman poll tax receipts precisely. One can observe that this group of texts starts at the beginning of Roman rule over Egypt and ends at about AD 60. After that date, to the best of my knowledge, only Greek poll tax receipts occur. Anyhow, there a r e Demotic tax receipts from after the interruption during the second half of the Ptolemaic Period.

Accounts and lists of people are well attested in Roman times, as are subjectively-structured texts. It is remarkable that their number increases significantly.

Real highlights are, finally, astronomical and astrological texts, like horoscopes or like a table giving

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3 S. L. Lippert/M. Schentuleit, *Ostraka, Demotische Dokumente aus Dime* I, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 4 and 71ff.

the entry dates of the planets Venus and Mercury into the signs of the Zodiac (Ω 1031).

There are also several religious texts. In some of these, the Demotic script is mixed up with Hieratic or with Hieroglyphs. Finally, the existence of Demotic Roman Period school texts on ostraca should be mentioned, for example, a conjugation exercise (Ω 4090).

At the end of my chronological survey, I should add that the latest explicitly dated Demotic ostraca from Elephantine come from the time of Commodus who reigned AD 180–192. It is interesting to compare the situation on Elephantine with that in the rest of the First Cataract region: the latest dated Egyptian text comes from Philae and is a Demotic graffito from December AD 452[4]. On Elephantine, Demotic seems to have come to an end much earlier.

Palaeographical Variety

One further point of interest should be mentioned. The variety of hands – I mean in a palaeographical sense – on Elephantine is surprisingly large. Unlike the situation, e. g., in Soknopaiou Nesos, a typical Elephantine handwriting does not exist.

Demotic develops very much in the course of time. This development even involves the standard form of the signs and the spellings of words. Also characteristic is the replacement of the old rush by the Greek style *calamus* for writing Demotic in the Roman Period. The use of the *calamus* results in an even thickness of all strokes.

Furthermore, one finds a lot of simultaneous but different handwritings. This phenomenon is particularly marked in the Roman material.

Onomastics

Turning now to Demotic ostraca as a whole, what can be learned from them about the First Cataract region? First of all, they are a rich source of onomastic material. To be sure, personal names with Khnum

abound. But it is strange to find only very few attestations of Anuket- and Satet-names. Other theophorous names, in particular those containing Osiris, Isis or Horus, could suggest some connection with Philae or Bigge. But they are, of course, also very well attested throughout the rest of Egypt. This is also true for names with Thoth and Amun. Astonishing is the occurrence of personal names with Month, a typically Theban god, and Mnevis, the sacred bull of Heliopolis. But of course, the material is not sufficient enough for us to study the possible inland migration of people.

As well as the Egyptian names, there are many Greek ones, written in Demotic side by side with Egyptian names in the same documents. This shows that many people of Greek descent were subject to the same administrative regime as the Egyptian population. But as far as I can see, persons with Greek names are not found as writers of Demotic tax receipts, as priests or as writers or addressees of Demotic letters[5]. Thus, these people do not use Demotic themselves. Rather, Egyptians write about them in Demotic.

The separation of Greek and Demotic is also reflected in the fact that only very few Demotic ostraca bear additional Greek notes or vice versa. Only 17, that is 2.6 % of our material (about 650 ostraca), are bilingual. But the Greek and the Demotic texts are never identical. Normally just notes were a d d e d in the other language, either for filing purposes or because of some other administration requirement.

Finally, we do find some Semitic names in the Ptolemaic Period. These probably belong to members of the Jewish community of Elephantine.

Female names are generally less common than male names. There are several reasons for this: although women had to pay taxes during the Ptolemaic Period, sometimes the husband, who also had to pay for himself, delivered the money. The fact that the sum also includes the wife's portion could be expressed by simply adding 'and his wife' – her name not being given – to the mention of the husband. In the numerous Ptolemaic and Roman accounts, women appear less often, obviously because they were less involved in business life.

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4 Graffito Philae 365 (F. LL. GRIFFITH [ed.], *Les temples immergés de la Nubie. Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus*, 2 vols., Oxford 1935 and 1937, pp. 102 f. and Pl. 54); cf. F. HOFFMANN, *Ägypten. Kultur und Lebenswelt in griechisch-römischer Zeit. Eine Darstellung nach den demotischen Quellen*, Studienbücher Geschichte und Kultur der Alten Welt, Berlin 2000,

p. 242 for the date and J. H. F. DIJKSTRA, *Philae and the end of ancient Egyptian religion. A regional study of religious transformation (298–642 CE)*, OLA 173, Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA 2008, pp. 197–201 for a detailed study.

5 Ω 1446 (Ptol., scribe *ptrwmys?*, "Ptolemaios[?]") could be an exception to this rule.

Toponyms

Much more rarely attested than personal names are toponyms. The names that occur, however, confirm our impression that the Demotic ostraca refer to local matters. The toponyms we find are mostly restricted to the area of the First Cataract, for example, Elephantine, Bigge, Philae, Syene or Sehel. Especially remarkable is a Roman ostracon, in which a *pr-šw* "House of (the god) Shu"[6] is mentioned (Ω 4018+4023):

(1) Pakhnum, son of Patineferhetep, son of Paheter, (and) (2) Pakhnum, son of Horpaiset, the priests who enter (3) Per-Shu, (are those) who say to Wennefer, son of (4) Pakhnum, son of Wennefer, the prophet of Khnum (5) of(?) Elephantine(?): 'Give the number!'

(6) Year(?) 20(?), month(?) 3(?) [...]

The context shows that people of Elephantine were possibly involved with a cult of Shu and that some connection with the cult of Khnum existed. Although this is limited information, the ostracon is welcome as it adds a bit of evidence to the so far very meagre material about the relationship of Khnum and Shu on Elephantine.

Gods, Cults and Priests

This brings us – or rather has already brought us – to the gods and goddesses mentioned in the Demotic ostraca from Elephantine and their cults. I mean those deities whose names are not part of personal names, but who are referred to as gods proper. Most of them are unsurprisingly characteristic for Elephantine or the region of the First Cataract, for example, Khnum, Satet, Anuket. Others are universal Egyptian gods like Osiris, Isis, Horus, Nun, Geb, Phre – i. e., Re – Hapi, Thoth and Imhotep. Peculiar is Osiris-Espmetis who is already known as an oracular child god in the famous pDodgson[7]. Osiris-Espmetis is a divinized person named Espmetis who after his death became – of course – Osiris-Espmetis[8]. Another local god seems to be Harbekis. He could also be a deified individual or a special form of the falcon god Horus, Harbekis being "Horus (the) falcon". Arsinoe in one Ptolemaic ostracon (Ω 1664), finally, is Arsinoe II, the deified wife of Ptolemy II. Really astonishing is the mention of a prophet of Amun in a Roman list (Ω 37). As far as I can see, attestations of a cult of Amun on Elephantine are extremely uncommon[9].

The Demotic ostraca can tell us more, of course, about the organization of the cult of those deities who play the more important roles on Elephantine. But there is a bias: we have many papyri dealing with the administration in Persian and early Ptolemaic times[10]. But later, texts of this kind are exclusively found on ostraca. Obviously papyrus was felt to be too expensive for the internal temple administration. And while documents sent to the government were written on papyrus, they were in Greek not Demotic.

An important group of Demotic texts, which shed some light on the cults of gods, is lists of services. A heading like *ꜥlt mḥ-2.t*, "(The) second service" (Ω 86) is followed by a list of people. Sometimes their occupation is given, like "chief singer" and "trumpeter" (Ω 86). I suppose that the services were organized on a day-to-day basis, since other lists show a day-by-day pattern.

As far as the rites performed are concerned, we do not learn very much from the ostraca. Well, it is not difficult to imagine what a singer and a trumpeter did, and the cult texts written in Demotic I mentioned earlier were probably used for performances in the temple. Apart from these glimpses, however, the Demotic ostraca shed light on only one aspect of the rites. This is the making of illuminations for many gods and goddesses like Satet, Khnum, Hapi and Osiris-Espmetis[11]. Once it is also mentioned explicitly

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6 Or could it be perhaps a miswriting for *pr-iw-wꜥb* "Abaton, Bigge"?

7 C. J. MARTIN, *The Demotic Texts*, in: B. PORTEN ET AL. (eds.), *The Elephantine Papyri in English. Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change, Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui. Studies in Near Eastern Archaeology and Civilisation* 22, Leiden/New York/Cologne 1996, pp. 339–345.

8 I would like to stress that the connection of Osiris and Espmetis, the latter meaning literally "belonging to the (divine) staff", is due to the normal Egyptian practice of calling a dead person Osiris NN and has nothing to do at all with a theological connection between Osiris and the divine staff of Khnum, as it was proposed recently by E. LASKOWSKA-KUSZTAL, *Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 31./32. Grabungsbericht. X. Osiris-Nesmeti – Child from Elephantine*, in: *MDAIK* 61, 2005, pp. 75–82. See now

F. HOFFMANN, *Die Datierung des Ostrakon Brooklyn 12768.1630 und der Kult des Osiris-Espmetis auf Elephantine in römischer Zeit*, in: D. KESSLER ET AL. (eds.), *Texte – Theben – Tonfragmente, Festschrift für Günter Burkard*, ÄUAT 76, Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 206–213.

9 E. OTTO, *Amun*, in: *LÄ* I, col. 240 with note 18; cf. H. JUNKER, *Der große Pylon des Tempels der Isis in Philä*, DÖAW Sonderband 1, Wien 1958, Fig. 76.

10 A good overview in C. J. MARTIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 277–385. Only four of the 37 papyri presented by MARTIN can be dated after 200 BC.

11 F. HOFFMANN, *Die Datierung des Ostrakon Brooklyn 12768.1630 und der Kult des Osiris-Espmetis auf Elephantine in römischer Zeit*, in: D. KESSLER ET AL. (eds.), *Texte – Theben – Tonfragmente, Festschrift für Günter Burkard*, ÄUAT 76, Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 206–213.

for the dromos of the Satet temple. It must have been a quite important and frequently performed rite.

I would like to single out here also one document dated to 6 August AD 106 (Ω 3212A):

(1) Pahemnetjerhapi, son of Pakhnum(?), <son> of Wennefer, [
(2) – ... (is) the one, who says to Nefershai(?) [
(3) – 'I am full(y paid) for the light<ing>(?) for Khnum(?) [
(4) by your (fem.) month 3 of the inundation season.'

Written (in) year 9 of (5) Trajan Caesar Augustus (6) month 4 of the summer, day 13.

The document concerns the exchange of temple services: Pahemnetjerhapi ($p3$-hm-ntr-h^cpy) declares to the woman Nefershai(?) (nfr-$š^cy?$) that he has been paid with a month of temple service and the income connected with it for making lighting. Obviously the woman owned times of temple service and the duty of making lighting. Pahemnetjerhapi fulfils the latter and is paid for it by the former.

Another very interesting piece among the letters is a Roman fragment (Ω 3228). In this letter, somebody tells his father about an eclipse. I suspect that these people belong to the priesthood. Who else wrote Demotic at this time and was engaged in astronomy?

Titles and Professions

Finally, we should see what titles can reveal about the First Cataract region. The following titles are known to me from Elephantine ostraca:

Great One of the Priest(s) (3-n-w^cb, Rom.)
Great One of the Phyle (3-n-$s3$, Rom.)
Chief Prophet (mr-hm-$ntr.w$, Rom.)
Prophet (hm-ntr, Ptol./Rom.)
God's Father(?) (it-$ntr?$, Rom.)
Hourpriest (imy-$wnw.t$, late Ptol./Rom.)
Priest (w^cb, Ptol./Rom.)
Master of Clothing(?) (hry-mnh, late Ptol./Rom.)

Scribe of the House of Life (sh pr-^cnh, late Ptol./Rom.)

Scribe of the God's Book (sh $md3.t$-ntr, Rom.)
Scribe and Lecture Priest (sh hry-tb, Rom.)

Chief Singer (mr-hs, Rom.)
Trumpeter ($t3i$-$šnb$ = dd-$šnb$, Rom.)

Lesonis (mr-$šni$, late Ptol./Rom.)
Overseer of the Necropolis (mr-$h3s.t$, Ptol.)

Pastophoros ($^cwn'^{12}$, Ptol./Rom.)

Oikonomos ($3knwms$, Ptol.)

King's Scribe(?) ($sh?$ pr-$^c3$, Ptol.)
Village Scribe (sh $m3^c$, late Ptol./Rom.)
Scribe ... of Fields (sh ... n $3h.w$, ?)

Great One of Ten ($^c3$-n-10, Ptol.?)

Chief Baker (^cmr $^c3$, late Ptol./Rom.)
Baker (^cmr, late Ptol./Rom.)
Fisherman (whe, late Ptol./Rom.)

Agent (rd, late Ptol./Rom.)

Primarily, these are titles of people who belonged to the temples, like the different priests or the singer and trumpeter. One must not, by the way, forget that sometimes one and the same person bore several titles.

The state and public administration are nearly always absent from our ostraca. Only in some Ptolemaic texts we can detect some relevant titles. Thus the tendency that the Demotic ostraca from Elephantine became more and more restricted to temple affairs is evident once more. At the same time their reference is very local. One does not get the faintest idea about larger overall connections. The one single mention of a "ship of the people of Akhmim" is nice, but not more than a trifle[13].

Strangely enough, the fact that Elephantine is located at the traditional southern border of Egypt is not reflected in the Demotic ostraca[14]. There is no text that can be connected to the Egyptian relations with the Nubians and no text concerning the long distance trade that may have existed even with inner Africa. Only one single text could possibly belong here,

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12 In fact the title is to be read iry-$^c3$; cf. F. HOFFMANN/J. F. QUACK, in a forthcoming Festschrift.
13 ODL 367 (provenance not certain!), U. KAPLONY-HECKEL (ed.), *Aus dem Hafen-Amt am Ersten Katarakt (Drei demotische Ostraka in München und Paris)*, in: D. KESSLER/R. SCHULZ (eds.), *Gedenkschrift für Winfried Barta. htp dj n hzj, Münchener Ägypto-*

logische Untersuchungen 4, Frankfurt a. M. 1995, pp. 215–228, esp. pp. 218 f.
14 Perhaps the ostraca edited by KAPLONY-HECKEL, *op. cit.* belong here. One should note, however, that the provenance of these ostraca is not certain (p. 215).

a pre-Ptolemaic ostracon (Ω 2519), which bears a text in an obviously foreign language but which is written in a syllabic Demotic script[15]. Any suggestions which language it could be are very welcome.

There is still one last point I would like to address. Although many of the Demotic ostraca were found during scientific excavations, even the majority of these are not stratified. Since most of them are not precisely dated, the ostraca are of little help for the excavators who want to date their strata. Nevertheless I could identify and date the early Ptolemaic house of *ḥr-pꜣ-is.t*, son of *pꜣ-wpt*[16].

By the way, it is remarkable that *ḥr-pꜣ-is.t* kept some ostraca with tax receipts, which he had written for others, at home. Were these receipts written in advance or was *ḥr-pꜣ-is.t* so trustworthy that people paid their taxes to him and asked him also to file the receipts? We will probably never know.

Concluding Remarks and Questions

I would like to conclude by summing up what we can say about the Demotic ostraca from Elephantine. They add a lot of facets to the picture of daily life in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods. They tell us mostly about private business matters, about taxes, about titles and the everyday organization of the temples. We learn about personal names and geographical terms – normally all restricted to Elephantine and its immediate vicinity within the First Cataract region.

The large number of ostraca, however, allows for some overall investigations for example concerning the development of the capitation taxes:

Ptol. I/II until 264 BC	Ptol. II/III/IV since 264 BC	Ptol. Vff.	Early Rom.	Late First Century
Demotic:				
yoke tax	salt tax	–	poll tax	–
Greek:				
–	salt tax	salt tax (not frequent, from Syene)	poll tax	poll tax (still Second Century)

As B. Muhs has shown, the system of capitation taxes was reformed in 264/3 BC[17]. One can also see that from Ptolemy V and from the late First Century AD onwards there are no Demotic receipts, only Greek ones. Since these occur at nearly all times and even side by side with the Demotic ostraca, it is perhaps wrong to ask why Demotic poll tax receipts sometimes were not common. Possibly one should rather ask why they were written in some epochs. One should note that Demotic tax receipts occur only in the early phases of foreign rules. Does this mean that the use of Demotic for matters of the state administration reflects the hope of the new overlords that the Egyptians would better cooperate if they were allowed to use their own script?

Apart from raising this question, I would like to note the following changes in our material:

	Ptolemaic	Roman
accounts		
on papyrus	+	-
on ostraca	+	+
letters		
on papyrus	+	-
on ostraca	+	+

I do not yet know how to interpret these data. Is the lack of papyrus in the Roman Period a sign of impoverishment? Or do we have to understand that the use of Demotic was completely abandoned in public life and reduced exclusively to informal written communications in the private and internal temple sphere? These texts were always written on ostraca. In contact with state authorities, Demotic was definitely replaced by Greek and by documents written on papyrus. I am very curious, indeed, to learn whether the examination of the Greek ostraca and papyri from Elephantine can answer the issues I raised.

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15 Cf. F. Hoffmann, *Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 25./26./27. Grabungsbericht. XXII. Zu den demotischen Ostraka*, in: *MDAIK* 55, 1999, p. 226.

16 F. Hoffmann, *Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 21./22. Grabungsbericht. XII. Zu den demotischen Ostraka*, in: *MDAIK* 51, 1995, pp. 186f.

17 B. P. Muhs, *Tax Receipts, Taxpayers, and Taxes in Early Ptolemaic Thebes*, OIP 126, Chicago 2005, pp. 29ff.