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# The Rise and Development of the Office of *Agoranomos* in Greco-Roman Egypt

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## PART ONE: THE AGORANOMOI OF THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD<sup>53</sup>

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Arriving in Thessaly on business, Lucius, Apuleius' hero of the *Metamorphoses*, soon finds himself in Hypata and face-to-face with an overzealous magistrate.<sup>54</sup> A trip to the city's market culminates in a basket full of fresh fish and a pleased Lucius (thinking he has bargained cleverly with the fishmonger), until our protagonist crosses paths with his childhood friend Pythias, who proudly relates that he is now an aedile in charge of the marketplace. Ever the attentive magistrate, Pythias inquires about Lucius' catch and his response prompts the aedile to haul him before the fishmonger who is subsequently berated for charging such an outrageous price for his fish. To make a show of his authority, Pythias orders the destruction of Lucius' fish before the fishmonger, amusingly leaving his friend without his dinner and what he over-

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53 I wish to extend my thanks to the classics and history faculty at Hunter College for their invaluable comments and suggestions when I presented the oral version of this paper at Hunter. I owe the greatest thanks to Chelsea O'Shea for her unwavering support.

54 Citations of ancient authors follow the abbreviations of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th ed.). Papyri are cited per the *Checklist of Editions* and abbreviations of inscriptions follow those of "A Preliminary Checklist of Greek Epigraphic Volumes," *Epigraphica* 56 (1994, pp. 129-169).

paid for it.<sup>1</sup> While written in Latin, the novel is set in the Greek city of Thessaly, making our pompous aedile an *agoranomos* (ἀγορανόμος, “market controller”), a magistrate charged with diligently supervising the marketplace.

The *agora* was the heart of the Greek polis and in his *Politics*, Aristotle characterized the office of *agoranomos* as one of the most important in a city, writing that “the first of the necessary offices ... deals with the supervision of the market, where there must be some office to supervise contracts and maintain good order.”<sup>2</sup> The presence and importance of this office in Greek *poleis* is well attested in literary sources and inscriptions throughout the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods. But while the *agoranomoi* of Greco-Roman Egypt are likewise well attested, a recent volume on the officials and their Roman counterparts, the aediles, failed to consider them.<sup>3</sup> I argue in this paper that the office in Egypt should be understood in relation to wider developments in the Greco-Roman world.

In the Greek world, *agoranomoi* were tasked with market inspection, price control, superintending weights and measures, and seeing to the overall good order of the *agora*.<sup>4</sup> In comparison, in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the *agoranomoi* appear in the documentation most dominantly as public notaries. Roman rule brought changes to the nature of the office and such changes correspond with those inflicted on the office in the wider Greco-Roman world. To trace the connections between these developments, it is necessary to trace the office back to its Greek origins.

## 1.2 THE CLASSICAL AGORANOMOS

*Agoranomoi* appeared frequently in Greek literature. The earliest attestations of the official in Athens are found in Aristophanes’ *Wasps* and *Acharnians*. In *Wasps*, Philocleon is threatened with the *agoranomoi* after offending a baker and in *Acharnians*, three men are appointed by lot as market controllers to keep away those Dicaeopolis deemed worthy of being barred from the marketplace. These *agoranomoi* are soon after called upon to settle a dispute.<sup>5</sup> The fragmentary *Phaedo* of the Middle Comedy poet Alexis contains a dialogue in which one character hopes the other will become an *agoranomos* so that he may put an end to Callimedon’s reign of terror upon the fish market, to which the latter replies, “You’re describing a task for tyrants, not

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1 Apul. *Met.* 1.24-25.

2 Arist. *Pol.* 6.8.3.

3 Capdetrey and Hasenohr (2012).

4 Arist. *Pol.* 6.8.3; Pl. *Leg.* 6.764b, 8.849, 11.917 and 12.953; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 51.1; Theophr. *Laws*. XXIII.

5 Ar. *Vesp.* 1408; Ar. *Ach.* 723-724; Ar. *Ach.* 824-825.

*agoranomoi*,” as the politician’s taste for fish is not in fact breaking any laws.<sup>6</sup> What is clear from these literary sources, however, is the recognized importance and authority of the *agoranomos* and how this importance and authority was perceived: Aristophanes’ characters immediately call on the authority and judgement of the *agoranomoi* to settle civil disputes. And while Alexis’ fragment shows how one overestimated the authority of these officials by assuming they can prohibit customers from purchasing too much fish (implying that the *agoranomoi* must act within the law and cannot punish illicitly at will), the character nonetheless harkens to the power of the *agoranomoi* to problem-solve.

From a theoretical prospective, philosophical sources from the classical period also allow us to examine the nature of the office. Plato’s ideal *agoranomos*, as recounted in his *Laws*, must physically punish misconduct in the *agora* (which includes whipping slaves or foreigners who bring damage upon the temples or fountains of the *agora*), supervise the orderliness of the marketplace, check on prices, keep a watchful eye out for fraud, and punish those found beating their parents.<sup>7</sup> These *agoranomoi* are to be chosen partly by lot and partly by election.<sup>8</sup> They are to draw up a list of rules indicating what sellers “ought to do or avoid doing, and shall post them up on a pillar in front of the steward’s office (= *agoranomeion*), to serve as written laws” after a violator has been beaten.<sup>9</sup> And in a fragment of Theophrastus’ *Laws*, the philosopher maintained that the *agoranomoi* were to see to the honesty of the buyers as well as the sellers.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond the realm of philosophy, the *Athenaion Politeia* reveals the Athenians elected ten *agoranomoi* by lot, divided equally among Athens and the Piraeus. These officials are charged with overseeing all merchandise to effectively prevent the sale of “adulterated and spurious articles.”<sup>11</sup> While the *agoranomoi* inspected the merchandise sold in the *agora*, the Athenian *agoranomoi* did not supervise the sale of grain—the *σιτοφύλακες* (*sitophylakes*, “grain-overseers”) saw to that.<sup>12</sup> In a large city like Athens, certain functions were allotted to other magistrates, such as the *metro-*

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6 Alexis Fr. 247; Trans. in Wilkins (2000, p. 173).

7 Pl. *Leg.* 6.764b; 8.849; II.917; 12.953.

8 Ibid. 759b.

9 Ibid. 917e.

10 Theophr. *Laws* XXIII.

11 Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 51.1.

12 Lys. 22.16.

*nomoi*, *astynomoi* or the *sitophylakes*, whereas in a smaller city, the *agoranomoi* might carry out all duties.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3 EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

The duties of these officials are better known to us from inscriptions.<sup>14</sup> These duties differed and depended on where the official was and when he was in office. The earliest inscription from Athens dates to the fourth century BCE.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the literary and philosophical sources, the epigraphic evidence present the names and actions of these officials who were praised with inscribed honorary decrees for maintaining the honesty and good order of the *agora*.

These honorary decrees provide a look into the duties of the *agoranomoi* as well as the importance of the office as these officials were deemed worthy of praise. Among the praise, we often see specific examples of duties carried out by these officials during their tenure in office. A decree from the second century BCE from Paros honors a certain Cillus for services rendered to the city, chiefly during his time as *agoranomos*:

... previously when he was *agoranomos* he discharged his office [well] ... he...made every effort to ensure that the people ... [were] supplied with bread and barley ... and as regards the wage laborers and their employers, he made sure that neither would be unfairly treated by compelling, in accordance with the laws, the laborers not to misbehave but to get down to work and the employers to pay their wages to the workers without having to be taken to court... *IG XII 5 129*<sup>16</sup>

Cillus is notably praised for successfully stepping in and resolving a conflict between employers and their employees, preventing the dispute from being taken to court. We are told he was thus gifted with a gold crown and honored with a marble statue (financed by his son) to be displayed in the *agoranomeion*. *IG II<sup>2</sup> 3493* (late 30s or ear-

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13 Capdetrey and Hasenohr (2012, p. 14).

14 Krenkel maintained that “in Athens, prostitutes were controlled by the clerk of the market, who fixed the fee that they could charge for a single visit” (1988, p. 1294). Bremen makes a similar claim: “the context of the *agoranomos*’ office was the market place and everything associated with it, prostitutes included” (1996, p. 56). This is challenged by Cohen with his claim that the Athenian state was not much interested in the pricing of such services (2015, p. 157).

15 *IG II<sup>2</sup> 380, 320/19* BCE.

16 Trans. Van Nijf and Meijer (2014, p. 60).

ly 208 BCE) is likewise a similar inscription from Athens in which the *agoranomos* Pammenes is honored by the city's merchants with a statue.<sup>17</sup>

Inscriptions likewise reveal the functions granted to these officials by law. *IGSK* 1 15 is an inscription from the fourth century BCE from Chios which mandates that anyone caught selling wool from one year old sheep are to be fined by the *agoranomos* a sum of two drachmas a day, revealing that the officials had the power to insure market goods were acceptable for purchase and to penalize when they were not.<sup>18</sup> An inscription from Thasos, likewise from the fourth century BCE, records a law regulating the conditions one must meet in order to lease public property, in this case, a garden of Herakles.<sup>19</sup> The responsibility of keeping the garden clean is placed on the lessees. Failing to do so is said to result in the lessee owing a sixth of a stater to the *agoranomos* and the priest of Asklepios for each day the garden is not clean. Another law from Thasos (ca. 350 BCE), concerned with honors awarded to fallen soldiers, maintains that the *agoranomos* in office must not neglect anything on the day of a soldier's funeral.<sup>20</sup> This law adds to the *agoranomos*' involvement in the city's affairs as he is able to move beyond supervising the marketplace by being trusted with some sort of involvement in these important public funerals meant to honor the city's dead. From Delos, we have a law (ca. 250-200 BCE) meant to regulate wood and charcoal trade: one may not disregard weights and measures nor sell any more or less than what was initially declared. The *agoranomoi* were tasked with registering complaints if there were suspicions that one violated the law. Within a month of the initial accusation, the *agoranomoi* were to take the accused before the court of the Thirty-One. In the event of a conviction, the *agoranomoi* had the power to pass the sentence within ten days and the accused were obligated to pay a fine of fifty drachmas.<sup>21</sup>

From such inscriptions, we learn of the roles filled by certain *agoranomoi* in Greece, such as maintaining the soundness of purchasable merchandise and resolving civil disputes (as we have seen above with Aristophanes' *Wasps* and *Acharnians*). Likewise, we see the power to penalize offenders allotted to them: the *agoranomoi* in Delos had the power to punish those who sold more or less than initially declared by hauling them to court and even passing their sentence, bringing to the *agoranomoi*

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17 Trans. Schmalz (2009, p. 297).

18 Trans. Van Nijf and Meijer (2014, p. 104).

19 *IG XII* 8 265; Trans. Arnaoutoglou (2008, p. 55).

20 *LSCG* Suppl. 64; Trans. Arnaoutoglou (2008, pp. 94-95).

21 *ID* 509; Trans. Arnaoutoglou (2008, pp. 42-43).

certain judicial powers. Notably, we learn of the power possessed by these officials and the importance attached to the office in maintaining not just the good order of the *agora*, but relations between citizens as well, as evidenced by Cillus' actions.

#### 1.4 THE AGORANOMOI IN ASIA MINOR

In Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor, we see a similar story. Take for example the Greek city Smyrna. The *agoranomoi* here are known to us primarily from inscriptions and inscribed weights found in the *agora*, the earliest dating to the fourth century BCE. The office was a liturgy, a public service rendered to the state by its wealthiest inhabitants, and as such, one could serve more than once.<sup>22</sup> These *agoranomoi* also held other positions, with the career of a certain Claudius Paulinus well attested.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, an anonymous patron from Aphrodisias is said to have held the positions of *gymnasiarch*, *stephanephoros* and the priesthood of Rome, in addition to that of *agoranomos*.<sup>24</sup>

The duties of the *agoranomoi* in Asia Minor correspond to those of the *agoranomoi* in Greece, though we see the former also fulfilling other functions within the bounds of their office. An inscription from the late third to early second century BCE from Ilion honors an *agoranomos* from Parion for his actions during the Panathenaia—actions that consequently earned praise for all the people of Parion as he had:

...honorably] and justly performed his duties as *agoranomos*...and has managed the supply [of corn, so that] the residents could buy it [as cheaply as possible], and has taken [every] care of the other merchandise, and [has provided] a doctor to treat those who fell ill at the festival; [therefore since] it is fitting [to commemorate] noble men with decrees, it is resolved by the councilors [to praise] the people of Parion...

SIG 596 = IMT Skam/NebTaeler 191

This *agoranomos* moves past offering cheap grain and further involves himself with the festival by providing a doctor to tend to unwell attendees, indicating a degree of wealth that is needed to arrange for a doctor to drop by. We also see the personal

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22 Dmitriev (2005, p. 257).

23 *I Smyrna* 644 (Hadrian's reign or later).

24 *I Aphr* 30 12.701.

attention given by the *agoranomos* to the smooth operation of the festival beyond the sale of merchandise.

The *agoranomoi* of Phrygia also collected revenues from taxes on document registrations, sales, fines, and tax farming. These revenues were sent to the royal treasury of the Attalids until Eumenes II declared in the second century BCE that the revenues from Tyriaion's *agoranameion* were to temporarily be used for purchasing oil.<sup>25</sup>

## 1.5 ROMAN PALESTINE AND RABBINIC LITERATURE

In Roman Palestine, the evidence differs from what we have seen thus far as the Rabbinic literature offer a non-Greek perspective on the official and recount the rather menacing character of certain *agoranomoi*, something that is lacking in the evidence from other Greek cities in which we only have honorary decrees. The *agoranomoi* here provide a similar picture regarding the duties saw to by the official. The *agoranomoi* supervised weights and measures, set prices, and maintained the orderliness of the *agora* just as their counterparts elsewhere in the Greek world. But while Apuleius characterizes his *agoranomos* as one who is eager to assert his authority and aid his friends with the power granted him via his position, the Rabbinic literature demonstrate the possibility of corrupt market controllers. The *agoranomoi* here wielded the power to beat those who attempted to escape inspection and might have been corrupt, therefore scaring shopkeepers into closing their shops to evade inspection of their measures, even if they were sound.<sup>26</sup> From the Rabbinic evidence we see that the *agoranomoi* here were no less instrumental to their city than their counterparts elsewhere. The *Leviticus Rabba* reads: "It is like unto a king who entered into a city. With whom does he speak first? Is it not with the city-*agronomon*? Why? Because he is engaged with the provisioning of the city."<sup>27</sup>

## 1.6 SOCIAL STANDING AND EUERGETISM

Duties aside, who were these officials in the Greek world? From inscriptions that attest to euergetism, it appears that most of the *agoranomoi* in Greek cities from the Hellenistic period hailed from wealthy families — landowners or traders, for in-

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25 *I Sultan Dağı*, 393; Trans. Jonnes and Riel (1997, p. 24).

26 Sperber (1977, pp. 229–231).

27 *Leviticus Rabba* 1.8; Sperber (1997, p. 239).



stance — but it is difficult to ascertain if this was universal among all *agoranomoi*, as Migeotte has suggested, if we have the honors of one *agoranomos* and nothing from others serving alongside the honorand.<sup>28</sup> Be that as it may, these honorific decrees that point to the personal wealth of certain *agoranomoi* serve as indicators of the social standing of at least some of these officials.

An inscription from Aphrodisias, referred to above (dated to the late Republic by the editor), mentions an anonymous patron who “having been *agoranomos* at a time of most serious famine...provided corn at a fair price at his own expense.”<sup>29</sup> Another such inscription found on a mosaic in the Roman colony of Patras speaks of “Neikostratos, *oikonomos* of the colony, twice the president of the games, having generously served as *agoranomos*... having laid the mosaic...of good cheer...”<sup>30</sup> This former *agoranomos* is said to have held the position of president of the games, a position that required a considerable degree of wealth.<sup>31</sup> A second century CE inscription from Chersonesos reads: “...Theagenes son of Diogenes, *agoranomos*, from his own resources built an *opsopolis* while Dio... son of Philadelphos was priest.”<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the *agoranomos* Aristagoras financed the construction of an *agoranomeion* in Istros.<sup>33</sup> The *agoranomoi* of Asia Minor committed their own funds to keep oil and grain prices low and an inscription from Roman Palmyra (266/7 CE) honors Septimius Worod for his time as a priest of Bel: “...who brilliantly served as *strategos* and as *agoranomos* of the same *metrokoloneia*, who spent great sums from his own personal fortune...”<sup>34</sup> These inscriptions that demonstrate the euergetism practiced by some *agoranomoi* in their respective cities point to the high social position of at least some of these officials.

## 1.7 CHANGES IN THE HELLENISTIC AND IMPERIAL PERIODS

The office was eventually subject to change and it is beneficial to once more look to Athens. Directly after laying down the duties of the *agoranomoi*, the *Athenaion*

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28 Migeotte (2005).

29 *I Aph* 30 12.701.

30 *SEG* 45 418.

31 Rizakis : “agonthètes et muneralii font partie de la tranche la plus riche de la société locale car ils sont appelés à faire des dépenses très élevées pour les jeux et les concours de la cité.” (1998, p. 30).

32 *VDI* 1947.2 245 = *NEPKh* II 129; Bekker-Nielsen (2007, p. 125).

33 *Dittenberger* 708; Trans. Hands (1969, pp. 180-181).

34 Po288.

*Politeia* mentions another official, the μετρονόμοι.<sup>35</sup> These “controllers of measures” were likewise chosen by lot (five for Athens and five for the Piraeus) and were tasked with superintending weights and measures. However, by the end of the first century BCE, we see the *agoranomoi* concerned with this task.<sup>36</sup> An inscription found in the Acropolis on a fragmentary stone dated to the imperial period (between the first to second century CE) shows an *agoranomos* had set up a balance and measures.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the *metronomoi* eventually vanish from the documentation.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly enough, another inscription attributes this function to the ἀστυνόμοι (city magistrates) rather than the *agoranomoi* or *metronomoi*.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the aforementioned inscription that attests to an *agoranomos* setting up a balance and measures implies that the Athenian *agoranomoi* were concerned with supervising weights and measures at least by the first to second century CE.<sup>40</sup>

Along with the expansion of the official’s duties, we see a decrease in the number of annual *agoranomoi* in Athens in the Hellenistic period.<sup>41</sup> By the early imperial period, it appears as if only two *agoranomoi* are in office, as a dedication in the *agora* to one of the two serving *agoranomoi* indicates:

Julia the divine Augusta Pronoia | The Council of the Areopagus and the Council of 600 and the People, from his private funds, Dionysios son of Aulus of Marathon set (this) up, while himself Dionysios of Marathon and Quintus Naevius Rufus of Melite were serving as *agoranomoi*.

*IG* II2 3238<sup>42</sup>

We see a shift from ten *agoranomoi* in the fourth century as recounted by the *Athenaion Politeia* to a significantly reduced number of two in the early imperial period. Oliver interprets these pairs of *agoranomoi* as suggesting that by the early imperial period, the position began to resemble that of the Roman aediles, who had similar

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35 Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 51.2.

36 *SEG* 47 196A and B.

37 *IG* II2 2886; Oliver (2012, p. 94).

38 Oliver (2012, p. 85).

39 *IG* II2 3939 and 2878. The suggested dates for this inscription are the late first century BCE or the early first century CE. Oliver considers the implications of the later date in regard to *SEG* 47 196 (late first century BCE): did the *astynomoi* temporarily take up the reigns? Were the *agoranomoi* not completely controlling weights and measures yet? (2012, p. 86).

40 Oliver (2012, p. 87).

41 *Ibid.* (p. 89).

42 Early imperial period, after 29 CE.

duties. This resemblance to the Roman aediles is noted by the Greek historian and rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the late first century BCE:

... [the plebeians] asked...that the senate should allow them to appoint every year two plebeians... to have the oversight of public places...and to see that the market was supplied with plenty of provisions... they are called in their own language...overseers of sacred places or aediles, and ...affairs of great importance are entrusted to them, and in most respects they resemble more or less the *agoranomoi* or “market-overseers” among the Greek.

Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.90.2-3

However, it remains unclear whether these pairs of *agoranomoi* were a product of Roman influence or if we are merely dealing with a case of equivalency, as both the Greeks and the Romans possessed an official with similar functions to the other. The fact that we see this change in the imperial period perhaps implies the possibility of Roman influence, but the evidence to support this theory begins and ends here.

The Hellenistic period also sees a shift in the mode of selection for the *agoranomoi* with the position eventually turning into a liturgy.<sup>43</sup> As revealed by the *Athenaion Politeia*, the *agoranomoi* were originally chosen by lot. This is reiterated by Aristophanes’ *Wasps* and by the Athenian orator Demosthenes who detailed that no fit punishment exists for those who demand “a tenfold restitution” when “... poor, unskilled [men], without experience, and appointed to [their] office by lot” — with the *agoranomoi* named among them—have been found guilty of embezzlement.<sup>44</sup> But by the third century BCE selection for this office was no longer random; rather, interested men could put their names forward for possible selection.<sup>45</sup> This development can be seen in inscription from Istros (before 100 BCE) which honors the *agoranomos* Aristagoras who is said to have been re-elected by the people twice more, earning him “equal distinction.”<sup>46</sup>

From an inscription dated to the third century BCE we see the financial strain such a position could inflict: an *agoranomos* from Erythrae found himself unable to afford to carry out his duty of crowning the statue of Philitos during religious festivals and needed to be funded for the task.<sup>47</sup> The *agoranomos* was thus sanctioned to

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43 Migeotte (2005, p. 294); Oliver (2012, p. 88).

44 Dem. 24.112.

45 Oliver (2012, p. 89).

46 Dittenberger 708.

47 *I Erythrai* 503.

levy the crown's price on the taxes. The office became increasingly expensive to hold and the position eventually evolved into "une forme d'évergétisme agoranomique institutionnalisé qui prit progressivement la forme d'une liturgie."<sup>48</sup> Rather than "poor, unskilled [men]", the city's wealthy elite held this position and utilized their wealth to carry out their duties, as demonstrated by the honorary decrees discussed above.

## PART TWO: THE AGORANOMOI OF PTOLEMAIC AND ROMAN EGYPT

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Compared to its counterparts elsewhere in the Greek world, the office of *agoranomos* in Egypt was most noticeably a notarial office. In 1911, P. Jouguet provided an overview of the office but distinguished between *agoranomes-notaires* and *agoranomes-édiles* rather than see the official as having both notarial and non-notarial functions. Jouguet questioned whether *agoranomes-notaires* existed alongside *agoranomes-édiles*, both of which possess the same name, and deemed it unlikely that the municipal *agoranomos* had a hand in drafting contracts.<sup>49</sup> This distinction remains faulty as market controllers concerning themselves with contracts is not exactly peculiar, given that Aristotle attributed to the *agoranomoi* the duty of overseeing contracts. This essentially brings contractual duties to the *agoranomoi* without any distinctions between their duty to the *agora* and to contracts. Sixty years later, M. Raschke provided a cursory overview of the office, focusing on the identities and locations of various *agoranomoi* and their terms of office as well as their most visible role in the documentation, that of a public notary. While Raschke claimed that there was a change to the office in the Roman period, he does not elaborate.<sup>50</sup>

The *agoranomoi* of Egypt appear in the documentation predominantly as public notaries mostly operating in the nome capitals. Given the nature of the papyrological evidence and the absence of inscriptions and works of literature that mention *agoranomoi*, we are unable to construct an idea of who an *agoranomos* in Egypt was in terms of his character. While Greek honorary inscriptions attest to the greatness of certain *agoranomoi* and the Rabbinic literature provide a moralizing perspective of the officials, the papyri provide us with a different sort of evidence given that the *agoranomoi* here were mostly notaries. The Egyptian *agoranomoi* are known to

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48 Capdetrey and Hasenohr (2012, p. 34).

49 Jouguet (1911).

50 Raschke (1974).

us from their signatures and presence on contracts – documents that cannot offer a look into any sort of honor this official could have received or how he was perceived by the local community. Instead, the papyri lead us through changes the office saw from the Ptolemaic to the Roman period and likewise demonstrate the role of the *agoranomoi* in Egypt.

The office was established in the Ptolemaic period and these officials are attested as notaries from the mid third century BCE to the early fourth century CE, with the second century BCE providing a better look at the official mostly through finds from the Pathyrite nome.<sup>51</sup> While the origins of the office in Egypt are unclear, the *agoranomoi* may have been introduced by the early Ptolemies in order to expand this well-known Greek practice into Egypt. In Thebes, the *agoranomeion* was in place in 174 BCE at the latest.<sup>52</sup> From the Thebaid, the office of the *agoranomos*, the *archeion* (= *agoranomeion*), is attested in Krokodilopolis (the main office) from 141 BCE and in Pathyris (the branch office) from 136 BCE. In these offices, contracts were drawn up and deposited and loans were paid off. The office in Krokodilopolis also housed the βιβλιοθήκη where a register of the copies of contracts was stored.<sup>53</sup> Other *agoranomeia*, such as the office in Latopolis, are not as well-known, as finds have not yielded the amount of agoranomic documents found in the Pathyrite nome.<sup>54</sup> These documents allow for one to trace the duties and notarial functions of the Egyptian *agoranomoi*.

## 2.2 NOTARIES AT WORK

As notaries, these officials wrote up and registered documents. Writing and registering land cessions, wills, slave sales/purchases/manumissions and labor contracts were among the scope of the notarial functions the *agoranomoi* saw to.<sup>55</sup> As a Greek office, these contracts were drawn up and registered in Greek. For example, in first century CE Oxyrhynchus, letters were sent to the *agoranomoi* informing them of or instructing them to register slave manumissions, the cession of catoecic land, house sales, or mortgages and other property, such as slave sales.<sup>56</sup> An example of such a

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51 *P. Sorb.* III 70 (270 BCE) is the earliest attestation of the official in Egypt.

52 Vandorpe (2011, p. 299).

53 Vandorpe (2004, p. 164).

54 *Ibid.* (p. 169).

55 *P. Sijp.* 45 (slave sale; 197–96 BCE); *P. Corn.* 4 (loan contract; III–10 BCE); *P. Oxy.* II 334 (sale of a house; 81–83 CE); *P. Oxy.* II 346 (notice regarding catoecic land; 100–01 CE).

56 Benaissa (2009, p. 157).

notification is *P. Oxy.* II 346, a notice sent to the *agoranomoi* about catoecic land situated near the village of Sko that has been ceded from one woman, Ptolema, to another, Demetrous:

Dionysius alias Amois, superintendent and assistant of the *katalochismoi* registers of the Oxyrhynchite (nome), to the *agoranomi*, greetings.

Demetrous, daughter of Ammonius, has had ceded to her by Ptolema, daughter of Dionysius, with her husband Harpocraton, son of Ptolemaeus, as guardian, in accordance with the contract executed through the notarial office (*agoranomeion*) in the city of Oxyrhynchi, in the present month Phaophi, the fifty arouras of catoecic and bought (land) belonging to me (*sic*) around Sko from the allotment of Strabas. I communicate (this) so that you may know. Farewell.<sup>57</sup>

Greek summaries could also be provided by the *agoranomeion* for Demotic contracts that were notarized by the *agoranomoi*. Egyptians who were unfamiliar with Greek could find a way around their lack of understanding: K. Vandorpe's study of two agoranomic loans revealed that the individual who held one of the contracts had a habit of adding Demotic summaries to his loan contracts, thereby revealing his Egyptian origins.<sup>58</sup> One can see how Egyptians could have kept (and understood) their Greek contracts by adding Demotic summaries onto the verso of such documents. One could have a Demotic document registered with the *agoranomos* for an extra layer of security and in 146 BCE, these Demotic documents were required to have Greek summaries.<sup>59</sup>

In the case of wills, the *agoranomoi* could draw up and register these documents and if necessary, could revoke or annul them as per request of the testator.<sup>60</sup> The Greek cavalry officer Dryton and his three wills is a good example of an individual who had more than one will drawn up.<sup>61</sup> To revoke such a document in the Roman period (in Oxyrhynchus, at least), it would have to be taken from the same *agoranomeion* that drew it up in the event of a revocation so as to avoid any sort of clash. The requested document would then be returned under the same seals and the *agoranomeia* would not allow a testator to retrieve his will without an acknowledgement

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57 Trans. from Benaissa (2009, p. 164).

58 Vandorpe (2000).

59 Monson (2012, p. 126).

60 *P. Oxy.* 106; *P. Oxy.* 2759; *P. Oxy.* 601.

61 *P. Dryton* 1; *P. Dryton* 2; *P. Dryton* 3.

that the same document was returned under seals.<sup>62</sup> These wills would be kept in the *agoranomeia* until revoked, declared void, or opened upon the testator's death. The *agoranomoi* eliminated the need for witnesses as the presence and signature of the Greek notary was enough to validate a document.<sup>63</sup> But wills, unlike the contracts handled by the *agoranomoi*, did require witnesses and in order to have a valid will in the Roman period, an *agoranomos* had to be involved.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to registering wills, the services of the *agoranomoi* were also utilized to free slaves from bondage. Those who wished to free their slaves could choose to do so in the presence of an *agoranomos* as manumission by notary was one of the ways in which slave-owners could readily manumit their slaves. *P. Oxy.* I 48 is a letter sent to the acting *agoranomos* (86 CE) giving instructions for the emancipation of a house-born slave and *SB* III 6293 is a contract from Arsinoë in which a slave's former owner promises not to make any claims against her. *P. Oxy.* II 375 likewise demonstrates the role of the *agoranomoi* in manumissions during the Roman period; with her husband (a freedman) acting as her guardian, a certain Diogenis purchases a female slave along with her two children for a sum of over 1800 silver drachmas. Beyond individual cases of agoranomic manumission, the *agoranomeia* presumably saw more traffic after a decree in 176-175 BCE required for house-born slaves to be registered along with the rest of the population and for children to be registered with the *agoranomoi*.<sup>65</sup>

Beyond their role as public notaries, the *agoranomoi* are still seen carrying out the functions typical of the officials elsewhere in the Greek world. *P. Oxy.* IV 836 (66-65 or 15-14 BCE), a wheat loan contract, stipulates that the wheat that is repaid must not be fraudulent and must be "mesuré à l'étalon de quatre chénices en vigueur chez les *agoranomes*."<sup>66</sup> From a written agreement likewise from Oxyrhynchus by municipal bakers to provide bread, we see the acting *agoranomos* at the time supplying these bakers with wheat.<sup>67</sup> In a private letter dated to 200-250 CE, a certain Ptolemaios writes to his father about his newfound position of *agoranomos* for a banquet in Sarapis' honor, which he took on so as to avoid the fee for the banquet. Consequently, Ptolemaios is duty-bound to provide wood for the banquet and it is

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62 El-Mosallamy (1970, p. 62).

63 Pestman (1978, p. 204); Monson (2012, p. 125).

64 *BGU* V 1210 § 7.

65 *SB* 6 8993 = *P. Harr.* I 61; Further examples of the presence of *agoranomoi* in manumissions include *SB* 6293, *P. Oxy.* II 380 and *P. Oxy.* II 332 (= *P. Bingen* 62).

66 Trans. from Schmidt (1999, p. 155).

67 *P. Oxy.* XII 1454, 116 CE.

his father's help he seeks.<sup>68</sup> And in *W. Chr.* 296 (269 CE), the council of Hermopolis reports to the *agoranomos* Aurelius Demetrios of the profits of the city market due to the lease of stalls.

### 2.3 THE LANGUAGE OF THE AGORANOMOI

Compared to the Egyptian notary scribes who were attached to the temple and wrote in the name of certain priests, the office of *agoranomos* provided services that were substantially different, the clearest being it was a Greek office that operated in Greek.<sup>69</sup> In Thebes, these Egyptian temple notaries belonged to a single family and a father and a son (or two brothers) in office is a common feature of these notary offices.<sup>70</sup> Egyptian notary scribes could, to cite Thebes again, keep this position in the family for up to a century whereas the tenure of the *agoranomoi* in Thebes barely exceeded five years.<sup>71</sup> While the prominence and power of the Egyptian notary offices declined, partly due to the decree of 145 BCE and the use of Greek in agoranomic contracts, that of the *agoranomos* rose.

While the *agoranomeia* were Greek offices that were operated by officials with Greek names, P.W. Pestman and M. Vierros discovered that a few of these men were actually of Egyptian origin and of the same family, revealing that these officials were not exclusively Greek.<sup>72</sup> This family of *agoranomoi*—Asklepiades, Areois, Ammonios and Hermias—operated in the Pathyrite nome. Asklepiades was a notary in Krokolopolis (127–126 BCE), his son Hermias (who was attested as a mercenary cavalry soldier in 123 BCE) in Pathyris, his brother Areois in Pathyris, and his nephew Ammonios (who like his cousin Hermias, was attested as a mercenary cavalry soldier in 123 BCE and was also a witness to Dryton's third will) was likewise a Greek notary in Pathyris. Most of the male family members possessed double names—one Greek and one Egyptian. Asklepiades' father was a scribe of the temple who wrote in Demotic and one of Asklepiades' brothers, Thrason, followed in his father's footsteps.<sup>73</sup> Asklepiades' mother is said to have been “a woman of revenue/substance” and this title demonstrates that we are dealing with an elite family as this title existed

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68 *P. Mich.* 8 511.

69 Arlt (2011, p. 17).

70 *Ibid.* (p. 18).

71 *Ibid.* (p. 19, 25).

72 Pestman (1978, pp. 207–208); Vierros (2012, pp. 100–101).

73 Vierros (2012, pp. 101–102).



elsewhere in Pathyris only among Egyptian priestly families.<sup>74</sup> From this family, we see how a local elite Egyptian family with a scribal tradition and ties to the temple managed to adapt to the Ptolemaic administration as they successfully assumed a prestigious Greek office.

#### 2.4 TOOLS OF THE TRADE AND OFFICE HOLDING

Not much is known about how the *agoranomoi* learned their trade, although an interesting papyrus from Oxyrhynchus (55 or 66 CE) appears to be an agoranomic document copied by a pupil as a school exercise.<sup>75</sup> The exercise may imply that once a student became literate, he was soon steered in the direction of a scribal career or that of a notary.

Evidence of apprenticeships are likewise another avenue one may explore to examine the sort of “training” the *agoranomoi* received prior to assuming the office. Once more Pathyris serves as a useful example. Under the supervision of the acting *agoranomos*, apprentices wrote and copied contracts. These apprentices later became notaries themselves: in 89/8 BCE, Hermias took hold of the office of *agoranomos* after nineteen years as an apprentice.<sup>76</sup> Vierros hypothesizes that as the penmanship among the notaries of the Pathyrite nome are similar, such notaries may have cultivated their writing skills in a temple school prior to assuming an apprenticeship.<sup>77</sup> A few documents are written in two different hands (a practiced cursive hand visible on the protocol and an unpracticed hand on the document proper, for instance), perhaps showcasing an *agoranomos* and his apprentice at work.<sup>78</sup>

Office holding among the *agoranomoi* in Ptolemaic Egypt may not have been as lengthy as those of the Egyptian scribal offices, but certain *agoranomoi* held their positions for quite some time, such as Areois from Pathyris who was in office for twenty-eight years, or Hermias who served for twelve years.<sup>79</sup> The average for office holding in the Theban area (usually only one notary was in charge of an office) was around three to ten years, though one could reach close to thirty years as Areois

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74 Pestman (1978, p. 210).

75 *P. Köln* 15 613.

76 Raschke (1974, p. 351).

77 Vierros (2012, p. 104).

78 *P. Grenf* I 24 and *P. Adl* 1.

79 Vierros (2012, p. 81).

did.<sup>80</sup> In Thebes these officials often were only in office for a year, barely ever surpassing a five year tenure.<sup>81</sup>

## 2.5 THE EARLY PTOLEMIES AND THE COMING OF THE AGORANOMEIA

But why did the Ptolemies wish to introduce the *agoranomeia* in Egypt? Monson has argued that the *agoranomoi* were given notarial functions because of the Ptolemaic state's effort to "reconcile Egyptian and Greek traditions and to facilitate transactions" as the need for temple notaries and witnesses were rendered redundant when one could—even in the villages—instead visit the *agoranomeion* or *graphaion* (the village writing office) and have contracts drawn up sans witnesses.<sup>82</sup> Pestman, on the other hand, found that the *agoranomoi* were meant to undercut and diminish the importance of Egyptians with notarial traditions.<sup>83</sup>

Rather than interpret the Ptolemaic introduction of the *agoranomoi* as an effort to subvert the local scribal elite, J. Manning proposed an alternative theory: these notaries were introduced by the Ptolemies on account of the desire to make contracting more centralized and orderly, rather than to tackle the prestige of the Egyptian scribes.<sup>84</sup> Instead of undercutting and sabotaging, Greek notaries instead worked *alongside* Demotic temple scribes and were indeed sometimes in competition with them, but were likewise working alongside and in competition with those who drew up *Greek* six-witness contracts as well. This hypothesis weaves into Manning's broader argument—a claim against the "strong state model" in Upper Egypt which argues for a centralized state and firmly places power in the hands of the Greek elite—which rests on the "bargained incorporation" model: the Ptolemies "[bargained] with several different ruling coalitions, including Egyptian priests and the scribal class" to institute their political legitimacy.<sup>85</sup> Introducing the Greek office of *agoranomos* but allowing for local Egyptians with pre-existing scribal and notarial traditions to assume the office fits Manning's theory of negotiation and incorporation.

While tempting, Pestman's theory is ultimately rendered problematic with his

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80 Ibid. (p. 105).

81 Arlt (2011, p. 25).

82 Ibid. (p. 285).

83 Pestman (1978, pp. 203–210).

84 Manning (2003, p. 187).

85 Manning (2012, p. 5, 77).

discovery of an Egyptian family who dominated the notarial office in Pathyris in the Ptolemaic period. Despite this proposed effort, Egyptian temple notary scribes were yet still employed when one did not have access to an *agoranomeion*.<sup>86</sup> Is this a visible failure on the part of the state to effectively undercut native notarial tradition or was this perhaps not the intention of the Ptolemies to begin with? I am of the latter opinion. These Egyptian temple notaries disappeared not under the Ptolemies, but under the Romans, with the added responsibilities of the *grapheion*.<sup>87</sup> These temple notaries were rendered unnecessary in the Roman period when one could consult the *agoranomeion* or the *grapheion* with ease, sans witnesses. Temple scribes from Soknopaiou Nesos serve as a valuable example of possible *Roman* efforts to undercut native notarial tradition: these scribes served only for a year, a clear change from the practice of hereditary office holding among Egyptian notary scribes under the previous regime.<sup>88</sup> While some notary families disappear from the documentary record (after revolts, it is important to note, such as the Theban Revolt of 88 BCE which resulted in the dissolution of hereditary office holding among the Egyptian notaries of Thebes, who disappear from the record), the presence of an Egyptian family of *agoranomoi* in the Pathyrite nome does not bode well with the theory of the Ptolemies' wishes to significantly reduce the power and prestige of local Egyptian notaries.<sup>89</sup>

Egypt's scribal families, with their ties to the temple, were visibly powerful. They formed key social networks and presided over the production of private contracts, at times throughout generations.<sup>90</sup> The early Ptolemies integrated the local elites of the scribal and priestly class into their new central structure and the capability of these elites to adapt was important to the development of the new regime.<sup>91</sup> In Monson's words, the Ptolemies "relied too much on Egyptian elites to remove them" as these scribal families legitimized their rule.<sup>92</sup>

With their cooperation, Egyptian temples made the taxation and administration of the Ptolemaic state smoother and working with these families rather than against them would prove beneficial.<sup>93</sup> These local families were already well-known and trusted by the locals, making the transition from Egyptian to Greek notary

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86 Monson (2012, pp. 131, 278); *BGU VI 1214* (185-65 BCE).

87 Monson (2012, p. 127).

88 Ibid. (p. 22).

89 Ibid. (p. 257).

90 Manning (2003, p. 186).

91 Ibid. (p. 142, 6).

92 Monson (2012, pp. 257, 262).

93 Ibid. (p. 212).

offices relatively easy, as has been argued by Vanderpe.<sup>94</sup> Desiring a more centralized state, the early Ptolemies bargained with the local Egyptian elite. This consequently led to their social assimilation and garnered their loyalty, with the latter being an important precautionary measure against insurrection, which always presented a dangerous threat to Ptolemaic authority.<sup>95</sup> These families with scribal and notarial traditions were permitted to continue their trade, with the bargain contingent upon one insurmountable exception: one would simply have to learn Greek. By committing to the new regime, local Egyptians with scribal/notarial traditions could carry on their work, granted they adopt the language of the Ptolemies. Because of this, these scribal families were incorporated into the society of the new regime rather than ousted. To quote Manning, a “*public* state system, with Egyptian scribes involved, was encroaching on earlier *private* scribal traditions” as the Ptolemies sought to rule through Egyptian society rather than over it.<sup>96</sup>

## 2.6 IMPERIAL RULE IN EGYPT: AN ALTERED OFFICE OF AGORANOMOS

By the Roman period considerable changes to the office are visible. While the Ptolemies worked with certain pre-existing institutions in Egypt and incorporated them into their new regime, the Romans, in certain respects, approached Egypt’s institutions differently. The Romans put forth a new system that favored a direct and centralized administration which in turn tackled the local power structures of the Ptolemaic regime.<sup>97</sup> While we see elements of continuity in Ptolemaic administrative institutions between Ptolemaic and Roman rule, the Romans also modified pre-existing institutions. Many institutions from the Ptolemaic period were kept under Roman rule but were tweaked: some offices were preserved but were made compulsory public services and others, such as religious institutions, saw a loss in their power, as seen through the reduced power of the temple with the confiscation of its lands. The Romans also altered the notarial system of Egypt: the *grapheia* were given the added responsibility of writing Egyptian contracts rather than only registering them, rendering Egyptian temple notary-scribes unnecessary, and the office of *agoranomos* was kept and made into a liturgy with the introduction of the new liturgical system.

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94 Vanderpe (2011, p. 300).

95 Manning (2012, p. 79).

96 Ibid. (pp. 193).

97 Bowman and Rathbone (1992, p. 125).

A liturgy or compulsory public service in Roman Egypt is used here to refer to unpaid mandatory service performed for the state for a limited duration.<sup>98</sup> This limited duration could consist of one year for some positions and three for others or could be a half-term in which one would serve for six months.<sup>99</sup> A considerable portion of the Egyptian populace would have found themselves performing some kind of compulsory service. By the second century CE these compulsory public services swept through Egypt's administrative offices and reached honorary municipal offices by the third century.<sup>100</sup> While Lewis has distinguished between magistracies and liturgies, and the posts indeed differed as magistracies were clearly the more prestigious posts, by the late second century magistracies became "so burdensome as to be regarded in the same light as liturgies."<sup>101</sup>

For one to be considered for a liturgical position a certain level of property ownership (πόρος) must have been met. Just how much property depended on the importance of the position in question. This property was in turn used as collateral to insure liturgists did their duty without fleeing from their posts. Those who did not meet this requirement were classified as ἄποροι but these individuals were still obligated to perform public services, generally manual labor.<sup>102</sup> In a country where "literacy coexisted with illiteracy," some liturgical positions required literacy so as to avoid catastrophic errors but as the *agoranomoi* were selected from the bouleutic class, members of which were expected to be literate (unlike at the village level, where some village scribes carried out their duties despite being illiterate), it does not appear as if illiterate candidates posed an issue.<sup>103</sup>

The strain of performing these liturgies can be seen in a letter from Oxyrhynchus (202 CE) in which a certain Aurelius Horion, in an effort to be "philanthropic and useful," donates a sum of money to the villages of the Oxyrhynchite nome who have been overwhelmed with the "burdens of the annual liturgies of the *fiscus*."<sup>104</sup> This was meant to allow the villages to purchase some land, the revenue of which was meant to be reserved for the expenses characteristic of liturgical positions. Like-

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98 Monson (2012, p. 237).

99 Lewis (1997, p. 65).

100 Thomas (1983, pp. 39, 36).

101 Bowman (1996, p. 69).

102 Thomas (1983, p. 36).

103 Bagnall (1993, pp. 243, 246); Youtie (1966, pp. 132-133).

104 *P. Oxy.* 4 705.

wise, an official from Oxyrhynchus recorded in 147/8 CE of the confiscation of the property of 120 liturgists. These individuals abandoned and fled from the responsibilities tied to their assigned liturgical posts as they did not possess ample funds to see them through.<sup>105</sup>

Appointment to these liturgies was contingent upon meeting the requisite wealth but a letter from Hermopolis (89-91 CE) from the prefect Mettius Rufus to the nome governors (στρατηγοί) reveals other conditions that must be met:

If you think that any of those in public service are unfit...you will send me three names for each one after examining them...You will take care that the three are not from a single household, but also not from the same place, and that they have not previously been in the same offices, that they have not been judged derelict in other offices, and that the officials in the same place are not related to them SB 6 9050<sup>106</sup>

While the stress on the wealth assessment is clear, Monson cautions against assuming nomination to public offices were not still sought voluntarily and that they were financially draining.<sup>107</sup> Rufus stresses the need to choose individuals of suitable personal conduct “that is necessary for those entrusted with authority to have.” These liturgical positions were thought to have held a degree of prestige, a prestige that had to be upheld not only by one who is merely wealthy, but worthy of exercising such power as evidenced by his personal conduct. Looking back to the wider Greek world, the prestige tied to these liturgies in Egypt is reminiscent of the honorary decrees discussed above. Such inscriptions harken to the honorable and dutiful way officials discharged their office and honor “noble men” who assumed the office — men who not only carried out their duties, but who were likewise honorable and just as indicated by their demeanor.<sup>108</sup>

Once transformed into a liturgy around 200 CE, the tenure of an official serving in the office of *agoranomos* was significantly reduced as this position rotated among those eligible for one-year terms. Serving for ten or twenty-eight years, for instance, was no longer a possibility. A striking aspect of this liturgy is that astonishingly, minors were likewise eligible for this magistracy, possibly under the care of

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105 Bowman (1996, p. 69).

106 117-27 CE.

107 Monson (2012, p. 241).

108 SIG 596 = *IMT* Skam/NebTaeler 191.

a guardian.<sup>109</sup> Once the Romans significantly reduced the power of the temple, ties to it were no longer remunerative or an attractive way of acquiring wealth and status; rather, owning land became desirable among Greek and Egyptian alike.<sup>110</sup> These land-owning elites were in turn utilized by the Romans and compelled to perform these liturgies.

## 2.7 CONCLUSIONS

Among the *agoranomeia* of the Greek world we see changes in the nature of the office: initially selected by lot, the *agoranomoi* began to be elected in the Hellenistic period, we see pairs of *agoranomoi* akin to Roman aediles in the imperial period, and the position eventually evolved into a liturgy by the Roman period. Similar developments can be seen in Egypt. Ptolemaic *agoranomoi* in Pathyris could hold their positions for lengthy periods of time, had ties to the temple, and hailed from elite families with scribal traditions. But by the Roman period the office became a compulsory public service to be held by members of the landowning elite for one-year terms. The office was expensive to maintain in both Egypt and the rest of the Greek East and was eventually exclusively held by men of means. This change and the notarial functions possessed by the *agoranomoi* indicate that Egypt was not atypical in this respect: the office of *agoranomos* being made a liturgy corresponds with the *agoranomeia* in the rest of the Greek East that were likewise made liturgies, and the official's notarial functions need not be seen as shocking, given the precedent set by Aristotle in the classical period. These developments therefore point to a wider trend in the Greek East of which Egypt was not exempt.

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109 Lewis (1997, p. 11).

110 Monson (2012, pp. 209–10).

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