

PAPYRUS DOCUMENTATION IN THE PERIOD
OF DIOCLETIAN AND CONSTANTINE

This article is the third and last in a series of attempts to set forth the chronological distribution of documents for which objective absolute dates are available during the period from Diocletian to Heraclius. The period covered by the present article, 284-337, is far the most densely documented of these periods. Once again, the geographical origins of the papyri are worth distinguishing in order to sort out archival influences; and the choice of type of dating technique--consulates and regnal years--varies also in a significant way. The charts below give the pertinent data.²

Upper Egypt stands out at once as poorly documented. Apart from the 73 documents of the Hermopolite, we have 31 papyri from Panopolis and 22 ostraka (narrowly clustered in time) from Thebes, and only 24 papyri from all the rest of the country, or a density of less than one papyrus per two years. Among the 73 Hermopolite texts, the important role of archives is worth noting, especially those of Charite, Adelphios, Demetria alias Ammonia, and Hyperechios and his sons. But this nome comes closer than most to presenting a balance of archival and non-archival material. The reader is reminded that documents without consular or regnal date are not included in these figures, but the comparative force of the figures is not diminished by this fact.

1 These have appeared in reverse chronological order: "Papyrus Documentation in Egypt from Justinian to Heraclius", *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 1 (1979) 5-10; "Papyrus Documentation in Egypt from Constantine to Justinian", *Miscellanea Papyrologica*, ed. R. Pintaudi (Pap.Flor. 7, Firenze 1980) 13-23.

2 The lists of documents by date on which these are based would be much too bulky to give here in the way that we did in the article on 337-540, but we will gladly furnish copies on request to anyone interested in pursuing the matter further. They are based on the lists in our *Chronological Systems in Byzantine Egypt* (Stud.Amst. 8, Zutphen 1978) and *Regnal Formulas in Byzantine Egypt* (EASP Suppl. 2, Missoula 1979), with additions and corrections contained in our privately circulated supplement to these volumes (available on request from either author). The principles of counting should be set out briefly: documents with multiple dates (e.g., a roll with many tax receipts or land declarations, like *P.Corn.* 20) are counted once for each Julian year represented, no matter how many dates to that year are found in it. This practice represents a compromise--admittedly imperfect--between disproportionately ballooning the statistics with a few large rolls and treating these rolls as if they were only short texts. Only those texts dated by consulate or regnal years are used: those dated only by an indiction are excluded because of the inferential character of any absolute date for them. It will be obvious that this practice unduly depresses the figures for the period after 312, but the alternative is to undermine the reliability of the figures.

The abrupt discontinuance of the use of regnal dating in Upper Egypt for any purpose at all is manifest: there is only one document after 308 in which a regnal year is used alone, and that is a Theban ostrakon. There is also one instance of a regnal year used in the period 309-13 in a document dated by a consulate. For practical purposes, therefore, regnal years disappear after 308. From 314 on, the indiction was used for reference to tax years, crops, and similar fiscal phenomena.

Oxyrhynchos, thanks to the editorial labors of the last two decades, now shows 257 dated papyri for the 53 years, 40 per cent of them published since about 1965. This nome is remarkable on several counts. Archives play a far less important role here than elsewhere (the result of the preeminent role of the excavation of the town dump, no doubt), and the distribution of documents is more even than anywhere else.

With the Arsinoite we come to the most complicated problem in the distribution. It yields 285 papyri and 248 ostraka, a remarkable total. It is at once obvious that the ostraka drop off to almost nothing after 313. Is this a fact of documentation or only of dating system used? Ostraka virtually never use consulates (they are brief documents and do not have the space, generally), and with the end of regnal years they used indictions, which are not tabulated here, for reference both to crops and to years. Only one ostrakon securely dated after 313 uses regnal dating (*O. Mich.* II 930.6 of 23.vii.315). We have the impression that the fourth century ostraka dated by indictions are, though numerous, not so numerous as the masses from the Diocletianic period; probably the decline is a matter both of dating technique and of documentation: partly real and partly apparent. Were it possible to date documents using indictions precisely without recourse to inferential arguments, the figures would naturally look rather different.

The ostraka come, with few exceptions, from Karanis (the exceptions are almost all from Theadelphia). This fact only accentuates the principal characteristic of the Arsinoite information, its archival quality. The tables show that of the 285 Arsinoite papyri, Karanis is responsible for some 155 (all but a handful from the Isidoros archive), and Theadelphia for 66 (mostly from Sakaon's papers). Philadelphia (based in part on *P. Princ. Roll*) gives 31, and all other places together 33. In short, 90 per cent of the Arsinoite papyri and about 95 per cent of the total documentation from the nome is essentially archival. Though in many

ways this is a blessing,³ it warns us against forming a rash verdict on the state of the Arsinoite at this period.

The end of the use of regnal dating, and the introduction of the consulate and the indiction as the principal means of dating documents, is one of the major marks of the change from the earlier to later period of the history of the Roman Empire in Egypt, and we have commented on this point before.⁴ It seems worthwhile, however, to try to be a bit more precise about the way in which this change happened, since it is not a very simple phenomenon. Several approaches will yield results. First, there are instances of regnal dates after 308, even after 313; considerable numbers of them, in fact. But an examination of the actual documents reveals that these uses are specialized in time, place, and purpose.

First, place. Apart from two documents of unknown provenance,⁵ we have one ostrakon from Thebes referring to taxes,⁶ and one item from Herakleopolis, which started to be dependent on Oxyrhynchos in this period.⁷ The totality of our remaining documentation of regnal years after 308 comes from the Oxyrhynchite and Arsinoite Nomes. Continued use of regnal dating is thus a very circumscribed practice.

Secondly, time. The Arsinoite texts fall almost all into the period between 308 and 314. Of all Arsinoite texts dated only by regnal years after 308 (including some of which the choice of 304 and 312 is uncertain), 41 fall before 314 and only 9 in or after 314; all of these come from 314 or 315. Since it was early in 314 that the indiction system was introduced into Egypt (though using 312/3 as year 1), it is obvious that the use of regnal years was within a very short time displaced in the Arsinoite by the use of indictions. The Oxyrhynchite documents, on the other hand, are more evenly spread over the period 308 to 337.

Thirdly, function. Regnal years appear in the Arsinoite in the post-308 period almost exclusively for dating short texts like tax receipts (especially referring to a crop) and tax accounts or

3 Cf. R.S. Bagnall, "Theadelphia Archives: A Review Article", in *BASP* 17 (1980) 97-104.

4 We deal briefly with this subject in *GRBS* 20 (1979) 283. See also the important article of H.J. Wolff, "Der byzantinische Urkundenstil Aegyptens", *RIDA* 3 ser. 8 (1961) 115-54.

5 *P.Princ.* II 97 and *SB* VI 9191 = 9270.

6 *O.Stras.* 289.

7 *P.Hib.* II 220.

private memoranda. There are only two exceptions to this rule, both loans from 310 dated by regnal years.⁸ In general, the distinction made here is preserved in later years in this nome in the use of indictions, which are used for dating tax receipts and small texts of that sort, while consulates are used to date legal documents.

In the Oxyrhynchite, there is a somewhat similar phenomenon, but the usage continues past the introduction of the indiction system. We find through the period 308-337 texts referring to tax years or crops by regnal year numbers, and as in the Arsinoite before 315, a usage of regnal dating as the only date in small texts like receipts, memoranda and orders. In two cases a lease term is defined by the regnal years in documents where no consulate has been preserved: but in both cases it appears possible that the consulate was written at the bottom but is not preserved.⁹ There is thus no case in which the regnal year was used after 308 in Oxyrhynchos instead of a consulate as the major dating criterion for a legal document.

The other side of the question also deserves discussion. After 308 consulates are used commonly and normally as the means of dating legal documents; before that time they are fairly uncommon. For example, up to 308, papyri with consulates amount to only 6 per cent of the dated papyri; for the period from 308-337, they represent 57.7 per cent (these figures are for Lower Egypt). The point may be pursued further: of our pre-308 consulates, how many appear alone, without a regnal date, as the sole means of dating a document? And in what sort of documents do they appear?

First, three of them are Latin documents, for which consular dates are found already under the principate.¹⁰ Secondly, nine or ten texts are or seem to be broken at the bottom, where a regnal date would have stood.¹¹ In these cases it seems likely that a regnal date would have been used as well originally. Thirdly, three texts contain references to a consulate in the body of a document which is itself dated by regnal years.¹² Fourthly, two texts may

8 *P.Cair. Isid.* 95 and 96.

9 *P.Oxy.* XLV 3256 (317/8): *PSI* IV 316 (328/9).

10 *ChLA* XI 499; Fink, *RMR* 86 = *P.Grenf.* II 110; and *P.Amh.* II 182 = *ChLA* IX 401.

11 *P.Vindob. Sal.* 7; *BGU* VII 1644; *P.Stras.* 261; *P.Oxy.* IX 1204; *P.Oxy.* XII 1551; *BGU* I 286; *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2674; probably *Aegyptus* 56 (1976) 57; *P.Lond.* III 1133 (p.lix descr.). Perhaps *P.Oxy.* XLVI 3301.

12 *P.Panop. Beatty* 1.26, 2.40, 2.37, 58.

be excluded, one as not being a document (a school exercise?), the other as a dubious formula doubtfully read.¹³ What is left? One petition from 298 (*P.Oxy.* XII 1469) and a letter of the boule of Oxyrhynchos from 294 (*P.Oxy.* VI 891). In 307 comes *P.Mert.* I 31, a tax receipt with no regnal years but a consulate. In 308, a large number of documents with only consulates is found, and from that point on they are numerous.

In short, we should distinguish clearly three aspects of the replacement of regnal years as a means of dating. First, regnal years as the principal dating criterion of documents remain in use until 308; almost all consulates before that date are either used in conjunction with regnal years or have some specific explanation. After 308, on the other hand, the consulate is supreme, and regnal years virtually disappear from this kind of use, with no examples after 310 at all.¹⁴ Secondly, regnal years as the means of referring to tax or official or agricultural years essentially disappear throughout all of Egypt with the coming of the indiction system in 314. Only Oxyrhynchos resists this trend, keeping regnal years and then later its own eras in many such contexts. Thirdly, a use of regnal years to date short texts like tax receipts, orders, and memoranda is preserved after 308 in the Oxyrhynchite, and to a lesser extent in the Arsinoite.

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13 *P.Oxy.* I 23 verso (exercise?); *SB* VI 9309 verso (dubious).

14 This statement is true of formal legal documents; it does not imply that regnal years do not occur in such at all, simply that they are not the principal means of dating the document.

15 A note on the division of texts into periods is necessary. Papyri dated to an Egyptian year like 298/9 are usually counted under the second of the years unless there is some reason to think the first part of the civil year more likely. More difficult are those assigned to a range of years which spans more than one of our divisions. These are generally placed in that division where the greatest number of years in the span falls; in some cases the decision has been made arbitrarily. These cases are not numerous, and while they affect a particular number, they do not affect the overall pattern significantly.

HERMOPOLITE ¹⁵											Total	
	<u>284-</u> <u>288</u>	<u>289-</u> <u>293</u>	<u>294-</u> <u>298</u>	<u>299-</u> <u>303</u>	<u>304-</u> <u>308</u>	<u>309-</u> <u>313</u>	<u>314-</u> <u>318</u>	<u>319-</u> <u>323</u>	<u>324-</u> <u>328</u>	<u>329-</u> <u>333</u>		<u>334-</u> <u>337</u>
Regnal	4	5	4	10	4							27
Regnal & Consulate		1	1	2	4	1						9
Consulate					1	3	4	14	6	7	2	37
Total	4	6	5	12	9	4	4	14	6	7	2	73
KOUSSITE												
Regnal/total			1									1
LYCOPOLITE												
Regnal				1								1
Consulate								1				1
Total				1				1				2
PANOPOLITE												
Regnal		1		1								2
Regnal & Consulate												2
Consulate			1	1		2	3	6	5	3	5	27
Total		1	1	2	2	3	6	5	3	5	3	31
ANTINOOPOLITE												
Regnal					1							1
Regnal & Consulate				1					1			2
Consulate							1		3	1		5
Total				1	1		1		4	1		8

GREAT OASIS												
	284- 288	289- 293	294- 298	299- 303	304- 308	309- 313	314- 318	319- 323	324- 328	329- 333	334- 337	Total
Regnal	1			1	4							6
Consulate				2				2				4
Total	1			1	6			2				10
THEBES												
Regnal (ostr.)				18	3		1					22
CYNOPOLITE												
Consulate						1				1		2
SYENE												
Consulate											1	1
UPPER EGYPT, TOTALS												
Regnal	5	6	5	31	12		1					60
Regnal & Cons.	0	1	2	4	4	1			1			13
Cons.				5	5	7	11	23	12	14	5	77
Total	5	7	7	35	21	8	12	23	13	14	5	150
OXYRHYNCHITE												
Regnal	21	29	19	17	13	8	6	3	7	1	4	128
Regnal & Consulate												
Consulate	1	12	8	8	15	1	11	7	1	2	1	59
Consulate	1	6	2	2	2	7	10	8	14	11	9	70
Total	21	31	37	27	30	16	27	18	22	14	14	257

	284- <u>288</u>	289- <u>293</u>	294- <u>298</u>	299- <u>303</u>	304- <u>308</u>	HERAKLEOPOLITE						Total	
						309- <u>313</u>	314- <u>318</u>	319- <u>323</u>	324- <u>328</u>	329- <u>333</u>	334- <u>337</u>		
Regnal		1		1	2						1		5
Regnal & Consulate						1	1						2
Consulate						1					2		3
Total		1		1	2	2	1				3		10
ARSINOITE													
Regnal (P.) 6	6		28	24	33	14	7						118
Regnal & Consulate	1		8	11	7	22	16	1	1				67
Consulate			1		4	15	26	20	24	4	6		100
Total (P.) 6	6	7	37	35	44	51	49	21	25	4	6		285
Ostraka	16	54	54	77	27	18	2						248
Total	22	61	91	112	71	69	51	21	25	4	6		533
MEMPHITE													
Regnal					1								1
Consulate				1									1
Total				1	1								2
MAREOTITE													
Regnal	1												1
ALEXANDRIA													
Regnal	1			1									2
Consulate									1				1
Total	1			1					1				3

LOWER EGYPT, TOTALS												
	284- <u>288</u>	289- <u>293</u>	294- <u>298</u>	299- <u>303</u>	304- <u>308</u>	309- <u>313</u>	314- <u>318</u>	319- <u>323</u>	324- <u>328</u>	329- <u>333</u>	334- <u>337</u>	Total
Regnal	27	38	47	43	49	22	13	3	7	1	5	255
Regnal & Consulate		2	20	19	22	24	28	8	2	2	1	128
Consulate		1	7	3	6	23	36	28	39	15	17	175
Total Pap. 27		41	74	65	77	69	77	39	48	18	23	558
Ostraka	16	54	54	77	27	18	2					248
Total	43	95	128	142	104	87	79	39	48	18	23	806

PROVENANCE UNKNOWN												
Regnal	3	2	5	1	3				1		1	16
Consulate		1		2	1	5	6	2	2	1	4	24
Total	3	3	5	3	4	5	6	2	3	1	5	40

ARSINOITE DISTRIBUTION												
Karanis		2	25	23	24	33	30	8	7	1	2	155
Theadelphia			5	9	11	8	6	7	14	3	3	66
Philadelphia 3			1	3	4	5	9	5	1			31
Others	3	5	6	1	4	5	4	1	3		1	33

TOTALS FOR ALL EGYPT												
Regnal	35	46	57	75	64	22	14	3	8	1	6	331
Reg. & Cons.		3	22	23	26	25	28	8	3	2	1	141
Consuls.		2	7	5	12	35	53	53	53	30	26	276
Total P.	35	51	86	103	102	82	95	64	64	33	33	748
Ostraka	16	54	54	77	27	18	2					248
Total	51	105	140	180	129	100	97	64	64	33	33	996