

CHAPTER 1

Family and Household, Ancient History and Archeology: A Case Study from Roman Egypt

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1 Introduction

The domestic sphere in Greek and Roman antiquity has arguably been the focus for some of the most exciting and innovative recent research in the fields of both ancient history and classical archeology. (While not all of their practitioners would agree, for the purposes of this chapter I am defining “ancient history” and “classical archeology” broadly, with ancient history encompassing epigraphy and papyrology as well as literary-based studies, and classical archeology including methodologies inspired by anthropological archeology in addition to the more traditional forms of art historical and architectural analyses.) This shared interest in the domestic realm would seem to make it ideal territory for collaboration, or at least dialog, between ancient historians and classical archeologists. So far, however, such dialog has been relatively limited, with the two groups of scholars tending to address rather different kinds of questions. With respect to Classical Greece, for example, historians have focused on Athens and have tended to be concerned with topics such as the legal status of individual family members and affective relationships between them. Archeologists, on the other hand, have often looked more broadly across the Greek world and addressed questions such as the degree of cultural variation between cities and the nature of the domestic economy (see Trümper, this volume). Where topics have been addressed from both sides of the divide, as, for instance, with the question of the extent of female seclusion in Classical Athens, the arguments put forward on the basis of the archeological evidence

have been slow to be addressed by those working with other types of material. (In fact, even scholars working on this one issue using different types of archeological evidence have not always taken account of each others' conclusions (see Bundrick (2008) 309–10).

Among a variety of factors likely to have contributed to this state of affairs, I would like to single out for discussion here one in particular, which is that the evidence used by historians tends to inform us about slightly different aspects of domestic life from that used by archeologists. For, while historical sources most frequently offer insights into the “family,” archeological material almost invariably relates to the “household.” This distinction is more important than it may appear. In modern, Western society the terms “family” and “household” often refer to the same entity, namely, a group of people living together under the same roof. In the context of the ancient world, too, there is some degree of overlap, and therefore ambiguity, in the terminology relating to families and households. In Greek and Latin the household is elided linguistically, and arguably also conceptually, with both the family and also with the physical structure of the house (*familia* and *domus* in Latin, *oikos* in Greek). Nevertheless, as anthropologists have long realized, “family” and “household” actually have precise and distinct meanings which are analytically important: households by definition do not necessarily comprise people related by blood, while those who are closely related biologically may reside in different houses. Thus, when an archeologist looks at a house, she cannot “see” the possible biological or social relationships between its occupants, while a historian reconstructing a family’s genealogy cannot “know” where individual family members resided at any particular point in time unless this is explicitly stated in his source material. Where relevant information does exist, some text-based studies have managed to cross this divide successfully (for example, Bradley (1994) 76–102 on household slaves; Cooper (2007a) on the character of households in Late Antiquity). But the nature of the evidence has meant that it is virtually impossible for archeology to do the same. These problems have led archeologists and historians to ask different kinds of questions, playing to the strengths of their sources, but such a strategy makes it hard to reach conclusions which add up to more than the sum of their collective parts.

In this chapter I explore the problem and suggest some possible ways in which ancient historical and archeological research might fruitfully be brought into closer dialog in the investigation of the domestic sphere. I use as an example evidence from villages in Roman Egypt. Because the arid conditions here have led to the exceptional preservation of organic material, the region combines some of the most extensive and detailed textual information on families (which survives in the form of documentary papyri) with some of the best-preserved domestic architecture anywhere in the classical world. While this information is atypical in its level of detail, it makes a good test case since it is surely here, if anywhere, that the possibility exists of bringing archeology and text closer together and of drawing methodological conclusions which can be useful in other parts of the ancient world. Not by coincidence, scholars working with this material have already begun to use the two sources in tandem, and it is with some of these studies that I begin my discussion.

2 Archeology and Text in the Investigation of Households and Families in Roman Egypt

While the archeological sites of Roman Egypt represent an outstanding opportunity in terms of the range of materials surviving, the long history of investigation at many of them has meant that the interests of investigators, and therefore the kinds of study they have undertaken and the information they have chosen to record, have changed through time. I want to focus here on two sites which illustrate both the potential and the difficulties involved in trying to work with the full range of evidence from these sites in the most productive way. These are the villages of Karanis in the Fayum, inhabited from the second century BCE until at least the late fourth century CE, and Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis, which was occupied from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE.

Karanis was first explored by archeologist Flinders Petrie in the late nineteenth century and a few years later by the papyrologists Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt. The primary aim of most of this work was to recover papyri, and little account was taken of the archeological context from which those papyri were retrieved. In 1925 fresh excavations were initiated by the University of Michigan. By this time large sections of the village, including its center, had disappeared, carried away for use as fertilizer because of the high organic content. Nevertheless, enough remained for the Michigan team to initiate a project aimed both at recovering papyri and also at learning something about the life of the village from the exceptionally well-preserved houses in which most of those papyri were found. Although there was considerable variation, many of the houses were relatively small (ca. 30m² in ground area). The ground floor most frequently comprised two rooms with additional living space in one or two upper storeys, and storage in a subterranean basement. Most of these dwellings also had the use of an external courtyard which played a major role in the lives of the occupants, serving as the location for animal pens, ovens, and a variety of other facilities (Figure 1.1).

Between 1925 and 1935 an immense volume of material was recovered from Karanis. Study of the papyri has still to be completed (see Gagos (2001) 517–18), while the architecture has been published only in summary form (Husselman (1979) xi). Scholars have long been aware of the potential of the papyri to provide insights into family life (for example, Bell (1952)), but in the publications the approach to the architecture and the many artifacts recovered from the site was purely descriptive (as was the case with the archeological remains of housing throughout the classical world until recently). Lately, initiatives by papyrologists working with the Karanis material have raised the possibility of reuniting papyrological and archeological evidence in order to explore domestic social life from both perspectives together. These have been encouraged by an increasing tendency to study documents as groups or archives, rather than in isolation (Gagos (2001) 514–16), as well as by a desire to adopt a more problem-oriented approach to the texts themselves (tentatively labeled the “New Papyrology” by Bruce Frier (1989) 217–26).



Figure 1.1 Courtyard of house C118, Karanis, viewed from the southeast. Kelsey Museum of Archaeology. Karanis Excavations of the University of Michigan in Egypt, 1928–1935: topography and architecture, Kelsey Museum Studies Vol. 5. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, plate 87b.

In 1994 Peter van Minnen proposed a “house-by-house or family-by-family” approach to Karanis and its material remains (van Minnen (1994)). Van Minnen used as an example a house (dubbed B17 by the excavators) which yielded a particularly rich group of Greek papyri, many of them relating to a man named Socrates. Based on this collection of private letters, tax receipts and other documents, together with related material found elsewhere at Karanis, van Minnen was able to discuss Socrates’ occupation (tax-collector), sketch his character (a man of learning but with a sense of humor), outline his family tree (including naming his parents, brother, wife, and children) and suggest the approximate year of his death (shortly after 171 CE). The texts thus provide a rich vein of information about Socrates and his family. As van Minnen pointed out, however, there are some topics which they do not address. It is here, he argued, that archeology should play a role. Based on the estimated size of the house, van Minnen suggested that at least seven people may have resided there, but he was unable to determine who these individuals may have been. He proposed that items such as castanets and spindle whorls, listed among the objects found in some of the rooms, were evidence of the presence of women, although the identities of those women could not be known.

No plan of house B17 appears to have been recorded by the excavators. It is therefore impossible to place in an architectural context the castanets and other items listed as being found here, in order to explore what the organization of activities might reveal about the identities of the different members of household. Equally importantly, a lack of stratigraphic information for this building means that it is difficult to tell when most of the items were deposited. Van Minnen's interpretation assumes a rather static picture of the architecture and its occupants. But while it might be tempting to identify Socrates' inkwell among the objects recovered from "his" house, we need to recognize that the material from that house represents a palimpsest, a partial record of a sequence of activities carried out by a number of individuals over many years or perhaps even over several generations. Given these problems there is a limit to where the archeology of house B17 can take us in the search for information about Socrates and his family.

Van Minnen, however, has not been the only scholar to argue for a more interdisciplinary approach to understanding the domestic sphere at Karanis. Robert Stephan and Arthur Verhoogt have recently begun to restudy a different documentary archive, this time belonging to the soldier Claudius Tiberianus, written in both Greek and Latin and coming from house B/C167, which is rather better documented in the excavation records (Stephan and Verhoogt (2005)). Stephan and Verhoogt's interest arose from their discovery that this relatively well-known group of letters belonged to a larger collection of documents all found in the same house, many in a single archeological context. The additional material is enabling them to investigate Tiberianus' family in more depth than has been done previously, revealing the identities of further individuals who may have been related to him. At the same time, they have also been prompted to consider what else might be learned about his household using archeological evidence from the house, and this study is still ongoing. Stephan and Verhoogt are rightly cautious about the association between their archive and the house in which it was found. As they point out, it is impossible to know with any certainty who lived here and how the majority of the letters came to be stowed under the stairs where the excavators found them. At the same time, although a plan of the house is available, it is unclear how the objects found relate to the two successive architectural phases of the building, which seems to have been in use for about a century.

Some of the difficulties encountered both by Stephan and Verhoogt and by van Minnen result from problems with the excavation and record-keeping of the individual buildings they have been looking at. But there is also a variety of other factors which complicate interpretation of the site. In addition to disturbance by previous investigators and fertilizer-diggers there is also uncertainty about the date at which the settlement was finally abandoned (Pollard (1998)). Unless they can be resolved, such questions will hamper attempts to reinterpret any house (or other building) at Karanis.

In some ways the outcome of these two studies is discouraging: in such rare cases where it seems that archeology and texts should be able to "speak" directly to each other, their juxtaposition does not seem to have offered much more information about the families or households in question than could have been gleaned from the texts alone. In the case of house B/C167 it is unclear whether Tiberianus ever even

lived in the house, or whether the archive of letters was kept and passed on by others inside or outside the family, until it was finally forgotten under the stairs. Thus, it is hard to know what relevance the architecture and finds may have for any investigation of his household. Even if we accept van Minnen's assumption that house B17 was inhabited by Socrates, neither the archeology nor the texts can tell us who else lived there with him. In both instances, then, the documents reveal interesting detail about the individuals and families in question, but the archeology fails to match this level of resolution. Furthermore, even when both sources are combined it is not possible to be precise about the nature of the social group living in any one specific structure. How far is this a problem with the nature of the evidence from Karanis in particular, and how far is it a more general difficulty with trying to use texts and archeology together in this way?

To explore whether data from a different site which lacks some of these shortcomings will give more productive results, I want to turn to some of the possibilities offered by material from the village of Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis, some 200 miles west of the Nile valley, where recent work has also attempted to bring texts and archeology together to reconstruct households. Here again, exceptional preservation of domestic architecture is coupled with a rich array of texts, mainly in Greek and Coptic. Included are private letters as well as official documents relating to the lease and sale of property, loan agreements, receipts and other financial records. Work at the site is still continuing, which means that a final archeological publication is not yet available, but preliminary reports provide sufficient material to explore how far juxtaposing the archeological and written sources can enhance our understanding of the erstwhile inhabitants.

The houses at Kellis are somewhat different from those at Karanis: instead of being on multiple levels they generally seem to have been single storey, with a larger number of rooms, which were organized around one or two internal courtyards. I focus here on two adjoining properties, houses 2 and 3 in Area A, at the center of the site, which were constructed early in the fourth century CE and abandoned close to the end of that century. These are not among the most elegant found so far (larger residences of somewhat earlier date with wall-paintings and central spaces resembling atria were located elsewhere, in Area B: Hope and Whitehouse (2006)), but they do offer a relatively close parallel for the Karanis structures in terms of the quantity and range of documents recovered.

On the basis of an archive found inside, house 2 has been interpreted as the home and workplace of a carpenter named Tithoes son of Petesis, who lived during the second half of the fourth century CE and whose family tree can be partially reconstructed over three generations. But the situation is complicated: a further group of texts from the same house relates to a second individual, Pausanias son of Valerius, who, the excavators suggest, may also have occupied the house but perhaps at an earlier date, during the mid-fourth century CE (Hope (1997) 9).

By looking further at the archeological evidence for the organization of the house itself, the Kellis team have been able to add an extra dimension to their discussion: house 2 is modest in size and irregular in plan (Figure 1.2). An L-shaped residential section, entered from the south, comprised eight rooms. The occupants may also have

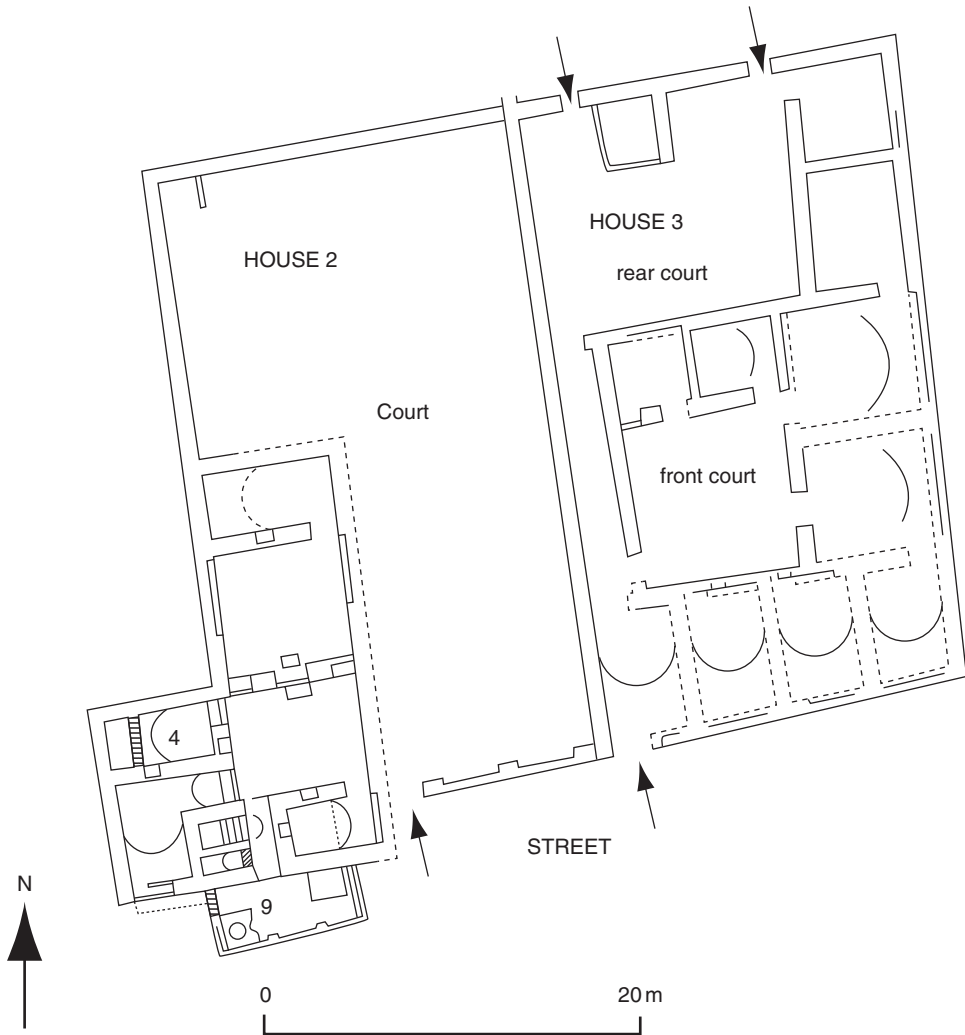


Figure 1.2 Plan of houses 2 and 3, Kellis; plan redrawn based on Hope (1987) fig. 2.

had access to a large courtyard to the east. A further, unroofed, space (room 9) was added by annexing part of the street on the south side and seems to have been used for cooking. Among the finds from this area were two wooden *codices*. Elsewhere in the house (room 4) were found carpentry tools together with sections of wood which may have been in the process of being prepared for the manufacture of further *codex* pages (Hope (1997) 9).

It is, of course, tempting to connect the documents referring to Tithoes the carpenter with the wooden *codices* and carpentry tools found here. Colin Hope, the excavator, is rightly cautious, however, stressing that one cannot assume that either the tools or the wooden *codices* were necessarily associated with Tithoes, since it cannot be proven that he was the final occupant of the house (Hope (1997) 10). A further aspect of the

evidence also raises questions about the relationship of both Tithoes and Pausanias to the building itself: the documents relating to the two individuals seem to come mostly from the same archeological contexts, and many seem to have been stored together in ceramic jars which might have fallen from the roof when the building collapsed (Hope (1999) 107). A question arises as to why Tithoes would have retained the material relating to his predecessor Pausanias. It is possible that there was some kind of familial connection between them which remains unrevealed by the texts. But one is also led to consider the possibility that there are reasons for the texts being found in the house other than that the men actually occupied the property.

In short, it is impossible to be precise about the occupants of house 2, even with detailed information about the archeology and a range of documentary material. The neighboring house at Kellis, house 3, provides an opportunity to explore some of these issues a little further using a richer database of finds. Here, the excavators note “an approximate total of 2,500 pieces of inscribed papyrus” as well as several wooden boards and two wooden *codices* (Hope (1991) 42). Only a small minority contained sufficient legible text to be considered worthy of publication, but even so these total over a hundred texts. Based largely on the Greek material, Klaas Worp has been able to reconstruct a tentative family tree for Aurelius Pamour(is) son of Psais, who lived during the early fourth century. The tree comprises the names of his wife and brother-in-law as well as those of three children, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren (Worp (1995) 50–54). Worp hypothesizes that these documents form a family archive but also notes that “quite a few texts were addressed or refer to persons whose links with the family of Aurelius Pamour(is) are ... not obvious” (Worp (1995) 52). Indeed, other groups of documents can be isolated among the material. For example, several late fourth-century letters and contracts, in both Greek and Coptic, refer to a garment manufacturing business run by a woman named Tehat with the help of a male relative (Bowen (2001)).

Worp suggests various explanations for the diversity of individuals appearing in the Greek papyri, including occupation of the house by a series of families. It is also possible that part of the building was rented to unrelated individuals, a practice attested by numerous lease and rental agreements from Roman Egypt, including several from this very house (compare Gagos (1999) 757: as Gagos points out, it is not clear that any of these documents from house 3 relates to the house itself). The papyrological material thus hints that the house may have had a complex history, changing hands over time and/or being shared between different groups of occupants.

How far does the archeological evidence help to untangle the complexity of this occupation history? House 3 is a somewhat larger house than house 2 and is organized differently (Figure 1.2). It was entered from the south via a street door which was protected by a screen wall preventing sand from entering. Inside, the lobby gave onto a corridor running through to the back. Space effectively fell into two parts: at the front, a door from the corridor led into a small courtyard off which opened six rooms (two indirectly) and a staircase which presumably led to space on the roof. At the rear lay a second, larger courtyard in which two ovens and a series of animal pens were located along with a doorway leading to a further room. A second entrance to the house led from this northern court.

Full publication of the architecture and finds will help in assessing in detail the roles played by the different rooms. So far, however, there is little indication that the house was divided into separate, self-contained units. While space was arranged around two different courtyards, their functions seem to have been complementary and the rooms were laid out as part of an integrated whole. The southern courtyard served as a light-well and access route while that to the north hosted domestic tasks and livestock. There is no suggestion that areas for essential activities such as cooking were duplicated, as one might expect if more than one group resided here. The two entrances also seem to have been functionally distinct rather than providing access to independent living units. In short, the archeological information published so far contains little indication of the kind of complex occupation history suggested by the documentary texts. While it is possible that more than one household may have been resident in the house at once, there is nothing to demonstrate this in the archeology. As with our other examples, we are therefore no closer to understanding the nature of the social group once occupying this structure.

In addition to the inscribed materials, numerous small items were present in house 3 when it was excavated, especially in the front courtyard, where finds are described as “prolific” (Hope (1991) 42). These include not only pottery and other containers such as baskets and boxes, but also furniture, clothing, toiletries, jewelry and small, bronze coins. The quantity and diversity of artifacts left in house 3, set alongside the number of inscribed materials and range of individuals mentioned in them, raises questions about the function of the building and the process by which it was abandoned. Iain Gardner, who published the Coptic texts, comments that “There would seem to be more textual remains and artifacts than can be accounted for by a simple residential context” (Gardner (1996) ix). For this reason, both he and Worp suggest that the building may have been used as a “storage place,” perhaps during the abandonment of the whole settlement at the end of the fourth century (Worp (1995) 52; Gardner (1996) ix).

A further possibility may also help to explain the quantity and variety of finds and papyri in house 3: study in other cultural contexts has highlighted a variety of general processes which can lead to the deposition of items in particular locations on an archeological site (Schiffer (1996)). In particular, such study highlights the use of abandoned houses as refuse dumps. This discussion is relevant to understanding the distribution of artifacts in Roman Egypt, including papyri. If house 3 were used as a dump, this might explain both the quantity and diversity of material found there and the apparent disparity in finds between it and house 2.

Given such interpretative problems, how securely can we argue that Aurelius Pamour(is) or Tehat ever lived in house 3? Or even that Pausanias or Tithoes lived in house 2? And if we cannot, how should we proceed if we want to use archeology and texts together? While my argument has necessarily been rather detailed, my general point should by now be clear: even though the excavations at Karanis took place a long time ago and are comparatively poorly documented, many of the problems raised by van Minnen’s and Stephan and Verhoogt’s studies still recur with the use of better, more recently acquired data sets. This is because even where careful records are kept, it is difficult to be certain about the nature of the connection between the houses

whose architecture we are studying and the documents found in and around them which mention individuals and their families or households. What seems to be required, then, is a change in approach.

In the remainder of this chapter I would like to explore one alternative strategy for using archeology and text together in order to investigate houses and households in Roman Egypt. Specifically, I suggest that by shifting focus and looking at families and households as a group, rather than an individual, level, it should be possible to sidestep some of the difficulties encountered in pursuing the micro-scale approach discussed above. At the same time, I argue that the archeology can be used more effectively by analyzing it independently of the texts, rather than as a supplement to try to fill in details which the documentary sources omit.

3 Towards a Closer Dialog about the Domestic Sphere: Continuity and Change in Households at Karanis

In recent years classical archeologists have tended to abandon the traditional search for named individuals and historically known events, realizing that archeology is rather better at elucidating larger-scale social patterns and longer-term processes. There is much to be learned about households and families by comparing some of the general patterns of domestic social life which documentary and archeological sources reveal. The key is to frame parallel or complementary questions in such a way that they can be addressed using both sources. In this section I would like to offer a brief example of the kind of work I have in mind by exploring one specific issue, namely, the degree of stability and change in domestic groups (families or households) at Karanis. By choosing to work at a village level I hope to eliminate the difficulties discussed above, while retaining a unit of analysis small enough to present a relatively local picture.

For Roman Egypt as a whole, Roger Bagnall and Bruce Frier have used census returns to look at household size and composition (Bagnall and Frier (1994) 57–66; see also Huebner, this volume). They conclude that the average household in an Egyptian village comprised 4.82 people. This figure masks considerable variation in the scale and configuration of the households in question, which ranged from single individuals through conjugal households and sibling groups, to those composed of extended families or multiple family groups. Some documents also reveal the presence of people more loosely affiliated with the household but resident there, such as lodgers or slaves (the latter were usually single, but on occasion whole slave families are recorded).

Although Bagnall and Frier's work shows that in modern classificatory terms the households recorded fall into a variety of different types, they also point out that the picture is more complex. In seven instances members of the same household are listed in documents resulting from two, or even three, successive censuses compiled at 14-year intervals, giving an insight into how that household changed through time and revealing a "life-cycle" in which one configuration was transformed into another by births, marriages and deaths or divorces. The relatively long intervals between returns give the impression that the households in this small sample were in a constant

state of metamorphosis. But can the archeological evidence together with other types of documentary source (such as letters and legal contracts) help to provide a broader, if less precise, picture of how the process of change affected households like these? Evidence from Karanis can be used as a test case, supplemented with papyrological evidence from other Egyptian sites.

The overall impression the excavated houses give for the best-documented phases of occupation (approximately the mid first century to late third century CE) is of continuity in spatial organization, with new walls following the lines of previous ones and properties being extended upwards following their old plans as their basements filled with sand. A closer look at some areas of the village, however, reveals more substantial alterations. These can be seen especially clearly in a housing block located in the northeastern part of the site, shown in Figure 1.3 (discussed by Husselman (1979) 15–16). In its earlier form (level C: Figure 1.3a) the block incorporated ten, apparently

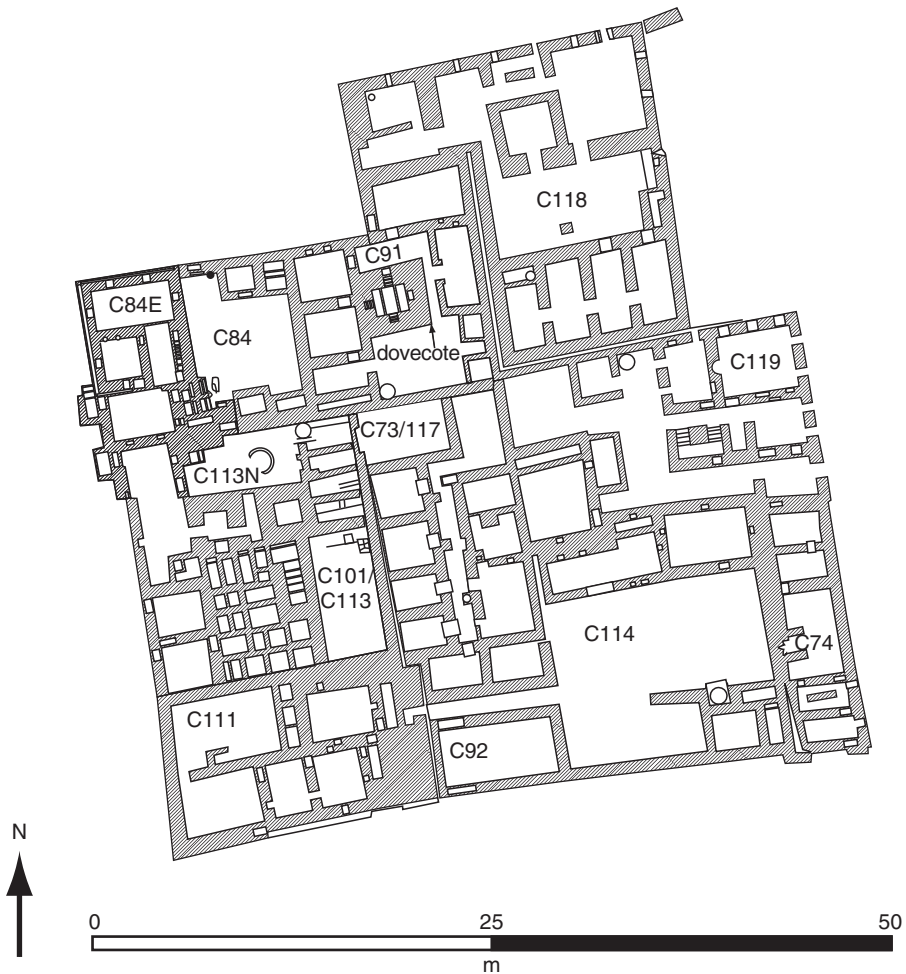


Figure 1.3a *Insula* from Karanis Area 10–12, F–G, phase C. Redrawn based on Husselman (1979) map 112.

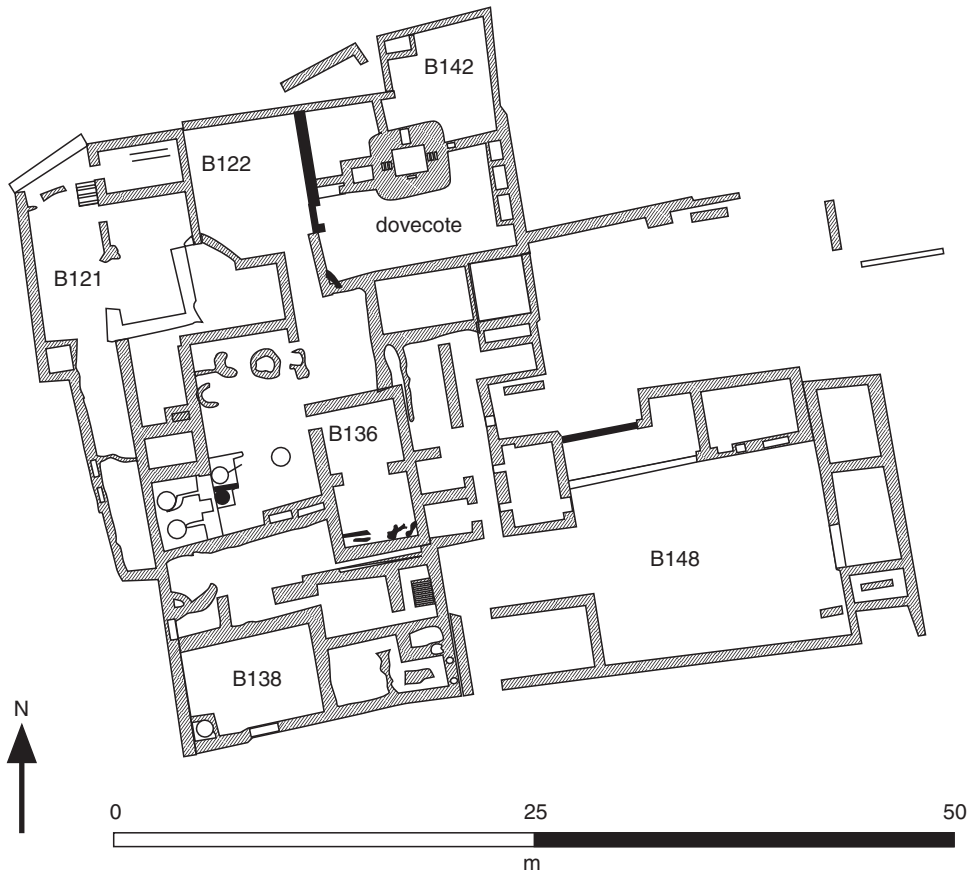


Figure 1.3b *Insula* from Karanis Area 10–12, F–G, phase B. Redrawn based on Husselman (1979) map 162.

separate, properties and included a dovecote (visible as a square structure at the center of C91) and a granary (identifiable in the subdivided space south of C113N and north of C111). A number of modifications can be detected by comparing the plans of the area in this period (the later second century CE) and in the succeeding level B (Figure 1.3b: dated to the late third century CE). The most radical involve changes to the boundaries of the properties themselves. These include the agglomeration of apparently self-contained units into fewer, larger structures; the extension of property boundaries; and a decrease in size. In some cases entire buildings even ceased to exist and were not replaced.¹

Some of the processes which may have given rise to these changes in property boundaries can be seen in documentary papyri from the village, which reveal that houses were regarded as economic assets as well as being places to live. In many cases individuals owned part-shares and sometimes had interests in more than one dwelling. This frequently appears to have been a result of patterns of inheritance, which split houses between several heirs. For example, in *Michigan Papyri* (hereafter, *PMich*) inv. 4716

(a copy of a census return for 161 CE found in house B17) three houses and two courtyards, inherited from their mother, are shared between Sab() and an unspecified number of brothers. Thais, wife of Sab(), is also said to own property: a house and courtyard plus a half share of a further house and courtyard, inherited from her own mother.

A variety of contracts exists for the sale of part-shares in houses. Such part-shares are normally spatially unlocated.² A house is sometimes explicitly described as undivided and there is little archeological evidence to suggest the physical division of houses. The fact that courtyards, dovecotes and granaries are commonly listed separately from the houses themselves might seem to offer one possible way of separating out the shares of different individuals, but there are few archeological examples of changes in access patterns designed to accommodate such divisions.

Sales of part-shares of houses may have served to concentrate portions of a divided property back into the hands of fewer individuals, and there are many contracts drawn up between family members which might have had this effect.³ At a larger scale, neighboring properties also sometimes seem to have passed into the hands of one individual or group of individuals. This is seen in a loan and lease document of 120 CE relating to a house in the village of Bacchias (*PMich* 108), in which the location of the house being leased is described by identifying the owners of the neighboring properties; these are, on the south and west sides building sites belonging to Katoites son of Menches and his associates, and on the east side a courtyard belonging to Horos son of Katoites. Such a pattern of ownership would potentially have enabled the boundaries of individual plots to be redrawn, especially where, as in this case, some of those plots were vacant. Sales of parts of houses could also have effected similar boundary changes. For instance, *PMich* inv. 1281, from Tebtunis, dated to the first century CE, records the sale by Psenobastis to Labesis of part of a courtyard on the east side of Psenobastis' house, which abuts the house of Labesis. It therefore seems likely that this sale enabled Labesis to extend his house at the expense of his neighbor's.

Despite a potentially fragmentary system of house ownership, therefore, both texts and archeology suggest that the houses themselves generally remained undivided.⁴ The main change we see is that houses increased and decreased in size as land was passed between neighboring properties. But what does all this say about the occupants of these properties? There are instances in which an individual appears to have resided in a property of which he or she is part-owner (for example, in *PMich* inv. 4715, dated to the mid second century CE, one Sisois lives in a house of which he has a half share). Where an individual or family has interests in more than one property, however, as in the case of Thais and her husband Sab() in *PMich* inv. 4716, mentioned above, some of the properties listed must have been empty, rented out or occupied by other family members. As noted above, there is ample documentary evidence for such rentals. Other forms of transaction might also lead to temporary occupation of a property by someone other than the owner: for instance, there are loan agreements where the lender is granted the right to reside in a house in lieu of being paid interest on a loan. This is the case in the loan and lease document *PMich* inv. 108, mentioned above, in which Hermas son of Ptolemaios, gives Tapekysis the right to reside in a house which he owns. It is

unspecified whether Hermas himself would simultaneously have occupied the house, but this seems unlikely since one clause in the contract specifies that Tapekysis is to be reimbursed for all repair and construction carried out in the house, which is to be her responsibility.

Such changes in occupancy, along with the morphing of households from one form into another noted by Bagnall and Frier (1994), must have altered the requirements placed on domestic space and been an incentive to modify the architecture, and indications of this can be seen in the archeology. In our example housing block (Figure 1.3) areas which were formerly subdivided are subsequently combined into fewer, larger, spaces. In addition, the excavators noted more minor changes made to individual structures and rooms, sometimes within the period indicated by a single stratigraphic layer. Individual architectural features suggest changes in the roles played by the different rooms.⁵

Minor alterations to the rooms of houses in this block are not discussed in detail in the site publication, but comments on house C45, located to the northwest, indicate the kinds of changes which must have been made (Husselman (1979) 69). These include construction of new amenities such as ovens and storage bins, as well as upgrading of facilities such as floors and the destruction of unwanted ones such as old ovens and storage compartments. Like some of the alterations made to the block discussed above, these took place during the occupation period of the C layer but should not be assumed to have been contemporaneous with each other: although the excavators' distinction between the different layers implies the existence of separate, well-defined building phases, their analysis of the changes made in individual blocks and structures within each layer shows that there was in fact a continuous cycle of minor modifications. Details of the distribution of artifacts in these properties are not included in the publication and can provide additional information about patterns of change, but they are unlikely to alter substantially the overall picture, which is one of relative stability in spatial organization, an interpretation corroborated by the more comprehensive information from the two Kellis houses discussed above.⁶

Overall, archeological and textual evidence offer different impressions of the balance struck between continuity and change by households at Karanis. While patterns of multiple ownership are highly visible through the documentary sources they seem to have had only a limited effect on the houses themselves. Rather than the subdivision of property between different owners, the principal form of substantial alteration was the changing of property boundaries or the aggregation of what were formerly more, smaller spaces into fewer, larger ones. At the same time, evidence for the occupancy of a single property by more than one household is virtually invisible in the architecture of the houses, suggesting that alterations to the physical structure may not have been required to accommodate such arrangements. Thus, while the texts suggest a wide variety of living arrangements and patterns of property ownership, and show that these changed through time, the organization of the houses themselves was fairly stable. The spatial requirements of different forms of household may therefore have been insufficiently different for alterations to be made to individual properties during occupancy by a particular household.

This tendency towards stability in domestic organization should also be understood in the context of the resources and social status of the households involved. The

evidence discussed here comes from village locations and the owners of these houses would probably have had relatively limited resources to spend on alterations to their homes. At the same time, however, mud-brick architecture is relatively easy to change. The lack of significant adaptations may therefore have something important to say about domestic ideology, suggesting that the concept of the household itself may have been relatively fluid. Physical boundaries do not appear to have been required to separate co-resident groups, indicating that there may not have been a perceived need for any kind of “privacy” between them. Nor do separate facilities for activities such as cooking seem to have been required for each group. Rather, a physical house seems to have operated as an organic whole despite changes in the make-up of the occupying household or households. This suggests that clear distinctions may not have been drawn between individuals and groups with or without biological relationships. Thus for practical purposes it is the household, rather than the family, which seems to have been the important social unit in daily life at Karanis.

4 Conclusion: Archeology and Text, Family and Household

While there are clearly many significant cultural and environmental differences between Egypt and other parts of the classical world, my discussion of the material from Karanis and Kellis yields some general points about households and how they can be studied using the archeological and textual sources. These are not intended to be prescriptive, but they do, I hope, show some of the potential rewards of working with archeological and textual sources together in a manner which is methodologically aware.

In comparison with the majority of excavated Roman dwellings, our Egyptian village examples are small and relatively unsophisticated in their decoration. In social and economic terms some of their closest parallels are the lower-status apartments explored at sites such as Rome, Ostia and Pompeii (see Dickmann, this volume), although these are obviously very different in terms of their urban setting and Italian location, and the Pompeian examples are also rather earlier. In these cases, apartments in the form of rooms or suites within larger structures have usually been identified through their separate entrance arrangements. The Karanis evidence highlights the fact that other configurations are possible, and that these should be considered when interpreting living spaces from classical antiquity. Hints that such flexible ideas about household definition are in fact more widely applicable in the Roman world can already be seen occasionally in some excavated structures and in some of the legal sources relating to multiple dwellings.⁷

At a more general level, the Egyptian material also emphasizes the potential importance of the household, rather than the family, as a unit of analysis in the Roman world. Even here, however, where we have exceptionally good evidence preserved in individual houses, when we look closely at those houses together with the documents and other associated objects, families and households both seem to evaporate, proving

hard to define clearly or study in detail. These problems demonstrate the importance of the way in which questions are framed. The scale of inquiry selected governs the manner in which evidence can be used and what can potentially be learned: as we have seen, at the level of a single household it is difficult to bring archeological and textual sources into dialog because convincing links between individuals and phases of buildings or objects are elusive. At a slightly larger scale, however, that of the individual community, such links are unnecessary. Here I have offered an example of a single issue studied at that level, looking briefly at the nature of changes affecting households, but a range of other social questions could be tackled on a community basis, including, for example, the role of women or the distribution of wealth. Examination of these and other questions on a larger, regional, basis is also possible and this offers the potential for comparisons between individual settlements or between different types of settlements (for example, between villages and towns). As I have stressed, the issues need to be framed to allow for parallel, independent treatment through both archeological and textual sources. Such analysis gives a much richer and more nuanced picture by opening up different perspectives on individual issues.

FURTHER READING

The following provide further discussion of some of the issues I have touched upon. On the role of papyrology within ancient history, see Bagnall (1995). On some of the general possibilities offered by combining papyrological and archeological evidence, see Gagos et al. (2005) 171–88. Some of the earlier anthropological discussion over definitions of family and household is reviewed in Yanagisako (1979) 161–205, see especially 162–66. On definitions of *familia* and *domus*, see Saller (1984a) 336–55; for definitions of *oikos*, see MacDowell (1989) 10–21.

For a detailed study of how far it is possible to reconcile textual and archeological material for housing in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, see Maehler (1983) 119–37. Written evidence for housing in Roman Egypt is discussed by Genevieve Husson, see especially Husson (1983). The documents from the Tiberianus archive are brought together in Strassi (2008). While a final publication of the archeology from Kellis is not yet available, some of the Greek and Coptic texts from houses 2 and 3 have already appeared in the Dakhleh Oasis Project monograph series (Oxford). In addition to the scholarly publications, a database of papyri from Karanis and a range of other sites are available online at the website of Advanced Papyrological Information System (www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?ATK2059). Recent discussions of Roman families in Egypt include Alston (2005) and Bagnall (2008). For further comments on the tax rolls and also on epigraphic sources as evidence for household composition in Egypt, see Huebner (this volume), who also elaborates on the use of modern models to classify household composition.

Housing of lower-status households at Rome is discussed in, for example, Wallace-Hadrill (2003). Brief overviews of evidence for apartments at Ostia, including the Garden Apartments and House of Diana, are presented in Meiggs (1973) 238–51 and Hermansen (1981) 17–53. My reading of the Italian material is a little different from that of some other scholars, for example Storey (2001) 398 argues that in Roman culture a separate entrance was a defining feature of a residential unit.

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NOTES

- 1 Examples of the changes noted are as follows. Agglomeration: C74, C114 and C92 were combined to create B148; extension of property boundaries: B121 incorporated part of a former street, CS100, and part of a former neighboring property, C113N; reduction in area: C111 lost space to its neighbor B136 when it became B138; disappearance of buildings: C118 and C119 became open spaces in the B level.
- 2 As, for example, in *PMich* 5865 which is dated to the earlier third century CE and from Karanis itself. In rare cases, such as *PMich* inv. 1267, a contract from Tebtunis drawn up in 30 CE between a woman and her son, a spatial location is given – in this case the sale is of a half-share in two non-adjointing rooms in an undivided house.
- 3 For example, in *PMich* 5806, a copy of a document dating to 121 CE, Gaius Sempronius Priscus cedes to his brother Marcus Sempronius Vestinus one tenth of a house and court in exchange for the cancellation of debt.
- 4 Brian Muhs has reached the same conclusion about Ptolemaic Hawara: Muhs (2008).
- 5 Examples of these changes are as follows. Aggregation of space: many of the rooms of C91 disappeared in its level B form, B142; changes in room function: vaulted storage chambers in granary C117 were replaced by residential rooms in its successor, structure C73; changes in the roles played by individual rooms: the locations of doors and windows in C117/C73 were altered.
- 6 I am currently preparing a longer study of changing patterns of domestic activity in houses at Karanis, which will include analysis of unpublished evidence on the distribution of finds.
- 7 At Ostia, for example, there are instances where, although separate rooms or suites seem to represent independent apartments, different entrances and thoroughfares are not provided. This results in various arrangements in which the spaces belonging to different suites flowed into each other (for instance in the Garden Apartments) or in which much interior space seems to have been shared (as in the House of Diana, converted from a single-family residence).