

Alabanthis of the Arsinoite Nome in Greek Papyriological Documents

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Abstract

In 2007, Uytterhoeven and Clarysse published a very short preliminary report on Alabanthis, apparently a rich village in the Graeco-Roman period, for the Trismegistos website in the section on the Fayum project.¹ A reconsideration of the papyriological references to the village has the potential to give more profound insights into the life of the village in Greek and Roman times. This article attempts to present a comprehensive study on the social, economic, and religious life of the village of Alabanthis based on Greek papyri uncovered from Graeco-Roman Egypt. The paper starts with a discussion of the location, name, and status of Alabanthis in the Graeco-Roman period. The social structure and the economy of the village will then be extensively considered to highlight the demographic composition of the inhabitants and their economic activities. The papyriological evidence for the religious life of the village will be the final element presented in the article.²

Keywords: Alabanthis, Meris of Herakleides, Arsinoite nome, Graeco-Roman Egypt.

The Location of Alabanthis

Two villages bearing the name of Alabanthis are confirmed in Greek papyri uncovered from Graeco-Roman Egypt. One village is attested in the Hermopolite nome; it is mentioned in a papyrus dating from AD 161 recording an oath of one Paesis,³ and also in a papyrus of AD 212-250 recording the sale of a male donkey to Aurelius Paleus, the public donkey-driver in the village.⁴ The other village is located in the Arsinoite area. The latter is the focus of this article. Alabanthis of the Arsinoite area appears in Greek papyri from the third century BC to the eighth century AD. Yet the village is best documented in the third century BC and the second century AD.⁵

Unfortunately, the location of Alabanthis has not been archaeologically identified and there is no trace of its material culture.⁶ Based on Greek papyri documents, however, Uytterhoeven and Clarysse attempted to reconstruct the location of the assumed site for the Trismegistos website (figure 1). The map shows Alabanthis on the south-eastern side of Lake Moeris in the Herakleides division. This rightly coincides with Greek papyri documents. The tax on ferry-boats (*porthmides*), which was collected from the inhabitants of Alabanthis in the third century BC,⁷ suggests that the village was probably located on the southern shore of Lake Moeris, particularly since it appears in many village lists, often in relation with tax payment with other villages located on the south area of the lake.⁸ The dyke of Alabanthis is evidence that the village was

¹ For the article: https://www.trismegistos.org/fayum/fayum2/97.php?geo_id=97 (last access on 22/12/2019).

² The texts and translations of Greek papyri are arranged as they appear in the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri. If a different text is used than that of the DDbDP, it is recorded in the footnote.

³ *P.Oslo* III.99 = *P.Mich.inv.* 158.A-B; Bagnall 1990: 9-10.

⁴ *P.Oslo* III.134.7.

⁵ A list of papyriological evidence of Alabanthis can be found on:

https://www.trismegistos.org/geo/detail.php?name=&tm=97&charttype=1&language=&material=&min_date=-799&max_date=799&georef_or_geotex=georef&p=2#pages (last access on 22/12/2019).

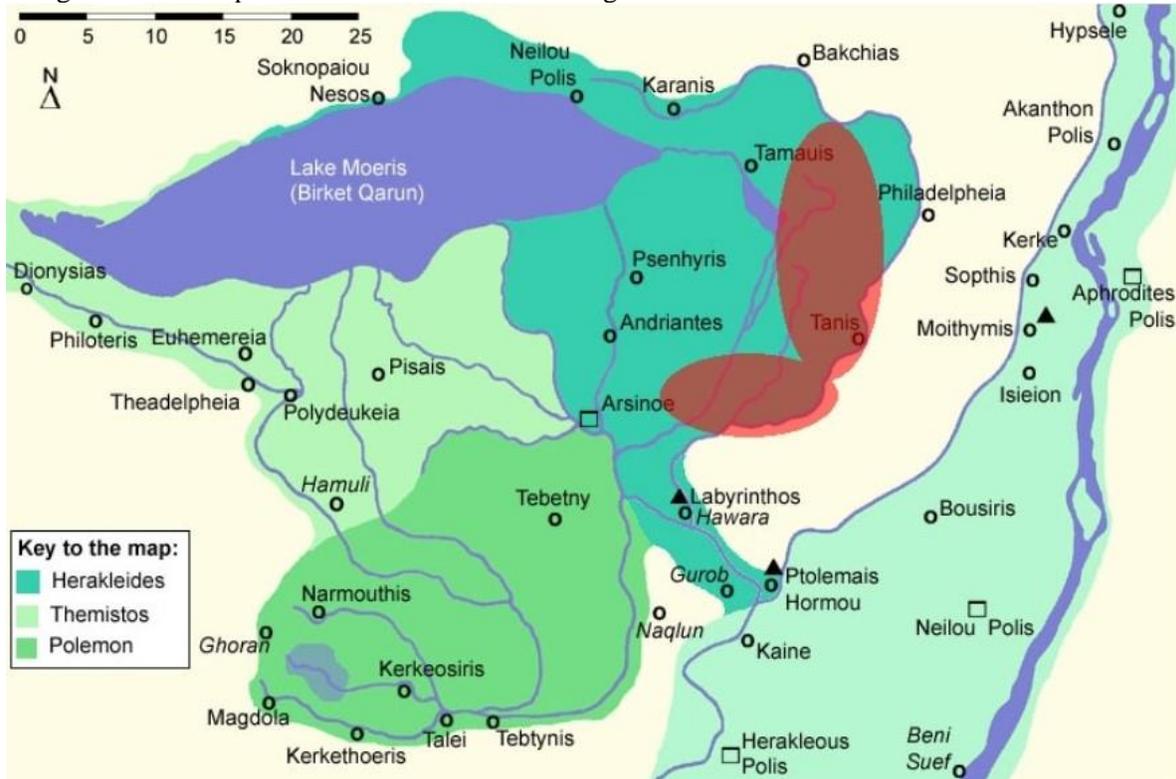
⁶ Grenfell, Hunt, and Goodspeed 1907.

⁷ *P.Petrie Kleon* 107.50.

⁸ *CPR* 8.1.66; *CPR* 8.1, 10; *SB* VI.9246.2; *SB* XII.11067.13; *Stud.Pal.* X.269.2; *Stud.Pal.* XX.239.6.

located on a major water stream.¹ The dyke must have been built to manage the distribution of the irrigation water into the arable lands of Alabanthis and perhaps into those of other nearby villages, which were closely connected with Alabanthis geographically and/or economically.² In the third century BC, there was a canal, the name of which is unfortunately lost, running to the west of Alabanthis.³

Figure 1: The map of the Arsinoite nome showing the assumed site of Alabanthis indicated in red



(https://www.trismegistos.org/fayum/fayum2/map.php?geo_id=97 –last access on 22/12/2019)

The Name of Alabanthis

Alabanthis is called *Hlbnd* or *HlbndH* in demotic;⁴ it is mentioned in a demotic papyrus as follows: 'The last day (of the month), fields of Alabanthis (*HlbndH*): grain 109 (artabai)'.⁵ Yoyotte offered a tentative Egyptian explanation of the second element of the name *HlbndH*, namely *bndH*, to derive from the word *bndyt* or *bndwt* (hence *banqij* in Greek), which means 'cucumber' or the 'field of cucumber', a reference, in his view, to the agricultural nature of the site. No explanation is given by Yoyotte for the first element of the Egyptian toponym, i.e. *Hl* (*αλα* in Greek).⁶

Given the uncertainty in the Egyptian origin of the village's name, it is likely that the Greek name of the village Alabanthis (or its variants Alabantis or Alabandis) is perhaps drawn from the

¹ *P.Tebt.* III.1.701.1-5.

² *P.Petaus* 40. 8-9.

³ *P.Petrie Kleon* 43.5-6.

⁴ Verreth 2013: 45.

⁵ *P.Lille Dem.* 110, Vo col. 3, 14.

⁶ Yoyotte 1962: 127-8.

ancient city of Alabanda in Asia Minor despite the fact that its form is slightly different. Alabanda, which is located about 7 km west of the present town of Çine in the Aydin province, was founded in the fourth century BC,¹ in contemporary with or a little before the foundation of Alabanthis in the Arsinoite area. In one interpretation, Alabanda was said to derive its name from the hero Alabandus, who allegedly received his name after winning a horse race.² Alabanda is a combination of the Carian words *αλα* (horse) and *βανδ* (victory).³ According to Strabo, the people of Alabanda were very rich, lived in luxury and many girls in the city played the harp.⁴ In another interpretation, the term Alabanda refers to the mineral almandine, which is the most important mineral variety of garnet family. “Alabandina”, the Latin term for garnet from Asia Minor, was used as a mineral name in medieval lapidaries.⁵ In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the deep red and brownish-red garnet was used as seals and as decorative inlay for jewellery.⁶ Pliny the Elder reported an important mine field for almandine-garnet as Alabanda in Asia Minor.⁷

Unfortunately, the connection between the names of Alabanthis and Alabanda, if any, cannot be clarified. Alabanda was a gemstone auction centre in Asia Minor, and was famous for its garnet red-coloured precious stone.⁸ It is confirmed in Greek papyri that Alabanthis had a quarry, as the labourers in the copper mines near Philoteris (modern Medinet Wadfa or Watfa in the Fayoum) went on a strike due to the lack of water and wanted to be transferred to the quarry at Alabanthis,⁹ yet it is highly unlikely that almandine-garnet was extracted from the quarry of Alabanthis. Garnet was known in ancient Egypt since the pre-dynastic period, but it was mainly used for small beads.¹⁰ According to Pliny, poor quality garnets were found in Egypt near Thebes.¹¹ Geologists have recently referred to garnets in the Eastern Desert.¹² The use of garnets in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt is rare. However, Petrie published an alabastron from Kafr Ammar with the inscription P..AIGYPT A..RAKINON, which probably means that it once held garnets (anthrakion) from Egypt.¹³ A garnet-set Herakles knot diadem or belt from Egypt dating from the second century BC is now kept in the Cairo Museum (figure 2).¹⁴

¹ Öziş 1991: 106; Ateşlier 2014: 247.

² Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 3.15.

³ Jones 2002: 115; Raddato 2019.

⁴ Strabo, *Geography* 14.2.26.

⁵ Hatipoğlu 2013.

⁶ Ganetsos et al. 2013, 5.

⁷ Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 36.13.62.

⁸ Hatipoğlu 2013.

⁹ *P.Petr.* III.43.8.fr2, r, 1-6.

¹⁰ Ogden 1990: 88.

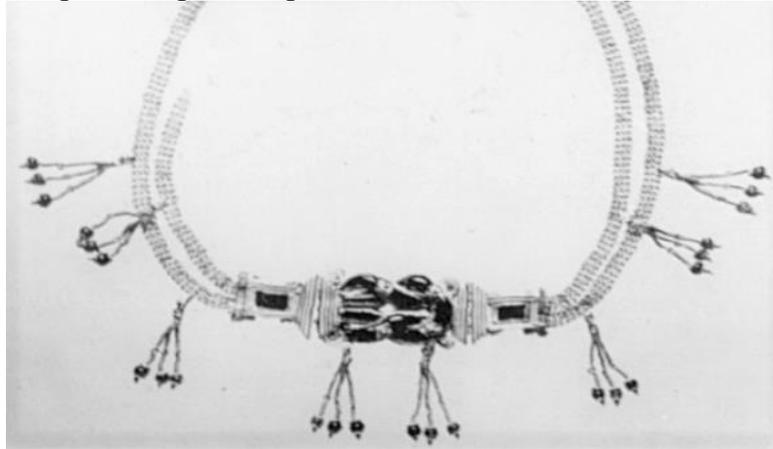
¹¹ Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 37.30.

¹² Ragab and Assran 2007: 97.

¹³ Petrie and Mackay 1915, pl. 37.

¹⁴ Amandry 1953: 120-21, fig. 72.

Figure 2: A gold and garnet Herakles knot diadem (JE 67881)



(Amandry 1953: 120-21, fig. 72)

The administrative status of Alabanthis

From the third century BC onwards, Alabanthis has the status of a *kome* (village) in the *meris* (administrative division) of Herakleides division in the Arsinoite nome.¹ It is commonly referred to in Greek papyri as Alabanthis *kome*.² In the third and second centuries BC, Alabanthis belonged to the external districts or *exo topoi* (ἐξω τοποι) of the *meris* of Herakleides.³ Administratively and geographically speaking, Alabanthis has always been part of the *meris* of Herakleides.⁴ Therefore, it is often called in surviving papyrological documents 'Alabanthis *kome* of the *meris* of Herakleides'.⁵ Between the fifth and eighth century AD, Alabanthis is referred to in Greek papyri as a *chorion* (χωριον) or village.⁶ However, one text from the sixth-seventh century AD refers to the site as an *epoikion* (εποικιον), which also means a village.⁷

The Demographic Composition of Alabanthis

After having explored the location, name, and status of Alabanthis, let us now turn to the social structure of the village during the Graeco-Roman period. Surviving papyri confirm that the inhabitants of Alabanthis, or the Alabantheites, came from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.⁸ The inhabitants of Alabanthis are referred to in Greek papyri as the Alabantheites (Αλαβανθειτης),⁹ whereas the ethnic for Alabanda of Asia Minor is Alabandeus.¹⁰ The ethnicon Alabanthites was apparently used as a double name since Pennesis, a farmer in *Epoikion Sarapionos*, was also called Alabanthites.¹¹

¹ *Stu.Pal.* XXII.85.6-8.

² *P.Daris* 23.4; *P.Turku* 38.4; *CPR* I.218.10.

³ *P.Enteux* 87; *P.Tebt.* III.837; Fati 2013: 38.

⁴ *P.Gurob* 24.1; *P.Tebt.* III.1088 descr., 5.

⁵ *P.Ross.Georg.* 2.18, 341; *Stu.Pal.* XXII.85.14.

⁶ *Stu.Pal.* X.40.15.

⁷ *SB* I.4869.1 = https://www.trismegistos.org/fayum/fayum2/97.php?geo_id=97 (last access on 22/12/2019).

⁸ *BGU* IV.1046.11.

⁹ *BGU* IV.1046.11.

¹⁰ La'Da 2002: 15 = https://www.trismegistos.org/fayum/fayum2/97.php?geo_id=97 (last access on 22/12/2019).

¹¹ *BGU* IV.1046.2.11.

In 236/235 BC, the 75-year old officer Antipatros of Kyrene, who lives in Krokodilon Polis, bequeathed all his belongings and a farmstead or *stathmos* (σταθμος) which he possessed in Alabanthis to his wife Dionysia.¹ In 222 BC, Crateuas, the Macedonian steward of the kleros of Asteropaios, petitioned the Ptolemaic king that he was beaten and insulted by Harmiesios and other shepherds from Alabanthis, who came down to his field, armed with rods, gave him many blows, took away his *himation*, and pastured their flock unauthorised on a plot of land which was under his supervision. Herodotus, the *epistates* of Alabanthis, was an eye-witness. Crateuas petitioned the king to ask Diophanes, the strategos, to summon Harmiesios and the other shepherds so that they may be punished for the violence and abuse and Crateuas may be pleased.²

There is no doubt that settlers (κατοικοι) possessed land in and around Alabanthis. Thus, in 221 BC, Apollodotos, a settler at Alabanthis, petitioned King Ptolemy that he was wronged by Mnaseas, the oikonomos.³ In 221 BC, Thetosiris complained to the Ptolemaic king against her husband; she requested the king to ask Diophanes the Strategos to write to Pasis, the Archiphylaketes of Alabanthis, to summon her husband.⁴ Antipatros of Kyrene possessed a farmstead in Alabanthis, which he bequeathed to his wife Dionysia in the third century BC.⁵

In AD 64, one Thaubas wrote to her father Pompeius, telling him that her sister Herennia died and asking him to come. After the peristole (wrapping) of Herennia's body, the corpse was transported to Alabanthis, apparently her birthplace, where her father had the chance to come from Oxyrhyncha to watch the body.⁶ In the Roman period, the katoekik land at Alabanthis was owned by metropolitites,⁷ whereas a *hieros* and *idiotikos paradeiso* was property of Alexandrians in the second century AD.⁸ Three arourai of *kleros katoikikos* near Alabanthis are similarly mentioned in a papyrus of AD 180-192.⁹ In the second half of the seventh century AD, the *ousia* of Petterios and Maroudos was located in Alabanthis.¹⁰ In the early Arab period, the church of Phoibammon owned some land in the village.¹¹

There is no papyrological evidence for the presence of Roman citizens or soldiers in Alabanthis.¹² Apart from the Greek and Egyptian inhabitants, the population of Alabanthis also included Jewish settlers.¹³ Apart from Alexandria in which there was a Jewish community at least since the time of Philadelphus, Greek papyri refer to the presence of Jews in the Arsinoite nome, who were engaged with other inhabitants in the Arsinoite area on trade and social matters in the Graeco-Roman period.¹⁴ In Krokodilopolis, for instance, a trial between a Jew and his Jewish wife was brought before a Greek tribunal in 222 BC.¹⁵ In the following year, Jews and Greeks

¹ *P.Petrie* II.16.1.16-22; *Nowak* 2015: 233-4.

² *P.Enteux*. 75.

³ *P.Enteux*. 87.

⁴ *P.Enteux*. 24.

⁵ *P.Petrie* II.16.1.16-22.

⁶ *P.Fouad* 75.

⁷ *BGU* III 907; *P.Flor.* I.97.

⁸ *P.Athens* 43 Ro, 1.

⁹ *BGU* III.907.7-8.

¹⁰ *Stud.Pal.* VIII 869.1.

¹¹ *CPR* XXII 60.29.

¹² *Hombert and Préaux* 1952; *Lindsay* 1963.

¹³ *P.Enteux*. 2.

¹⁴ *Ritter* 2015.

¹⁵ *CPJ* 19.

paid grain tax to the granaries of the village of Psenyris.¹ In 218 BC, Harmiysis, a wool merchant and settler from Krokodilopolis, complained to king Ptolemy that he purchased the fleece of 118 cross-bred sheep from Seos, a Jew with an Egyptian name and a settler from Alabanthis, who deceived him and secretly sheared the sheep and removed the wool for himself.² In 182 BC, Apollonius son of Protogenes, Jew of the epigone, lent to Sostratus son of Neoptolemus, Jew of the epigone, two talents and 3000 drachmas of copper money for one year without interest on security of house and court belonging to him at Apias in the division of Themistes.³ In the second century BC, Judas the Jew, son of Dositheus the Jew, a farmer near Philadelphia of three arourae, petitioned Zopyrus the *epistates* against the decision of the *komogrammateus* who arbitrarily raised his rent.⁴ In the first century BC, Sabbataeus son of Horus and his son Dosatus, Jewish potters from syron kome agreed to share with Petesuchus and his sons Nepherus and Nechthanoupis the pottery at Nilopolis.⁵

The Economy of Alabanthis

Having discussed the demographic composition of the inhabitants of Alabanthis in the light of surviving Greek papyri, let us now turn to their economic activities. As in other villages in the Arsinoite area and elsewhere in Egypt, the economy of Alabanthis depended primarily on agriculture. There is no question that Alabanthis had rich water supplies. This is clearly confirmed in papyri since the village has both a dyke⁶ and an unidentified canal, which is mentioned in a private business letter and once ran to the west of Alabanthis in the third century BC.⁷

The dike-area at Alabanthis appears in an official correspondence dating back to 235 BC: 'Give orders for the measurement to Sokonos son of Pasis, for the dike-area at Alabanthis'.⁸ The papyrus suggests that the dike-area at Alabanthis was enclosed with an arable land of wheat, where the official asked for the wheat artabas to be returned from the new crop with an increase of one half and the rent would be paid in wheat proportionate to the seed. In 241 BC, Hermogenes, the head of the quarrymen, sent a letter to Theodoros, the engineer/ architect working on the irrigation canals and in the stone quarries in the Arsinoite area and the successor of Kleon. Hermogenes informed Theodoros that Harmachoros, the secretary of the public record office, sent him a complaint of the quarrymen, who 'have been working in the Chalkorychia (copper mines) for quite some time now, and have been hoping to move on to Alabanthis when they have finished the job on which they were at work up to the 30th of Pachon, since there is no water around here'.⁹ Undoubtedly, the drought of the copper mines near Philoteris and the richness of Alabanthis in water resources, which is apparent from its dike-area and plain, was the motivation behind the strike of the quarrymen at Philoteris and their eagerness to be transferred to the quarry at Alabanthis.¹⁰ Yet the economic importance of the minerals/ metals extracted from the quarry of Alabanthis cannot be gauged from the documents.

¹ CPJ 33.

² P. *Enteux*. 2; Feldman and Reinhold 1996: 29.

³ CPJ 23.

⁴ CPJ 43.

⁵ CPJ 46.

⁶ P. *Petrie Kleon* 107.50; P. *Teht*. III.1.701.1-5; P. *Petaus* 40. 8-9.

⁷ P. *Petrie Kleon* 43.5-6.

⁸ P. *Teht*. III.1.701.1-5.

⁹ P. *Petr*. III.43.8.fr2, r, 1-6.

¹⁰ P. *Petr*. III.43.8.fr2, r, 1-6.

Wheat, barley, and lentils were the most planted cereals in the village.¹ Like nearby villages like *Syron Kome, Tenao, Palit, and Tanesos*, Alabanthis had many fields planted with wheat in the third century BC.² In the third century BC, the dike-area (*perichoma*) near Alabanthis was planted with wheat and barley.³ Seeds of wheat are mentioned in a fragmentary papyrus; they were provided for the farmers in the village.⁴ In 245-244 BC, it seems that grain was measured in Alabanthis and in the surrounding topoi according to the grain-measure of the toparchy.⁵ In the early second century BC, Alabanthis was mentioned together with Arabon Kome, Neilopolis, and Letopolis in connection with wheat.⁶ The village possessed a grain-store or *thesauros* (θησαυρος) since the Ptolemaic period:

The 4th year, Pharmouthi, from Tothoes and Palamounis, sitologoi of the grain-store in the *exo topoi*. Grain received on the 21st from the produce of the said year: measured into the granary at Alabanthis for that village, for seed 14 artabas of wheat, for rent 449 1/2 1/3 artabas of pure wheat, for loss in cleansing 9 1/3 1/12 artabas, fee for sifting 4 2/3 artabas, making 14 1/12 artabas, total 463 1/2 1/3 1/12 artabas.⁷

Wheat was delivered to ‘the granary of the god’ at Alabanthis in the second century AD.⁸ It is unclear whether “the granary of the god” was associated with a certain temple at Alabanthis or is the name of the local grain-store in the village. Private granaries were often named after their owners like the granary of Basullus⁹ and the granary of Saturninus.¹⁰ It is also known that some temples could have their own granaries in the Arsinoite nome and elsewhere in Egypt. At Tebtynis, for example, the temple of the god Souchos/Kronos, possessed a granary in the village. The granary guard was a woman called Thenapynchis, after whose death her living son Apynchis seems to have inherited her position.¹¹

In addition to other villages like Psenphoris, Tanis, Tamais, Nebla, and Haueris, Alabanthis had many fields that were planted with lentils.¹² In the mid-third century BC, the lentil-soup makers and brewers from Alabanthis appear in a fragmentary papyrus in connection with tax payments.¹³ In 260 BC, a taxing-list for the different villages of Phebichis in the Herakleopolite nome mentions that ‘the one who boils the lentil soup (*phakepsos*)’ had to pay 4 (drachmas?), presumably in connection with his profession.¹⁴ A taxing-list of 110 BC mentions that the holdings of the temple of Harmotes and Harpokrates at Aphroditopolis amount to 130 arourae for making a ‘bread and lentil-meal’ of the two greatest gods.¹⁵ Undoubtedly, the bread and lentil-meal were connected with some cult or ritual practice in honour of Harmotes and Harpokrates, particularly since the lentils mentioned in this papyrus recall Plutarch’s statement that lentils

¹ *P. Dublin* 27, 2; *Stud. Pal.* 2.3.550.2.

² *P. Tebt.* III.701.94.

³ *P. Tebt.* III.701.2-3, 171.

⁴ *P. Tebt.* III.701.105.

⁵ *P. Petr.* III.106.

⁶ *P. Tebt.* III.848.19.

⁷ *P. Tebt.* III.2.837.

⁸ *SB XX.14088.7.*

⁹ *P. Tebt.* II.375.

¹⁰ *P. Mich.* 12.633.

¹¹ *P. Mich.* 5.226.

¹² *P. Petrie Kleon* 107, 60, 81.

¹³ *P. Petr.* III.37.

¹⁴ *P. Hib.* I.112.77 = *P. Bodl.* I.58.77.

¹⁵ *BGU VI.1216.43-7.*

were particularly offered to Harpokrates.¹ Yet it remains uncertain whether the bread and lentil-meal associated with Harpokrates was a ritual part of the festival of the Harpokratia confirmed at Euhemeria and Soknopaiou Nesos.²

In AD 98, there was a guild of lentil-meal makers operating in Memphis, where two of its members, Petosiris and Petermouthis, signed a contract to serve as tax-farmers.³ In AD 228/233, Aurelius Chigas, ‘the one who boils the lentil-soup’ in Hermopolis Magna, paid 16 drachmas as taxes, presumably in connection with his job.⁴ The presence of a guild of lentil-meal makers suggests that lentil-meals were popular in Graeco-Roman Egypt. So much so that a commercial association was established on the basis of this profession, the members of which were liable to a taxation amount of 16 drachmas and could act as tax-farmers in the Roman Period.⁵ Lentil-soup makers thus operated in Alabanthis.

The production of wine and oil must also have been important for the economy of Alabanthis in the Graeco-Roman period. Regrettably, the names of only two brewers, Haryotes and Psan[...], are known.⁶ Surviving papyri suggest that the Arsinoites preferred the Chian and Egyptian wine,⁷ and this was probably the case in Alabanthis. Alabanthis also appears in connection with oil monopoly in a fragmentary text from the third century BC.⁸ Persons from Alabanthis are similarly listed together with individuals from nearby villages, including Autodike, Theadelphia, Ptolemais Hormou, Hephastias, Soknopaiou Nesos, Philadelphieia, Psinachis, Aphrodites Berenikes Polis, and Alexandrou Nesos in connection with oil monopoly.⁹ We know at least the name of an oil-merchant Semtheus.¹⁰

The most striking activity of the village, however, is pasturing or the breeding of sheep and goats. Alabanthis was a suitable place for grazing domestic animals since the village possessed a plain in the second century AD.¹¹ Hay and grass for grazing in the plain of Alabanthis and around the village were transported by donkey-drivers, who originally came from Alabanthis, other nearby villages like Memphis of the meris of Polemon, or even from the metropolis. The donkey-drivers were given fare for transporting the hay and grass, and the transportation price apparently depended on the distance between the original place from which the hay and grass were brought and the plain of Alabanthis.¹² Zenon’s goatherd Hermias takes over 30 goats in the village around 248 BC; the Jew Seos owns 118 adult sheep and is accused of sheathing them and taking their wool;¹³ a professional herdsman is involved in a lawsuit with a Greek cavalryman,¹⁴ and sheep from Alabanthis have invaded the kleros of Asteropaïos;¹⁵ a *boukolos* is mentioned in *P.Tebt.* III.701.¹⁶ In the Roman period, a sheep-owner loses 10 out of his 22 sheep;¹ payment for

¹ Plut. *De Is. et Os.*: 377c.

² Abdelwahed 2019.

³ *P.Bour.* I.13.

⁴ *P.Lond.* III.944.2-4.

⁵ *P.Bour.* I.13; *P.Lond.* III.944.2-4.

⁶ *Stud.Pal.* XXII 85.7, 12-14.

⁷ *P.Mich.* 1.74, 1.108.

⁸ *P.Petrie* III.66b, 4.10.

⁹ *P.Petrie* II.28.9, 15.

¹⁰ *Stud.Pal.* XXII 85.7, 14.

¹¹ *P.Würzb.* 18.14-15.

¹² *P.Lond* III.1165.

¹³ *P.Enteux* 2.

¹⁴ *P.Enteux* 24.

¹⁵ *P.Enteux* 75.

¹⁶ *P.Tebt.* III.701.

green fodder amounts to 1294 drachmas in a single day.² Six arouras of land sown with hay near Alabanthis are offered as mortgage.³

The economic prosperity of Alabanthis must have secured good income, generated from the taxations, for the public treasury. The administrative machinery required for the arrangement and running of such an economy is ensured in the village. For the third century BC, an archiphylakites, an epistates, and a komogrammateus are attested in the village.⁴ We know the name of Petosiris, who served as the komogrammateus of Alabanthis under Philadelphus.⁵ The praktor of Alabanthis also appears in connection with 1 measure of vinegar.⁶ In 258-257 BC, the handicraftsmen at Alabanthis paid an unidentified tax, presumably in connection with their profession. A tax on ferry-boats (*porthmides*) was also collected from the inhabitants of Alabanthis in the third century BC. In the same papyrus, the inhabitants of Alabanthis appeared in connection with tax payments on salt ($\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsigma$) and brewing ($\zeta\upsilon\tau\eta\rho\alpha$).⁷ In 117 BC, Pnepheros, farmer of the taxes on beer and natron (salt) of Kerkeosiris, petitioned the basilikos grammateus asking to be put under his protection; the basilikos grammateus subscribed to the petition and forwarded it to Menches, the komogrammateus.⁸ In 258-257 BC, the lentil-soup makers and brewers from Alabanthis appear in a fragmentary papyrus in connection with tax payments.⁹

The economic activities such as agricultural productions and tax payments and other social activities such as marriage necessitated the presence of the grapheion and komogrammateia at Alabanthis during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.¹⁰ Like many other sites, Alabanthis possessed a grapheion, which is fully designated in Greek papyri 'the grapheion of Alabanthis of the meris of Herakleides of the Arsinoite nome'.¹¹ The *grapheion* or public record office was responsible for the registration of documents concerning the different affairs of the population. Copies of the daily activities associated with agricultural and commercial dealings were registered and kept by the komogrammateus at the public record office. In the second century AD, several texts are written or registered in the *grapheion* of Alabanthis.¹² A marriage contract dating back to AD 154 was written and a copy of it was kept in the grapheion of Alabanthis.¹³ In the third century AD, Alabanthis still had its own komogrammateus, though his name is lost.¹⁴

Religion in Alabanthis

Regrettably, there is no much information on the religious life of the Alabanteites. The only cult attested for certainty in the village is that of the god Serapis. In a list of an offering distribution by villages, Alabanthis and Ptolemaiou Hormou shared the offering distribution of 1 calf and 2

¹ *P.Phil. Gr.* 8.

² *P.Lond.* III 1165 Ro.

³ *BGU* III.947.7-8.

⁴ *P.Petr* III.121.5.1-3.

⁵ *P.Petr* III.121.5.1-3.

⁶ *P.Gen.* II.1.71, 2.18.

⁷ *P.Petr* III.121.

⁸ *P.Tebt.* I.40.

⁹ *P.Petr.* III.37.

¹⁰ *P.Petr* III.121, *BGU* IX.1898.321.

¹¹ *BGU* IV.1045.1.4, 2.24; *P.Flor.* I.97.24; *P.Mich.* IV.225.

¹² *BGU* IV.1045, *P.Flor.* I.97; *P.Mich.* IV.225.

¹³ *BGU* IV.1046.1.14-15; Burkhalter 1990: 51-60.

¹⁴ *BGU* IX.1898.

pigs for the festival of the god Serapis, which was held in Pachon.¹ This is the same offering share assigned to, or offered by, other villages mentioned in the papyrus. Each two villages such as Aphrodito Polis and Arabon or Arsione and Tanis were obliged to present 1 calf and 2 pigs as offering for the festival of the Serapeia.² Although Alabanthis was famous for the sowing of lentil,³ which in turn was closely associated with the god Harpokrates,⁴ one of the most popular child-deities in the Arsinoite area and the rest of Egypt and abroad,⁵ there is no surviving textual or archaeological evidence of the cult of Harpokrates in Alabanthis. In many areas, the cult of Harpokrates, as the child incarnation of the god Horus, appears alongside Serapis (the cult of whom is already confirmed at Alabanthis) and Isis. Yet the absence of concrete evidence makes it hard to come to a definite conclusion. In a marriage contract of AD 154, a bronze statuette of the goddess Aphrodite appears among the goods which Isidora Satoros brought over her dowry to the house of her husband at Alabanthis.⁶ This seems to suggest that the cult of Aphrodite had found its place in the life of inhabitants in Alabanthis. Apart from the pagan inhabitants, the population of Alabanthis also included Jewish settlers, who possessed landholdings and sheep in Alabanthis and must have adhered themselves to the religious instructions of Judaism.⁷

Conclusion

Alabanthis was a prosperous village in the meris of Herakleides in the Arsinoite nome. The village attained the climax of its prosperity from the third century BC and down to the second century AD, when it heavily appears in official and private papyrological documents. There is no archaeological evidence for Alabanthis as the site has not yet been identified. This naturally hinders the formation of a complete picture about the material culture of the village under Greek and Roman rule. Yet the papyrological evidence at our disposal gives many insights into the social, economic, and religious life of the village. Alabanthis was a multi-cultural milieu with a mixture of inhabitants from different backgrounds. The population of the village included settlers, both Greek and Jewish, and undoubtedly Egyptian peasantry. Like other sites in the Arsinoite area and elsewhere in Egypt, the economy of Alabanthis depended primarily on agriculture. Alabanthis was an agricultural community; grain, barely, and lentils are confirmed in the dike-area in and around Alabanthis, which once possessed a local granary. The village was also famous for its wine and, probably, oil production, where brewers and oil merchants of the village appear in connection with tax payments. In addition to Judaism, the cult of the god Serapis and, probably, Aphrodite, are confirmed in the village from surviving papyrological documents, reflecting the multicultural composition of its inhabitants.

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¹ *P.Petaus* 40.8-9.

² On a full-discussion of the festival of the Serapeia, see Abdelwahed 2016.

³ *P.Petrie Kleon* 107, 60, 81.

⁴ *Plut. De Is. et Os.* 377c.

⁵ Abdelwahed 2019.

⁶ *BGU* IV.1046.1.14-15; Burkhalter 1990: 54.

⁷ *P.Entreux. 2.*

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