

Synopsis: Data Processing and State Management in Roman Egypt (30 BCE-300 CE)

Abstract

Running a state is based on absorbing, processing and safekeeping information on its population and territory. These operations are conducted by a series of officials and a range of bureaus, whose cooperation is indispensable for the effective performance of these tasks. One mode of cooperation is vertical. A lower instance collects information on site and then forwards it to a higher instance, where the information is used to verify that past decisions were put into practice and as a basis for taking future ones. Still, bureaucratic apparatuses are pyramid-shaped, meaning that the higher instance is expected to receive information from more than one subordinated instance. Consequently, if the higher instance were to receive the mass of raw information as collected by each and every subordinated instance on site, it would simply not possess the intellectual capacity to internalize or deploy the data for its purposes. Accordingly, one of the key tasks facing the lower instances would be to convert the data of its operations in a new, handy format that could be feasibly processed and applied by its superiors. In the proposed project will study the working of this conversion mechanism in early Roman Egypt (30 BCE—300 CE). We will focus on three spheres of state interest: (1) legal documents, (2) information on population and property, (3) data relating to the collection of taxes.