Impact of Slaves on the Egyptian Economy During Ptolemaic and Roman Periods
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Abstract

Greco-Roman Egypt had an ordering of social classes, with slaves being the lowest social class. The origin in the emergence is an economic reason is the need for manpower to cover the shortage that primitive societies suffered in their better period. The origin in the appearance of the slavery is an economic purpose is the need for manpower to cover the shortage that primitive societies suffered in their upper stage.

The Ptolemaic Period in Egypt shows an increase in slavery based on war capture, the purchase of slaves from Syria and Palestine, the enslavement of debtors, and the inherited status of slaves' children born in the house of their masters.

Roman rule over Egypt was a time of peace, and this is also the time when the Roman civil wars came to an end. Despite the fact that some routes developed between the Roman state and its neighboring nations in the east, south, and north, this led to the enslavement of many hostages of war.

This paper aimed to clear how slaves impacted on the Egyptian economy in Ptolemaic and Roman Periods.

1. Introduction

The origin of slavery in the ancient world was linked to war. The ancient primitive societies killed their prisoners of war at first and when the economic activity of those societies increased, these societies needed their prisoners of war to use them as laborers, so the rule at that time became to preserve the lives of prisoners of war, and turn them into working human tools owned by the government, and then to individuals with the emergence of private property. The origin in the emergence of slavery is an economic reason is the need for manpower to cover the shortage that primitive societies suffered in their better stage. Slaves were the lowest social class in the hierarchy of social classes that made up Greco-Roman Egypt. They were consistently subjected to deplorable living conditions and hard treatment.
Meaning (slave) in the ancient Egyptian language:

There were many words that expressed the meaning of (servant) from the era of the Old Kingdom until the Roman era, some of them appeared as follows (ḥm) or (ḥmt) was used to express the meaning of (servant). It expresses the meaning of (servant) and (servant) for the inhabitants of the house, as well as a worshipper of the temple god.

(ḥm ṣḥ) It also expressed the (servants) of the priest, from the eighteenth dynasty until the Greco-Roman era. The word was also used in the names of persons and it also expressed the meaning of (followers of the king) (Walker, 1961).

Slaves in Ancient Egypt

Owning a slave is a manifestation of luxury among the Egyptians. Number of slaves in Egypt was small, and the majority of them worked for the king, cultivating his lands and exploiting mines and quarries. Ordinary people could own slaves, however, because the king used to give some slaves to his employees, and owning slaves was considered a sign of luxury among Egyptians. (Walz & Cuno, 2010)

Slaves in general were all foreigners in ancient Egypt; they had social and legal rights, such as the ability to testify in Egyptian courts. Slaves were the lowest social classes in Egyptian society. They are of foreign origin, but they were captured in the past as a result of an Egyptian victory in Nubia or Libya or the Eastern Desert or Syria. (Redford, 2004)

Slaves have been used as a labor force since the reign of King Senefru, with the rise and expansion of the state's architectural activities. When they were brought to Egypt during military campaigns, (CASTILLOS, 2021). Some of them were bought as slaves from foreigners, who were the basis and commodity for the king, and when captivity, the free prisoner was equal to his slave counterpart, so both are It has the status of a commodity for its owner. (Meillassoux, 1991).

Egypt has recruited and harnessed Nubians and used them in general in paramilitary operations for internal security since the Old Kingdom. (Yoyotte, 1981).

In the Middle Kingdom, (ḥmw nsw) appeared frequently, which means (servants of the king), they were the children of prisoners, and Asian slaves brought from Syria in the slave trade, as well as prisoners brought by police inspection, appear in them. Similarly, many prisoners with cows, livestock, and sheep during the reigns of King Merneptah and King Ramesses III. These captives were used as labourers in temples, forts, and other structures. Slave’s sons and daughters are born slaves and are known as “dt” and they are not separated from their mothers, these children, of course, were forced to accompany their fathers to work from infancy, as were their mothers. (Loprieno, 2012).

Slaves in Greco-Roman period

Slavery terms recorded in Greek papyrus documents from the Roman era show that the terms applied to slaves were either general terms applied to all slaves or special terms applied to specific groups of slaves. The general terms of slaves is (δοουλος) it was called to the masculine and feminine slave, it followed in use the term (παις) it originally means a child, or a boy, and its derivations are applied to slaves and free people, therefore, this term - or one of its derivations is often encountered in documents, and its publishers cannot determine the legal status of those who were called the term, whether they are free or slaves. (Mirković, 2005).

The ancient world knew many of the main sources of slavery, the prisoners of war, who became slaves, and this source was the first in the emergence of slavery, the slave trade and
the upbringing of female slaves. Kinds of the slavery based on military capture, buying slaves from Palestine and Syria in Ptolemaic period. (Wiedemann, 2003).

The beginning of the Roman reign of Egypt was the beginning of the so-called Roman peace period, which is the period in which the Roman civil wars ended, and the situation began to stabilize. Despite the fact that some paths arose between the Roman state and its neighboring people in the east, south and north, which resulted in a large number of hostages of war were enslaved. (Woolf, 1993).

Slaves from India and Ethiopia (upper Nubia), which was considered the eastern gate to Africa, were exported to the west via Egypt; they were exported to Egypt as good slaves from East Africa. (Hathaway, 2018). The Roman administration in Egypt imposed great restrictions on the export of slaves outside Egypt, apparently to prevent the existing slaves from leaking out. Slaves were brought from Germany, France, Italy, and Macedonia. (Goody, 1980). As the names of the slaves do not indicate their nationalities, it is noticeable that the slave girls represented an important percentage among the imported slaves, especially from Asia, and slave girls were preferred to perform housework. When a slave was born, his owner registered him and extracted a certificate proving his inclusion in the category of slaves. This testimony was valid throughout the life of the slave because it was like an identity for him. It was discovered that children left behind in wars and those who are thrown into ruins are both captured and sold into slavery. The kidnapped kids were brought up as slaves. (Collins, 2008).

As for the marriage of freewomen and slaves, a freewoman who holds Roman or Latin citizenship, if she marries a slave without the approval of the slave owner, becomes a slave of that owner, and thus her children become slaves. (Parker, 2007). But if this marriage is approved by the slave's owner, the woman retains her freedom, and her children become freemen. (Evans-Grubbs, 1993).

Slave hire was common in the Greco-Roman era, and the documents relate to the hiring of female slaves as a wet nurse, and the hiring of male slaves to work in knitting, weaving, and in the field. (Dalby, 1979).

Since raising a child is costly and time-consuming, it is preferable to purchase an adult slave rather than a child slave. The owner purchases a wet nurse (a woman who breastfeeds) for a child slave, who is sometimes exposed to death, resulting in loss to the owner. (West, 1916).

Economic production was based on agriculture and industry, and there were plenty of freemen laborers available for low wages so, slaves had little impact on production, however, slaves were responsible for managing the agricultural land of their masters. (Hunt, 2017).

The slaves worked in several fields, they worked in the palaces of the noblemen, they also worked on farms, where the exemption of slaves from military service led to an increase in the rush to employ them in farms and fields, especially vineyards, especially at a time when many free men were driven to the battlefields, and the fields became abandoned on the one hand and tied to debts on the other hand, Which led to its sale in the hands of the owners, who used slaves to take care of it. (Bradley, 1994).

Slaves also worked in trade, which was considered one of the professions unworthy by the masters, as they were practicing it under the guise of their slaves, The creditors of his slaves were not able to file a lawsuit against him because the contract was in the name of the slave. Slaves were used as agents in commercial life, financial affairs and auctions. (Bradley, 1994). It is possible that the dancers and musicians who were celebrating the parties were slaves, and undoubtedly the prostitutes were slaves. (Dalby, 1979) (Montserrat, 1996).
As for Alexandria, which was the largest commercial and industrial center in Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman eras, the role of the slave differs in it from his role in the Egyptian countryside in terms of working in the homes of the rich and in the construction work. (Rostovtzeff, 1936).

The legal possession of slaves, there were many methods of possession of slaves in Egypt during the Greco-Roman era, and these methods are: Purchasing, gifting, inheritance and division of property, appropriation of female slaves, abduction and enslavement of children, in return for payment of debts. As for the illegal possession of slaves, the purchase of slaves in most cases, the buying and selling of slaves took place directly between the two direct parties, namely the owner and the buyer. Sometimes it was done through a mediator or an agent and sometimes through auctions. (Westermann, 1955).

As for slaves and taxes, the impact of Roman rule on the law of slavery is most obvious. A process (known as Epikrisis) that was used to identify people in this status was created as a result of the emergence of a class of financially honored metropolitans. Slaves also underwent this process because they were expected to follow their masters' financial status. Slaves were liable for a number of taxes, including the trade, taxes known as poll tax, and the Jewish tax even if their masters were Jewish and the slaves were not. (Rathbone, 1990).

Additionally, they had to perform obligatory tasks like fixing the dams and clearing the canals. In some cases, slaves were used as collateral for loans, and sometimes it was contracted to train them in one of the crafts, especially weaving. (Rathbone, 1993).

This following lines of a papyrus of several contracts where a slave is hired out by her or his master to perform a specific kind of work, with the master receiving the earnings from the slave's labor (P.Wisc.15: Oxyrhynchus(Elbahnasa,Egypt),185 AD.) fig no.1
Fig:1 The slave's labor  (P.Wisc.1 5 : Oxyrhynchus(Elbahnasa,Egypt) ,185 AD.)

The translation of the document:

{Glaukios, who is Pekysis’ son , Dieus is his mother, form Oxyrhynchos, Sento is his town, has employed to Achillas, Harpaesis’s son , Tesposiris  is his mother, living in the same town, for period of only one year, beginning on the first of the current month of Thoth, his feminine slave whose name is Tapontos as a performance of weaver. The lessor will make sure she is never far from him any time of the night or the day. The slave is fed by and gets her other needs from Achillas, however her master brings her clothes. The annual hire is 420 silver drachmas, which I, Achillas, shall immediately pay to Glaukios in installments at the end of each month after the lease has been approved. There will be no deduction from the hire for the eight days of vacation that the female slave Tapontos will receive in the months of Tybi and Pachon. However, if she is absent for longer periods of time due to a holiday of festival day, an illness, or a pressing need on the part of her master, the pay for those days will be withheld. Her master will send for her if he needs her to bake some bread late at night without taking anything away from the hire. The lease is valid. The twenty sixth year of the Caesar Marcos Aurelios Commodous Antonius Agustus Pius Armeniacous Medicous Sarmaticus Girmanicous Bretannicous Maximous, the fourteenth Thoth.} (P.Wisc.:1 5)
There were many means by which the master exploited his slave or female slave to obtain income in return for his work, or to teach him a specific trade or skill without obtaining a wage for the purpose of profiting from the slave or female slave after the end of training. (Forbes, 1955). The purpose of the number of documents related to teaching female slaves was to learn the craft of weaving, as for slaves; they were trained in the craft of carpentry (Thompson, 1982).

The following document represents the training of slaves. (Grenfell & Hunt, 1916) fig:2

II spc Oxyrhynchus

Fig:2 P.oxy.14.1647 represents the training of slaves (https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;14;1647)
The translation of the document

Platonis, also known as Ophelia, is the daughter of Horion of Oxyrhynchus. Together with her guardian, Plato, who is also her full brother, and Lucius, a weaver living in the small Oasis of Aphrodisium, they mutually acknowledge that Ophelia has apprenticed Lucius's young slave Thermuthion to learn the craft of weaving for a period of four years beginning in the first year of the current year. She gets paid 8 drachmae per month for the first year, 12 drachmae for the second year, 10 drachmae for the third year, and 20 drachmae for the fourth year. In addition, she is given 18 days off each year for vacations. The taxes on the trade and impost on apprenticeship are chargeable to the teacher and Lucius on his end, if there are any days when she does not work or is unwell, she shall remain with her instructor for a number of days equivalent to these at the conclusion of the time.

Slaves were being bought around five thousand drachmas of the Ptolemaic currency and one thousand nine hundred and sixty silver drachmas. (Bieżuńska-Malowist, & Lentsman, 1986). It is noted that the prices of slaves increased greatly in this period, this is due to the general economic crisis that the Roman Empire witnessed in this century, and its effects were reflected in Egypt. (Straus, 1973).

In the ancient Greek and Roman cultures, teaching literacy to slaves was likely a labor-intensive and financially rewarding endeavor. The royal family was one of the several large families that frequently employed instructors or taught their own slaves and freedmen how to read and write. (Poster, 2002). On important estates and in the imperial chancery, a sizable portion of the copyists, stenographers, and letter writers were slaves and freedmen. Producing literate slaves was another thriving industry. From this vantage point, it is clear that educated slaves would fetch a higher price when sold, and their abilities would also contribute to the big ability to maintain its opulent way of life. (Alford, 1986)

The following document represents a contract of a course for a slave and the teacher will be paid in three increments (education for slaves) fig no.3

Apprenticeship to Shorthand Writer (https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;4;724)
Transcription: p.oxy.4.724 (AD 155 Oxyrhynchus)

Salutations from Panechotes, also known as Panares, a former cosmetes for Oxyrhynchus, who reached out to Apollonius, a shorthand writer, through his acquaintance Gemellus. For a period of two years beginning in this month, Phamenoth of Antoninus Caesar the lord’s 18th year, I have assigned my slave Chaerammon to you to learn the signs that your son Dionysius is familiar with, for the agreed-upon wage. 120

Fig:3 Apprenticeship to Shorthand Writer (https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;4;724)

The translation of the document

Salutations from Panechotes, also known as Panares, a former cosmetes for Oxyrhynchus, who reached out to Apollonius, a shorthand writer, through his acquaintance Gemellus. For a period of two years beginning in this month, Phamenoth of Antoninus Caesar the lord’s 18th year, I have assigned my slave Chaerammon to you to learn the signs that your son Dionysius is familiar with, for the agreed-upon wage. 120
silver drachmas, not including feast days; of this amount, you have already received the first installment in the amount of 40 drachmas; you will receive the second installment in the amount of 40 drachmas once the boy has mastered the entire system; and the third installment in the amount of 40 drachmas will be paid to you at the conclusion of the period once the boy writes fluently in all respects and reads flawlessly. If you make him excellent within that time, I will not wait until the specified deadline, but it is illegal for me to remove the child before that time has passed, and he must stay with you after that for as many days or months as he may have been idle. The Eighteenth Year of Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius the Great, Phamenoth 5.

Conclusion

=Slaves had a major impact on Egypt's economy in Greco-Roman period. They were valued as assets in Greco-Roman Egypt and could be bought, sold, rented, mortgaged, or inherited.

=Slaves were allowed to own property as they desired, including farms that they could pass down to their children and they could marry freewomen.

=In the case of renting a slave, his master covers the cost of his clothes and all his needs, and this is proved in an official contract.

=Slaves had little impact on production because there were plenty of freemen workers for low salaries, but they were in charge of managing their masters' farms.

=Educated slaves would get a higher price when sold.

=In accordance with the slavery debt repayment agreement, a slave may purchase his freedom following a period of employment.

=Slaves were treated poorly at first, and then improved under Hadrian's rule.

=It is preferable to buy an adult slave rather than a child slave, since the cost of raising a child is high and expensive.

References


Tأثير العبيد على الاقتصاد المصري خلال العصرين البطممي والروماني
شيرىان إبراىيم جاد الله
المعهد العالي للسياحة والفنادق كينج مريوط إسكندرية

المتخصصة

كان لدى مصر اليونانية الرومانية ترتيب الطبقات الاجتماعية، وكانت طبقة العبيد أم أدنى الطبقات الاجتماعية. والأصل في الظهور سبب اقتصادي هو الحاجة إلى القوى العامية لتغطية النقص الذي عانت منه المجتمعات في بعض الأعمال، والأصل في ظهور الرق هو غرض اقتصادي نتيجة الظروف الاقتصادية الجيدة التي تجعل هناك الحاجة لامتلاك العبيد. كذلك فإنه في وقت الازمات الاقتصادية أثر ذلك في وجود العبيد. هناك العديد من المصادر لجلب العبيد، وكانت الحروب هي أكثر مصادر التي يتم بها الحصول على العبيد حيث كان يتم اتخاذ أسرى الحرب كعبيد.

تُظهر الفترة البطممية في مصر زيادة في العبودية في ظل الاستيلاء على أساس الاستيلاء على الحرب، وشراء العبيد من سوريا وفلسطين، واسترقاق المدنيين، والوضع الموروث لأطفال العبيد المولودين في منزل أسيادهم.

كان الحكم الروماني على مصر وقت سلام، وهذا أيضاً هو الوقت الذي انتهت فيه الحروب الأهلية الرومانية. على الرغم من أن بعض الطرق تطورت بين الدولة الرومانية والدول المجاورة لها في الشرق والجنوب والشمال، فقد أدى ذلك إلى استعباد العديد من رهائن الحرب. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توضيح كيفية تأثير العبيد على الاقتصاد المصري في الفترتين البطممية والروماني.

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