Explaining Incest: Brother-Sister Marriage in Graeco-Roman Egypt

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Formally accepted types of incestual union present one of the most problematic and yet poten-
tially revealing fields in the study of basic human relationships. Attested historical instances, however,
are rather scarce. For that reason alone, the society of Graeco-Roman Egypt (from *c.* 300 B.C. to
A.D. 300), which provides an unusually well-documented case, is of considerable interest. For a
period of about three centuries, a significant proportion of all marriages noted in official Roman
census declarations were between full brothers and sisters. An analysis of these data, and of the
precise historical and social context of the persons mentioned in them, supports the argument that
there were special circumstances that led those concerned to override 'normal' inhibitions against
close-kin marriages and sexual relationships. The reasons for their doing so were specific to their
social situation and cannot be invoked loosely in arguments concerning strategic differences in
kinship and marriage patterns between the eastern and western Mediterranean regions.

Introduction

One of the oldest, and firmest, of anthropological premises is the supposition
that incest taboos, prohibitions and regulations are amongst the most fundamental
generative elements in systems of social relationships, especially those con-
structed on models of kinship (Goody 1990: 320-1, recapitulating Tylor 1889;
Westermarck 1891 [1922]; Durkheim 1963 [1897]; Freud 1918 [1912-13];
White 1948; Parsons 1954; and, above all, Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949]).[1] It follows,
as a corollary of that supposition, that an understanding of the rationale behind
the rules of behaviour governing incestuous relationships is in some sense central
to a better comprehension of how social systems are formed, and of why they
work in the ways they do (Goldthorpe 1987; Arens 1986; Hopkins 1980: 304-
11). The problem is that there are several rather distinct types of human
behaviour that are encompassed by the simple term 'incest'. A clear under-
standing of these distinctions seems to have been bedevilled by a real overlap,
and therefore confusion, between restrictions on endogamic marriage and prohi-
bitions on sexual relations (Goody 1956; Fox 1967; Bagley 1969). Moreover, the
peculiar values attached to incest in Western 'high' culture, that have been
elaborated in metaphoric domains far beyond that of the simple act itself, have so
coloured our perception as to produce serious impediments to a clear under-
standing of the social problem (Arens 1986; Twitchell 1987). To these two
sources of distortion must be added the fact that the overwhelming concern of

modern sociological and social-work literature has been on incest as a form of abuse (Rubin & Byerly 1983; Young 1985). That seems, perhaps, to point to the need for a more specific typology that must be made within the general category of 'incest', one that would have to deal with relations of power as well as the mere action. Esposito's study (1981) indicates that even for contemporary society in the United States one can clearly separate out certain categories of behaviour (some of particular relevance to this article) which he has labelled 'consensual incest', in which he includes some types of brother-sister and uncle-niece relations. He contends that there are major distinctions between many of these cases and other categories, especially father-daughter relations, which appear to be characterized by the use of force against the unwilling. The distinction is critical since, as just noted, it is the latter case that dominates modern sociological analyses and has become the 'classic' instance that first comes to mind, precisely because it is the most problematic for social work in contemporary 'advanced' societies. The paradox then emerges that, although 'there is a general consensus that sibling incest is much more prevalent than any other type of incest', there is almost no concern with this type simply because it is not perceived as a great social problem (Bank & Kahn 1982; Herman & Hirschman 1981; Young 1985: 81). Indeed, in a typical study, Renvoize (1982) felt able to lump all forms of incest apart from the paradigmatic father-daughter case into 'other than father-daughter' instances.

Before beginning my presentation of the particular historical case of incest to be analyzed here, I should therefore like to make a preliminary distinction between a broader and a narrower type of action that might be labelled as incestuous (White 1948; Fox 1962; Bagley 1969; Goody 1956; 1990: 319-21). First of all, one can speak of types of sexual acts (with no assumptions about other cultural connexions such as marriage) between persons in defined relationships to each other (e.g., father-daughter), which are forbidden by the moral and social norms prevalent in the society concerned. Linked to this more fundamental form, but in some clear analytical senses to be separated from it, is a form in which marriage bonds (and therefore sexual relations) take place within nominally prohibited degrees of kinship and social boundaries normally set by the societies concerned. This investigation is primarily concerned with the second, somewhat narrower and weaker sense of 'incest'. As Goody has cautioned, however, even within this second type distinctions must be made: 'Even if we restrict our attention to the prohibitions within the elementary family, it is necessary, both from a cultural perspective and from a more general analytic one, to distinguish sexual intercourse within generations from that between generations' (Goody 1990: 320). My analysis will take another look at a rather well-documented case of incestuous behaviour of the former of these two types (that is to say, incestuous behaviour between siblings) in a situation that was apparently regarded as both normal and acceptable by the persons directly involved, even though it would have been considered unacceptable and abnormal in terms of the values embraced by the wider society of which they were part.

Close-kin marriage in the Graeco-Roman world

The historical case with which I shall deal concerns the rather large number of firmly documented marriages between brothers and sisters in Egypt of the Roman period (roughly speaking, the first three centuries A.D.). The relevant documentary material has been known for well over a century, and has been subject to a number of studies during that period (see Kornemann 1923: 17n2, who refers to studies from the turn of the nineteenth century; for subsequent treatments, see Bell 1949; Henne 1954; Hombert & Préaux 1949; Middleton 1962; Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1955; 1956: 342-8; 1964, amongst others). Of all these studies, however, by far the most sophisticated and analytically satisfying (and this by a considerable margin over the others) is the detailed description and analysis that has been provided by Keith Hopkins (1980). Based on a near-exhaustive sorting of all the available primary data, his study must form the basis of any further serious discussion of the subject. A brief review of Hopkins's conclusions is therefore in order, not only for the purpose of setting forth a minimum of information on which the case can be adequately understood, but also to dispel what are likely to be fundamental misunderstandings of (or possible objections to) the nature of the evidence itself.[2] Despite their apparent 'hoary antiquity', the Egyptian data are not a matter of mere antiquarian interest. They provide intensive and clearly documented evidence of a consistent human behaviour extending over at least three centuries (indeed, probably much longer than that, as I shall argue below). They directly challenge assumptions commonly made about the universality of certain types of incest taboos (Rubin & Byerly 1983; Young 1985: 5-8). The Egyptian data not only bring into question the supposed universality of such rules, but also cast doubt on basic explanations and theories that have been offered for typical human behaviour. Goody has recently re-emphasized the significance of this case: 'one striking feature of domestic life [in Egypt of the period] was that marriage was permitted, even encouraged, between brother and sister, whose union has often been considered prohibited by a universal taboo on "incest", that is, on sexual relations within the elementary family of father, mother, daughter and son'. Hence, 'the Egyptian material must lead us to modify generally accepted ideas about the universality of the incest taboo... to this extent, the ball is back in the sociological court and the game is a matter of identifying contingencies that may over-ride widespread tendencies' (Goody 1990: 319, 338).

There can be little doubt that 'widespread tendencies' were being overridden. Our word 'incest', and its conception, is closely linked to moral, social and legal norms established in Graeco-Roman antiquity. The Latin word *incestum*, basically meaning ritually 'unclean' (i.e., not-*castus* or not-pure), connoted a sense of moral revulsion at specifically polluting forms of sexual intercourse. In more formal terms, however, the word *incestum* referred to a moral and legal stain incurred by committing an act that was forbidden by state laws in the context of 'illegal' or unacceptable types of marriage bonds, especially those marital links which might involve members of the social upper classes (an important point for our argument here). Intermarriage between such 'pure' higher status persons and specific sorts of undesirable social inferiors was regarded as a type of pollution against which the social order had to be protected, even, if need be, by formal

legislation (Glotz 1969 [1900] and Humbert 1969 [1900] are the standard ency-
clopaedia entries; see also Guarino 1943; Lotmar 1912). Those norms varied,
sometimes markedly, in the world of the city-states and empires of the ancient
Mediterranean (Goody 1983), but in no circumstances did they ever envisage
marriages as close as those between full brothers and sisters as being even re-
motely acceptable (Weiss 1908). There were, however, significant differences
between Roman and Greek values and behaviours that are relevant to my argu-
ment. For example, Roman 'rules' and social practices regarding incestuous
marriages, being rather hostile to parallel cousin and closer-kin marriages, were
rather more stringent than those found in most Greek city-states (Treggiari 1991:
105-18). This too, is clearly reflected in the semantics of incestuous behaviour.
Whereas the Romans had a hard, precise term, *incestum*, to specify such forbidden
relationships, the Greeks did not. In fact, until the third and fourth centuries
A.D., they continued to use elaborate periphrastic expressions to designate what
we would call 'incest'; it was only after the Christianization of their society that
neologisms were created specifically to designate such prohibited marriages and
relationships (Rudhardt 1982: 731-3). The long survival of the earlier circum-
locutions in the Greek world indicates, in itself, a different attitude towards
close-kin marriages.

By comparison with the Romans, the Greeks were indeed far more inclined
towards endogamy and close-kin marriage, with cousin-marriage and the
epiklerate (i.e., the enforced marriage of a widow to her husband's brother or
closest male kinsman) being typical examples of their practices (Weiss 1908;
Erdmann 1934: 179-89). In so far as such matters can be determined, in the
society of the Greek city-state there was greater concern with direct ascendant-
descendant incest – as evidenced, for example, by the story of Oedipus and
many other such mythical instances (Rudhardt 1982). In their social practices and
values, Greek societies were, on the whole, more closely related in type to other
societies of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East that favoured closer
degrees of in-marrying than they were to those in the western Mediterranean,
which did not (Shaw & Saller 1984; Goody 1983; 1990: chs. 11-13, 15; Ziskind
1988). In this sense, they fell in with the 'great divide' in social practices between
eastern and western Mediterranean that has persisted in historical continuity from
antiquity to the present day (Holy 1989; Goody 1990). Concern with sibling
incest was certainly less emphatic, to the extent that half-brother/half-sister
marriages were clearly permitted (Erdmann 1934: 181 sqq.; Keyes 1940: despite
his own arguments; for the legal situation in Athens, see Harrison 1968). Both
records of actual marriages, and the popular assumptions embedded in forms of
literature such as the novel, do indeed affirm that such close-kin marriages actu-
ally took place and could be arranged by the parents of the prospective spouses.
The fact that they were 'permitted' and 'could be arranged', however, cannot be
taken as a simple index of their deeper acceptability to the persons concerned. In
this case, the story retailed in a piece of 'popular' literature concerning just such
a marriage must give some pause. The tale is told in the novel by Achilles Tatius
entitled *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, in which it is announced that the hero, Kleito-
phon, is to enter an arranged marriage with his half-sister Kalligonê.[3] Kleitophon

reports that one night, not long after receiving this news, he had the following dream:

> I saw my sister's body and mine grown together into a single body from the navel down, and separating into two above. Over me there hovered a huge, fearsome woman who glowered at me savagely: eyes shot with blood, rough cheeks, snakes for hair, a sickle in her right hand, a torch in her left. In a wild attack, she aimed her sickle at our groin where the two bodies joined, and severed the girl from me.

Kleitophon then describes how he woke up in a terrible fright, and 'decided to tell no one, but brooded over my troubles privately'. While some of the message of the dream sequence might be 'explained away' by the requirements of the novel's *mise-en-scène*, its explicit content surely evokes a manifest concern over the propriety of such marriages.

That marriages and sexual relations between very close kin were much frowned upon is also evident from the use made of charges of incestuous behaviour in the political arena in city-states such as Athens – charges that often had serious consequences for the accused. 'Slanderous' allegations of covert brother-sister marriage or sexual relations were sufficient to provoke outrage and divorce (Cox 1989: esp. 40 sqq.). How deeply rooted these values were in the social structure of the Greek city-state is also substantiated by a striking piece of primary data which conveys to us the interpretation the Greeks themselves placed on dream messages, such as the one experienced by Kleitophon in the story retailed above. The evidence comes from the work on dream interpretation by Artemidorus of Daldis, one of the great positivist analysts and reporters of the lives of 'average persons' of his own world.[4] In the fifth book of his technical manual he reports the following dream:

> A man dreamed of shitting into a bushel measure (*choinix*). He was caught having sexual intercourse with his own sister. The bushel is a measure, and a measure is like a law/social convention (*nomos*), so, in a certain sense, he was transgressing the laws/norms set down in common for the Greeks.

In the world of the Greek city-state, therefore, there seems to have been some ambiguity in attitudes towards close-kin marriages. Certainly cross and parallel cousin marriages were regarded as normal and acceptable. That positive evaluation, however, when judgements spilled over into the more questionable area of half-brother/half-sister marriage, tended to become more obscure and dubious. Finally, full brother-sister marriage, and the type of sexual contact it normally entailed, seems to have evoked feelings of deep revulsion. This ambiguity is also reflected in the 'mythical' materials produced by Greek-speaking communities. Whereas ascendant-descendant relations were regarded as absolutely forbidden in these stories, the attitudes revealed in them towards brother-sister relations were far more equivocal. Indeed, such close relationships seem to have been viewed with increasing hostility with the strengthening of state power over the first five centuries B.C. The exception on all occasions, however (an exception of some relevance to our argument), was that such incestuous relations were always perfectly acceptable 'amongst the gods' (Rudhardt 1982: 733-9, 760-1).

It has been persuasively argued that these general Greek attitudes towards acceptable marriages became part of a Hellenistic *Rechtskoinê* or common system of legal values and norms that were transplanted to the Graeco-Macedonian successor conquest kingdoms that dominated the eastern Mediterranean and the

Near East after the death of Alexander the Great (Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1964:
60-1). That is to say, the norms of the Greek *polis* which clearly permitted, and
even encouraged, marriages between cousins, and which allowed for half-
brother/half-sister marriages, were part of the cultural package taken abroad by
Greek emigrants to their new lands of settlement. Those values, however, also
included clear prohibitions against marital and sexual relationships that fell within
those proscribed bounds. Hence, so far as we can tell, these values were ones that
were normatively subscribed to by the Greek inhabitants of the land of Egypt,
the successor kingdom ruled by the family of Ptolemy (one of Alexander's
generals), who will be the principal subjects of our investigation. Not only did
the Greek settlers in Egypt bring these formal values with them, but later they
also became subject to the 'more stringent' incest norms typical of Roman
society in the west, following on the Roman incorporation of Egypt as a pro-
vince of empire in the final decades B.C. Most importantly for us, incest was
clearly regarded as a crime that could be tried before the Roman Prefect (gover-
nor) of Egypt (*BGU* 4.1024). A Greek or Roman inhabitant of the land could
reasonably expect to be able to bring such a charge before a court, as did one
Antonius who threatened to charge his father-in-law, one Sempronius, on the
grounds of incest (*P.Oxy.* 2.237, vii, 19-29; Whitehorne 1978: 245).

The evidence for brother-sister marriage and its interpretation

The primary evidence for the incidence of brother-sister marriages in Roman
Egypt is provided by ancient census records (on these see, in general, Wallace
1938 [1969]: ch. 7; Hombert & Préaux 1952; Nachtergael 1974; Nelson 1979;

TABLE 1:   A typical Roman-Egyptian census return.

Source:	P. Meyer 9
Location:	Arsinoë (Faiyûm)
Date:	Census of AD 145/46 (declared in 147)
Translation:	To Maximus, Strategos of the Heraklid District (*meris*) in the Arsinoite Nome, and to Herakleides, Royal Scribe of the same District, and to Sabinus and Antoninus, Secretaries of the Metropolis, and to [x...], Ptolemaios and Sarapion, the census takers (*laographoi*), and to Apion, local headman (*amphodarch*) of the city-quarter Dionysios' Place, from [x....] registered in the district 'First Goosepens' (*Chênoboskiôn Prôtôn*), through my administrator Aphrodisios son of Philip [...]
	[There depend on] me [....] in the Metropolis located in the Quarter of 'The Macedonians' one-eighth of a house and its atrium and courtyard, in which I declare for the required 'Household-by-Household Census' (*kat' oikian apographê*) for the 9th Year, just elapsed, of the Caesar and Lord Antoninus [= AD 145-46] in the city-quarter Dionysios' Place, for which I had already made a previous declaration for the 'Household-by-Household Census' in the 16th Year of the Divine Hadrian [= AD 131-32], the residents listed below:
	Charês, son of Atarias, son of Dionysios, whose mother Chariton was the daughter of Aphrodisios. Atarias was a Settler (*katoikos*) belonging to the (original) 6475, beyond the age subject to the tax (*hyperetês*), age 71, without any distinguishing marks,

and his [i.e., Charês'] wife who is also his sister from the same father (*kai toutou gynaika ousan homopatrian adelphên*), Heroïs, whose mother, Tertia, daughter of Didymos, was a Settler (*katoikos*), declared in the 16th year of the Divine Hadrian in the same city-quarter, Dionysios' Place, 41 years old, without any distinguishing marks,

and (their) two children, Atarias, 21 years old, without any distinguishing marks, registered (*epikekrimenos*) among the Settlers (*katoikoi*), and his wife, who is also his sister from the same father and the same mother (*kai tên toutou gynaika ousan autou homopatrian kai homomêtrian adelphên*), Athenarion, 13 years old, without any distinguishing marks,

and Charition, also known as Theodotê, daughter of Charês, 11 years old, without any distinguishing marks, and Didymê, another daughter of Charês, [x...] years old, without any distinguishing marks,

and [x...] son of Dioskoros, whose mother Rhodous, daughter of Dioskoros, is registered in the census as a privileged personal tax-payer (*epikekrimenos idiôtês*), 40 years old, without any distinguishing marks,

and the slavish bodies [i.e., slaves] that belong to Aphrodisios, namely [x ..., y...] years old, without any distinguishing marks, and her child, Pasion, known as Eutychês in the household-accounts, 20 years old, without any distinguishing marks, and Harpalos, known as Nikêphoros in the household-accounts, 18 years old, without any distinguishing marks, and Heroïs, 8 years old, without distinguishing marks,

and [x...], another female slave, [x...] years old, without distinguishing marks,

and Isidôra, also known as Hêdistê, another female slave, 23 years old, without distinguishing marks, and her child Aphrodous, also known as Parinous, 6 years old, without distinguishing marks,

and [x...] another female slave, [x...] years old, without distinguishing marks,

these female slaves were declared in the 16th year [i.e., of the Divine Hadrian] by my children Philip and Charition. I am declaring them here.

[In a second hand:] Received and registered by the Strategos in the 10th Year of Antoninus, Caesar and Lord, on the 14th Epeiph [= 8 July, AD 147].

[In a third hand:] Received and registered by the Royal Scribe in the 10th Year of Antoninus, Caesar and Lord, on 14th Epeiph.

[In a fourth hand:] Received and registered by the Secretary of the Polis on 14th Epeiph.

Note: This census return is typical in that it follows the general form found in most census returns; it is from the Faiyûm (the regional source of three-fifths of all recovered census documents); it is from Arsinoë, the single village that has produced the most modern finds; and it is from the general period to which most of the surviving census returns date. Of course, it also has some atypical features. It is longer and more complete than most surviving census forms (many of which survive only in fragments). And not one of the persons listed in it has any distinguishing marks (usually moles, scars, or such). The careful notation that the declarant's father, Atarias, was a *katoikos* (Settler) of the 6475 means that he was classed as belonging to the hereditary category of the original 6,475 Greek adult male heads of households who came as settlers to the region – a remarkable continuity of the establishment and maintenance of a *numerus clausus* as the hallmark of a privileged ethnic group, since in this case the identification must go back to the original Ptolemaic colonial settlement of the region some three and a half centuries before this declaration was made.

for a typical example, see table 1). Every fourteenth year between A.D. 5/6 or 12/13 (Montevecchi 1976: 72-4) and 257/8 the Roman government of the province of Egypt ordered a 'household-by-household' count of all persons in the land (*kat'oikian apographê*, as it was called in the technical Greek jargon of the administrators). About three hundred of these returns now survive, recorded in Greek, the official administrative language of the government (table 2). Of the 275 census returns used by Hopkins in his study, only 172, which list 880 persons, 'were sufficiently informative and legible to be used' (Hopkins 1980: 315).[5] To obviate any dispute over the reliability of this evidence, one must state categorically that there is no reasonable doubt that the persons involved in the sibling marriages recorded on these census reports were genuine sisters and brothers. The terms 'brother' and 'sister' are not being used loosely, or metaphorically, but in the strict and ordinary senses in which we normally understand them. To quote Hopkins's own summation: 'It is worth stressing that we are dealing here not with occasional premarital sex between siblings, abnormal but condoned, but with lawful, publicly celebrated marriages between full brother and sister, replete with wedding invitations, marriage contracts, dowries, children, and divorce' (1980: 303-4). The documents available from the census returns would seem to indicate that between one-sixth and one-fifth of all marriages were in this category. 'In the usable census returns, brother-sister marriages account for between 15-21 percent of all ongoing marriages (N = 113)'.[6] Hopkins concludes with a statement which, though concordant with the rest of his analysis, will be critical to the quite different interpretation that I shall give to these data: the claim that the surviving census returns 'are probably representative of a wider Egyptian population' (1980: 304).

One of the first types of explanation offered for the Egyptian phenomenon was that of social tradition or habit: the inhabitants of Roman Egypt were copying the known practices of their ancestors of the pharaonic period (brother-sister marriage was supposedly a 'well-known' practice indulged in by the Pharaohs). But there is no substantial historical evidence to demonstrate that brother-sister marriage was either known or commonly practised by 'ordinary' Egyptians in the pharaonic period – that is, before the advent of Graeco-Roman rule. Detailed studies of what quantitative data survive (Thierfelder 1960: 7 Sqq.; Pestman 1961: 2-5) certainly substantiate this negative conclusion. Though qualitative evidence (e.g., of a few intra-dynastic marriages in pharaonic circles) might give the impression that the practice was of some frequency, Cerny's analysis of around five hundred marriages amongst the 'ordinary' people of pharaonic Egypt produced only six possible cases (all of them only half-brother/half-sister marriages) or, at best, about one per cent. of the whole. And there is, as he explicitly states, 'no certain evidence for a marriage between a full brother and sister' (Cerny 1954: 29). A few such marriages were, of course, attested for the 'royal household' of the Pharaohs – the relevance of which for our investigation I shall pursue below. But the exiguous numbers do not support the common impression that the practice was a widespread one, even in this highly privileged and exceptional social milieu. The crucial point for our purposes is that clear and irrefutable evidence for the widespread practice of brother-sister marriage amongst 'ordinary persons' in Egypt is post-pharaonic.

Two simple propositions follow. First, such behaviour was not built into the Egyptian 'character' or social ethic in some transcendent fashion. Nor do we have any evidence that it was just a peculiar local social tradition. It had very precise beginnings. This conclusion is linked to a second one. There must be some definable set of circumstances that affected the persons concerned, and which must be connected to changes in the social, economic and political structures of Egypt after the end of pharaonic rule over the region, and to the subsequent imposition of foreign rule first by Greek, and then by Roman, rulers. These two fundamental propositions must form the starting point for any further investiga-tion. My analysis, therefore, is wholly in line with Goody's call for a 'cultural approach' to the problem of incest, an analytic approach based on cultural cate-gories (Goody 1956; 1990: 320).

What, then, do the Egyptian census documents from the Roman period tell us? 'Of 113 recorded, on-going marriages, 23 (17 certainly, 6 from perhaps to probably), 15-21 percent, were between brother and sister. Of these 23 cases, 11 or 12 were between full brother and sister (9 or 10 of the 17 certain cases), 8 were between half brother and sister (6 of the same father, 2 of the same mother); in the 3 remaining cases, it was unclear whether the married pair were full or half-siblings' (Hopkins 1980: 320).[7] One possible objection is that the terms 'brother' and 'sister' might be being used in some sense other than our normal understanding of them. But the parents and grandparents of the de-clarants are regularly named in the documents, and the description normally used in the recording of brother-sister marriages is: 'my (or 'his') wife and sister of the same father and of the same mother' (gynê kai adelphê homopatrios kai ho-mometrios). As Hopkins observes: 'This formula leaves little room for ambiguity' (1980: 321). He then goes on to adduce a host of supporting data which clearly establish that such marriages were regarded as normal in the precise sense that they were conducted in all other respects as non-consanguineous marriages: the census declarations reveal nothing unusual about them. They were publicly de-clared and duly noted by the authorities. The brother-sister marriages were celebrated with the same social practices as for 'ordinary' marriages, replete with wedding invitations. Public notices of the nuptials were issued by the happy and proud parents, the usual legal and property arrangements were made (including the transfer of dowry), and the relations were crowned with all of the trappings of 'romantic love' normally associated with exogamous courting and marriage (e.g., love poetry, love letters, and other such sentimental communications).

The evidence, then, is unequivocal. Yet by the norms usually set by the Graeco-Roman world there can be no doubt that marriage, and sexual relations, between full brothers and sisters would have been regarded as incestuous. So why was it done with such apparent frequency, and with all of the appurtenances and trappings of normality? What can be offered by way of a rational explanation? Hopkins is refreshingly candid. 'It is time we moved towards an explanation of brother-sister marriages in Roman Egypt. Let me confess straight away that the end of this article is disappointing. I do not have an explanation' (1980: 327). The problem of explanation is indeed a difficult one. For one thing, the Egyptian case of incest is rather recalcitrant to received explanations. The brothers and sisters concerned seem ordinarily to have been co-resident members

of 'normal' family/household units throughout their childhood (with little or no
evidence that would indicate substantial physical separation during the formative
period of their upbringing). The usual explanations of attraction and avoidance
posited for incestuous behaviour, from Westermarck and Freud to Fox and
Shepher, seem therefore to have little direct applicability to the present case
(Westermarck 1891 [1922]; Freud 1918 [1912-13], on both of whom see Spain
1987; Fox 1962; 1967; Shepher 1983). That is to say, even if these social 'norms'
are considered to be generally 'lawlike', they would then constitute only a further
'natural impediment' that the Egyptian brothers and sisters had to overcome in
the practice of sibling marriage. Before confessing his agnosticism on the matter
of an explanation, however, Hopkins very usefully considers the series of ex-
isting explanations that have been proffered for the Egyptian data, in order to
reject them one by one. It would be useful to review these again here. I do this
for my own purposes, since I am largely in agreement with his analysis and wish
to follow his lead in ruling out these explanations as in any way sufficient for the
problem at hand.

   Most of the explanations currently canvassed are based on various combina-
tions of naked economic self-interest. First, there is the claim that brother-sister
marriages were motivated by the desire to save on the expenses of dowry
bequests. Hopkins refutes this on both logical and empirical grounds (1980: 322
sqq.). It has recently been revived in a modified form by Goody, who points out
that Hopkins's logical objection to dowry as a factor (i.e., that dowry exchanges
would tend to cancel out in the long term) does not take adequate account of
the complex motives of social mobility in marriage, or of the complex nature of
the assets to be exchanged (Goody 1990: 333-4). These subtleties are indeed
important in analyzing any régime of property and marriage, but they do not
suffice to explain the specific phenomenon of brother-sister marriage. The
known facts of dowry are no different in cases of brother-sister marriage from
other cases. Moreover, these same contingent factors affecting dowry exchanges
were found quite widely in most other societies of the ancient Mediterranean,
but nowhere else did they compel incestuous marriages.

   Then again, there is the allied claim that brother-sister marriages were moti-
vated by the economic desire to maintain family property, especially to avoid
partition of the basic wealth of the time, namely land. It is indeed possible to
point to known cases where peasants were willing to contemplate brother-sister
marriage for precisely this sort of reason (e.g., in the well-known case reported
from late medieval Montaillou by Le Roy Ladurie, 1978: 36, 52, 179 sqq.). Once
again, however, Hopkins's objections must hold. Since these marriages were in
fact modelled on 'normal' marriages, arranging them between siblings hardly
secured much advantage. They were subject to termination by death and
divorce, to reformation by remarriage, and to all the other normal responses of
parents towards children's property (e.g., disherison).[8] Goody (1990: 334) has
attempted to reinstate the motive of keeping family property intact as a possible
partial explanation by emphasizing contingent elements not fully taken into
account by Hopkins. Once again, however, the riposte is not fully convincing.
The contingent or attendant circumstances such as extreme pressures on scarce
land resources, the need to conserve limited wealth within the family, special

considerations (the 'heirloom' factor, the unusual market or familial value of a particular piece of land) certainly did exist. But they were never sufficient to provoke so extreme a response as brother-sister marriage anywhere else in the Mediterranean (certainly in any known Graeco-Roman society). Hopkins's final suggestion (1980: 350 sqq.), based on his analysis of household composition, and the nature of the cycle of domestic development, is that brother-sister marriage was a way of controlling property exchanges and other claims attendant upon the in-marrying daughter-in-law. But this is basically still a variant of the economic argument alluded to above. As such, it is open to precisely the same (and, to me, decisive) objections. That is to say, there must have been at least one other true cause or decisive catalyst that led considerations of economic advantage to have had a type of impact in Egypt that they had nowhere else in the Mediterranean.

After having ruled out all these factors as sufficient explanations in themselves, one might well wish, like Hopkins, to profess a bald agnosticism on the subject. But I would like to proffer an alternative explanation – one which I think is concordant both with the available evidence and with the general historical developments in which Egyptian society was involved in the post-pharaonic period. The explanation is also specific to the very persons whose brother-sister marriages the census figures reveal. To pre-empt my argument, the explanation offered is rather simple. It was all a matter of race, or better, 'racism'. Expressed in somewhat more elaborate terms, I shall argue that these close-kin marriages were one response to the effects of what I would call the racial perceptions of the persons involved in them. If true, we would at least have an explanation that would require us neither to go back to the 'distant mists' of an Egyptian past nor to rely solely upon social and economic factors that should have been operating almost everywhere else in the Mediterranean world of the time. The factors I am going to claim as responsible for brother-sister marriages were ones specific not only to Egypt, but also to the precise social group involved in these marriages in the post-pharaonic period. Moreover, if such a secular explanation can be made to work for this case, it should shed a little more light on the general history of incest, and perhaps also on the problem of the supposed universality of certain aspects of human behaviour (or, as it is sometimes more grandly put, 'human nature').

The social location of Greek settlers in Egypt

We must begin our investigation by inquiring into the identities of the persons whose families and kinship relations are recorded in the census declarations from the Roman period. It is here that I must make my first serious break with one of Hopkins's claims, namely his assertion that 'the surviving census returns are probably representative of a wider Egyptian population' (1980: 304). I would argue that this is unlikely to be true, and that the recognition of the precise population involved in the brother-sister marriages is a most important first step towards a possible explanation. For one thing, the geographical distribution of the surviving census returns is hardly a random sample from all the nomes or administrative districts of Egypt (see table 2A, and fig. 1). A mere two or three nomes (out of some thirty-five to forty) account for almost all the currently known census

TABLE 2: Geographical and chronological distribution of census returns
from Egypt of the Roman Period (N = 301).

A: Geographical distribution by administrative district [nome] (bracketed
entries under nomes = some major town sites from that region)

Nome		N =		% =
Apollonite		9		3.0
Arsinoite		**177**		**58.8**
[Arsinoë]	[81]		[26.9]	
[Karanis]	[23]		[7.6]	
[Soknopaiou Nesos]	[15]		[5.0]	
[Tebtunis]	[13]		[4.3]	
Herakleopolite		11		3.7
Hermopolite		10		3.3
Memphite		11		3.7
Oxyrhynchite		**46**		**15.3**
[Oxyrhynchus]	[39]		[13.0]	
Prosopite		20		6.6
Others		11		3.7
Unknown		6		2.0

Note: One nome, the Arsinoite, has produced three-fifths of all
known census returns; and another, the Oxyrhynchite, has produced
another sixth. Therefore, only two administrative districts or nomes
(out of c. 35–40) are the source locations of about three-quarters of
all census documents recovered by modern scholarship. In fact, five
town sites alone (Arsinoë, Karanis, Soknopaiou Nesos, Tebtunis and
Oxyrhynchus) account for 171 or 57% of all known census documents.

B: The chronological distribution of census returns

Year (AD)	N =	% =
5/6	1	0.3
33/34	4	1.3
47/48	1	0.3
61/62	5	1.7
75/76	3	1.0
89/90	3	1.0
103/104	15	5.0
117/118	19	6.3
131/132	**34**	**11.3**
145/146	**35**	**11.6**
159/160	**31**	**10.3**
173/174	**41**	**13.6**
187/188	**48**	**15.9**
201/202	15	5.0
215/216	17	5.6
229/230	7	2.3
243/244	7	2.3
257/258	1	0.3
Unspec.	14	4.7

returns, and the location of these districts is most important to our analysis. The nomes that are by far the most heavily represented (the Arsinoite, Herakleopolite, Memphite and Oxyrhynchite) were also renowned as regions of heavy Greek colonial settlement following upon the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great. In fact, the single most heavily represented nome (the Arsinoite) is basically coterminous with the geographical region of the Faiyûm – a zone of planned intensive colonial development by the first Ptolemaic kings of Egypt (especially under Ptolemy Philadelphus II, to whose reign the foundation of the nome capital or *metropolis* of Arsinoë dates; see Crawford 1971: ch. 3). Therefore, both the geographical location of almost all the surviving data, and the nomenclature of the persons concerned, indicate beyond any reasonable doubt that they were not representative of 'Egyptians as a whole'. Rather they were direct descendants either of Greek settlers or of those Egyptians who were desperately trying to 'pass' as such persons and who are generally known as having had 'metropolitan' status because they identified themselves (by actual residence, or otherwise) with the urban-dwelling or urban-centred Greek settler inhabitants of Egypt. They lived in the 'mother cities' (*metropoleis*), or dependent settlements, that were the main loci of Hellenistic Greek settlement in the land of Egypt following on the conquest of the region by the Graeco-Macedonian armies of Alexander the Great in the late 330s B.C. In order to understand the peculiar situation of these settlers, and their probable social organization (especially as regards something as fundamental as marriage and family formation), it is necessary first to review their vested interests in coming to Egypt, and their ethnic relations with the indigenous Egyptian inhabitants of the land they were occupying and whose resources they were administering.

    Without accepting too literally the concept of a 'marriage market', one can nonetheless envisage marriage as involving choices made, either by the spouses themselves, or by their parents (or families), or by both. The nature of the family group, and its values, is then of some importance in giving a context for these decisions. Both Hopkins (1980: 328-32) and Goody (1990: 337-8) have noted that the family groups of the specific Graeco-Egyptians involved in very close-kin marriages were themselves rather isolated. They seem to have been characterized by a relative absence of the larger, complex networks of kinship relations that were typical of Greek communities in 'old Greece'. Hopkins specifically notes that, in the absence of such larger kin groups, households were aggregated directly into the unit of the village which 'was quite steeply stratified and internally differentiated' (Hopkins 1980: 342). This seems a rather unusual condition if one compares these village-dwelling Greeks with those in similar circumstances in their Greek homeland, where larger kin-group connexions and obligations were the norm. The fragmented and relatively isolated nature of Greek households in Egypt is surely a symptom of their 'colonial' situation, their settler origins. It is most likely that those Greeks recorded in the Roman census returns, or, to be more precise, their ancestors, came as individual settlers or as isolated families to establish themselves in the new land. They had to depend on institutions other than naturally constructed kinship groups, on artificial status markers such as membership in their town, in the local gymnasium, in craft and other such associations, in order to form larger resource groups. These latter
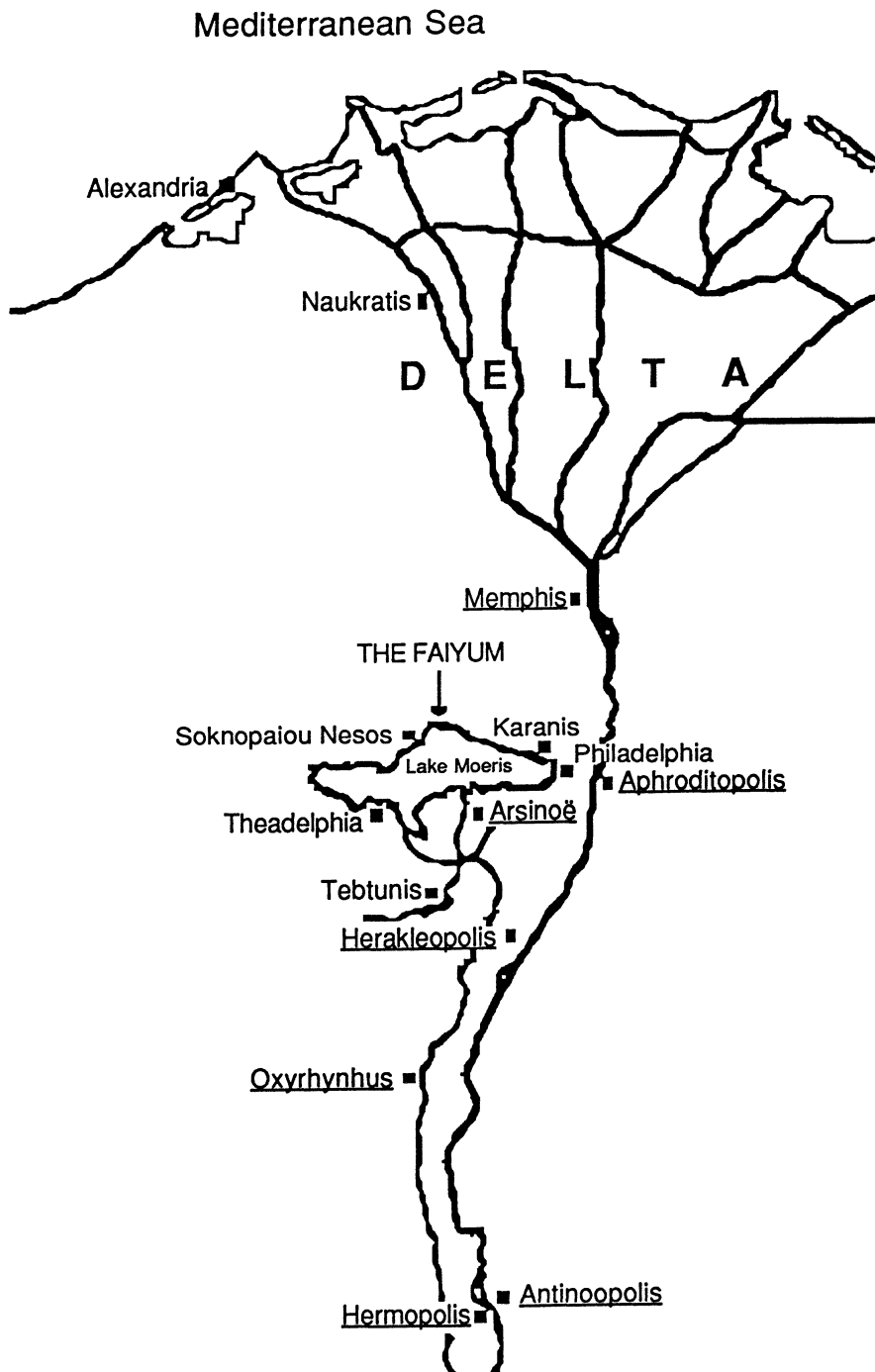
FIGURE 1. Major sites in Upper Egypt of the Roman Period, including the principal
source locations of the census documents (nome capitals, or *metropoleis*, un-
derlined).

associations served rather well as extensions of family interests, but they could not replace the family formation when it came to dealing with such critical matters as the devolution of property (especially, in the Nile valley and Faiyûm, where such property included highly productive irrigated land) and the manipulation of family wealth.

The Greek settlers' attitudes towards the indigenous Egyptians, whose land, property and wealth were the object of one of the greatest 'take-overs' in all of antiquity, amply justify Edouard Will's characterization of the situation as one of classic colonialism (Will 1985). The new networks of power instituted by the Graeco-Macedonian conquerors were marked by the deliberate exclusion of the native Egyptians from almost every level of formal state power, and from almost every ancillary area of life where the settler government controlled access to resources. Detailed studies of the different positions of governmental and formal economic power in Ptolemaic Egypt, including state high-priesthoods, officers of the Greek law-courts, gymnasiarchs, the heads of local municipal organizations and even athletes competing in formal games, yield the same uniformly negative picture: over the entire Ptolemaic period there is hardly a known example of an Egyptian being allowed into any of these positions (Clarysse 1985; Peremans 1962; 1970a; 1970b; 1973; 1974; 1975; 1976). The social separation between Greek settlers and locals was further marked by the clear distinction between 'country' and 'city' in the exploitation of Egypt. There was a very limited Greek settler presence in the countryside itself; most Greek colonists tended to congregate in urban centres, including the three genuine cities (all foreign establishments of theirs) of Alexandria, Naukratis and Ptolemaïs (see fig. 1). The domination of the countryside itself was managed through a network of 'false poleis' or Greek-type town settlements, each of them rather grandiosely labelled a 'mother city' (metropoleis), even if it was not much more than a 'hopped-up' village (komê), at the centre of each provincial administrative district or nome. The Greek settlers tended to converge on these urban centres, thus exacerbating the harsh opposition between the 'civilised' people of the 'cities' (i.e., themselves) and the native Egyptian 'inferiors' in the countryside (Bingen 1973; Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1983: 254).

The superior power wielded by the Greek rulers, combined with their demand that all formal and official acts be conducted in their language alone, enforced the clearest of separations between 'us' and 'them'. Given the fundamentally agrarian nature of the ancient economy, all this was in the service of the most important part of the great takeover: the seizure of all of the most fertile and most productive tracts of land in Egypt. All the known holders of the most extensive properties and the richest lands were now colonial Greeks. Native Egyptians were restricted to service as tied-peasants labouring on crown or temple lands, or as holders of small and marginal pieces of land (Peremans 1974 provides the statistics). In order to exclude this labouring Egyptian 'mass' from infiltration into the Greek networks of power, a number of extremely harsh segregation measures were put into place by the conquering administration. Amongst these measures, for example, was a rule forbidding indigenous Egyptians even to change their Egyptian names to Greek ones without formal permission of the government. Breach of this law carried the death penalty

(Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1983: 244-5; *Select Papyri*, 2.307 of A.D. 194). A simple thing such as identification by personal name (whether Greek or Egyptian) was of critical importance since the serried ranks of governmental and bureaucratic posts created by the occupying colonial régime were technically open only to 'Greeks'. Recognition of the hard facts of this stark economic exploitation, and the social and cultural norms systematically deployed in its direct support, has led scholars to move radically away from the rosy ideological view of Egypt as exemplifying the 'admirable' mix of Greek and local cultures called 'Hellenistic'. If anything, current historians generally subscribe to the opposite position, and view the situation as one of a conquering élite strictly segregated from a subject population on almost every plane, a segregation that was rigorously buttressed by cultural and linguistic norms, legal sanctions, and religious beliefs (Swiderek 1954; Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1980: 62-4; 1983; Préaux 1978; Thompson 1988; for the Roman period see Foraboschi 1988; Montevecchi 1985).

As a caution, however, one must concede that ethnicity was never solely a matter of names, and so nomenclature alone will never provide an unequivocal guide to ethnic identification. In addition to 'pure' Greek names sometimes assumed by Egyptians, there was a rather florid and modish 'Egyptianizing' style of names assumed by Greeks; in addition to which there was a prevalent system of dual naming (i.e., the same person bearing both an Egyptian and a Greek name, and using one or the other in different circumstances). The obscurities caused by the different possibilities in naming are sometimes so great as to bring into doubt the very existence of hard-and-fast ethnic frontiers in Egypt of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The latest, though not the most sophisticated, attempt to question the link between naming and ethnic identification has been made by Goudriaan (1988). Basing his analysis on Barth's (1969) theory of ethnic boundary formation, he argues for a situation of considerable ethnic mobility and fluidity amongst all the inhabitants of Graeco-Roman Egypt.[9] Since his analysis strikes at the heart of the position being argued here, two conclusions to which even he has been compelled perhaps bear repetition. First, he admits that 'as everyone knows, when the Romans re-organized Egypt, they availed themselves of the presence of a Hellenic population living mainly in the nome capitals and granted it the privilege of paying the poll tax at a reduced rate' (Goudriaan 1988: 14). Unlike Goudriaan, however, I am not as interested in the absolute benefit of slightly lower taxes, as in all the other political and economic advantages that such an official concession clearly signalled. Secondly, Goudriaan is forced to admit, in the face of unequivocal evidence that stands against his own theory, that ethnic identification decisively affected tribute status, and, with that, much else (Goudriaan 1988: 102-4). Given the fact that 'Greeks', however defined, constituted a tiny ethnic minority amidst a massive local population (Goudriaan 1988: 90), there can be little doubt that the deployment of ethnic identifiers (amongst which names were an important component) mattered greatly in determining control over, and access to, critical economic and bureaucratic resources.

It is therefore this position of Greek settlers in Egypt in the Hellenistic period after the conquest of the region by Alexander the Great and the imposition of settler rule under the Graeco-Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies (and during

the period of Roman rule following the conquest and absorption of Egypt by Octavian/Augustus from Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemies, in 31 B.C.) that is the critical factor that must be taken into consideration. The evidence on their situation is almost unequivocal in revealing a society in which relations between the incoming conquerors and exploiters of the land, and the indigenous locals, were pervasively and ubiquitously determined by racist conceptions. The importance for the ruling élite of legitimating and protecting its massive seizure of wealth (unparalleled in the world of antiquity at the time it occurred) cannot be underestimated. That problem specifically faced the ruling family or *oikos* of Ptolemy, one of Alexander the Great's strongmen, who seized the land as his share of the massive pillaging expedition of the whole Near East staged by Macedonian armies in an unprecedentedly narrow span of time – 'unprecedented', that is, given the scale of the loot. As an important part of the maintenance of its hegemony over these acquisitions, within a generation the family of the Ptolemies took the Greek tendency to endogamy to its logical limits. In the mid-270s B.C. Ptolemy II married his full sister Arsinoë, who was then dubbed 'Philadelphos' or the 'Brother-Lover' (Kornemann 1923: 23-4n4).

Over the next two centuries or so, the very close in-marrying practices of the Ptolemaic family produced a remarkable series of publicly advertised and celebrated 'Brother-Lovers' and 'Sister-Lovers'. An elementary calculation can be offered on the matter. Of the fifteen or so marriages made by the male Graeco-Macedonian rulers of Egypt from Ptolemy II to the end of the dynasty, ten, and possibly eleven, were full brother-sister marriages.[10] That is to say, at least two-thirds of all such marriages were fully incestuous. There is no comparable phenomenon known from the preceding pharaonic period. It must be further emphasized that the persons engaging in these acts were *not* indigenous Egyptians, but Graeco-Macedonians who clearly separated themselves, in almost every possible way, from the local inhabitants. They made it a point of pride to be known as 'Macedonians', and all of them also prided themselves on not knowing so much as a word of the local language (Cleopatra, the last of the dynasty, being the singular exception in this regard). The inception of the practice of brother-sister marriage at the pinnacle of the Ptolemaic family, where it is first most firmly documented, was therefore directly tied to the unusual colonial situation of the foreign ruling élite. Even amongst the settlers themselves, however, attitudes towards the practice, official and otherwise, were varied; to more than a few it was seen as a rather extreme measure of dubious 'moral' quality. Official poets in the pay of the dynasty, such as the Sicilian immigrant Greek Theokritos (*Idylls* 17.128sqq.), could call upon divine parallels in Greek mythology (viz., Zeus and Hera) to legitimate the close-kin marriages. But the practice clearly broke the innermost boundary of marriage prohibitions normally maintained in Greek city-states (though, notably, not by the ruling élites of the rural, kinship-dominated societies of Macedonia, whence these families ultimately came).[11] That elicited more than a few nasty comments from other poets, such as Sotades, noted for his 'tactless frankness', who wrote of Ptolemy II's relations with his sister: 'You are thrusting your foul prick into that unholy hole' (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai*, 14.621). Once his epigram became known, Sotades's reaction was to flee from Alexandria as soon as possible; the king's reaction was

to have Sotades pursued and arrested by his general Patroklos (near the distant Aegean island of Kaunos) and to have the miscreant placed in a leaden container and sunk into the oceanic depths. Both responses demonstrate how seriously the breaking of the incest barriers could still be taken. Norms were clearly perceived as being broken in the service of a more compelling goal (that is, as far as the Ptolemies and their Greek settler subjects were concerned).

Greeks and Egyptians in the Roman period

In the Roman imperial period, the time from which our surviving census returns come (see table 2B), the 'racial context' forged during the Greek conquest did not change appreciably. Egyptians were still the victims of distaste, hatred and maltreatment by virtue of the simple fact of their ethnicity. The Egyptians' low status was, to a considerable extent, determined by the unusual degree of unity which an oriental-type state had forged in the Nile Valley in the pre-Roman era. In the pharaonic period the whole country had become the property of a single ruler at the pinnacle of a collage of temple properties and 'noble houses' that controlled the land. The final incorporation of Egypt into the Roman empire by Octavian in 31 B.C. therefore took the form of the narrowest of circulation of élites. Princeps replaced pharaoh. The land became the private preserve of the emperor, directly controlled by his personal agents. If the native Egyptians had already been stigmatized as inferior beings during three centuries of Graeco-Macedonian colonial rule, then their status was only further depressed by the addition of yet another level of foreign superiors (see table 3). Conquest and integration did not bring them the benefit of a partial restoration of civil status

TABLE 3.   The ethnic divisions of Hellenistic-Roman Egypt.

ETHNIC GROUPS	MARRIAGE BARS	TRIBUTE STATUS
Roman citizens (administrators, soldiers)	↕	Tribute Free *ateleis - immunes*
Greek settlers (administrators, soldiers, farmers, businessmen, traders, artisans)		Privileged Class *epikekrimenoi*
	↕	
Native Egyptians (farmers, priests)		Totally Subject

that was conceded to most other provincial areas of the empire. Their situation was one of complete personal subordination, such that they have been likened to slaves or 'the utterly surrendered' (*dediticii*) in their near-total lack of civic status and inability to acquire basic rights on their own (Jones 1968; but see Sherwin-White 1973: 380-6). In theory there was no way for native Egyptians to advance directly to Roman citizenship; they were trapped in a hermetically sealed status compartment that allowed access to citizenship only through other intermediate chambers. The Roman administration of Egypt continued to enforce the old Greek settler norms of the Ptolemaic period, including legal injunctions against assuming Greek names and any other such attempts by locals to pass themselves off as non-Egyptians (Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1983: 244-5; *Gnomon of the Idios Logos, § 42*).

The fact that the small village dominated the rural society of upper Egypt (which continued to possess no true cities except for foreign establishments) led its indigenous inhabitants to be stigmatized as belonging to a world of rural 'barbarism'. Outsiders identified Egyptians with the rustic idiocy that was one of the hallmarks of 'barbarian' peoples beyond the frontiers of the empire. The lack of true urban centres meant, by extension, a singular absence of those visual signs of 'civilized' society — theatres, odeons, amphitheatres and circuses — that signalled architectural acceptability. Alexandria, the great urban centre of Egypt, was carefully segregated, ideologically and legally, from the rest of the country, almost as a separate community floating offshore. The city's precise name of 'Alexandria *beside* Egypt' reflected this status, as well as the more important fact that its citizens held a citizenship separate from, and absolutely superior to, that of the native Egyptians on the mainland (El-Abbadi 1962). The division is reflected in a decree issued by the emperor Caracalla in A.D. 215, in the aftermath of a bloody reprisal vented on the citizens of Alexandria who had presumed to question his divinity and his innocence in the matter of his brother's murder. The decree called for a wholesale expulsion of the idle and troublesome rural elements from the city, and anticipated no trouble in separating native Egyptians from Alexandrians. One finds in the emperor's words a racial segregation of the two groups, the outcast population being clearly marked by distinctive dress, mode of life, manners and language (*P.Giss.* 40.99.16-29 = *Select Papyri*, no. 215).

The whole ethnic group of Egyptians therefore found themselves stigmatized as outsiders in their own land. They suffered the brunt of personal and collective exploitation and maltreatment. And there was no way out of the trap. Egyptians could not acquire Roman citizenship except via the prior holding of Alexandrian citizenship, which was effectively withheld from them. What is more, Egyptians were kept recognizable. At birth, the native Egyptian was registered and had to keep his conspicuous Egyptian name; it could not be changed to a higher status Greek-sounding name without permission from the Roman authorities (Lewis 1983: 32; *Select Papyri*, no. 301). Most importantly for our considerations, a whole series of marriage bars, formally instituted in the law of the Roman emperor's Private Account (*Idios Logos*), made sure that Egyptians could only marry other Egyptians. (The so-called *Gnomon of the Idios Logos*, or the 'Rule of the Private Account' of the Roman emperor, was the basic fiscal

law-code issued by the chief finance officer of the province of Egypt. He acted
on behalf of the Roman emperor who had replaced the pharaoh as the *de facto*
owner of the whole land and its inhabitants.) If mixed marriages took place
between an Egyptian and a higher status Greek or Roman, the children were cast
down to the lower status of the Egyptian mother or father (*Gnomon of the Idios
Logos*, § 38-9). The complex rules that governed the potential miscegenation of
Egyptians with the other higher status ethnic groups that ruled Egypt in effect
'amounted to a veritable ancient apartheid' (Lewis 1983: 34). In other words, the
formation of families was governed not only by social prejudices and racial anti-
pathies, but also by formally legislated restrictions on who could marry whom.

   Although all Egyptians were contemptuously lumped together by Greeks and
Romans into the general category of *Aegyptius*, the lowly status of most Egypti-
ans led members of the local and indigenous upper-classes to distance themselves
from their more ordinary, polluted brethren and to strike a vicarious identifica-
tion with local Greek-speaking élites. They achieved this principally by the
deployment of a specific cultural code – in this case that of the Hellenistic settler
classes. The distancing was further effected by the upper-class Egyptians' identifi-
cation of themselves with the culture of the main urban centre in each province
or 'nome', its so-called metropolis. The attitudes and behaviour of these partic-
ular Egyptians is adequately reflected in the words of one of them from
Oxyrhynchus; after having been away from home for a year, he wrote back to his
relatives: 'Perhaps, brothers, you think that I have become some sort of barbar-
ian or an inhuman Egyptian' (*P.Oxy.* 1681 = *Select Papyri*, no. 152). However
much 'metropolitan' Egyptians of pseudo-Greek descent attempted to distin-
guish themselves from other Egyptians, the Alexandrians and the Romans in
Egypt tended to lump all the indigenous inhabitants of the land into the gener-
ally despised category of 'Egyptian'. When metropolitan officials, for example,
tried to coerce malefactors who were of Alexandrian or Roman status, the act
evoked a howl of anguished protest, of outrage that such higher status persons
should have to suffer the indignity of being punished at the hands of despised
Egyptians who served as the punishers and executioners (Lewis 1983: 23-4; *SB*
11114 = *Select Papyri*, no. 254, A.D. 153). Given the status of indigenous Egyp-
tians in Egypt itself, a treatment which placed them in an extraordinary, if not
unique, condition for a civil and nominally free provincial population of the
empire, it can come as little surprise that Egyptians who went outside their
homeland suffered greater stigmatization than either Greeks or 'Syrians'. In addi-
tion to experiencing the normal stigma attributed to immigrants in the large
urban centres of the west, such as Rome, they also incurred a virulent hatred and
distaste reserved for a polluted race. So, for example, a powerful member of the
Jewish aristocracy of Alexandria could be further downgraded from his Jewish-
ness by emphasizing his Egyptian background, by referring to him disparagingly
as an *Aegyptius* and therefore one 'whose statue deserved not just to be pissed on'
(Juvenal, *Satires*, 1.130; cf. 1.26). But, then again, Juvenal was only reflecting his
own society's deeply ingrained disgust and hatred of Egyptians and their strange
ways, especially their (to Greeks and Romans) bizarre religious beliefs and prac-
tices (Smelik & Hemlrijk 1972). These led on at least one occasion (in Juvenal's
firm belief) to a 'documented case' of cannibalism, normally taken as one of the

surest proofs of depraved barbarity (Juvenal, *Satires*, 15). What else could one expect of them? In the years just after A.D. 200, when an educated Christian woman imagined the most degraded type of human to represent the quintessentially evil, a human surrogate for Satan himself, it was none other than 'a foul Egyptian' (*Passion of Perpetua*, 10).

The restriction of marriage choices in a settler society

When we speak of the marriage choices available to Greek settler elements in Egypt of the Roman period, therefore, the general social conditions in which they made those choices must not be forgotten. This 'colonial' Egyptian society was one fixed by extraordinarily rigid social hierarchies and one where there were, so to speak, 'black and white' lines to be drawn between the civilized 'us' and the degraded and barbaric 'them'. Given this social background, which I have just described in some detail, we might reconsider the range of choice of marriage partners attested in the census documents. First of all, I must make an obvious methodological rejoinder. We must not be led astray because of the fortuitous patterns of survival and recovery of the evidence. I think there can be no reasonable doubt that these marriage practices did *not* emerge suddenly, full-blown, in the Roman period. Everything indicates that they also typified Greek settler behaviour in the earlier Ptolemaic period. The only reason we suddenly acquire a picture of them is because of the peculiarities of the provincial census instituted by the Roman provincial government of Egypt, and the fact that those particular records have survived in some numbers (a fact clearly recognized by Thierfelder 1960: 90-6; the doubts expressed by Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1964: 56-8 are not convincing). Given that we have no census returns of the highly rational and detailed Roman type from the Ptolemaic period, we are thrown back on other types of evidence. These clearly show that such practices did exist and were regarded as 'normal'. In 136 B.C., in making a query regarding his tribute status, a Greek immigrant banker from Tebtunis made clear reference to his wife who was also his sister (*P. Tebt.* 3.1, 766, lines 4-8; cited by Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1964: 58-59). Though such notices are infrequent, that is simply in the nature of the surviving evidence. If the evidence of the detailed Roman census reports were to be removed from consideration, we would not be in a much better position to argue the case for the first three centuries A.D. – in fact, there would be very little hard evidence for the practice of brother-sister marriage during the Roman period (Montevecchi 1976: 83 makes the allied point that, but for these documents, we would in fact hardly know anything about the census itself).

What, then, was the situation as regards the choice of marriage partners actually like? For the Greek settlers who came to Egypt after its conquest by the armies of Alexander, and its foreign domination by the subsequent Graeco-Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies, it was a situation of both new-found freedoms and of new-found restrictions. The relative freedom lay in relation to the old environment of the Greek city-states or *poleis* they had left behind. The social structure of these cities was characterized by two broad marriage patterns. There was an archaic 'aristocratic' mode that both pre-dated the emergence of the full city-state, and also survived into its classical period. This was a pattern of

marriage in which 'nobles' or members of the urban élites were encouraged to marry 'outsiders' from other Greek cities, so long as they were of the same social class as themselves, in order to solidify their class interests and to extend their upper-class linkages. The classic marriage model of the developed city-state, however, and especially that of the democratic city-states, was inward-looking and restrictive. Law and custom dictated marriage to partners who were fellow-citizens, fellow members of the same *polis* (for some of the reasons behind these patterns see Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1980: 53-4; see G. Herman 1987 for the 'aristocratic' norms). When Greek settlers went to Egypt, the evidence we have indicates that the old barriers between the city-states to which they had once belonged simply lapsed; they were no longer regarded to be of any particular significance. Persons of Greek background intermarried with no apparent prohibitions. In this sense, the 'New World' of Egypt freed the colonists from their old city-state inhibitions – it was more important for them, in their new colonial milieu, to be from a common Greek *ethnos*, than it was to maintain the old, petty city-state distinctions amongst themselves (Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1980: 54-5). The basic reason for that breakdown of old distinctions was the new situation in which Greek settlers found themselves: an exiguously small governing élite, with privileged access to land and other economic resources. Set against them was a population of millions of indigenous Egyptians. It is precisely in such circumstances of isolation, even in recent states and societies where the possibility of 'getting out' has been much greater than under the cloying constrictions of the pre-modern economy and society of Graeco-Roman Egypt, that distinct immigrant ethnic groups have demonstrated extraordinary tendencies to endogamy, so much so as to be described as 'virtually caste-like' in their behaviour (see, for example, Pagnini & Morgan 1990, on the situation in New York at the turn of the century).

Though we can trace a few 'mixed marriages' between Greeks and Egyptians they are very rare, and occur mostly among certain special elements of local society and in special situations, such as frontier military posts where Greek soldiers occasionally married native Egyptian women. One of the best documented examples of just this sort of intermarriage is the second marriage of a Greek cavalry officer, one Dryton, in *c*. 150 B.C., to a native Egyptian girl known either by her Greek name, as Apollonia, or by her Egyptian one, as Senmouthis. But the known circumstances of this marriage only serve to emphasize its marginality (and probable rarity). First of all, the Greek officer Dryton had been transferred to an isolated frontier post on the southern borders of Egypt – to a small town, Pathyris, that was wholly indigenous (i.e., Egyptian) in its population, culture and language. Secondly, the girl's family, going back several generations, came from the same 'military' background as her prospective husband. Even given this convergence of background, and the compulsion of isolation, the marriage was only deemed possible because of the considerable steps taken by Apollonia-Senmouthis's family to make themselves 'look Greek' (e.g., by adding Greek-sounding names). Even so, the marriage must have been considered to be a strongly hypergamous one for Senmouthis, which made her agree, amongst other things, to marry a man 25-30 years older than herself (Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1984; Lewis 1986: 91 sq.). But, it must be emphasized,

such situations were both rare and perceived to be highly abnormal. As Mélèze-Modrzejewski has rightly emphasized, even in the absence of formal juridical prohibitions, in Ptolemaic Egypt 'there arose a cultural barrier to intermarriage between the Greek-speaking immigrants and the indigenous Egyptian population. It was just another aspect of the gulf that separated the conquerors and the conquered' (1980: 64).

This situation continued basically unchanged in Egypt's transition from rule by the Ptolemies to integration (if that is the proper term) in the Roman empire by way of conquest by the first Roman emperor Augustus (from 31 B.C. onwards). If the situation changed at all, it was to the further disadvantage of the indigenous Egyptians, and for two reasons. First, a further (though very thin) layer of foreign domination was added to that of the existing Greek/Hellenistic rulers and administrators (see table 3). Though the number of Roman citizens who came to Egypt was never very great (they came principally as high-level administrators and soldiers in the legions stationed in the province), their presence and existence were nevertheless clearly demarcated both from the privileged Greek element in the local population and, of course, from the despised indigenous Egyptians. Secondly, the Roman empire operated with a far higher level of effective administrative rationality, especially as it concerned the imposition of uniform tax ('tribute') statuses on local provincial populations. These two elements, when added to a situation that was already riven by racial hatred and extraordinarily tense ethnic relations, only served further to exacerbate them.

A series of Roman legislative acts, especially the comprehensive revenue law for the whole province (the aforementioned 'Rule of the Private Account' of the Roman emperor) re-affirmed both the rigidity of ethnic boundaries and the old prohibitions on ethnic intermarriage. The law established three basic levels of tribute liability which corresponded, roughly, to the new tripartite ethnic or racial division in the land. Most privileged were those, generally Roman citizens, who were 'tribute exempt' (*ateleis* in Greek, *immunes* in Latin). Below these came persons who were subject to tribute payment, but who did so under certain ameliorative conditions, principally 'Greeks', or 'persons who were registered' (*epikekrimenoi*) as members of the local gymnasium or *metropolis*, and who were therefore officially registered as belonging to pure Greek 'blood lines'. In final place were the great mass of the inhabitants of Egypt, who were subject to the full rigour of the tribute (on all the above, see Wallace 1938 [1969]: chs. 7-8). In the first category were the offspring of marriages between full Roman citizens, or between a Roman citizen and a citizen of a local Greek town settlement in Egypt (*Gnomon of the Idios Logos* § 39, 46 & 52). In the second (and still privileged) category were offspring of marriages between citizens of Greek settlements in Egypt. In the last, most despised, category, were the offspring of 'mixed marriages', that is to say, between persons of 'Greek status' and native Egyptians. The former sort of 'mixed marriages' were possible, but were heavily discouraged by civil sanctions threatening the status of the children and by legal curbs on their rights of succession to their parents' property (§ 38, 46-50, 57).

The data we have bearing on brother-sister marriage in the Roman period, namely the census returns, must be set within this wider social context. But the census documents themselves are, alas, never going to give us the reasons for the

marital choices made by these people. Nor are any of the other types of evidence likely to yield any direct statements about personal motives. Therefore, the argument will have to hinge on what set of contingent circumstances might be adjudged to provide the most probable causal context. Hitherto most explanations have been rather 'inward looking', considering either isolated personal factors (e.g., modish preferences, religious beliefs) or internal family circumstances (e.g., family size, kin and personal relationships, family property). My argument is that a more persuasive answer can be provided by placing the Greek settler families in their broader social and political context.

In the situation of their *laagermentalität*, the broader range of marriage choices made by the Greek settlers is almost predictable. In all attested cases in the Ptolemaic period, there is negligible evidence of intermarriage between Greeks and native Egyptians. The few known cases all entail special circumstances, for example in which male Greek soldiers in isolated postings marry local Egyptian women. Not a single instance of a marriage of the reverse gender pattern (i.e., of an Egyptian male marrying a Greek female) has yet been uncovered (Peremans 1981). Apart from explicit evidence for intermarriage, we have the documentary evidence of nomenclature, of simple names. There are many problems with these data, but we shall accept the most optimistic scenario possible in order to highlight the extremes of possibilities suggested by them. There are about 20,000 named persons in documents from the Ptolemaic period. The question is: how many children in these bear two names, a Greek name and an Egyptian one (a customary practice, it might be argued, resulting from mixed marriages)?[12] And there are those cases where the father has an Egyptian name, but the son, in an attempt at upward mobility, has changed his to a Greek name, or indeed been given a Greek one at birth. The maximum numbers indicated are, again, negligibly small. For double-name cases the numbers are scant in the third century B.C., about 0.2 per cent. of all instances; the numbers are not much greater by the second century – about 0.5 per cent. (Peremans 1970: 218-19). Much the same can be said of father-son intergenerational name shifts: the proportion of names which indicate such a shift, in the total number of names, rises from about 0.3 to 3.0 per cent. over the last three centuries B.C.

Once we have considered these as maximum possibilities, however, it is only fair to add that almost all historians feel that these measurements (especially the latter), if read mechanically, would lead one to overestimate considerably the actual number of cases. All indices of *possible* intermarriage between Greeks and Egyptians, therefore, would indicate that from the very beginning (as the historical circumstances themselves would have otherwise suggested) the Greek settler element in Egypt successfully barricaded itself against permanent 'mixing' with indigenous Egyptians; they subscribed to a fortress-like mentality that clearly demarcated acceptable marriage partners (i.e., persons from the same ethnic and cultural background as themselves) from those who were, for all intents and purposes, *verboten* (i.e., the locals). This is *not* to argue that, *de facto*, persons did not cross these lines all the time – indigenous Egyptians tried 'to pass' as Greeks, some Greeks surrendered to the force of circumstances and married locals. The argument relates to the mentality, to perceptions of acceptability and unacceptability that would determine behaviour, including marriage arrangements. In their

new colonial surroundings the Greeks had already made one 'sacrifice', that is, to give up their old 'parochial' city-state marriage restrictions, and 'to agree' to a type of intermarriage that was atypical of their behaviour in the city-states of old Greece. The claustrophobic social world into which the Greek settlers had locked themselves would compel other such adjustments. It has been argued that it is precisely in such circumstances of severe isolation, of near-paranoic rejection of contacts with immediate neighbours, that the impelling conditions for incestuous relationships are to be found (Cohen 1978: 74-6).

The social pressures on Greek families in the era for which we have our best attested evidence of brother-sister marriages (i.e., the Roman period), as has been pointed out above, only increased. Greek parents had to be immensely concerned with maintaining their social status as 'Greeks', their 'metropolitan' condition (as was clearly seen by Hombert & Préaux 1949: 140). This could be done, on the one hand, by maintaining membership in settler clubs and associations, above all the 'social club' of the gymnasium, and by various forms of governmental registration. These measures could serve to meet the 'external' concerns of maintaining various formal privileges, such as tribute-status. But much more might be needed to meet the needs of maintaining family status in other terms: land, property and rank (with all its legal and other formal privileges). If the data that are the basis of Hopkins's study are re-evaluated for clues of this sort, one can say, at the very least, that they reveal precisely the sort of population among whose members the marital strategies with which we are concerned might be expected. The persons listed all come from the major Greek urban and governmental centres of the various provinces, or *nomes*, of Egypt. That is to say, they were all metropolitan Greeks of the most privileged status.

An analysis of their nomenclature confirms this. The names of the persons in the families involved in the brother-sister marriages are either wholly Greek, or, in certain instances, are 'invented' and innovative Graeco-Egyptian names assumed by Egyptians in order artificially to 'hellenize' their status. Typical of the latter are members of Egyptian priestly families who wished to preserve their special tax and land privileges as part of a local élite that had been willingly co-opted as part of the Graeco-Roman ruling order in Egypt.[13] And in their census declarations the 'pure' Greeks display a great concern with their status, carefully noting links between parents and children; they are concerned to correct minute errors in nomenclature, and are equally careful to insist on their social status markers – especially in the case of males, that they were *apo tou gymnasiou*, among 'those from the gymnasium'. For example, there is the complaint lodged by one Aurelius Dionysius son of Diogenes from the 'polis' of Oxyrhynchus in A.D. 224-25: 'Since I have learned that my son Heras, mother Tauris, who is also my full sister, has been entered in the list of minors registered in the past second year in the category of thirteen-year-olds by a clerical error as "Heras, son of Diogenes, mother Tausiris, full sister of the father, twelve-drachma category, from the gymnasium". The entry ought to be "Heras, son of Diogenes alias Pausirion, grandson of Diogenes, mother Tauris, full sister of the father". I therefore submit this request' (*P.Oxy.* 43: 3096).[14] Such concerns were maintained for years far beyond those for which the official census materials are preserved. For example, in A.D. 295 Aurelius Nilus, who had married his

half-sister Aurelia Artemidora, carefully registered his sons, noting that they too were of the twelve drachma category and were 'from the gymnasium' (*P.Oxy.* 43: 3137).[15]

The *epikrisis* ('judgement' or 'test') or procedure by which boys were registered as citizens of 'metropolitan status' and/or as members of the local gymnasium (and were henceforth known as 'the registered' or *epikekrimenoi*) was therefore a critical political *rite de passage*. It was, in fact, a severely formal test procedure in which the applicant had to prove his Greek blood descent on *both maternal and paternal sides* in order to be approved for admittance into the privileged ethnic-political class of Greeks in Egypt known as 'those from the metropolis'. A successful passage not only admitted him (and, subsequently, his family) to a class of privileged persons who were either partially or wholly exempt from the poll-tax, but also meant that he was an official part of the hellenized upper-class and was part of the social group of formally recognized 'acceptable' persons from whom most local (municipal) officials were selected. It is in this connexion that parents (or legal guardians) came to have an overwhelming concern with blood ancestry, with declarants tracing their Greek origins on both maternal and paternal sides for as far back as five or six generations.[16] A succession of very-close kin marriages would, no doubt, be a very helpful strategy in maintaining these critical ethnic-political distinctions. That was, indeed, the conclusion arrived at by Hombert & Préaux some four decades ago (1952: 105): 'The hereditary and almost closed nature of their "class" amongst the citizens of the *metropoleis* explains the frequent practice of consanguineous marriages in the families of persons of metropolitan status'.

Conclusion

The case of the Egyptian colonial Greek settler class is a very specific and special one. Given the extreme social pressures dictated by their circumstances, we must see their decisions as to whom to marry as involving, on occasion, the question of just how close a kinsperson they would be willing to contemplate for the liaison. In a certain proportion of all cases (about one-sixth or so, according to our surviving data) we know that they were willing to collapse their traditional inhibitions against marriage between siblings. But we must show due caution. This is a very special case, with very specific historical roots and causes. The persons involved felt, on the one hand, compelled by ideological and material pressures; and, on the other, 'permitted' by certain precedents set in the ranks of their own local ruling class. It is therefore illegitimate (I would contend) to use this historical case, torn from its specific context (and with attention directed only to 'internal' causes) to support more general arguments about 'close-kin' marriage preferences in the 'Orient' as opposed to the 'West'.[17] To recast Goody's words, I might define the 'incest taboo' not so much as some absolute, near-biological syndrome, but rather as what he has called an 'overriding tendency' (albeit a very strong one).[18] What I have tried to do in this article is to bring the discussion of incest down from the transcendent heights of grand theory to the realm of the analysis of those 'contingent circumstances' that could in special cases (at least one of which is here documented for us in some detail) override the prevailing 'tendency' against very close-kin intermarriage and sexual intercourse. The

intense pressures of an economic nature (the massive rewards to be gained and maintained, amongst them very limited amounts of extraordinarily productive land), combined with and a colonial situation of a distinct ethnic ruling élite which continually defined itself in a very racist manner (via the hallmarks of a peculiar culture), were the main impelling forces. Indeed, these circumstances produced racial antipathies of the most violent and extreme sort ever attested for the world of Mediterranean antiquity. The peculiarly intense and claustrophobic social relationships generated in the isolated 'hot house' environment of the Nile Valley were conducive to a narrower range of pragmatic choices which led a minority (albeit a substantial one) of all Greek settlers in Egypt to override the inhibitions against normally 'incestuous' marriages and sexual relations. The option was made possible by the sense of almost 'royal' distinction that the Greek settlers arrogated to themselves, and by their close vertical linkages with their own dynastic rulers in Egypt (Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1983: 253). Those rulers, from a very early date, set a precedent by imitating the possibilities opened by their 'pharaonic predecessors', who on occasion had indeed practised brother-sister marriage. The option could then be mimicked by the Greek settlers in Egypt who, however rich or poor, weak or powerful they might have been, perceived themselves to be an integral part of the whole privileged Greek ruling 'class' in Egypt (and therefore in very close mental and moral proximity to the 'top' people at the upper end of that same social order). Certain types of 'incest' may well be seen as morally repellent, and might be 'proved' to be 'biologically disadvantageous'. But the behaviour is not part of an immutable 'law of nature'. In all its various degrees and varieties of manifestation, whether of indulgence or avoidance, it is still a part of human culture, and deserves, quite simply, to be explained.

NOTES

I should like to draw special attention to the generosity of Professor Keith Hopkins. On request, he readily made available to me the entire corpus of data he had used for his 1980 study. Such a sharing of resources, while a fundamental desideratum of the social sciences, is not always as readily forthcoming as the ideals of disinterested scholarship would dictate. I can only express my gratitude and note the model of his unhesitating co-operation.

[1] Goody himself notes: 'I implicitly accepted – like most anthropologists of that time and this – the universality of the incest taboo, by which was meant the prohibition of sexual intercourse between brother and sister, and between parents and children. [To Tylor, Freud, Parsons and Lévi-Strauss] the incest taboo was the basis of culture, the root of the moral order.' To this I can only add my own experience at a High Table conversation (Churchill College, Cambridge) when I described the Egyptian case, only to be faced with frank disbelief by R.G. Abrahams (and a couple of his anthropological colleagues). Such was their general faith in the 'law' of the 'incest taboo' that recourse was immediately sought by them in most of the standard objections ('perhaps they really didn't mean *real* brothers and sisters' *vel sim.*).

[2] I must caution the reader that I am only drawing on, and briefly summarizing, some of the salient conclusions of Hopkins's article. His treatment is so full of lively description and provides such extensive and detailed quotation of the extant primary evidence that the reader is urged, if at all possible, to read his account first. My analysis will assume the broader evidence presented in Hopkins's account. His analysis forms my point of departure, and the fine details, fascinating as they are, will not be repeated *in extenso* here.

[3] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Kleitophon*, 1.3 (translation by John J. Winkler in Reardon 1989: 178).

⁴ Artemidorus, *Oneirokritica*, 5.24. The dream-interpretation book or *Oneirokritika* of Artemidorus has been widely recognized as a strikingly unusual piece of evidence for the social history of his time (the Greek city-states of the Roman empire of the second-century A.D. – therefore contemporary with the evidence provided by the Egyptian census returns). On Artemidorus in this context, see the extensive treatment by Foucault (1986). On the possible meanings of law/social custom/convention in this context see, especially, Winkler (1990: 33-41).

⁵ I have analyzed and taken into consideration an additional forty-one census documents published since Hopkins's study, but since the data in them have not fundamentally altered the basic proportions on which he based his analysis (cf. note 7), for the sake of continuity I have kept his statistical base as the foundation for my study. Where additional instances are employed, they are so designated.

⁶ Hopkins continues: 'Crude demographic calculation suggests that in the conditions of high mortality prevalent in Roman Egypt, only about 40 percent of all families had both a son and a daughter or both sons and daughters surviving to marriageable age'. He concludes from this that up to one third or even more of all brothers with marriageable sisters married inside the family in preference to marrying a woman from outside the family. I am not so sure that these two sets of data can be linked in this way. The census returns will provide us with a proportion of all recorded marriages that are in the brother-sister category. I do not think this proportion can then be linked retroactively to a putative reconstruction of the demographic profile of an Egyptian population. That is to say, the census returns give us proportions which eventuated from those given social circumstances, whatever they may have been. They cannot legitimately be 're-attached' to the putative numbers of 'daughters' or 'sons' available in families in order to produce a 'third order' statistic (in this case, yielding a much higher proportion of all marriages that were probably of the 'brother-sister' type). Whatever my doubts on this matter, however, I accept Hopkins's statistics as indicating that something in the order of 15 per cent. of all attested marriages in the census documents were of the full brother-sister type (i.e., about one-sixth of all attested marriages), and that this alone is more than sufficient to indicate the parameters of our problem.

⁷ On re-sorting the original data, I arrived at slightly different results: seventeen certain or relatively certain full brother-sister marriages, seven half-brother/half-sister marriages, and six cases that could be either (total $N = 31$). Brother-sister marriages of any type would then constitute about one-quarter of all marriages (on-going or not), and full brother-sister cases would account for about 16-17 per cent. or about one-sixth of all cases. The addition of census documents found since Hopkins's analysis would add, on my calculation, one full brother-sister case (*P.Oxy.* 43, 3096), and two half-brother/half-sister cases (*P.Petaus*, 1-2; *P.Strasb.* 768). Given the additional number of new marriages attested in these same documents, the proportion of brother-sister marriages of the total does not change appreciably.

⁸ On divorce, see, for example, the divorce contract/settlement of *P.Kron.* 52 (A.D. 138) for a full brother-sister marriage (in addition to Hopkins's data). It is absolutely standard in its division of property and the recognition of the rights granted to the divorcing spouses (both children of the same mother and father, the latter acting as the legal guardian or *kyrios* of his daughter, wife of his own son).

⁹ It should be noted, however, that Barth is virtually the only anthropological source on race and ethnicity that Goudriaan cites. Further, he does not seem to understand the nature of Barth's theory, nor that even if a case could be made for some mobility across racial/ethnic frontiers, that would still be no argument against either the firmly entrenched reality of such perceptions, or their considerable power in determining a considerable inequality in social relationships.

¹⁰ Using the standard reference sources, I could count eighteen known marriages from the inception of the dynasty. I have, however, discounted the three marriages of Ptolemy I, since it was only from Ptolemy II's actions that the pattern could be regarded as an 'established' and therefore acceptable one (and, on that basis, one might also be able to argue for ignoring *his* first marriage). There are some cautions: not all marriages might be known, and it is difficult to encompass some of the marriages of the female dynastic heads (especially Cleopatra VII). The point I am trying to make, however, is a general one, and at the level of generalization on which I am making it, the evidence clearly supports the conclusion.

¹¹ The tendencies were already evident before Arsinoë's marriage to her full-brother Philadelphus II; she had previously been married to her half-brother Ptolemy Keraunos. It was a

behaviour replicated in similar circumstances by isolated Graeco-Macedonian conquering ruling élites. There are, for example, two certain cases of full brother-sister marriage in the Hekatomid ruling dynasty that ruled over the successor kingdom of Caria, in southwest Anatolia, in the fourth century B.C. (see Hornblower [1982] – though I would reject his elaborate antiquarian search for 'causal influences').

    [12] There are many methodological and other problems with this type of argument, on which see, amongst others, Peremans (1962; 1970*b*), the cautionary remarks in Crawford (1971: ch. 9), Mélèze-Modrezejewski (1984: 366-70) and, especially, the hard counter-arguments in Clarysse (1985). But, as I have stated, I shall assume all such arrangements to be possible indications of mixed marriages in order to indicate to the reader the maximum possible number of instances suggested by the evidence. If there were many fewer such marriages, so much the worse for integration.

    [13] Typical of these would be the persons listed in the following census returns: *PSI* 1147; *Stud.Pal.* II, p. 30, col. iv; *BGU* 706; *P.Amh.* 74.

    [14] Additional to Hopkins's data; the Tauris-Tausiris mistake made by the government scribe is one of the small errors that the complainant means to have corrected.

    [15] Additional to Hopkins's data.

    [16] For a striking example, see *P.Mich.* 14, 676. In fact, it is often the case that notices of brother-sister marriages are to be found in such *epikrisis* documents, rather than in the census records. See, e.g., *P.Amh.* 75 (AD 161-68) in which at least three successive brother-sister marriages are documented on the father's side of the declarant.

    [17] In saying this I am only rejecting this specific part of Goody's argument, while tending to accept the general import of the rest – that is to say, in its more recent reworking (1990) as opposed to the earlier version (1983), on which see some of the reservations expressed by Shaw & Saller (1984).

    [18] I use the term 'biological' here in a somewhat muted sense to catch the distinction between 'natural' and 'cultural' explanations of the phenomenon. I mean no more than that. For the distinction, as I understand it, see Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949]: 8-10, 24), and the explication by Bischof (1975: 37-8).

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BGU = *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den [Königliche] Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden,* Berlin (from 1895; vol. 13 by 1976)

Gnomon of the Idios Logos = W. Schubart ed., *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos, Berlin, 1919* = *Vol. 5 of BGU* (see above)

P.Mich. = *The Michigan Papyri*, various sources and editors, from 1931 (reaching vol. 13 by 1977)

P.Oxy. = B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt *et al.* eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, London, from 1898 (vol. 57 by 1990)

P.Tebt. = B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, J.G. Smyly, E.J. Goodspeed, C.C. Edgar, J.G. Keenan & J.C. Shelton, eds., *The Tebtunis Papyri*, London, 1902-1976

SB = *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten*, begun by F. Preisigke in 1915, continued by F. Bilabel, E. Kiessling & H.A. Rupprecht (vol. 16 by 1987)

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Expliquer l'inceste : les mariages entre frères et sœurs en Egypte à l'époque gréco-romaine

Résumé

Les unions incestueuses officiellement reconnues forment un domaine complexe mais potentiellement révélateur pour l'étude des relations humaines fondamentales. Il n'existe pourtant que peu de preuves irréfutables de ce phénomène. Ne serait-ce que pour cette raison, un cas particulièrement bien documenté comme celui de la société égyptienne au cours de l'époque gréco-romaine (300 av.J.C -300 ap. J.C.) offre un intérêt considérable. Pendant près de trois siècles,

un pourcentage élevé des mariages enregistrés par les recensements romains concerne des mariages entre frères et sœurs (réels). L'analyse de ces données, ainsi que du contexte socio-historique des personnes mentionnées, confirme l'hypothèse selon laquelle il a fallu des conditions exceptionnelles pour que ces personnes soient amenées à enfreindre les inhibitions 'naturelles' interdisant le mariage entre parents proches et les rapports sexuels. Les raisons invoquées sont tout à fait spécifiques à la situation sociale particulière de ces acteurs, et ne sont donc pas directement utilisables dans le débat concernant la variation des stratégies familiales et matrimoniales entre les régions orientales et occidentales du bassin méditerranéens.

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