

INVITATIONS IN ROMAN EGYPT

By

Soheir Zaki Bassiouni

Roman Egypt had a large number of public festivals and private celebrations: There were imperial and religious feasts, games and entertainments⁽¹⁾. Imperial festivals were held on the accession of a new emperor, birthdays of members of his household, a victory of the Roman army or even a visit from a high official⁽²⁾. When news came of the accession of a new emperor, the people in the provinces went through the ceremony of swearing an oath of allegiance to the new ruler, and the date of his accession was considered a holiday every year⁽³⁾.

A proclamation from Oxyrhynchos, directs rejoicing and sacrifices for the declaration of Nero as emperor⁽⁴⁾. When Pertinax became emperor, the prefect issued an edict addressing the Alexandrians and all the people; "You should in full assembly make sacrifices and prayers on behalf of his lasting empire and of all his house, and wear garlands for 15 days beginning from today"⁽⁵⁾.

The employees had holidays on the occasion of imperial and religious festivals. There were almost 20 days of important festivals which every one attended. In a contract of weaving apprenticeship, the boy was to have 20 holidays a year on account of festivals without any deduction of wages⁽⁶⁾. In another document a woman left her slave girl to learn weaving. The girl was to have 18 days of holiday for festivals annually⁽⁷⁾.

Among the regular holidays were those of religious character. In addition of the preexisting Egyptian and Greek Gods were added Roman Gods⁽⁸⁾. The religious festival lasted for many days⁽⁹⁾.

(1) J. Lindsay, *Daily Life in Roman Egypt*, London, 1963, p. 160; *Leisure and Pleasure in Roman Egypt*, London, 1965, p. 1.

(2) J. Lindsay, *Daily Life*, p. 162.

(3) N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, New York, 1985, p. 89.

(4) P. Oxy. 1021.

(5) P. Giess. 3. 491.

(6) P. Oxy. 725.

(7) P. Oxy. 1674.

(8) N. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

(9) cf. P. Oxy. 1275, 2721.

The suppression of the Jewish revolt was commemorated by an annual feast at Oxyrhynchos for over 20 years⁽¹⁰⁾. Roman holidays, anniversaries of the imperial house, and native crocodile cult were celebrated with local Graeco Egyptian ceremonies⁽¹¹⁾.

Athletic festivals were pursued only in large towns⁽¹²⁾. After Alexandria, Antinoopolis had the most important athletic contests. Oxyrhynchos also had athletic shows⁽¹³⁾.

There is a fair amount of scattered evidence as to the amusements and festivals of the people of Egypt during the Roman period. The theatre was one of the places of entertainment. Outside Alexandria, we find few references of theatres in the other cities or metropolises. However they certainly existed⁽¹⁴⁾. The sites of theatres at Oxyrhynchos and Antinoopolis have been found⁽¹⁵⁾.

Amusements were not confined to the cities, the authorities of villages seem to have realised the importance of providing some recreation for the inhabitants.

In a contract, the presidents *προστάται* of the village of Souis acknowledged that they had engaged Copreas son of Sarapammon, head of a company of flute players and musicians to perform for the inhabitants of the aforesaid village for five feast-days⁽¹⁷⁾.

Even the villagers were able to have performers from the metropolis for private entertainment. "To Isidora, castanet dancer, from Artemisia, of the village of Theadelphia. I wish to hire you with two other castanet dancers to perform at my house for six days⁽¹⁸⁾.

Family occasions were also celebrated. Birthdays, marriages, comings of age, coronations and examinations were used as occasions for festivity.

- (10) Lindsay, *Daily Life*, p. 163; G. Milne, *A History of Egypt under Roman Rule*, 3rd ed. London, 1924, p. 267.
 (11) *BGU*, 362.
 (12) Lindsay, *Daily Life*, pp. 160-161; Milne, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
 (13) *PSI*, 199; *P. Oxy.* 705.
 (14) Lindsay, *Leisure and Pleasure*, p. 236.
 (15) Milne, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
 (16) *Ibid.* pp. 264-5.
 (17) *Select Pap.* 21.
 (18) *Select Pape.*, 20. for other contracts cf. M. Vandoni, *Feste pubbliche e private* (Nos. 14-28).

We have many private invitations belonging to the Roman period. I did not find any invitations from Ptolemaic Egypt, but there were invitations through private letters⁽¹⁹⁾. The invitation is a slip of papyrus from about 2.6 cm. to 9.5 cm, in length, and from about 2.7 cm. to 12 cm. in width.

I have gathered Roman invitations from different collections of Papyri. In this study I am going to discuss 22 invitations divided into 7 divisions.

The first division deals with the dinner parties, and includes the following 4 invitations:

P.Oxy. 116 (2nd cent. A.D.):

"Chaeremon requests your company for dinner δεῖπνῆσαι at the table of the Lord Sarapis in the Serapeum, tomorrow the 15th, at 9 O'clock".

This is a formal invitation by someone inviting someone else to dine with him on an occasion. Chaeremon had invited a person whose name is not mentioned. The hour was the ninth - about 3 O'clock in the afternoon⁽²⁰⁾, and the day was the following day. Dinner was to take place at the Serapeum. It was a favourite place for parties, which were thus given a religious tinge, a sense of the beloved God's participation⁽²¹⁾. We know that people in Roman Egypt had been accustomed to make Sarapis their companion at feasts. And the phrase "to dine at the table of the Lord Sarapis" probably means, with the spirit of the Lord presiding over the celebration. Devotees of Sarapis the Lord would feel his presence at their gathering⁽²²⁾. This reminds us of the members of Isis community, who were in the habit of being invited to dinner in the temple of Isis⁽²³⁾.

P.Oxy. 523 (2nd Cent.):

"Antonius Ptolemeus⁽²⁴⁾ invites you to dinner at the table of the Lord Sarapis εἰς κλεινὴν τοῦ κυρίου Σαρραπίδος in the house of Claudius Sarapion, on the 16th at 9 O'clock".

(19) Cf. U.P.Z. 66 (154 B.C.).

(20) P. Oxy. 524 n.l. 4.

(21) Lindsay, *Leisure*, p. 49.

(22) Lindsay, *Daily Life*, p. 149.

(23) *ibid.* p. 150.

(24) "Antonius Ptolemaeus" is the correct name and not "Antonius son of Ptolemaeus" as the editor wrote. It was incorrectly completed. Ptolemaeus must be in the nominative instead of the genitive case. Antonius is a Roman name, Ptolemaeus is a Macedonian. So, this person was Greek and got the Roman citizenship. About the names of the new Roman citizens cf. E. Daitz, *Romanization of the Greek East, The Evidence of Egypt* (BASP 2, 1964), pp. 57-64.

Temples and public buildings were used as restaurants for special dinners and entertainment. In this papyrus dinner was to be at the table of Lord Sarapis too. It is clear that Antonius Prolemachus still believed in Sarapis, the Hellenistic God, although he had become a Roman citizen.

P. Oxy. 1755 (2nd or early 3rd Cent.):

"Apion invites you to dine in the house of Sarapion⁽²⁵⁾ at the table of the Lord Sarapis on the 13th, from 9 O'clock onwards".

The host in this invitation is Apion, a metropolitan living in Oxyrhynchos. We do not know the reason for this dinner, but it is important to mention here the clubs and drinking associations which were common under the Ptolemies, and were liable to be illegal gatherings under the Romans. These clubs and associations were dissolved in Alexandria, but it was difficult to have them under control in the countryside⁽²⁶⁾.

Dinner was to take place at the 9th hour, the usual hour, and on the 6th day. The month was not mentioned, perhaps because the day was often the same or the following day.

P. Oxy. 1485 (2nd or early 3rd Cent.):

"The exegetes ΕΞΗΓΗΤΗΝΕΣ requests you to dine at the temple of Demeter, today, which is the 9th at the 7th hour".

In this invitation the exegetes invites someone for dinner on the same day. He does not say the reason for this dinner, perhaps it was for celebrating his coronation for the office. The meeting place was the temple of Demeter and the hour was the 7th. It is the only invitation at the 7th hour.

Let us then turn to the 2nd division of invitations concerning coronations. I have two papyri of this kind:

P. Oxy. 2117 (Early 3rd Cent.):

"Eudaemon invites you to dine with him at the gymnasium on the crowning of his son Nilus on the 1st day, at the 8th hour".

(25) The editor suggested in his notes that the house of Sarapion was a part of the temple of Sarapis, I think it is the same house of Claudius Sarapion mentioned in the previous papyrus.

(26) Cf. Milne, *op. cit.* p. 268; Lindsay, *Daily Life*, p. 150.

Eudaemon invites someone to dine with him on the crowning of his son on his entry upon some civic office, perhaps for being a gymnasiarchos, because the celebration was to take place at the gymnasium. The designee to such an office paid the expenses of the office, in whole or in part, out of his own pocket. He bore a traditional title, and was honoured in a ceremony, at which a garland was placed upon his head. So it was called a coronation. After holding one of those offices a man retained for the rest of his life the honorific designation of being gymnasiarchos, kosmetes, eutheniarchos... etc⁽²⁷⁾.

P. Oxy. 3202 (Late 3rd - early 4th).

"The prytanis ⁽²⁸⁾ πρύτανις invites you to his crowning, tomorrow, Tybi 9, from the 8th hour".

This is an invitation from a prytanis for his crowning, on the following day. The place was not mentioned, we are not sure whether this would have varied according to the nature of the office involved; if it did, the prytanis might have been crowned in the bouleuterion⁽²⁹⁾.

In the first papyrus⁽³⁰⁾, the father made the invitation to celebrate his son's coronation, but the prytanis in the second papyrus made it for his own celebration. It is of interest to notice that dinner was not mentioned. But I expect it was intended, because in the other invitation for crowning it was mentioned.

Of the following division of birthday invitation, we have only one example:

P. Oxy. 2791 (2nd Cent.):

"Diogenes invites you to dinner for the first birthday εἰς πρωτογενέσιον of his daughter in the Serapeum, tomorrow, which is Pachon 16⁽³¹⁾, from the 8th hour onwards".

(27) N. Lewis, op. cit. p. 46. About civic offices cf. A. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, Oxford, 1937, pp. 319-37.

(28) About the prytanis, cf. A. Bowman, *The Town Councils in Roman Egypt* (1971), pp. 61-65.

(29) P. Oxy. 3202 introd.

(30) P. Oxy. 2147.

(31) There is a gap before the number 6, so the day may be 16 or 26.

It is of interest to see Diogenes happy for having a baby girl, and wanted to make a birthday party for her. In the Ptolemaic and Roman periods men preferred to have boys rather than girls and we have evidence of people getting rid of a newly born baby girl⁽³²⁾.

The birthday party would include dinner. We do not know what the banquet would consist of. But we have more than one papyrus, where a father wrote to someone asking to bring fish for a birthday feast⁽³³⁾. It also seems that poultry was a favourite for such banquets⁽³⁴⁾.

The following division of invitations concerns an unknown occasion. We have only one example:

P. Oxy. 747 (Late 2nd or 3rd Cent.):

"The decadarchos δεκάδαρχος invites you to his party εἰς τὴν ξενίαν ἑαυτοῦ on the 6th day before the Calends καλάνδαρις at 8 O'clock".

The present invitation is from the decadarchos. He does not mention the purpose of the party, nor the place. It is not a coronation party, as he does not hold a civic office, he is a cavalry officer. It is not also a dinner meeting, because he does not mention dinner in the invitation.

It is important to notice that this invitation is the only one in which the Roman Calender is used, due to the military position of the entertainer⁽³⁵⁾.

The following division concerns the coming of age. We have only one example:

P. Oxy. 1484 (2nd or early 3rd Cent.):

"Apollonius requests you to dine at the table of the Lord Sarapis on the occasion of the approaching coming of age μελλοκουρίων of his brothers at the temple of Thoeiris".

The invitation begins with the name of the entertainer Apollonius, who requested an unknown guest to dine on the occasion of the coming of age of his brothers αδελφῶν. The last sentence caused some

(32) Select Pap. 105 (1 B.C.).

(33) P. Fay. 114.

(34) P. Fay. 119.

(35) We know that all writings of the army were in Latin, and it seems that they had to use the Roman Calendar.

difficultly. The editor⁽³⁶⁾ suggests that the brothers were about to be ἐφῆβοι⁽³⁷⁾ or ceased to be ἀφῆλικες⁽³⁸⁾.

The party would be at the temple of Thoeiris. So the entertainers and their guests would feel the presence of the spirit of Goddess at their celebration. The host had not fixed the day nor the hour of the festival.

The next division is about invitations made for celebrating an examination ἐπίκρισις. We have 3 examples:

P. Oxy. 926 (3rd Cent.):

"Heratheon invites you to dine with him, on the occasion of his examination, at his house, tomorrow, the 5th, at the 9th hour".

On the verso we read: "To Chaeremon son of Helasios".

When a metropolitane boy approached his fourteenth birthday, his parents submitted a formal application for his examination, with a view to his enrolment in the registry of their class⁽³⁹⁾. In Oxyrhynchos for example, it was customary to demonstrate the membership in the gymnasial elite by every male ancestor, maternal as well as paternal, all the way back⁽⁴⁰⁾. This examination is to verify the status of the boy before being liable to the tax⁽⁴¹⁾ λαογράφια

It is of interest to notice that the boy going to be examined issued this invitation in his name and not his father's or brother's⁽⁴²⁾. The place of the ceremony was the boy's house.

Usually invitations were delivered by hand and bore no address⁽⁴³⁾. But this invitation is peculiar in having upon the back what seems to be an address, which former instances had lacked. The address however, is in a different hand and possibly is not really connected with the invitation on the recto⁽⁴⁴⁾.

(36) Cf. P. Oxy. 1484 note l. 4.

(37) This means: arrive at adolescence.

(38) It means: at the age of 25.

(39) Cf. P. Oxy. 257 introd.; P. Oxy. 1452.

(40) N. Lewis, *op. cit.* p. 41.

(41) P. Oxy. 926 introd.

(42) We can consider it a way of honouring the boy by letting him write the invitation, just as the birthday invitations of nowadays, which children write themselves.

(43) N. Lewis, *op. cit.* pp. 30-31.

(44) Cf. P. Oxy. 926 introd.

P. Oxy. 2792 (3rd Cent.):

"Horion invites you to the examination of his son εἰς τὴν ἐπίκρισιν τοῦ υἱοῦ on the 15th at his own house from the 8th hour onwards".

It is a little slip written in accordance with the usual style of invitations. It seems evident that on the occasion of an examination there were private celebrations. In this example the host is the father of the boy. The festival would take place in a private house as the former party. It would be on the 15th day at the 8th hour.

P. Oxy. 3501 (3rd-4th Cent.):

"Syrus invites you to the examination of his son, you and your wife, σὺ καὶ ἡ γυνή σου from the 9th hour, Mesore 15".

It is the only example where a wife was invited with her husband. Dinner was not mentioned, and the place of ceremony was neglected.

All the previous invitations were written by men: a father, a brother, an official, a cavalry officer... etc. In the following division concerning wedding γάμος, we meet invitations written by women also who were always mothers. This division is about weddings. We have several examples in a variety of papyr collections.

P. Fund, 7 (2nd Cent.):

"Agathos invites you to dine on the occasion of his daughter's wedding, tomorrow, in the 16th, at 8 O'clock, at the house of Xystarchos, where... lives".

This is an invitation for a wedding ceremony. The father issued it to celebrate his daughter's marriage. The ceremony would take place at the house of Xystarchos, which perhaps was a place for entertainment like the house of Claudius Sarapion or was the house of the bridegroom's family. But it seems that the place was not well-known, and the host was trying to explain its location.

P. Oxy. 524 (2nd Cent.):

"Dionysius invites you to dinner on the occasion of the marriage of his children εἰς τοὺς γάμους τῶν τέκνων ἑαυτοῦ at the house of Ischyron, tomorrow, the 30th, at 9 O'clock".

In this invitation Dionysius invites someone to the marriage of his children. Perhaps that means brother and sister marriage. We know of

brother and sister marriage as far back as the eleventh dynasty in the Pharaonic times in about 2000 B.C.⁽⁴⁵⁾. It was frequent in the royal family but not common out of it. From this time it became usual for commoner husbands to call their wives "sister"⁽⁴⁶⁾. In 278-7 B.C. Ptolemy the second married his full sister Arsinoe, henceforth she was known as Arsinoe Philadelphus⁽⁴⁷⁾. Theocritus likened their relations to those of the Gods Zeus and Hera⁽⁴⁸⁾. Much later Pausanias commented: This Ptolemy fell in love with Arsinoe his full sister and married her, violating Macedonian custom but following the custom of the Egyptians whom he ruled⁽⁴⁹⁾. The Ptolemies followed this Egyptian custom, and of the next kings, seven married their sisters⁽⁵⁰⁾.

We have only few evidence of brother and sister marriages among common people in Egypt before the Roman period. During the Roman rule, this marriage was clear through many examples in the papyri⁽⁵¹⁾. The evidence of it appears in invitations, marriage and divorce contracts. It comes also primarily from household census returns⁽⁵²⁾. In the usual census returns, brother and sister marriage account for 15 to 21 per-cent of all ongoing marriages⁽⁵³⁾.

The wedding would be at the house of *Ischyron*, which seems to be a public place for entertainment. The party would be on the following day at the usual hour, the 9th.

P. Fay. 132 (3rd Cent.):

"Isidorus invites you to dine with him on the occasion of his daughter's wedding
 εἰς τοὺς γάμους θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ at the
 house of Titus, the centurion ἑκατοντάρχου, at 9 O'clock".

It is probable that the house of Titus was either a house for celebration or the house of the bride groom's family.

(45) K. Hopkins, *op. cit.* p. 311.

(46) J. Cerny, *Consanguineous Marriages in Pharaonic Egypt* (JEA. 40, 1954), pp. 23 ff.

(47) OGIS. 34.

(48) *Idyls*, 17, 128 ff.

(49) Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1. 17. But Kornemann thought the custom of persian origin. Cf. E. Kornemann, *Die Geschwisterehe in Altertum* (Mitteilungen der schlesischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde 24, 1923), pp. 17 ff.

(50) Cf. Hopkins, *op. cit.* p. 312.

(51) N. Lewis, *op. cit.* p. 43.

(52) Cf. M. Hombert and C. Préaux, *Recherches sur le recensement dans l'Égypte romaine*. (Papyrologica Lugdono-Batava 5, Leiden, 1952).

(53) K. Hopkins, *Brother-Sister marriage in Roman Egypt*, (Comparative studies in Society and History, 22, 1980), p. 304.

P. Oxy. 111 (3rd Cent.):

"Herais requests you to dine in the wedding of her children εἰς γάμους τέκνων εὐαίῃς at her house, tomorrow, the 5th, at 9 O'clock".

Herais invites somebody to the wedding of her children. The invitation gives us the place of celebration, it is the house of their mother. An interesting feature of this invitation is that the mother is the entertainer. We have met with many invitations written by men, and this is the first invitation, which we find to be written by a woman. Perhaps it is due to the absence of the father and of an elder brother.

P. Oxy. 927 (3rd Cent.):

"Eros invites you to a wedding, tomorrow αὐριον, the 29th, at the 9th hour".

Another formal invitation to a wedding. Though there is no mention of dinner, no doubt a feast in celebration of the wedding is to be understood. It would be on the following day as most invitations are, and at the same time, the 9th hour. It does not reveal who the couple to get married are, or where the celebration would be.

P. Oxy. 1579 (3rd Cent.):

"Thermouthis invites you καλεῖ σε Θερμούθις to dine with her at the wedding of her daughter in her house, the 18th, from... hour".

In this and in similar cases of marriage invitations we notice that women could write invitations instead of men. This papyrus contains the important features of invitations: dinner, the place of ceremony, which here is the house of the mother, the day and the hour, which is lost.

P. Oxy. 1580 (3rd Cent.):

"Theon invites you to the marriage of his brother, tomorrow, from the 8th hour onwards ἀπὸ ὥρας η'".

It is the first time to meet a person celebrating the marriage of his brother. We do not know the place of the ceremony, perhaps it was the house of Theon. However, they would celebrate the wedding on the following day at the 8th hour.

P. Oxy. 2678 (3rd Cent.):

"Dioscorous invites you ἐρωτᾷ σε Διοσκοροῦς to dine

at the wedding of her son on the 14th of Mesore in the temple of Sabazius from the 9th hour. Farewell $\delta \iota \epsilon \upsilon \tau \upsilon \chi \epsilon \iota$ ".

This invitation had been written by Dioscorous to celebrate the marriage of her son. It would be in the temple of Sabazius⁽⁵⁴⁾. Temples were usually favourite places for celebrations. This is the only invitation, where we find the word 'farewell'..

P. Oxy. 1486 (4th Cent.):

"Xenicos also called Pelius $\xi \epsilon \nu \iota \kappa \acute{o} \varsigma \delta \kappa \alpha \iota \Pi \acute{\epsilon} \lambda \iota \omicron \varsigma$ invites you to his wedding... today, Pharmouthi 22, at the 8th hour".

Here the entertainer is the bridegroom himself. The wedding would be at the same day of the invitation. The place of the ceremony is not mentioned; perhaps it is his house.

The way the name is written is new, though it is well known in other documents, but it is the first time we encounter such a style in the invitations.

P. Oxy. 1487 (4th Cent.):

"Theon son of Horigenes $\theta \acute{\epsilon} \omega \nu \upsilon \iota \acute{o} \varsigma \text{'}\rho \rho \iota \gamma \acute{\epsilon} \nu \omicron \upsilon \varsigma$ invites you to the wedding of his sister tomorrow, which is Tybi 9, at the 8th hour".

In this invitation Theon invites someone to the marriage of his sister. It would take place on Tybi 9 at the 8th hour. The host did not mention dinner, nor the place of the ceremony.

We have also two letters where the senders wrote to some people inviting them to festivals. They are normal letters with different styles from invitations.

The first is a letter from Didymos who wrote to his friend Apollonios at Bacchias, "Please accompany Ailourion, who conveys this letter to you, in order to buy for us young pigeons for the celebration. You are invited to come down and feast with us. If you do, you will have laid up a great store of gratitude at my hands. Greet all your household⁽⁵⁵⁾.

It is a letter where the sender invites Apollonios to feast with him. It

(54) Presumably in Oxyrhynchos and not previously known (cf. P.Oxy. 2678 introd.).

(55) B.G.U. 596 (86 A.D.).

seems that the feast was a private one. In such feasts we can expect the presence of musicians, dancers, actors and Homeric reciters to perform⁽⁵⁶⁾.

The other letter is written as follows, "Greetings my dear Serenia, from Petosiris. Be sure, dear, to come up on the 20th for birthday festival of the God, and let me know, whether you are coming by boat or on donkey, so that we may send for you. Take care not to forget, dear. I pray for your lasting health"⁽⁵⁷⁾.

This letter was written by Petosiris who invited Serenia to be present in the birthday festival of the God. It is not a private, but a public feast. We cannot consider this a formal invitation. This letter and the previous one⁽⁵⁸⁾ are illustrated here, as they imply the idea of invitation through their lines.

After having discussed these 22 invitations we can conclude that the invitation has the following 6 essential features:

- 1- The name of the host.
- 2- The person invited.
- 3- Dinner.
- 4- The occasion of the invitation.
- 5- The place of the party.
- 6- The date.

If we turn to the first point. We find that most of the names were of men, except in the marriage invitations where we meet women like Herais and Dioscorous.

The names of the hosts were Greek names as Chaeremon, Eudaemon. Some of the names were of Egyptian origin as Apion and Horion. They were all single names except the following: Theon son of Horigenes, Xenicos also called Pelius, Antonius Ptolemaeus. It is important to notice that the name "Aurelius" which was carried by all the new Roman citizens after the Constitutio Antoniniana was not mentioned in all the invitations, although some of them were dated to the 3rd cent. and the late 3rd to the 4th cent. That was because all invitations were made for private ceremonies, and so it was not necessary to use an official name next to original name as in formal documents.

(56) Lindsay, *Dialy Life*, p. 163.

(57) P. Oxy. 112 (Late 3rd or early 4th Cent.).

(58) B.G.U. 596.

The second point deals with the person invited. His name was never mentioned, he was always referred to as "you" except in one invitation, where the entertainer wrote "you and your wife".

The third point is about dinner, which was an important feature in most invitations. Through the 22 invitations 14 mentioned dinner, 10 of which were on the table of the Lord Sarapis.

The fourth point deals with the occasions of parties. They are here divided into 7 divisions: Invitations for dinner, for coronation, for examination and coming of age, for celebrating birthday and special parties and for wedding feasts.

The fifth point concerns the place of the party. On 5 occasions it was in temples (the Serapeum, the temple of Demeter, the temple of Thöeris and the temple of Sabazius), on one occasion it was in the gymnasium, 8 occasions were in private and public houses, and for the rest of invitations the place was not mentioned.

The last point is the date. The year was never mentioned, the month was written in 6 of the invitations. The month was always known to the person invited, because the day fixed was usually the same or the following day of the invitation, so there was no need to write the month. The hour was the 8th (two O'clock in the afternoon) in 9 invitations, and the 9th (3 O'clock in the afternoon) in 10. It was the 7th hour in only one case and was lost in another.

From these examples we get a fairly good idea about the way invitations were arranged in Roman Egypt.

Now we can draw a picture of what went on at public and private festivals.

We should expect the entertainers to begin their preparations well before the party. We can cite several examples: Appia wrote to her mother announcing the dispatch of some clothes and telling her that Agathos would come to her bringing some things for the festival⁽⁵⁹⁾. Korboson wrote to Heracleides the following: "I am surprised you did not manage to let me have what I asked you to send, especially as I wanted it for a festival⁽⁶⁰⁾". Didymos wrote to his friend Apollonius to buy for him young pigeons for

(59) P. Oxy. 1679.

(60) P. Oxy. 113.

the festival⁽⁶¹⁾, and Gemellus asked someone in a letter to bring fish for the birthday of his daughter⁽⁶²⁾.

In an account of the late 3rd century we read: "For Eumenia of my household for the price of lamps for the wedding of Apollonius, 200 drachmas"⁽⁶³⁾. This means that they were using more lamps for lighting to better the place of the ceremony.

In another account the following was written: "For entertaining Antonia 2 obols and for Tapollous daughter of Caecilias, 3 obols; Trypha's birthday, for garlands, 2 obols; For... birthday, garlands, 2 obols"⁽⁶⁴⁾. It is probable that the garlands of roses were bought for decorating the place or to be offered as presents.

Roses played an important part in both private and public rejoicing under the Romans. They were strewn at the entry of notable persons into a city and at the arrival of good news⁽⁶⁵⁾. They were also used in garlanding all the statues of the Gods in the religious festivals⁽⁶⁶⁾. People used to wear garlands in the ceremonies of the accession of a new emperor⁽⁶⁷⁾. Roses were also offered as presents for wedding's ceremonies. In a delicate and very expressive letter⁽⁶⁸⁾, Apollonius and Sarapias expressed their pleasure at the news of the wedding of Dicoysia's son. They regreted that for business and health reasons would not attend and explained what arrangements they had made to supply flowers for the wedding.

Roses were not the only presents offered on occasions of festivals. In a list of accounts we read: "To the land lord Sarapion, who has office of agonotheis⁽⁶⁹⁾, 10 cakes of frankincense"⁽⁷⁰⁾. Presents were offered also at some feasts to the officials. Gemellus wrote to his steward: "Buy us some presents for the Isis festival for the persons we use to send them to"⁽⁷¹⁾. The occasion was used, perhaps, to keep in good relations with the authorities, at least by men of property⁽⁷²⁾.

(61) B.G.U. 596a1.

(62) P. Fay. 11473.

(63) P. Oxy. 2144.

(64) P. Oxy. 736.

(65) Lindsay, Leisure and Pleasure, p. 12.

(66) B.G.U. 362, 390.

(67) P. Oxy. 1021.

(68) P. Oxy. 3313.

(69) The Land Lord had the charge of the games.

(70) P. Oxy. 2144.

(71) P. Fay. 118.

(72) Lindsay, Leisure and Pleasure, pp. 16-17.

Though very keen on festivals and ceremonies people did not use them as an excuse to delay their work. Cerdon wrote to Horreis: "For the future look after the tunic that you spoke of to me, saying, I will do it after the festival, do it, do not neglect it"⁽⁷³⁾.

There are much evidence in papyri for employing musicians, singers and dancers to perform in the public and private festivals⁽⁷⁴⁾. We should expect the performance of trumpeters, singers and dancers in marriage and birthday parties, but in the coronation ceremonies we should expect the performance of a flute player, a bard and a homeric reciter.

In a papyrus, we read that the strategos in celebrating the installation of a gymnasiarchos, conducted a sacrifice and libations in the gymnasium⁽⁷⁵⁾.

We should expect sacrifices to be offered and libations to be poured in public festivals. We have a list containing objects used for sacrifice to Nilus, the river God: a calf, jars of sweet-smelling wine, wafers, garlands, pine cones, cakes, palm branches, reeds, oils, honey and milk⁽⁷⁶⁾.

People were expected to wear new and beautiful clothes in the festivals. Through papyri we know that at least certain social events had their correct dress. A notary wrote to his son to inform Timotheus that he must make his entry to the session in the correct dress, in order to prepare himself before he is in⁽⁷⁷⁾. What the occasion was exactly, is not clear, but we know from the letter that they were bidden to go in their cloaks.

From another papyrus we know that the persons attending the theatre at Alexandria were expected to wear white garments⁽⁷⁸⁾. As it is clear that people in Roman Egypt used to wear the suitable clothes for the occasion, we should expect them to wear their best clothes in ceremonies and festivals. Women were expected to wear beautiful - coloured dresses and jewels while making their toilets and arranging their hair in different styles. Children were also expected to wear their bright-coloured clothes.

We have a fairly good idea about festivals in the temple of Socnopaïou Nesos. The priests and their attendants would bring out the images of the God and parade it before the public, thronging the forecourts and the steets leading to it⁽⁷⁹⁾.

(73) P. Oxy. 2149.

(74) Select pap. 21, 22.

(75) Select Pap. ii. 242.

(76) Sel. Pap. ii, 403.

(77) P. Oxy. 123.

(78) P. Oxy. 471.

(79) A. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharoos*, London, 1986, p. 183.

So in public festivals there would be sacrifices, libations, incense, rituals, hymns of praise, processions, sacred images, band of musicians and perhaps some offerings, cakes and wine.

In private parties, as already mentioned, there was singing, dancing and entertainment, but the main part was the dinner, which usually, included several courses. We expect it to start with the hors d'oeuvres, as lettuces, snell-fish and eggs. Then the principal course which consisted of fish, flesh, fowl or of all three. After an interval they would have the dessert, which included cakes and fruits both fresh and dried. We should expect the invited persons to have a drink with the dinner or after it⁽⁸⁰⁾.

At the end we can say that the private parties were not very different from what we have nowadays, and the style of invitations was often similar.

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Soheir Zaki Bassiouni
 Department of Archaeology and Classical
 Studies, Faculty of Arts
 University of Alexandria