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Roman Egypt in the Second Century CE

A Nexus of Transformation



International Conference, February 17 - 18, 2026
Istituto Svizzero & DAI Rom

Organized by

Prof. Dr. Sabine Huebner & Dr. François Gerardin (University of Basel),

Prof. Dr. Patrick Sänger & Dr. Andrew Lepke (University of Münster)



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PAPYROLOGIE
Seminar für Alte Geschichte

Roman Egypt in the 2nd Century CE

A Nexus of Transformation

The province of Egypt occupied a pivotal position within the Roman Empire, both geographically and functionally, as a region of unparalleled economic, social, and cultural significance. By the second century CE, Egypt had evolved into a unique microcosm of the Roman world: a fusion of ancient traditions and Roman imperial systems, a site of thriving trade networks stretching from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, and a locus of both social cohesion and discord. This conference seeks to explore the multifaceted nature of Egypt during this transformative period, drawing on recent research in history, archaeology, papyrology, and religious studies.

The second century was a time of relative stability within the empire, often characterized as the high point of the Pax Romana. Yet, in Egypt, this era was marked by dynamic interactions between imperial policies and local populations. The province bore witness to the enduring legacy of the Jewish War, the visit of Emperor Hadrian, and the consequences of events like the Antonine Plague. At the same time, the flourishing economy, driven by agricultural production and long-distance trade, coexisted with environmental challenges such as fluctuations in Nile flooding, requiring innovative administrative responses. These developments were accompanied by profound social and legal changes, as Romanization processes transformed urban and rural life, while native traditions adapted to new frameworks of power and governance.

In addition to the socio-economic and political dynamics, Roman Egypt presents a rich tableau of religious life. The persistence of Egyptian temple cults, the emergence of early Christianity, and the adaptation of religious texts and practices under Roman rule offer unique insights into cultural continuity and change. At the same time, incidents of social unrest, such as the Boukoloi uprising, reveal the fractures within this diverse and stratified society.

This conference brings together leading scholars to examine these themes and more, offering fresh perspectives on the environmental, economic, administrative, social, and cultural history of second-century Roman Egypt. By integrating diverse methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches, we aim to deepen our understanding of this extraordinary province and its role within the broader Roman Empire. Through these discussions, we hope to shed light on the ways in which local and imperial dynamics intersected, creating a province that was both distinctively Egyptian and integrally Roman.

Organizer:

Sabine R. Huebner, University of Basel
François Gerardin, University of Basel
Patrick Sänger, University of Münster
Andrew Lepke, University of Münster

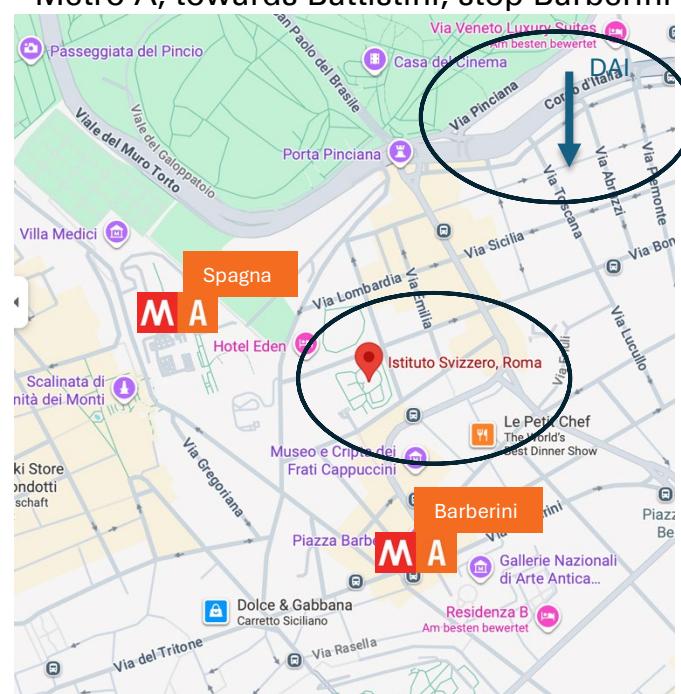
Under the patronage of the SVAW,
the Swiss Association for Classical
Studies

Location:

Istituto Svizzero di Roma (Villa Maraini)
Via Liguria 20
Roma (Italia)

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut
Via Sardegna 79
Roma (Italia)

From Fiumicino Airport:
Leonardo Express to Termini
From Downtown Rome/Termini
Metro A, towards Battistini, stop Barberini



Programme

Day 1, February 17th, 2026

Istituto Svizzero di Roma

Programme

Day 2, February 18th, 2026

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom

09.00	Welcome & Coffee Sabine R. Huebner, Patrick Sänger
Panel 1	Egypt in Focus. Representation, Identity and Imperial Presence Chair: François Gerardin (University of Basel)
09.30	Second-Century Egypt and the Impact of the Empire Patrick Sänger (University of Münster)
10.00	Lucian's Egypt Thomas Ford (University of Münster)
10.30	Imperial Connections and Cultural Entanglements at Antinoopolis David Westerkamp (University of Münster)
11.00	Coffee
Panel 2	Agriculture, Economy & Trade Chair: Patrick Sänger (University of Münster)
11.30	Reinventing the Granary. The Agriculture of Negotiation in Roman Egypt Sara Baldin (University of Basel)
12.00	Coinage and the Economy of Roman Egypt in the 2nd Century CE. Some Key Questions Christopher Howgego (University of Oxford)
12.30	Lunch
14.00	Infrastructure and Mobility in Roman Egypt. Developments of the Second Century AD Federico de Romanis (Università degli Studi di Roma 'Tor Vergata')
Panel 3	Administration Chair: Sara Baldin (University of Basel)
14.30	A Very Dynamic Stalemate. Agents and Mechanism of Social Change Andrew Lepke (University of Münster)
15.00	The στρατηγοί in 2nd Century Egypt Niklot Langnau (University of Münster)
15.30	Ἐρρώσθαι σε εῦχομαι, φίλτατε. Is there a Corporate Identity of the Enchorian Elites? Alexander Free (Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg)
16.00	Coffee
16.30	The Transformation of Village Notary Offices in the 2nd Century. Bianca Borrelli (University of Würzburg) Graham Claytor (University of Warsaw) &
17.00	General Discussion
19.30	Dinner

Panel 4	Cities, Law, Society Chair: Sabine R. Huebner (University of Basel)
09.00	What's New About the New Hellenes? François Gerardin (University of Basel)
09.30	Provicial Law. The Century of the Aigypcioi Jose Luis Alonso (University of Zurich)
10.00	An invisible Local Elite? The <i>Katoikoi</i> of Roman Heracleopolis Lucas Weisser-Gericke (University of Basel)
10.30	Terenuthis in Roman Gaze. An Egyptian Town 2nd Century CE Sylvain Dhennin (University Lumière Lyon 2)
11.00	Coffee
Panel 5	Health and Crisis Chair: Marco Maiuro (Sapienza University)
11.30	The Antonine Plague: Origins and Effects Brandon McDonald (Tufts University)
12.00	Qussur Mohareb, a 2nd Century Village Community facing the Challenges of the Saharan Environment Cassandre Hartenstein (University of Strasbourg)
12.30	Lunch
Panel 6	Social Resistance and Rebellion Chair: Andrew Lepke (University of Münster)
14.00	Echoes of War. The Aftermath of the Jewish Revolt in Roman Egypt Sabine R. Huebner (University of Basel)
14.30	Money, Credit and Banking in Roman Egypt in the 2nd Century CE François Lerouxel (Sorbonne University)
Panel 7	Religion and Spiritual Life Chair: Lucas Weisser-Gericke (University of Basel)
15.00	The Administration of the Sacred: The Temple of Soknopaios at Soknopaiou Nesos in the 1st and 2nd centuries Maren Schentuleit (University of Oxford)
15.30	Coffee
16.00	Inner Generation in Some Magical, Philosophical and Gnostic texts of second century Egypt Alberto Camplani (Sapienza University)
16.30	Teaching Transformation. The Emergence and Integration of Early Christians in the Pedagogical Landscape of Roman Alexandria Edward Creedy (Durham University)
17.00	General Discussion
19.30	Dinner

Panel 1

Egypt in Focus. Representation, Identity and Imperial Presence

Chair: François Gerardin (University of Basel)

Second Century Egypt and the Impact of the Empire

Patrick Sänger (University of Münster)

At the end of his inspiring article *More than the sum of its parts. Hellenistic-Roman Alexandria, global networks and the question of innovation*, a kind of introduction to the edited volume *Alexandria the cosmopolis. A global perspective* (2022), Miguel John Versluys concluded: "There is [...] more to empires than top-down power and imperialism alone. They also, for instance, increase connectivity and are impacted, bottom-up and often unwillingly, by the network they intensify or create. " (p. 25) This study belongs to a series of other contributions in which Versluys prominently advocates understanding the formation of empires, understood as networks, against the backdrop of processes of increased connectivity as an expression of globalization. As case studies for his argument, Versluys uses phenomena that are explored from an object-related or archaeological perspective.

Panel 1

Egypt in Focus. Representation, Identity and Imperial Presence

Chair: François Gerardin (University of Basel)

Lucian's Egypt

Thomas Ford (University of Münster)

Arguably the greatest author of Greek to have lived entirely in the second century, and surely the most imaginative, Lucian of Samosata (c. 125 – after 180) was a leading light in the ‘Second Sophistic’, transforming the literary landscape of his age. The range of his topics goes well beyond the *limes* of the Roman Empire. Unlike contemporaries such as Aelius Aristides (*Or. 36*) or Achilles Tatius (*Leucippe and Cleitophon*), none of Lucian’s works is set in Egypt or specifically concerns it, yet across 86 separate works (spanning four OCTs / eight Loeb volumes) his references to the country take on a cumulative effect whose *Gesamtbild* or ‘literary persona’ is worth investigating, not least as it has not been widely considered. A rare exception is a brief treatment by Alain Martin (2010: 191), who has suggested that, while Lucian’s references to Egypt are abundant, many of them are repetitive and hardly original. Such a view deserves examination – especially because a ‘dull’ picture of Egypt might seem to stand in contrast to the “nexus of transformation” underway during that century.

Panel 1

Egypt in Focus. Representation, Identity and Imperial Presence

Chair: François Gerardin (University of Basel)

Imperial Connections and Cultural Entanglements at Antinoopolis

David Jonah Westerkamp (University of Münster)

This paper aims to approach the local repercussions of Hadrian's famous visit to Egypt 130/131 CE and his foundations of Antinoopolis and the cult of Antinoos from an transcultural and empire-wide perspective. Using selected examples of connections drawn to the wider mediterranean in the course of these foundations, I shall examine the complex cultural entanglements and implications for a supposedly "Greek" city and its religion in Roman Egypt in the 2nd century, which were not the result of organic, long term developments, but, at least on the surface, of an emperor's radical overnight transformation of local affairs.

Panel 2

Agriculture, Economy & Trade

Chair: Patrick Sänger (University of Münster)

Reinventing the Granary. The Agriculture of Negotiation in Roman Egypt

Sara Baldin (University of Basel)

To sow and reap in Roman Egypt was never simply to follow a calendar, but to navigate shifting landscapes of water, labor, and power. Agriculture unfolded in an environment shaped as much by fluid calendars, irrigation uncertainties, and demographic pressures as by imperial demands. The result was not a fixed routine, but a field of continual experimentation and negotiation, where local strategies and wider structures met. The second century CE, a period of relative prosperity but also mounting pressures, offers a particularly valuable lens through which to explore these dynamics. In this paper, I consider how environmental rhythms, irrigation regimes, and patterns of landholding intersected with broader social and economic transformations in a dynamic arena of adaptation. Instead of a static backdrop to imperial extraction, agriculture emerges as a domain of continual recalibration shaped by geography, community, and state, and emblematic of Egypt's long-standing capacity to integrate local knowledge with imperial demands.

Panel 2

Agriculture, Economy & Trade

Chair: Patrick Sänger (University of Münster)

Coinage and the Economy of Roman Egypt in the Second Century CE.

Some Key Questions

Christopher Howgego (University of Oxford)

Our understanding of the coinage of Roman Egypt has been advanced by the publication of the relevant volumes of [*Roman Provincial Coinage*](#) up to 192 CE, by work on the hoard evidence in connection with the [*Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire Project*](#), and by metal analyses undertaken by Kevin Butcher and Matt Ponting. What key questions remain to be answered in bringing all this evidence to bear on our understanding of the economy of Roman Egypt?

Panel 2

Agriculture, Economy & Trade

Chair: Patrick Sänger (University of Münster)

Infrastructure and Mobility in Roman Egypt.

Developments of the Second Century AD

Federico de Romanis (Università degli Studi di Roma ‘Tor Vergata’)

The paper investigates the infrastructural developments that shaped intra-provincial mobility in Egypt during the second century AD. The first section analyzes the consequences of the opening of the Trajan Canal and the construction of the Via Hadriana Nova for the pattern of connectivity between the Red Sea and the Nile Valley. The second addresses the organization and logistics of transporting tax grain from the Arsinoite nome to Alexandria in the latter part of the century.

Panel 3

Administration

Chair: Sara Baldin (University of Basel)

A Very Dynamic Statement – Agents and Mechanisms of Social Change

Andrew Lepke (University of Münster)

Panel 3

Administration

Chair: Sara Baldin (University of Basel)

The στρατηγοί in 2nd -Century Egypt

Niklot Lingnau (University of Münster)

From the mid-3rd century BC onwards—that is, since the early Ptolemaic period—the office of στρατηγός became the highest administrative position within each Egyptian νομός, overseeing all aspects of local and regional governance and forming the crucial link between local administration and Alexandria. Having survived the transition from Ptolemaic to Roman rule, the office represents an exceptional case of institutional continuity over more than four centuries and across two xenocratic regimes.

This presentation is part of an ongoing, mainly prosopographical study of the officeholders of the στρατηγία from its inception to its disappearance. By examining both the changes and continuities in the social backgrounds of officeholders in 2nd-century AD Egypt, the paper aims to shed new light on how the Roman xenocratic regime was actually implemented at the local level.

The central research questions are: Can we identify particular social classes that held the office of στρατηγός at various times, and what were their origins? Is it possible to reconstruct a *cursus honorum* based on the available evidence? To what extent were the στρατηγοί integrated into the wider social structure of their respective νομοί?

The analysis is based on a prosopographical database compiled by the presenter, which is continuously updated with data primarily drawn from papyri and ostraca, complemented where possible by other sources. This database facilitates the identification of connections and patterns among individual officeholders, but also allows the view onto specific and singular documents. Ultimately, by contrasting the situation of the 2nd century AD with that at the beginning of Roman rule, this diachronic perspective will offer new insights into the interplay between administrative as well as social continuity and transformation in the xenocratic environment of Roman Egypt.

Panel 3

Administration

Chair: Sara Baldin (University of Basel)

Ἐρρῶσθαι σε εῦχομαι, φίλτατε. Is there a Corporate Identity of the Enchorian Elites?

Alexander Free (Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg im Breisgau)

The talk addresses the development of the members of the gymnasium in the metropoleis of Hermopolis. Looking at the epitaph of a certain Isidora, who is celebrated as a nymph in elaborate Greek verses, and other epitaphs of the Hermopolitan necropolis, the changing relationship of the Enchorian elites to the Roman central authorities will be examined. To what extent had the elites of the 2nd century changed from those of the 1st century and why? A special focus will be given to education and athletics

Panel 3

Administration

Chair: Sara Baldin (University of Basel)

The Transformation of Village Notary Offices in the Second Century

Graham Claytor (University of Warsaw)

Bianca Borrelli (University of Würzburg)

This paper explores the transformation of the village notary office (*grapheion*), which at the beginning of the second century was a thriving institution found in most large villages but by the end of the century was virtually confined to the metropolis (at least in the Fayum). After a brief survey of developments, the first part of the paper proposes some answers to the why and how of this transformation, while the second part focuses on a newly-identified archive and expanding dossier of a family of Tebtynis notaries, which exemplifies the changing landscape of the notariate in the second-century Fayum.

Panel 4

Cities, Law, and Society

Chair: Sabine R. Huebner (University of Basel)

What's New About the New Hellenes?

François Gerardin (University of Basel)

Hadrian did not innovate much when he founded Antinoopolis as the “city of the new Hellenes.” Greeks had been around Egypt since the middle of the First Millennium BCE at least, founding settlements as well as leaving inscriptions and artifacts. The trading center of Naukratis holds pride of place in this encounter between two cultures, but other settlements, such as Neapolis (“Newtown”) in Upper Egypt, also deserve mentioning. In the context of Ptolemaic internal colonization, the ethnic designation of “Hellene” then morphed into the status designation of a fiscally privileged group. By granting his new city fiscal abatements and other privileges, Hadrian was therefore walking in the footsteps of the Ptolemies. At the same time, a closer look at the papyrological and, to some extent, archaeological evidence points to significant differences, which may be attributed to the Roman notions of imperial rule and provincial administration. This paper reviews these source materials (including an unpublished papyrus from the papyrus collection in Freiburg i. Br.) to elucidate continuity and change in legal and administrative practice in Roman Egypt in the second century CE from a broader chronological and geographical perspective.

Panel 4

Cities, Law, and Society

Chair: Sabine R. Huebner (University of Basel)

Provincial Law: The Century of the Aigyptioi

José Luis Alonso

In the tradition of political thought that Rome inherits from Greece, citizenship determines the law to which each is subjected, no 'own laws' being conceivable without a civic body. Egypt, where until Caracalla most inhabitants were *peregrini nullius civitatis*, challenged this framework. The Roman response to this aporia seems to have crystallised in the 2nd century in the expression "laws of the Egyptians" – the laws of the citizenless, regardless of their ethnic origin or cultural background. Legal historians have long maintained that each community largely continued to follow its own tradition, as under the Ptolemies, and that Greek and Egyptian law remained entirely distinct, in a "coexistence without fusion" (H. J. Wolff). This paradigm needs to be reconsidered, particularly in light of the evidence from the 2nd century, both of the models provided by the notarial offices and of the quasi-jurisprudential activity of the local legal experts (*nomikoi*) in family and inheritance law, where the expression "laws of the Egyptians" is attested.

Panel 4

Cities, Law, and Society

Chair: Sabine R. Huebner (University of Basel)

An Invisible Local Elite? The *Katoikoi* of Roman Heracleopolis

Lucas Weisser-Gericke

P.Oslo 3.98 col. 2, dated to 132/3 CE, is a census declaration from Heracleopolis preserved as part of a *tomos synkollesimos*. The declarant, Semtheus, identifies himself as “one of the *katoikoi* of Heracleopolis” (ll. 15-16) and again as “*katoikos*” (l. 25). This document contains the only known attestation of this group in Roman Heracleopolis. The “*katoikoi* of Heracleopolis” have been compared to the well-documented “6475 Greek *katoikoi* in the Arsinoite nome”, who constituted a privileged status group, and are understood to be their counterparts in the Heracleopolite nome. This paper explores what can be inferred about the *katoikoi* of Roman Heracleopolis and their role in urban society in the second century CE by analysing *P.Oslo* 3.98 in relation to the parallel case of the Arsinoite “6475” and the evidence for cavalry settlers (*katoikoi hippeis*) in the (late) Ptolemaic and early Roman Heracleopolite nome.

Panel 4

Cities, Law, and Society

Chair: Sabine R. Huebner (University of Basel)

Terenuthis in Roman Gaze: An Egyptian Town in 2nd Century CE

Sylvain Dhennin (Université Lumière Lyon 2)

Terenuthis, modern Kom Abu Bello, is one of the few well-preserved roman sites in Lower Egypt, despite the region's strategic importance in Roman times. The city is a perfect case study for understanding the changes of Roman Egypt in the 2nd century: the archaeological work carried out since 2014 (IFAO/CNRS) has reshaped our understanding of the town's development, especially in the 2nd century. This paper will explore both the newly excavated urban settlement and the previously known but poorly documented necropolis, offering a comprehensive view of the city during this crucial period.

The first focus is on urban planning and the specialization of activities. The 2nd century marks a distinct shift from earlier periods. The city, known from papyri since the 1st century, was rebuilt on a large, sand-covered area. The urban layout was carefully planned with streets intersecting at right angles and housing arranged in insulae. Terenuthis' strategic position at the crossroads of the Wadi Natrun and Nile Delta spurred a boom in artisanal production, responding to the growing demand for natron in the Roman Mediterranean.

The second focus is on the Roman necropolis. The exceptionally well-preserved tombs date mainly to the 2nd century. Many still feature steles and offering tables with the last remains deposited, providing a rare glimpse into burial practices in the roman Delta. Artifacts, like clusters of upturned oil lamps, offer insights into ritual activities, contrasting with other Egyptian necropolises and Roman provinces. These comparisons place the evolution of rites in the wider context of the Empire and bring new precision to the expression of Egyptian multiculturalism and the circulation of practices. They help determine the extent of Egyptian tradition, the contribution of the Greeks, and the adaptation of models to Roman customs. The diversity of the population in Graeco-Egyptian society during the second century fostered interactions among various communities, reflecting a complex and interconnected social landscape.

Panel 5

Health and Crisis

Chair: Marco Maiuro (La Sapienza University)

The Antonine Plague: Its Origins and its Effects

Brandon McDonald (Tufts University)

The Antonine Plague (c. 160s–180s CE) remains one of the Roman world's most consequential biological and economic shocks. Emerging in textual sources soon after Lucius Verus' Parthian campaigns in western-central Asia (161-166 CE), the disease reached the Mediterranean region by 165 and spread to the Empire's furthest corners, including Britain, by the 170s. The pandemic's rise may have been shaped by contemporaneous climatic volatility—volcanic forcing, cooling, and aridity. Its spread was undoubtedly facilitated via the Mediterranean's booming second-century connectivity—a product of Roman infrastructure and trade networks. This paper integrates textual, archaeological, and paleoclimatic evidence to explore the plague's origins and regionally varied effects, with particular attention to Roman Egypt. Papyrological evidence from the Nile Delta and the Fayum reveals epidemic mortality and archaeological data from the Eastern Desert demonstrate economic dislocation of supply chains, quarrying, and Red Sea trade. Yet concurrent environmental and geopolitical stress compound the picture, cautioning against moncausal explanations. By interrogating these intersecting factors, this paper offers a more nuanced understanding of the Antonine Plague's impact on Roman Egypt and the wider empire.

Panel 5

Health and Crisis

Chair: Marco Maiuro (La Sapienza University)

Qussur Mohareb, a 2nd Century Village Community Facing the Challenges of the Saharan Environment

Cassandre Hartenstein (University of Strasbourg)

The site of Qussur Mohareb, located in the Bahariya Oasis at the end of the tracks arriving from the Nile Valley, remained unexcavated until recently despite the excellent state of preservation of its buildings. It includes an entire agricultural village from the Roman period, two necropolises, a hydraulic system that supplied dwellings and irrigated fields, and a parcelling system that is still visible in the landscape.

It seems that the site was built, occupied, and abandoned in a short period of time in the second century AD. The first excavation season, conducted by a team from the University of Strasbourg and the Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire in early 2025, revealed that the inhabitants of Qussur Mohareb faced challenging living conditions. The first archaeological test pits demonstrate the resilience and adaptation of the oasis dwellers in response to environmental phenomena, which were also observed at another site in the same oasis (Qasr 'Allam) during the same period. This paper will also present the potential of historical, environmental, and anthropological studies of this isolated Saharan population far from Roman centers of power in the second century CE.

Panel 6

Social Resistance and Rebellion

Chair: Andrew Lepke (University of Münster)

Echoes of War: The Aftermath of the Jewish Revolt in Roman Egypt

Sabine R. Huebner (University of Basel)

This paper reconsiders the consequences of the Jewish Diaspora Revolt of 116–117 CE for Roman Egypt through a synthesis of literary testimony, re-examined papyrological dossiers, and archaeological indicators. After sketching the longue durée of Jewish presence in Egypt and the gradual attenuation of communal stability after 73 CE, the discussion reconstructs the rapid escalation of the uprising from civic violence in Alexandria to sustained provincial warfare across the *chora*. It argues that the aftermath produced a compound crisis: not only the near-erasure of Alexandria's Jewish community, but also profound agrarian dislocation exacerbated by exceptionally low Nile floods, and documentary traces suggestive of heightened epidemic mortality. The analysis further contends that the disappearance of Egypt's Jewish networks significantly delayed and reshaped the province's Christianization compared to other Eastern provinces. By integrating disparate bodies of evidence, the paper identifies the revolt as a critical inflection point that reconfigured Egypt's social, economic, and religious landscape well into the later second century.

Panel 6

Social Resistance and Rebellion

Chair: Andrew Lepke (University of Münster)

Money, Credit and Banking in Roman Egypt in the 2nd Century CE

François Lerouxel (Sorbonne University)

During the second century, at least until the Antonine Plague, the monetary economy of the province of Egypt reached its heyday.

The scale and quality of monetary issues, the historical and geographical development of private banking, and the unprecedented dynamism of the credit market are exceptionally well documented compared to the rest of the Roman world.

The three phenomena are interrelated and enabled the inhabitants of the province to use money at a particularly high level when compared to other historical economies.

Panel 7

Religion and Spiritual Life

Chair: Lucas Weisser-Gericke (University of Basel)

The Administration of the Sacred: The Temple of Soknopaios at Soknopaioi NEsos in the 1st and 2nd centuries

Maren Schentuleit (University of Oxford)

Egyptian temples were never solely places of religious contemplation; they consistently played important social, economic, and administrative roles. For the Graeco-Roman period, however, it has often been assumed that priests withdrew into their temples, devoted primarily to ritual while struggling to preserve their existence under successive political regimes.

The exceptionally rich Greek and demotic records from the temple of Soknopaios at Soknopaioi Nesos in the Fayum provide rare insights into the vibrant religious and secular activities of the priesthood, both within and beyond the temple walls.

This paper explores how a provincial Egyptian temple was managed under imperial rule, its interactions with Roman authorities, and its place within broader economic, social, and administrative networks.

Panel 7

Religion and Spiritual Life

Chair: Lucas Weisser-Gericke (University of Basel)

Inner Generation in Some Magical, Philosophical and Gnostic Texts of Second-Century Egypt

Alberto Camplani (La Sapienza University)

This paper examines the interactions of religious languages in second-century Egypt, considering magical texts, Hermetic dialogues, Christian and Gnostic writings on baptism. It will identify and analyse a number of cases of borrowing and re-semanticisation across religious traditions, in order verify the existence of textual strategies of religious competition. In particular, the paper will focus on the notion of 'new generation' prompted by a 'divine intervention' in the human spiritual or cultic experience, studying the similarities and the differences among different religious traditions to determine whether each tradition independently developed this notion based on the philosophical-religious *koine* of the second century or whether they can be placed in a dialectical relationship of opposition, imitation, competition with each other.

Panel 7

Religion and Spiritual Life

Chair: Lucas Weisser-Gericke (University of Basel)

Teaching Transformation: The Emergence and Integration of Early Christians in the Pedagogical Landscape of Roman Alexandria

Edward Creedy. (Durham University)

The model of Christian education traditionally understood from Eusebius – that Pantaenus, Clement and Origen led the so-called Catechetical School in the city through the latter half of the second century and into the third – has long been understood as anachronistic. Beyond Eusebius' own writing, such a model sits at odds with the wider historical record. This paper interrogates Christian involvement in contemporary pedagogical landscapes through a twofold approach. A reconsideration of the language of Eusebius' comments on the early days of this Christian “school” reveals a less coherent model of Christian participation in contemporary pedagogical practices, and an analysis of Clement's own understanding of his educational activities further suggests a different picture. Clement's writings reveal a Christian teacher competing with a range of freelance intellectual and religious practitioners, including schools centred on rival Christian pedagogues.

This paper will present a new conception of the activity of Clement and his contemporaries, suggesting not simply a move away from an anachronistic sense of a second-century Catechetical School, but in its place a more varied landscape of Christian education in the ancient city. We can speak not of a second-century Christian school, but of schools, centred on a range of early Christian religious practitioners. The development of early Christian communities in Alexandria represents one of the most significant areas of transformation in second-century Roman Egypt, and the teaching of its converts lay at the heart of this change. As Christians learnt in and through new Christian teachers in the second century, they began to themselves develop identities and self-conceptions in response not only to the Greco-Roman world in which they lived, but even in response to alternative Judeo-Christian groups they encountered through this process.

