

A World Full of Associations
*Rules and Community Values in Early Roman Egypt**

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Introduction

This chapter investigates the nature of the relations between the rules of professional associations and the shaping of community values in early Roman Egypt.

The ancient world was full of associations. From West to East, in urban as well as rural centres, individuals gathered in more or less formalised groups, each displaying specific purposes and connotations, and over time the associative model, or *fenomeno associativo*, was widespread across all of the Mediterranean countries – and beyond.¹ Being part of a group reflected a primary human desire, thus providing individuals with a sense of belonging and contributing to the shaping of one's social identity. Multiple reasons, social and cultural as well as political and economic, lie behind the development of this phenomenon.² The religious element, in particular, was common to all types of ancient associations.³ Some groups had a very distinctive religious character, as their main purpose revolved around the worship of a particular deity; in modern scholarship, these are generally referred to as 'religious associations'.⁴ Economy, broadly speaking, also played a role in the formation and evolution of associations; indeed, individuals sharing the same occupation are attested to have

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¹ On the associative model, see Cracco Ruggini 1971: 59–64 and 1976. On the origins of associations there is a vast bibliography; see, for example, Poland 1909 and Waltzing 1895–1900. See also De Salvo 1992: 373–4 for associations in Italy (*collegia*) and van Nijf 1997 for a tradition of associations in the East. For Egypt, see Boak 1937b, San Nicolò 1972 and Muhs 2001. For associations as global Eurasian phenomenon, see Evers in Chapter 10.

² See Gibbs 2008 and 2011; Hawkins 2016: 66–129; Paganini 2020c; Venticinque 2010 and 2016.

³ See also Carbon in Chapter 4.

⁴ On religious associations in Egypt, see in general de Cenival 1972.

formed what today we usually call professional or trade associations.⁵ The separation between religious and professional associations, however, was not definite and the boundaries between the two groups were rather blurred.⁶ Religious elements were to be found in associations that had a prominent economic character and vice versa, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Associations with a more pronounced professional (or economic) focus grew in number during the early Roman period.⁷ The evidence shows that such groups normally had a well-defined internal structure and sets of regulations, *nomoi*, which governed individual behaviour as well as communal activities. From Roman Egypt three sets of regulations have survived, all coming from the same village, Tebtynis, in the Fayum (ancient Arsinoite district), and dated to the mid-first century AD: of a non-identified association; of the *apolyssimoi* of the imperial estate of Claudius, that is, imperial farmers who were exempt from certain liturgies; and of the salt merchants (*halopolai*).⁸ The three *nomoi* were formally recorded at the local record office (*grapheion*), which reflected a common practice among associations; indeed, the contemporary register of contract titles attests the registration of several *nomoi* for the year AD 45/6 (see discussion below).⁹

Thanks to the availability of a significant number of contemporary documents from the same site, we are also well informed about the social, economic and administrative environment in which these associations operated and their rules functioned.¹⁰ This gives us a unique opportunity

⁵ For a definition of professional associations, see Cracco Ruggini 1971: 64–5: ‘Collectivity of men who gather together with a common and permanent objective (or at least felt as such in the conscience of the members), which represents the ideological link at the base of the continuity of this system. This objective establishes another characteristic feature (of the associations), that is, their stable organisation, independent from any change which members might experience’ (the translation is mine). See also Cracco Ruggini 1973: 272–3. Some scholars use the definition of ‘trade associations’; see, for example, Gibbs 2008, 2011 and 2015.

⁶ For a discussion of terminology, see Gabrielsen 2016a: 131–2.

⁷ The general consensus holds that the Romans did not create professional associations, but took advantage of the associative model for their own administrative purposes. See, for example, van Minnen 1987: 53. Van Nijf 1997: 8 also notes that ‘the associations of the Greek East did not spring into existence ex nihilo, although Waltzing suggests that professional associations were a conscious innovation, imported by the Romans together with their own political institutions’.

⁸ *P.Mich.* V 243 (AD 14–37), 244 (AD 43) and 245 (AD 47). ⁹ *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*.

¹⁰ A large number of documents of various types and several archival groups survive from Tebtynis in the first two centuries AD, including the archive of the record office (*grapheion*), the archive of Kronion son of Cheos (see Foraboschi 1971) and the archive of the descendants of Patron (see Bagnall 1973 and Kehoe 1992: 74–92). It is the first-century record office archive that provides the best evidence regarding the community in which the rules of associations were established. See Husselman 1970 and Langellotti 2016a.

to explore the issues that are put forward in this volume: the place of association rules in the local community and their role in producing and shaping social values.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: first, to identify the values embedded in the regulations of the professional associations of early Roman Egypt and establish how far these values reflected those of the local community; second, to determine whether these rules aimed to create a well-ordered society (and whether they succeeded in doing so).

Regulations of Associations in Roman Egypt

In Egypt, associations had a long-standing tradition, which can be traced back to the Saite period.¹¹ As mentioned in the introduction, in the Roman period there was a proliferation of associations with a more professional characterisation, and it is remarkable to note that in Egypt many of these groups operated in rural communities. In the first century AD in the village of Tebtynis only there were at least eighteen associations that displayed a professional character; they exhibited a high level of specialisation and professionalism, mainly to do with textile production (weavers, dyers, fullers, cloak-makers, cloak-beaters and wool merchants) and metal work (coppersmiths and goldsmiths).¹² The role and importance of these groups have not gone unnoticed. Recent studies have focussed in particular on their economic dimension, suggesting that membership in a formalised group provided protection and clear financial advantages.¹³ In this period, associations were private and voluntary enterprises, which means that there was no formal imposition on individuals to band together.¹⁴ Nevertheless, a large proportion of the population participated in associations, and this was not a phenomenon limited to Egypt. Usually these groups were headed by a president, who was elected by the majority of the members and was in charge of enforcing the rules.¹⁵

¹¹ See Gibbs 2015: 242, with previous bibliography in n. 2. The most common Greek term for association is *synodos*, but *koinon* and *plethos* are also well attested. For an analysis of the terminology employed by associations in the Ptolemaic period, see now Paganini 2018.

¹² For a list of associations in early Roman Tebtynis, see Langellotti 2016b: 113–15. For a list of professional associations in the Roman East, see Arnaoutoglou 2002: 29–30; also Arnaoutoglou 2005: 213–16, who collects the evidence related to associations in the late first century BC and first century AD. For a general overview and discussion of different types of associations in Roman Egypt, with a focus on the first two centuries AD, see now Paganini 2020c. On professions and craft specialisation in the Eastern Mediterranean under the Romans, see Ruffing 2008.

¹³ See, for example, Gibbs 2011 and Verboven 2011. ¹⁴ Wilson 1996: 9–10.

¹⁵ In the papyri, the president is usually referred to as *begoumenos*. Other terms, such as *epimeletes*, *kephalaïotes* and *prostates*, are also used.

However, some particularly large associations, like the public farmers (*demosioi georgoi*) and the fishermen (*halieis*), had a board of officials called elders (*presbyteroi*), as the management of their activities would have been more demanding and in this way duties could be shared.¹⁶ In the daily administration they were assisted by a secretary (*grammateus*).¹⁷

In the Roman period Egyptian associations had sets of rules which were agreed upon by the majority of the members and formally registered at the record office, as confirmed by the case of mid-first-century Tebtynis.¹⁸ As notarial agreements (*demosioi chrematismo*), these documents were legally binding. This means that members of an association committed to the compliance of the rules from a private as well as legal perspective; in other words, violation of rules could result in formal legal action, should the association deem it necessary, even though internal resolution of disputes seems to have been the preferred method for members (see below).¹⁹

Boak was the first to note that the procedure by which associations' rules were validated voluntarily by their members was to be found in the Athenian private associations before Alexander the Great and suggested that their 'contractual basis was introduced into Egypt under Greek influence'.²⁰ The traditional view holds that the *nomoi* had a one-year validity.²¹ While this seems to have been the norm in the Ptolemaic period, this was definitely not the case under the Romans.²² As I suggested elsewhere, the president was in charge for one year, whereas the rules had a variable validity, which could be longer than one year.²³ The role of the president, with his power to enforce the association rules and collect fees and fines, was not necessarily or exclusively one of social prestige, but could also be a burden. Normally, presidents had other occupations to keep them busy; an example is given by Petheus son of Petheus, president and secretary of the weavers of Kerkesoucha Orous.²⁴ His daily schedule must have been quite hectic: as a weaver, he was

¹⁶ See, for example, *P.Mich.* V 313 and *PSI* VIII 901. Kruse 2020 suggests that under special circumstances the elders and the president could have co-existed.

¹⁷ The same structure is to be found in associations of royal farmers of the Ptolemaic period. See also Gibbs 2015: 251, who also notes the existence of an overlapping terminology between state officials and officials of trade associations.

¹⁸ *P.Mich.* V 243, ll. 13–14; V 244, ll. 45–6; V 247, ll. 17–18; V 248, ll. 8–9. See Boak 1937b, Gibbs 2011 and Venticinque 2016: 77–85.

¹⁹ See, for example, Venticinque 2016: 58–60. ²⁰ Boak 1937b: 220. ²¹ Boak 1937b: 213.

²² Monson 2007: 770–1. For the Ptolemaic period, there is, however, at least one exception – the association of the weavers of Coptos who engraved their regulations in Demotic to be valid 'forever and eternally': *Short Texts* I 158 (22 Tybi = 19 January 30 BC).

²³ Langellotti 2016b: 117–18. See also Gabrielsen 2016b: 93–4.

²⁴ *P. Mich.* II 121 verso, III l. 13 = recto IV vi. See also Langellotti 2016a: 1731–2.

engaged in textile production; as a president and secretary of an association, he had to perform regular administrative and other social tasks. Although in the ancient world occupational patterns were normally rather fluid, the involvement in different roles and activities of varying degrees of responsibility must have been demanding; therefore, the temporary nature of an association president's mandate would have made this role more attractive. It is likely that the annual turnover of presidents also contributed to ensuring that a certain level of fairness was kept in the internal set-up of the group and in the management of the various activities. In this way, no one would have been given the chance to establish and foster long-term power relations.

The rules, on the other hand, did not need to be modified every year; the president was in charge of their enforcement, and in the case of violation he had the authority to arrest the defaulter (*enechyrazein*) and 'hand him over' (*paradidonai*), most likely to the local authorities.²⁵ The main purpose of these regulations was to create a social and administrative order within whose boundaries individuals could operate and interact with each other; this also created what we might call a 'sub-legal' system within the established judicial system.²⁶ Although associations, in the role of their president, had the right to enforce their rules, there is no evidence suggesting that they had their own judicial system. Instead, it appears that members tended to favour, when possible, internal resolution of disputes, as recently noted by Cameron Hawkins and Philip Venticinque.²⁷ The fact that *nomoi* were registered at the record office means that the central government was informed of the associations' affairs, but also, and most importantly, that the associations were making a conscious effort to align themselves and their rules with the state's practice of registration.²⁸

²⁵ Right to arrest: *P.Mich.* V 244, ll. 19–20 and 245, ll. 37–42; right to exact pledges: *P.Mich.* V 243, l. 3. Arnaoutoglou 2002: 43 notes that these provisions regarding the president's power were also to be found in Greece in the second century, concluding that they might have been a Roman introduction. However, a similar role (i.e. chasing of defaulters and collection of fees and fines) is attested for the 'representatives of the house' as outlined in the Ptolemaic Demotic regulations, which may speak against the idea of a Roman introduction (at least for Egypt).

²⁶ Gibbs 2015: 258–60 examined the relationship between state laws and regulations of trade associations in the Ptolemaic period. He points out that 'the notion of internal jurisdiction was very important. Disputing members would presumably seek redress through the *nomoi* that all members had agreed upon, before going to the state to resolve the issues.'

²⁷ Hawkins 2016: 118–19; Venticinque 2016: 58–60. For Roman Egypt, see in particular the clause included in the unnamed association, *P.Mich.* V 243, ll. 6–7: 'If anyone prosecutes another or defames him, let him be fined eight drachmas' (transl. Boak).

²⁸ Recent scholarship has argued that the Roman legislation which issued bans and restrictions on associations was not implemented in Egypt. For an overview of state restrictions on associations, see Cotter 1996 and Arnaoutoglou 2002: 30–6; for a discussion of the application of Roman legislation

In general, this attitude of conforming to the values of the central power was typical of associations in the Roman East.²⁹

For the Ptolemaic period, we have several rules of religious associations in Demotic from Tebtynis.³⁰ Using the network model theorised by Charles Tilly, Andrew Monson interpreted the ethical rules of these groups as a vehicle to create an institutionalised trust network that would facilitate cooperation between members.³¹ In his view, economic reasons were secondary to social relations when joining an association. Was this still true in the Roman period? Did rules of associations and their underlying values change over time, adapting to new socio-economic and political circumstances? And finally, can the network model still be applied to the so-called professional associations of the Roman period? The following sections will attempt to answer these questions.

The Evidence

The village of Tebtynis provides us with particularly valuable evidence about rules of associations: three full sets of regulations and a notarial register dated to AD 45/6 in which at least six other associations recorded their rules. Of these, the title of only two is given: of the shepherds (*poimenes*) and of the builders (*oikodomoi*).³² The surviving three sets of rules regulated three separate types of associations, each reflecting a specific dimension of the local community; some of the rules are in common, some

in Egypt in the first century AD, see Arnaoutoglou 2005, who argues that in this province the government, in the person of the prefect Flaccus, took temporary measures only towards the Alexandrian associations. See also Arnaoutoglou 2002.

²⁹ Arnaoutoglou 2002: 29. The inclusion in the *Gnomon of the Idios Logos* of a regulation mentioning a fine of 500 drachmas for members of associations has been used to argue in favour of a hostile attitude of the state towards such groups. However, given the existence of a large number of associations in the Roman world, recent scholarship has proposed that fines against associations were limited to specific contingencies and are not to be regarded as a means to discourage the formation of new formalised groups; see now Venticinque 2016: 176–8. The *Gnomon* was a collection of rules concerning legal status, inheritance, marriage etc. compiled first under Augustus; see *BGU V* 1210 and *P.Oxy.* XLII 3014.

³⁰ For a list of Demotic rules of associations in the Ptolemaic period, see Arlt and Monson 2011: 211. Cf. Table 1.1 in Chapter 1. See also Monson 2006, 2007 and Muhs 2001. For a study of trade associations in the Ptolemaic period see now Gibbs 2015.

³¹ Monson 2006. See also Venticinque 2010, esp. 277, for the use of the network model to suggest that ethical rules aimed at reinforcing familial bonds between members.

³² Shepherds: *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, XVI l. 12 (23 May 46); builders: *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, XVII l. 39 (17 June 46). One set of regulations is submitted by a certain Psoseus who is said to be an oil-producer, which suggests that he was a member of the relevant association and acting on its behalf (*P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, VI l. 18, 28 October 45). For the other regulations, see *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, IX l. 45 (2 January 46), X l. 6 (4 January 46) and XI l. 36 (30 January 46).

others are unique to each group. All three ordinances include a provision regarding the election of an annual president who was given the power to enforce the laws of the association, a provision on the attendance of monthly banquets and a number of provisions on the prosecution of lawbreakers, which varied from one group to another (Table 8.1).³³ They also include a number of ethical rules, which regulated the social relations between the members and set the correct line of conduct. These constituted a well-ingrained tradition in Egyptian associations, and their presence in the ordinances of the Roman period attests to a line of continuity in the life of these groups.³⁴ The rules of an ethical nature are prominent in the ordinance of the non-identified association. The *nomos* of this group exhibits an essentially convivial character. Their explicit purpose was to hold monthly banquets to which all members had to contribute through the payment of dues. According to Boak, the reference to the purchase of a flock of sheep as an event to be celebrated might suggest the possibility that we are dealing here with the association of the cattle graziers (*probatoktenotrophoi*). However, this is not a convincing argument. In this document it is clear that the purchase of a flock has the same value as the purchase of a property (*to eggaion*), and in the same provision other events are envisaged as occasions for celebration. It is possible that members of this group engaged in some type of collective activity (economic or administrative) and that their rules, though not directly regulating this particular aspect of communal life, facilitated these non-convivial operations.

That conviviality was the main feature of this association is also suggested by the number of provisions on social gatherings and ethical behaviour, mutual support and respect, which are not to be found in the

³³ Boak 1937b provided a clear analysis of the three Greek *nomoi* from Tebtynis and compared the rules of Greek and Demotic texts. For a critique of the dichotomy Greek–Egyptian in Ptolemaic associations, see Paganini 2017. See also Muhs 2001, esp. 4–5, who supports the generally accepted view that there was an independent Egyptian tradition of religious associations, which can be seen in the very early evidence for associations in Egypt. This tradition would have been later adopted by Greek-speakers in the formation of the so-called professional associations. Rules about social behaviour are to be found also in associations outside Egypt; see, for example, the case of the *Iobacchoi* of Athens (e.g. Moretti 1986). Gibbs 2015: 248–9 points out that the early professional associations in the Hellenistic Mediterranean had a distinctive organisational structure ‘that was preferred among all others’, and that this structure is partly reflected in the *nomoi*. He suggests that there might have been a common institution that was derived from Greek precedents, and this Greek model ‘could be grafted onto existing traditional indigenous institutions’.

³⁴ Venticinque 2010: 286 suggests that behind these regulations there is the association’s concern to protect ‘the reputation for reliability and trustworthiness of the guild’. See also Arnaoutoglou 2002: 43, who thinks that the purpose of rules on ethical behaviour was to keep social turmoil under control ‘without any immediate cost to the Roman administration’.

Table 8.1. *Common features in the regulations of the first-century Tebrynis associations*

PROVISIONS	Non-identified association	<i>Apolysimoi</i> of the imperial estate of Claudius	Salt merchants
Election of a president	Yes	Yes	Yes
Main payment of members	Monthly contribution (set at 12 dr.)	Poll-tax and expenses	Trade taxes
Main purpose of the association	Monthly banquets	Payment of poll-tax and expenses	Payment of trade taxes and division of areas for sale of salt and gypsum
Monthly banquets	Yes (12th)	Yes (8th)	Yes (25th)
Prosecution of misbehaving members	Yes	Yes	Yes
Attendance of meetings	Non-attendance punished by fines	Non-attendance punished by fines	Non-attendance punished by fines
Arrangement of seating plan at banquets	Yes (Fine: 3 ob.)	No	No
Prosecution or defamation of members	Yes (Fine: 8 dr.)	No	No
Intrigue and corruption of a member's home	Yes (Fine: 60 dr.)	No	No
Payment for birth, marriage, purchase of property, of sheep and of cattle	Yes	No	No
Mutual support	Failure punished by fines (8 dr.)	No	No
Mutual assistance for debt	Yes	Yes	No
Attendance at a member's funeral	Yes (Fines: 4 dr. for not shaving; 4 dr. for not attending)	Yes (Fine: 4 dr. for not attending)	No

other two extant *nomoi*. Members were required to follow a good conduct and to make a financial contribution when another member married, had a child and bought a property, cattle or a flock of sheep; members were also expected to help a fellow member in trouble and to be considerate when taking seats at a banquet, and were forbidden to prosecute and to corrupt a fellow member. Finally, a provision was included regulating behaviour in the event of a member's death, whereby members had to shave, feast for one day and contribute with 1 drachma and two loaves of bread each. The importance of these ethical rules is reflected in their respective fines, which ranged from a minimum of 3 obols for shoving other members at the banquets, to 8 drachmas for denying help to a fellow member, for prosecuting him or slandering him, to a maximum of 60 drachmas for intriguing against a member or corrupting his home. It emerges clearly that fines were directly proportional to the seriousness of the violation, thus revealing the values that the group perceived as of the utmost importance and that therefore should not be infringed. For this association, it was the act of scheming against another member (*hyponomeuein*) or corrupting his home (*oikophthoreuein*) that was viewed as the most appalling offence of all, with a fine of 60 drachmas. By ensuring good conduct and mutual respect, ethical rules encouraged the creation and maintenance of strong relations of trust and solidarity. The inclusion in the *nomos* of such rules (and associated fines) combined with a monthly fee of 12 drachmas per member and occasional additional contributions made membership of this group rather costly. As Philip Venticinque has noted, an annual membership of 144 drachmas would have been sufficient to support a family of four for a year, thus suggesting that members were relatively well off.³⁵ The enforcement of fines that added to the members' financial burden no doubt would have been a good way to ensure proper behaviour.

In the *nomos* of the *apolysimoi* and in that of the salt merchants, rules on social behaviour are limited to provisions on mutual support in case of debt and attendance of funerals for the former and to participation of meetings only for the latter. An early provision states the main purpose for the *apolysimoi*, that is, to pay their share of the poll-tax (*laographia*) and other expenses (*dapanai*) to their president.³⁶ This rule is of particular

³⁵ Venticinque 2016: 14–15.

³⁶ *P.Mich.* V 244, ll. 2–7: 'Having met together, the undersigned men of Tebrynin, *apolysimoi* of an estate of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator, voted unanimously to elect one of their number, an excellent man, Kronion, son of Herodes, to be superintendent for one year from the month Sebastos of the coming fourth year of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator, the same Kronion to collect the public revenues of the poll-tax of the

significance, for two reasons: first, because it highlights the administrative and practical aspect of their gathering into a formalised group; second, because it reveals that members of this group were not exempt from the main capitation tax, but from liturgies.³⁷ Paying taxes as a collective was not without advantages, mainly because it avoided that members must deal directly with tax collectors.³⁸ Another noteworthy aspect of their regulations is the formalised link with the emperor Claudius; a provision required that members hold a party on the eighth day of each month, in honour of the emperor's birthday, with the president providing drinks for the celebrations and toasts. No provision is to be found that regulated other collective activities of the group, but some entries listed in the contemporary register of contract titles suggest that the *apolysimoi* occasionally made contracts as a collective. One contract, for example, mentions the 'group of *apolysimoi*' (*plethos apolysimon*).³⁹ A group of *apolysimoi* is also attested, jointly with the cattle graziers, in two affidavits (*cheirographiai*) registered at the record office in AD 45/6.⁴⁰ It is unclear whether these *apolysimoi* are to be identified with the *apolysimoi* of the estate of Claudius or with the farmers of another estate, but it is interesting to note that the two associations had shared interests (perhaps leasing of pasture land) and engaged in collective actions (one of the affidavits mentions the maintenance of some canals). The association of the *apolysimoi* with an imperial estate and their potential collaboration with groups of professional cattle breeders suggest that their activities included farming and livestock grazing. It is not surprising that these activities were not officially regulated by a *nomos*, as they were in fact 'state' activities, whose main terms were dictated by the Roman government and therefore there was no need, or freedom, for enforcing specific rules. However, the fact that the imperial farmers made contracts as a collective guaranteed some degree of flexibility in their economic enterprises. The rules of their associations did not give instructions as to how make bid applications or any other type of contracts, but facilitated these transactions by introducing a provision on debt, whereby members were given security for a set period of time (thirty or

same *apolysimoi* and all the expenses of the said association' (transl. Boak). It is worth noting that paying taxes collectively was a novelty in Egypt and seems to have been connected with formalised associations; see van Minnen 1987: 48–56. It was not, however, a Roman introduction; see, for example, the payment of the *eisphora*, a direct tax paid in periods of particular needs, like war, in Classical Athens: Christ 2007b.

³⁷ Boak, Introduction to *P.Mich.* V 244. See also *P.Gen.* II 91. ³⁸ Hanson 1984.

³⁹ *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, XX l. 44.

⁴⁰ *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, III l. 40 and VIII l. 26. See Parassoglou 1978: 61 and n. 67; also Langellotti 2016b: 122–4.

sixty days) in case they incurred in a private debt of up to 100 drachmas. Membership itself served as a protective measure in financial dealings.

A provision on debt is missing in the *nomos* of the salt merchants, but nine out of twelve regulations deal with the arrangement for the distribution of salt and gypsum among the members in the Fayum region. The reason behind the lack of a clause on debt probably lies in the fact that the salt merchants already enjoyed rights and privileges that other traders did not have, which was reflected in the careful subdivision of areas among the members. The sale of salt, at least in the Fayum, constituted a government concession, and salt merchants were required to submit bidding applications (*anaphoria*) to the state in order to acquire this right, as is attested by the local record office evidence dated to AD 45/6.⁴¹ Membership in an association aimed at strengthening the position of the salt merchants in the various activities connected with their trade, from the application process to the sale of the finished product.⁴² For the association to work efficiently, precise rules were needed as how to divide the market among the members.⁴³ This was all the more important due to the presence in the area of

⁴¹ Written bids by salt merchants are attested in *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, VII l. 27 (15 November 45), *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, XXI l. 40 (14 August 46) and *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, XXII l. 27 (23 August 46). For an up-to-date discussion of *anaphoria* as written bids, see now Langellotti 2016b: 129–34. On the sale of salt in the Greek world, see Carusi 2008, esp. 207–14 on Graeco-Roman Egypt. She notes that it is still unclear to what extent the production of salt was under state control during the Roman period and how its exploitation was managed. See also Wallace 1938: 183–4 and Adams 2013: 273.

⁴² Gabrielsen 2016b: 92–5 argues against the consensus that holds that the salt merchants were a professional association, suggesting instead that they formed a sort of partnership. Whether or not the salt merchants constituted what we call a regular association, it is impossible to ascertain; it is conceivable, however, that other associations also functioned like the salt merchants, meaning that this was not a unique case, but rather the manifestation of a wider phenomenon (i.e. formation of associations with a more economic character).

⁴³ The list of current members appended to the *nomos* of salt merchants is damaged and shows only the ages and distinctive marks of five signatories, which might mean that the association had only five members, including the president. These regulations are stated in *P.Mich.* V 245, ll. 9–34: ‘And (they have decided) that all alike shall sell salt in the aforesaid village of Tebtynis, and that Orseus alone has obtained by lot the sole right to sell gypsum in the aforesaid village of Tebtynis and in the adjacent villages, for which he shall pay, apart from the share of the public taxes which falls to him, an additional sixty-six dr. in silver; and that the said Orseus has likewise obtained by lot Kerkesis, alone to sell salt therein, for which he shall likewise pay an additional eight dr. in silver. And that Harmiusis also called Belles, son of Harmiusis, has obtained by lot the sole right to sell salt and gypsum in the village of Tristomos also called Boukolos, for which he shall contribute, apart from the share of the public taxes which falls to him, five additional dr. in silver. Upon condition that they shall sell the good salt at the rate of two and one-half obols, the light salt at two obols, and the lighter salt at one and one-half obol, by our measure or that of the warehouse. And if anyone shall sell at a lower price than these, let him be fined eight dr. in silver for the common fund and the same for the public treasury. And if any of them shall be found to have sold more than a stater’s worth of salt to a merchant, let him be fined eight dr. in silver for the common fund and the same for the public treasury. But if the merchant shall intend to buy more than four drachmas’ worth, all must

other groups of the same type, namely, the salt merchants of Talei and Theogonis and those of Ibion Eikosipentarouron.⁴⁴ The inclusion of legally binding rules on the subdivision of localities for the sale of salt must be seen as a way to regulate the competition and to set defined and clear parameters by which each member was required to abide. Needless to say, failure to do so resulted in the payment of fees, which was probably a good deterrent for misbehaving members.

While the expectation in all three sets of rules that members attended monthly meetings is a good indication of the strong social character of these groups, some associations felt the need to add rules that regulated more closely the ethical behaviour of their members. The exact nature of each of these associations is difficult to ascertain. If we go by the content of their *nomoi* and their titles, we may conclude that the non-identified association was a convivial club, while the *apolysimoi* and the salt merchants constituted more professional groups. This distinction, however, is not a fair reflection of the realities behind these groups. As Vincent Gabrielsen pointed out, associations that did not display in their title an occupational connotation did not necessarily lack an economic role in the community and, therefore, should not be excluded from our economic analysis.⁴⁵

The regulations of the exempt farmers of the imperial estate of Claudius and those of the salt merchants reveal two fundamental dimensions of communal life in the early Roman period: first, the desire to fit into the new Roman administrative system, which is clearly shown by the formalised commitment of the *apolysimoi* to pay taxes collectively; second, the social values of conviviality and sociability, which are the reflection of a society where personal relations were central, and trust among individuals was continuously fostered.

A significant aspect of communal life that emerges from the three sets of regulations is geographical mobility. Members of associations regularly travelled from their village of residence to other villages of the region and to the district capital, Ptolemais Euergetis, in order to attend monthly meetings in the context of which social networks were established and maintained. Reasons to travel outside Tebtynis were either business or participation in religious festivals and other social events; the salt

sell to him jointly. And if anyone shall bring in gypsum and shall intend to sell it outside, it must be left on the premises of Orseus, son of Harmiusis, until he takes it outside and sells it' (transl. Boak).

⁴⁴ Talei and Theogonis: *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, XXI l. 40; Ibion Eikosipentarouron: *P.Mich.* II 123 *recto*, XXII l. 27.

⁴⁵ Gabrielsen 2016b: 89.

merchants, for example, who held the concession for the sale of salt and gypsum in Tebtynis and nearby villages, were expected to travel around the district and have business relations with merchants and other buyers living outside Tebtynis. Provisions on meetings in the *nomoi* clearly attest this type of mobility. Members of the three associations were required to attend all the meetings called by the president, which could take place in the village, in a place outside the village or in the district capital. Although the nature of these meetings is not specified, variation in fines for failing to attend them suggests that their importance depended on their location, and those happening in the district capital were of particular significance: between 1 and 2 drachmas if the meeting was in the village, 4 drachmas if it was outside the village, 4 and 8 drachmas if it was in the district capital.⁴⁶ It appears that the non-identified association was less mobile; its members did not have meetings in other villages and the fine for missing a meeting in Ptolemais Euergetis was lower (4 instead of 8 drachmas). We do not know how far members of other associations established social or economic relations with individuals in other villages and in the district capital, but the very fact that some of their meetings took place outside Tebtynis, where the association was based, unveils the existence of a net of connections between Tebtynis, its neighbouring villages and Ptolemais Euergetis. It is most likely that one of the purposes of their meetings and banquets was that of providing the members with the possibility of networking, which would have facilitated potential economic dealings by creating trust networks.

An important fact to be noted is the inclusion of ethical rules in the ordinance of the non-identified association, which are missing in the other two ordinances (the exempt farmers of the imperial estate of Claudius do have provisions for mutual assistance and funerals, but none on ethical behaviour). Does this mean that these values were less important for the purpose of being a member of a professional association? Did the salt merchants not value the contribution of ethical rules? As membership in an association was not mutually exclusive, it is possible that those who were part of a more professional association also joined a social club, like that of the non-identified association, in order to enjoy the privileges of mutual support. Certain rules were agreed upon by the members on the basis of their particular needs, which clearly differed from one group to another. The relations between members of a professional association seem to have relied on rules that were dictated by conscious economic decisions

⁴⁶ On regulation of compulsory participation in associations, see Eckhardt in Chapter 3.

more than on social rules, suggesting that the members were aware that this group was in fact an economic enterprise.

Table 8.1 includes a list of provisions to be found in the three surviving sets of regulations (of the non-identified association, of the *apolyssimoi* and of the salt merchants), thus revealing which terms were common to all, which were common to two associations only and, finally, which terms were unique to one association only. It emerges clearly that, although associations were free to devise their personalised sets of rules according to their own needs, they all shared three core provisions – election of a president, obligation to attend monthly banquets and prosecution of lawbreakers – which can be regarded as the distinctive markers of an officially recognised association, at least in the Roman period.

The World of Professional Associations: A Well-Ordered Society?

The regulations of associations that survived from early Roman Egypt reveals the existence of a set of social values that underpinned the behaviour and activities of these groups and the relations between their members. These values were of two types: ethical (solidarity, trust and sociability) and practical (mobility and desire to integrate into the Roman administrative and economic framework). The fact that a large number of people joined one or more of these associations confirms that these values were not unique to specific groups but reflected those of the entire community. Although the percentage of individuals who were members of specific formalised groups cannot be calculated, the evidence from Tebtynis gives us a pretty good idea of the magnitude of this phenomenon. Assuming that each association had an average of twenty to thirty members, I calculated elsewhere that 10 to 15 per cent of the male population in the village might have belonged to an association.⁴⁷

Trust and solidarity were not simply theoretical notions, but core values at the base of the contractual economy of Roman Egypt. Mobility too was not a prerogative of members of associations, but a phenomenon widely attested among all strata of the population. Traders and craftsmen, for example, were not the only social groups who travelled around their own region and beyond. Shepherds too, who, incidentally, might have formed an association, occasionally had to relocate their flocks to different areas (sometimes outside their own district) to find pastures; state officials, slaves and freedmen who worked in administrative roles regularly travelled on

⁴⁷ Langellotti 2016b: 119.

business, and many individuals of Hellenic descent resided half-time in the district capital, half-time in the village, therefore making frequent journeys between their two residences.⁴⁸

The increase of professional associations under the Romans was not a product of chance, but a phenomenon strictly connected with the proliferation of state concessions, which in many cases replaced the old Ptolemaic monopolies.⁴⁹ This new situation led to the development of ad hoc rules that reflected the new needs of these groups' members. The case of the salt merchants in this respect is illustrative, as it shows the necessity to regulate a specific economic activity – the distribution of salt and gypsum – within a wide region and was not a unique case. As the evidence from first-century Tebtynis shows, many economic enterprises were now organised as state concessions and revolved around a relevant association: the fishermen, the builders, the weavers, the dyers, the cattle graziers and so on.⁵⁰

The *nomoi* of these groups have not come down to us, but the example of the salt merchants suggests that some of their rules also covered their economic dimension. Such associations most likely had regulations that covered the financial aspects of their business; the weavers, for example, paid their trade tax (*cheironaxion*) collectively, a condition that was probably included in their *nomos*.

The values introduced by the new rules reflected primarily the need of the individuals to acquire enhanced support and protection in the bidding procedure.⁵¹ The old social and ethical rules, conversely, were not abandoned, as they were strongly embedded in institutionalised social networks.

In this respect, the *nomoi* of the Roman period associations reflect a community that was different from the one in place in the Ptolemaic period. This society had new needs and concerns; the livelihood of families and individuals depended now on an economic set-up mainly based on an organised system of licence fees that required initiative and resourcefulness on the part of the bidders. State concessions enhanced competition and gave individuals the possibility to be involved actively and voluntarily in a number of activities. It was a chance for more profit, but it also meant

⁴⁸ Bagnall 1973. ⁴⁹ Wallace 1938: 181–3.

⁵⁰ Gibbs 2015: 261–2 suggests that the trade associations of the Ptolemaic period would have been involved in the system of state monopolies, whereby contractors, through an auction, would agree to produce a fixed amount of product at a fixed price. In the Roman period, state concessions replaced the Ptolemaic monopolies, allowing for more flexibility in an open market.

⁵¹ See Arnaoutoglou in Chapter 6 for the impact of the Romans on Athenian associations.

financial risk. The associative model, based on those ethical values that had characterised the Egyptian society for a long time, proved to be a useful way to deal with this new scenario.

The economic situation in Egypt rapidly changed from the first to the second century AD.⁵² Associations were put under stricter control and soon were required to perform administrative duties on behalf of the state.⁵³ The change in the administrative and economic set-up would have led inevitably to a change in community values – in many cases, fear was probably more prominent than desire for profit, and ethical and protectionist norms might have had a privileged place in associations' *nomoi*. The character of associations and their rules adapted to the increasingly and ever-changing society, demonstrating not only that they were a fundamental social institution, but also that they were flexible and easily adjustable to different situations. Some rules, however, did not disappear, for example, the ones related to burial of members and members' relatives.⁵⁴ While various political and economic contingencies gradually modified the ancient Egyptian society, community values that mirrored the new needs of the individuals (to conform to the Roman administration) emerged. This was an attempt on the part of associations to align their values (and those of their own community) with the values of the central authority. Things, of course, did not always run smoothly. Conflicts and disagreements can be seen in petitions in which members of associations filed complaints in matters of taxation, an inevitable result considering that by the second century AD associations became fully involved in the administrative state machinery.⁵⁵

The creation of ad hoc rules that would conform to new circumstances confirms the willingness of associations to survive and maintain a certain order in which they could exist. From this point of view, it could be argued that rules were established to create a well-ordered society; whether members of associations were influenced or inspired by the Greek idea of 'good

⁵² For Roman Asia, Harland 2003: esp. 89–112 argues that associations participated fully in 'civic vitality' and were not to be seen as 'compensatory phenomena in a period of civic decline'. Cf. Cracco Ruggini 1976. See also Gillihan 2012, whose analysis of the Dead Sea scrolls reaches similar conclusions.

⁵³ See, for example, *Stud.Pal.* IV pp. 70–1 (Ptolemais Euergetis, AD 73) and *P. Tebt.* II 287 (Tebtynis, AD 161–9).

⁵⁴ Craft guilds in late Medieval England, for example, provided their members with two types of religious activities: Sunday gatherings at church and postmortem services (funerals and burials). These were well-structured organisations with rules that regulated both ethical conduct and administrative and economic activities of their members. See also Richardson 2005: esp. 149 and 156–63.

⁵⁵ Venticinque 2015: 357.

order', is, however, difficult to prove. Though deeply ingrained in the native Egyptian strata of the population, associations had a long tradition that combined both Egyptian and Greek models; 'good order' might have been embedded in the Greek model, but there is no clear evidence. More likely, the reason why associations, with their rules, strove to achieve a social order lies in their need for preservation. The associative model provided a useful social (and, to an extent, economic) framework that their members did not want to give up. They created rules that allowed their associations to function the best way possible under different political, administrative and economic scenarios.

It is very tempting to suggest that the values that were at the core of professional associations in the early Roman period and beyond, that is, trust, solidarity and mutual support, had a universal character. These were to be found in Egypt well before Christianity and continued to be an integral part of the identity and rules of associations in later periods and in different regions outside Egypt.⁵⁶ In her analysis of medieval craft guilds and market order in the sixteenth century, Mougeot points out that 'although they conveyed the values required to set up an economy of exchange, these craft guilds remained influenced by the values of mutual assistance which was a feature of primitive society'.⁵⁷ Their rules of conduct, which regulated ethical behaviour to ensure good business, were approved by the legal authorities. Admittedly, late antique and medieval associations were different from earlier institutionalised groups. However, members still found a way to preserve the ethical values that were at the core of their own establishment.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See also Evers in Chapter 10. Carrié 2002: 311 pointed out that professional associations in late antiquity were characterised not only by the fiscal obligations to which they were subjected, but also by 'sociability, conviviality, and cultural practice'. Hughes 1974: 61–2 suggested erroneously that medieval guilds, 'many of which had as their most notable feature the sharing of a common meal', were based on familial feelings, which found their roots in the Bible. In fact, feelings of familiarity are to be found in ancient associations well before the advent of Christianity.

⁵⁷ Mougeot 2003: 170; also Richardson 2005: 140 notes that 'the rational-choice approach to the analysis of organization behavior suggests the performance of an organization (such as a guild) depends upon the rules by which it operates and how effectively those rules are enforced. Rules encourage individuals to contribute toward collective goals and discourage them from taking advantage of their colleagues.' For a comparison between ancient associations and medieval guilds, see van Nijf 1997: 11–18, in which the similarities between the two institutions are stressed. See also Carrié 2002: 328–31.

⁵⁸ See Rosser 2015: 37–87.