

## **Roman Memphis**

Memphis was the oldest capital city of Egypt and had served as the residence of the kings in the pharaonic time. Even during the periods when Memphis was not the official capital of pharaonic Egypt, it never lost its religious, economic, administrative, or military importance. Memphis was the sacral capital, the home of Ptah, creator god, and the centre for the cult of the Apis bull. It was an important river port and centre of crafts, as well as the headquarters of a large garrison. Already before the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great, Memphis was a cosmopolitan city where different Mediterranean cultures met and mixed. People from the outside world, Herodotus, for instance, associated the whole land of Egypt with Memphis, and the conquerors of Egypt made the city their residence and administrative centre. The sacral authority of Memphis ensured its political relevance: the kings of the new dynasty of the Ptolemies came there to be crowned as pharaohs so that their power was legitimised according to the Egyptian customs. Memphis retained the second place among Egyptian cities after Alexandria during the three centuries of the Hellenistic Ptolemaic kingdom and was still a major centre of the country's cult, culture, and economics when the Romans annexed Egypt in 30 BC. Under the Romans, Memphis continued to be one of the major Egyptian cities, the nome capital, and an important centre for administration in Middle Egypt.

The present project focuses on the Roman period of the history of Memphis (I–IV AD). How much change and continuity characterises this period? How did this city function under the Romans? How much 'Romanised' did it become? How did the administrative system and socio-economic life change with the new rule? What was the role of Memphis in the life of the province Egypt in that time, compared to the exceptional religious and political standing of this city in the previous historical periods? To answer these questions, it is necessary to study in detail papyrus documents coming from Memphis and mentioning Memphis and/or the Memphite region. One large group of about 150 such documents dating from the first half of the III AD was found in Saqqara near Memphis. These documents were published in the 19<sup>th</sup>–first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in several separate editions and have never been studied as a whole archive. About one third of the papyri from this archive have remained unpublished to the date; others need to be revisited and re-edited. In the framework of the project, these significant documents will be thoroughly studied as historical sources about the city of Memphis in that time. These and other relevant documents will be compiled into the corpus of papyrus sources that will be then compared with other available documentary, literary, and archaeological material. The following aspects of historical evidence will be given special attention: Roman public offices; Roman financial institutions, taxes and their collection; economic of landholding; court procedures in Roman Memphis; social status of inhabitants of the city; traditional Memphite cults and priests and Roman religious innovations; diversity in language, ethnic background, and culture.