

From Cradle to Grave

When Dioskoros writes his Greek to Coptic glossary, he adds an entry for “abortion” or “miscarriage.”¹ The death of unborn babies, newborns, and children is common in this world. However, the lives of Aphrodito’s children are invisible to our eyes. The town’s inhabitants act in their own right only as adults, and children appear in our records only in passing, as bystanders in family disputes. What their lives may be like is a gap in the history, in Aphrodito as in most places in the ancient world. Remember the small finds from Aphrodito in Chapter 1.² The 1901 excavations at Kom Ishqaw uncovered a doll made of rough red earthenware; a horse’s head made of pottery; and wooden writing tablets, including one with wax still in it.³ These dolls and tablets may be the best glimpse we will ever get of Aphrodito’s children.

The levels of child mortality in Roman Egypt probably vary little from one period to another. Census records from other places in Roman Egypt, from earlier periods of Roman rule, provide raw data for reference. Life expectancy is low for both men and women, in the low to mid-twenties, and infant mortality is high.⁴ Dioskoros is one of three siblings that we know of. Others may have died in childhood. Likewise, Dioskoros has four children that we know of, and may have lost still more. These lost brothers and sisters, these lost children, are ghosts hidden throughout the town. The people of Aphrodito grow up hearing about the ones before them, knowing the ones after them, seeing them in ways we never can.

Aphrodito’s marriages are much clearer. The Michailides collection held twenty-one papyri from Aphrodito, bought on the open market around the end of the Second World War. The large majority of these papyri relate to the life and career of Phoibammon, the son of Triadelphos whom we have met in earlier chapters. The lone exceptions are three papyri allegedly

¹ Bell and Crum 1925, 214. ² See Figure 1.3. ³ Quibell 1902, 88.

⁴ Males: “at least 25.0 years” (Bagnall and Frier 1994, 100). Females: 22.5 years (ibid., 87).

“found together, in a different spot from the rest of the collection, in a box made of ‘mud’, each roll resting in a separate groove in the box.”⁵

When collectors buy papyri that do not come from controlled archaeological excavations, we have no way to know whether we should believe these stories. The box, if it existed, was “described as being rectangular, and provided with a lid of the same material, which was possibly sun-dried mud-brick, or a sun-dried clay.” It may have been the ancient equivalent of a scribe’s desk drawer. The modern editors suggested that the three texts were the notary’s copies.⁶

One of the papyri has two documents on a single roll, the two together forming a marriage settlement between Rachel and Besarion on December 30, 566. The main characters in both pieces are Jacob and Irene, the parents of Besarion, the prospective groom. In the first text, Jacob and Irene acknowledge that they owe Rachel, their future daughter-in-law, “the customary marriage-gift,” in this case thirty gold pieces. As a guarantee for that sum, they offer Rachel just under seven acres of land for her to choose from their holdings in Aphrodito. In the second text, Jacob and Irene then lease the seven acres from Rachel for the cost of the taxes on the land.

This may seem like a strange arrangement. The whole thing is fictional: no gold changes hands, and no land.⁷ The point of this marriage gift is to guarantee that Rachel will have claim to the gold – or the land – if her husband divorces her or dies. In effect, Jacob and Irene are offering Rachel marriage insurance. This sort of arrangement has deep roots in indigenous Egyptian practice, appearing in Egyptian-language marriage contracts centuries before the start of Roman rule.⁸

Why would Rachel think such insurance necessary? Is she taking a risk in marrying Besarion? Are Jacob and Irene willing to risk having to pay a hefty sum as a way to buy a good marriage for their son? Is she marrying down while they are marrying up? Jacob is no small man himself: he signs the village’s petition to the empress Theodora in the 540s, and has served as a village tax contributor. Even the best of marriages may need a guarantee.

The modern world imagines weddings as large celebrations with friends and family, parties full of friction and fun. The paperwork and formalities are always present, but not necessarily prominent in public. But the ancient world’s paperwork is all that survives. It is also the evidence for the real friction, the moments of tension and awkwardness. The groom’s parents both need help to get the paperwork done. The groom’s mother is illiterate,

⁵ *P.Michael*, page 71. ⁶ *P.Michael*, page 80. ⁷ *P.Michael*, page 85. ⁸ Pestman 1961, 40–41.

and a priest named Dioskoros signs for her. But as the editors note, “the priest seems almost as illiterate as the lady for whom he wrote.”⁹

The groom’s father gets interrupted as he signs the lease. He starts one word in his acknowledgment too close to the end of the line and stops, unsure how to fix the mistake. The rest of the word is in different handwriting. “One might guess that Jacob was slow in finishing” his signature, and that “Dioskoros impatiently snatched pen and papyrus and finished it for him.”¹⁰ If the groom’s father is nervous at the signing, we can understand why. The standard form of marriage contract in this period is a hefty declaration of debt to the bride. One contract, most likely from Antinoopolis, the capital of southern Egypt, in the 560s or 570s, includes an acknowledgment of a debt of six gold pieces. The groom or one of his relatives signs the text with the promise that he is “ready to hand these over to Your Grace [the bride] whenever you want, free from all malice and procrastination, at my own hazard and liability, and at the cost of my family and personal possessions.”¹¹

This is generic language, and reappears almost word for word in another marriage contract from the same period, between Horouogchis and Scholastikia.¹² Their agreement begins with a clause acknowledging that the groom owes the bride just under six gold pieces as a counter-dowry, but it is far more interesting for the conditions it places on both parties. To my mind, the burden of the agreement lies more heavily on the husband than the wife. He promises her

I won’t despise you or throw you out of my marital home except on account of unchastity and shameful transactions and bodily disorder made known by three trusted free men either from the country or the city ... I, your spouse, further promise not to invite anyone unsuitable to the house, nor to dine with a friend or relative when you’re at home unless you are willing.

The list of conditions goes on at length, and the groom claims that he is not making his promises from fear or through deceit or under duress.

In fact, these conditions tell us hardly anything about Horouogchis and Scholastikia as husband and wife, but they do reveal a fair amount about typical expectations for married life. Accusations of infidelity might come easily, but demanding three witnesses sets a high standard of proof.¹³ The note about witnesses from the country and the city is an interesting touch.

⁹ *P.Michael*. 42.A.40.n. ¹⁰ *P.Michael*. 42.B.24.n.

¹¹ *SB* 22.15633 with translation from Kuehn 1993, 107.

¹² See Scholastikia 1, *P.Lond.* 5.1711 and its draft version, *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67310.

¹³ A standard of proof with old roots: compare *P.Eleph.* 1 (311/310 BC).

Even in the status-conscious late Roman world, all that matters to witness infidelity is to be free. Husbands misbehave, bring home obnoxious friends, and take over the home with unwanted guests. But here too, the wife has protection, an expectation that she has some say, some level of control over that home.

Elsewhere, we meet a bride named Theodora, also called Segā, and her husband, apparently named Kollouthos.¹⁴ One part of the text includes a declaration of debt to the bride, but whether it is from the groom himself or one of his relatives, we cannot tell. Hardly anything shows who these people are. The groom may be a *singularis*, a messenger or assistant in a provincial office. One of the bride's family, a man named Pithiodoros, may be a fruiterer.¹⁵ This is not society's elite, and yet the documentation of their marriage amounts to over one hundred lines of text.

In another marriage contract, we meet Viktorine and Aphous.¹⁶ This document survives today in fragments written "in very bad Greek, full of spelling errors and grammatical mistakes."¹⁷ Dioskoros works with this couple during his time in Antinoopolis, the provincial capital. They are from the Lykopolite nome and own property both there and in the Antaiopolite nome. The property survey gives a rare peak into the closet of a late antique Egyptian woman.¹⁸ Viktorine's property includes roughly three ounces of gold jewelry and an assorted list of other clothes and jewelry: linen fabrics, handkerchiefs, cushions, cloaks, jewelry boxes, perfume containers, and much more.

Their agreements to each other are much like the others. Aphous agrees that he will "neither commit any outrage against her, nor to her body, nor to her face, and not expel her ... and not bring in another wife or (?) a concubine."¹⁹ Viktorine agrees "to cherish the marriage and to love her husband in everything and to stay in the house ... and not to do anything without her husband's knowledge."²⁰ Some of the language in these marriage contracts is generic, and does not show the human side of the marriages. A petition from Antinoopolis in the late 560s or early 570s gives more detail about the marriage at the heart of its story. "My father," the petitioner writes:

¹⁴ See Theodora 1 and Kuehn 1993 for *SB* 22.15633's potential relationship to *P.Flor.* 3.294 and *P.Lond.* 5.1710.

¹⁵ *P.Lond.* 5.1710.15, absent from Ruffini 2011. ¹⁶ Who appear again, page 138.

¹⁷ APIS Catalog Record for *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67006.v.

¹⁸ *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67006.v.80–91, with Italian trans. in Russo 1998, 150–151.

¹⁹ Trans. altered from Urbanik 2011, 144. ²⁰ Trans. in Urbanik 2011, 136, note 25.

abandoned me, then a little child, and preferred the life of a monk to the life of an Antaiopolite defensor. He sent me away from Antaiopolis with few things to my uncle on my mother's side. Later on, when I grew up, my uncle became my father-in-law, for he married me to his daughter, and gave me, as is customary, some property according to a dowry contract, for he was a kind man.²¹

Bitterness at the petitioner's father – unable or unwilling to provide for his son – gives way to gratitude to his mother's brother, a man named Kollouthos. This marriage between two first cousins is a bit of good luck for the husband, who will now have financial resources he once lacked. It is also a smart move by Kollouthos, who can leave his daughter in the safe hands of a grateful relative.

Some of these marriage contracts are basically debt agreements.²² After the consummation of marriage, the groom agrees to give a gift to his bride; this gift becomes, legally, the groom's debt to the bride, and it may be a payment for the bride's virginity.²³ The gift or debt agreement comes after the wedding itself in order to wait for proof on the wedding night. Indeed, Horouogchis tells Scholastikia that her gift comes now that he has “found your holy and steadfast virginity.”

Depending on the status of the newlyweds, such gifts and a dowry may be a legal requirement. Recent imperial legislation banned marriage by agreement alone for high-ranking officials, adding that “there shall always be a dowry and bridal gifts and everything that becomes the noble persons.”²⁴ This helps eliminate uncertainty about a marriage's exact legal standing: if a dowry and bridal gifts have been given and documented, everything is in order.

These gifts to the bride are not just the couple's business. Marriage comes with in-laws and the potential for conflict between them. One of the longest texts found at Aphrodito is a complex dispute from Antinoopolis for which Dioskoros himself may have been the arbitrator. On one side of the case are Anastasia, her husband Phoibammon, her sister Maria, and her husband, also named Phoibammon. On the other side of the case is Anastasia's brother, Psates. The case is a tangled mess. Dispute over the wedding gift is mixed up with a dispute over inheritance and a further dispute over money spent maintaining disabled relatives and decaying homes.

²¹ *P.Lond.* 5.1676.1–11, slightly altering the “paraphrase” in Kovelman 1991, 144–145.

²² A *donatio propter nuptias*: see Papatomas 2004, 139–140 for a brief discussion of the genre.

²³ Rowlandson 1998, 210 with Kuehn 1993, 108, note 19 for references.

²⁴ *Nov.* 74.1.4; trans. in Urbanik 2011, 132.

The beginning of the text is damaged, but soon gets to the heart of the matter. Phoibammon the tow worker complains about his brother-in-law, Psates the bootmaker:

Although he had promised me when I married his sister that immediately after the solemnization of the marriage he would hand over all her share of household utensils inherited from her parents and also my share, in right of my wife, of the house-property to live in – which indeed ... was the very reason why I was anxious to marry his sister ... as I had no house; but up to the present he has given us nothing of all this, though we have grown weary first of demands and then of reproaches.²⁵

Phoibammon's honesty is striking. He does not wax sentimental for his wife, but has his eyes firmly on the prizes marriage brings with it.

Phoibammon's testimony is only part of the story. The bulk of the document focuses on statements by the disputants. Psates sees himself as a helpful victim: complaining about his family, "And this, this is the return I get for my *philadelphia*: they are suing me!"²⁶ Psates works making *tzagkaria*, "Persian shoes, perhaps an upscale specialty that would have sold well in the fashionable society of the ducal seat."²⁷ Dioskoros tells his story in almost poetic language. His father died, Dioskoros writes, "having laid down the final liturgy, his life."²⁸ When Dioskoros helps to resolve the dispute, proposing a division of the inheritance into equal shares, he calls the resolution itself a "quenching," as if the dispute is a fire raging through the family and its society.²⁹

Not all stories end so well. In September 573, a doctor in Aphrodito named Isakos divorces his wife Tegrompia.³⁰ The marriage's surviving *perilisis* or cancellation begins with a brief summary of the events:

Whereas I, Isakos, took you in partnership as wife with good hopes for the marriage and for having children, wanting my marriage to come to peaceful fruition, now, a grievous demon bearing ill-will towards our life together, we have been driven away from one another.

Isakos and Tegrompia release each other from all further obligations, and acknowledge that they are each free to remarry or, should they choose, to join a monastery. No court proceedings will be necessary to finalize their divorce.

On the one hand, their case is rare in the records: we do not have as many divorce records for cases in Aphrodito itself as we have divorce

²⁵ *P.Lond.* 5.1708 introduction. ²⁶ Trans. in MacCoull 1988, 34. ²⁷ MacCoull 1988, 32.

²⁸ Trans. in MacCoull 1988, 32–33. ²⁹ MacCoull 1988, 34.

³⁰ *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67121; see Tetrompia 1 in Ruffini 2011.

records found at Aphrodito but originally from Antinoopolis. On the other hand, the heart of the matter is all too common: a grievous demon is the standard reason for a failed marriage.³¹ Menas divorces Maria in 568, also citing a grievous demon bringing ill will between the two.³² When Mathias, a crewman in a state galley, divorces his wife Kura in 569, he blames an evil demon for their separation.³³ When Theodoros divorces his wife Amaresia, also in 569, he blames an “evil grievous demon.”³⁴

Sarapion, a date seller whose father had been a doctor, divorces his wife Mariam at some point in the same period.³⁵ Although both Sarapion and Mariam are originally from other regions, they, like all the previous examples, now live in Antinoopolis. However, unlike the previous examples, they do not quite blame a demon for their divorce. Sarapion says that they have been split asunder by “a full-grown grievous ill-will between the two of us from I don’t know where.”

Thinking about these demons, the modern mind might instantly recognize the language of a no-fault divorce.³⁶ The demons shift the blame from the husband and wife. This helps ease one’s conscience: despite formal church condemnation of divorce, the spouses are not in fact to blame.³⁷ Indeed, invocation of a demon may be legally necessary: in 566, imperial legislation explicitly bans consensual divorce.³⁸ The text of the divorce between Mathias and Kura stresses that the two are in complete agreement:

We agree and each party agrees that it has received back its personal property in full ... and we are not charging one another and we shall never make any charge in any court whatsoever, or outside of court, because we have been ... paid in full and have been reconciled with one another.³⁹

Each of them is free to start their life anew: “it shall be possible for each one of us to enter into marriage with someone else if he (or she) should wish, without hindrance or impediment or reproach.”⁴⁰

At the same time, these demons are truly part of a pervasive popular superstition. The evil eye plays an ongoing part in Greek magic. Surviving Greek amulets and exorcisms attack the demon *Baskosunê* (Envy) and blame this demon for separating husband and wife. In one Byzantine text, Jesus himself blames separation between husband and wife on the work of the devil.⁴¹ Thus these demons are two sides of the same coin, a

³¹ For the format of divorce settlements, see Urbanik 2014, 158–159.

³² *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67153 and 67253, with trans. in Urbanik 2014, 167–169. ³³ *P.Lond.* 5.1712.

³⁴ *P.Lond.* 5.1713. ³⁵ *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67155. ³⁶ Keenan 2007, 239. ³⁷ Urbanik 2005, 215.

³⁸ *Nov.* 134. ³⁹ Trans. in Rowlandson 1998, 212. ⁴⁰ Trans. in Rowlandson 1998, 212.

⁴¹ Dickie 1993, 13.

“widespread conception” in late antiquity that serves at the same time as a convenient way to avoid legal blame.⁴²

Once the demons drive these marriages apart, one of the most important problems is the future of the children. Mathias and Kura, whose full agreement on their divorce we have already discussed, finish with the following note:

And it has been additionally decided between us that, if the fetus of the above-written Kura should survive and be born, on condition that Mathias, oarsman, give for the expense of the said childbirth six gold [carats] without judgment or trial, his father should receive the little child.⁴³

In short, Mathias agrees to buy full custody of his unborn child. Modern readers might find the transactional nature of this text strange, but it is a convenient and businesslike way to avoid disputes farther down the road.

Marriages driven apart by demons end more happily than those without them. The case of an Aphrodito woman named Eirene offers a good example of how much more could go wrong.⁴⁴ In September 553, Eirene files a police petition against a coppersmith named Makarios. In the petition, she claims that Makarios “illegally dared to harm me and broke his oath to me, the petitioner Eirene, that ‘I take you as wife,’ but now mocks me.” Eirene asks that the police arrest Makarios and hold him until her case comes to court. At the end of the petition, she adds Makarios’s mother, Tkouiskouis, to the complaint as well.

This petition says little, but we may guess what has happened. One modern author pins the blame on the mother-in-law, whose name means “the tiny tiny one.” Maybe she interferes in the marriage and pushes her son to leave Eirene.⁴⁵ Eirene’s grounds for legal complaint against Makarios are unclear. She says only that he dares to outrage her or harm her. The Greek verb *hubrizein* (to treat despitefully, outrage, insult, maltreat) is the same verb Aphous uses when he agrees to marry Viktorine and do her no harm.⁴⁶ Legally, Eirene is accusing Makarios of *iniuria*, a violation suggesting sexual assault under Roman law.⁴⁷ Deeply buried here may be a hint that Makarios consummated the marriage with an act of rape.⁴⁸ Recent legislation outlines financial penalties – one-quarter of the man’s estate – against men who lure women into false marriages, sleep

⁴² See references to earlier arguments in Bagnall 1987, 55, note 46.

⁴³ Trans. in Rowlandson 1998, 212.

⁴⁴ *P. Cair. Masp.* 1.67092 with Urbanik 2011, modifying his translation on page 141.

⁴⁵ Urbanik 2011, 142–143. ⁴⁶ See page 134. ⁴⁷ Urbanik 2011, 145.

⁴⁸ Sexual misconduct, consummation: Urbanik 2011, 147.

with them and then expel them. Eirene may hope for exactly this sort of settlement against the man she thought would be her husband.⁴⁹

In a strange juxtaposition, the back of one of the divorce contracts in Dioskoros's archive has the text of a father's will to his daughter.⁵⁰ Both father and daughter go unnamed. "An old man from sixth-century Antinoopolis left his daughter his property as a *donatio mortis causa* in return for her continuous care in his sickness and old age."⁵¹ Some people have wondered why any parent would want this kind of contract with a child. They may think that their children will not honor their moral obligations, or want a formal agreement when more informal arrangements have already failed.⁵²

Death is as much a legal transaction as marriage and divorce. But wills are rare in late antiquity. Not even two dozen survive from the start of the fourth to the start of the eighth century.⁵³ Three of them are from the Aphrodito archives.⁵⁴ We have already seen the story of the monk named Psa, and his donation to the monastery of Apa Apollos. Several others, mostly from Antinoopolis, have also left their plan for what should happen when they are gone.

Pauchab, who dies in late 525, leaves a will which only partly survives.⁵⁵ Because we only have the end of the text, many of the important details are lost. He leaves to a monastery some property designed to provide it with revenue in wine and grain. That property will, apparently, remain in the hands of his daughters or their heirs, but the monastery can ask for it back "if it comes to pass that the heirs, my daughters, in heedlessness do not pay [the monastery] in a reasonable spirit."

In an earlier chapter, we met Theodoros, an employee in the duke's office in Antinoopolis who draws up his will in 567.⁵⁶ He has no legal heirs, but his grandmother is still alive, and Theodoros remembers her in his will:

I want and deem it worthy that my noblest maternal grandmother shall have by the title of succession a plot of land with all that justly belongs to it and in all its extent, and I want it to suffice for her, that she shall not sue for anything else either of the two monasteries or Petros and Phoibammon on account of the *Falkidion*.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Urbanik 2011, 149. ⁵⁰ *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67154.v.

⁵¹ Huebner 2013, 138 citing *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67154.v. ⁵² Huebner 2013, 138. ⁵³ Bagnall 1986, 2.

⁵⁴ A fourth (*P.Lond.* 5.1894) survives in a small fragment containing only subscriptions. A fifth (*P.Michael.* 53) survives in a much larger fragment, not yielding continuous sense.

⁵⁵ *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67324. Date: Ruffini 2011 *s.n.*

⁵⁶ See page 108 and extensive discussion of this will in Keenan 2001, 618–625.

⁵⁷ Trans. altered, with some omissions, from Urbanik 2008, 127.

In this extract, his will sounds a bit defensive.

Under Roman law – specifically, the *lex falcidia* mentioned here – legal heirs are entitled to the “Falcidian portion,” a quarter of an estate. But that law does not apply here, because the grandmother is an ancestor of Theodoros. She is not one of the people automatically entitled to a share of the estate.⁵⁸ Theodoros may expect a grandmother to be grumpy on hearing that so much of her grandson’s goods are going to the monasteries. Alternatively, Dioskoros may be doing nothing more than flexing his legal muscles and showing off his learning.

Other wills naturally show other priorities. In November 570, Phoibammon, the head doctor in Antinoopolis, drafts a will leaving the administration of the hospital to his brother Ioannes; the education of his children to Besa or his successor at the Apa Ieremias monastery; an annual sum in kind for Athanasios, his pupil, until his majority; and an instruction for Besa to get fifty of the sixty gold coins owed to Phoibammon by Petros for his annual fee to use in payment of a debt to Christophoros.⁵⁹

Much of the will focuses on practical issues. One clause includes provision for a dependent named Athanasios, who may be the doctor’s love-child.⁶⁰ Phoibammon leaves the Apa Ieremias monastery a new boat, along with a bill of sale: the monastery will be able to show that its ownership of the boat is clear. He also leaves the monastery two-thirds of an acre of vineyard land – his father’s old property – along with its irrigation machinery, “for the salvation of my soul and a holy offering on behalf of the departed.”⁶¹

A spiritual thread runs through the text. Early in his will, Phoibammon writes that “The end of all things and of the human race is death, and it is totally impossible to escape.”⁶² We wonder whether we are hearing his words, or those of Dioskoros. Either way, Phoibammon cares about his fate. He instructs his sons to wrap his body for the funeral, and asks the head of the monastery

to receive my remains into the holy monastery at a memorial, for a commemoration of my all-too-short life, and to reckon my name in the catalogue of all the saints who are at rest, when you make a recital of them by name.⁶³

In classic form, a man dies and an immortal patron is born.

⁵⁸ Urbanik 2008, 134–135.

⁵⁹ *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67151; this section follows MacCoull 1988, 50–54. Cf. also Amelotti 1972, 62–63.

⁶⁰ MacCoull 1988, 54. ⁶¹ MacCoull 1988, 51.

⁶² MacCoull 1988, 50. See also Fournet 2013b, 143. ⁶³ MacCoull 1988, 52.

All three wills leave goods to monasteries. It becomes almost a standard practice to include a monastic bequest in preparation for death.⁶⁴ Phoibammon shows – more openly than many people in this book – that everything in life and death is a transaction, even the road to sainthood. We find a quid pro quo in death as much as we do in marriage and divorce. This may be a symptom of the evidence: truly selfless works need no paper trail.

Sometimes inheritance appears only much later, long after a will has already taken effect. Widows are often given extended use of their husbands' estates "on the condition that they [take] responsibility for the administration of the property for the benefit of their common children."⁶⁵ When we meet the widow Tekrompia in 570, she claims to have done just that: "I worked with diligence day and night."⁶⁶ But this does not sway her daughter Anna, who wants her share of the paternal inheritance and expects to charge her mother rent for living in her dead father's home.

Earlier, we met a petitioner from the regional capital, Antaiopolis, whose father abandoned him, only to have his mother's brother take him in and marry him to his first cousin.⁶⁷ The story seems to begin happily but ultimately, Kollouthos, the uncle turned father-in-law, falls badly ill. At this stage of the story, the petitioner and his new wife are no longer living with him: "together with his servants he was in need of daily bread, for he had no person to supervise his meager property." This is the real reason this story survives:

The malice and intrigues of tax-collectors increased his discomfort and fever, and he longed for death ... everywhere he saw oppression both for his suffering body and for his soul suffering from hunger and thirst.⁶⁸

Buckling under pressure from the taxman, he transfers part of his property to a third party named Peter, who agrees to handle the tax burden.

Later, with Kollouthos dead, Peter goes back on his agreement and tries to pass the tax burden for the property onto our petitioner's dowry.⁶⁹ This is a classic case of economic uncertainty coming at life's major turning points: the father's disappearance followed by the father-in-law's death.

⁶⁴ Maspero in a note to *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67324.4.

⁶⁵ Huebner 2013, 98. See Yiftach-Firanko 2006 for the evolving role of spouses in wills in earlier periods.

⁶⁶ *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67156 with trans. in Kovelman 1991, 145. ⁶⁷ See page 134.

⁶⁸ *P.Lond.* 5.1676, slightly altering the "paraphrase" in Kovelman 1991, 145.

⁶⁹ *P.Lond.* 5.1676 introduction.

The anonymous petitioner lands on his feet the first time, and we may guess that he will do so again. Something about the picture of his father-in-law near starvation “together with his servants” does not quite ring true. We may guess that this family has at least some resources to use in times of trouble. However, the petition itself is part of this process, the never-ending search for someone one step above you to give you leverage against the others around you.

As this case shows, wills and inheritance can have a dark side. They sometimes include conscious decisions to leave people out. In 569, a man from Antinoopolis whose name is lost announces his decision to disown his children:

Having my mind and understanding unaffected, with true and unerring judgment ... this I transmit to my parricidal children, though children in name only, that is, to Dionysia and John and Paulina and Andrew the outcast ones ... thinking to find you helpful in all things, a comfort to my old age, submissive and obedient, and on the contrary you in your prime have set yourselves against me like rancorous things ... I fell grievously ill through you ... it is no longer lawful for you in future to call me father, inasmuch as I reject and abhor you from now to the utter end of all succeeding time as outcasts and bastards and lower than slaves ... for ravens to devour the flesh and peck out the eyes, in this manner I debar you from receiving or giving anything on my behalf, whether I be alive or dead.⁷⁰

A few years later, someone prepares a draft for another disinheritance but with the names of the children left out. In that draft, the father announces

I have decided by writing in this very moment for a lawful renunciation and disownment of you, daughter, useless and unworthy of being called by name ... I expel you ... I have already disowned you in every legal way today for all the course of the sun, from now on, for centuries of centuries ... you shall be as if you were a stranger, separated forever from my blood and family and from my whole estate ... you shall not be counted among all of my children ... all my assets ... shall belong to my [other] children ... who have obeyed, being submissive to my will in everything, and having followed my orders ... they respect eternally the same paternal stock with natural goodness and good-heartedness.⁷¹

These two angry fathers sound similar. Both insist that the disinheritance will last for all time. Only subtle differences sneak in: the ravens devouring flesh and pecking eyes, for example. While these are legal deeds, neither

⁷⁰ *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67353.v.A. Trans. *Sel.Pap.* 1.87.

⁷¹ *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67097.v.D. Trans. slightly altered from Urbanik 2008, 123–124. Date: Urbanik 2008, 122, note 6. Draft, not rhetorical exercise: Urbanik 2008, 124 with references in note 7.

father claims that his children have done any legal wrong. (The first man claims that he fell ill because of his children, but this sounds more like a generalization than an actual accusation.) Both men instead complain that their children are disobedient and disrespectful. Gross insults and disrespect are circumstances under which disowning is legally permitted.⁷²

Whatever the children have actually done, they shame their parents and this shame is public. Disowning them is only a legal action in response. Shame demands a public action as well. And so the first father calls upon several city officials “to give the customary publicity to the decisions” he has made to disown his children.⁷³ It is not enough that they be disowned: everyone has to know. This is a reminder of the dispute begun by Psaios and Talous discussed in an earlier chapter.⁷⁴ As their legal claims against Ioannes the priest stall, they use “loud complaints” against him in his own church. The law matters, but one’s honor and dignity matter just as much, if not more.

Despite all we know about the preparations these people take for death, we never know how it finally comes, to any of them. On the way to their deaths, these men and women most likely have experiences very different from ours. Anyone reading this book has already been poked and prodded by a nameless array of doctors, nurses, and other health professionals. Another endless array still lies ahead as the end draws near. Late antique health care is very different.

Aphrodito has at least two hospitals, including one at Dioskoros’s family monastery.⁷⁵ It also has a treatment center (a *therapeutèrion*) and – in the eighth century, at least – a Doctor’s Place.⁷⁶ But the treatment center may be religious, not medical, and the doctor’s place a plot of land known by its owner. By my count, the town has only seven doctors through the span of the sixth century.⁷⁷ Crudely put, this is roughly one doctor for every 1,000 people we know from Aphrodito. Assuming that some people never saw a doctor, and assuming that others did so only in extreme emergencies, this ratio may mean a pretty light caseload.

The evidence says very little about these seven doctors, but two stand out. The Aphrodito land records from the 520s register land that had once

⁷² *Nov.* 115.3.1–14; Urbanik 2008, 126. ⁷³ Urbanik 2008, 121. ⁷⁴ See page 56.

⁷⁵ MacCoull 1988, 6, citing *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67096.29 for Apa Apollos.

⁷⁶ Marthot 2013, Volume II, 86 and 92.

⁷⁷ Biktor 173, Isak(i)(os) 60, Makarios 52, Mouses 6, Papnouthis 8, Theodoros 24, and [ai] 2.

been held by the heirs of a doctor named Papnoute.⁷⁸ The same records register three different plots of land in the hands of Mouses, who is described as a doctor and farmer.⁷⁹ These two men may be different points on a spectrum. A small-town doctor may need or want other forms of income. One might own land to get it, and another might need to work that land himself. How a doctor farmer could balance these two jobs, the land records give no clue.

Dioskoros's documents give more detail about health care in the big city. Where Aphrodito only has doctors, Antinoopolis has head doctors. The head doctor Phoibammon succeeds his father in the position, and, at least according to his will, is to be succeeded by his brother in the position when he dies. But the doctors also have students, so the trade is not kept exclusively in the family.

Phoibammon's hospital, which his father had founded, "provided patients with medical care, food, and housing."⁸⁰ Hospitals just like this must have been relatively common in cities throughout Egypt.⁸¹ Generally speaking, the late antique hospital emerged in the fourth century when monastic health care became part of a larger, institutionalized Christian charity.⁸² But the hospitals in Antinoopolis are not simply independent institutions for the common good: Phoibammon's hospital was his property, part of his patrimonial estate, to be passed on to his heirs.⁸³

Another head doctor, Sophronios, appears in the heat of the action. A report by the headman Arsenios is badly damaged and the context missing. A patient "was strong enough at that moment to beg Sophronios the head doctor to take hold of him and give him medical treatment to stop the bleeding, since he was altogether laid out by a stroke in his head and his whole body had been worn down."⁸⁴ But ultimately, the report admits, God is the one who helps save the sick from disease.

Where we imagine doctors, we easily imagine nurses. When Theodoros drafts his will, he includes an inheritance for his nurse Tadelphe and her daughter Leontia.⁸⁵ The dispute between the bootmaker Psates and his family mentions a nurse as well.⁸⁶ A letter from Dioskoros mentions a "great nurse."⁸⁷ But the word in these cases, *trophos*, is etymologically related to wet nursing and feeding.⁸⁸ These are not nurses in our sense of the word. They are caregivers and workers of another kind, for those at the beginning of life, not its end.

⁷⁸ *SB* 20.14669 and 14670. ⁷⁹ *SB* 20.14669. ⁸⁰ Miller 1997, 48. ⁸¹ Miller 1997, 94.

⁸² Crislip 2005, 138–142. ⁸³ Miller 1997, 107. ⁸⁴ *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67077.9–12.

⁸⁵ *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67312.105. ⁸⁶ *P.Lond.* 5.1708.257. ⁸⁷ *SB* 20.14626.25.

⁸⁸ Tawfik 1997, particularly references at 943, note 58.

We do not know what it is like to fall ill in Aphrodito. Very little evidence survives. People may be reluctant to record specific illnesses in the papyri. One letter writer mentions in passing that “the pustular disease has not settled upon me.”⁸⁹ A petitioner from Antaiopolis describes his father-in-law as “half-dead and completely helpless” because of “fever from gout in his feet.”⁹⁰ This sort of detail is rare, probably because most sickness takes place out of sight, receiving nothing more than traditional home remedies. One papyrus shows such a home remedy for a common malady:

For a migraine, take a little myrrh and thorn and saffron residuum (*krokoma*) and gum, rubbing them (on your head) with a smearing of vinegar. Fumigate your head with bitumen and bird horn. Another recipe: plaster *euphorbia* with egg white on the side of your forehead.⁹¹

The euphorbia is a common genus of flowering plant. The first modern editor of this recipe noted that euphorbia sap is a violent caustic and the egg white is intended to act as a sweetener.⁹² Sweetened or not, euphorbic sap on the forehead is dangerously close to the eyes, where it can cause permanent damage, including blindness.⁹³

This risky potential side effect might give the impression that we are dealing with quack medicine. But these migraine recipes are in the mainstream of classical medicine. Euphorbia gets its name from Euphorbos, physician to the famous African king Juba, son-in-law of Anthony and Cleopatra. Euphorbos had noted the laxative powers of these plants in his writing.⁹⁴ Medical uses for saffron appear in no less an ancient authority than Galen.⁹⁵

As striking as the recipe itself is its place in the text. It is written in a different hand in the middle of a long set of estate accounts, after nearly fifty lines and before over one hundred more lines of tedious, precisely dated payment entries to shepherds, butchers, monks, and many others. We can almost imagine Dioskoros, our accountant, taking a break on the eighth day of Tybi, rubbing his eyes and sending for the local doctor to ask for help writing a prescription for his headache before he picks up later with other entries for the same day.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ MacCoull 1993, 28: for “pustular disease,” the Coptic *pihe*.

⁹⁰ *P.Lond.* 5.1676.16 (*pephlegmenê podalgeia*); see page 141.

⁹¹ *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67141.II.r.20-29; cf. Maspero’s trans. in the introduction; notes ad.loc; Fournet 1994, 320, note 22.

⁹² *P.Cair.Masp.* 2 page 60. ⁹³ Eke et al. 2000. ⁹⁴ Totelin 2012, 137.

⁹⁵ Galen *de alim.* II.89B. ⁹⁶ Eighth day of Tybi: *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67141.II.r.17.

Other hints of illness or disability hide in the papyri. At least three men from Aphrodito are named Cholos.⁹⁷ The word means “lame” in Greek, or halting, limping. Cholos may not be a name, but a nickname. In every single case, it appears in a private account, where the author needs no legal formality. It may be easier for his memory to make note of payments from “Enoch, son of the cripple” or from “the crippled potter” than to remember their real names. In another case, an account records payment from Ioannes, son of Kertos. Kertos may be a misspelling for the Greek *kurtos*, and the payment from Ioannes the hunchback’s son.⁹⁸

Blindness is equally common. Apollos “the blind” appears in one of Dioskoros’s theft records next to an entry recording “the rendering of the pledge.”⁹⁹ Apollos may be promising to return whatever has to do with the son of Talous in the account’s previous line. In his next appearance in the records, Dioskoros calls Apollos “his uncle,” apparently referring to the informant Ieremias, son of Pathelpe the shepherd. It seems that the blind Apollos is indeed a shepherd promising the return of stolen property.¹⁰⁰

Apollos is not the town’s only blind man. Dioskoros makes a small payment to the unnamed wife of Victor, another blind shepherd, on three separate occasions in the Egyptian months of Hathur, Choiak, and Tubi.¹⁰¹ On the 30th of the same Choiak, Dioskoros makes another small payment through the unnamed wife of a blind man named Soul.¹⁰²

Why? Is Dioskoros giving charity to the blind? And why does he do it through their wives? When the men are disabled, are they unable to come to him? Is it considered more appropriate or less embarrassing for their wives to seek charity than for the men themselves to do so? Dioskoros uses *polublepôn*, a grimly ironic euphemism, to describe all these men. Literally, these men “see many things” rather than nothing at all. He could call them *tuphlos*, a common enough classical word for blindness he lists in his own customized Greek dictionary and knows how to use in context.¹⁰³ Instead, he chooses another word he had put in his dictionary, one that is much more obscure.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Ruffini 2011 s.n. ⁹⁸ Ruffini 2011, Kertos 1. ⁹⁹ Apollos 95; *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67143.

¹⁰⁰ If Pathelpe 1 = Pathelpe 2 = the brother of Apollos 95, then Apollos 95’s extended family includes both Ieremias 14 and Apollos 107 and his son Ieremias 24.

¹⁰¹ Biktor 174, assuming that *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67141.2.r continues 1.v, that a reference to Choiak is lost somewhere in this continuation, and that the entries in 1.v.31, 2.r.6 and 2.r.19 are all to the same Biktor.

¹⁰² *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67141.2.r.12.

¹⁰³ The word appears in *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67020.11, which Dioskoros himself possibly wrote.

¹⁰⁴ Bell and Crum 1925, 193 with note at 211.

Maybe he is showing off, to himself. Or perhaps his word choice reveals a more general attitude toward the disabled, of unease, of discomfort, or – toward the blind specifically – of almost religious reverence. Alternatively, his word choice in these quiet and out of the way moments may show how hard it can be to look at the world through bilingual eyes. Dioskoros lists seven Greek adjectives for blindness in his dictionary, but can only find two ways to translate them into Egyptian.¹⁰⁵ In some languages, our bodies and their failings are less complicated than they are in others.

To my mind, this chapter more than most others in this book shows the gaps in our evidence. The fragility of life hides from us. We know little about the disabled and the sick and see them only when they need help from others. We know even less about the children, so many of whom never leave childhood. We do not know what sorrow feels like to any of those who live on after they die. We know only what needs to be put on paper.

More precisely, much of the evidence for marriage, divorce and death comes from legal texts. It is not always clear what this evidence means. In some situations it seems that imperial law has little reach in the distant provinces, and that civil courts in Egypt no longer work.¹⁰⁶ This “may in part be a result of Coptic disaffection with the Chalcedonian central government.”¹⁰⁷ But it is easy to be skeptical of this view, since there is ample evidence of imperial legislation in Egypt.¹⁰⁸ This chapter is full of contemporary law, in some cases used very effectively.

This reveals another problem. Roman marriage is created by the “will of the parties and dissolved by the simple lack of it.” Under these rules, divorce is “formless” and does not really need any documentation.¹⁰⁹ Marriage and divorce records are rare, which means those that we do have do not represent typical experiences. Most marriages will not end with women as unhappy as Eirene, bringing Makarios to court. This may mean that marriages begin and end much more easily, practically, when needed and without fuss.

We do not find evidence for love anywhere in Aphrodito’s marriages. Besarion’s marriage settlement calls him the “most beloved” or “most longed-for,” but his parents are speaking, not his bride.¹¹⁰ The one exception I can find is in Horouogchis’s marriage contract with Scholastikia. Here, the groom tells Scholastikia that she “will altogether be home-

¹⁰⁵ Bell and Crum 1925, 192–193. ¹⁰⁶ For the historiography, see Keenan 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Bagnall 1987, 57. ¹⁰⁸ Beaucamp 2007, particularly 283–285. ¹⁰⁹ Urbanik 2014, 155.

¹¹⁰ *P.Michael*. 42.B.7.

mindful and accordingly will be husband-loving towards me, worthy in the things I set before you and prudent in your inclinations.”¹¹¹

But this is not love. It is a contractual condition, and one vague enough that it cannot be enforced. The eighteen gold pieces she would have to pay if she were not husband-loving are presumably the husband’s bargaining chip if the marriage turns out badly and he wants a divorce. Here too, late antiquity is a world of people jostling for position, always trying to find a way to protect themselves.

¹¹¹ *P.Lond.* 5.1711.40–42 with *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67310.r.18–19.