

Happiness in the Kingdom of the Cleopatras: Examining Government Influence on Quality of Life in Hellenistic Egypt (332–30 BC)*

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Štěstí v rámci Kleopatřina království: Zkoumání vlivu vlády na kvalitu života v helénistickém Egyptě (332–30 př. n. l.)

Abstract: The cross-cultural application of happiness studies has led to many interesting results over the last few decades. The merits of this field of research are widely recognized, resulting for instance in government strategies taking into account the scores of the World Happiness Index, rather than just Gross National Product and other economic parameters. However, not all fields of study related to sociology have completely caught up with recent developments, in particularly historical studies. Some pilot studies with a limited scope on applying happiness research to periods of time and regions in the past have already been executed with promising results. This paper proposes a happiness index for Hellenistic Egypt (332–30 BC), taking into account recent developments in the field of sociology and the specificity of the source material for this particular period and region. The goal is not to measure absolute happiness in a quantitative study involving scales, but studying government impact on the well-being of Egypt's inhabitants through predetermined parameters derived from studies on cross-cultural determinants of happiness.

Keywords: Ptolemies; Hellenism; ancient Egypt; happiness studies; well-being

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Introduction

Whereas happiness studies have been the subject of many scholarly debates in various disciplines, the study of happiness in the sense of “quality of life” or “well-being” has not received the attention it deserves in historical studies. Admittedly, it is hardly possible to survey happiness in a remote past, but there are other possibilities for research. In what follows, we will examine governmental influence on quality of life for a specific region in Antiquity for which a wide range of private and official documents are extant, namely Hellenistic Egypt. Our quality of life-index for the Nile country, drawing on modern methods for measuring quality of life across cultures, builds on pilot studies by other historians for different regions and periods of time, and is adapted to Egypt's rich source material. In

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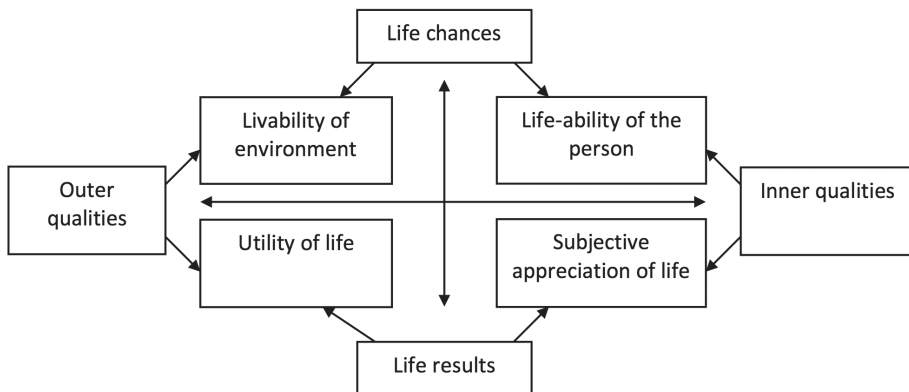


Figure 1: The four qualities of life based on Veenhoven 2000

other words, our index is developed as a framework for researching the impact of government action on the quality of life of Egypt's inhabitants, because a happiness index in the traditional sense would be impossible to apply to the past.

Our definition of quality of life is based on Veenhoven [2000], who defined the four qualities of life in the form of a quadrant, as represented below. One aspect of the quadrant is formed by the opposition between life chances, i.e. the opportunities for a good life that a person receives, versus life results, which implies the actual outcome of what an individual did with the chances he or she was offered. The second aspect that completes the quadrant is that of outer qualities, i.e. environmental factors that are not controlled by the individual, versus inner qualities, elements within a person that contribute or are detrimental to one's quality of life.

The combination of life chances and *outer qualities* renders the quality of life that is best suited for our study of government investments in Hellenistic Egypt, which is named "livability of environment." This notion consists of all the chances that are offered to an individual by his or her environment, without a guarantee for the eventual results. For Hellenistic Egypt, this would mean the opportunities created by government investments that were at the disposal of the general population, such as an effective court system. The second element that is of interest to our study is that of life chances combined with *inner qualities*, resulting in the concept of "life-ability" of a person. Government investments could influence these as well, by indirectly enhancing or diminishing personal development, for instance through education, healthcare and occasion for spiritual experiences. The combination of the two qualities of life that form the focus of our studies, "livability" and "life-ability," is jointly termed as "objective quality" by Brock [Brock 1993]. Most of the factors that result in "subjective appreciation" and "utility of life" will be excluded from this study, since the personal appraisal of individuals cannot unambiguously be reconstructed from the available sources. In other words, our study will focus on the life chances offered to the Egyptian population, not on the life results they produced.

Hellenistic Egypt is taken here as a case-study because of its abundant and exceptional source material. The Nile country was conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 BC, and after his death, the pharaonic crown passed to one of his generals, Ptolemy, who in turn

founded the Ptolemaic dynasty. The new monarchy was intermittently successful, lasting for almost 300 years until its last queen, the famous Cleopatra, already the seventh queen bearing that name, committed suicide and the country became a Roman province in 30 BC. More than any other region in the Mediterranean, Hellenistic or Ptolemaic Egypt allows us to analyse the private lives not only of wealthy families and middle classes, but of lower socio-economic classes as well, due to the unique source material available. The dry desert environment of Egypt did not only preserve inscriptions, terracotta, figurines and other archaeological material, but an abundance of documents on papyrus as well, documenting everyday life in Hellenistic Egypt. Government papers, such as tax registers, census documents, and official letters illustrate the functioning of the royal administration. Petitions, which are preserved in thousands, in turn offer insight into the problems of all population groups, and how they expected their issues to be resolved. Private and official archives document the lives of families and officials working in government bureaus, and disclose information on matters such as laws of inheritance, marriage and other legal and private matters.¹ In contrast to the recent attention for scholarship examining the presence of instant happiness and other emotions in historical documents, happiness in the sense of quality of life has remained largely unexplored in papyrology and in other disciplines of the ancient world [*Vandorpe 2013*]. But before we proceed to an adapted index for quality of life in Hellenistic Egypt, a short overview of cross-cultural quality of life studies, and their low impact on the field of history Egypt will be presented.

Happiness and related studies across cultures and applied to the past

Historians today often feel reluctant to incorporate explicit elements of sociological research. Braudel [1980] described the dialogue between historians and sociologists as a “dialogue of the deaf,” illustrating the gap between the two disciplines that had been growing over the course of the first half of the 20th century. After the cultural turn of the field (cfr. infra), the former grand narratives of the 19th century, which were felt to represent an “unfounded” social history [*Burke 2005*], were rejected. Social sciences such as psychology were also put aside at the time since they used similar models of explanation as the grand narratives that had fallen from grace. Historiography reverted to what Burke describes as an “anecdotal history at large,” which implies the description of a collection of events, while rejecting models of explanation as these were assumed to homogenize and generalize historical processes. This deliberate attempt of historians to distance themselves from earlier historiography also had its downside, sometimes resulting in a lack of depth compared to cultural-anthropological studies at the time and a tendency to fragmentise and isolate sources.

During the 1960’s, historians’ interest in social sciences gave rise to the “new cultural history,” due to (among others) major advancements in the fields of anthropology, geography, sociology and economics. Awareness grew once more that several disciplines had valuable insights to offer each other.

¹ For more information on papyrus documents and papyrology in general, see Bagnall, Roger (ed.) [2009]. *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*. Oxford: Oxford Books. For metadata on papyrus texts, see the Trismegistos website (www.trismegistos.org), with 16391 entries for the Ptolemaic Period.

Over the last few decades, the application of models and quantitative methods to historical research has been gaining ground. An example is the success of digital humanities, where network analysis, a methodology borrowed from sociology, has firmly taken root as a valid field of study in historical research. As Burke [2005: 189] concludes his book on history and social theory: “One might say that, like comparison, [social] theory enlarges the imagination of historians by making them more aware of alternatives to their habitual assumptions and explanations.”

The approach to researching quality of life in Hellenistic Egypt is mainly derived from sociological methods, since these have a strong societal-level focus. Earlier research applying this area of study on historical periods can be subdivided into two categories: those applied to contemporary pre-industrial societies and comparisons between Western and non-Western societies on the one hand, and those applied to limited fields and periods in history on the other. We will discuss both categories briefly to illuminate their respective value to the compilation of an index of quality of life in Hellenistic Egypt.

Numerous sets of parameters have been developed to compare and examine objective and subjective quality of life in different societal settings, both now and in the past. There is no consensus on which set of parameters or index is most suitable for examining quality of life across cultures. The difference between objective well-being, roughly corresponding to the “objective quality” as described by Brock,² and subjective well-being, i.e. the subjective appreciation of a person’s life, is emphasized by several authors, such as Biswas-Diener et al. [2005], Graham and Pettinato [2001] and Veenhoven [2008]. As mentioned above, our main interest lies in the study of life chances influenced by both external and internal qualities (objective quality of life), rather than results (subjective quality of life). The following studies on cross-cultural determinants of quality of life in current societies handle a quantitative approach,³ while those concerned with research applied to history are, through the very nature of their sources, necessarily qualitative.

In his research on happiness⁴ across cultures, Veenhoven [2012] states that “Happiness roots in the gratification of basic needs that are part of human nature. In that respect, happiness draws on universal grounds, (...) it is unlikely that humans orient on variable cultural standards in the first place, rather than on needs that root in biological evolution,” but later in the paper he nuances this: “Happiness is grounded in social standards, and in this respect, happiness is culturally relative.” Strong parameters according to Veenhoven are wealth, freedom, peace, justice, equality, education, social rank, personality and marriage. However, these do not all hold the same relevance across cultures and time. Economic prosperity and high life-expectancy (and all they entail) seem to hold the strongest cross-cultural relevance. Contrary to Veenhoven, who emphasizes basic biological needs as important determinants of happiness, Wierzbicka [2010] places a stronger emphasis on cultural determinants: “Different cultures and different languages suggest different habitual construals, and since habitual construals change over time, as a result, habitual feelings change too.” This opposition can be caused by the narrower view Wierzbicka

² Cfr. *supra*.

³ Exact and extensive sociometric data concerning the parameters and indices mentioned can be found in the corresponding papers, cited in the bibliography.

⁴ Here as a synonym for subjective appreciation of life.

held on happiness as a subjective experience, while Veenhoven casts a wider net and also includes the determinants of objective well-being, since these in turn influence subjective well-being.

If basic biological needs are the foundation of human happiness, then a number of determinants have to hold cross-cultural value, although the relative importance of these values may differ from culture to culture. This view is supported by other authors, such as Graham and Pettinato [2001], who argue that the standard demographic determinants of happiness in advanced countries also hold for Latin America. Jagodzinski [2010], who compared the economic, social and cultural determinants of life satisfaction between Asia and Europe, found that most determinants, i.e. personal and societal economic capital, national pride and national integration, religiosity, and societal religious integration, held up in both Asian and European societies, although the importance attached to each determinant could differ. In their comparison of happiness between the Inughuit (tribe of the Inuit), the Amish and the Maasai, Biswas-Diener et al. [2005] employed fourteen domains that constitute life satisfaction, such as romantic life, health, intelligence, family, friends etc. They found that across these very different cultures, the determinants were on the whole valued as positive. This led them to state that people are “wired” to be happy, or that “people are on average happy, when they live in conditions that are favourable to human needs”, in line with Veenhoven’s previously mentioned statement on the biological foundations of happiness. Cramm et al. [2012] performed a study on well-being in a small and poor Eastern Cape Township, focusing on crime experience, health status, social capital and demographic variables. Other noteworthy case studies on happiness in contemporary pre-industrial and non-Western societies can be found in “Happiness across cultures” [Selin – Davey 2012], whose authors employ comparable parameters and methods.

Another important element advocated by Veenhoven [1996], is the examination of both the quality OF a nation and the quality of life IN that nation. The determinants constituting the quality of a nation are well suited to the search for contributing factors to objective quality of life, since the quality of an adequate justice or educational system have a direct impact on both the life chances of the individual and the liveability of the environment.

As a result of the findings presented above, several quality of life-indexes or sets of determinants have been developed. We will briefly describe those that have been most influential to current literature and more specific, to the compilation of a set of determinants for Hellenistic Egypt.

The Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), construed by Morris [1979] as a tool for measuring quality of life in developing countries, was composed of only three variables: infant mortality rate, adult literacy rate and life expectancy at birth. This index was extended by two variables by Mazumdar [1999], i.e. percentage of total population living in urban areas and per capita calorie supply as percentage of requirement. These variables indicate respectively access to urban facilities such as sanitation, medical and educational amenities, communications, access to safe water etc. and standard of nutrition of a country, implying national and per capita income.

Research on well-being in Algeria, based on the International Wellbeing Index (IWI), was performed by Tiliouine et al. [2006]. The IWI is subdivided into the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and the National Wellbeing Index (NWI). The PWI differentiates between

seven life domains: standards of living, personal health, achievement in life, personal relationships, personal safety, community connectedness and future security. The NWI only focuses on six domains: economic situation, state of environment, societal conditions, government, business and national security. This corresponds to the views of Veenhoven [1996], who prefers to examine the quality of a nation (through the appraisal of the nation's productivity, liveability, system-stability, etc.) before determining the quality of life in the nation. Davey et al. [2009] studied subjective well-being⁵ in rural China, far away from the industrialized cities of the west coast. They also used the PWI, and refer to it as an index with a good validity that has been applied in over 48 countries, and concluded that the index was appropriate for determining subjective well-being in China, and therefore, across countries. It should be noted that the relative weight of each domain differed between cultures.

The study of Haq and Zia [2013] focuses on the measurement of happiness in rural Pakistan. Based on the index of quality of life as formulated by Prescott-Allen, they created a framework of parameters that differentiates between human dimensions (such as health, education and social capital) and ecosystem dimensions (energy and resources, air quality and water quality), and between objective well-being and subjective well-being. A heavy emphasis is put on living conditions, as these have a large influence on health.

A few attempts have been made on a minor scale to apply happiness studies to history,⁶ but none have reached as far back as European antiquity. Jordan [1993, 1996, 2009, 2010] studied sources and methods to examine the objective quality of life of 17th and 19th century inhabitants of Dublin and a selection of cities from England and Wales. Although he acknowledges the difficulty of examining the quality of life of people so far removed from ourselves, he claims that this is a necessary step in understanding remote events, large and small [1996]. He heavily emphasizes the importance of health (and in correlation, mortality), financial capital, and the number of hearths per family. These data can be compiled from the censuses that were executed in Britain. Jordan developed the Victorian Index of Quality of Adult Life (VICQUAL Index) for his research [1993]. His 1996 study collects types of historical documents and data that can be useful in determining the quality of life in history, i.e. birth and death rates (if available), indexes of wages and the cost of commodities and housing, placing a heavy emphasis on economic information originating from census data. In his 2010 paper on 17th century Dublin, Jordan collected 20 domains from across several studies in the field [Mazumdar 2003; Bramston et al. 2002; Boelhouwer 2002] that, when combined, paint a picture of the quality of family life, including safety, paid employment, public utilities and religion. In their study on quality of life in three centuries of French history, Ostroot and Snyder [1996] reflected on several difficulties that the historian faces when examining quality of life in the past. They refer to Jordan [1993] for a theoretical approach. According to Ostroot and Snyder, the most consistently cited domain affecting human well-being in history is interpersonal relations [apart from food and shelter]. Security and salvation (in Catholic France) were also of great importance. Other relevant domains are closely related to the physical quality of life, i.e. health, child

⁵ Studies on subjective well-being or subjective quality of life are only included insofar as they (in)directly contribute to research on (influences on) determinants of objective quality of life.

⁶ For more references, see <<http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl>>.

mortality etc. Ostroot and Snyder, like Mazumdar [1999], quote the PQLI as the basis for the selected domains. Finally, a few theoretical studies from the field of historical anthropology have contributed to the study of societies and welfare in the past, arguing that human life satisfaction in general dropped during the agrarian phase, and rose again after the industrial revolution of the 18th century [*Maryanski – Turner 1992; Sanderson 1995*].

Compiling an adapted index of quality of life for Hellenistic Egypt

The aforementioned pilot studies applying happiness and quality of life studies to the past have shown that each region and period of time needs its own specific framework and set of determinants, since conditions and attitudes can differ strongly. However, sociological research has determined that there are a number of universal human needs or requirements that are present in every human being. Moreover, several determinants can be identified as inherent to each human, but their importance can differ regionally and over time. To compile a suitable list of determinants for quality of life in Ptolemaic Egypt, we will need to take both the human needs that are considered universal into account, as well as the geographical and temporal specifics. As for Victorian England or for Catholic France, an adapted index should be developed for Egypt, a preliminary version of which has already been proposed [*Vandorpe 2013*]. What perspectives does such quality of life research open? The objective cannot be to examine whether people in Egypt were actually happy, an impossible task as surveys are crucial for such research. Instead, because of the diverse character of sources available for Ptolemaic Egypt, it is possible to research if and how the Ptolemies (un)consciously invested in or neglected certain determinants, thus contributing to the improvement or deterioration of chances present in the environment of their subjects. A comparison between other Hellenistic kingdoms at the same time and Roman Egypt can be enlightening as to how successful the Ptolemies were in promoting the quality of life of their subjects compared to their Hellenistic and Roman counterparts.

The compilation of an index for Hellenistic Egypt entailed the involvement of three cross-cultural contributors to quality of life: objective satisfaction of biological needs,⁷ quality of nation (livability) and quality of life in a nation (life-ability). As most of the corresponding determinants hold cross-cultural value, a large portion of them could be integrated in the proposed index without any alterations. However, some were discarded because of their inclusion of modern comfort or technology (such as availability of electricity) or modern values (such as views on the meaning of freedom). In the following paragraphs, determinants of these three categories will be discussed and fused into an index suitable for Hellenistic Egypt.

The satisfaction of biological needs is the first category of determinants to be included into our index for Ptolemaic Egypt. Guillen Royo and Velazco [2006] cite the Theory of Human Needs (THN) [*Doyal – Gough 1991*], which “maintains that there are universal characteristics from which individuals’ well-being can be assessed, and that those can be summed up in concrete and specific lists of well-being components.” They link objective well-being, i.e. the fulfillment of requirements necessary for a persons’ living and functioning, with subjective well-being, i.e. the subjective appreciation of a person’s life, implying

⁷ Needs present in every human being.

that the satisfaction of basic needs will always result in a higher chance of personal happiness in the individual. After researching this link for correlations using the Resources and Needs Questionnaire (RANQ), they report that “satisfiers are obviously diverse and different across cultures, but the underlying basic and intermediate needs appear to have an impact in people’s self-reported happiness and satisfaction.” The correlation was found to be greater in pre-industrialized countries [Moller 2005]. These findings are in accordance with the THN, which states that “assessment of well-being achieved by a society/individual could be done through *indicators of objective need satisfaction* showing the level of satisfaction of the basic needs, as well as the performance of intermediate needs.” The aforementioned RANQ identifies three universal goals, i.e. avoidance of serious harm, social participation and critical participation, two basic needs, i.e. physical health and critical autonomy, and nine intermediate needs, i.e. adequate nutritional food and water, adequate protective housing and non-hazardous work and physical environments, appropriate child care, security in childhood, significant primary relationships, physical and economic security, safe birth control and childbearing, appropriate basic and cross-cultural education. These parameters represent the basic needs of a human being as a social animal, and will of course be included in the final set for Ptolemaic Egypt. The findings of the THN about basic human needs as universal contributors to happiness and quality of life are in line with research by, among others, Jagodzinski [2010], Veenhoven [2012] and Graham et al. [2001]. The translation of the abovementioned elements into appropriate determinants for Ptolemaic Egypt is rather straightforward, since biological need satisfaction does not only hold relevance for humans across cultures, but also across time. Mankind as a species has not evolved that much in 2000 years to have progressed beyond the requirements of f.i. food, shelter, safety and social relationships. Therefore, most determinants can easily be included in the proposed index, although the relative importance of some determinants may have shifted over time.

Having included determinants for basic and intermediate human needs, we move on to factors that influence the so-called “quality of nations” [Veenhoven 1996]. Veenhoven states that before we can research the quality of life in a nation, the quality of the nation itself⁸ needs to be studied as well. Research by Jorm and Ryans [2014] resulted in similar findings, since they found clear evidence that certain features of a nation contribute to subjective well-being. They cite the following socioeconomic factors that are (among others) associated with positive effects on national well-being: income per capita, income equality, social welfare, individualism, democracy and freedom, social capital and physical health. Veenhoven formulates four main parameters, i.e. system-stability, productivity, idealexpression (such as support of or rebellion against the royal family) and liveability (this can include safety, climate circumstances etc.), and identifies some of the parameters by Jorm and Ryan, such as physical health, as dimensions of quality of life in nations, rather than the quality of a nation. The International Wellbeing Index (IWI) also differentiates between personal well-being and national well-being [Cummins 2002]. We already see some overlap with the objective basic and intermediate needs mentioned above.

⁸ Corresponding to the quality of life identified as “livability.”

A third angle that needs to be included, is the “quality of life in a nation.”⁹ We start with Veenhoven’s parameters for quality of life in nations: wealth, freedom, peace, justice, equality, education, social rank, personality and marriage. Jagodzinsky [2010] adds the dimension of religiosity, societal religious integration and social pride to the list. Several other indices, such as the PQLI [Morris 1979] and that of Prescott-Allen [2001], are worth mentioning that include more or less the same parameters with a different emphasis on certain aspects. A number of the abovementioned parameters are converted into determinants of objective quality of life in our index for Ptolemaic Egypt. Their exact interpretation needs to be specified to suit our geographic and temporal context. For instance, since a schooling system was nowhere in place in Mediterranean antiquity, we will readjust this determinant to also include apprenticeships, temple education, and the passing on of traditions through the generations. Parameters that would require exact and complete data (as would be found in a census list) or imply a strong individual component (and would have to be assessed through questionnaires) are automatically excluded from our index because of the nature of the available source material.

Another important set of studies that formed the inspiration for our own research, are the World Happiness Reports (WHP) [Helliwell *et al.* 2012, 2013, 2015], which were presented to the United Nations as a guideline for policy development. In the view of the authors of these reports, happiness research should be linked to government policy. The WHP examine happiness from a comparative perspective worldwide, and involve the deployment of determinants with cross-cultural validity. Key determinants of happiness include: income, work, community and governance, values and religion, mental health, physical health, family experience, education, and gender and age.

Before we turn to the proposed index for Ptolemaic Egypt, a brief overview of the most important available source material is in order. An abundance of petitions is preserved for both the Ptolemaic and Roman time in Egypt. Drawn up both in Greek and Demotic (Egyptian script), petitions enabled people from all classes to report any injustice they suffered and demand action from the government. Unlike today, petitions were usually sent by individuals or small groups of people, and were addressed to a wide range of officials, ranging from the village head of police to the king himself. Complaints reported could be trivial or grave, reporting boundary disputes, petty theft and assaults alike. The large amount of petitions sent by inhabitants of Egypt over several centuries attest the belief in the functioning of the system, and many replies or consequent instructions to officials by the higher levels of the royal administration are preserved as well. Another important corpus of sources is composed of letters, both private and official. The separation between occupancy and private life was almost non-existent, so separating the two sometimes proves to be a difficult task. Letters could be exchanged between family and friends, colleagues, patrons, business associates and so on. They convey a range of information about everyday life and familial bonds. Letters between spouses for instance, inform us about the nature of marital relationships, and women’s position in the marriage, extended family and her role in the household. Elaborating further on the same theme of women’s position in society, contracts come into view. This type of document does not only entail legal proceedings, but the legal position of separate or groups of individuals.

⁹ Contains elements of both “livability” and “life-ability.”

The absence or presence of a guardian for women in Greek and Demotic contracts presents an interesting image of women's independence in Hellenistic Egypt. Tax receipts offer insights into the financial situation of both households and the state, specifying in detail the sometimes large number of separate taxes an individual had to pay, such as the salt tax, the wine tax, ranging even to a taxation on dove cotes. Almost all of the aforementioned document types can be found in both official and private archives. The inhabitants of Egypt generally tended to keep an archive, keeping documents because of legal or emotional reasons. Written evidence was deemed very important by the courts of Ptolemaic Egypt. Contracts, receipts and other documents were saved in case of the event that they would have to serve as evidence in a court case. Archives were kept by all layers of the population, and those who could not read or write could use the services of local professional scribes. An example of an archive from a rather modest family is that of the Upper-Egyptian family of Peteharsemtheus, son of Panebchounis, mainly from the end of the second century BC.¹⁰ The different family members possessed small patches of land and parts of houses, and some are identified as herdsmen. Although in Peterharsemtheus' time the family seems to be doing well, the documents from his grandfather Patous show that his ancestor was in considerable debt, and the required amount could only be repaid 25 years later by his son Panebchounis. The family loaned again on several occasions, but were mostly able to repay the loan on time. The archive contains not only these loan contracts, but also sale contracts, tax receipts, letters from relatives serving in the military, and marriage contracts.¹¹

Lastly, temple archives should be addressed. Priests could function as judges and wielded real political power throughout the country. They organized festivals and provided education, especially for those who wished to enter in Egypt's bureaucracy. It is important to view temples and priests as complementary to the royal government, rather than a separate "state within a state."

Taking into account the aforementioned studies and corpus of source material, creating a custom set of determinants for Hellenistic Egypt involved elements from both determinants with cross-cultural validity as determinants that hold meaning for our specific context. Vandorpe [2013] has made a start creating a framework that suits Hellenistic Egypt based on the determinants found in the World Happiness Report of 2012. Modern-day determinants were adapted to fit the Hellenistic context. When we combine this preliminary set with our findings as presented above, we arrive at the following set of determinants for examining government influence on quality of life in Hellenistic Egypt, which are linked to specific source material in Table 1:

¹⁰ Trismegistos Archives ID no. 183.

¹¹ See also Vandorpe, Katelijin – Waebens, Sofie [2009]. Reconstructing Pathyris' Archives. A multicultural community in Hellenistic Egypt. *Collectanea Hellenistica* 3: 163–189; a more recent discussion by Waebens is "Life Portraits: People and their Everyday Papers in a Bureaucratic Society" in Vandorpe, Katelijin (ed.). *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt*. Oxford (forthcoming).

Table 1: The Index for quality of life in Hellenistic Egypt with corresponding source material

Main determinant	Sub-determinant	Suitable source material
Government	Government performance	Petitions, Private letters, Lawsuits
	Services and Infrastructure	Petitions, Contracts, Tax receipts (e.g. For use of government facilities)
	Political/critical/constructive ¹² participation	Petitions, Court proceedings, Convictions for crimes against the government
	Justice/absence of corruption	Petitions, Private letters, Official letters, Lawsuits, Court proceedings, Temple oaths, Royal edicts
	(Perceived sense of) safety	Petitions, Private letters, Official letters
	System stability/peace	Official letters, Reports of revolt, Official decrees granting amnesty, Royal edicts
Economy	Adequate and safe housing	Petitions, Private letters, Archaeological findings
	Assets	Petitions, Private letters, Contracts, Archaeological findings
	Income p/c and tax burden	Tax receipts, Accounting books
	(Un)employment	Private letters, Contracts
	Productivity	Official letters, Tax receipts, Accounting books
Social	Significant primary relationships (core family, marriage)	Private letters, Marriage contracts, Votive offerings
	Familial and social networks	Private letters, Marriage contracts, Votive offerings
	Social support and social capital	Private letters, Official letters
	Gender equality ¹³	Private letters, Contracts, Legislature
Culture	Level of appropriate education/literacy/knowledge of local myths, traditions	Private letters, Temple accounts, Number of transmitted literary compositions
	Artisan skills	Archaeological findings, Employment contracts
	Notion of values/ideal-expression	Private letters

¹² The freedom of subjects to contribute to public projects and the functioning of the state, see Helliwell, John [2006]. Well-being, social capital and public policy. *The Economic Journal* 116: 34–45.

¹³ Even when societies generally condone discrimination against women, average happiness is markedly lower when gender inequality is present, see Saskia ChinHonFoei, “Gender equality and happiness in nations,” Paper presented at “Dag van de Sociologie,” Tilburg University, 2006, as cited by Veenhoven Ruut in Selin, Helaine – Davey, Gareth [2012].

Physical and mental health	Physical health: Life expectancy	Private letters, Tax receipts, Archives
	Physical health: Disability	Private letters, Tax receipts, Archives
	Physical health: Safe birth	Private letters, Temple accounts and votive offerings, Midwife/Wet-nurse contracts
	Physical health: Adequate nutritional food and water	Petitions, Private letters, Official letters concerning the upkeep of canals and the distribution of grain
	Psychological well-being	Private letters, Temple accounts and votive offerings
	Possibility to express emotions	Petitions, Private letters
	Access to spirituality and/or religious experience	Temple accounts and votive offerings, Contracts concerning religious festivals, Accounts of religious festivals
	Critical autonomy	Private letters
	Appropriate child care and security in childhood	Private letters, Temple accounts and votive offerings, Midwife/Wet-nurse contracts
Environment	Ecological issues	Private letters; Official letters concerning upkeep of canals and dykes, the flooding of the Nile and growth of plants and trees; Temple accounts and votive offerings; Royal edicts
	Urbanization issues	Petitions, Private letters, Official letters, Lawsuits, Royal edicts
	Government policy and effective action	Petitions, Official letters, Royal edicts
	Wildlife damage to crops	Petitions, Private letters, Official letters

Case study: The *Erbstreit*-dossier

As a demonstration of the application of the determinants proposed above, we will present the papyrus documents found in the so-called “*Erbstreit*-dossier” (P. *Erbstreit*), and how they contribute to our understanding of quality of life in Ptolemaic Egypt. The collection of documents that are the object of this case study have been gathered in antiquity, and concern the inheritance dispute between the relatives of the deceased woman Tamenos, daughter of Panas. Contenders are her children, her brother’s family, and her sister’s family. The papyri were found in the town of Pathyris in Upper-Egypt, and most of the documents preserved in the dossier are evidence that was presented in front of several courts over the course of six years, court proceedings ranging from 139 BC to 133 BC. Evidence presented to the courts was a mixture of Greek and demotic documents, the oldest 50 years old at the time of the proceedings. Not only are sale and lease contracts preserved, reports of the court cases were added as well as the dispute dragged on. It appears

the quarreling families repeatedly brought their case before several magistrates, until the highest court of appeal, the court of the *chrematistai* or royal judges, put an end to the dispute and ruled in favour of Tamenos' children.

In the following table, we have placed the documents from the “*Erbstreit*-dossier” in five categories, and have then matched them to the (sub-)determinants from the proposed index for quality of life in Ptolemaic Egypt. The table visualizes the way in which determinants can be researched through our corpus of source material, of which the “*Erbstreit*-dossier” forms only a tiny fraction.

Table 2: Documents from the “*Erbstreit*-dossier” as sources for quality of life in Ptolemaic Egypt

Type of document	Determinant	Sub-determinant
Court rulings/reports/petitions	Government	Justice
		Services and infrastructure
	Environment	Government policy and effective action
Sale and lease contracts	Economy	Assets
Documents mentioning family ties and corresponding rights to inheritance	Social	Significant primary relationships
		Familial and social networks
Documents mentioning women as active parties in court and inheritance	Social	Gender equality
Temple oaths	Government	Justice
	Culture	Knowledge of local traditions
		Notion of values

The applicability of the proposed index for Ptolemaic Egypt is further illustrated by the following document, which is a copy of the lawsuit proceedings that took place in 134–133 BC (P. *Erbstreit* 16). The court session took place in Diospolis Magna¹⁴ before the *epistrategos*¹⁵ Boethos, who acted as judge. The children of Tamenos are challenged in their ownership by Tamenos' brother-in-law Patous and his children. In court appear Tamenos' daughter Senenoupis and her husband, Thotortaios on the one side, Patous and his son on the other. What follows are selected fragments, numbers indicate words or passages that will be discussed below:

Copy of a session of the court which had taken place in Diospolis Magna, conducted on 4 Thot of year 37 before the *hegemones*, who accompany Boethos, kinsman (of the King), *epistrategos* and *strategos* of the Thebaid (1).

Thotortaios, son of Kales, who was also appointed as representative by his wife Senenoupis (2), appeared before the court, (conducting a case) against Patous, son of Psemmonthes, and

¹⁴ Also known as Thebes.

¹⁵ A mid-level official.

his son ..., while others charged by them (that is by Thotortaios and Senenoupis) had not appeared before the court. The petition (3) presented by the party of Thotortaios, was read (4). The transcript runs as follows (...)

(Thotortaios presents his case)

That is how things stood. After they had pleaded their cause before the judges (5), Thotortaios was the most convincing, having brought forward the argument that the mother of his wife, Tamenos, had collected by purchase ten arouras¹⁶ from Hermokrates (6), son of Apollonios, in year 20, Epeiph, and the remaining 35 arouras from Proitos in year 21, Parmouthi. The latter had purchased the arouras from the Crown in year 19 according to a certificate. He presented as evidence: the above-mentioned certificate and the copies of the conveyances (7).

(Party of Panos accepts the loss of the first ten arouras, but does not wish to relinquish its claim on the further 35 arouras)

They were brought before Boethos and after everything had been reported to him, he gave orders that the said Senenoupis would become master of her mother's inheritance (8) in accordance with the title-deeds she had.¹⁷

Discussion

- 1) The case is taken to a court in Diospolis Magna (Thebes), somewhat removed from both parties' hometown of Pathyris. This suggests that mediation at a local level had not succeeded, and appeal was made to a higher institute of justice, in this case the court of the *epistrategos* (provincial governor) of the Thebaid region. The document has been composed in Greek, indicating that this was the language used in the higher echelons of the Ptolemaic justice system, although other documents from the archive and the proper names involved strongly suggest the Egyptian ethnicity of both parties. The fact that a transcription of every court case was registered and made available indicates a formalized and functioning justice system.
- 2) Senenoupis, daughter of the deceased Tamenos, is accompanied by her husband Thotortaios in court. He appears to speak in his wife's name, who does not seem to speak herself during the trial.
- 3) It appears to have been necessary for parties to submit a written petition to the court before an actual trial could take place. The petition served as the main medium for parties to make their case. The importance of written documents is discussed further under item 7.
- 4) The submitted petition is read aloud in court, and counts as part of the plea of the party of Senenoupis and Thotortaios.
- 5) Both parties were allowed to make their case before a college of judges. Apparently, a preliminary hearing before the judges took place before the final session before the *epistrategos* Boethos. This probably would have had a positive impact on the speed with

¹⁶ Measure of land.

¹⁷ Translation Vandorpe Katelijn and Vleeming Sven [2017]. *The Erbstreit Papyri. A Bilingual Dossier from Pathyris of the second century BC. Studia Demotica 13*. Leuven: Peeters.

which the head official was capable of pronouncing verdicts, having received the initial petition and the report of the preliminary hearing.

- 6) Tamenos was apparently allowed to carry out legal transactions such as purchases and sales, which is quite rare for women in the Mediterranean during that period of time. She appears as the acting party (without a guardian) in the sale contract presented to the court.
- 7) Thotortaios submits several written documents to the court, aiming to prove the ownership by Tamenos of the disputed property, consequently proving the legal inheritance of the lands by his wife. Being able to present legal documentation to support a claim appeared to have a very strong influence on the claim's credibility before a Ptolemaic court.
- 8) Although Thotortaios speaks for his wife during the trial, the judge designates only Senenoupis and not her husband as master of the inheritance. Together with item 6, it appears that women could own, sell and buy land without interference or co-ownership of their husbands, which suggests relative financial freedom for adult women in Ptolemaic Egypt.

The next step in applying the Ptolemaic Well-Being Index consists of a qualitative synthesis of the results above, together with the results of parallel analyses of other documentary material from other court cases or otherwise related to the justice system. Item 1 testifies to the presence of several levels of mediation between quarreling parties. The matter apparently could not be resolved at the local level, meaning both parties had to travel to obtain a final verdict on their case. This allows us insight into some positive and negative aspects of the Ptolemaic justice system: on the one hand, if both parties were willing, conflicts could be addressed by local administrators, facilitating access to justice for locals. However, on the other hand, if one party decided that they were not satisfied with the ruling of the local magistrate, they were free to seek justice elsewhere, and engage another court of law to issue a verdict that was more to their liking. This relative freedom meant that proceedings could be drawn out for quite a long time, slowing down the entire system and requiring both parties to appear before several court sessions that sometimes obligated them to travel and prevented them from managing their businesses for periods of time. Item 5 suggests that some measures were taken to at least curb the length of court sessions, informing us that a preliminary hearing first took place before the actual trial before the (no doubt very busy) *epistrategos* Boethos. This way, the head judge had both the submitted documents and the reports by the preliminary judges to inform him about the case, and the trial could proceed more swiftly, at least in theory. Moreover, item 1 also addresses the necessity of written documentation, to be provided by both parties before the actual hearing, as also exemplified by items 3 and 7. The great importance attached to written evidence is attested by a great number of documents from the entire Ptolemaic period, and several mechanisms were in place to prevent forged documentation entering the court. People who could not write or read would also hang onto this material, and used the services of professional scribes when the need arose for the drawing up and notarizing of contracts. The importance of written evidence is further exemplified by the papyrus UPZ II 162 = P. Tor. Choachiti 12, where a judge writes to a registration office to provide him with the details of a contract registered there, about which a court case has arisen. The careful registration and safekeeping of contracts and receipts suggest not only a legal

system operating quite strictly according to a set of rules, but also a certain trust of the population of Egypt in the validity of legal documents and (relative) objective approach of the judges supervising the justice system.

Items 2, 6 and 8 are focused on the legal position of Senenoupis, daughter of the deceased Tamenos, whose possessions are the object of contention. Senenoupis is accompanied by her husband in court, who speaks for his wife during the entire trial. Other documents from Ptolemaic Egypt¹⁸ containing court proceedings show that women were allowed to speak for themselves in trials, sometimes even representing other family members. Other documents from the family archive of Senenoupis show that she could act legally independent (P. Erbstreit 7–8), but for unknown reasons, she chose not to in this court case. Senenoupis' mother Tamenos also conducted business in her own name, as demonstrated by item 6. Item 8 also suggests the ability of adult women to take care of their own affairs during the Ptolemaic reign in Egypt.

The image of the Ptolemaic justice system that arises from the analysis of the court trial before the *epistrategos*, is one of a relatively formalized and hierarchical system, where higher appeal was possible. Mediation was easily accessed, but actual court cases might have required parties to travel, an inconvenience in ancient times. Notarization and formalized contracting largely avoided falsified documents, and facilitated court rulings.

The example above shows how, in this case, mainly the determinant of "Government" can be examined through the analysis of the available documents, an approach that can be applied to the other determinants, thus culminating in a qualitative appraisal of well-being in Ptolemaic Egypt.

In conclusion

The Ptolemaic rule of Egypt has traditionally been regarded as a failing one. The dynasty gradually lost control of its possessions outside of Egypt, and because of our extensive knowledge of the tax system, it appeared that the inhabitants of the Nile country paid an enormous amount of taxes to the crown. Our approach aims at nuancing this view, by not only examining what people paid to the state, but also what the state did for the people in return. The preliminary results of our research suggest that the Ptolemies reinvested a substantial amount of tax revenues into factors contributing to the well-being of their subjects, such as a functioning and accessible justice system. A re-evaluation of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt is thus required, not only focusing on possibly high tax rates, but also taking into account the benefits for the population that resulted from them.

Our future research on the aforementioned determinants will not include a survey of happiness among the people of Hellenistic Egypt for obvious reasons. In the years to come, we will examine in which of these determinants the Ptolemaic government invested, and thus (un)consciously positively or negatively influenced the quality of life of the people they governed. This approach opens up a new methodology for appraisal of the performance of the Ptolemaic government, and can form a starting point for a comparative study of governments across the ancient world.

¹⁸ As for instance P. BM 10591 ro and UPZ II 162.

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