

Laurens E. Tacoma, Imperial wealth in Roman Egypt. The Julio-Claudian *ousiai*¹
Draft as of 23-5-2011. Not for further circulation.

Introduction

The fact that Roman rulers were extraordinarily rich is abundantly clear. Part of the behaviour of the emperors consisted of staged displays of their immense wealth: processions showed their conquests over enemies and the treasures they had obtained, games were given on a magnificent scale, money and food were distributed in ritualistic handouts involving thousands of people. Among many other things, part of the explanation of the power of Roman emperors was simply that they showed that they were the wealthiest men in the empire, capable of mobilizing resources in an unsurpassed way.

The wealth of the Roman rulers is common knowledge and hardly needs substantiation. But how rulers obtained and used their immense wealth is often less easy to determine. Obviously, the acquisition of the wealth of their predecessor, either through legitimate inheritance or through simple appropriation normally provided the basis of their fortunes. Once in possession, additions and alienations could be made in various ways. But the details of the process are hardly documented and the general trends are therefore difficult to discern.² If, as is often thought, the process was a cumulative one by which successive emperors acquired ever more property, why are the emperors by Late Antiquity only in possession of roughly one fourth to one fifth of all property, and not of much more?³

Thanks to the survival of numerous references in the papyri, the documentation of imperial wealth in Egypt is fuller than elsewhere, where brief mentions in literary sources and inscriptions form the main source. The evidence from the papyri varies from mere mentions of officials to relatively full descriptions of particular estates. Of course, as always in papyrology the evidence is fragmentary, and raises a host of technical problems.

¹ My thanks to Miriam Groen-Vallinga, Egbert Koops, Luuk de Ligt and Brian Muhs for commentary.

² Millar (1977) 175: 'A history of the properties of the Roman emperors cannot be written. (...) [W]e are hopelessly ignorant of the patterns of private ownership and exploitation'.

³ As MacMullen (1976) rightly asked.

The sources consist of scattered references to individual pieces of property and are unevenly distributed geographically and chronologically. Nevertheless, the possibilities for an analysis of the way rulers acquired and passed on their property are much better than elsewhere.

The possibilities for analysis have not gone unnoticed. In particular the *ousiai*, the large estates of the Julio-Claudian period have been studied.⁴ What has attracted most attention is the fact that the way these *ousiai* were treated by the Roman emperors seems to show similarities to the way the Ptolemaic kings handled the *doreai*. As the name implies, the latter were gift-estates that the Ptolemies handed out to their administrators. Quite naturally, the similarity has sparked a debate over the question of continuity between Ptolemaic and Roman times. It has been argued that the Roman imperial *ousiai* were the direct successors of the *doreai*. In such an interpretation, the Julio-Claudian *ousiai* were gift-estates which the emperor handed out to family members and loyal friends, and which would eventually revert to the emperor. However, forceful reservations have been made against this view, in particular based on the argument that Roman attitudes to property were quite different from Ptolemaic ones. *Ousiai*, in this view, were nothing more than privately-owned estates, some of which happened to be owned by the emperor. That so many of the *ousiai* ended up in imperial hands was mainly due to the practice of including the emperor in wills.

The debate what the Roman *ousiai* are and how they relate to Ptolemaic *doreai* remains unresolved. One problem is that little is known about *doreai* in the later part of the Ptolemaic period: most evidence is confined to the third century B.C.⁵ Apart from the chronological gap, the Ptolemaic *doreai* themselves also seem to be in dire need of renewed study.⁶ Another problem is that although there is much that points to private ownership of the Julio-Claudian *ousiai*, the problem remains that in the *ousiai* an element of redistribution seems to be at work. Many of the *ousiai* that were in non-imperial

⁴ An overview with bibliography is offered by Capponi (2005) 104-112.

⁵ Capponi (2005) 105.

⁶ One of the problems is that the idea of royal gift-estates squares ill with the notion that gradually during the Ptolemaic period most land became de facto private land. One crucial question is whether the estates were tied to the person, or tied to the office.

ownership eventually ended up in imperial hands. Known owners of *ousiai* seem to belong to a limited circle of friends and family of the emperor. In consequence, radically different opinions about the nature of the estates continue to be given. So Rowlandson could argue in 1998 that '[t]he Roman legal conception of property-ownership, with which the status of the *ousiai* presumably always accorded (..), was utterly unlike that of the Hellenistic kingdoms, and if Augustus derived the idea of temporary grants of land from these precedents it is difficult to see how such gifts could have had any formal legal standing.' Temporary grants were alien to Roman thinking. However, Capponi in 2005 reverted to the older position: 'In the Ptolemaic period, the land given as *doreai*, as well as the *ge en aphesei*, could at any time revert to the Ptolemaic king. Similarly, in the Roman period, the imperial estates ultimately belonged to the emperor's patrimony: the numerous changes of owners of the Julio-Claudian *ousiai* seem to support the view that estates often reverted to the emperor, who redistributed them to new beneficiaries'.⁷

Here, it will be argued that both these views are partially correct. The Julio-Claudian imperial *ousiai* were private estates, but they circulated in what might be called an indirect redistributive system. This need not cause surprise. Many systems in which a ruler redistributed property to loyal supporters occur in history, and the distribution of privileges and wealth is a recurrent characteristic of any autocratic regime. The crucial and more interesting fact is that the forms of such redistribution might differ substantially. I will argue that their circulation should be understood not as a continuation of Ptolemaic practice, but can be explained within the principles of Roman property devolution and imperial *liberalitas*. This created a system of indirect redistribution that merits further study. Although much property eventually ended up in imperial hands, the process of indirect redistribution was neither one-sided nor automatic, and has interesting implications for our understanding of Roman elite formation.

1. Egyptian *ousiai* in the Julio-Claudian period

⁷ Rowlandson (1998) 55-56; Capponi (2005) 107-108 (cf. 120). Crawford (1976) 41 and Parassoglou (1978) 5-6 citing older views.

There is no Greek term that directly and unequivocally describes the personal property holdings of the Julio-Claudian emperors in Roman Egypt. What we find instead are references to *ousiai*.⁸ It is therefore clear that the term is crucial for our understanding and it might be helpful to present an overview of what is known about the *ousiai* and to discuss the major areas of disagreement.⁹

With the victory at Actium and the subsequent acquisition of Egypt, Octavian gained access to the wealth of the Ptolemies. Even if part of it had been squandered by the predecessors of Cleopatra VII, it still must have been immense.¹⁰ At any rate it is known that Cleopatra had seized substantial estates.¹¹ All of this must have gone in one way or another to the Roman state and to the Roman emperor.

Directly after the incorporation of Egypt in the Roman empire, large estates, *ousiai*, start to appear in the papyri. These estates usually consisted of several holdings and could be spread out all over Egypt. They were named after their owner.

In the Greek world the term *ousia*, literally ‘that which is one’s own, one’s substance’, was from early onwards also used to denote property, both in literary and in legal texts.¹² Its use was rather generic. In Egypt, it was already used to denote landed property in the Ptolemaic period. But it was only in the Roman period that the term came to be used frequently to describe large estates.¹³

The naming patterns of the *ousiai* allow for drawing up a social profile of the owners (see table at the end). A few of these *ousiai* were held by the emperor himself, others were owned by members of his entourage. There appear members of the imperial family, such

⁸ Alternative terms might sporadically be used to designate the estates, such as *edaphos*, but this occurred not on a regular basis; see Capponi (2005) 105-106.

⁹ For a brief overview, see Tacoma (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Broughton (1942); Parassoglou (1978) 3; Broughton (1985). With regard to the wealth of the palace itself, Augustus claimed to have melted everything with the exception of a single cup: Suet., *Aug.* 71.

¹¹ Crawford (1976) 40, Rowlandson (1998) 55, and Capponi (2005) 105 n.51.

¹² L.S.J. s.v. with refs.; Parassoglou (1978) 9-10.

¹³ Parassoglou (1978) 10.

as Livia and Germanicus, and friends and loyalists closely connected to the emperor, like Maecenas. Then, there are also *ousiai*-owners who cannot be identified further, but whose names suggest high status. They might be otherwise unidentified members of the Roman aristocracy or high-ranking Alexandrians.¹⁴

How the *ousiai* that appear in the Roman papyri were created out of Ptolemaic property is unclear. In the sources there is no direct continuity visible between the *ousiai* and any particular category of Ptolemaic land. The *ousiai* were certainly not created wholesale out of the crown land of the Ptolemies, which continued to exist as *basilike ge*. Some land may already have been owned by Romans before Octavian's conquest; there is some evidence that at least some of these Romans were allowed to retain their estates, even if they had supported the other party.¹⁵ One early attestation of a Roman *ousia* suggests that some *ousiai* might have been created out of particular Ptolemaic estates that were somehow in individual possession.¹⁶ But hints at other origins have also been found.¹⁷ It is therefore likely that the *ousiai* were created from multiple Ptolemaic sources. These sources may have included the Ptolemaic *doreai*, but full and direct continuity between the *doreai* and the *ousiai* cannot be established.¹⁸ Although this does not necessarily mean that the argument about continuity between the Ptolemaic and the Roman treatment of the estates is incorrect, it needs to be emphasized that any such argument concerns primarily continuation of practice rather than of holdings.

¹⁴ Parassoglou (1978) App. 1-2 for a list of owners. Subsequent publications have added some names, but have not altered the social profile.

¹⁵ Capponi (2005) 107.

¹⁶ See *S.B.* 14.11933 (27 B.C.) with Parassoglou (1978) 100: *tes proteron Petenefieous nunei de Kaisaros autokratoros ousias*. It is however difficult to proceed from there. The reconstruction offered by the editor, who argues that Petenefies belonged to priestly circles and that his land was former temple land which was confiscated by Octavian is conjectural. Note also that the notion of Ptolemaic ownership itself is problematical, and that the way that is used to describe the estate does conform in content but not completely in format to the way that is found later.

¹⁷ Tomsin (1957) 211 and Kuhnke (1971) 4 listed cleruchic land, sacred land, and *doreai*. Thompson (1987) 559 argued for the conversion of unproductive land into *ousiai*. Some of the arguments are based on the geographical location of attested Roman *ousiai*, which supposedly corresponds to Ptolemaic counterparts. Given the dispersed nature of the Roman *ousiai* this seems a hazardous line of reasoning.

¹⁸ Capponi (2005) 106 suggests tentatively that some other terms to designate estates that are found in the first century B.C. (*ktesis*, *ktema*, *prosodos* and *edaphe*) may provide the missing link, but apart from the fact that the argument is based on the premise that continuity exists, this still would leave a considerable chronological gap between the *doreai* and *ousiai*.

Whatever its origin and its functioning, it is clear that the system of *ousiai* created under Augustus remained unchanged for the remaining part of the Julio-Claudian period.

Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Nero, all are attested as owners of Egyptian *ousiai*. The profile of the other owners also remained unchanged. We find for example Antonia, the wife of Drusus, the children of Germanicus, and Messalina. The fact that later on also some imperial freedmen (Dionysodorus, Doryphoros, Narcissus) and the occasional imperial mistress (Claudia Akte) are added only reinforces the picture of a relatively confined set of owners around the emperor.

The social profile of the owners raises in its most acute form questions as to what *ousiai* are. It is clear that the term *ousia* could be used for imperial estates. But the crucial question is implied by the fact that the term was also used for the estates of other persons. What does it mean that members of the imperial family, people around the emperor and some members of the aristocracy owned *ousiai* as well? Are these simply private holdings, which have nothing to do with the emperor? And given the fact that many of the holdings were owned by members of the imperial family rather than the emperor himself, what exactly do we mean by imperial holdings? The fact that some lands were owned by people in the circle around the emperor (both relatives and friends) makes it difficult to establish what counts as imperial estate and what not.¹⁹

An important factor to take into account is that in many sources a transfer of ownership is visible, and that these transfers show a clear trend: many of the *ousiai* eventually ended up in the hands of emperor. Our evidence for this process derives from the naming patterns of *ousiai*. The normal way the term *ousia* was used consisted of the word *ousia* followed by the name of the owner in the genitive.²⁰ The owner's name could be that of the current owner, but often the previous owner was also mentioned. In many of the attested cases, the current owner is the emperor, and the previous owner a private individual.²¹ There was in any case a strong tendency to retain the name of the original owner, with some of these estate-names surviving well into the third century, long after

¹⁹ Thompson (1976) 35, 39-40.

²⁰ Kuhnke (1971) 3; Parassoglou (1978) 7-13, with app. A.

²¹ Parassoglou (1978) 9 n.27.

their incorporation into the imperial estates.²² Obviously, in the cases where the owner was the emperor, the connection to the imperial house is certain (though how the estates entered the imperial property is not). However, there are also cases where only non-imperial owners of *ousiai* appear. Did they remain outside the imperial orbit?

The evidence has been interpreted radically different.

Traditionally, the *ousiai* have been seen as gift-estates given by the emperor to family members and friends, which would eventually revert to him. This idea is closely connected to the argument that the Romans took over the Ptolemaic system of *doreai*. By implication, the term *ousia* in itself denoted imperial gift-estate, and all *ousiai* that are found in the papyri should be regarded as such. That some *ousiai* lacked any further attested connection with the imperial house was simply a matter of chance. The advantage of the theory is that it offers a coherent model, but the problem is that it goes against the grain of Roman attitudes towards land, with its strong emphasis on private ownership and the notion that gifts were irrevocable. It should also be pointed out that its proponents have been vague about the mechanism by which the *ousiai* reverted to the emperor. Did this occur at the death of their owner? If so, how?

In an important study of 1978, Parassoglou argued that *ousia* was a generic term for a large estate of any private owner – which included the emperor, who operated in a purely private capacity.²³ In his interpretation the *ousiai* had nothing to do with the Ptolemaic *doreai*. The Ptolemaic word *dorea* was after all not retained. Parassoglou explained the rise of the new term *ousia* at the beginning of the Roman period as a consequence of the introduction of private ownership. The term was convenient because it could comprise any type of property, and in that sense was comparable to the use of the English word estate, which has similar inclusive connotations. Only those *ousiai* that have an attested connection to the imperial house should therefore be regarded as imperial property. He argued further that the privately owned *ousiai* that had no obvious connection to the

²² Parassoglou (1978) 11-12.

²³ Parassoglou (1978), based on a dissertation of 1971.

emperor were acquired on the private market, in sales or auctions of land that was privatized by the Romans.²⁴

Parassoglou's arguments have been partially accepted, but have also raised scepticism.²⁵ Although it remains tempting to do otherwise, it seems safer to follow Parassoglou in his argument that *ousia* is a neutral term, which in itself does not denote any connection to the imperial house.²⁶ Not only because that would be the more cautious route in a contested area, but also because a similar kind of unspecific meaning applies to privately-held *ousiai* outside Egypt.²⁷ At the same time, an important objection to his theory is that the social profile of the owners of *ousiai* remains unexplained. If *ousiai* could be owned by any wealthy individual, it remains strange to find a restricted number of people from a very high stratum of society who have little to do with Egypt but who are closely connected to the emperor. Where are the others? It is difficult not to think of some sort of redistributive system in which estates revolve around the emperor.

No matter how such a system is interpreted, it is clear that with the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty the nature of the *ousiai* changed. *Ousiai* now became imperial patrimony tied to the office of the emperor.²⁸ Almost all *ousiai* were now merged into a newly created department of the *ousiakos logos*, headed by a procurator.²⁹ Part of the estates was owned by Vespasian, the rest by Titus. In referring to individual estates within the *ousiakos logos*, the name of the original owner was retained, and this system kept being used afterwards. For example, an estate (formerly) belonging to Antonia Drusi could be found under that name as late as the middle of the second century.³⁰ Thus, we now find in a single daily register taxes paid by farmers of five different *ousiai* located

²⁴ Parassoglou (1978) 10.

²⁵ Rowlandson (1998) //.

²⁶ The primary reason for caution is that both before and after the Flavian reorganisation privately-owned *ousiai* that are not explicitly connected to the imperial house are found. See for a list Parassoglou (1978) app. 1.

²⁷ Cf. Zablocka (1967).

²⁸ Parassoglou (1978) 26-30 and 84-90; Bowman (1986) 95; Rowlandson (1998) 30, 57.

²⁹ Crawford (1976) 42 n42 for some exceptions of land subsumed under different headings. New (?) privately-owned *ousiai* are found after the creation of the *ousiakos logos*. See for a list of non-imperial owners, ranging well into the third century, Parassoglou (1978) App. 1 nr.5-27.

³⁰ *B.G.U.* 15.2554 (A.D. 138-161).

near Theadelphia, the *Alexandriane*, the *Germanikiane*, the *Maikenatiane*, the *Pallantiane* and the *Senekane*; the fact that they are paid together showing their incorporation into the imperial *ousiakos logos*.³¹ The same is shown by an offer of ten peasants to lease substantial areas of land belonging to the *ousiai* of Antonia, Dionysodoros and Severus.³²

Several factors help to explain the creation of the *ousiakos logos*. In the first place, the severing of dynastic ties: in the context of the normal rules of property transmission it was not self-evident that the property of Nero (and his immediate successors) passed into Flavian hands, though in terms of power relations it certainly was.³³ The change should also be read in the context of the developments with regard to the blurring of boundaries between private property of the emperor and state property: the idea of private ownership by the emperors was at odds with state requirements, if only because many state expenses were covered from private imperial funds.³⁴ The change should also be placed in the context of an empire-wide set of reforms by the Flavians, both concerning the imperial estates and concerning state finances in general.³⁵

The department of the *ousiakos logos* would remain into existence well into the third century. The *ousiakos logos* passed on from emperor to emperor, and from dynasty to dynasty, but still with the names of Vespasian and Titus attached.³⁶ There may have been further reorganizations under Hadrian, and under the Severi. During the third century several new officials appear; under Diocletian an attempt was made to curb the growth of bureaucracy and make the management of the imperial estates more efficient.

As the creation of the *ousiakos logos* by the Flavians marked a new departure, the Julio-Claudian period presents a clearly demarcated phase in the history of imperial

³¹ *S.B.* 16.12676 (mid. 2nd cent A.D.).

³² *P.Strasb.* 6.584 (A.D. 141).

³³ What happened between Nero's death and Vespasian's rise to power is not entirely clear, though it is reasonably certain that Galba, Otho and Vitellius took over Nero's property; see Parassoglou (1978) 26.

³⁴ It is in the context of this article neither possible nor necessary to do justice to this extremely complicated subject. See Brunt (1966) and Parassoglou (1978) 27 n.84 for extensive further bibliography.

³⁵ Thompson (1987) 555; 561.

³⁶ Thompson (1987) 562, Parassoglou (1978) 28-29.

landholding in Egypt. It is relatively well documented, but it also forms the most problematical part. The relation between imperial and private *ousiai* remains elusive. The key question is how (or even if) *ousiai* circulated between emperor and others. Given the tendency to keep referring to estates by the name of the original owner long after their incorporation into the imperial estates, the evidence for the circulation stems from a much wider period than the Julio-Claudian period alone, and runs well into the third century. At the same time, the actual analysis of why particular *ousiai* were transferred from one owner to another is not easy. What the attestations of *ousiai* can show is individual changes of ownership. These are attested to a remarkably high degree, allowing to get a sense of circulation patterns. But internal explanations as to how or why the property changed hands are almost always lacking in the papyri: we see property moving, but do not know how. In some individual cases the process can be reconstructed with a reasonable degree of probability, but it is impossible to determine in each and every case how this occurred. It is rather through historical contextualisation and considerations of a more general nature that it is possible to obtain an idea of what happened.

2. Imperial acquisitions

In order to clear up the problems mentioned above the system of transmission of *ousiai* should be analyzed in more detail. As the position of the emperor is crucial, we should focus on the transmission of property of the *emperor*: how could imperial *ousiai* be created, and how could they be alienated? It is best to start with the least controversial part and discuss first the way the Julio-Claudian emperors could obtain *ousiai*. In the analysis, I hope to demonstrate that Roman principles of property devolution are sufficient to explain what happened, and that there is no need to take recourse to Ptolemaic practices.

Apart from violent appropriation, which applied only to the beginning and end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, there were four regular modes through which emperors could acquire estates: by purchase, gift, confiscation and inheritance.

The first mode to discuss is purchases. Purchases could in theory comprise both *ousiai* of others and other land that would be subsequently turned into imperial *ousiai*. That emperors bought estates and turned them into imperial *ousiai* remains by and large an academic option. No cases in the Egyptian evidence can be positively identified as sales to the emperor, nor does purchase of land by the emperor seem to be a major feature anywhere in the empire. But the option cannot be excluded altogether. Scholars have emphasized that the emperor operated with respect to the Egyptian *ousiai* in a private capacity: although the boundary between private imperial and state property was vague, the *ousiai* decidedly belonged to the former category. Obviously, one of the main characteristics of private property is that it can be bought and sold. Despite the ideological imperative to own rather than acquire property, large landowners are known to have engaged actively in buying property, and there is no reason to exclude the emperor from this. Moreover, if we follow Parassoglou's argument and allow for the possibility that at least some non-imperial *ousiai* were created out of land acquired on the free market, it is difficult to draw a sharp line between those who did buy land to turn it into *ousiai* and those who did not. Where to leave for example the other members of the imperial house? It is also possible that the people who would eventually become emperor engaged in purchases before their ascension.³⁷ In fact, there is a possible case in the appearance of an Otho as an owner of *ousiai*, who might be identified with the future emperor.³⁸ However, whereas purchases cannot be excluded, it also seems safe to assume that buying was not a dominant form to increase the stock of imperial *ousiai*.

Roughly the same applies to the second mode of transfer, gifts. It remains by and large a theoretical possibility that the emperors received much land through gifts. None of the *ousiai* that ended up in imperial hands can be positively identified as a gift to the emperor during the life-time of giver and recipient. In itself the emperor is known to have received

³⁷ Provided they were legally capable of doing so (i.e. *sui iuris*). Note that Tiberius through his adoption by Augustus lost the possibility to own property himself until Augustus' death, and acted accordingly (Suet., *Tib.* 58.1).

³⁸ *S.B.* 26.16784 (A.D. 54-62) line 1 for an *ousia* of *Sal]biou Othonos*, previously of Petronius. Otho is somewhat speculatively identified with the future emperor. The fact that the estate was acquired from another private person may, but need not necessarily, indicate sale.

various types of gifts from various quarters: gifts from foreigners as part of diplomacy, gifts of rare or remarkable items by inhabitants of the empire, on a more regular scale (though retaining the form of voluntary gifts) the gold crowns sent by cities and other civic bodies at important occasions; then the gifts after crises (sometimes voluntary, sometimes exacted).³⁹ But such gifts normally will not have comprised of landed estates. However, later evidence does provide some reason to pause. In the section of the *Liber pontificalis* concerning the donations of Constantine to the church, it is explicitly stated that in some cases the estates had come into imperial possession by way of gift, implying that the practice was not wholly unknown.⁴⁰ None of the cases that is mentioned in the *Liber pontificalis* is early, but there is no intrinsic reason why it should not have been possible in Julio-Claudian Egypt. However, that it formed a predominant mode through which the stock of imperial *ousiai* was increased seems hard to believe.

Then, there were also various modes through which property was forcibly removed from its owners. It could be confiscated, and there were categories of property that were automatically removed: property where no heirs were available, or property of condemned persons. Confiscation is of course well attested in the literary sources about the Julio-Claudian period.⁴¹ Judging from the literary evidence confiscation was the major means by which additional imperial property was acquired. However, the scale and social spread of the phenomenon needs further thought.⁴² What should be kept in mind that confiscated property (and property without heirs and of condemned persons) in principle would go to the state, not the emperor, and that such property might not only be kept but could also be sold by auction. But not all confiscated property needs to have followed the same route, and it seems possible that some of the better pieces were reserved for the emperor. Such a possibility is in fact explicitly mentioned by Philo with respect to the estates of Flaccus: ‘while a vast number of properties belonging to

³⁹ Millar (1977) 139-144.

⁴⁰ Millar (1977) 172 n.76.

⁴¹ Millar (1977) 163-174; note that there is a distinction between property of condemned persons and confiscated property.

⁴² Cf. Millar (1977) 170, arguing that it ‘applied far outside the range of political offences’.

condemned persons were sold by public auction, that of Flaccus alone was reserved for the emperor'.⁴³

There are a significant number of Egyptian privately-held *ousiai* that appear to have been confiscated.⁴⁴ But the question is what happened subsequently. In most cases, evidence that they were subsequently incorporated in imperial *ousiai* is lacking. A possible indirect indication would be formed by the cases where *ousiai* went to the emperor during the life-time of their original owner. As most attestations of imperial *ousiai* post-date their actual transfer by a wide-margin, the moment of transfer is often beyond recovery. Only in cases where the property was subsequently obtained by others can this sometimes be reconstructed. This applies to several cases of high-ranking imperial freedmen. Strictly speaking is what we see the movement of *ousiai* between different freedman, without a phase of imperial ownership in-between. Several explanations are possible. In actual practice the emperor might simply have reassigned property from one freedman who had fallen from favour to a new favourite, but technically the first part of the process will have counted as confiscation.

The last way by which the emperor could acquire property was through inheritance, and this was without doubt a very important mode by which *ousiai* came into imperial hands. As the emperor operated in a private capacity with respect to the imperial estates, in principle on his death the normal rules of Roman property devolution applied. Although there was a tendency for the current emperor to pass the majority of his property to his intended successor (provided there was one), his whole property was not passed on en-bloc. So, Tiberius inherited only two-thirds of the estates of Augustus directly in A.D. 14., but the remaining one-third went to Augustus' wife (and Tiberius' mother) Livia. She, to be sure, hardly needed it, being an owner of substantial property herself.⁴⁵ Again, Gaius

⁴³ Philo, *Flaccus* (18) 150 (adding that 'a few articles being excepted so as not to run counter to the law enacted about persons convicted on these grounds') with Millar (1977) 167. A similar distinction occurs in Tac., *Ann.* 6.19, where copper- and gold-mines are reserved for Tiberius.

⁴⁴ Many of the estates listed in Parassoglou (1978) appendix 1 happen to be confiscated.

⁴⁵ Suet., *Aug.* 101; *Tib.* 23; Tac., *Ann.* 8. Earlier there had been different arrangements, see e.g. Suet., *Claud.* 1.5. Cf. Caesar's will, giving $\frac{3}{4}$ to Octavian and the rest to Lucius Pinarius and Quintus Pedius: Suet., *Divus Julius* 83. For Livia as property owner in Egypt and elsewhere see Crawford (1976) 39 and

(Caligula) had to share the inheritance of Tiberius with Tiberius Gemellus, son of Drusus. The fact that this arrangement did not last long shows the tensions between private arrangements and the realities of imperial power. The tendency to tie imperial property to the office rather than the person of emperor would be formalised after the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and it is surely no coincidence that hardly any emperor thereafter is known to have made a will.⁴⁶

By virtue of the fact that they were members of the same family, members of the imperial house were participating in the same inheritance system as the emperor himself. Property would be transmitted within the family. This partly explains why many *ousiai* were owned by members of the imperial family. But given the centrality of the emperor within the inheritance system, it is not surprising that many of their *ousiai* would eventually come into imperial hands. With the death of Livia in A.D. 29 Tiberius must have obtained both the remaining one-third of the property left to her by Augustus, and the estates she owned herself.⁴⁷ He also seems to have acquired at least a large part of the Egyptian estates of Germanicus after the latter's death in A.D. 19.⁴⁸ At the same time, members of the imperial family need not have bequeathed their property directly to the emperor in each and every case. In many cases it is impossible to infer whether an *ousia* accrued directly to the emperor or through intermediate heirs.⁴⁹ One papyrus of A.D. 40 points to somewhat more complex arrangements: in it we find a manager of two separate estates in the same location, one of the emperor Gaius, the other of the future emperor Claudius. The combined management makes it likely that they came from Antonia Drusi, who divided her inheritance between the two.⁵⁰

The emperor also received inheritances and legacies from outsiders. According to a well-known Roman principle, the emperor was often included in the wills of people not related

Parassoglou (1978) 72. Cases of joint ownership by Livia and Tiberius outside Egypt are mentioned in Hirschfeld (1902; 1913) 521; Crawford (1976) 43 and Parassoglou (1978) 17 n.9.

⁴⁶ Brunt (1966) 78.

⁴⁷ Parassoglou (1978) 17. Tiberius annulled her will, see Suet., *Tib.* 51 and cf. *Galba* 5.2.

⁴⁸ Parassoglou (1978) 17-18; the crucial text is *P.Ryl.* 2.134 (A.D. 34) lines 7-9: *georgou tes Tiberiou Kaisaros Sebastou ousias Germanikes*, showing that at that point the estates had gone over to Tiberius.

⁴⁹ As Crawford (1976) 40 emphasises, also giving a non-Egyptian example from the second century.

⁵⁰ *P.Ryl.* 2.148 with Parassoglou (1978) 20.

directly to him.⁵¹ The practice went back at least to the first century B.C. when important Romans received bequests from outsiders, but what was then a social custom ‘hardened into something approaching an obligation under the empire’.⁵² In exceptional cases the emperor was in fact the sole heir. This could apply both to the inheritances of allied kings, and to those of direct friends, and although such cases would not be too frequent, it should be realised that the property that was transferred in this way could be of considerable size. In other cases, the emperor received a portion of the inheritance alongside others, or as a legacy. The practice figures prominently in discourses about the limits of imperial propriety. As Tacitus summed it up: ‘no good father would leave property to any emperor except a bad one’.⁵³ Emperors often made a point of refusing or returning inheritances from individuals that they did not know personally or that had surviving offspring,⁵⁴ but this essentially confirms the existence of the practice. Augustus claimed to have received as heir or legatee in the last 20 years of his life the staggering sum of 1,400 million HS, and this implies that the circle of people leaving part of their wealth to him must have extended far beyond his intimate friends.⁵⁵ The risk of appropriation (through confiscation, annulment of the will, or simply by violent take-over) no doubt loomed large if imperial expectations were not met. At the same time clearly a very strong sense of social obligation was at work, with strong symbolic overtones.

The Egyptian *ousiai* were owned by people who certainly belonged to the circle supposed to leave part of their wealth to the emperor. Even in cases where we have no further information about the identity of an owner of a private *ousia*, their names usually suggest high status. In cases where the privately-owned *ousiai* ended up in imperial hands after the death of the owner, the most likely explanation is therefore that the *ousiai* came in imperial ownership through inheritance. One relatively certain case is that of Maecenas,

⁵¹ Hirschfeld (1902; 1913); Millar (1977) 153-158. Note that a substantial part of the evidence of the practice is indirect, for instance consisting of names of imperial slaves that betray a former owner.

⁵² Millar (1977) 157-158 (quote); Rogers (1947) 140-141 and Shatzman (1975) 36.

⁵³ Tac., *Agr.* 43.

⁵⁴ Rogers (1947) discusses all the available evidence; it is a recurring theme in all imperial biographical writing. It is also found in the inverted image of bad emperors transgressing this social boundary and showing their greed.

⁵⁵ Suet., *Aug.* 101 with Millar (1977) 155. For a list of inheritances and legacies left to Augustus, see Shatzman (1975) 361-362, who also points out at 367 that it is unlikely that Augustus received less in the previous period.

who is known to have made Augustus his sole heir in 8 B.C. This makes it virtually certain that the Egyptian *Maikenatianai ousiai* that are later found as imperial property came to Augustus by inheritance.⁵⁶ At the same time, the freedom in testation implies that *ousiai* will not automatically have gone to the emperor, even in cases where no off-spring was available. There is some evidence pointing to inheritance to others.⁵⁷

According to the same principle other members of the imperial family and even other powerful figures could also receive inheritances. It goes without saying that this occurred to a lesser extent than in the case of the emperor, but the practice existed nevertheless. In Palestine, Livia inherited both from Herod and from Herod's sister Salome. In Egypt, Livia was also in the possession of an estate formerly owned by an Alexandrian named C. Iulius Alexandros, which she may have inherited from him.⁵⁸ There are also a number of attestations of joint ownership of *ousiai* by members of the imperial family, and by others. Such joint ownership is almost certainly the result of an inheritance. Some of such cases may have come from inheritances from outsiders, though certainty can hardly be obtained.⁵⁹

There were, then, several modes through which the stock of imperial *ousiai* could be increased. Some are unlikely to have been substantial: purchases by and gifts to the emperor can hardly have occurred frequently, though the possibility that they occurred cannot be ruled out completely. Confiscation of non-imperial *ousiai* seems in itself to have been a regular occurrence, but it is important to keep in mind that this would not necessarily lead to incorporation into imperial property. Acquisition through inheritance is likely to have occurred frequently. It seems therefore probable that this last mode was the most important one, but the relative frequency of each cannot be established with certainty. What is at any rate important is the simple fact that there was more than one way by which property could accrue to the imperial house. It follows that there was no standard mechanism by which this occurred, and hence that there was no absolute

⁵⁶ Rogers (1947) 142; Parassoglou (1978) 15-16; Thompson (1987) 559.

⁵⁷ Capponi (2005) 108.

⁵⁸ Parassoglou (1978) 17; it is not known how he had obtained the estates.

⁵⁹ Parassoglou (1978) 17-18. E.g. *P.Ryl.* 2.138, estates of *Tiberiou kai Libias Drousou Kaisaros teknon* (for which see Parassoglou (1978) 19) formerly of an otherwise unidentified Falcidius.

guarantee that it occurred at all. Freedom of movement was of course relative. It is well known that there existed a heavy social pressure on the wealthy landowners to leave at least part of their estates to the emperor, and this pressure was backed up by the threat of forced transfer through confiscation. In the case of the *ousiai*, this might explain why so many estates ended up in imperial hands, but it also might explain why a substantial number of them remained in private ownership for a long period, or even remained outside the imperial orbit at all.

3. Alienation of imperial property

That confiscation and transfer by will were the most common modes by which the imperial property grew is hardly surprising, and has not been in doubt, though the scale of the property transfers seems to have been underestimated. The more interesting part is the fact that also substantial alienations of *ousiai* seem to have taken place. This leads us to the more contested issue through what modes such alienation occurred.

Imperial property in the empire did not grow unchecked. Diminishments also took place. As mentioned above, according to Suetonius, Augustus claimed to have received 1,400 million HS in the last 20 years of his reign out of inheritances. But he also claimed to have left only 150 million HS to his heirs, having spent the rest, plus the estates of both his own father and of Caesar, for the benefit of the state. No details are given, but the discrepancy between the two figures is noteworthy, as it implies an extremely high turnover rate of property.⁶⁰ This suggests strongly that a substantial part of imperial wealth was alienated during the lifetime of the emperor. We could perhaps place Tacitus' notion that good emperors owned few estates in that context.⁶¹

This seems to be corroborated by what happened to the Egyptian *ousiai*. It is striking that many *ousiai* were not owned by the emperor himself, but by people from his entourage.

⁶⁰ Suet, *Aug.* 101.

⁶¹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.6, on the good part of Tiberius' reign: *rari per Italiam Caesaris agri*.

The number of attested cases of Julio-Claudian emperors found in actual ownership of *ousiai* is limited to a handful of cases.⁶²

How anyone other than the emperor obtained their *ousiai* is of course what is most contested. As explained above, many scholars have regarded *ousiai* as gifts from the emperor, some as being acquired on the private market. One fundamental objection to the idea that the Romans took over the Ptolemaic system of *doreai* is that such a system would be alien to Roman attitudes towards private ownership which left little to no room for temporary gifts. This objection is in itself justified, but it needs to be emphatically stated that this does not in the least imply the absence of gifts. Roman principles for the transmission of property can explain perfectly well what happened. They suggest that there were three modes through which such estates could leave the stock of imperial property: through a will, through a sale – and through a gift.

Inheritance as a mode to transfer property has been discussed above, and what applied to acquisition also applies to alienation. Emperors participated in a wider inheritance system. Just like everyone else, emperors could designate more than one heir. But as instituting an heir was closely connected to the designation of a successor, in reality the room for manoeuvre was limited. If the requirements of imperial succession were somehow neglected, wills ran the risk of being cancelled on technical grounds. Gaius had the will of Tiberius annulled, and thereby became sole heir.⁶³ Gaius died without a will, but had he carried out his alleged plan to make his sister his sole heir, no doubt the will would have been annulled. Nero in turn annulled the will of Claudius.⁶⁴

But no matter what further restrictions pertained in practice to the designation of an heir, emperors had the possibility to leave legacies to a host of other persons.⁶⁵ In the case of

⁶² Parassoglou (1978) app. 2 and, for Augustus, Rowlandson (1998) 55 (previously it was in fact thought that Augustus did not own *ousiai* at all).

⁶³ Suet., *Tib.* 76; *Gaius* 14.1; 16.3; Dio Cass. 59.1.1, with Parassoglou (1978) 19-20.

⁶⁴ Suet., *Claud.* 44; Dio Cass. 61.1.2; cf. Tac., *Ann.* 12.69, with Parassoglou (1978) 23.

⁶⁵ As an admittedly somewhat remote parallel, see Jos., *B.J.* 1.646. When king Herod revised his will in 4 B.C., he bequeathed to Augustus, 'besides gifts in kind, one thousand talents; to the empress, to the children, friends and freedmen of the emperor about five hundred; to the other members of his own family he assigned large tracts of territory (*tes te choras ouk oligas*) and considerable sums of money, honouring

the *ousiai* transfer by will by the emperor to others has not received much attention, but it certainly should be included among the possibilities.

The next possible mode is sale. Although the evidence for sales of imperial estates by emperors of the Julio-Claudian house is scanty, it is certainly possible that emperors sold parts of their estates from time to time. Such sales were obviously used to raise cash. During the troubled times before the onset of the Principate, contenders for power are known to have sold estates to raise cash for their campaigns or for other purposes, and many of the sales concerned estates of enemies, sometimes in the context of proscriptions.⁶⁶ Under the Principate, sales normally concerned confiscated estates, not imperial property itself. For the Julio-Claudian emperors, there are only a few suggestions of such sales, though they certainly may have been used to finance campaigns. There are some later snippets of evidence testifying to the continuity of the practice. Nevertheless, it seems very likely that at least a part of Augustus' millions spent on behalf of the state mentioned by Suetonius consisted of estates that were sold. Such sales were normally by auction, and it is not entirely surprising that friends were among the buyers.

For Egypt, actual evidence of sales of imperial *ousiai* is also relatively late, post-dating the Flavian reorganisation by a wide margin.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, according to Parassoglou the Julio-Claudian *ousiai* that were not owned by members of the imperial family were acquired on the private market. He put this in the context of the massive privatization of various types of land at the start of the Roman rule; by implication not necessarily of imperial *ousiai*. This scenario has raised scepticism, because no evidence for such sales or auctions has been found. But the possibility cannot be discounted completely.⁶⁸ The possible objection that many private owners are outsiders, members of the Roman

his sister Salome with the most magnificent presents of all.' Note the inclusion of the 'friends and freedmen' of the emperor.

⁶⁶ Millar (1977) 164-165, remarking that 'large-scale transfer of property was a significant element in any civil conflict'.

⁶⁷ The possibility of an early sale is raised with respects to parts of the *ousiai* of Germanicus in the ed.pr. of *S.B.* 18.13903 (first cent A.D.).

⁶⁸ Likewise Crawford (1980) in her review of Parassoglou (1978).

aristocracy not known to have been active in Egypt otherwise,⁶⁹ might in fact plead just as well in favour of sales. Especially if sales are seen in the context of attempts to raise cash by the state or the emperor, the profile of private owners of *ousiai* is perfectly explicable. However, a distinction should be made between creation of private *ousiai* out of any type of land through purchase, and sales of imperial land to private individuals. Economy of hypothesis makes the latter option less likely than the former. It is in other words certainly possible that some privately owned *ousiai* were not created out of imperial holdings.

The third possible mode of alienation is through gift. In the traditional interpretation, privately owned *ousiai* have been as regarded as imperial gifts, in direct continuity of the Ptolemaic *doreai*. In rejecting the theory of continuity between Ptolemaic and Roman practice, Parassoglou denied the possibility that Roman *ousiai* could consist of estates given by Roman emperors. Others have subsequently emphasized that a system of returnable *doreai* akin to that of the Ptolemies would go against the grain of Roman property devolution, with its strong emphasis on private property.⁷⁰ The objection is surely justified, but that does not mean that gifts could not be given. It needs to be stressed that the idea that Roman emperors gave gifts is in itself entirely unproblematic. In fact, that is what emperors were for.⁷¹ It is also highly relevant that much of imperial expenditure would be conceptualized in terms of *beneficia*. It is attested in many guises, some of them well-known.⁷² For example, from Augustus onwards, Julio-Claudian emperors enforced a stricter policy for entrance into the senate, but at the same time helped individual senators unable to meet the property qualification with gifts, all with an

⁶⁹ Cf. Rathbone (1993) 103 in a somewhat similar vein.

⁷⁰ So Rowlandson (1998) 55-56 quoted above in the introduction.

⁷¹ The idea that emperors were supposed to give is well expressed in the reaction of the Alexandrian's when Vespasian increases the burdens instead of giving gifts. He does not know how to be an emperor, they shout in the theatre – see Dio 65.8.6. Similarly in Suet., *Titus* 8.1 the emperor exclaims to have lost a day when he realises he has done nothing for anybody for a whole day. See now also from a slightly different perspective Laurence (2009) 18-20.

⁷² For an overview, see Millar (1977) 133-139, showing that emperors were not only expected to give gifts on almost any imaginable occasion, but that sometimes gifts were even openly requested. A good short vignette of the possible range of gifts can be found in Suet., *Gaius* 17-18, Augustus' *Res Gestae* offer a sense of the immense scale.

eye on upholding the prestige of the senate.⁷³ It is usually not stated how such gifts were effectuated – they may have comprised of money, but estates seem just as likely. The principle did not only concern needy senators. Admittedly, actual gifts of estates to individuals are not documented in the literary sources all too often, but that the practice occurred is certain.⁷⁴ The scale and common nature of the gifts is indicated by the fact that the writings of the *agrimensores* contain short statements showing that each region had a separate register, a *liber beneficiorum*, in which such imperial gifts were recorded.

As stated above, it is certainly possible that some privately held *ousiai* were created out of land purchased on the free market. However, it is just as likely that some of these *ousiai* were imperial gifts. The range of owners found directly after Actium makes it likely that Octavian distributed Egyptian lands to his family and friends. Throughout the Julio-Claudian period people who had no obvious personal interest in Egypt but who were close to the emperor are found in the possession of *ousiai*. It is precisely this profile that makes it likely that they obtained their estates through imperial favour.

If a substantial number of *ousiai* were gifts, this might suggest continuity with the Ptolemaic system. However, the crucial difference with Ptolemaic *doreai* was that Roman gifts did not automatically revert to the giver.⁷⁵ In Roman law a gift was in principle irrevocable and entailed a definitive change in ownership.⁷⁶ The *ousiai* were not in temporary possession and did not revert automatically to the emperor at the death of their owner.⁷⁷ In the case of any imperial gift an emperor might revoke one of his *beneficia* for specific reasons, but this was certainly not standard practice,⁷⁸ and will not

⁷³ Nicolet (1984) 94-96.

⁷⁴ Millar (1977) 175: ‘the conferring of properties was among the principal forms of benefaction which he [the emperor] had at his disposal’.

⁷⁵ A possible Roman alternative by which estates could *de facto* circulate is formed by usufruct. However, the use of the genitive and the fact that the estate-names were kept in use long afterwards suggest full ownership.

⁷⁶ The exception is formed by gifts by a patron to a freedman that turned ungrateful; these could be revoked during the life-time of the *patronus*. See *Fr. Vat.* 272.

⁷⁷ The statement of Thompson (1987) 558 that ‘such grants were limited to the lifetime of the recipient and their return to the crown and subsequent disposal results in complicated descriptions of the plots returned’ (cf. also 560, where she speaks of ‘temporary alienation’) is incorrect. There was no automatic guarantee that the estates reverted to the emperor at the death of the holder.

⁷⁸ See Suet., *Claud.* 29.1, where this is seen as characteristic of Claudius’ arbitrary behaviour.

have been the rule in the case of the *ousiai* obtained from the emperor. The fact that *ousiai* came to be known under the name of the person who received it and not under the name of the emperor who donated it, is in itself significant: they were held in full ownership. As gifts indicated a real change in ownership, this may also explain why we find privately-held *ousiai* not returning to imperial hands. As people could acquire *ousiai* through different means, it remains uncertain whether it applies to all of them.

Just as there were multiple ways through which imperial property could be acquired, there existed more than one way through which *ousiai* could be alienated. They could be bequeathed, sold, and given away. Establishing in individual cases which mode of transfer was used is impossible, though sometimes it may be possible to determine a degree of probability. The precise proportion of these modes is impossible to establish, but gifts will have played a large role. Unlike the Ptolemaic system, the *ousiai* thus obtained did not automatically return to the ruler.

Implications

The aim of this article has been to analyse the redistributive elements in the way emperors handled their personal properties. This has been done on the basis of a study of the *ousiai* that appear in Egypt in the Julio-Claudian period. By way of conclusion, it might be useful to summarize the findings and explore what they imply.

No direct continuity with the Ptolemaic treatment of *doreai* should be assumed. In the first place the sources not show a direct connection in holdings. Secondly, it seems likely that *ousiai* could be created out of *doreai*, but also out of other parts of Ptolemaic land. Lastly, the simple fact remains that *ousiai* were named *ousiai* - not *doreai*.

At the same time, it is difficult to escape from the idea that some form of redistribution was at work. The estates were owned by a fairly circumscribed set of owners most of whom can be connected to the emperor: some were simply members of his family, others

prominent friends or loyalists, some freedmen. The *ousiai* seem to have circulated between them at a relatively high speed. Many ultimately ended up in imperial hands, but it is striking that attestations of actual ownership by Julio-Claudian emperors are relatively scarce. This suggests that emperors not only acquired property, but also alienated it. The question is how.

I have argued that there is no need to assume anything but normal Roman processes of imperial property devolution to understand the circulation of *ousiai*. This does not mean that the transmission itself was simple, for there were various modes through which property could be obtained and various means through which it could be alienated. This resulted in a complex system of what might be called indirect redistribution. Given the fact that multiple modes were used for the transfer of property, it was not a completely closed system, and not based on automatisms. *Ousiai* could be created out of many sources, some imperial, others not.

It may perhaps be objected that the difference between the Ptolemaic *doreai* and the Roman *ousiai* was more one of theory than of practice. It concerned the legal context within which the distribution took place. Although the legal conception differed, the way property was handled to establish relationships of power was functionally the same. However, the crucial difference was that the Roman pattern of redistribution was indirect. The Roman system was fundamentally open and therefore generated its own dynamic.

All owners of *ousiai* participated in the system in the same way. For example, members of the imperial family had the same means of acquisition and disposal of the large estates at their disposal as others. At the same time, realities of power created a strongly hierarchical network. The position of the imperial freedmen in the system will in reality have been different from that of a wealthy senator.– notwithstanding their sometimes extremely high degree of influence. The focus of the system as a whole was clearly on the emperor.

Given the centrality of the emperor in the process, it seems likely that this was not a truly zero-sum game, but rather that it was a slowly cumulative process. Sooner or later, the *ousiai* ended up in imperial hands. One is reminded of the Gary Lineker definition of football: ‘Football is a simple game; 22 men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans always win.’⁷⁹ If so, the creation of the *ousiakos logos* and the absorption of most *ousiai* in it by the Flavians completed a process that had been going on for some time.

As is only too well known, land was regarded as a stable form of wealth in the Roman world, and for more than one reason seen as preferable to other types of wealth. Landed wealth clearly formed the basis for the social hierarchy of the Roman world. The Egyptian *ousiai* show that in reality circulation of estates could be relatively high. No matter how we perceive the relative importance of the various modes of transfer, it must be clear that the imperial property of Julio-Claudian Egypt was in constant flux. Constant additions were made, through various modes, and in various parcels. And just as frequently, subtractions occurred. An emperor acquired different parts of his wealth at different moments, and seems to have busied himself continuously with redistributing it. Rulers showed their power not through actual ownership of property, but both by receiving it and by distributing it. The same applies to the other *ousiai*-owners. In the case of Egyptian *ousiai*, the ideological preference for landed wealth should not be confused with stability in landholding.

What the findings mean for the interpretation of the economy of Roman Egypt is more difficult to determine. That they do matter is clear, if only because the *ousiai* comprised large tracts of property. Both modernist and primitivist elements can be discerned in the system of indirect redistribution. On the one hand, the high degree of fluctuation and the transfers of wealth by a variety of means suggest a complex market in land. On the other hand, redistribution with a central role for a gift-giving emperor vitiates the emergence of price-setting market mechanisms. The simultaneous occurrence of both modernistic and

⁷⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gary_Lineker; after Britain lost the semi-finals to Germany in the world cup of 1990.

primitivistic elements suggests that neither forms an appropriate framework for interpretation. Perhaps a better framework is provided by the concept of the tributary economy as presented by Peter Bang. At a more modest, less theoretical level, they do at any rate point to the centrality of the economic role of the emperor. Perhaps this is not an earth-shattering conclusion to derive from a study of imperial property, but it is important to realise because so many other high-ranking members of society participated in the system.

Socially the interpretation seems much less difficult. The *ousiai*-system allowed emperors to create their own network, and others to participate in it. This network overlapped to some extent with the formalised social hierarchy of the *ordines* that they purported to uphold at all costs, but at the same time it clearly competed with it. The network of *ousiai* owners comprised of family members, friends and supporters, regionally important persons, and influential freedmen. It is striking how limited the number of participants actually was, and that it also comprised regionally important persons.. Given the fact that patterns of property transfer were not completely fixed, the network was relatively open. It was also relatively unstable: people could rise in it, or fall from grace.

What is striking is the way it functioned. The currency used to create the network was land. In a society in which elite-formation depended to a large extent on landed wealth the transfer of large estates was hardly a trivial matter. We are far removed from a world in which status is merely expressed through the exchange of small, symbolic presents. The transfer of land was underpinned by an ideology of social expectations and obligations that was apparently so strong that no formalisation was needed and a notion of voluntary behaviour could be maintained. At the same time the process was subject to vagaries, and some room for manoeuvre was built into the system. One's position was continuously open to negotiation and reaffirmation. Dangerous games could be played.

A last question remains – but a crucial one. The argument that has been developed with regard to the *ousiai* can be placed in the context of a scholarly tendency to regard Roman

Egypt primarily as *Roman*, i.e. as part of the Roman world. The corollary is that Egypt functions as a laboratory to study phenomena that are more difficult to observe elsewhere because the requisite sources are lacking. If the circulation of *ousiai* can be explained by Roman principles of property devolution, the question rises to what extent the Egyptian *ousiai* can help to understand the use of imperial property elsewhere. Did it circulate in the same manner? There are sources that point in such direction,⁸⁰ but it should be immediately conceded that the question is far too large to answer here, and would require detailed regional analysis. The analysis is obscured by two factors. The first is that often we lack the evidence for transfers of ownership that the Egyptian naming patterns offers. The second is that most modern studies focus on the increase of imperial land, and therefore on imperial estates alone, not on circulation and distribution of estates among a wider set of members of the elite. However, on logical grounds there is no reason to assume that the situation elsewhere was very different from that in Egypt.

⁸⁰ In Africa Proconsularis in the case of imperial *saltus* very similar naming patterns are found in which former-owners keep being mentioned long after the incorporation in the imperial estates, see MacMullen (2000) 34. In the city of Rome, the *horti* (the pleasure gardens around the city) seem to circulate in a pattern reminiscent of the *ousiai*, including their eventual incorporation in the imperial estates.

Owners of Egyptian *ousiai* of the Julio-Claudian period

Source: Parassoglou (1978) app. 1-2

* = no attested connection with imperial *ousiai*

1.	Augustus	
2.	M. Vipsanius Agrippa (Postumus?)	
3.	Valeria or Iulia Agrippina	
4.	Claudia Antonia (Claudii filia)	
5.	Antonia minor (= Antonia Drusi = Antonia augusta)	
6.	Claudius	
7.	Claudius' children	
8.	Gaius	
9.	Germanicus Iulius Caesar	
10.	Germanicus' children	
11.	Livia	
12.	Claudia Livilla	
13.	Livilla's children	
14.	Valeria Messalina	
15.	Nero	
16.	Tiberius	
17.	Claudia Akte	freedwoman of Claudius, mistress of Nero
18.	C. Iulius Alexandros	
19.	Anthos	slave or freedman of Germanicus
20.	*M. Aponius Saturninus	
21.	*Tib. Claudius Balbillus	
22.	*Tib. Iulius Nikanor	
23.	Camelius	poss. a freedman or slave of Claudius
24.	Calvia Crispinilla	mistress of Nero
25.	Dionysodoros	poss. the strategos of the Arsinoite nome between bef. 12-45 A.D.
26.	Tib. Cl. Doryphoros	freedman of Claudius, <i>a libellis</i> under Nero
27.	Eros	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian
28.	Falcidius	unknown
29.	Iucundus	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian
30.	Kharmos	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian
31.	Khresimos	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian
32.	Khrestos	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian
33.	Latinus	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian
34.	Lurius	prob. M. Lurius, commander at Actium
35.	Gaius Maecenas	
36.	Menas or Menatius	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian
37.	Tib.Cl. Narkissos	freedman of Claudius
38.	*Norbana Clara	
39.	Onesimos	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian

40.	M.Ant. Pallas	freedman of Antonia Drusi, <i>a rationibus</i> under Claudius
41.	Petronius	prob. the prefect of Egypt 24-21 B.C.
42.	Rutillius	unknown
43.	Tib.Cl. Sarapion	freedman of Claudius
44.	L. Annaeus Seneca	
45.	Severus	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian
46.	Sokrates	unknown; poss. imperial slave or freedman, or Alexandrian

Bibliography

- Bowman (1976): A.K. Bowman, 'Papyri and Roman imperial history, 1960-1975', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 66: 153-173.
- Broughton (1942): T.R.S. Broughton, 'Cleopatra and the treasure of the Ptolemies', *American Journal of Philology* 63: 328-332.
- Broughton (1985): T.R.S. Broughton, 'Cleopatra and the treasure of the Ptolemies. A note', *American Journal of Philology* 106: 115-116.
- Brunt (1966): P.A. Brunt, 'The fiscus and its development', *Journal of Roman Studies* 66: 75-91.
- Capponi (2005): L. Capponi, *Augustan Egypt. The creation of a Roman province* (New York and London).
- Crawford (1976): D.J. Crawford, 'Imperial estates', in: M.I. Finley, *Studies in Roman property* (Cambridge) 35-70.
- Crawford (1980): D.J. Crawford, 'The emperor as landowner', *The Classical Review* 30: 251-253.
- Hirschfeld (1902; 1913): O. Hirschfeld, 'Der Grundbesitz der römischen Kaiser in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten', *Klio* 2 (1902) 45-72 and 284-315, repr. in idem, *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin) 516-575.
- Kuhnke (1971): H.C. Kuhnke, *Ousiake ge. Domänenland in den Papyri der Prinzipatszeit* (Köln).
- MacMullen (1976): R. MacMullen, 'Two notes on imperial properties', *Athenaeum* 54: 19-36.
- MacMullen (2000): R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the time of Augustus* (New Haven and London).
- F. Millar, *The emperor in the Roman world (31 BC AD 337)* (London).
- Nicolet (1984): C. Nicolet, 'Augustus, government, and the propertied classes', in: F. Millar and E. Segal (eds.), *Caesar Augustus: seven aspects* (Oxford) 89-128.
- Parassoglou (1978): G.M. Parassoglou, *Imperial estates in Roman Egypt* (Amsterdam).
- Rathbone (1993): D. Rathbone, 'Egypt, Augustus and Roman taxation', *Cahiers du Centre G. Glotz* 4: 81-112.

- Rogers (1947): R.S. Rogers, 'The Roman emperors as heirs and legatees', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 78: 140-158.
- Rowlandson (1998): J. Rowlandson, *Landowners and tenants in Roman Egypt. The social relations of agriculture in the Oxyrhynchite nome* (Oxford).
- Shatzman (1975): I. Shatzman, *Senatorial wealth and Roman politics* (Coll. Latomus 142). (Brussels).
- Tacoma (forthcoming): L.E. Tacoma, 'Imperial estates (Egypt)', to appear in: *Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (Blackwell-Wiley).
- Thompson (1987): D.J. Thompson, 'Imperial estates' in: J. Wachter (ed.), *The Roman World* (London) vol.2., 555-567.
- Tomsin (1957): A. Tomsin, 'Notes sur les *ousiai* de l'époque romaine', *Studi in onore di Aristide Calderini e Roberto Paribeni* vol. 2(Milan) 211-224.
- Zabłocka (1967): J. Zabłocka, 'Die Bedeutung von *he ousia* in Inschriften aus der Kaiserzeit', *Klio* 49: 265-266.