CHAPTER 3

Looking for Singles in the Archaeological Record of Roman Egypt

Anna Boozer

1 Archaeology and Singles

While literary and documentary source material have long been used for family and demographic studies of the ancient world, the surviving material culture continues to be perceived as too epistemologically ambiguous for shedding light on the ancient family. In spite of such skepticism, both the abundance and the variety of archaeological material make it indispensable for studies of the ancient family, and in this case, the ancient single life. In contextualizing distinct temporal and geographical loci, archaeology serves not only to reconstruct a broad pattern of household materialities, but also to discern what factors led to particular household formations. This ability to provide both breadth and detail demonstrates how archaeology might contribute to ongoing discussions of singles in Antiquity.

This article looks for singles in the archaeological record of Roman Egypt. In doing so, there are four important considerations to keep in mind. First, identifying singles purely on the basis of material evidence and without any sort of written testimony is, to put it simply, not possible. The most critical issue with the archaeological data is ambiguity; what archaeological signatures suggest a single person? Even among documentary sources, questions of defining single-ness are fraught issues, particularly given the flux evident in all family forms. This issue is even more difficult for archaeologists, who often struggle to define single event horizons in the archaeological record, much less distinguish individual persons. Additional problems plague archaeological interpretations of the single life. Disparate qualities of data collection can significantly impact

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1 Nevett 1999:61–79. See also Jameson 1990.
2 See Laes, in this volume. See also DePaulo and Morris 2005a, 2005b.
our ability to reconstruct and compare archaeological material within and across sites. Moreover, all too often, archaeological data is poorly published or physically inaccessible to researchers. And, finally, data often is not interpreted in a way that allows for broad social questions to be asked of it; a complete re-evaluation of the material would be required before theoretical interpretations could be advanced.

Even when archaeology provides a mute or uncertain response to a question, basic reasoning about the possibilities is essential. For example, women and children were long ignored for their role in producing and using a substantial portion of the archaeological record. Recent research has demonstrated the value in considering age groups and genders beyond men in their prime of life when interpreting the archaeological evidence. Although we must remain cautious in how we interpret data, we do real conceptual harm to archaeological interpretation by ignoring a group that may have contributed to a substantial percentage of the material culture left behind.

In order to answer this call to include archaeological approaches in the study of singles in Antiquity, I first review Laslett’s household classification system, which was published in 1972. In doing so, I underscore where we might find singles among these forms and, in turn, identify where these forms might appear in the archaeological record. A necessary corollary to any current review of Laslett is the critiques that have come about in recent years. These critiques also provide direction for ways in which archaeology can further developments in household studies that grow out of Laslett’s model. This article provides four case studies of Romano-Egyptian archaeological material that speak directly to Laslett’s classification system, namely apartments, praesidia (remote garrisons), field houses and houses. These four case studies demonstrate both the particular circumstances of singleness, including short-term singleness, as well as the material conditions in which long-term or life-long singles resided. Finally, I conclude this article with a discussion of how archaeology can continue to contribute to our understanding of singles in Antiquity.

2 Household Classifications: Laslett 1972

The classic Cambridge household classification system, developed by Laslett in the 1972, distinguished between at least five different types of households:

1. Solitary households (one individual)
2. No-family households (roommates)
3. Simple or nuclear family households (conjugal couple residing with/without children; single-parent families)
4. Nuclear families with an elderly parent
5. Multiple family households (more than one conjugal couple residing together)

Rather than serving as stagnant categories, these five household types should be viewed as fluctuating over the years. These different forms of family composition should be understood as stages in a categorical model of household progression. Indeed, a single individual might experience all five of these household options during the life course.

For the purposes of this paper, it is notable that singles could be found in types 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. In other words, singles can be found in each and every one of the classification systems that Laslett provides. Singles turn out to be a dominant category to consider when employing the Laslett terminology for analyzing household structures.

3 Critiques of Laslett

It is undeniable that the Laslett household classification system has conceptual flaws and numerous scholars have critiqued Laslett’s model over the years. A particularly common thread of criticism is that Laslett’s system smooths over the considerable variety found among regional household forms in the Mediterranean. These local variations range from almost exclusively nuclear households to a system with a high percentage of complex family households. These variations would impact where we might look for singles.

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4 Laslett and Wall 1972. See also Laslett 1983.
5 In the recent past these “no-family households” typically consisted of unmarried siblings residing together, but it also could be people living in apartments above work spaces (an ancient example is Kom el Dikka, see below). Today these no-family households would be seen more frequently as apartment shares in expensive, large cities, such as New York, London or Tokyo.
How can archaeological data help to mitigate critiques of Laslett’s model? Let us look at three major categories of critiques leveled against his model.

First, critics urge scholars to remain mindful that real households were always a *process* rather than a category. Household boundaries are fluid, defined by the everyday practices and relationships of its members. These household forms can be shaped by marriage patterns, fertility and mortality rates. The family evolves over time through cycles of birth, marriage, death and divorce. Researchers have called this process “the family life cycle.” The order, contours and timing of these events are particular to individual families, although quantitative detail can be informative as well.

The call for more emphasis upon the family life cycle is valid, but an archaeological contribution to understanding singles as part of this process is limited. It is difficult for archaeology to differentiate fine-grained, short-term changes on the basis of the current data that we have available to us in most regions and time periods. Archaeologists require exceptionally well-preserved and well-defined contexts in order to sort out short-term household changes. Some scholars argue that even household-level change is beyond the ability of archaeologists to detect. This area of work should not be ignored, however, as there are ways around this issue. For example, we can consider various contexts for their physical role within different phases of a single life course even if we cannot follow the life course of a single individual from birth to death.

Second, there is considerable regional and local variety in families, which critics would like to see addressed more thoroughly. Archaeology can contribute enormously to addressing this issue. Although census data, and particularly the Roman census in Egypt, is an incredible resource for ancient demographic studies, this data is highly geographically and temporally circumscribed. Archaeology can provide additional regional texture to the data that we gain from census documents (among others).

Third, there is a pressing need to combine categorical, quantitative research with qualitative, in-depth studies of families. For example, Sacchi and Viazzo have suggested turning to qualitative sources where epigraphic and papyrological evidence does not exist. It is notable,

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7 Hammel 1984: 31; Wilk 1991; Wilk and Netting 1984: 5. For Roman Egypt, see Huebner 2013.
9 Neveit 2011. 10 See Huebner, in this volume.
however, that they do not consider (or even mention) the potential of material evidence for facilitating qualitative study of households.\textsuperscript{11} The urge for qualitative rather than quantitative studies of the family is noteworthy, although statistical analysis cannot and should not be discarded.\textsuperscript{12} Archaeological research can contribute substantially to gathering qualitative data on ancient families because we can provide access to the so-called ‘people without history’ whose lives went largely unrecorded in Antiquity.\textsuperscript{13}

4 Data and Analysis: Methods for Looking for Singles

This section introduces the methodology for finding singles in the archaeological record to determine how we should look for them and where they may have been located physically.

In the next section, I examine four different options for the physical location of singles in Roman Egypt: apartments (insulae) at Kom el-Dikka (Mediterranean coast), praesidia in the Eastern Desert, possible field houses in the Dakhleh Oasis (Western Desert) and houses in the Western Desert and the Fayum. The wide range in geographic locations is intended to mitigate against the bias of the Roman census data, which concentrates upon other locales in Roman Egypt.

For each case study I present a table summarizing the data sets employed as well as the assumptions I make. I also describe the Laslett category that the example addresses. In this way, I suggest viable contexts in which different types of singles may be found. These physical locales provide texture and depth to literary and documentary evidence.

My methods for finding singles are heavily dependent upon texts and cross-cultural comparisons. I have focused on archaeological contexts that documentary texts suggest would be likely locales for singles (apartments, praesidia, houses) or that cross-cultural comparisons reveal as a context deserving of further exploration in Roman Egypt (field houses). Rather than signaling a weakness, this cross-disciplinary work demonstrates the considerable gains scholars can make when employing a diverse range of evidence for answering nuanced research questions.

\textsuperscript{11} Sacchi and Viazzo 2014: 235, 239–41.
\textsuperscript{12} On this critique, see Sacchi and Viazzo 2014. On the need for statistics, see Bowersock 1997.
\textsuperscript{13} Wolf focused upon globalization and its impact upon both “civilized” and “uncivilized” people in his well-known book (Wolf 1997). The term “people without history” has been used beyond this period and framework to include others who have been ignored in traditional macro-histories.
5 Case Studies of Singles in the Archaeological Record

(1) Apartments

The term *insula* (pl. *insulae*, literally ‘island’) denoted a city block and also a multistoried apartment building. This form of housing was essential in the urban areas of the Roman Empire due to population increases and the rising costs of land in densely occupied areas. Survivals of apartment buildings have been poor in major cities such as Rome, where they are presumed to have been the dominant housing form. Ostia, located at the mouth of the Tiber River and the major port for Rome, provides our best examples of apartment houses. These Ostian apartments could have multiples entrances into the building. Central courts helped to provide air and light into the individual apartments. The exterior could include shops at street level.

A number of urban apartment blocks have been discovered in Egypt, of which the complex at Kom el-Dikka is the prime example. Given that most of Alexandria has remained unexcavated, the ratio of public buildings, palaces and parks to shops and housing, both apartment housing and houses, remains unknown. Moreover, the proportion and distribution of these various types of structures would have changed over time and these diachronic shifts are not well understood.

Kom el-Dikka has undergone excavation since the 1960s by Polish archaeologists, and excavations continue to this day. This site is the most

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Primarily young and male; older males also possible</th>
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<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Short- and long-term occupancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why</td>
<td>Artisans and apprentices</td>
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<tr>
<td>How</td>
<td>Suites of data (archaeological and papyrological); comparisons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1. *Kom el-Dikka Apartments*

14 Boozer 2012; Gates 2011: 356.
15 Rodziewicz 1984: 66–234, pl. III. Also on Kom el-Dikka, see Rodziewicz 1976, 1991. Some apartment blocks consisting mostly of two-room flats, with a similar arrangement, have been excavated at Abu Mina, by the DAI since 1998, in the northwestern region of the site, beside the North Bath (Grossmann and Pfeiffer 2003: 22–28, fig. 1). These blocks appear to have been rest houses for pilgrims and travellers. See also al-Taher, Abd al-Hafiz and Grossmann 2003: fig. 1; Grossmann et al. 1998; Grossmann 2007: 132. This site also could be explored for the study of singles.
16 Delia 1988: 279.
extensive and intensive site available to us within ancient Alexandria. In the early Roman Period, Kom el-Dikka had luxurious urban residences that were damaged or destroyed and subsequently abandoned by the mid-fourth century CE. At this stage, the entire area was rebuilt with new structures. These structures include a small theater (or *odeion*), a bath

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Figure 3.1 Map of Egypt.
Drawn by M. Matthews after a commission by A. Boozer (CC-BY).

complex and a set of auditoria, which probably belonged to an educational institution. This area may have included a gymnasium complex.\footnote{For a summary of the visible evidence, see Bagnall and Rathbone 2004: 62–67.}

The Kom el-Dikka apartment building is located near the baths. There is an earlier brick structure (third-fourth century CE) and a later, larger brick-and-block construction (fifth century CE) with apartments or shops to the west. The apartment building at Kom el-Dikka appears to date from the early fourth to the mid-seventh centuries CE. It is a two-, possibly three-story building with a number of one- or two-room apartments surrounding a narrow central court. There must have been a balcony
running around the court that could have been used to access the apartments upstairs since there is no portico. A stairway opposite the entrance on its east, narrow, side, provided access to these apartments. There is a common latrine next to the stairs.

Evidence for ivory working, as found in various dumps, as well as glassmaking, as found in dumps and in kilns, suggests that this complex is associated with craft production. Parallels to the association between artisanal and domestic space can best be found in Rome and Ostia. This craft production, and particularly the ivory carving, appears to have been on an industrial scale.\textsuperscript{19}

The apartment complex at Kom el-Dikka has not been published fully yet, but a viable hypothesis for its use must connect it to the craft production areas. As such, it is likely that at least some of the apartments in this complex housed artisans and their apprentices who were learning

\textsuperscript{19} St. Clair 2003: 36.
the crafts produced here, namely glassmaking and ivory working. These apprentices were almost certainly singles.\textsuperscript{20}

According to recent research, the circulation of children and young adults to learn various trades appears to have occurred in the ancient Mediterranean. Dixon has described the mobility of children between families in the Roman world.\textsuperscript{21} The institution of apprenticeship of adolescents that we know best for Roman Egypt, thanks to the papyrological evidence, can also be regarded as life-cycle service.\textsuperscript{22} Farmers and artisans sent their own children to other peasants or artisans to help them out or let them learn a trade. In turn, these families might host the children of other families in their own household, while providing them with training.\textsuperscript{23} These apprentices would live with the family and be fed and clothed. After a few years they would return home with the new skills they had acquired.\textsuperscript{24}

The juxtaposition of the Kom el-Dikka apartment complex with intensive craft production suggests a possible urban solution to housing craft workers and apprentices. Rather than incorporating apprentices into houses, it is possible that crafts people and apprentices resided in these small apartments. In Laslett’s system, these arrangements would be termed ‘no-family households’ and the singles found here were most likely male.\textsuperscript{25}

(2) Praedia

All Roman soldiers were banned from contracting legal marital unions, probably from the time of Augustus until 197 CE, when the marriage ban was lifted.\textsuperscript{26} Despite this ban, we have ample papyrological data suggesting that soldiers and veterans produced large households.\textsuperscript{27} Illegitimacy obviously led to some complications for inheritance, and accounts of these legal issues can be found in documentary sources. The legally required single

\textsuperscript{20} Alston and Alston 1997: 207. It was not uncommon to find singles in cities in Roman Egypt. Alston and Alston also note the concentration of craft areas in cities, which would promote the movement of singles into urban areas.

\textsuperscript{21} Dixon 1999. On the Greek world, see Bremmer 1999.

\textsuperscript{22} Bradley 1991a; Brewster 1917; Herrmann 1958; Westermann 1914. \textsuperscript{23} Bradley 1991a: 109.

\textsuperscript{24} Van Minnen argues that we find only very few freeborn females among the apprentices because parents of freeborn females of marriageable age kept them at home to ensure their virginity (van Minnen 1998: 201). Cases in which female apprentices are found (n=3 in van Minnen’s study) show them living with women (n=2) or a married couple (n=1). This does not mean that freeborn women did not learn or practice a trade; they just learned it at home (Bradley 1991a: 201).

\textsuperscript{25} van Minnen 1998. \textsuperscript{26} Alston 1995: 54–55; Campbell 1978; Phang 2001: 245.

\textsuperscript{27} Phang 2001: 296–99, 305.
status of a Roman soldier should not, therefore, be taken *a priori* as evidence of soldiers not forming families.

All locales, however, did not equally allow for Roman soldiers to develop family entanglements, be they legal or not. For example, soldiers stationed at well-fortified garrisons (*praesidia*) in remote areas would have had fewer opportunities for forming family ties. There were simply fewer people with whom they could form relationships. One such locale to consider is Egypt’s Eastern Desert. In this remote locale, garrisons can be found on
the road from Koptos to Myos Hormos and the Red Sea, and in the quarries of Mons Claudianus, Didymoi, Aphrodites Orous, Kompasi, Dios and Xeron. The building of the *praesidia* along the recently constructed stretch of road from Phoinikon (*Laqeita*) to Phalakro was new under Roman rule and seems to have happened under Vespasian, probably around 76–79 CE. Desert products (e.g. porphyry) and trade items from the Red Sea were important to Egypt’s Roman rulers. Moreover, the Eastern Desert was important for military control of the desert.

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28 Sidebotham, Hense and Nouwens 2008: 19.
and guarding against marauders.\(^{30}\) The *praesidia* served to maintain boundaries and to control and guard trade goods.\(^{31}\) Each garrison would have contained approximately 15 men.\(^{32}\)

The *praesidia* themselves are small structures that resemble miniature Roman army camps.\(^{33}\) There were pragmatic and ideological considerations for this resemblance; the construction was familiar and easy to replicate while also signaling a perpetual Roman presence, even in the barren desert. Most of the *praesidia* are rectilinear and were constructed with materials found at hand, such as cobbles and small boulders that were laid without mortar. Defensive towers often are placed on the corners and surrounding the primary entrance gate. Many of these *praesidia* had protective deities and shrines associated with them. A large well (*hydroema*) can be found in the center of most of these garrisons. Abutting the interior walls of the structure were storage rooms

\(^{30}\) Maxfield 1996.  
\(^{31}\) Bagnall 1977.  
\(^{32}\) Bülow-Jacobsen 2013: 564.  
\(^{33}\) Sidebotham, Hense and Nouwens 2008: 162.
and the rooms of the individual soldiers stationed there. Some of these structures had a small intramural bath.\textsuperscript{34}

Records of communication along the roads and between these praesidia preserve concerns expressing both professional and personal circumstances.\textsuperscript{35} Ostraka found in excavations of the praesidia provide ample details about the daily life of soldiers stationed here. From these records, we learn that the soldiers were charged with protecting the roads and aiding with quarrying duties as their official roles. They also seem to have felt the need to frequent prostitutes.\textsuperscript{36} For example, \textit{O.Dios.} inv. 39 provides one such account:

\begin{quote}
... Herakles, the horseman, took the letters, but did not leave until the tenth hour of the night (c. 4:00 a.m.), which you can verify, (in margin: ‘I found it’) because he was lying with a woman.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Prostitutes were transported between the praesidia, from one contract to the next, by donkey.\textsuperscript{38}

The need for prostitutes may indicate the single status of these soldiers and their need to find some respite from their singleness in this barren desert. These prostitutes also could be explored as another group of singles in Antiquity.

As it seems that there was local recruitment of Egyptian legions, it is possible that some of these praesidia soldiers had prior family arrangements in other areas of Egypt.\textsuperscript{39} For example, \textit{O.Florida} 15 and 17 show families of soldiers trying to obtain food for them while they are posted to the Eastern Desert. The loneliness, disconnection and even ennui found among the soldiers also is attested.\textsuperscript{40} Even so, the most viable interpretation of these praesidia soldiers’ family situation is that they were single for at least the duration of the time that they occupied these structures.

Locating singles within these praesidia required ample use of documentary and comparative source material, but the environment as well as the archaeology itself contributes to interpretations of singles living in these structures. Once again, this case study provides an example of Laslett’s ‘no-family households’.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Sidebotham 2011: 162–67.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Bülow-Jacobsen 2013: 561.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Cuvigny 2005, 2003.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Bülow-Jacobsen 2013: 563. H. Cuvigny published this ostrakon as \textit{P.Worp} 51.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Cuvigny 2003: 374–95.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Haensch 2012: 72, \textit{ILS} 2483. See also Bagnall 1977: 70.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Bagnall 1977: 70.
\end{itemize}
Field houses are very small, seasonally occupied structures. They are best known from the American Southwest, but they also can be found elsewhere. These structures helped farmers to cope with the inconvenient distances between residences and agricultural areas. Cross-culturally, inhabitants of field houses were single or temporarily without a family while they occupied these structures.

The catalyst for developing field houses centers upon the need to minimize transportation costs. Some authors have thought that they represent both the effects of shifting cultivation and the beginnings of its demise. Preucel, for his part, considers the field house strategy as a form of agricultural intensification. This intensification develops in response to escalating competition over arable land as a result of population growth and the clustering of people into larger settlements or cities. Field houses, he argues, develop in order to minimize the costs of transportation to and from distant villages.

Preucel’s observations find particular relevance in the harsh conditions of the Saharan desert. These unforgiving desert conditions constrain the development of larger nucleated settlements. Many Saharan oases have multiple small villages spread through the palm groves in order to reduce the travel distance between dwellings and gardens. Urbanism has been a rare and episodic phenomenon in the Sahara as a result of these environmental constraints.

Given Preucel’s reasoning concerning the

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<th>Table 3.3. Field Houses</th>
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<td>Who</td>
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<td>Duration</td>
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<td>Why</td>
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<td>How</td>
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41 Kohler 1992. See also Kolb and Sneed 1997; Kolb 1997.  
42 See Laes, in this volume, for definitions of singleness.  
45 See Fletcher 1995 for a link between maximum settlement area and communication range and travel capacity.  
46 See papers in the forthcoming Mattingly and Sterry volume Urbanism and State Formation.
Figure 3.7 Sketch map indicating the location of the columbarium farmhouses in Western Dakhleh, made in 1908.

Figure 3.8  Plans of columbarium farmhouses drawn in 1908.
From H. E. Winlock, ed., Dakhleh Oasis: Journal of a Camel Trip made in 1908. New York, 1936,
plate XII; reproduced with the permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Figure 3.9  Photos of the Dakhleh Oasis columbarium farmhouse, taken in 1908. From H. E. Winlock, ed., Dakhleh Oasis: Journal of a Camel Trip made in 1908. New York, 1916, plate XVI; reproduced with the permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Figure 3.10 Plan of Columbarium Farmhouse 33/380-H6-2 or “House VII”.
conditions required for field houses to develop, it would seem logical to expect these structures during periods of incipient and full-blown urbanism.

As far as I am aware, no one working in Roman Egypt has identified field houses yet. This lack is surprising since these structures could mitigate against the harsh desert conditions found in the Eastern and Western Deserts. Given the intensification of urbanism in the Western Desert under Roman rule, this region offers a prime locale to look for these structures.

I suggest that the so-called “columbarium farm houses” of the Dakhleh Oasis might be candidates for field houses. Even if these particular structures later prove not to be field houses, the search for field houses in Roman Egypt should be pursued. The environmental and urban developmental pressures that would create the need for these structures are in place. Moreover, the spatial distribution and architectural features of these structures reinforce the impression that they were employed to reduce transportation expenditures within an urbanized, harsh environment.

The so-called 'columbarium farm house' occurs singly, in pairs or (less often) as part of a larger grouping. The name 'columbarium' was introduced in Herbert E. Winlock’s 1936 publication of his research visit to the Dakhleh Oasis in 1908. The name derives from the incorporation of a pigeon loft into the structure of each of these houses. The distribution of this house is oasis-wide, although they seem to occur more frequently in the western half of the oasis. Some well-preserved examples can be found near Amheida on the road leading out to the Qârat el-Muzzawaqa burial ground. The sizes of these farm houses are variable, but they are typically square in plan view and their dimensions tend to vary from 5 x 5 m to 9 x 5 m. These dimensions are tentative at this time since only one columbarium farmhouse has been excavated (see below).

Winlock describes the structures that he saw in the vicinity of Deir el-Haggar as small structures standing to two stories. Most had two vaulted...
rooms on the ground floor, but one of them (Winlock Building C) had six. Access to the second floor, where the pigeons were housed, was by means of a ladder. Another columbarium has an open court in the center, which measured about 8 m square.

The only columbarium to be examined in any detail is one known as House VII at site 33/390-H6–2, which is located in western Dakhleh. The walls stand nearly four meters high. As is typical of these structures in Dakhleh, it is remarkably well preserved. This house belongs to a widely dispersed group of eleven buildings. This village is situated on a flat area of sandstone bedrock. The use of such natural “turtle backs” for habitation is common in Egypt as good agricultural land was in great demand and was protected from construction. North of this bedrock, good arable land can be found. This farm house group is closer to the escarpment foothills than to the southern perimeter of the oasis and is 2.5 km northeast from Deir el-Haggar. Given its location, Trimithis (Roman Period Amheida) would have been the closest city.

The outer perimeter wall of House VII encloses a space of about 22 m x 15 m. There is a single entrance on the east side, which gives into an open space that is the northern half of the whole enclosed area. The living space and the actual columbarium building occupy the southern half of the enclosure.

The northern half of the courtyard was open to the sky and contained a single room (no. 3) in the northwest corner. This rectangular room, approximately 2.75 x 4.65 m, is entered from the east side and utilizes the outer wall for two of its own. The floor of this chamber was bare bedrock and the fill consisted solely of a 3 cm compacted layer of animal droppings and straw. The stable, for a small flock of domestic animals, is a typical component of Egyptian farmhouses. Apart from this shed, the northern half of the courtyard is featureless. The southern half contained the living quarters. There are two parallel, rectangular rooms (nos. 1 and 2), each 5 x 2.15 m in size. The entrance to each is through an arched doorway in the north wall, and there is a connecting doorway between them that was cut through after the building was completed.

Mills found only one floor level in his excavation of the House VII ground floor. There was little occupational debris, suggesting a short occupation and planned departure. Adobe floors wear easily and require

numerous episodes of repair and replastering to maintain them. Low artifact densities suggest that individuals had time to plan the removal of their belongings.

Full reports of the architectural features, ceramics and small finds are not available, but the preliminary reports are already informative. For example, a pair of small domestic ovens (no. 4) were found. Special jars used for the pigeon nests confirm the use of the columbarium for housing these birds.

The most likely inhabitants of field houses would be men, possibly from the same family, who were temporarily single. These men could be considered to be living in ‘no-family households’ because they were not a conjugal pair. It is also possible, but unlikely, that a single person lived alone in a field house, thereby occupying Laslett’s first category of a single person living alone. In either case, it seems likely that the occupants were temporarily single, having a family living in a city or large settlement in reasonably close proximity, but visited infrequently during the heavy labor periods of the agricultural season.

(4) Houses

A house can be understood as a physical structure, while a household defines a group of individuals sharing a common dwelling, usually family members and possibly some biologically unrelated members. The physical houses of ordinary Romano-Egyptians were modest, consisting of two or more rooms. They were rectangular, square or sometimes more complicated in their footprints. The majority of Karanis houses found in the center of the settlement were about 50 m square in their footprint.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Family members, domestic or agricultural servants, slaves, lodgers or apprentices; male or female; broad age range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Short-term, medium-term, long-term, and temporarily single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why</td>
<td>Singles ubiquitous despite being ‘invisible’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How</td>
<td>Documentary sources; archaeology will be mute</td>
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Table 3.4. Houses

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60 Boozer 2015: 152–53.  
61 Boozer 2015: 406; LaMotta and Schiffer 1999; Schiffer 1987.  
63 Hope 1979: 194–95 and plate XIX.11.  
64 Depraetere 2005.
They were multistoried, and so the total square footage of the structure would have been larger, depending on the number of floors. Small houses, of about 30 m square or so for their footprints, were found at the edges of the town.\footnote{Given the potential of field houses, these houses should be fully re-examined. Unfortunately, little can be found about them in the published reports.}
Singles residing with families either could be relatives or they could be from the non-family category of household members. These singles could reside with families for anything from a few weeks to a couple of years, or even a lifetime. Singles residing with their extended families should be
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expected in Roman Egypt. One of the signature characteristics of the Mediterranean family model is the importance of extended kin who might live with the so-called immediate family.\textsuperscript{66}

The number of family members in the Romano-Egyptian household ideally increased as the parents entered old age. Culturally, the elderly were respected and valued household members. The continuously evolving roles and standings of its members naturally created individual changes, but elders were not physically and socially isolated in the manner we have come to expect of most modern nuclear families.\textsuperscript{67} Both daughters and sons were involved in the support of their elderly parents, even if to different degrees and functions. It is certain that some of these elderly persons were single as single status becomes more demographically significant in old age.

Non-familial singles might include domestic or agricultural servants, slaves, lodgers or apprentices. Slaves seem to have played a rather negligible role in households below the social elite in the Roman world. While the Roman elite household of Rome, Herculaneum or the great Roman landowners’ estates required a large slave population, households of the standard Romano-Egyptian type seem to have owned at most one or two, and then mainly female, slaves.\textsuperscript{68}

As a result, the singles we might expect within the Romano-Egyptian household likely will be family members, servants, lodgers or the aforementioned apprentices. Archaeology will be mute for most of these possible categories of singles. This ambiguity is normal when considering individual household members. It is difficult, if not impossible, to attribute objects to specific household members, although one can make logical hypotheses when a contextual analysis is employed.\textsuperscript{69}

There are additional issues that make identifying singles in Romano-Egyptian houses more difficult than identifying specific genders or age groups. First, the single person may be kin and there are no specific material correlates to this status that would materially distinguish this individual from the rest of the family. Second, apprentices are usually

\textsuperscript{66} The significance of the extended, often multigenerational kin groups is a topic of some controversy. Richard Saller and Brent Shaw minimized the significance of this group in epithe
t\textsuperscript{ts} (Shaw and Saller 1984), which others, notably Huebner, have argued against (Huebner 2013).

\textsuperscript{67} Rupprecht 1998.

\textsuperscript{68} Bagnall and Frier 2006. See also Culbertson 2011 on the Roman East more broadly.

\textsuperscript{69} I attempted to attribute some artifact assemblages and frequency of room usage to specific gender and age groups in my excavation report for House B2 from Trimithis (Roman Amheida) in the Dakhleh Oasis (Boozer forthcoming-a). This analysis was possible due to the preservation of the structure and the way in which specialists analyzed the material.
treated like family members, and therefore also are invisible archaeologically.

Third, domestic furniture was modest and preserves poorly so we cannot attempt to identify singles and additions to houses through beds and other items. Fourth, houses of most families were small and the ways in which they used space changed throughout the time of day and year, which leaves behind confusing and even conflicting material signatures. For example, areas for accounting become areas for spinning linen, and then become areas for sleeping. The genders, age groups and (for our purposes here) marital status of the people using this area become intertwined and may be impossible for archaeologists to disentangle.

Despite these caveats, we would do a conceptual disservice to our understanding of domestic life if we did not admit to the possibility and, indeed, likelihood, that singles occupied houses. We also may devise logical strategies for surmising the presence of singles in houses if we retain a strong element of caution. First, the houses of Roman Egypt were easily modified to accommodate changing circumstances because they were made predominantly of mud brick. If houses are excavated and analyzed closely, we can discern physical modifications to the structures to allow for a greater number of people. In particular, additions that are not clustered with the rest of the rooms of the structure might reveal non-familial household additions.

Second, concerns for security within the house can be discerned in papyrological and archaeological evidence. Some families would lock internal doors in houses to protect individuals and possessions from non-family members. We could look at house plans and at door construction to discern door bolts that would have been used for this construction. Additionally, the presence of locks on boxes and the like may provide additional clues that security was a concern. As is usual in archaeology, the confluence of multiple material signatures will be more persuasive than an isolated signature suggesting singleness.

The houses that included singles would most likely be Laslett’s “simple or nuclear family household”, “nuclear family with elderly parent household”, or a “multiple family household”.

6 Conclusion

Even if Laslett’s 1972 model is now dated, it provides a useful comparative tool and illustrative device. For the purposes of this paper, Laslett’s model
reminds us that singles can be found across all of his categories. Indeed, I have explored examples for each of Laslett’s five categories in the four case studies provided. At this stage it is useful to re-examine the possibility of ‘finding’ singles in the archaeological record of Roman Egypt as well as considering how they might be located archaeologically in other regions and time periods.

Most fundamentally, it must be made clear that singles cannot be identified securely in the archaeological record. Despite this negative statement, I argue that there is conceptual harm in ignoring singles. Singles were a known group of people who produced and used a significant proportion of the material record. Ignoring this category of individuals is conceptually erroneous.

Moreover, this article has suggested that we can provide best-guess scenarios for the physical location of singles by using a holistic approach to the data as well as employing cross-cultural comparisons. The four case studies employed demonstrate how we might approach the material signatures associated with singles. These case studies may help to illustrate the potential for future work to incorporate singles into our conceptions of craft production, the military, agricultural production and domestic life.

Moreover, I suggest that archaeology can contribute substantially to redressing critiques of Laslett’s model. The four case studies have demonstrated some possibilities for answering these critiques, but additional research could do substantially more to further such objectives.

First, critics wish to see more emphasis upon the family as process. Sites such as Karanis (among others) could contribute substantially to our understanding of diachronic household changes if re-analyzed contextually. Karanis has deep stratigraphy with houses superimposed upon one another. Analyzing these houses using the method suggested here could produce diachronic data on changing family structures as well as underscoring viable hypotheses for the presence of singles in specific locales.

Second, critics point out that families experience great regional and local variety. Although documentary and literary sources provide remarkable details on family life in Antiquity, as other papers in this volume amply demonstrate, they often subject researchers to a particular region, gender and class perspective. In the case of Roman Egypt, the Roman census provides a narrow chronological and regional perspective of demographic conditions. Archaeology can provide considerable regional and local variety that can compliment or enhance the documentary and literary record. For example, we have informative archaeological remains from the Eastern Desert, the Western Desert, Alexandria and the Fayum to contribute to
our understanding of these regions. All of these regions were missing from the Roman census, and therefore there are great gains to be envisioned by looking to other categories of material for amplifying the data drawn from the Roman census.

Third, critics of Laslett have urged that scholars should contribute more qualitative rather than quantitative studies of the family.\footnote{Sacchi and Viazzo 2014.} Due to the uncertainties involved, archaeological studies cannot provide secure quantitative data on singles, but they can provide instructive qualitative data. In the present article, I discussed groups such as the military, artisans, farmers and families. Archaeologists can study the possibility of singles among additional groups of people, particularly when they pair archaeological data with documentary and literary sources. A few examples of these groups might include monastic, pilgrimage, migrant, work (such as miners) and even prison communities.

An archaeological study of singles may initially appear to be an impossible task, but this article suggests potential ways forward through the inherent uncertainties. It is hoped that additional, future studies, possibly as outlined above, will reveal more data about this enigmatic but pervasive group in Antiquity.