

Circumcision in Greek and Roman Egypt

Abstract:

This study deals with circumcision (male and female circumcision) in Egypt during the Greek and Roman periods. It discusses the references to this custom in literary sources and papyrological documents; in an attempt to shed light on the ancient roots and origins of circumcision and how and when it spread in Egypt. The study also discusses how circumcision was performed, the tools which were used in the operation, the reasons and the motives of its practitioners, the age at which circumcision was usually performed, those who performed the operation, and the procedures required for getting a permission to be circumcised. This research also attempts to answer some questions such as: was there a difference in the operation of circumcision in the two eras? Did the advent of the Romans affect the custom? Did the permissions required for performing circumcision meant that it was, usually, limited to priests only and not permitted to the rest of the Egyptians? Did everyone abide by the Roman laws in this regard?