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Loyal and Knowledgeable Supporters

Integrating Egyptian Elites in Early Islamic Egypt

Petra M. Sijpesteijn

TUCKED away in the “Rome and Ancient Sudan” section in the basement of Cambridge’s Fitzwilliam Museum is a marble gravestone inscribed with an Arabic text. It commemorates a woman who died in the month of Muḥarram in the year 256 AH (December 9, 869–January 7, 870 CE). The gravestone contains beautifully carved floral Kufic with Qur’ānic citations and an avowal of the dead woman’s belief in God, God’s Prophet, and death followed by the afterlife as ordained by God. The quality of the material used, its size, and its workmanship suggest that the family that erected the stone was a fairly affluent one. On the stele, the deceased is identified as Ḥujja daughter of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *al-fārisī*.¹

Set up 230 years after the arrival of the Arab armies in Egypt, the gravestone offers a good entry point into the topic of this chapter, as a witness and expression of the social and cultural changes that Egyptian society underwent in the first two centuries of Arab rule. Starting with the conquest in the mid-seventh century and continuing into the ninth century, demographic shifts and processes of acculturation comprehensively reconfigured the social landscape, and with it the markers with which it was signposted and by means of which individuals and groups within it identified themselves. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān arrived in Egypt not as the result of a Persian invasion or such but rather as part of the waves of migrants moving from the eastern part of the Islamic Empire in the early ninth century CE. These newcomers, like al-Ḥujja’s family, apparently, often ended up on the upper rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. This was partially the result of the increased role that Turko-Persian military and governing cadres had started to play throughout the caliphate, but in Egypt, the old Arab-Muslim elites seem to have suffered especially badly as a result of the internal fighting that had afflicted the province from the end of the eighth century. The identification of

1. The stele has *الفارسي* written with defective long ā and without diacritical dots, allowing also for a reading of *الفرشي*. The gravestone was donated to the museum by Frederick William Green (1869–1949), Honorary Keeper of Antiquities at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (1908–1949), probably in 1914. Inventory number E.57.1914. For a translation, see Martin, *Stelae*, p. 185. This work was supported by the European Research Council under Grant number 683194.

al-fārisī, “the one from Fars,” that is used for our ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is, in this sense, a typically ninth-century phenomenon. Against the background of a developing regional identity, increased integration between Arab-Muslim settlers and the Egyptian population stimulated the use of religious and ethnic markers to light the increasingly undifferentiated ethno-religious murk and distinguish between the different social groups.

What was the role of local elites in these processes, and how were they affected by it? This chapter explores how Egyptian elites—broadly defined as those occupying the positions of economic and political influence, usually through a combination of land ownership and office holding—fared in the first three centuries of Muslim rule, who constituted them, and how they related to the central authorities in Fuṣṭāṭ and their own local constituencies. By examining the political-administrative, economic, military, and social roles played by the members of Egypt’s elite under Arab rule, and how these changed, I want to understand how these groups adjusted to their new functions, what possibilities were opened up for them, and what opportunities were closed off. Building on my earlier work into how post-conquest administrative measures supported the establishment of Muslim rule in Egypt, this chapter examines the process from the point of view of indigenous Egyptian elites rather than the conquerors’ perspective. It follows this development into the ninth century C.E.

In the context of this chapter, local “Egyptian” elites constitute different groups, some coexisting from the time of the conquest onward, others arriving later. First, there are the Christians and Jews who inhabited the Roman province of Egypt at the time of the arrival of the Arab conquering armies in the mid-seventh century. The indigenous Egyptians continued to play an important role in the administrative and socioeconomic life of the province, although their position changed over time. To these should be added the Arab and other groups who arrived with the conquerors and settled in Egypt, eventually forming a settler class of what has been called an Egyptian provincial elite, or, in Arabic, the *wujūh*.² Initially urban-based, but from the second half of the eighth century also settling in the countryside, these Arab families and their associates formed the backbone of the administrative power structure in the province into the early ninth century.

Arriving in the military entourage of governors appointed to Egypt, Turko-Persian soldiers settled permanently in the province. From the late eighth century they played a role in local military upheavals.³ Officials and scribes, but also merchants, pilgrims, and adventurers, settled from the east in Egypt in the ninth century. Turko-Persian immigrants took over the central positions in the Egyptian administration, pushing aside Arab-Egyptian families, who then allied themselves with local acculturated Egyptian elites with whom they shared a locally based identity and socioeconomic interests. Already earlier on, however,

2. Kennedy, “Central Government.”

3. Kennedy, “Egypt.”

non-Muslim administrators had been brought to Egypt from other provinces, most notably Syria, in order to serve the Muslim chancery.

CO-OPTING LOCAL ELITES

The mid-seventh-century Arab conquest of Egypt had, not surprisingly, very significant repercussions for members of Egypt's pre-conquest provincial elite and their role in the country's structures of power.

The continued employment of Egyptian district officers to run the provincial administration ensured the smooth takeover of the country that appears in our sources. The ability to draw upon the local knowledge and contacts of these groups, as well as their authority and leverage in their respective communities, was essential for the success of the new regime. With a small coterie of invaders superimposed on a preexisting power system, disruption had to be minimized in the interest of keeping the wheels turning. The precarious nature of Arab dominance, especially during the first decades, was exacerbated by internal strife and civil war, as well as threats and attacks from outside, most notably ongoing Byzantine aggression, but also the Nubian resistance in the south, which occupied the Arabs' attention and resources for the better part of the seventh century.⁴

Yet common sense—not to mention every available historical precedent—suggests that even the least intrusive conquest is still a conquest. The Arab conquerors necessarily left their mark on the administrative and military organization of Egypt as soon as they established control in the province (see below). A new Arab elite also had to be kept on board through financial and other inducements—how did these relate to local elite interests? Indeed, ambitious building projects to construct the capital *Fuṣṭāṭ* were initiated within years of the Arab takeover, with an administrative network laid down to support the effort.⁵ Moreover, as Arab rule became more secure, scope for more far-reaching goals opened up, consolidating and extending the Arabs' hold. Understanding how the Arabs achieved this, while retaining the cooperation of local notables, is key to our understanding of their success in moving from a conquest society to a Muslim empire.

To appreciate how the Arabs managed to establish their rule over Egypt so successfully, the response of Egyptian local elites needs to be taken into account as well. Maintaining their position under altered circumstances, seizing new opportunities, and, finally, amalgamating with their Arab rulers to serve their shared interests, Egyptian local elites were actively involved in the shaping of the administrative management and social organization of the province. While some

4. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 58–60. The same model applies to seventh-century Jazīra. Cf. Robinson, *Empire*, pp. 33–62.

5. Morelli, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXX; Legendre, "Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?"

Egyptians rose in the state service, others lost out. Both groups and their efforts are visible in the documentation. Comparative models from empire studies and regime change in the premodern Middle East can be used to study these phenomena,⁶ but the circumstances of the mid-seventh-century Arab conquests, the management of resources, and the role of (constructed) Arab identity in subsequent centuries deserve special attention.

SOURCES

For the role of local elites in the shifting social historical context, literary sources contain little useful information. Mainly concerned with events occurring at the urban courts, they typically attribute complex historical processes to the agency of single individuals. Produced at the political and intellectual centers, such literary accounts also pay disproportionate attention to religious issues and confessional politics, distorting the social reality of daily interaction and the strategic choices between groups.⁷ In addition, the Arabic literary sources were produced several centuries after the events they report, and while they doubtlessly contain information that dates back to this period, it is inevitably mixed with later perspectives and prejudices. The documentary sources, mainly Coptic, Greek, and Arabic papyri and ostraca, as well as Arabic inscriptions in the form of graffiti and epitaphs, serve a very different goal. Fulfilling a function that is limited in space and time, their audience is circumscribed by their immediate environment, specific applications, and targeted circle of users. That does not mean that this source base constitutes a uniform and equally spread body of evidence. Besides a preservation bias stemming from the vagaries of survival, the connection between media, text genre, and the way in which social relations, including self-identifications, appear should be taken into account when assessing the value of their evidence.

Egypt is exceptionally rich in documentary sources. Its uninhabited dry desert sands preserved papyrus documents for thousands of years, until they began to be excavated on a large scale from the end of the nineteenth century onward. Collections in the Middle East, Europe, and North America contain thousands of documents, preserving the written residue of an enormous variety of day-to-day activities and concerns. Egypt's antiquities attracted widespread attention early on, and the limited inhabited areas along the Nile valley were explored extensively, especially once the interest of European collectors and scholars had been sparked. Although most visitors were less interested in the artifacts of the Islamic period, many objects ended up in collections collaterally. The focus of exploration lay on deserted areas, where occupation was discontinued in the later

6. Crawford, ed., *Regime Change*.

7. Papaconstantinou, "Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*"; Robinson, *Empire*, pp. 30–32.

Muslim period, while papyri are hardly preserved in the wetter areas of the Delta. This has caused uneven patterns of survival, with the overwhelming majority of evidence originating in the southern part of the country and from smaller provincial centers, while the cities that continued to be occupied, which were also the political centers in the early period, have yielded little written material of value.⁸

The challenge with these sources is to move from the micro level of the documentary record to the macro level of the history of the Muslim Empire. How can the gravestones, letters, and receipts of individual Egyptians, who remain otherwise anonymous in the written record, connect to wider historical processes? How can the experience of the Arab conquests of the mid-seventh century and the subsequent transformation into the Muslim caliphate be connected to the dynamics of political transformation and empire building? As the position of local elite groups shifted along with their interrelationships, the use and character of (self-)identification markers in the documentary sources to delineate the different groups operating in Egypt changed as well. How can these identifiers be connected to the different stages in the establishment and development of a Muslim state in Egypt?

Another concern is how to combine different sources. Gravestones and official inscriptions are conditioned by concerns different from those of graffiti, while documents, although falling in different categories, ranging from official correspondence to private letters, have other parameters again. How do the self-identifying categories of these different media compare, and how do they relate to literary texts which served different goals and which in some cases were produced centuries later?

THE CONQUEST: INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS STORIES?

As a general rule, regime change means the replacement of the highest-placed administrators, while offering opportunities for lower strata to enter the new imperial structure.⁹ The Arab conquest of the Near East seems, similarly, to have offered opportunities to enterprising members of local elites. Opportunities might, in fact, have favored this group even more, as the Persian invasion that took place a decade or so before the Arab takeover seems to have dispersed the international elites of the late Byzantine Empire, those families of extreme wealth

8. Note the exception of the recently discovered material from Fustāṭ, dating, however, mostly from the late second/eighth and third/ninth century onward (Sobhi Bouderbala and Khaled Younes are preparing a publication of this material). See also Denoix, "Les ostraca"; Younes, "Arabic Letters."

9. Similarly, the dissolution of the Roman Empire in western Europe offered opportunities to local elites whose position improved, as they could play a role at local courts and were no longer subjected to the great aristocrats who operated on an empire-wide stage. Brown, *Through the Eye*, pp. 3–30, 394, 398; Heather, *The Fall*, p. 437; Reimitz, "The Historian," p. 42.

who possessed large estates extending over multiple provinces while holding important positions at the court in Constantinople.¹⁰

The literary record does indeed contain anecdotal evidence of individual Egyptians who joined the Arab army during the conquest. John of Nikiou (fl. late seventh century) mentions several Egyptians in the Byzantine army who converted and joined the Arab campaigns.¹¹ Another crucial figure who appears in the Arab sources is Abū al-Muhājir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Balhībī. Captured by the Arab troops in the Delta, he played a critical role in gaining control of the province in the Umayyad takeover. He was rewarded with a high position in the army by Egypt’s conqueror and first governor, ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (d. 664). As ‘arīf, he was responsible for recording changes in the population, births and deaths for the diwan, as well as for the distribution of stipends, the *‘aṭā*,’ on the basis of the diwan.¹²

These figures are not known from the documentary record, and we have little information on how the process of inclusion of such high-profile *mawālī* in the Arab army worked at this time. On the contrary, everything suggests that the Arab army was run by Arabs. *Mawālī*, converts or freedmen, did, of course, serve, and some of them received stipends as high as those of *muhajirūn* soldiers, but the leading positions were reserved for the conquerors, not for the locals.¹³ At the local level, Egyptian administrators were stripped of all military responsibilities, which were taken over by amirs. Assisted by contingents of soldiers, these Arab army officials were placed throughout the province and also fulfilled administrative and financial duties (see the following section).¹⁴

POWERFUL LANDHOLDERS

In general, there is no indication in the documentary record of Egyptians filling the central positions in the immediate post-conquest Muslim civil administration of the province, while all military responsibility was removed from them. At a lower level, Egyptian elite members continued to play a role holding important executive positions in the administration and fiscal infrastructure. These “little big men,” to borrow Peter Brown’s formulation, would become the main support of Muslim rule in Egypt, initially—that is, during the first two generations—as executives of the new regime and, finally, dressed in Arabo-Islamic guise, as participants.¹⁵ Similarly, the central and provincial chanceries were heavily

10. For Syria, see Foss, “Syria”; Kennedy, “Syrian Elites.” For Egypt, see Banaji, “On the Identity.”

11. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, p. 57 n. 60.

12. Bouderbala, “Mawālī,” pp. 141–142.

13. Kennedy, *Armies*, pp. 31–32, 44–45; Hasson, “Mawālī”; Onimus, “Les mawālī en Égypte,” pp. 89–90; Crone, “Pay.”

14. Morelli, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXX, introduction.

15. Brown, *Through the Eye*, pp. 3–30, 398. For the crucial role of Egypt’s administrative functionaries at the village level for running the province, see also Papaconstantinou, “Great Men,” p. 182.

dependent on the skills of Egyptian scribes and secretaries. The Arabs' continued reliance on members of Egypt's local elites does not mean that there were no personnel changes. A practical approach was taken, aimed at providing expertise, capacity, and stability in the form of loyal servants in order to ensure the new regime security on the one hand and a steady income on the other. Ideas about who was best able to provide such loyalty, stability, and expertise changed over time, leading to subsequent administrative adjustments.

The social-economic class that fed the Arab administration had developed a crucial role in Egypt's administration in the late Byzantine period. With the late Roman changes in the organization of the public, city-based administration, and the subsequent entry of elite Egyptians into the Byzantine imperial service, income was generated that could be used to accumulate substantial landholdings back in Egypt. In this way, large country estates were formed whose owners took over most of the province's civic duties, such as tax collection, the maintenance of order, and public works, through a fusion of public and private power. The dukes, in charge of the four larger districts of Egypt, and the pagarchs who headed the fifty or so Byzantine pagarchies, the smaller administrative subdistricts that made up the Egyptian province, belonged to the same class of landholders but formed, it seems, a lower economic stratum. Their jurisdiction incorporated the towns and cities in the province but did not extend over the mega-estates that remained independent. The pagarchs and dukes wielded significant economic and military power, which was increased under Justinian's sixth-century reorganization of the empire.¹⁶ The same families kept these offices in their hands for generations, building up important local constituencies, reinforced by the economic leverage that derived from their agrarian enterprises.¹⁷

The Arab takeover does not seem to have resulted in large-scale confiscation or redistribution of land—in fact, there are no reports of estates or farms being occupied by the conquerors outside the fortress of Babylon and the newly founded capital, Fustāt. Large estates (the *oikoi* “houses” and *ousia* of the Greek papyri) continued to operate as independent fiscal units in the possession of Egyptian families in the Arab period, and their owners continued to play an important role in the (financial) administration of the province.¹⁸

In fact, there are plenty of indications that the Arabs not only left many of the same officers in place immediately following the conquest but also continued to rely on the same kind of landholding families to fill the local offices for the next decades.¹⁹ After gaining nominal control over the province, the Arabs replaced

16. Palme, “Imperial Presence.”

17. Banaji, *Agrarian Change*; Gascou, “Grands domaines”; Sarris, *Economy*; Ruffini, *Social Networks*; Hickey, *Wine*.

18. Sijpesteijn, “Landholding Patterns.”

19. For a list of Christian pagarchs who were also landholders in Arab Egypt, see Banaji, *Agrarian Change*, p. 153 n. 120.

several dukes, as is recorded in narrative and documentary sources.²⁰ The dukes appointed by the Arabs seem to have originated from the same local background as their predecessors, and some might have held the identical position before.

One level lower in the administrative hierarchy, the pagarchs continued to operate as family enterprises under Arab rule, forming dynasties of officials controlling the fiscal and administrative organization in the areas where they possessed land. The two brothers, Christophoros and Theodorakios, who succeeded their father as officials in charge of the *Ihnās*/Herakleopolite pagarchy, are examples. Their office coincides with the Arab conquest of Egypt.²¹ Papas, the pagarch of Edfū/Appolonis Ano in the 660s/670s, had succeeded his father, Liberios, as pagarch of the same district.²² This pattern continued among Christian pagarchs in the eighth century. The pagarch Basileios, who headed the district of *Ishqūh*/Aphrodito in 709–710, also came from a family of administrator-landowners; his brother headed a neighboring district.²³ Other examples are the father-and-son pagarchs of the *Fayyūm*/Arsinoe, Stephanos son of Cyrus and Paul son of Stephanos.²⁴

While the same class of landholding families continued to form the local administrative organization, their responsibilities, as well as their relation vis-à-vis the central authorities, changed profoundly. First of all, a new class of Arab officials filled the more central positions at the capital. Important functionaries, such as the governor (*wālī*, amir), head of police (*ṣāḥib al-shurṭa*), head of finances (*ṣāḥib al-kharāj*), and chief judge (*qāḍī*), were appointed from local Arab families.²⁵ Second, for about one decade following the conquest, Arab military leaders, amirs, were appointed in parallel to the dukes and pagarchs in charge of security. These amirs were also heavily involved in the administrative and fiscal administration of the districts. They can be seen in the sources giving orders to collect new kinds of taxes, organize, and supervise communal deliveries and taking other measures related to the organization of the district.²⁶

The role of the pagarchs in the taxation system also changed significantly. The system of tax collection, with communal tax demand notes sent to communities of taxpayers, such as villages, monasteries, and estates, remained in place throughout this period. At the level of the community, the taxes were divided

20. John of Nikiou, *Chronicle*, trans. Charles, CXX.29, pp. 192–193; Carrié, “Séparation,” pp. 118–120.

21. Rupprecht and Kießling, eds., *Sammelbuch*, vol. 6, no. 9576, dated 22/643; and discussion in Morelli, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXX, introduction.

22. Rémondon, ed., *Papyrus grecs*.

23. Bell, ed., *Greek Papyri*, vol. 4.

24. Banaji, *Agrarian Change*, p. 153 n. 120. For Paul’s landholdings, see Sijpesteijn and Worp, eds., *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. VIII, no. 71; Foss, “Egypt under Mu’āwiya, Part II,” p. 265 n. 35.

25. To what extent these positions were introduced in the decades following the establishment of Arab rule is uncertain. See, for the *ṣāḥib al-kharāj*, Legendre, “Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?” pp. 15–16; for the *qāḍī*, Tillier, “Qadis’ Justice,” 41–45.

26. Morelli, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXII; Morelli, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXX, introduction; Legendre, “Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?” pp. 7–9.

among the individual taxpayers, supervised by officials of the Arab administration. Tax receipts and tax demand notes written in Greek and Coptic were issued by such local Christian Egyptian officials for the pagarchs. Immediately following the conquest, the role of the pagarchs in this process was pared back. Whereas the pagarchs had determined the amounts of taxes imposed on the different fiscal communities in their districts, under the Arabs, these amounts were decided centrally in Fuṣṭāṭ. The demand notes for the different communities were issued in the name of the Arab governor or his immediate subordinates, the dukes. The pagarch's role was merely to distribute the demand notes to the relevant communities and to supervise the collection and transport of the taxes to the capital.²⁷

Visible in the record at the beginning of Arab rule, the Arab amirs disappear in the early Umayyad period. This change was part of the administrative reorganization undertaken by Mu'āwiya (r. 661–680) but also shows a first step in the Arab extension of control over the regular administrative and financial positions in the province.²⁸ The administrative and financial tasks of the amir are again taken over by the dukes, who from the second half of the seventh century often have Arab names.²⁹ A Greek papyrus of 669 attests the presence of an Arab-manned, fixed, state-controlled rapid mail service in the Fayyūm, which forms another example of an expanding Arab infrastructure in the Egyptian countryside.³⁰

MAINTAINING A SEPARATION

In spite of an overwhelming sense of continuity of daily life after the Arab conquest of Egypt, the new order immediately made itself felt through the introduction of a new language, as well as new fiscal, military, and administrative institutions.³¹ Nevertheless, sound managerial judgment and their precarious military position inside and outside the country initially discouraged the Arabs from undue interference in the way the province was run.

The Arab presence in the Egyptian countryside in the seventh century was consequently limited, restricted to temporary stays and yielding little interaction with the indigenous population.³² Soldiers and other officials traveled or

27. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 88–89.

28. On the administrative changes that occur with the establishment of Mu'āwiya's caliphate, see, for Egypt: Legendre, "Islamic Conquest," pp. 239–240; Foss, "Egypt under Mu'āwiya, Part I"; Foss, "Egypt under Mu'āwiya, Part II"; Bruning, "Rise," pp. 159–161; and for Syria, Foss, "Mu'āwiya's State."

29. Legendre, "Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?" p. 11.

30. Rupprecht and Kießling, eds., *Sammelbuch*, vol. 6, no. 9232.

31. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, pp. 65–81.

32. By far the majority of Greek and Coptic sources of this period lack any reference to an Arab presence. The annual grazing of the *jund's* animals in the spring in preparation for the raiding season as an "occupation of the Egyptian rural space directly following the conquest" is discussed by Bouderbala, "Murtaba' al-jund."

were temporarily settled throughout the province for security and administrative tasks, while others visited for commercial reasons. As we have seen, Arab army commanders, amirs, with their contingents of Arab soldiers, were initially settled throughout the province. The same soldiers continued to work for indigenous Egyptian administrators in the second half of the seventh century.³³ Moreover, the responsibilities and relations vis-à-vis the central authorities of local administrators changed markedly after the conquest. Arabic was used to communicate with these indigenous officials, but, crucially, Greek and Coptic remained fully integrated into the administrative system for several centuries to come.³⁴ Egyptian administrators and their bureaucracies could thus continue to operate in their own languages, with all correspondence from the capital being transmitted in Arabic and Greek. In other words, there was no need for local administrators to Arabicize in order to operate fully in the political-economic system. Similarly, local administrators continued to originate in the class of the indigenous, Egyptian landed aristocracy with economic ties to the areas they administered.

For strategic and ideological reasons, but also from a socioeconomic point of view, there were good reasons to keep a distance between the conquered and the conquerors. The Arab soldiers were occupied with the continuous conquest for which purpose they remained settled in garrisons. In keeping with a decision attributed to the second caliph ‘Umar b.al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–644), the conquered territories were left in the hands of the subject people. The income generated by these lands was distributed among the conquerors via the diwan that recorded all those entitled to a stipend based on their social place in the Muslim community. The system kept the Arabs free to fight. The privileged register that determined the level of the stipends was well guarded, with the aim of maintaining the stipend for a limited group of conquerors. The system came, however, more and more under pressure from immigration, natural expansion, and conversion, as ever more people demanded inclusion.³⁵

Such a separation between conquerors and subject people prevented confrontations but was surely also motivated by the Arabs’ fear of losing a distinct identity among the majority Egyptians at a time when their religious ideas and practices do not seem to have fully crystallized.³⁶ In general, the new rulers abstained from imposing their religion upon or discriminating against non-Muslim Egyptians, or even formulating strict demarcations between themselves

33. Legendre, “Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?” p. 10.

34. This does not differ from language policy in Egypt after other conquests. See, for example, the initial continuation of the use of Demotic in the Ptolemaic administration, where Greek became the main administrative language some 150 years after Alexander the Great’s takeover of the province. Thompson, “Literacy.” I examine the multilingual language policy in the early Muslim empire in a forthcoming publication (“Did the Muslim Empire have a Multilingual Language Policy?”).

35. Sijpesteijn, “Army Economics”; Morimoto, “Diwāns”; Mikhail, “Notes.”

36. Kister, “Do Not Assimilate.”

and other religious communities, participating, rather, in the religiously diverse late antique landscape by adding yet another confessional community.³⁷

This situation is reflected in the terms used to describe the conquerors and the Egyptians in the documentary record. The paucity of attestations of specific terms and titles, as opposed to personal names, however, also reflects how limited interaction was on a day-to-day basis. There was little need to indicate the separate nature of these groups. In those cases where the two populations met, an important distinction between Arab and Egyptian self-identification appears in the way individuals are denominated in the documents. The contrast is clearest in bilingual texts but can also be detected in individual Arabic, Greek, and Coptic texts which clearly reflect different scribal traditions. Arabic texts identify individuals by their names and patronymics, while in the Greek and Coptic ones, titles are used for classification.³⁸ The Arabs are identified in Greek papyri as *sarakēnoi* and *m(ō)agaritai* (Ar. *muhājirūn*).³⁹ In Arabic papyri, they appear, again, not with a generic term but rather as followers of a specific commander: ‘*Abd Allāh ibn Jābir wa-aṣḥābuhu*.⁴⁰ *Mu’minūn*, believers, is used in Greek and Arabic texts as a technical term referring to the Muslim administration but not for individuals.⁴¹ Tribal affiliations occur in specific circumstances, for example, in legal documents to identify witnesses and in lists of individuals for administrative purposes.⁴² One Arabic epitaph, dated AH 31/652 CE, preserves the name of the deceased as ‘*Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥajrī*.⁴³

Increased interaction and the establishment of an Arab presence in the Egyptian countryside postdate significant administrative Islamicizing and Arabicizing reforms dating to the turn of the eighth century. The adjectives used to describe Egypt’s inhabitants in the papyri and in inscriptions show how the relationship between the Arab-Muslim rulers and the local population had changed, as will be discussed below.

AGENTS OF ISLAMICIZATION AND ARABIZATION

Important changes took place around 700 CE in the organization of the administration of Egypt, with direct effects on the position of Egyptian local administrators. Most important, the middle administrative layer of the dukes disappeared, while the lower-echelon offices of the pagarchs were reshaped, with a new class of Muslim officials taking over the administration at this lower level of the province. The goal of the reforms was to introduce a thoroughly Arabicized and Islamicized

37. Papaconstantinou, “Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*,” pp. 134–139; Hoyland, “New Documentary Texts,” pp. 409–410; Hoyland, “Reflections”; Robinson, *Empire*, p. 30.

38. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 67–68.

39. Legendre, “Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?” pp. 7–8; Lindstedt, “Muhājirūn”; Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, p. 102.

40. Rupprecht and Kießling, eds., *Sammelbuch*, vol. 6, no. 9576, dated 22/643.

41. Bruning, “Legal Sunna.” See also below, for the meaning of *amir al-mu’minin*.

42. Khan, “Arabic Legal Document,” dating to 707; Sijpesteijn, “Seventh/Eighth-Century List.”

43. Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 1.

bureaucracy, whose loyalty lay with the central authorities rather than with their local constituencies. Clearly related to the empire-wide reforms designed to centralize control and increase Arabicization and Islamicization, the measures were also aimed at tightening administrative grip and improving efficiency, thereby increasing the fiscal income from the provinces.⁴⁴ At the village level non-Muslim Egyptians continued to be responsible as scribes, headmen and tax-collectors. Administrative reforms nevertheless had an impact, for example on how Coptic tax-receipts were written.⁴⁵

As part of the program of reforms, land was measured, and surveys of cattle and censuses of inhabitants were conducted. A better registration of taxable goods and people facilitated the raising of higher taxes from the indigenous population. Other measures, such as the introduction of safe conducts, tax seals, and a detailed registration of the population, enabled the close scrutiny of taxpayers and their movements. The measures were successful, as reports of a great surplus in the treasury at the beginning of the eighth century seem to indicate. Complaints of heavy taxes, especially in Christian sources, suggest, too, that the fiscal impositions were implemented successfully from the point of view of the fisc.⁴⁶

The pagarchs in charge of the execution of these measures had Arab names. They operated in Arabic, and even the Greek documents issued by their offices draw upon an Arabic model for the formulation and style used,⁴⁷ with Arabic-Islamic seals and other signs of identity. At the same time, Greek and Coptic continued to be used in the chancery. This change in personnel did not take place overnight and non-muslim personnel continued to serve the Muslim administration in Egypt in its lowest echelons.

The presence of the new Arab-Muslim officials is signaled by a new terminology in Greek and Arabic to describe their status. They were called by the title *epikeimenos*, a term in use for all sorts of functionaries, with a general meaning of supervisor, rather than the earlier *pagarchos*.⁴⁸ The Arabic terminology changes as well: while the Christian pagarchs are described as *ṣāhib* plus a place name, that is, as owner or manager of a place, the Arab pagarchs were called *ʿāmil al-amīr ʿalā* followed by a place name, “agent of the governor (appointed) over . . .” Besides being simply a different word, the formulation also shows another aspect of these new local administrators, that they were loyal representatives of the governor (amir), exactly the kind of faithful servants the reforms aimed to put in place.⁴⁹ Their title might also refer to the changed relationship between

44. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*.

45. Cromwell, *Recording Village Life*, chapter 6; Cromwell, “A Village Scribe,” pp. 137–138.

46. Al-Kindī (d. 350/961), *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. Guest, p. 59.

47. For example, the introduction of sequences of sentences each preceded by *kai* (“and”) mirroring the Arabic style of endless series of sentences connected with *wa* (I owe this observation to Federico Morelli). Cf. Garosi, “Cross-Cultural Parameters,” pp. 75–79.

48. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, p. 120. Legendre, “Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?,” p. 14, argues that the *epikeimenoi* took over the tasks from the dukes and were Arabs.

49. Legendre, “Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?” p. 15. Cf. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, p. 103 n. 382.

the pagarchs and the land under their jurisdiction. None of these new pagarchs is known to have belonged to the class of estate holders from which the previous Christian class of pagarchs was chosen.⁵⁰

Without owning estates in the areas they governed, unlike their Christian predecessors, these Arab pagarchs lacked a local independent power base. Their being moved around through different offices during their careers, generally along a promotional track, from smaller to larger districts and into more significant offices, added to the pagarchs' dependency on the central authorities to which they were personally beholden.⁵¹ There is also no indication, at least not at this stage, of families controlling the offices of the pagarchies.

Another reform involved the role of the pagarch in the fiscal administration and the relation between the pagarchs and individual taxpayers. While the role of Christian pagarchs had been reduced to that of little more than a messenger, transmitting the demand notes for fiscal communities issued at the central bureaucracy, Arab pagarchs exercised this responsibility themselves. The Arab pagarchs thus write that *they* have divided the amount that the whole district is told to pay among the different communities in the pagarchy. At the same time, the tax demand notes for individual taxpayers were issued in name of the pagarch as well, rather than that of the lower village administrators. All tax demand notes sent in the name of pagarchs to individual taxpayers come from Arab pagarchs' offices.⁵² In other words, more responsibilities were placed in the hands of this new class of administrators.

Who are these new-style pagarchs? They clearly operate in a very different administrative tradition and have a background unlike that of their Christian predecessors. Comparative studies indicate that the first group to join a new regime through acculturation are exactly the same kind of provincial middle-elite members with administrative positions as our Christian-Egyptian landowning pagarchs.⁵³ For early-eighth-century Egypt, however, the situation seems to have been slightly different, with a new group being brought in, rather than a local group being elevated, to serve the Arab administration.

The first Arab-named pagarch is Atias (Ar. 'Aṭīyya) son of Ju'ayd. Atias first appears in 698 CE as pagarch in Upper Egypt. His Hellenized name and *nomen gentilicium* might indicate (descent from migrants with) a background in the Byzantine Levant, where Arabs had been settled for several generations and had become thoroughly integrated into the Greek administrative culture. Such a background, providing him with administrative experience and Arab stock, would have made him an ideal candidate to fill the place of an Egyptian local administrator.⁵⁴ There are other indications of a Levantine Byzantine Greek

50. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, p. 205 n. 468.

51. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 103–104, 201–206.

52. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, p. 203 n. 460.

53. Clarysse, "Greeks"; Brown, *Through the Eye*, p. 398.

54. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 201–202.

presence in Egypt under Umayyad rule. New Greek (from Latin) administrative technical terms that are attested in Egypt in the second half of the seventh century point to an influence on the administration from Byzantine Syria.⁵⁵ A population movement from the Levant is suggested as well by the onomastic evidence in the Nessana papyri. A new group of Arabs settled in the garrison in the Negev desert, whose Arabic names are not Hellenized as were those of the people who occupied the site in the pre-Islamic period.⁵⁶

Since their socioeconomic and linguistic background as well as their *modus operandi* were very different, it is unlikely that the new, Arab-named pagarchs were (converted) Egyptians from the same class of landowners that had provided the previous generations of local administrators. The new pagarchs do not own estates, nor do they form administrative dynasties. Moreover, there is no indication in our sources (for example, through the use of double Greek and Arabic names) that these officials have a local background. Quite the opposite: even in Greek documents, their Arab names appear transcribed often in different ways, indicating their alien credentials.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the new administrators constitute a fully formed, rather than experimental, system of organizing the administration, based on experience gained elsewhere. In fact, there had not been a need or much opportunity for Egyptian landholding elites of the countryside to gain the necessary proficiency in Arabic or understanding of Arab culture at this stage. They were executors of a policy made much higher up. At most, they were asked to justify their actions in the capital, but their input, in spite of literary accounts of Egyptian local expertise being commandeered by the Arabs, seems otherwise to have remained very small.⁵⁸ Nor was there a language policy that promoted the use of Arabic in the administration.⁵⁹

So while the Egyptian land-based elites had remained loyal to their ancestry and the linguistic, economic, and social structures that underlay their authority, because there had been no need or much opportunity to change their ways, the new group of Arabicized (Muslim) bureaucrats, whose loyalty to the central authorities was based on their close relation to them, represented an entirely new style of governmental and administrative organization. Their origins should be sought with Arab or Arabicized, Byzantine-trained administrators who established close alliances with the Muslim rulers either at the center of the caliphate in Syria or at the provincial capital Fustāṭ.⁶⁰

55. Morelli, "Gonachia"; Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 69–71.

56. Al-Jallad, "Arabic."

57. See, for example, in the case of 'Aṭīyya, Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 201–202.

58. See, for example, the Egyptian Christian "knowledgeable old man" who is often presented in Arabic chronicles to speak to Egypt's conqueror and governor 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ to explain how the province is best run.

59. As there was in Ptolemaic Egypt, for example, with tax breaks for those, such as teachers, who facilitated the use of Greek; see Verhoogt, "Administration."

60. Christian Arabs played a role in the conquest armies and could be found as wives and mothers of caliphs at the center of power. See Fück, "Kalb b. Wabara"; Dixon, "Kalb b. Wabara. II."; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*.

Another case of personnel change in the Arab chancery similarly shows the importance to the Arab authorities at this time of securing loyal administrative supporters with close associations to the Arab rulers. At his installation as caliph, al-Walīd (r. 86–117/705–735) is said to have ordered his governor in Egypt, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Malik (in office 86–90/705–709), who was also his brother, son of the previous caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705), to transfer the diwans, the fiscal registers, from Coptic to Arabic.⁶¹ Long considered to have been a measure aimed at general Arabicization of the administration, this seems more likely to have signaled the installation of a new group of administrators to support a regime change, whether or not accompanied by administrative reorganization. This becomes clear when we examine the backgrounds of the officials heading the diwan and their political and ethnic-religious affiliations. The chiefs of the Egyptian diwan, Athanasios, originally from Edessa, and Isaac, an Egyptian Christian, were appointments of the previous governor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān (in office 65–86/685–705), brother and fierce competitor of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik.⁶² At the death of his brother, ‘Abd al-Malik sent his son, the aforementioned ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Malik, as governor to Egypt, ordering him “to remove all traces of his uncle ‘Abd ‘Azīz as heir apparent and to replace every official and appointee (appointed by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz).”⁶³ ‘Abd al-Malik died only five months later, and his son al-Walīd was appointed caliph. Together with the command to translate the diwan, al-Walīd also ordered the replacement of Athanasios and Isaac, the two secretaries in charge of the diwan, replacing them with a certain Ibn Yarbū‘ al-Fazārī from Ḥims, a *mawlā* of the Banū al-Dhiyāl.⁶⁴ This appointment seems to have been a continuation of the changes of personnel that were supposed to prevent any future claims to the caliphal throne by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s descendants. Accounts of contemporary measures in the chanceries of Syria and Iraq make the association with a change in personnel even more explicit, with representatives of the previous tradition of secretaries lamenting that they, or some of them, would lose their jobs due to this measure.⁶⁵ Whenever the names of new heads of the diwan are mentioned, they invariably are also *mawālī*.⁶⁶

61. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. Guest, pp. 58–59; Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871), *Futūḥ Miṣr*, ed. Torrey, p. 122; *History of the Patriarchs*, ed. and trans. Evetts, vol. 3, pp. 48, 54; al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), *al-Mawā’iz wa-l-i’tibār fi dhikr al-khiṭa’ wa-l-āthār*, ed. Sayyid, vol. 1, p. 98.

62. *History of the Patriarchs*, ed. Evetts, vol. 3, p. 12.

63. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. Guest, p. 58.

64. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-wulāt wa kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. Guest, p. 59; *History of the Patriarchs*, ed. Evetts, vol. 3, p. 48.

65. Al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. de Goeje, p. 193. The making of calculations with the aid of Greek numerals is, on the other hand, seen as an indispensable skill that “non-Arabic” scribes continued to offer the administration. Theophanes (d. 818), *Chronicle of Theophanus Confessor*, trans. Mango and Scott, p. 376.

66. In Iraq, it was Šālīḥ b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *mawlā* of the Banū Tamīm, who replaced Zadhānfarūkh (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. de Goeje, pp. 300–301). In Syria, Abū Thabit Sulaymān b. Sa’d al-Khushanī (or *mawlā* of Ḥusayn/Khushayn), a *mawlā* of Quda’a, took over from Sarjūn b. Maṣṣūr (Rebstock, “Observations,” pp. 233, 235–236, 245). In Syria, ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) (al-Jahshiyārī [d. 331/942], *Kitāb al-wuzarā’ wa-l-kuttāb*, eds. al-Saqqā, al-Abyārī, and ‘al-Ḥafīz Shalabī, pp. 38, 40) or al-Walīd (by

Non-Muslim secretaries continued to serve the Muslims also in the central administrative departments. It is therefore likely that the accounts in the literary sources of caliphs such as ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Hishām (r. 724–743) issuing decrees prohibiting the hiring of non-Muslim administrators are later fabrications.⁶⁷ On the other hand, it is indeed around 700 that the conquerors start to form a clear Muslim and Arab identity, seemingly in an effort to distinguish themselves from their non-Muslim, non-Arab subjects.⁶⁸ In reaction, it seems, Christian communities start, from the 690s onward, to emphasize confessional boundaries more sharply as well, both between Christians and Muslims and between different Christian groups.⁶⁹

In Islamic Egypt, apparently, the incorporation of the local middle elites is a longer, more drawn-out process than in comparative examples, such as in Ptolemaic Egypt, or as occurred at the political, administrative centers of the caliphate. After an initial period in which local elite members continued to feed into important positions in the central and local chanceries, they were unable to transform themselves into fully integrated members of the new administration. Their place was taken in by Arab Muslims and *mawālī* from the centers of Arab rule who were more reliable and closely dependent on the Arab rulers.⁷⁰ Only after the acculturation, Arabicization, and Islamicization processes of the eighth century did this change again, with Egyptians, in Arabic-Muslim guise, rising again to high positions in the administration as home-grown, full participants in the Muslim Empire.

PEOPLE OF THE LAND, PEOPLE OF THE ARMY

The identification markers in documentary texts reflect the relation between the Arabs and Egyptians in this early period. The rulers and the ruled were confined to separate economic, linguistic, cultural, and spatial spheres. Arabic

different Christian authors, all seemingly getting their information from a source c. 750 CE; cf. Theophilus of Edessa [d. 785], *Chronicle*, trans. Hoyland, pp. 199–200; I would like to thank Robert Hoyland for pointing me to these latter references) is credited with the measures. Cf. Sijpesteijn, “Did the Muslim Empire Have a Multilingual Language Policy?”

67. Sarjūn b. Maṣṣūr’s son continued to serve as *kātib* in the caliph’s administration, albeit not, it seems, at the head of any of the diwans, as did his descendants (Griffith, “Maṣṣūr Family,” p. 32). Yarbrough, “Did ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Issue an Edict?,” p. 182. For Hishām, see Rebstock, “Observations,” p. 232.

68. For the development around 700 of a distinctive and exclusive Muslim identity, see Donner, *Muhammad*; Donner, “Qur’anicization”; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 549–554. For a description of the contemporary process of Arabicization of the Muslim conquest, see Webb, *Imagining*.

69. Papaconstantinou, “Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*,” pp. 139–144. Although “in the first 150 years after the conquest, the main understanding of belonging and community among the population was clearly that of the local village group” (Papaconstantinou, “Great Men,” p. 182).

70. Arietta Papaconstantinou argued that competition between Egyptian lay and ecclesiastical authorities might have been another reason for the Arab authorities to switch to Muslim administrators (“Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*,” p. 150).

papyri of the seventh and early eighth centuries are mostly of an administrative nature. Egyptians are referred to with the terms “people of the land” (*ahl al-arḍ*) and *nabaḥī* (pl. *anbāḥī*), signifying a local, subject, indigenous inhabitant.⁷¹ Most references to both these terms occur in the letters sent from the governor Qurra b. Sharīk (in office 709–715) to the Christian administrator Basileios of the Upper Egyptian town of Ishqūh/Aphroditō. Qurra uses *nabaḥī* when referring to specific, quantifiable individuals, while *ahl al-arḍ* refers to Egyptians as an undefined group.⁷² This is also how *nabaḥī* is used in a later document. In a letter, the governor ‘Abd al-Malik b. Yazīd (in office 133–136/750–754) writes to a lower official concerning the claim by “a subject from amongst the people of your district (land)” (*anna nabaḥīyyan min ahl arḍika*).⁷³ Another term that is used is *a’jam* (pl. *a’ajim*).⁷⁴ Four witnesses are mentioned at the end of an Arabic quit-tance from Luxor, dating to the seventh or eighth century: two Muslims and two Christians who are identified, the latter described as being *min al-a’jam*, from among the “locals.”⁷⁵ This term continues to be attested very occasionally in later documents as well, for example, in the guarantee contract dated 225/840, which is dated by *shuhūr al-a’ajim*.⁷⁶

On the other side stand the *ahl al-jund* or *ahl al-dīwān*, the Arab-Muslims registered on the diwan, or the “people of Miṣr” (*ahl miṣr*).⁷⁷ Thus, the indication on four lead seals dated 93 AH (712 CE) and 95 AH (715 CE), “*min ahl Miṣr*,” that were used to close off and secure goods or money.⁷⁸ In an inscription dated 164/780–781 on Cyprus, a certain ‘Abd Allāh b. Maṭraḥ, presumably a soldier who died on campaign, is identified as being “from the people of Miṣr (*min ahl miṣr*).”⁷⁹ The two individuals who died in Egypt in 174/790 and 184/800 and who are identified with the *nisba* al-Ḥaḍramī were probably descendants from the conquering Arab armies who had a Yemeni background.⁸⁰ The terms *sarakēnoi*, *m(ō)agaritai* (Ar. *muhājirūn*), and *mu’minūn* continue to be used in the papyri. Only one personal allusion to the caliph can be identified with

71. Diem, “Einige frühe amtliche Urkunden,” no. 2, dating 632–800; Abbott, *Kurrah Papyri*, no. 3, pp. 47–49.

For the meaning of *nabaḥī* in the literary sources as referring to indigenous “agriculturalists opposed to the Arabian militarised élite of the *amṣār*,” see Webb, “Identity,” p. 145.

72. For *ahl al-arḍ*: Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, vol. 3, nos. 148, 159; Becker, *Papyri*, nos. 1–3, pp. 58–77; Abbott, *Kurrah Papyri*, no. 2, pp. 45–46. For *nabaḥī*: Abbott, *Kurrah Papyri*, no. 3, pp. 47–49; Grohmann, *From the World*, p. 129; Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, vol. 3, no. 155; Becker, *Papyri*, no. 1, p. 58, l. 7.

73. Diem, “Einige frühe amtliche Urkunden,” no. 2.

74. Liebrecht, “Frühe arabische Quittung.”

75. For *a’jam*, meaning local, subjected people, as opposed to the term *’ajam*, which from the eighth/ninth century got the more specific meaning of Persian, see Webb, “Identity,” p. 148.

76. Khoury, *Chrestomathie*, no. 37.

77. Diem, “Einige frühe amtliche Urkunden,” no. 1; Rāgib, “Lettres nouvelles,” no. 1; Hinds and Sakkout, “Letter.”

78. Four of such seals are known; see Schindel, “Nochmals zu umayyadischen Bullen.”

79. Megaw, “Muslim Tombstone,” p. 108.

80. Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, nos. 2, 18. These are the only geographical *nisbas* attested in Egyptian documentary sources up to the year 200/815 (see notes 132–144 below).

certainty in a work contract dated 699/700 to produce wine from the vineyards of the *prōtosymboulos*.⁸¹ This word does not occur in pre-Islamic documentation and only occurs once for the caliph, but it relates to the frequently used Greek term for Egypt's governor: *symboulos*.⁸²

WHERE DO THE EGYPTIANS GO?

With the introduction of a new class of Arab administrators at the lowest level of the administration, Egyptians did not disappear from the record. Their wealth, status, and social prestige made them valuable assets for the Arab administration. We see these wealthy Egyptians operating as collectors and guarantors of the public taxes. They are the "strong, solvent" men called upon to go into the villages to secure fiscal payments, to locate and return fugitive taxpayers, and to compile the records on which the fiscal assessments were based.⁸³

Their continued local social prestige sustained their position among their own constituencies, while their contacts with the Arab authorities made them valuable middlemen. They are the most important channel through which official requests to the Arab authorities are directed via petitions. As the "powerful" men, they are called upon by the local population in times of conflict and disagreement. Their role in mediation and informal conflict resolution seems, in fact, to have increased as their role in the official administration diminished.⁸⁴ The Egyptian elite members also seem in the eighth century to have entered in large numbers into ecclesiastical positions in monasteries and bishoprics.⁸⁵

The question remains whether these members of Egypt's elites accepted the reduction of their responsibilities and removal from the office of the pagarchy without objections. The absence of revolts in the first sixty years of Muslim rule in Egypt has been commented on as remarkable.⁸⁶ The ease with which Egypt's readily navigable and manageable countryside could be controlled must have had a lot to do with this, but another reason is surely that it took the Arabs sixty years to erode the Egyptians' rights and responsibilities in a substantial way.

The first recorded Egyptian revolt seems to have been limited to a monastic context. It is referred to in one Greek papyrus dated 699 CE. The reasons for the uprising are unclear, and the monks are only warned not to attempt a repeat on punishment of losing their "privileged position."⁸⁷ From the early eighth century

81. Sijpesteijn and Worp, eds., *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. VIII, no. 82. The term is also used for the caliph by the ninth-century Byzantine historian Theophanes.

82. Morelli, "Consiglieri."

83. For the terms used in the papyri to describe these officials, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 152–162.

84. Sijpesteijn, "Establishing"; Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, pp. 152–163.

85. Papaconstantinou, "Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*," pp. 146–147.

86. Kennedy, "Egypt," p. 67.

87. Bell, "Two Official Letters."

onward, extending into the ninth, Egyptian Christians did rise in revolt repeatedly, soon attracting the attention of the Arab inhabitants of Egypt. Rather than expressing Egyptian Christian dissatisfaction with Arab-Muslim anti-Christian measures, as they are often described in the narrative sources, these revolts seem to express a general concern among the inhabitants of Egypt—Christian and Muslim alike—over the expanding Arab state and its heavier fiscal burdens.⁸⁸ There are no indications that members of the indigenous Egyptian elite used the revolts to further their own political or socioeconomic interests, for example, as fomenters or leaders.

The support of the indigenous Egyptian elites—still a formidable economic and social force—was crucial for the Arab authorities. What, then, kept the Egyptians appeased? One could argue that under the more confident, because stronger and more secure, Arab rule, members of the Christian Egyptian elite had little room to object. Successful rule, however, as premodern empires tend to show, can only rely so much on force.⁸⁹

Perhaps the economic opportunities in the early Islamic Empire offered sufficient compensation for the reduced role in the administration of the province. The reallocation of tax monies under the Arabs must have resulted in more money remaining in Egypt than under the Byzantines. The Arab fiscal structure which demanded payments in cash seems, moreover, to have benefited the rich inhabitants of the province who could provide ready cash to those in need.⁹⁰ The payment to the Muslim army in cash in the form of the *ʿaḩā* and the striking of coins in individual *ajṇād* must have had a stimulating effect on the local economy as well.⁹¹ The building projects and other public works initiated by the early Muslim administration in Egypt invigorated the economy, reaching into the smaller communities of the provinces.⁹² Economic stimulus also came from extending economic activity in the early Muslim Empire, with especially fruitful commercial opportunities in the Mediterranean. Commercial activity under the Umayyads, which can be traced in the Islamic material with an influence that spread throughout the eastern part of the sea (Cyprus, Anatolia, Greece, Sicily), benefited the Egyptian economy enormously.⁹³ Egypt in late antiquity boasted the largest internal market in the Eurasian world besides China, which continued to fuel commercial and artisanal demand for imported and local products.⁹⁴

88. Lev, "Coptic Rebellions."

89. Haldon, "Late Rome," p. 377.

90. Papaconstantinou, "Great Men," pp. 185–186.

91. Kennedy, "Military Pay."

92. While the delivery of building materials was part of the levies imposed by the rulers, financial compensation was provided as well. Morelli, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXX.

93. Ward-Perkins, "Specialisation"; Vroom, "Trading." Merovingian graves show continuous influx of eastern and southeastern objects until the end of the seventh century, when the furnishing of graves was abandoned; see Drauschke, "Development," p. 126.

94. Sarris, *Economy*, p. 10. For the continued demand in Islamic Egypt, see Sijpesteijn, "Rise."

The concerns of non-Arabs to participate fully in Muslim society extended beyond the ranks of Egypt's middle elite. The empire-wide reforms of the Marwanids aimed at greater centralization, Islamicization, and Arabicization and were implemented in Egypt at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century. While the first Arab officials had already been settled outside the garrison cities to head specific government services, such as the imperial post, Arabs now replaced Egyptians at the lower levels of the regular fiscal-administrative system. From the second half of the eighth century, Arab settlement in the Egyptian countryside expanded to nongovernmental activities, as can be traced in agricultural leases, tax receipts, legal contracts, and letters that document commercial activities in trade and agriculture.⁹⁵

Increased Arab settlement in the countryside accelerated acculturation, Arabicization and, eventually, Islamicization. From the 720s, *hijra* years start to appear in Greek and Coptic papyri indicated with the term *kata arabōn* or *kata sarakēnōn*.⁹⁶ Indeed, it is from the second half of the eighth century that Christian texts show greater concern with conversion, or apostasy, as they called it.⁹⁷ While economic incentives—non-Muslims paid an extra poll tax and Egyptian Christians were increasingly pressured by their community leaders to help carry the financial burden of the Christian infrastructure—surely played a role, the slowly improving social and economic opportunities for converts, vis-à-vis Arab Muslims, must have made conversion increasingly attractive, while (the suggestion of) conversion was also exploited to achieve legal and social advancement within their own communities by Christians and Jews.⁹⁸ In the Egyptian countryside, *mawālī*, clients, converts, or freedmen associated with Arab individuals, only appear in the documentary record in the course of the eighth century.⁹⁹ In other words, only with increased opportunities for Egyptians to intermingle with Arabs could Egyptians establish the necessary relationship with Arab patrons that led to their status of *mawlā* and inevitably also to Arabicization. They would have been an obvious source of personnel for the Arab administration. Indeed, the term *mawlā* seems at times to have been used as a title, such as in the *mauleōs tou maneufēmou symboulou*, “*mawlā* of the governor,” who comes to the Upper

95. E.g., Morelli, *Documenti*, no. 34; Frantz-Murphy, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXI.

96. Worp, “Hegira Years”; Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems*, p. 300 n. 1.

97. Papaconstantinou, “Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*,” p. 144.

98. On economic motives, see Papaconstantinou, “Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*,” p. 151; Simonsohn, “Conversion,” p. 202. On the position of *mawālī* versus Arab Muslims, see Crone, *Slaves*. On advancement within their own community, see Simonsohn, “Conversion,” pp. 206–209.

99. Strikingly, there are no *mawālī* in the dossier of texts associated with Senouthios dating to 643–644 CE. Cf. the overview in Onimus, “Les mawali,” p. 87, where the only seventh-century *mawlā* appears in a papyrus from Nessana dated 64/684.

Egyptian town of Ishqūh/Aphrōdito as messenger of the chancery,¹⁰⁰ or the *mawālī amīr al-mu'minīn* who start to appear in the documentary record from the second half of the eighth century.¹⁰¹ Egyptians and others who had joined the central administration in Fuṣṭāṭ worked as intermediaries between the indigenous population and the Arab authorities, but now they did so as clients of the regime, incorporated as inferior but nevertheless distinct status holders.¹⁰² Christians and Jews continued, of course, to fill the administrative offices, both at the political centers and in provincial towns, as secretaries, scribes, and different kinds of lower executive officials.¹⁰³

Again, the change in the level of interaction is reflected in the documentary record. Starting in the late second/eighth century, a new legal terminology is introduced for fiscal purposes. As Arabs moved into the countryside to settle and work the land, the opposition between them and the Egyptians occupied with agriculture and paying taxes, which had been distributed among the Arabs, who remained in the garrisons standing by to continue the conquests if needed, was no longer relevant. Egyptians were not the only ones to be called “people of the land,” and new terms were introduced to distinguish the different population groups. The new juxtaposition was between the “people of the protective covenant” (*ahl al-dhimma*) and Muslims (*muslimūn*), which in an administrative context started in the 790s.¹⁰⁴ In a tax-related document dating to 784, the term is combined with *anbāṭ*, in the meaning of “local peasant/landlord.” In the document, the inhabitants of a district (*kūra*) are described as “the wealthiest (most important) indigenous landholders, its (regular) indigenous landholders and (the other) non-Muslims” (*jamājim anbāṭ kūra . . . wa-anbāṭihā wa-jamī' man yaskunuhā min ahl al-dhimma*).¹⁰⁵ Another term to describe the Egyptians that occurs at this time is *qibṭī* (pl. *aqbāṭ*), which makes its debut in an eighth-century document related to taxation, where it is juxtaposed with “Muslim.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, fiscal dues and contributions in kind imposed on the Egyptian population are described with this terminology (e.g., *fuḍūl al-qibṭi*; *baqṭ al-qibṭi*).¹⁰⁷ The term *qibṭī*, the Arabic transcription of the Greek *Aegyptos*, was thus introduced in the late eighth century for legal-fiscal purposes, referring to the Egyptians as inhabitants of the land of Egypt, not in the later meaning of adherents of the Coptic Church.¹⁰⁸

100. Morelli, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXII, no. 55; Bell, *Greek Papyri*, vol. 4, no. 1441, pp. 343–347.

101. Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 20, dated 192/808.

102. Bouderbala, “Les *mawālī*,” p. 146; Crone, “Mawla II”; Simonsohn, “Conversion,” pp. 200–203.

103. Papaconstantinou, “Administering”; Papaconstantinou, “Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*,” p. 150.

104. Grohmann, *From the World*, pp. 132–134, dating to 789; Diem, “Einige frühe amtliche Urkunden,” no. 7, dated 790. Again, the earliest attestation of *dhimmā* referring to the subjected population comes from Nessana; Hoyland, “Earliest Attestation.”

105. Diem, “Einige frühe amtliche Urkunden,” no. 7.

106. Sijpesteijn, “Archival Mind,” no. 1.

107. Grohmann, “Arabischer Steuerpapyrus,” nos. 2, 4.

108. Cf. Omar, “‘Crinkly Haired People.’”

THE CRUCIAL NINTH CENTURY

The processes that set in motion fundamental changes in the linguistic, ethnic, and religious composition of the Egyptian countryside crescendoed in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁰⁹ Increasing numbers of Arabic papyri coming from the ninth century onward attest, on the one hand, to an increase in Arab settlement in the countryside, where most papyri are found, and, on the other, to the growing use of the Arabic (written) language and Arabic-producing institutions by Egypt's inhabitants of whatever background.¹¹⁰ Fiscal demands and receipts were increasingly written in Arabic, although the chancery continued to use Greek and Coptic as well.¹¹¹ While Egyptians had little choice in the language in which they communicated with the authorities, Arabic legal documents were also drawn up for Egyptians who sometimes did not even speak Arabic.¹¹² Finally, increasing numbers of Arabic letters, recording commercial transactions, requests for help, or demands for deliveries, were produced. The result was an amalgamation of Egypt's Arab and non-Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants, who shared the same space, language, and economy.

The call for a full participation of non-Arab Muslims in the Muslim Empire coincided with political events and demographic developments in the ninth century that further undermined the position of Arab Egyptians. Although conversion rates in general seem to have continued to be low, the number of *mawālī* increases in the Greek, Coptic, and Arabic papyrological and epigraphic material from the mid-eighth century onward. Not all *mawālī* mentioned in the documentary record need to have been Egyptian converts and freedmen—they could very well have migrated to Egypt. New Muslims not only increased in numbers, but they demanded equal treatment, challenging Arab superiority.

The revolts and factional fighting that plagued Egypt in the eighth and ninth centuries must have had a damaging effect on agricultural estates and the economic situation in general in the province. This affected Egyptian and Arab landlords and merchants equally, but what is important is that it undermined the economic power of the older Arab elite who had settled in the Egyptian countryside.¹¹³

109. For a similar development in North Africa, see Aillet, "Islamisation"; for al-Andalus, see Fierro, "Les généalogies."

110. Judeo-Arabic developed as a language used by Egyptian Jews with the first specimens on papyrus dating to the ninth century; see Blau and Hopkins, "Judaico-Arabic Papyri."

111. Coptic tax receipts issued for individual taxpayers are systematically being redated to the ninth century. I would like to thank Cecilia Palombo for sharing her observations concerning the Coptic documentation.

112. See the tenth-century Christian marriage contracts drawn up in the Fayyūm; Abbott, "Arabic Marriage Contracts." The phrase used in Arabic legal documents for non-Arab speakers is "after it was read in Arabic and explained in Coptic (*ʿajamiyya*)" (Frantz-Murphy, "Comparison," nos. 1, 2, dating to 961); "after it was read to them and translated" (Abbott, *Monasteries*, no. 1, dating to 946).

113. Kennedy, "Egypt," pp. 78–82.

Finally, migrants from the eastern part of the caliphate challenged the position of the old Arab settlers. Starting in the late eighth century, the role of administrators sent from the eastern Islamic Empire increases. While the governors were, of course, already appointed from Baghdad, the head of police (*ṣāḥib al-shurṭa*), the head of finances (*ṣāḥib al-kharāj*), and the chief judge (*qāḍī*) were traditionally appointed from among the local Arab families, sometimes chosen locally by the governor, sometimes appointed (confirmed) directly from Damascus or Baghdad. The practice of relying on local Arab families to fill these positions changed in the early ninth century.¹¹⁴ The caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785) appointed Ismāʿil b. Alisāʿ al-Kindī from Kufa *qāḍī* of Fuṣṭāṭ in 164/780, who remained in office until 167/783. From then on, the *quḍāt* of Egypt regularly came from Marw, Kūfa, Medina, Balkh, and Basra, although native Egyptians continued to be appointed occasionally to the office.¹¹⁵ With the rising power of Turko-Persian military and administrative elites in the Abbasid caliphate, governors appointed over Egypt were also increasingly chosen from among them. While this process had begun in the late eighth century, the arrival of ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṭāhīr (d. 230/844) in Egypt in 827 to restore order for the caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 189–218/813–833) in the aftermath of the fourth civil war was instrumental. The administrative reforms introduced by him resulted in greater centralization of the different governmental domains and their institutional infrastructure.¹¹⁶

Coming as part of the military entourage of the governors, Turko-Persian soldiers settled permanently in the province.¹¹⁷ Scribes, secretaries, and other administrative personnel probably accompanied these governors and their troops, as the introduction of Persian technical vocabulary and scribal customs from the east shows.¹¹⁸ Others, including large groups of Christian and Jewish merchants from Tikrit and Mosul, were attracted by the much more favorable economic situation in Egypt, especially in the cities. Among the immigrants were well-known intellectuals such as the lawyer al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820), the geographer al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 897/8), and the family of the Prophet Muḥammad’s biographer Ibn Hishām (d. 828 or 833). The famous Egyptian monastic communities offered another magnet for temporary and permanent visitors from the rest of the Muslim

114. Kennedy, “Central Government.”

115. See the overview of *quḍāt* in Tillier, *Histoire*, pp. 24–30.

116. Sijpesteijn, “Delegation,” p. 69; Kennedy, “Egypt”; Kennedy, “Central Government.”

117. Where they appear as agricultural leaseholders (Frantz-Murphy, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXI).

118. The Persian *jahbadh* replaced *qusṭāl* for paymaster; see Khan, “Pre-Islamic Background”; Frantz-Murphy, “Economics.” The use of star-shaped drawings on fiscal documents, tax receipts, and demand notes seems to imitate the stars on clay seal imprints that appear on fiscal documents in Khurasan; see Khan, “Newly Discovered.” Similarly, the cursive chancery script introduced in Egypt in the ninth century is attested in documents from Khurasan already in the mid-eighth century; Khan, “Newly Discovered.”

Empire. Their impact on the material and religious-linguistic domain of their coreligionist communities in Egypt is clearly detectable.¹¹⁹

The old Arab elite did not undergo the dismantling of the privileges it enjoyed on the basis of descent and early achievements passively. Members of the Arab settler population led several revolts, sometimes joining dissatisfied Egyptians.¹²⁰ The development, however, was inevitable, and the process was completed with the caliph al-Mu‘taṣim’s decision in 218/833 to “drop the Arabs from the diwan, stopping the payment of their stipends.”¹²¹

These demographic, economic, and political developments seem to have had three main results. First, an Arab and Egyptian common regional identity, coalescing around shared interests and convergent cultures, developed. Second, with the disappearance of the distinction between Arab and Egyptian inhabitants of the province, new markers began to be used. Finally, with the decline of Arab hegemony, other instruments of social and administrative hierarchy and authority came into existence.

SHARED INTERESTS

As Turko-Persian officials took over the main positions in the administration of the province, members of Egypt’s Arab elite become more visible in the countryside, where they made alliances and eventually integrated into the indigenous Egyptian strata. Arab landholders suffered the same fiscal burdens as their non-Muslim neighbors, and they rose in revolt to protest financial pressure and other governmental measures.

The increased interaction between Egyptians and Arabs also led to the development of a shared Egyptian regional identity. Histories and tales establishing a common Arab-Egyptian narrative pointed to the intertwined trajectories of the different population groups.¹²² It is in the ninth century that the historical myth of the Egyptian-Arab alliance during the seventh-century Arab conquest comes into existence.¹²³ Other accounts emerge aimed at appropriating the Egyptian landscape and history for Islam, installing Islamic values and events in reports

119. Patriarch Michael (in office 881–899?) is said to have sold Coptic churches and other properties in and around Babylon to Jews in the reign of Aḥmad b. al-Ṭulūn (r. 868–884); Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Armani, *Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, trans. Evetts, fol. 44a. The use of Syriac in Egypt’s monastic communities increased, with the most explicit expression in the foundation of Dayr al-Suryān, the monastery of the Syrians; see Innemée and van Rompay, “Présence.” This monastery and other buildings in ninth-century Cairo, such as the mosque of Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn, display the characteristic stucco works of the Abbasid palace city of Samarra. Cf. Sijpesteijn, “Visible Identities.”

120. For example, Ibn ‘Ubaydūs, who led a Christian-Muslim revolt in the Delta in 216/831; Kennedy, “Egypt,” p. 83. See also the violent uprisings against al-Shāfi‘ī’s legal reforms instigated by Egypt’s leading Maliki scholars and members of the old Arab settlers; El Shamsy, *Canonization*, pp. 115–116.

121. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. Guest, pp. 194–195.

122. For example, in the accounts on Muḥammad’s Coptic bride Māriya; see Öhrnberg, “Mariya al-Qibtiyya.”

123. Mikhail, *From Byzantium*, pp. 23, 33, 191.

set in pre-Islamic Egypt.¹²⁴ Such local histories established inalienable ties to the land and emphasized the early Arabs' achievements, boosting their status when faced with competition from the newcomers.¹²⁵ That such stories did not need to have an especially robust historical grounding but could rather be entirely the confessions of the Islamic period only emphasizes the importance of this phenomenon.¹²⁶ These developments as observed in the Egyptian sources should be connected to the more general trend of the appearance of regional histories or world histories organized according to regions.¹²⁷

ETHNIC-RELIGIOUS IDENTIFIERS

In the ninth century, significant changes occur in the terms used to describe the Egyptians that reflect a different spatial and social interaction among the province's population. Increased intermingling of Arab and Egyptian populations led to a shared Egyptian identity and stimulated processes of conversion. Greater movements of people across the empire in this period added to the mixing of population groups. As a result, religious and ethnic identifiers were used more frequently to express social distinctions among a population that had otherwise converged culturally, religiously, and linguistically. This process of reacting against the intermingling and, eventually, convergence of diverse populations as a result of globalization—a movement to universalization—by drawing upon local and particularistic identifications has been described as “glocalization.”¹²⁸ A similar movement can be observed in legal and other normative texts that from the end of the eighth century aim to regulate relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.¹²⁹ Another development is the increased importance of space, as can be concluded from the introduction of geographical markers as onomastic identifiers from the ninth century onward.

With the abolition of the diwan, Arabs lost their privileged status in the province. It comes as no surprise that the use of Arab tribal *nisbas* virtually disappeared from this period onward.¹³⁰ Only a handful of common tribal identifiers—such as al-Qurashī, al-Anṣārī, and al-Hāshimī—continue to be attested.¹³¹ Similarly, attestations of the word *mawlā* diminish sharply at the end of the ninth century,

124. Sijpesteijn, “Building.”

125. As when Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam recorded the achievements of his family, who were among the first Arabs to arrive in Egypt; Kennedy, “Egypt.”

126. Cook, “Pharaonic History.”

127. Antrim, *Routes*, pp. 87–88, 102–107.

128. Robertson, “Globalisation.”

129. Simonsohn, “Conversion,” p. 202; Papaconstantinou, “Between *Umma* and *Dhimma*,” pp. 148–150.

130. This compares well with the situation in other areas of the Muslim Empire; Webb, “Identity.”

131. E.g., David-Weill, “Papyrus arabes,” no. 16, dating to 773; Khan, “Arabic Legal Document,” dating to 796; Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, vol. 1, no. 51, dating to 811; Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, vol. 2, no. 96, dating to 841–842; Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 15, dated 190/806; no. 57, dated 205/820; 372, dated 238/853–854.

to disappear entirely from the papyrological and epigraphic record by the tenth.¹³² No longer separated in space or by language and not even able to gain some advantage from ethnicity, Egyptians turned to religious and regional markers to assert differences.

The use of *nisbas* such as *al-yahūdī* and *al-isrāʿīlī* to refer to Jews and *al-naṣrānī* and *al-masīhī* for Christians, as well as other religious descriptors occur more frequently from the ninth century onward. Among these are also religiously defined names such as Yahūdā and ʿAbd al-Masīh and expressions such as Banū Isrāʿīl.¹³³ The so-called Era of the Martyrs used to date Coptic documents spread in the ninth century, establishing a connection with the early-fourth-century Christian martyrs at the hands of the Roman emperor Diocletian as an expression of a self-conscious religious identity.¹³⁴

Curiously, geographical markers representing cities, regions, or provinces outside Egypt only occur twice—for descendants from Yemeni conquerors of Egypt¹³⁵—in the documentary record from Egypt before the ninth century, and they are only sparingly used for people after that date. This pattern seems to compare with other regions in the Muslim Empire. The exception is Arabia, where a couple of regional markers occur already in seventh- and eighth-century graffiti, presumably left by pilgrims, identifying the garrison city from which they originate.¹³⁶

References to provinces or larger regions are less commonly applied to individuals on documents and epitaphs in Egypt than are *nisbas* referring to cities. Several individuals who died in the ninth century are identified as descending from migrants from Khurasān.¹³⁷ *Al-Andalusī* is attested on an epitaph dated 235/850.¹³⁸ *Al-maghribī* is not a *nisba* that is used in the epitaphs of this period, but several individuals are identified as such in the papyri. These all date from the tenth century onward, possibly coinciding with increased immigration from North Africa.¹³⁹ *Nubian* is used to describe slaves, especially female ones.¹⁴⁰ Another possible association with slavery appears in the epitaph of a woman who died in 335/946 in Aswān and who is identified as the daughter of Hārūn *mawlā*

132. Onimus, “Les mawālī.” Epitaphs mention descendants of *mawālī* into the eleventh and twelfth (very occasionally) centuries.

133. Sijpesteijn, “Visible Identities.”

134. Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems*, pp. 67–68.

135. In epitaphs dating to 174/790 from the cemetery ʿAyn al-Šīra, south of Fustāṭ, and 191/807 (Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, nos. 2 and 18).

136. E.g., Muḥammad b. ʿArīf al-Dimashqī, who completed the *ʿumra* in 144/761; see al-ʿAbūdī and al-ʿĀmir, “Nuqūsh al-Islamiyya muʿarrikha,” pp. 54–55. Another geographical *nisba* that occurs relatively often is *ʿAylāʿī*. I would like to thank ʿAbd Allāh AlHatani for pointing me to these references.

137. E.g., Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 35, dated 200/815–816; no. 190, dated 222/837; no. 273, dated 230/845.

138. Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 328.

139. E.g., Grohmann, “Arabische Papyri,” no. 10; Rāḡib, *Actes*, no. 6.

140. Rāḡib, *Marchands*, vol. 5.1, no. 13; no. 14, ninth century; Rāḡib, *Actes*, no. 7, dating to 966; no. 9, dating to 983; no. 10, dating to 994; no. 11, dating to 994.

al-Nūbī.¹⁴¹ The identification *al-fārisī*, from the province of Fāris, occurs in several epitaphs.¹⁴² The earliest attestation in the epigraphic record, however, comes from Arabia, where it occurs in a graffito from Najrān dated 190/805–806.¹⁴³ *Al-Shāmī* is not very commonly attested in epitaphs.¹⁴⁴

There are many attestations of migrants from Iraqī and Khurasani cities such as Baghdād, Kūfa, Baṣra, and Khwarizm in papyri and inscriptions dating to the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁴⁵ This compares well with the migration movements from the central Abbasid lands to the west described above. Other towns that appear in the documentary record, albeit less frequently than the above-mentioned ones, to refer both to individuals and, more often, to goods, are Ḥimṣ, Dimashq, Tūnis, al-Quds, Tripoli, Ba'lbak, and Mecca.¹⁴⁶ Egyptian towns occur sparingly, but among them is Aswān, possibly also because a garrison was stationed there.¹⁴⁷

With Egyptian and Arab identities converging, the terms *qibṭī* and *ʿajamī* start to be used by Muslims and non-Muslims for indigenous Egyptian practices as well as the Coptic language. In this way, “Coptic months” (*shuhūr al-qibṭī*; *shuhūr al-ʿajamī*) occur in fiscal documents produced by the Muslim chancery and in legal documents preserved on papyrus, as well as on epitaphs.¹⁴⁸ *ʿAjamiyya* is used to refer to the Coptic language in four legal documents dating from 961 to 964

141. ʿAbd al-Tawab, *Stèles*, vol. 3, p. 129, no. 428. It is also one of the *nisbas* of the father of a woman deceased in 208/823–824 (Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 76).

142. E.g., Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 196, dated 223/838; no. 268, dated 230/844; vol. 3, no. 852, dated 253/867–868; Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 9, no. 3399, dated 229/843–44; vol. 10, no. 3876, dated 250/864–865.

143. Kabawi et al., “General Survey Reports,” p. 60, no. 31.

144. E.g., Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 4, no. 1213, dated 272/885–886; vol. 5, no. 1774, dated 341/952–953.

145. Al-Baṣrī, e.g.: Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 314, dated 234/849; vol. 3, no. 810, dated 252/866–867; Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 2, no. 401, dated 241/855–856; no. 566, dated 246/860–861; Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *Répertoire*, vol. 2, no. 661, dated 263/876–877; Margoliouth, *Catalogue*, no. III 12, dating to 926–927. Al-Kūfī: Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 3, no. 865, dated 254/868; Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 9, no. 3287, dated 214/829–830; Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique*, vol. 1, no. 250, dated 221/835–836; ʿAbd al-Tawab, *Stèles*, vol. 1, no. 13, dated 227/841–842; Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, vol. 5, no. 289, dating to the ninth century. Al-Baghdādi: Khan, *Arabic Papyri*, vol. 1, no. 12, dated 844; Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 2, no. 419, dated 241/855–856; no. 542, dated 245/859–860; vol. 4, no. 1313, dated 278/891–892; vol. 10, no. 3924, dated 300/912–913; Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 3, no. 832, dated 252/866–867. Al-Khwarizmi: Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 353, dated 237/851.

146. Only the *nisbas* associated with individuals are listed here. Al-Ṭrābulṣī: Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 37. Al-Ba'lbakki: Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 324. Al-Dimashqī: Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, no. 215, dated 226/840–841; Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 2, no. 410, dated 241/855–856. Al-Makki: Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue* vol. 1, no. 297, dated 232/847; vol. 3, no. 823, dated 252/866–867; Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique*, vol. 2, no. 456, dated 247/861–862; Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 9, no. 3294, dated 215/830–831; ʿAbd al-Tawab, *Stèles*, vol. 1, no. 81, dated 247/861–862; P.Vind.Arab. III, no. 17, dated 919–920. Al-Qudsi: Diem, *Arabische Briefe*, no. 60, ninth century. Al-Ḥimṣī: Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 9, no. 3348, dated 220/835; Diem, ed., *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XVI, no. 4, dated 952.

147. Hawary and Rached, eds., *Catalogue*, vol. 1, nos. 191, 255, 279; Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, vol. 6, no. 394, ninth century; Khoury, *Papyrologische Studien*, no. 9, dated 856–857.

148. E.g., on epitaphs: Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 5, nos. 1776, 1867, 2021. On papyri: Frantz-Murphy, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. XXI, no. 20, dated 277/891; Khoury, *Papyrologische Studien*, no. 6, dated 264/878; no. 11, dated 185/800–801. For the unique use of *shuhūr al-a'ajim*, see note 73 above.

from the Fayyūm. As it is stated, the legal documents were read to the parties of the legal transaction in Arabic as one of the conditions of their validity but were subsequently translated or explained to them in Coptic.¹⁴⁹ *ʿAjāmī* and *qibṭī* also occur in descriptions of female slaves dating to the tenth century.¹⁵⁰ In a Muslim epitaph dated 323/934–935, the deceased is described as Kalma (كلمة) bint Maymūn al-Qibṭī.¹⁵¹ The *nisba al-Miṣrī* appears several times in the epigraphic record of the ninth century in Egypt. An epitaph from Aswān dated 247/861–862 identifies the deceased woman’s father as *al-miṣrī*.¹⁵² The famous mystic Dhū al-Nūn is identified on his mausoleum, dated 245/859–860, as “Egyptian” (*al-miṣrī*).¹⁵³ In a dedicatory inscription dated 299/911–912, the beneficiary is called *Nimr al-Miṣrī mawlā amīr al-muʿminīn*.¹⁵⁴ In ninth-century papyri, coins are sometimes identified as “Egyptian.”¹⁵⁵

RULES FOR EVERYONE

The breakdown of Arab supremacy called, on the one hand, for new ways of announcing social distinctions. On the other, it paved the way for a different legal framework, which did not privilege Arabs but had rules that applied to all Muslims regardless of their ethnic background. The great architect of Islamic law, al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), designed his legal theory in Egypt. His intellectual project was very much inspired by the Egyptian context. Among his fiercest opponents were representatives of the old Arab-Egyptian families who upheld the Maliki *madhab*, while his supporters and students included many *mawālī*.¹⁵⁶

Another development that facilitated merit-based achievement, as opposed to privileges acquired at birth, was the emphasis on the office or position that someone held in the administration. A small papyrus document dating from between Rajab 10, 212 AH (October 5, 827 CE) and Ramaḍān 214 AH (November 2–December 1, 829 CE) illustrates this well. It contains an official document produced by “Ḥasan b. Yaʿqūb, representative (*khalīfa*) in the Fayyūm of Yahyā b. Saʿīd who is the representative of the judge (*qāḍī*) ʿĪsā b. al-Munkadir.” ʿĪsā b. al-Munkadir (d. after 215/830) is the well-known chief judge of Fuṣṭāṭ who held office from 827 to 829.¹⁵⁷ Ḥasan b. Yaʿqūb and Yahyā b. Saʿīd are not otherwise known. Significantly, Ḥasan b. Yaʿqūb identifies himself with only minimal reference to his own office and geographical constituency. More important seems

149. See note 108 above.

150. Rāḡib, *Actes*, no. 6, dating to 923; no. 9, dating to 983.

151. Wiet, ed., *Catalogue*, vol. 5, no. 1652.

152. ʿAbd al-Tawab, *Stèles*, vol. 1, no. 83, dated 247/861–862.

153. Wiet, *Matériaux*, vol. 2, p. 63, no. 562.

154. Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique*, vol. 3, no. 904.

155. Rāḡib, *Marchands*, vol. 3, no. 1; Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, vol. 1, no. 42.

156. El Shamsy, *Canonization*, pp. 115–116; Brockopp, *Early Mālikī Law*.

157. Sijpesteijn, “Delegation.”

to be the chain of officials reaching back to the main officeholder in the capital itself, of which he is a part.

In earlier centuries, lower officials also made reference to their superiors when implementing government policy or specific orders, such as the imposition of a new tax, the collection of tribute, or the rounding up of fugitive taxpayers. This took place, however, in a direct, face-to-face manner, for example, by quoting from a decree or letter received from a higher-placed official. Other documents indicate that the letters were taken along by officials as they went about their tasks, making references to the mandate their superiors had imposed on them. Starting in the second half of the eighth century, the highest officials, representatives of the governor or caliph, were identified through this relationship. So *mawālī* of the *amīr al-mu'minīn* appear frequently as fiscal and other administrative agents, and local officials identify themselves as *'āmil al-amīr*, the governor's agent.¹⁵⁸ Establishing authority through the delegation of power from above in the (self-)identification of third-tier officials such as al-Ḥasan is new. It signals the final stage of the integration of Egyptian elites into the Muslim Empire: using Arabic in a Muslim environment, they could fulfill the same offices that Arab Muslims could.

CONCLUSION

The Arab takeover does not seem to have resulted in large-scale displacement; in fact, there are no reports of estates or lands occupied by the conquerors outside the fortress of Babylon and the newly founded capital, Fuṣṭāṭ. There is no evidence of large-scale deportations, sequestrations, or ejections of local elite communities. Strikingly, there are also no revolts or uprisings recorded in the first sixty years of Muslim rule. The picture is one of almost eerie calm, but we have no specific reason to question it.

The role of local elites, especially the middle layer or "little big men," in a successful regime change and empire building is crucial.¹⁵⁹ As potentially dangerous as the forces of resistance were, pulling together their local constituencies in revolt, local elites are vital to the smooth transition in the day-to-day running of affairs and as necessary middlemen between the rulers and the local population. The inclusion of local elites in the new regime determines its success, while local elites are attracted to the opportunities offered by the new political constellation. A balance needs to be found between devolution through total co-option and annihilation through replacement. State service typically offers middle local

158. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, p. 103. For the observation that the *mawālī amīr al-mu'minīn* are administrators, I should like to thank Marie Legendre.

159. See also Brown, "Byzantine Italy"; Brown, "Gentlemen"; Brown and Christie, "Was There a Byzantine Model?"

elites an opportunity for social mobility within one to two generations after the military-political takeover.

How do these models compare with the Arab takeover of Egypt? And how were the Egyptian middle elites incorporated into the empire, ensuring its successful transition from a conquest society to a political empire? After the conquest of Egypt, the small number of high governmental positions were immediately filled with Arab officials. The Arab rulers of Egypt had several main concerns. First, they had to make sure to maintain their own identity apart from the people they had conquered. As a minority with many elements of their religion and culture still undefined, measures to keep a safe distance from the majority subject population were crucial. Inside the garrison city of Fustāṭ and in some other places such as Alexandria, paid from the diwan, there was initially deliberately little interaction between the Arabs and the Egyptians.

Next was the care of their own Arab elites. The leaders of the earliest conquerors received prime plots of land in Fustāṭ to build on. Stipends were provided for them and their families while they continued to fight on campaigns in North Africa, on the Nubian border, and on the Mediterranean. This was no longer the work of the “whole” Arab militarized population but rather a more or less professionalized standing army. New opportunities for the Arabs from Fustāṭ thus arose.

At the lower level of the administrative structure, Egypt’s pre-Islamic administrative and economic local elites were reduced to the status of functionaries, maintaining the same positions in the local administration but with drastically reduced responsibilities vis-à-vis Arab officials, initially located in the countryside and then in the central chancery. At the same time, the need to find new sources of income became more urgent. In the course of the seventh century and definitely in the early eighth, pressure on the diwan increased, with more and more people demanding to profit from it. At the same time, the authorities in Damascus might have needed new sources of income as the winding down of the great conquests led to a decrease in income through booty, so that they, too, made more of a demand on the fiscal income of the province. The administrative offices lower down the administrative hierarchy might have provided good career prospects for the Arabs from Fustāṭ. The replacement of Christian Egyptian administrators by Arab ones was part of a program aimed at greater centralized control to increase fiscal income from the provinces. New ambitions among the Arab rulers, extending naturally from the development of the Muslim Empire, were enabled by the consolidation of their position. It was possible *and* desirable to take matters more firmly into their own hands.

Egyptian local officials were gradually replaced by Arab-Muslim substitutes, but even then, Egyptian middle elites continued to play an important role in the administrative management at the lowest levels of the administration. Other

occupations in an enhanced economy offering new opportunities and profits might have provided some relief. At the same time, their crucial role at the village level and as middlemen with the Arab authorities might have provided sufficient compensation.¹⁶⁰ Still, the so-called Coptic revolts that begin in the first half of the eighth century and continue for the next century or so are surely related to the reduction of local Egyptian elites' status.

Only with the fundamental social changes that took place in the ninth century were pathways created for Egypt's middle elite to rise through the different layers of the administration.

It takes some two centuries after the Arab conquest of Egypt for local middle elites to acquire the opportunities of social mobility that post-conquest societies typically offer after one or two generations. This deviation from the rule of post-regime-change involving middle local elites was the result of the circumstances of the Arab conquest. It was caused by the strictly imposed separation of the majority of the Arab and Egyptian populations in garrisons and the Egyptian countryside, respectively, which lasted into the second half of the eighth century. The Egyptian middle elite had little need and not much opportunity to get fully acculturated before this period. Two generations later, at the beginning of the ninth century, Egyptian middle elites do appear fully participating in the Muslim Empire in Egypt. Through conversion and Arabicization toward the end of the eighth century, Egyptians become more intertwined with the Arab community, providing opportunities to pass on cultural traits and knowledge. The influx of eastern administrators in the ninth century (post-Fourth Fitna) create openings for a drawing together of the Arab and Egyptian inhabitants of Egypt. With Arab supremacy broken, Egyptians were no longer hampered by the ethnic background that they lacked but could rather benefit from the cultural-linguistic adjustments they had been able to make. Incorporating indigenous Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Arab Muslim elements, "Egyptian" now meant something very different from what it had meant at the time of the conquest.

160. Papaconstantinou summarizes how at the village level Christian Egyptian notables could exercise tremendous power as village headmen ("Great Men," pp. 182–183).