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Living the End of Antiquity



Individual Histories from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt

Edited by

Sabine R. Huebner, Eugenio Garosi,
Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello, Matthias Müller,
Stefanie Schmidt and Matthias Stern

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<http://www.papyri.info/docs/checklist>.

Editions of Arabic papyri are quoted according to the abbreviations of Petra M. Sijpesteijn, John F. Oates, and Andreas Kaplony “Checklist of Arabic papyri,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 42 (2005) 127–166. The up-to-date electronic version is accessible via:

<http://www.naher-osten.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/papyrologie/apb/index.html>.

Arabic inscriptions:

RCEA = Étienne Combe et al. (eds.), *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* I, Cairo 1931.

Sabaic documents:

X.BSB = Peter Stein, *Die altsüdarabischen Minuskelinschriften auf Holzstäbchen aus der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek in München*, 2 vols., Tübingen 2010.

Bactrian documents:

BD = *Bactrian documents from Northern Afghanistan*:

I = Nicholas Sims-Williams (ed.), *Legal and Economic Documents*, London 2000.

II = Nicholas Sims-Williams (ed.), *Letters and Buddhist texts*, London 2007.

Sogdian documents and texts:

Mugh = Sogdian documents from Mount Mugh, mostly edited by Vladimir A. Livshits (ed.), *Sogdian Epigraphy of Central Asia and Semirech'e. Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum. Part II: Inscriptions of the Seleucid and Parthian Periods and of Eastern Iran and Central Asia vol. III* (trad. Nicholas Sims-Williams), London 2015.

TSP = Emile Benveniste (ed.), *Textes Sogdiens*; édités, traduits et commentés par E. Benveniste, Paris 1940.

Islamic Numismatics:

ASCC = Rika Gyselen, *Arab-Sasanian Copper Coinage*, Vienna 2000.

BMC = John Walker (ed.), *A Catalogue of the Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umayyad Coins* (A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum II), London 1956.

CUS = George C. Miles, *The Coinage of the Umayyads from Spain*, New York 1950.

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List of Contributors

Roger S. Bagnall is Professor emeritus of Ancient History and Leon Levy Director emeritus of the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, and Jay Professor of Greek and Latin and Professor of History, emeritus, Columbia University. He has edited papyri, ostraka, and inscriptions from Egypt and Asia Minor and worked in the social, economic, administrative, and cultural history of the Greco-Roman East. He is the director of NYU's excavations at Amheida (Dakhla Oasis, Egypt). The second edition of his *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* appeared in 2019.

Anne Boud'hors is Directrice de recherche at the CNRS (Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes). Her research focuses on Coptic language and manuscripts. She has edited many Coptic texts, both literary and documentary. Her publications include (with Chantal Heurtel), *Les ostraca coptes de la TT29. Autour du moine Frangé* (Brussels, 2010) and *Le Canon 8 de Chénouté* (Cairo, 2013).

Jennifer Cromwell is Lecturer in Ancient History at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research interests focus on social and economic history during the 6th to 8th centuries CE, in particular on the basis of the Coptic papyrological evidence. The role of Coptic scribes at both the local and national level is the subject of her monograph, *Recording Village Life: A Coptic Scribe in Early Islamic Egypt* (Ann Arbor, 2017).

Alon Dar is a PhD candidate at Leiden University as part of the ERC research project "Embedding Conquest: Naturalising Muslim Rule in the Early Islamic Empire (600 – 1000)." His study focuses on Early Islamic governors and the role they played within the social and political structures of the empire.

Judith Evans Grubbs is the Betty Gage Holland Professor of Roman History at Emory University. Her research focuses on social history and law in the Roman imperial period, particularly women, the family, and slavery. She is the author of *Law and Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine's Marriage Legislation* (Oxford, 1995) and *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce, and Widowhood* (Routledge, 2002), and the co-editor (with Tim Parkin) of the *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (2013). She is currently working on a book, *Children without Fathers in Roman Law: Paternity, Patrimony, and Freedom*, as well as several articles on slavery in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Eugenio Garosi holds a Ph.D. in Arabic Studies and Ancient History from the University of Basel and the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (Munich) and is currently employed as a research assistant in the Arabic Papyrology Database project at the

LMU. He was a member of the interdisciplinary three-year research project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society – Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries” funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation from 2016 to 2018. The focus of his doctoral thesis lies on the rise and development of Arabic as an imperial language. He has written various articles on Early Islamic Arabic documentary sources and on Christian-Muslim relations in medieval times.

Sabine R. Huebner is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Basel and PI of the SNSF research project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society – Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries.” Her research focuses on social and religious history and the everyday life of common people in antiquity. She has published monographs including *The Family in Roman Egypt* (Cambridge, 2013) and *Papyri and the Social World of the New Testament* (Cambridge, 2019) and is co-editor of *Growing up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (Oxford, 2012), *Inheritance, Law and Religion in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Paris, 2014), *Mediterranean Families in Antiquity* (Oxford, 2016), *The Single Life in the Roman and Later Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, 2019), and the edition of the Basel papyrus collection (*P.Bas.* II).

James G. Keenan in Fall 2019 completed his tenure as Professor of Classical Studies, Loyola University Chicago, having taught there since 1974. His research interests have centered on Late Antique Egypt’s law and society with special concern for the historical uses of documentary papyri. He is co-editor of *Law and Legal Practice in Egypt from Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Cambridge 2014), recently reissued in paperback.

Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello is a research collaborator at the University of Basel and was a member of the SNSF project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society – Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries.” Her research focuses on Greek and Coptic papyrology and more recently Digital Palaeography. She is one of the editors of the forthcoming volume of papyrus editions from Basel (*P.Bas.* II) and has published several articles on the papyri coming from the village of Aphrodito before and after the Islamic conquest.

Matthias Müller is a research assistant at the University of Basel and was a member of the SNSF project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society – Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries.” His research focuses on Coptic as well as Pharaonic Egypt. He has published monographs on Ancient Egyptian and Coptic grammar as well as text editions, such as *Archangels and Martyrs* (Tübingen, 2019). He coedited the forthcoming edition of the Basel papyrus collection (*P.Bas.* II).

Arietta Papaconstantinou is Associate Professor of Ancient History at the University of Reading. Her research focuses on the social, cultural, and religious history of the late antique and early Islamic eastern Mediterranean, with a focus on Egypt and South Palestine. Among her books are *Le culte des saints en Egypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides* (Paris, 2001) and *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids* (Farnham, 2010). She has written widely on aspects of late antique and early Islamic social history and material culture, and is currently engaged in a project that studies the social implications of credit and debt in the early medieval East Mediterranean.

Lucian Reinfandt, Christian-Albrechts-Universität Kiel, is a historian of Islam and Senior Researcher at the Department of Papyri of the Austrian National Library. He has published on law and society in eastern Islamic lands, including his *Official Epistolography and the Language(s) of Power* (with Stephan Procházka and Sven Tost, Vienna, 2015). His current research focuses on the formation of bureaucracy in the early caliphal empire. Recent publications include *Strong Letters at the Mamluk Court* (Leiden, 2019) and *Les archives fiscales de Minā, fils de Damarqūra, un contribuable copte du IXe siècle* (with Naïm Vanthieghem, Paris, 2016).

Stefanie Schmidt is a PostDoc researcher at the University of Basel and former member of the SNSF project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society – Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries.” Her research focuses on the economy of the Roman, Late Roman and early Islamic periods with a special focus on Egypt. She has published a monograph on the finances of Egyptian *metropoleis* (Wiesbaden, 2014) and several articles on economic changes between late antique and early Islamic times.

Matthias Stern is a lecturer at the Institute of Ancient History at the University of Basel, where he was also an academic assistant and a member of the SNSF project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society – Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries.” His research focuses on public administration and the interactions of state and society in the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire. In Basel, he recently completed his PhD in Ancient History with a thesis on *Taxes and Authority in the Late Antique Countryside: The Reach of the State and the Pagarchs of Byzantine Egypt*.

Nicoletta De Troia completed her PhD in 2019 at the University of Rome Tor Vergata with a thesis entitled *Le oasi del Deserto Occidentale d'Egitto nella documentazione letteraria greco-latina. Problemi e prospettive di ricerca*. Her research focuses on the Greek and Latin sources for the history of the oases of the Western Egyptian Desert.

Lorelei Vanderheyden holds a Ph.D. in Coptic Papyrology from the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Paris) since 2015 and is currently a post-doctoral researcher in the Cultural Research Centre 933 (Material Text Cultures) at the University of Heidelberg. Her doctoral thesis focused on publishing a corpus of written correspondence in Coptic, found in a family archive of the sixth century CE in Middle Egypt. She is the author of papyrological articles and is particularly interested in palaeography, in the history of Byzantine Egypt, and the edition of ancient texts.

Sabine R. Huebner, Eugenio Garosi, Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello,
Matthias Müller, Stefanie Schmidt, Matthias Stern

Introduction: Individual Histories From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt

1 The setting

With the capture of the city of Alexandria, the cultural center of the classical world, the advancing armies of the Islamic expansion crushed the last resistance to their conquest of Egypt. In 642, nearly seven hundred years after the region had become part of the Roman Empire, it fell once again to a foreign power. However, we know little about the institutional and organizational changes the new rulers imposed once they had the chance to. Scholars agree that a considerable portion of what had been “Byzantine Egypt” survived the first decades of Muslim rule, but the extent of administrative, social, and economic change at this crucial transition period from ancient to early medieval history remains the subject of debate and continues to intrigue scholars.¹ Indeed, one could hardly expect several hundred years of (virtually) continuous Christian-Byzantine domination to fade without leaving substantial traces behind. And while switching colors on political maps is easily done, it is harder to grasp what this entailed for the local population, their daily lives, and their perceptions of one another and of their masters. How “Byzantine” was “early Islamic” Egypt still? How “Egyptian” or, if one prefers, “Coptic” was it?

The international conference *Living the End of Antiquity: Individual Histories from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt*, which took place in May 2017 at the University of Basel, gathered established and early-career scholars alike to discuss change and continuity from late antique to early Islamic Egypt through individual experiences – delving into political-administrative, economic, religious, and (other) social dynamics to explore phenomena of stability and disruption during the transition from the classical to the postclassical world. The conference formed part of the interdisciplinary three-year research project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society – Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries” directed by Sabine R. Huebner and funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation from 2016 to 2018.

As questions about change and continuity demand multilayered and nuanced answers, focusing on individual histories allowed the conference participants to capture patterns as well as to highlight what was particular. While such a close-up view

¹ For contributions to the debate on change and continuities, see i.a. Berkes (2017); Bruning (2017); Delattre/Vanthieghem (2016); Mikhail (2014); Sijpesteijn (2013); Legendre (2013); Delattre/Pintaudi/Vanthieghem (2013); Papaconstantinou (2010); Foss (2009); Gonis (2009; 2004a; 2004b; 2003; 2001); Morelli (2001); Gascou (1983).

inevitably simplifies the issues at hand, it also presents opportunities to explore the roles of agency and contingency for phenomena of change. Given the complexity of the topic, not all questions could be posed or addressed at the conference. However, the joint discussion of individual perceptions of change demonstrated that there was not one uniform Byzantine society that perceived change uniformly: common taxpayers, for instance, may have noticed politico-administrative change only when it affected the amount of tax they owed or the procedures for gathering it. Provincial power brokers, in contrast, may have faced more immediate repercussions from the conquest as they were closer to the political center. Change and continuity manifest themselves differently in different milieus, and not every region will have experienced the same phenomena: a merchant in Bubastis in the Nile Delta may, for example, have been confronted with change earlier than a tenant in the Thebaid, the southern part of Egypt. Touching upon numerous aspects of change in Egyptian society between the sixth and the eighth centuries, this volume does not aim to provide a systematic survey of the transition from Byzantine to early Arab society. Instead, it offers a mosaic of micro-narratives while at the same time embracing the potential of overarching themes, shared sources, and intertwined methodologies. The individual profiles traced in the various contributions highlight first and foremost the circumstantial character of change and continuity. By discussing synchronous phenomena of stability and disruption, the various contributions illustrate the shortcomings of holistic interpretative models.

One result of these considerations is our approach to terminology. Since each discipline has developed its own connecting ideas and technical language, the varied terminological choices taken by contributors reflect the inclusive approach of our volume. Instead of implementing a unifying parlance, we acknowledge that a label's stringency does not only depend on the inherent quality of the phenomenon or concept it applies to, but also on the extrinsic relations it unveils: "Roman" and "Byzantine," "Arab" and "Muslim" rule, "state" and "empire": each term in these binomials is used apparently interchangeably by different authors in the context of this volume, yet each opens up a different web of references and does not overlap completely with its opposite pendant. We do not view terminological eclecticism as a symptom of inconsistency, but rather embrace it as a means of accentuating different facets of complex phenomena. The multiplicity of scholarly approaches represented in this volume demonstrates not only the complexity of the field but also the opportunities for new scholars from different branches of the humanities to engage with the permeable boundaries between late antiquity and early Islam.

This introduction cannot and does not seek to discuss every aspect of change and continuity from the Byzantine to the early Islamic period. Nevertheless, a short review of illustrative discussions in the field may prove useful to readers who have thus far been unfamiliar with either Byzantine or Islamic Egypt (or both) and with what these fields of study have to offer.

2 Chronology and geography

At the heart of this book is the problem of transition, which naturally invites us to rethink conventional epochal boundaries. We refrain, however, from attempting to answer the elusive question of when and how antiquity in Egypt came to a close. Instead, this volume utilizes the question of the end of antiquity as a stimulus to problematize the value of established chronological boundaries based on epochal political events. While working with an orientative chronological framework stretching from the reign of Justinian I (527–565) to the end of the eighth century, our volume does not envisage a single timespan as binding or exclusively authoritative. Quite on the contrary, we recognize the ancillary value of earlier and later experiences in addressing the long shift from a Byzantine to a Muslim society. Both **Nicoletta De Troia** and **Roger Bagnall** examine archaeological and documentary evidence reaching back as far as the third and fourth centuries as they seek to address long-term trends of change in Egyptian society. And at the other end of our timeframe, **Alon Dar** and **Stefanie Schmidt** discuss accounts by Christian and Muslim historians and geographers from the ninth, tenth, and even later centuries which are key sources on antecedent macro-historical developments that documentary and archaeological sources merely hint at.

Although preceding the period of interest of the present volume, the ecumenical church council at Chalcedon (situated directly opposite Constantinople on the southern shore of the Sea of Marmara) in 451 was nevertheless a decisive landmark. During the council, the trial of the Alexandrian archbishop Dioscorus led to his deposition and exile. This in turn resulted in religious turmoil in Alexandria. The main factor, however, that led to a schism between the Eastern churches was the Chalcedonian definition of the nature of Christ: that within Christ a human and a divine nature existed independently. In opposition, the Alexandrian dogma considered both natures inseparable (hence they are called *miaphysites* or, as was common in earlier years, *monophysites*). From this date on, Christians in Egypt would be faced with the question as to whether they adhered to the Creed of Chalcedon (as championed chiefly by the Byzantine emperors, hence the derogative designation *melkite*), or not.

Our main period of interest starts with the reign of Justinian (527–565), who introduced fiscal, monetary, and administrative reforms in Egypt with his Edict XIII issued in 539. During his regency, religious disorders are recorded in Alexandria for the year 536. Justinian was followed by the emperors Justin II (565–574) and Tiberius II Constantine (574–582), whose reigns did not affect Egypt in the same way. Alexandrian revolts are reported again from the reign of Tiberius' successor Maurice (582–602). Emperor Phocas (602–610) was supported by the Egyptians but faced civic troubles against him starting from 608. Nicetas, Heraclius' cousin, came to power after bloody combat near Alexandria in late 609. The reign of Heraclius (610–641) ensued. Its latter part was marked by religious tensions over monothelitism and was interrupted in Egypt by the Sasanian occupation during the years 619–629.

In the years 639–642, the Arab armies led by ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ conquered Egypt, and the brief reconquest of Alexandria by Byzantine troops in 645–646 only deferred the inevitable. Dissatisfaction with the policies of the caliph ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (644–656) of the Umayyad clan erupted in uprisings in different provinces of the Islamic Empire including Egypt, and it was an Egyptian rebel party that reportedly murdered the caliph in Medina in 656. ‘Uthmān’s assassination prompted the election of ‘Alī as the new caliph and the subsequent rebellion of Mu‘āwiya, governor of Greater Syria and a relative of ‘Uthmān’s. In 659, a re-appointed ‘Amr gained Egypt for Mu‘āwiya’s side and expelled the governor installed by ‘Alī. During the renewed dynastic crisis triggered by the death of both caliph Yazīd I b. Mu‘āwiya (683) and his infant son Mu‘āwiya II, the contender to the caliphate ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr was able to assume control over the province. Shortly thereafter, however, troops sent by the newly elected Marwān I re-asserted Umayyad authority in the region.

While the new rulers initially retained the existing administration and thus also Greek and Coptic as its working languages (see Section 9 of this chapter below), Arabic became the official language for all state affairs and coinage in 705 – although Greek and especially Coptic maintained a key role in the bureaucratic apparatus for decades and centuries thereafter respectively. The imposition of taxes resulted in a series of tax revolts by the Egyptian population in the 720s. During the years 727–737, Arab populations from Syria were relocated into Egypt. The year 750 witnessed the capture and execution in Egypt of the fleeing Marwān II, the last ruler of the Umayyad dynasty based in Damascus, and the subsequent establishment of the Abbasid dynasty based in Baghdad.

Compared with the surveyed timeline, the geographical boundaries of Egypt seem easier to define. This volume’s many portrayals of individuals operating in interregional networks bear testament, however, to Egypt’s political, economic, and cultural integration in the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Egypt as a crossroads for trade between East and West is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea in the North and by the deserts east and west of the Nile Valley. The Nile did not only offer fertile land through its annual summer floods carrying water and silt onto its floodplain; it also provided efficient transport facilities from South to North connecting inner Africa with the Mediterranean world. The total population of Egypt probably remained relatively stable during the transition period. Egypt’s population at the end of the Byzantine period in the sixth and seventh century is estimated at about 2.5 million people.²

While substantial agriculture was limited to the floodplains along the Nile, the Fayum, and the other oases in the Western Desert, the desert plains were equally important for Egypt’s economy. The Eastern Desert held great raw material reserves in gold, precious gems, red porphyry and grey granite, marbles and other stones. The

² Charanis (1967). O’Sullivan (2006) 76 argues for a higher population count at the end of Byzantine rule.

Western Desert offered alum, the Wadi al-Natron natron used in glassmaking. Moreover, the Nile Valley cliffs were also used for quarrying sandstone and limestone, and Aswan in the South was famous for its red granite.

The scope of some contributions embraces Egypt as a whole (**Roger Bagnall**, **Matthias Stern**) and some draw fruitful comparisons with contemporary sources from Syria, Mesopotamia, Central Asia, and even North Africa (**Alon Dar**, **Eugenio Garosi**, **Lucian Reinfandt**). The majority of chapters, however, offer local but vivid glimpses into a specific topic. The peripheral situation of the oases in the Western Desert occupies **Nicoletta De Troia**, **James Keenan** zones in on Antinoopolis, the capital of the Thebaid, and **Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello** and **Lucian Reinfandt** focus on individuals from the nearby city of Hermopolis. Further south, the best documented village in this transition period, Aphrodito, provides the scenery of **Lorelei Vanderheyden**'s portrait and the Theban region offers material for three contributions (**Arietta Papaconstantinou**, **Jennifer Cromwell**, **Matthias Müller**). **Anne Boud'hors** sheds light on the city of Edfu, and **Stefanie Schmidt** and to some extent also **Judith Evans Grubbs** reflect on Egypt's southern border and relationships with Nubia.

3 Prospects and limitations of the evidence

The well-known wealth of Egypt regarding textual sources is again impressive for the period that spans this volume. Giving figures for the number of texts documenting this specific period is, however, a delicate operation. First, not all published texts have already been entered into online databases to make them easily accessible, although the efforts of the teams behind online resources such as papyri.info and trismegistos.org are immense and continue to make scholars' lives considerably easier. Although the figures given below are therefore not exact, they may be taken as an indicator of the order of magnitude we are looking at. According to a search on papyri.info about 9,000 Greek documentary texts can be dated strictly to the period between 500–800 CE. The Coptic sources (mostly ostraca but also including papyri) are less numerous, with a little more than 700 texts. The recent interest in documentary papyrology in Coptic studies will certainly contribute to reducing this discrepancy over the coming decades, and the same can be said for the young discipline of Arabic papyrology, which in total numbers only about 760 edited texts dateable before 800.

Assigning texts to archives is a key element in gaining a better understanding of their content and exploiting their interconnectedness. Of more than 500 papyrological archives listed in the relevant section of trismegistos.org, about 75 belong to the period from the sixth to eighth centuries. One third of these contain fewer than ten texts, while only a dozen contain more than 50 documents. The quantity of texts cannot, of course, be the sole criterion to be taken into account, as illustrated by the two largest archives of ostraca: the Abu Mina archive (TM Arch ID 506) contains about

1,000 similar harvest receipts and the almost 200 texts forming the so-called Etmoulon archive (TM Arch ID 507; lit. “to the mill”) all record the transport of grain to a mill. At the opposite end of the scale, small archives like those of Apa Antinus (TM Arch ID 457), Demetrius (TM Arch ID 309), or Philemon and Thecla (TM Arch ID 190) provide additional information supplementing the picture gained from the main archives most often referred to: those of the Apiones (TM Arch ID 15) and Dioscorus of Aphroditō (TM Arch ID 72) for the sixth century and those of Senuthius (TM Arch ID 418), Papas (TM Arch ID 170), and Basileios (TM Arch ID 124) for the post-conquest period. Further studies on these archives are already yielding fruitful results, as shown by the contributions of **Roger Bagnall, Anne Boud’hors, Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello, Matthias Müller, Lucian Reinfandt, and Lorelei Vanderheyden**, and more can be expected, not least from the present project.³

The prominent focus of the majority of this volume’s contributors on textual evidence offers the opportunity for attentive reflection on the “mediality” and the transmission of written sources. Besides papyri, other materials served ancient societies as text substrates – pieces of broken pottery (ostraca), for instance, or wooden tablets were used for immediate purposes and were not expected to endure for decades or centuries. If durability was intended, parchment or stone was used, depending on the type of text; parchment was used less widely in Egypt than across the rest of the Byzantine world.

Inscriptions intended for public display are not, however, of great significance for this volume. A certain individual perspective was expressed by visitors’ graffiti of the kind that can be seen in many temples, for instance in the Isis temple in Aswan⁴, but no contribution to this book covers this aspect. Tombstones can also be seen, to some extent, as witnesses to change: inscriptions on tombstones are indicative of cultural and societal change since they provide information about social stratigraphy. The first Muslim tombstone from the Islamic period found in Egypt is that of a certain ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥajrī, who died in 652.⁵ While this tombstone’s origin is uncertain, the second oldest, one of a Muslim convert called ‘Abbāsa, daughter of Jurayj (Arab. “little George”), is known to originate from Aswan.⁶ Although it does not bear yet the characteristic religious formula common in later periods, its profession of faith “she died ... confessing that” and the reference to the “people of Islam” are indicative of social changes and may even attest the presence of a “religious expert” in this part of Upper Egypt at the end of the seventh century.⁷ Due to their highly formulaic character, however, tombstones reveal personal

³ As part of the SNSF project “Change and Continuities from a Christian to a Muslim Society – Egyptian Society and Economy in the 6th to 8th Centuries,” contributions to the relevant section of *trismegistos.org* are in preparation for several archives of the studied period.

⁴ Dijkstra (2012).

⁵ El-Hawary (1930) 332, but also Schmidt (forthcoming).

⁶ El-Hawary (1932) 290 – 291.

⁷ Brockopp (2017) 66.

perspectives only to a limited extent and consequently are not a significant part of this volume.

Texts, whether of a documentary or a literary nature, are not unbiased vehicles of information; they are rather shaped by the interests of their issuers and reflect the cultural context of their production. Documents *stricto sensu* are not free individual creations but exist within established frameworks of formulaic, graphic, and even aesthetic norms.

Roger Bagnall reflects on the material from which we write social and economic history and especially on family archives as the key element from which narratives can be drawn. He recalls the characteristics of the earlier Roman period with Oxyrhynchos as an inescapable model for urban society, while documentation on rural settlements prominently comes from five villages in the Fayum. From the sixth century, however, the textual evidence is vastly dominated by the Apiones archive from Oxyrhynchos and the Dioscorus archive from Aphrodito (for which see **Lorelei Vanderheyden**). The thorny issue of redactional processes is discussed most clearly in **James Keenan**'s analysis of the so-called will of Flavius Phoibammon which unravels multiple layers of authorship and compilation. The text presents itself as having been dictated by the testator. Phoibammon's oral utterances are found mediated and diluted in the mold of the technical language and the formulaic framework prescribed by the Byzantine scribal tradition. The compiler Dioscorus' lexical choices and adaptations of the document's formal structure further reveal yet another layer of authorship.

In her look at the archive of Papas, pagarch of Edfu around 670, **Anne Boud'hors** shows that Coptic was not only used for private business and in ecclesiastical and monastic milieus. Like Bagnall, Boud'hors highlights the difficulty of classifying documents as either official or private. It is clear that language is not a useful criterion here: Greek is used, for example, for leases and accounts that pertain to the private business of Papas as a wealthy landowner, while Coptic is used not only in letters from lower ranking officials and individuals, but also in orders from "above" and from colleagues of equal status. This is supported by **Jennifer Cromwell**'s paper, which focuses on an individual named Psate, son of Pisrael, attested as a village scribe in Jeme for the period from 713/4 until 726, who wrote in both Coptic and Greek. The texts that can be connected to him deal with monastic issues or are tax receipts or private legal documents.

New types of transcultural professional bureaucrats gradually filled the ranks of the Islamic administration, and one of them is exemplified by the case of Petosiris, a Copt found serving as an Arabic scribe in the Islamic tax administration and corresponding with Arab officials as equals in an Arabic letter from eighth-century Hermopolis. The rise of a class of transcultural professional bureaucrats with multilingual expertise was instrumental to the progressive implementation of Arabic as the sole language of the imperial administration over the course of the eighth century, as **Lucian Reinfandt** points out in his chapter. Concomitantly, the employment of specialized clerks probably undermined – as Reinfandt argues – the influence and

social capital of the non-Arabicized landholding magnates that had acted as intermediaries between the Arab-Muslim ruling class and the local populations in Egypt and elsewhere in the first decades after the Arab conquest.

At the other end of the spectrum, the serial nature of formal features of documentary texts provides indicators of wider shifts in socio-cultural relations. Thus they can be utilized to trace broader developments in cultural trends and patterns of social behavior. The formulae used by the Arab-Muslim Yazid b. Aslam in his letter to his Coptic colleague Petosiris in the eighth-century Hermopolite indicate that he considered the addressee as socially equal. Conversely, the formulae utilized in the Arabic letter sent by the governor of Egypt Mūsā b. Ka'b to the Christian ruler of Nubia entail a claim of cultural alterity, as **Eugenio Garosi** points out in his contribution to this volume. In general, in the early Islamic period Arab-Muslim officials utilized not only a distinctive set of Arabic formulae in their correspondence, but also a distinctive layout that functioned as a social identifier compared to those used by the non-Muslim officials serving under their authority.

Stefanie Schmidt and **Judith Evans Grubbs** stress in their respective chapters that documentary and literary evidence demonstrates that transregional commercial exchange of goods and slaves across the borderland with Nubia continued throughout the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. A comparative analysis of the epistolary social behavior of Muslim officials towards regional elites in Egypt provided by **Eugenio Garosi** further evidences a common set of communicative strategies with the proportionally underrepresented documents from Syria, North Africa, and Central Asia.

Analyzing documentary evidence in tandem with literary sources furthermore provides a broader context for imperial policies seen at play in Egypt. The resentment towards the culturally “defensive” military settlement policy Muslim sources attribute to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb in Egypt, for instance, finds parallels in accounts pertaining to Mesopotamia and Greater Syria, as **Alon Dar** stresses in his chapter. Similarly, **Lucian Reinfandt**’s case study on the emergence of cultural brokers in early Islamic Egypt is complemented by literary accounts of individuals operating in similar capacities in other provinces of the early Islamic Empire.

4 Politics and administration

The question as to when a Muslim state came into being has been frequently engaged with in recent years, and the Egyptian papyri have, again, been at the forefront of this debate.⁸ The idea that Byzantine Egypt gradually evolved into early Islamic Egypt and was integrated into an Islamic empire is to some extent misleading;

⁸ For a comprehensive account of these discussions, see recently Legendre (2016) 3–6 with the relevant literature.

there is good reason to assume that an “Islamic empire” into which Egypt could be integrated did not yet exist when Egypt fell to the Islamic conquest. Egypt’s early Islamic period is not so much a story of adaptation to Arab imperial customs as the history of one of the (many) places where an Islamic empire was formed, as illustrated by **Alon Dar, Eugenio Garosi, and Lucian Reinfandt**.

For particular regions, however, turning the question around may yield interesting results. To what degree did the comparatively bureaucratic and socially hierarchized Byzantine Egypt influence the emergence of an Islamic empire and its set of legal institutions? One evident phenomenon concerns the administration of the country, and at this point, two aspects of Egyptian “provincial” administration, the role of the *duces* and that of the pagarchs, may serve as an introduction to the problems and prospects of research on this topic. In 539, nearly exactly a century before the Muslim armies reached Egypt, Emperor Justinian had issued his Edict XIII, through which he had abolished the position of the Augustalian prefect to whom the entire Egyptian diocese would have been subject.⁹ Instead, the provinces Aegyptus (I and II), the Thebaid (Inferior and Superior), and probably also Augustamnica (I and II) were now each controlled by a *dux et Augustalis* who held civilian and military authority once again in one hand and to whom a civilian *praeses* was subordinated. The province of Arcadia remained undivided and was subject only to a *praeses*, although there is evidence that the *dux* of the Thebaid held authority over Arcadia at least temporarily as well.¹⁰ Responsible to the *dux* were the pagarchs, the leading officials of the approximately ten subdivisions (*civitates* or, to use a more traditional term, *nomoi*) within each province. This basic structure appears to have transformed well into the early Islamic period, albeit with a *dux et Augustalis Arcadiae* appearing as early as 636, during the short episode of renewed Byzantine reign (629–639) between the Persian and Islamic occupations.¹¹

This last point illustrates an important problem when it comes to administrative change from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt: some phenomena that were once viewed as clear evidence for such change have in recent decades been exposed as, in fact, innovations from the late Byzantine period, perhaps provoked by or even falling within the short intermezzo of the Persian occupation (619–629). It is most regrettable, in this regard, that we lack sufficient evidence from this brief period to discern exactly what was going on.¹² The *duces* are one instance of potential Persian or Byzantine rearrangements, but one layer below, at the level of the individual cities and their hinterlands, the pagarchs are another. At some point during the Persian occupation or after the Byzantine reconquest, the pagarchs of the Fayum ceased to bear the title “pagarch of Arsinoe and Theodosiopolis” and were styled only as “pagarch of Arsinoe,” even though the “Theodosiopolite nome” continued to feature in other con-

⁹ On this and the following, see Palme (2013a) with further literature.

¹⁰ Morelli (2008).

¹¹ Palme (2013b); Palme (2013c).

¹² For a good discussion of what can be said so far for this period, see Sängner (2011).

texts. The precise moment from which the pagarchs became so dominant that the term for their official authority, *pagarchia*, turned into a territorialized rendering of the entire nome is also unclear – the phenomenon is found immediately after the conquest, but not beforehand. Whether these changes were innovative or simply acknowledged already well-established administrative practice is, however, something that the fragile documentation of the mid-seventh century does not allow us to discern. In any case, these examples illustrate our lack of knowledge of this crucial period of late antique history, a difficulty further compounded by the problem that administrative history has, to some extent, to build on different types of documents from the Byzantine and early Islamic periods, as discussed by **Roger Bagnall**, **Anne Boud'hors**, and **Matthias Stern**. New documents emerging from this period will refine our understanding in the future.

We would give much to have the papers of Byzantine governors or pagarchs at this time. From later on, we have the archive of Papas (second half of the seventh century), which is explored in depth by **Anne Boud'hors**, and that of Basileios and Qurra (from the early eighth century), which have contributed much to what we know about early Islamic administration and particularly about how the various administrative layers interacted with one another.¹³ One genuine innovation of the new rulers concerns the administrative layer immediately above the old Byzantine provinces: above the *duces* now ranked the *symbolos* (Arab. *wālī*), who held absolute civil and military authority and was directly appointed by the caliph.¹⁴ The *symbolos* was installed by the end of the 640s and took up residence not in the traditional center of political power in Egypt, Alexandria, but in Fustāt (Old Cairo), which rapidly grew into its new role as the capital of the country.¹⁵ And while requisitions of all sorts of goods for supplying the army had not been unprecedented in Byzantine Egypt, the frequency and regularity with which they appear to have been conducted in the early Islamic period certainly was.¹⁶ The *amīrs* (“commanders”) who frequently appear in this context were also an innovation in Egypt, albeit this time clearly drawn from a preexisting structure of the Arab military administration; their precise role, however, is still debated.¹⁷ Under the *symbolos* and amid the *amīrs*, the *duces*

¹³ See Foss (2009) for a discussion of the Papas archive and Papaconstantinou (2015) for insights into the Basileios archive with regard to the subject of this conference.

¹⁴ Despite being frequently referred to as *wālī* in Arabic literary sources, Muslim governors of Egypt invariably bear the title of office of *amīr* in seventh- and eighth-century Arabic papyrus documents, coinage, and inscriptions. On other officials labelled “amīrs” in early Islamic Greek and Coptic documents, see *infra*.

¹⁵ However, some scholars (e.g., Power [2012] 96) have suggested that the Arab government also acknowledged the “conceptual duality” of Egypt, dividing it into Fustāt with the Nile Delta (Hawf) and Upper Egypt (Saʿīd). On the early history of al-Fustāt, see now Bruning (2018). Alexandria was seen as too vulnerable to Byzantine naval attacks, a fear that proved true when Byzantine briefly recaptured and held the city in 645–646.

¹⁶ Legendre (2015) 237–238.

¹⁷ Morelli (2010).

now lost their military authority, although security forces were still at their disposal, as is visible in the numerous documents concerned with the capture and redistribution of fugitives, the *duces*' competence to organize statute labor (*corvée*), and their authority to levy taxes.

However, the *duces* were still the superiors of the various pagarchs in their provinces. **Anne Boud'hors**'s contribution highlights the at times uncomfortable situation the pagarch Papas may have found himself in, caught between village communities and the demands of his superiors. At the beginning of the eighth century, however, in the archive of Basileios, pagarch and *dioikētēs* ("administrator"), the *symbolos* Qurra interacts directly with local authorities.¹⁸ This development seems to be in line with the rise of the *epikeimenos* (lit. "president") and the *āmil* (lit. "agent"). Originally a kind of envoys of the *symbolos* in the countryside, these men increasingly drew many tasks under their authority that originally had been in the purview of the *dux* and the pagarch, and these latter titles disappeared: the *dux* at the beginning of the eighth century (the last one attested is 'Aṭiyya b. Ju'ayd, who held office until 703 or 712) and the pagarch around the mid-eighth century.¹⁹

5 Social hierarchies

This brief institutional overview leads us directly to those who kept the machinery of this system running. It has been frequently highlighted that in the politico-administrative system outlined above, the main figures of political power in early Islamic Egypt were Muslims from the start. The Islamic army, through its amirs, was an occupying force, and the absolute authority in the country, the *symbolos*, was directly appointed by the caliph. At the next lower level, the *duces* and pagarchs that we know of were, as far as we can tell, still Christians in the first decades of Muslim rule, and their social backgrounds point more or less to the same milieus that their Byzantine predecessors came from: a generally local landholding elite bearing high honors, or on their way thereto, through distinct bureaucratic service. Around the turn to the eighth century, however, two prominent individuals appear to start a tradition of Muslim outsiders occupying these positions: Flavius Atias, son of Goe-dos (or 'Aṭiyya b. Ju'ayd in Arabic), pagarch and later *dux*, and Nājid b. Muslim, successively pagarch of two different pagarchies, not long before the rise of the *epikeimenoi*.²⁰ As **Matthias Stern** argues, however, the careers of (at least some) Byzantine pagarchs may well not have been all that different from the careers of 'Aṭiyya and Nājid; whether this is a sign of continuity or of two coinciding but distinct patterns

¹⁸ On this particular relation, see Papaconstantinou (2015).

¹⁹ Legendre (2016) 14–16.

²⁰ For a brilliant study of Nājid, however, within a much larger context that may serve as an overall introduction to these decades, see Sijpesteijn (2013).

is elusive. In any case, the traditional notion of the pagarchs as a generally insubordinate local elite should be reconsidered. Generally, historians today are more nuanced in characterizing the relationships between the Byzantine provincial aristocracy and the imperial center than they were maybe two generations ago, when the state of affairs in late Byzantine Egypt seemed to be one of permanent turmoil and of disintegrating public authority in the province.

Coming from another direction, **Alon Dar** discusses the general prohibition on obtaining landed estates in the Egyptian countryside which applied to the Muslim administrative and military elite in the early decades after the Arab conquest. The second caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, is credited with having prohibited the distribution of conquered land among the Arab fighting forces. Literary accounts suggest that 'Umar's policies engendered dissatisfaction not only among the Arab soldiers but also on the part of some of his senior advisors. Ultimately, 'Umar stood firm in his resolve, as is corroborated by the absence of documentary evidence for Muslim landowning in Egypt prior to the mid-eighth century. In the long run, **Alon Dar** argues, the decision to leave conquered lands in the hands of the local population was instrumental to ensuring stable and perpetual tax revenues and preventing the cultural assimilation of the Arab minority. It was also a fundamental step in the transformation of tribally organized, nomadic troops into a permanent professional army and a smart move, which forestalled the rise of a landowning Muslim aristocracy with local powerbases.

Other contributions focus on the men at lower levels – “levels” that are naturally deeply intertwined. **James Keenan's** contribution presents a thriving provincial capital to us, together with a representative of the highly educated literary elite that kept the administrative machinery running: Dioscorus of Aphrodito, who worked for some years as a notary in Antinoopolis. Beforehand, Dioscorus had been an important village administrator, and **Lorelei Vanderheyden's** contribution expands this picture by presenting the various roles that Dioscorus' father Apollos played in the village of Aphrodito. We see, again, a vibrant community which contrasts starkly with the apocalyptic images that Dioscorus' petitions paint of the Byzantine village and its relation to superior authorities. The strong links of an urban middle class to the countryside around their respective cities are also very evident in the small new archive from Hermopolis presented by **Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello**. Some mechanisms through which these locals adapted to the new cultural and political conditions presented by Arab rule are highlighted by **Lucian Reinfandt**, whose study on “Arabized” multicultural local bureaucrats may raise the question to what degree the increasing numbers of the “Arab-Muslim” elites were swelled by such individuals from within local communities rather than by outsiders alone. **Eugenio Garosi** pursues a similar argument, although dealing with different material, in his analysis of formal and formulaic aspects of the early Islamic evidence, and demonstrates how lower-level administrative staff themselves were trying to bridge the gap to their rulers, as it were, by translating Arab-Muslim concepts into a context familiar to the local Coptic population. Finally, **Judith Evans Grubbs** explores in her contribution

what papyri transmit about members of the lowest social hierarchical level – slaves. Due to the scarce evidence of only four slave sale contracts dating from between the fifth and seventh centuries a fully comprehensive study on slavery and possible changes from the Byzantine to the Islamic period is difficult to conduct. However, although we have no personal testimony from a slave, sources like for instance testaments regulating manumission, the laws of Justinian concerning child slavery, or *paramonē* contracts, offer individual narratives told by or about people held in slavery or slave-like conditions. This “micro-historical” approach illustrates how permeable the borders between free and unfree status may have been in late antiquity. The threshold of entering slavery or slave-like working conditions was often very low depending on individual socio-economic conditions. In early Islamic times we see some changes in the supply of the slave market. From the middle of the seventh century onwards, the *baqt*, an agreement between Muslim Egypt and Nubia, determined a yearly influx of at least 300 slaves from Nubia to Egypt. The impact of this growth for the labor market can, however, not be determined since it is unclear whether these slaves remained in Egypt or were brought to other parts of the Islamic Empire.

6 Law and legal practice

Tracing the development of distinctive Muslim legal practices is rightly considered one of the thorniest issues of the transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule in Egypt. On the one hand, Muslim historical sources maintain that the early caliphs designated experts responsible for passing judgments (Arab. *quḍāt*, sing. *qāḍī* “judge”) in the conquered provinces, implying that a system of Islamic jurisprudence was a cornerstone of the early Muslim community since its inception.²¹ At the other end of the spectrum, tangible documentary evidence for Muslim courts are not mentioned in the papyri from Egypt until the ninth and tenth centuries.²² The earliest surviving manuscript evidence for jurisprudential *œuvres* similarly lacks traces of a class of legal scholars in Egypt prior to the late eighth/early ninth century.²³

Conversely, seventh- and eighth-century documentary evidence offers only sparse glimpses of the formative process of Islamic legal practices. *Juridical* documents (mostly acknowledgments of debts) in Arabic appear within the Muslim minority community as early as the seventh century.²⁴ Unique among these is the bilin-

21 For the first *qāḍī* of Fustāt, Sulaym b. ‘Itr al-Tujībī (in office from 40/660–661 to 60/679–680), mentioned by historiographic sources, cf. Tillier (2012) 59. The first *qāḍī* mentioned in documentary sources is probably in *P.HindsNubia* (Qaṣr Ibrīm; 758) r, 46. It is noteworthy that the *qāḍī* mentioned there issues a verdict that pertains to the affairs of a non-Muslim country.

22 E.g. *P.GrohmannUrkunden* 7 (Ushmūn/Hermopolis; IX); *Chrest.Khoury* I 78, 82, and 83 (all from Ushmūn/Hermopolis; IX–X).

23 Brockopp (2011) and *id.* (2017).

24 See the list of documents in Tillier/Vanthieghem (2019) 148–149.