Landholding Patterns in Early Islamic Egypt

PETRA M. SIJPESTEIJN

This article examines the impact of the Arab conquests of the 630s and 640s on rural society and fiscal organization in Egypt. Traditional accounts paint a picture of a seventh-century Egypt from which the aristocracy had largely disappeared and in which Arab rulers and administrators communicated directly with village communities. Drawing upon the testimony of seventh-century documentary papyri, this essay reveals the continued role of Christian elites in administering tax collection and the extent to which the Arab conquerors left agrarian social relations largely undisturbed. Only over the course of the eighth century were indigenous Christian elites sidelined, leading to a number of tax revolts on the part of the Coptic population.

Keywords: Egypt, papyri, Umayyad Caliphate, tax collection, landownership

INTRODUCTION

Fed annually by the Nile flood with water and enriched soil, Egypt has historically been able to sustain unusually high levels of agricultural production, the source of its wealth from ancient times into the Islamic period. Trade and natural resources contributed to the vast and varied assets with which this province furnished its Muslim rulers in their new capital Fustat (founded in 691), as well as the caliphs in Medīna (632-661) and later in Damascus (661-750) and Baghdād (750-1250). But the capacity to generate such great wealth that made it so attractive also made it a source of often bitter contention. Struggles for control over the province had already arisen in the earliest Muslim period and continued to determine rulers' attitudes towards it (Sijpesteijn 2007a). In 871 Ahmad b. Tūlūn, taking advantage of the confusion at the 'Abbasid court, took control of the whole province and its taxation, making Egypt the first province to gain full financial independence from the 'Abbasid empire. This move was surely facilitated by its agricultural selfsufficiency and, more importantly, its ability to sustain a significant independent army. An additional stimulus for Ahmad b. Tūlūn was probably the possibility of placing the province's wealth at his own disposal, even though a large part of it had to be spent on the Tūlūnid army (Bianquis 1998).

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Egypt's reputation in the Islamic world as an agricultural centre is also reflected in the genre of the so-called farmers' almanacs, which combined information on astrological, calendrical and meteorological phenomena and their significance for agricultural life. Based on ancient Egyptian and Greek models, these works were used all over the Islamic world, but their Egyptian context, with the use of Coptic month names, references to the Nile inundation and Egyptian agricultural produce, was maintained in almanacs produced from al-Andalus to the Yemen.1

How to access and control this phenomenal agricultural wealth – directly through landholding or indirectly via taxes – was not only a concern of caliphs in the empire's capital, but also of the Muslim governors in Fustat. In this paper I will examine how this concern and the measures and decisions taken to deal with it were determined on the one hand by the circumstances of the Arab conquest of Egypt, and on the other by changing population patterns, including Arab settlement in the Egyptian countryside, conversion and immigration, as well as the formation and consolidation of the Muslim state in Egypt and in the empire at large. I will focus on the first 150 years of Muslim rule in Egypt, from the Arab conquest of Egypt in 642 to the end of the eighth century. My material is the Greek, Coptic and Arabic papyri from Egypt, as well as Arabic narrative texts, chronicles, legal and administrative normative texts and to a lesser extent literary works. Before we turn to the issue of land-tenure, we have to examine the governmental and administrative system in place after the conquest, as it tells us much about the conquerors' attitude towards the land they had taken possession of.

CONTINUITY IN THE EARLY POST-CONQUEST PERIOD

It is well known that immediately following the Arab conquest of Egypt in 642 the new rulers left the Byzantine administration, including most of its representatives, in place. Taxes were assigned and collected according to the pre-Islamic, Byzantine system by the same Christian Egyptian officials who had done so in the preceding years. Only at the highest levels in Fustāt did Arabs take over in the functions of governor (Ar. amīr, Gr. symboulos), head of police (Ar. sāhib alshurta), chief judge (ar. $q\bar{a}d\bar{a}$) and some other highly placed administrators. The five eparchies, headed by duces, that had divided Byzantine Egypt at the time of the conquest continued to exist. With the dissolution of the Byzantine army (but not necessarily the disappearance of all Byzantine soldiers from Egypt) the duces heading them had lost their military function, their jurisdiction having been reduced to an administrative one. The eparchies were divided into pagarchies, some sixty in the whole of Egypt, at the head of which stood the pagarch, whose main task was the imposition and collection of taxes in the villages, estates and monastic communities of his district, which were taxed collectively. The taxable amounts were determined by the governor's administration and transmitted via

¹ For the Coptic farmers' almanacs to which the Egyptian Arabic ones were obviously greatly indebted, see Wilfong (1999, 224-36). For Arabic farmers' almanacs, see Pellat (1986) and Varisco (1994).

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the *dux*, tasks that had fallen under the pagarch's responsibility in the pre-Islamic period.² Existing pagarchs retained their position under Islamic rule,³ while new appointees were chosen from amongst the same Christian, land-holding élite that had supplied the pre-Islamic pagarchs.⁴ These pagarchs, often forming administrative dynasties in their constituencies,⁵ were also in charge – independently of the higher administrators – of judging and certain administrative matters within their pagarchy (*P. Apoll.* 44, 61, 69). Individual tax-payers were assigned their taxes at the level of the village and monastery taking into account possessions and means.

While to a large extent happy to maintain the administrative status quo, the new rulers nevertheless exercised strict and direct supervision over the administration. This can be seen, for example, in the output of administrative documents, which sharply increased after conquest. This increase applied especially to Greek papyri, but included documentation in Arabic, as one of the two earliest dated Arabic papyri (from 22/643), which seems to be the end of a regular tax demand-note, indicates. Greek papyri recording ad hoc levies raised for military units travelling through the Egyptian countryside also show a kind of central recording system that was used with some of the Arab army officers (amīrs) involved in the regular tax-collection. 'Saracens' appear in Greek papyri as deliverers of tax-demand notes, collectors of levies and envoys sent by the governor on special administrative missions from the capital to the countryside. At the same time, pagarchs and other local administrators were regularly called upon to justify, or elaborate upon, their administrative records in the capital.8 The logistics of the tax-collection and administration continued to be in the hands of local Egyptians, but these were by no means outside the reach and control of the new Arab rulers.9

Based on their perceived role in the Muslim administration, post-conquest pagarchs have been judged in various ways by contemporary scholars from 'mere functionaries subject to the harassment of the higher state authorities' (Banaji 2001, 154) and answerable to a governor with final authority on every

² Tax-demand notes for villages and other taxable units were issued in the name of the *dux* or governor, but transmitted by Christian pagarchs (Sijpesteijn forthcoming (a), ch. 1).

For example, the pagarch of Ashmunayn/Heracleopolite, Athanasios (CPR XXII, 1).

⁴ For a list of land-holding Christian pagarchs of the Fayyūm from the Islamic period, see Banaji (2001, 153, n. 120).

⁵ Cf. Flavius Stephanus and his son Flavius Paul, pagarchs of the Fayyūm (Banaji 2001, 153, n. 120), Papas, who succeeded his father as pagarch of Apollos Anô/Edfū (*P. Apoll.* 1) and Basilios, whose father had also been pagarch of Aphrodito/Ishqaw (*P. Lond.* IV introduction).

⁶ The unpublished *P. Berol.* 15002, depicted in Grohmann (1966), Plate II.

⁷ P. Apoll. 2, 3, 37, 94.

⁸ P. Apoll. 6 (for the date, see Gascou and Worp (1982). This procedure would continue in the eighth century. When the governor Qurra b. Sharīk requested Basilios to send him some tax records, he asked that they be accompanied by the scribes who had written them (P. Cair. Arab. III 146.31–33). The lower administrator 'Abd Allāh b. As'ad was asked to send his secretary to the capital, presumably related to some kind of audit (Sijpesteijn, forthcoming (a), text 1).

⁹ But see: 'this . . . resulted in what can best be described as communal tax evasion' (Frantz-Murphy 1999, 244).

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administrative, fiscal and judicial matter, 10 to semi-autonomous delegates operating in a system in which 'the governor was totally dependent on local officials and notables for apportioning the district's assessment among the local population' (Frantz-Murphy 1999, 243) via the reports that were sent by the latter to the central administration and upon which the local tax levies were determined (ibid.). How the pagarchs' position is assessed depends largely on our sources. Both these observations were made on the basis of the early eighth-century dossier of letters from the governor Qurra b. Sharīk (in office 709-715) sent to the pagarch Basilios of Ishqaw/Aphrodito. 11 These letters represent, however, the situation after the introduction of certain important administrative changes which drastically reformed the government of the province. 12 Moreover, they only constitute letters from the governor to the pagarch, not vice versa, from the pagarch to his colleague pagarchs or to those falling under his responsibility in his pagarchy, giving a skewed image of the power relations between the pagarch and the higher Muslim administrators in Fustāt. As we will see, the position of the pagarch could differ greatly over the period from the conquest through the eighth century and beyond, and 'Muslim' pagarchs eventually came to resemble their pre-Islamic colleagues very closely (Sijpesteijn forthcoming (a), ch. 1).

The conquest, moreover, does not seem to have affected the land-holding élite in Egypt in their rural possessions on which their power was based and it continued to play an important role in the administration into the mid-eighth century. Our sources, documentary or narrative, do not mention any confiscations of lands having taken place at the time of the conquest. Plots of land in and around Fustāt and Alexandria were given to Muslim (army) leaders, but those were used to build houses for themselves and their families (Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, Futūh, 97). When the governor 'Abd al-'Azīz (in office 685-705) established a new capital in Hulwan in 70/689-690, he also donated land to members of the Muslim and Christian élite, but again the purpose was to build houses and other structures, not to exploit these lands for agriculture (Evetts 1910, 296-7). After the conquest of Alexandria, Arab soldiers moved into the houses vacated by emigrated Byzantines (Ibn'Abd al-Hakam, Futūḥ, 130-131). Even in the generations following the conquests, no evidence exists of members of the Muslim élite taking possession of pre-existing estates in Egypt. There is no evidence for the kind of large-scale development projects (for personal enrichment) that we find the Umayyad family undertaking in Greater Syria and Iraq. 13 No Arab names appear in lists of agricultural tax-payers or land-holders until well into the eighth century. Greek and Coptic land-leases mention no Arab cultivators or landowners (Richter 2009), and Arabic agricultural leases are not attested before the third

¹⁰ Especially in relation to Qurra's letters sent in response to petitions to be dealt with by the pagarch, e.g. Diem (1983).

Consisting of Greek (cf. Cadell 1968), Arabic (cf. Diem 1984a) and Coptic (P. Lond. IV) papyri. ¹² See below, the section 'Late Seventh-Century Changes'.

E.g. 'Amr b. al-'As' draining of Trajan's canal was a public work. For development projects in Syria, and Iraq, see Banaji (2009).

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quarter of the eighth century. 14 On the other hand, ousias, estates, continue to be mentioned in the papyri and are treated as fiscal units. There are no accounts in the narrative sources of members of the ruling élite establishing rural estates in Egypt, nor is there any archaeological evidence for this. When the caliph Mu'āwiya (r. 661-680) is said to have donated a village in the Fayyūm to his son Yazīd, there was such a protest that he quickly overturned his decision and returned the village to its owners. 15 This contrasts starkly with the practice in other areas conquered by the Muslim armies: in Syria and Palestine villages and estates were given to Muslim generals and in Persia the former crown lands that had belonged to the royal family were divided amongst the new rulers. 16 The great conqueror of Egypt, 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ (d. c.664) himself, is said to have owned estates in Syria and Palestine, some of which might already have been in his possession before the conquest, but there is no mention of his holdings in Egypt. 17 There is also no evidence of large-scale emigration or of the expulsion of members of the Egyptian aristocracy. Landowners are reported to have abandoned their possessions temporarily in the face of the fighting, but they seem to have returned to their domains as soon as possible. 18 It is true that we do not hear any more of the oikoi, the large landowners such as the famous Apion family who possessed land in different pagarchies, but the Apions had already disappeared from the papyrological record at the time of the Persian occupation of Egypt (619–629). 19 Their lands had presumably been sequestered by the Sasanians and, when they left Egypt again, co-opted by (smaller) local landholders. Contrastingly, Arabic narrative sources paint the Muslim conquerors as having been quite ignorant of agricultural matters at their arrival in Egypt, having to ask Egyptian Christian experts for advice on how to run the country, and especially its agricultural programme, most efficiently and successfully.²⁰ Moreover, at the beginning of the eighth century, so much land was unused that a special tax category, (so-called baqt or Pakton) was invented for newly cultivated land, while 'forced' land-assignments were needed to increase the accreage (Morelli 2000; CPR XII pp. 175–178).

While papyri record soldiers and Arab officials moving through the countryside, there is hardly any evidence for more permanent Arab settlement before

¹⁴ The first one is dated 159–161/775–776 (Diem 1984b, 126ff., nos. 5a–5b).

¹⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (d. 257/871), Futūḥ Miṣr, ed. Torrey (1922, 101).

¹⁶ Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229), Kitāb mu'jam al-buldān, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig 1866–1873) II, 277-8; Morony (1984, 69). cf. Banaji (2009).

Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897), Mushakalat al-nas li-zamanihim wa-ma yaghlibu 'alayhim fi kulli 'aṣrin; tr. Millward (1964). I would like to thank Jairus Banaji for pointing this reference out to me.

John of Nikiou (fl. late 7th), Chronicle, tr. Charles (1916, 108.6).
 Sarris (2006). The negative effects of the Persian invasion on Egypt's archaeology are described by Grossman (2002, 63, 69). Cf. Bowman (1986, 52); Gascou (2004, 404).

^{20'} For example, the 'Copt' who, in response to 'Amr b. al-'As' question on what makes Egypt so rich, answers that good tax revenues are secured by 'maintaining public facilities by digging out canals, keeping up bridges and stopping the cultivation of what is difficult on the land', while the opposite diminishes them (Ibn Taghri Birdi [d. 874/1470], al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira (Cairo 1929–1972), I, 47; Dimashqī (d. 727/1327), Nukhbat al-Dahr fi 'ajā'ib al-barr wa-l-bahr, ed. A. Mehren (Leipzig 1923), 109).

the eighth century. An Arab manned postal station is said to have been in place in the Fayyūm by 669.21 Arab merchants might have been amongst the first to explore the Egyptian countryside and some documents record their activities there. The earliest preserved Arabic commercial letter, datable to the seventh century, was sent to the Middle Egyptian town of Bahnasa (Oxyrhynchus) (Rāghib 1991). Arabic seventh-century debt acknowledgements were also found outside Fustat evidencing more commercial transactions involving Arabs having taken place in the countryside.²² But it is not certain that these merchants had moved to live in the countryside. There is, moreover, no evidence of any Arab connection to agricultural exploitation, neither indirectly as remote estate-holders nor directly as tillers or locally settled landowners, until the very end of the seventh and especially in the eighth century. (See below.)

Only the second conquest of Alexandria in 645 after a temporary recapture by the Byzantines between 643 and 645 is said to have resulted in a massacre of a large part of the Greek inhabitants of the city and a subsequent large-scale exodus of the surviving Greeks.²³ This did not affect, however, the important role that 'Greek' officials continued to play in the Muslim administration. The Greek language continued to be a vital and viable element of the Muslim administrative apparatus, with Greek scribes being trained and continuing to compose documents in a living (written) language for some 150 years after the conquest.²⁴ Alexandria, constituting an independently governed unit within the province until the Tūlūnid period (Bianquis 1998), continued to function as an important centre of Greek culture and education at least into the eighth century (Pormann 2004; Sijpesteijn 2004; Derda, Markiewicz, Wipszycka 2007). Egyptian Christians retained, moreover, cultural, legal and religious ties with the remains of the Byzantine empire (Papaconstantinou forthcoming 2009). Apparently a reservoir of Greek-trained intellectuals remained in Egypt and continued to be supplied with fresh blood from within the province.

Directly following the conquest, the Arabs in Egypt were too small in number and not well enough defined religiously and culturally to become too directly involved at the lower levels of the administration.²⁵ Similar concerns not to provoke unrest and endanger the co-operation of the local élite might have motivated the apparent reluctance to take over land from the locals, and to settle amongst them. With the whole of Arab society militarized and settled

SB VI 9232. For the date, see Gascou and Worp (1982).

For an overview of this documentation, see Sijpesteijn (forthcoming (a), ch. 1).

Balādhurī (d. 279/892), Futūḥ al-buldān, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden 1866), 221; Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, Futūh, 175-7. The important role that this reconquest of Alexandria played in later debates amongst 'Abbasid jurists about the fiscal status of Egypt which determined the taxes that could be raised there, suggests that this report might in fact have been a later fabrication. I am indebted to Kaj Öhrnberg for this interpretation.

CPR XXII, 53. The last dated Greek papyrus dates to 796/797 (CPR XXII, 21).

See Sijpesteijn (2007a) for a discussion of the military threats that the Arabs faced in Egypt during the first 50 years of their rule.

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in the garrison cities of Fusṭāṭ, Alexandria and Aswān, ready to continue the conquests to bring the rest of the world under Islamic rule, there was, moreover, no time (yet) to become a landed aristocracy. In fact, Muslim soldiers were prohibited from settling in the Egyptian countryside and make a living from agriculture (Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, Futūḥ, 162). This attitude was also applied to other areas conquered by the Egyptian army. After taking possession of the Pentapolis, 'a fertile and beautiful area', the soldiers were not allowed to settle there, but had to return to their Egyptian garrisons (Kindī, Wulāt, 12, 32–3). The new rulers' most important concern was not to jeopardize the continuous productivity of Egypt's agriculture by securing uninterrupted cultivation and tax-collection with which to pay their military endeavours and their soldiers' stipends. For this the local Egyptian land-holding élite was indispensable. Some 50 years later, however, the rulers' position had changed radically.

LATE SEVENTH-CENTURY ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

The caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) and his son al-Walīd (r. 705–715) introduced empire-wide administrative changes leading to greater Arabization and Islamization, and a more centralized administration. In Egypt, related reforms were implemented by 'Abd al-Malik's brother, the governor 'Abd al-Azīz and his successor 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Malik (in office 705–709). Several measures were taken leading to an increase in rural acreage and improved fiscal productivity. The introduction of land surveys, inventories of cattle and censuses made it possible to tax the Egyptians and their possessions more accurately and efficiently. Through safe-conducts, neck seals and other recording systems, tax-payers' movements were scrutinized more closely. Forced land assignments of uncultivated land and development projects further contributed to increase the agricultural area and the taxes that could be raised.²⁷

Other changes led to greater Arabization and Islamization of the administration and eventually of the province's inhabitants. In 87/706 the governor 'Abd Allāh allegedly changed the language of the central $d\bar{\imath}w\bar{\imath}an$ from Coptic to Arabic. The closer supervision of tax-payers, their possessions and whereabouts were executed by pagarchs and *duces*, who from the end of the seventh century were increasingly Muslim rather than Christian. The first pagarch who can be identified as a Muslim/Arab is Flavius 'Aṭīya b. Ju'ayd (Φλάουϊος Ατίας νίος Γοεδου), pagarch of the Fayyūm oasis (in office 694–697), who later became *dux* of Arcadia and for a time *dux* of both Arcadia and the

²⁶ Cf. the idea that the effort and expense of tax-collection requires some special motivation, such as the need to pay a standing army (Wickham 2005, 146).

For these administrative changes, see Sijpesteijn (2007b, 2007a, forthcoming (a), ch. 1).

²⁸ Al-Kindī (d. 350/961), *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa-kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. R. Guest (1912). But see Sijpesteijn (forthcoming (b)) for the continued use of Greek and Coptic in the administration.

Thebaid.²⁹ From the second quarter of the eighth century Muslim pagarchs appear more frequently, but the change was not an absolute one and did not take place everywhere in Egypt at the same pace. Even while taking over the administrative positions of their Christian colleagues, the Muslim officials did not take over their lands. In fact, the Muslim pagarchs had quite a different economic background from their Christian counterparts. There is no evidence that any of the Muslim pagarchs owned land. Quite the opposite: the careers of several Muslim officials suggest that there was a conscious policy on the side of the Muslim administration to move officials around through different positions during their career taking them to several pagarchies and even eparchies.³⁰ Unable to build up a local powerbase, these Muslim officials were beholden to the Muslim state rather than to their constituency. At the same time, the landholding Christian village élite continued to play an indispensable role in the fiscal system as the organizers of the tax-collection at the village level and guarantors of its payment exactly because of their position in the local communities that came with their land holdings. 31 These first Muslim pagarchs were therefore not members of the local Christian land-holding élite who had converted to Islam to maintain their administrative and economic position, but rather originated from a totally different pool of administrators. There is some evidence, moreover, that these new Muslim officials based their economic power on commercial trading rather than rural possessions.³²

ARABIZATION AND ISLAMIZATION OF THE EGYPTIAN COUNTRYSIDE

The coming of the Muslim pagarchs and the new administrative regime resulted in a deeper Muslim-Arab penetration into the Egyptian countryside. In the eighth

²⁹ 'Aṭīya's papyri were gathered in *CPR* VIII, 189–237. The Arabic name 'Aṭīya had been Hellenized in the pre-Islamic period and does not necessarily indicate that he was a Muslim (Bell 1926, 265-81, 1.8 = SB III 7240; NB 64; Supplement, 59 left column). These names are known from Arabic literary sources (cf. Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819), Gamharat an-nasab. Das genealogische Werk des Hisham Ibn Muhammad al-Kalbī. Ed. W. Caskel (Leiden 1966) s.v. 'Ğuaid' and "Atīya'; Ibn Durayd (d. 322/933), Kitāb al-Ishtiqāq. Ed. 'Abd al-Salām and M. Hārūn, 2nd edition (Cairo 1979) 229, 418, 558). The name 'Atiya is also attested in Arabic papyri (e.g. Sulaymān b. 'Atīya, P. Khalili I 9.r3; dated 104/ 722), but his patronymic, Ju'ayd, however, is not attested in pre-Islamic Egypt and appears in two Coptic papyri as NOE Δ O Σ (CPR IV, (3.1), dated 696, provenance Ashmūn (Hermopolite) and (4.1), dated 698, provenance unknown, restored), and in one Greek papyrus as Γοεδου (SB III 7240, dated 697. For the date, see Gascou and Worp, 1982, 83ff.).

See Flavius 'Atiya who became dux of the Thebaid and later of Arcadia and the Thebaid after having been pagarch of the Fayyūm (694-697), Nājid b. Muslim (see CPR XXII, 8, introduction, and Sijpesteijn, forthcoming (a)) who was pagarch of Ihnās/Heracleopolite (727-729) and then of the Fayyūm (c.730–750), Khālid b. Yazīd who was pagarch of Ashmūn/Hermopolite before becoming pagarch of the Fayyūm in the 760s (Gonis 2004, 193-4; Sijpesteijn, forthcoming (b)) and Rāshid b. Khālid who was pagarch of Ihnās (Heracleopolite) between 718 and 723 and of Ashmūn/Hermopolite between 724 and 731 (Gonis 2004, 195, n. 39).

For this role of the local village élite, see Sijpesteijn (forthcoming (a), ch. 2).

³² For example Nājid b. Muslim and his lower placed colleague 'Abd Allāh b. As'ad (Sijpesteijn forthcoming (a)).

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century, although Greek and Coptic continued to be used, Arabic appears more frequently in administrative communication and recording (Sijpesteijn, forth-coming (b)). From this time date also the first tax-demand notes for individual tax-payers issued in the name of, mostly, Muslim pagarchs (Sijpesteijn and Clackson 2009, n. 32). Even if the details of the tax-payer and the amount owed were filled in at the village level by Christian lower officials, the presence of the pagarch's name represented an unprecedented presence of the Muslim fisc.³³ From the seventh century dates the first known tax-receipt issued in the name of a Muslim functionary operating at the village level and interacting with individual Egyptian tax-payers (Gonis 2001, 228). The first firmly dated tax-receipt issued in the name of a Muslim official, however, is the bilingual Arab–Greek papyrus dated 95/714³⁴ and the first tax-receipt written entirely in Arabic is dated 148/765 (*P. Cair. Arab.* III 197).

The increased Muslim-Arab presence in the local administration was followed by the appearance of Muslim-Arab land-holders in the papyri. A Greek papyrus, dating to 699/700, mentions a vineyard belonging to the amīr al-mu'minīn, referring to the caliph 'Abd al-Malik.³⁵ This is the earliest evidence of land in hands of a member of the Muslim ruling family and indeed of any Muslim at all. ³⁶ Eighthcentury Greek and Coptic lists of (rural) tax-payers and cultivators contain Arab names.³⁷ From the eighth century date also Coptic letters and legal documents mentioning or written by Arab-named individuals, suggesting they were Egyptian converts rather than Arab immigrants.³⁸ Arab-named tax-payers in lists of fugitives or corvée-labourers also suggest that these were of Egyptian rather than Arab ethnicity.³⁹ Although the numbers of such Muslim-named individuals remains very small and the documents in which they appear cannot be dated any more precisely within the eighth century, we can conclude that conversion amongst the local population had made a start. Moreover, these converts had come in touch with the new religion in or near their place of residence and continued to live amongst Egyptian Christians, suggesting also that Islam was more present in the countryside and that the number of converts was rising.⁴⁰

For tax-demand notes issued in the name of the pagarch but filled in at the village level, see Diem (2006, 61–2); Bell (1945); Grohmann (1950, 107f., n. 14). For a safe-conduct, see Grohmann (1934, 393, n. 18). Gonis (2001, 226–7). For later examples see *CPR* XXI, 64.

³⁵ *CPR* VIII, 82, provenance Fayyūm.

³⁶ For a much later reference to an estate of the mother of an 'Abbasid caliph, probably Muqtadir's (r. 908–932) mother who is known in the sources as al-Sayyida, see 'āmil al-sayyida umm amīr al-mu'minīn (P. Ryl. Arab. I II.1.2).

E.g. in CPR XXII and P. Ross. Georg. V.

It is unlikely that Arab immigrants would have started to use Coptic after settling in the countryside. For Coptic letters between Muslims, see for example *CPR* II, 228; *P. Ryl. Copt.* 378; *P. Balaizah* 185. For Coptic legal documents signed by Muslim witnesses in Coptic, see for example *P. Ryl. Copt.* See also the Coptic guarantee given by a certain Abū Thābit *mawlā* Yazīd from Ihnās (*P. KRU* 111).

For Muslims mentioned amongst fugitives, see *CPR* XXII, 34 and in a list of corvée-labourers, see Gonis (2003).

⁴⁰ Compare Patricia Crone's reconstruction of early converts in Iraq as those moving to the garrison cities where they came in touch with the new religion and converted, far away from their own community which would not have accepted them and where they would not have come up with the idea of converting (Crone 1980, 51–2).

The fifteenth-century historian al-Magrīzī stated that Coptic tax revolts, first breaking out at the end of the seventh and early eighth century⁴¹ in response to the higher fiscal burden as a result of the administrative measures described above, motivated Arab settlement in the Egyptian countryside. 42 The emigration of Arabs from the garrison cities into the countryside was stimulated by the demilitarization of the Muslim society at large and the cessation of the payment of pensions except to professional soldiers, a development generally considered to have been completed by the Marwanid period (Kennedy 2001, 77). Without the security of the pensions, many Muslims had to look for income elsewhere, leading them also outside the garrison cities. Some of these would naturally have been attracted by the money to be made as Egyptian land-holders, venturing into agricultural business and acquiring control over land in competition with local land-holders, but presumably with the advantage of their privileged position as belonging to the ruling élite (Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, Futūh, 162; Balādhurī, Futūh, 257). Arab immigration had continued steadily after the conquest, first leading to more and more densely settlements around the garrisons (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, Futūḥ, 128), but later surely also to settlement of the countryside. The finance director and governor 'Ubayd Allāh b. al-Habhāb (in office 724–734) had settled several hundred families belonging to the tribe of Qays from Syria in the eastern Delta in 109/727, where they made a living from horse-breeding and trade. 43 New immigrants arriving in Egypt on their own account presumably settled anywhere where they could make a living. The earliest Arabic land leases, mentioning Arab land-holders, date from 159-161/775-776 and from that moment onwards more Arabic land leases record Arab-named individuals involved in agriculture.44

From the second half of the eighth century, Arabic, Greek and Coptic agricultural receipts issued in the name of Muslim officials increase in number. 45 The tax-demand notes issued in the name of Muslim pagarchs for individual tax-payers that appear from the second quarter of the eighth century onwards and that are another example of the increased presence of the Muslim pagarchs at the expense of the Christian élite, have already been discussed above. These documents show that through the Islamization and centralization of the administration, collective fiscal responsibility was superseded by individual accountability and the Christian independently acting middlemen were cut out. Christian tax-collectors, however, continued to be responsible for the tax-collection at the village level, but they now acted in name of Muslim officials operating as

A Coptic (tax) revolt took place in Upper Egypt at the end of the seventh century (SB III 7240, dated 697, provenance Thebes, for the date, see Gascou and Worp 1982, 83ff.). A first/seventhcentury letter reports on villagers who refused to pay their jizya (P. Berl. Arab. II 23). Kindī writes that the first Coptic revolt took place in 107/725 (Wulāt, 74).

⁴² al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-athār, ed. A. F. Sayyid (London 2002–2003), I, 80–82. ⁴³ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, Futūḥ, 142–143. Cf. Kindī, Wulāt, 76; Jahshiyārī (d. 331/942), Kitāb alwuzarā' wa-l-kuttāb, 134; Magrīzī, Khitat, I, 214-215.

See above n. 15. For an overview of Arabic agricultural leases, see CPR XXI, 56-61.

⁴⁵ For Arabic receipts, see *CPR* XXI, 84–87.

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professional functionaries in the Muslim administration, rather than on the basis of their status in the Christian community. 46 From the 750s also date other kinds of texts that show the direct involvement of Muslim pagarchs in tax collection at the village level. They sent officials to break villager protests that involved refusing to pay their taxes and intermediated in problems with tax-collectors, having taken the place of Christian village headmen who no longer formed a buffer between the villagers and the authorities.⁴⁷ The papyri also show, from this time on, Muslims standing guarantor for the (fiscal) debts of Christian and Muslim tax-payers, another task that used to fall within the Christian élite's purview.48

Not only had the Christian Egyptian land-holding élite lost its power in the Muslim administrative system to assign taxes at the village level independently of the Muslim administration, to guarantee and function as intermediaries between the tax-payers and fiscal officials, but also their lands were now falling under the envious gaze of Muslim would-be agriculturalists. Threatened with the loss of the lands on which their status was based, as well as the economic and administrative role that was associated with it, the members of the Christian landholding élite rose in protest. From the mid-eighth century the papyri record more conflicts and complaints raised against Muslim tax officials organized by Christian villagers, included highly placed ones.⁴⁹ While the first Coptic tax revolts are recorded for the end of the seventh and first half of the eighth century, they increased dramatically in the second half of the eighth century, for example in 738 in Upper Egypt⁵⁰ and in 749 in Lower Egypt (Kindī, Wulāt, 94) - and into the 'Abbasid period in 752 (Kindī, Wulāt, 102), 767 and 772.⁵¹ As Chris Wickham has remarked, the frequency and number of these revolts were unprecedented in Egypt and might very well have been initiated and organized by a now disenfranchised Christian élite (2005, 147).

The strictly centralized fiscal system, with Muslim officials in charge of the tax-collection from a majority Christian tax-paying population that had been put into place over 100 years from the reforms initiated at the end of the seventh century, did not continue unchanged. The changed demography of the Egyptian countryside, with a larger Muslim-Arab presence as well as political-administrative changes at the centre, resulted by the end of the eighth century again in a very different system of tax-collection and administration marked by the prominence

⁴⁶ The Muslim Maymūn b. Rāshid paid his taxes to the Christian māzūt Shenūda in 156/772 (David-Weill 1971, 12ff., n. 16).

For the reflection in eighth-century receipt formulae, see Sijpesteijn and Clackson (forthcoming 2008). For Muslim pagarchs as protectors of Egyptian tax-payers and intermediaries, see e.g. P. Ryl. Copt. 324; P. Berl. Arab. II 26.

E.g. David-Weill (1971, 12ff., n. 16, dated 156/773).

E.g. organized by the 'heads of Akhmīm', P. Cair. Arab. III 167. Cf. the officials sent to help a pagarch deal with a complaint raised against a tax-collector, Rāghib (1978, 1-6, n. 1).

Kindī, *Wulāt*, 81; Sāwīrus b. Maqaffa', ed. Evetts 1910, 94–95. Kindī, *Wulāt*, 116–117, 119 – all in Lower Egypt. A mid-eighth-century letter reports on the turn-around of a Coptic tax protest, writing that after a tax-collector has been sent to a Coptic village the inhabitants 'received him, became obedient, paid him their jizya, so that none of them were opposed' (P. Cair. Arab. VII 445.9-10, dating from 141-143/759-760, provenance unknown).

of tax-farmers and large estate-holders, many of whom were now Muslim, but not necessarily Egyptian.⁵² While the Christian land-holders might still have felt disenfranchised during the eighth century, the Coptic and Muslim tax-related revolts yielded in the ninth century, when the processes of Arabization and, less influentially, Islamization gave the Egyptian aristocracy again a role to play in Egypt.⁵³

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See the discussion on tax-farming in Sijpesteijn (2001). Cf. CPR XXI, 40-8.

See also Kennedy's interpretation of Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam's Futūh as an expression of Egyptian Arab pride (Kennedy 1998). In this period too come into circulation accounts providing Egypt with its own place in Islamic religious history as expressed in the Fadā'il Miṣr literature. Cf. Maqrīzī's remark that in the ninth century Muslims 'had gained control of most Coptic villages' (Khitat, I, 79-80; II, 494).

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