

P.Lond. I 113.10, the exile of patriarch Kyros of Alexandria,
and the Arab conquest of Egypt

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ABSTRACT

The chronology of the patriarchate of Kyros of Alexandria, a key actor in the transition of Egypt from Roman to Arabic rule, has long been controversial. The difficulty consists in reconciling sources speaking of a long exile of around four years, in 637–41, with two documents that seem to suggest Kyros' presence in Alexandria during this period. The first, a letter of Kyros to patriarch Sergios of Constantinople accepting the *Ekthesis*, displays some unusual characteristics that suggest that Kyros was in reality in exile already by autumn 638. The second, the papyrus *P.Lond.* I 113.10, can be read as the sole surviving documentary trace of the tribute paid at the initiative of Kyros to stave off the Arab invasion of Egypt. The mention of Kyros as the initiator of these **payments** in the papyrus does not imply, therefore, his presence in Egypt in 639/40. The long exile of Kyros concords with the testimony of narrative sources, in the first place the *Short history* of Nikephoros, and suggests, in turn, that this text is better informed of the affairs of Egypt than thought since the time of Alfred Butler's monograph on the Arab conquest of Egypt. Nikephoros' account of several Roman campaigns to defend this province in the years preceding the invasion of 'Amr b. al-'As in 640 **relocates** the most detailed narrative of the Muslim conquest of Egypt, the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu, in its context: that of the aftermath of the defeat of a major Roman army sent to Egypt in 639. This reconstruction of the events sheds some new light on the formation of Islamic traditions on the conquest of Egypt and the supposed Roman reoccupation of Alexandria several years later.

The Acts of the Lateran Synod of 649 contain a document that has so far attracted little attention. At first sight, there is nothing special about the letter of Kyros, the patriarch of Alexandria, to his colleague Sergios, the patriarch of Constantinople.¹ Its date, context and purpose seem to result straightforwardly from its contents: Kyros endorses in enthusiastic terms the doctrinal edict recently issued by Emperor Heraclius known as the *Ekthesis*, and wishes him victory over his enemies. Several indications concur to place the letter in the last months of 638. But at closer reading, questions arise. Why did Kyros omit his patriarchal title in the address of the letter? Why was he asked to sign the copy of the *Ekthesis* addressed to the exarch of Italy and the bishop of Rome, and not to himself, the third dignitary of the imperial church? Why was the letter of Sergios brought to him by a military official and not a cleric of the Great Church? Even more puzzlingly, chronological hints contained in the letter contradict each other: the successor of Pope Honorius, who died on 12 October 638, could not possibly have been known in Constantinople before the death of Sergios on 9 December 638.²

¹ *Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum*, ed. R. Riedinger (ACO II, 1), Berlin 1984, p. 172; trans. R. PRICE, *The Acts of the Lateran Synod of 649*, Liverpool 2014, pp. 235–6.

² For a detailed argument, see M. JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes: a mistake in the chronology of seventh-century bishops of Rome*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, forthcoming. I became aware of these difficulties when

A careful reading of Kyros' letter to Sergios can help to answer such questions. It also suggests a fresh perspective on, among other things, the chronology of the bishops of Rome, the beginnings of the monothelete controversy, the career of Kyros, the course of the Muslim conquest of Egypt, and the relative value of the main sources that report it. I consider the first two implications elsewhere;³ in this paper, I take the letter of Kyros to Sergios as the starting point for a reappraisal of the sources related to the patriarchate of Kyros and, more broadly, to the transition of Egypt from Roman to Islamic rule.

THE LETTER OF KYROS OF ALEXANDRIA TO SERGIOS OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The letter of Kyros to Sergios survives in the acts of a church synod that met in the Lateran Basilica in Rome in October 649.⁴ The aim of this gathering was to demonstrate the heretical character of “monotheletism” i.e., the opinion ascribing one will to Christ, and to condemn the churchmen deemed to have developed and supported it.⁵ While the former was achieved through an impressive dossier of patristic texts compiled under the direction of the Palestinian monk Maximos, known as the Confessor (580–662), the latter—the excommunication of several eastern patriarchs—was justified by a dozen original documents demonstrating their support for the “heretical” *Ekthesis*, Heraclius' edict that spoke of one will.

Kyros' letter to Sergios indeed makes clear his endorsement of the *Ekthesis*. He acknowledges the receipt of two documents brought to him by a general named Eustathios: a letter from Patriarch Sergios and a copy of the *Ekthesis* of Heraclius. Somewhat surprisingly, the latter was addressed not to him but to the exarch of Italy Isaac who, in turn, was supposed to present it to Pope Severinus “who, with the help of God, is to be consecrated in Rome.”⁶ Kyros read the *Ekthesis* carefully “not only once or twice but many times,” and was delighted at the clarity of its exposition of the correct faith. He accepts it wholeheartedly and concludes the letter with a prayer for the victory of the emperor over the enemies, “so that we may exclaim at that time with songs of thanksgiving: ‘Saved us, saved us, thrice saved us the all-pious three emperors,’ I mean from tyrannical oppression, Persian ferocity, and also Saracen wilfulness.”⁷ Kyros alludes here to the overthrow of Phokas by Heraclius, the victory over the Persians, and the hoped-for success against the Muslim armies that by 638 had conquered much of the Near East.

His letter is in several respects unusual. Kyros introduces himself merely as “the most insignificant Kyros of Alexandria,” without mentioning his episcopal dignity.⁸ Such an omission is uncommon, even if it does not necessarily imply that he has been deposed: he addresses Sergios as his “spiritual brother and fellow minister” (πνευματικῶ ἀδελφῶ καὶ συλλειτουργῶ), and the title of bishop is also absent from the addresses of his two other letters

working on my doctoral dissertation, but was then unable to solve them: M. JANKOWIAK, *Essai d'histoire politique du monothélisme*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Paris – Warszawa 2009, pp. 158–9.

³ See JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes* (quoted n. 2), and IDEM, *The date of the Ekthesis and the beginnings of the monothelete controversy*, forthcoming.

⁴ On which see now PRICE, *Lateran Synod* (quoted n. 1). Two other letters of Kyros to Sergios, written in 625/6 and 633, are known: *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum tertium*, ed. R. Riedinger (ACO II, 2), Berlin 1990–2, pp. 588–94; trans. and commentary in R. PRICE & M. JANKOWIAK, *The Acts of the Third Council of Constantinople (680–1)*, forthcoming. They have no bearing on the present argument.

⁵ For a recent voice in the debate on what the Lateran Synod may have actually looked like, see H. OHME, *Was war die Lateransynode von 649? Was sollte sie sein?*, *Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum* 48, 2016/7, pp. 109–57.

⁶ *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), p. 172.11–16; trans. PRICE, *Lateran Synod* (quoted n. 1), p. 235.

⁷ *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), p. 172.27–32; trans. PRICE, *Lateran Synod* (quoted n. 1), pp. 235–6, slightly modified: see below, note [21].

⁸ *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), p. 172.3–4: Δεσπότη τὰ πάντα θεοτιμήτω καὶ μακαριωτάτω πνευματικῶ ἀδελφῶ καὶ συλλειτουργῶ Σεργίῳ ἀρχιεπισκόπῳ καὶ πατριάρχῃ Κῦρος ἐλάχιστος ὁ Ἀλεξανδρείας; trans. PRICE, *Lateran Synod* (quoted n. 1), p. 235.

to Sergios.⁹ It is also odd that Kyros was asked to comment on a copy of the *Ekthesis* destined for the pope-elect Severinus, and not for himself as the patriarch of Alexandria. Even though the *Ekthesis* was issued primarily with a view to averting a conflict with the church of Rome,¹⁰ it was posted in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, confirmed by two synods in the capital, and translated into Syriac, all of which shows that it circulated also in the East.¹¹ The eastern patriarchates must therefore have received their own copies, similar to those of the definition of faith sent after the Third Council of Constantinople to the “five patriarchal thrones.”¹² This is perhaps confirmed by the heading of the Latin translation of the *Ekthesis* that claims that the edict “has been received with great satisfaction and favour by the bishops together with the patriarchal sees,”¹³ although it is also possible that the “great satisfaction and favour” refers specifically to the letter of Kyros to Sergios that was probably appended to the exemplar of the *Ekthesis* sent to Rome. Either way, that a general edict on doctrinal matters was communicated to the third patriarch of the empire in such an oblique way strongly suggests that Kyros was no longer in charge of his see.

It was, furthermore, uncommon—if not unheard of—for a patriarch of Constantinople to write to a colleague by the intermediary of a military commander and not a cleric of the Great Church. The involvement of the general (στρατηλάτης) Eustathios¹⁴ in obtaining Kyros’ endorsement of the *Ekthesis* recalls other visits of imperial officials to influential churchmen in the seventh century. As we will see, they had one thing in common: the churchmen were in jail.

There is, finally, also the chronological contradiction. The letter of Kyros alludes to a sequence of events that must have taken place in the two months between the deaths of Honorius (traditionally dated to 12 October 638) and Sergios (9 December 638): the election of Honorius’ successor Severinus, the arrival of this news at Constantinople, the preparation of an answer by the emperor (possibly including the publication of the *Ekthesis*), and finally the despatch of a letter from Sergios to Kyros by the intermediary Eustathios. This is impossible. We are well informed of journey times between Rome and Constantinople in the seventh century: no known embassy, or as much as a rumour, is known to have travelled between the two cities in less than three months.¹⁵ A faster journey was not possible even in summer, let alone in November when navigation in the Mediterranean is perilous. The events described in the letter of Kyros

⁹ *Concilium Constantinopolitanum tertium* (quoted n. 4), pp. 588.8 and 592.8 (in both cases Kyros refers to himself as ἐλάχιστος). Such omissions are very rare in the letters included in the acts of seventh-century councils: the only other instances are *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), pp. 22.33 and 99.5 (title omitted in Greek or Latin but extant in the other language) and *Concilium Constantinopolitanum tertium*, p. 620.22 (the fragmentary second letter of Honorius to Sergius).

¹⁰ See JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes* (quoted n. 2).

¹¹ *Ekthesis* posted in Hagia Sophia: see e.g. *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), p. 25, trans. PRICE, *Lateran Synod* (quoted n. 1), p. 127; the two synods: H. OHME, *Die Konstantinopler Synoden von 638/9 (?) und die Ekthesis des Kaisers Herakleios (610–641)*, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 129, 2018, pp. 289–315, and JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes* (quoted n. 2); Syriac translation: M. CONTERNO, *Three unpublished texts on Christ’s unique will and operation from the Syriac florilegium in the ms. London, British Library, Add. 14535*, *Millennium* 10, 2013, pp. 115–44, at pp. 116–8.

¹² *Concilium Constantinopolitanum tertium* (quoted n. 4), p. 830.

¹³ *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), p. 157.23–24: *quam cum multa satisfactione et gratia exciperunt patriarchi<cis> cum sedibus praesules*; trans. PRICE, *Lateran Synod* (quoted n. 1), p. 226.

¹⁴ Eustathios seems to be otherwise unknown. He cannot be identified with the homonymous *magistros* who attended a procession to Hagia Sophia on 1 January 639, not only because *magistros* usually stands for the civil *magister officiorum* (D. FEISSEL in Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, *Le livre des cérémonies*, ed. by G. Dagron & B. Flusin (CFHB 52), Paris 2020, II, 28, vol. 3, p. 205 n. 9; *pace* PLRE III Eustathius 14), but also because he could not have returned by then from Italy if he left Constantinople in autumn 638. See also PLRE III Eustathius 12.

¹⁵ Details in JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes* (quoted n. 2).

to Sergios cannot be reconciled with the current chronology of the bishops of Rome and Constantinople.

In such circumstances, one could doubt the authenticity of the letter or, less drastically, suspect that it has been interpolated.¹⁶ But neither the contours of an interpolation nor a rationale for the falsification appear clearly. Direct tampering with documents was, in fact, rare during the monothelite controversy. Both sides put an unusual emphasis on the verification, and verifiability, of the sources on which they based their claims, be it patristic texts supporting their theological arguments or documents establishing the responsibilities of the churchmen for the controversy. Original texts were carefully identified, as in the dyothelete florilegium known as *Doctrina Patrum*, and meticulously compared with the originals, as at the Third Council of Constantinople, dubbed for this reason “the council of antiquarians and palaeographers” by an unappreciative church historian.¹⁷ This does not mean that they were not manipulated: they were extracted, abbreviated and decontextualised in ways that could affect their original meaning, but outright falsification of documentary evidence was rare and counter-productive.¹⁸ Their authenticity cannot be challenged unless there are very good reasons to do so.

In the case of the letter of Kyros to Sergios, there are no such reasons. Rather than ~~to~~ doubt the authenticity of a text that resists our interpretation, it is sounder to question our chronological framework. As I argue elsewhere, it is possible to show that the chronology of several seventh-century popes is flawed by a systematic error of one year.¹⁹ Consequently, the death of Honorius should be dated to October 637. This correction makes it possible to reconcile the letter of Kyros to Sergios with the account of lengthy negotiations conducted by the legates of Severinus in Constantinople preserved in a fragmentary letter of Maximos to abbot Thalassios, in which he reports, with much satisfaction, the refusal of the Roman envoys to accept “the dogmatic document that they [i.e., the churchmen of Constantinople] have now published” (*dogmaticam chartam nunc ab eis expositam*).²⁰ It allows sufficient time for the events described in these two texts, and implies that Kyros wrote his letter to Sergios around the time of the departure of the Roman legates from Constantinople in autumn 638.²¹ The *Ekthesis* must therefore have been issued around that time, perhaps soon after 1 September 638 as suggested by the Lateran Acts.²²

¹⁶ A possibility that I envisaged, *faute de mieux*, in JANKOWIAK, *Essai* (quoted n. 2), p. 159.

¹⁷ *Doctrina Patrum de incarnatione Verbi: ein griechisches Florilegium aus der Wende des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, ed. F. Diekamp, 2nd ed. B. Phanourgakis & E. Chrysos, Münster 1981; A. HARNACK, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte. 2, Die Entwicklung des kirchlichen Dogmas I*, Freiburg i.B. 1894³, p. 406.

¹⁸ See e.g. *Disputatio Bizyae*, in *Scripta saeculi VII vitam Maximii Confessoris illustrantia*, ed. P. Allen & B. Neil (CCSG 39), Turnhout 1999, pp. 99–101 (trans. P. ALLEN & B. NEIL, *Maximus the Confessor and his companions: documents from exile*, Oxford 2002, pp. 91–3), for an attempt by Maximos to dispute the authenticity of several patristic texts, met with incredulity by his discussant Theodosios of Caesarea and silently dropped. Such texts as were falsified were often attributed to early Church Fathers (such as Justin or Irenaeus of Lyon) and played a marginal role in the controversy, see M. RICHARD, *Un faux dithélite. Le traité de S. Irénée au diacre Démétrius*, in *Polychronion. Festschrift F. Dölger*, Heidelberg 1966, pp. 431–40.

¹⁹ JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes* (quoted n. 2).

²⁰ PL 129, 583D–586B (quotation at 584D); cf. M. JANKOWIAK & P. BOOTH, *A New Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor*, in *Oxford Handbook to Maximus the Confessor*, ed. by P. Allen & B. Neil, Oxford 2015, pp. 19–83, at pp. 59–60, no. 58.

²¹ The letter of Kyros seems to allude to the coronation of Heraklonas, the second son of Heraclius, on 4 July 638 (for the date, see e.g. Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, *Le livre des cérémonies* [quoted n. 14] II, 27, vol. 3, p. 201): the substantive τὸ τρισάγουστον ἢ τρισσῶς ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς τὸ πανευσεβὲς τρισάγουστον (*Concilium Lateranense* [quoted n. 1], p. 172.28–30: “thrice saved us the all-pious three emperors”) is more naturally understood as “three *augusti*” rather than “thrice-august”, as in PRICE, *Lateran Synod* (quoted n. 1), p. 235.

²² *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), p. 12.15–16: κατὰ τὴν προσεχῶς διεληθοῦσαν δωδεκάτην ἐπινέμησιν. See, in more detail, JANKOWIAK, *The date of the Ekthesis* (quoted n. 3). I modify on this point my earlier proposal to

THE EXILE AND TRIAL OF KYROS OF ALEXANDRIA

The chronological difficulty contained in the letter of Kyros to Sergios can be thus solved, and its contents corroborated with the letter of Maximos to Thalassios. But Kyros' status and location at the time of its writing remain open questions. We have seen that the text contains contradictory pointers: Kyros omits his patriarchal title and adopts a humble tone, but addresses Sergios as his "fellow minister"; instead of being visited by a cleric, he receives the letter of the patriarch of Constantinople by the hand of a military official; he is asked to sign a copy of the *Ekthesis* addressed not to him, but to another bishop; and it is difficult to explain why a letter sent from Constantinople to Ravenna should have travelled via Alexandria.

These difficulties lead to the vexed question of Kyros' deposition from the see of Alexandria and his subsequent exile. Kyros, originally bishop of Phasis in Lazica (today western Georgia), was put in charge of the vacant see of Alexandria shortly after the evacuation of the city by the Persians in summer 629, and became its patriarch soon after the union with the Theodosians (the main group of Egyptian miaphysites) in June 633. He was at some point deposed and exiled, then reinstated in September 641, and remained patriarch until his death in Alexandria on 21 March 642.²³ That much is generally agreed; what is debated is the date of Kyros' deposition and the length of his exile. Two positions have emerged, both trying to accommodate, in different ways, a papyrus that appears to attest the presence of Kyros in Alexandria in 639/40: one proposes two periods of exile, roughly in 636–9 and 640–1, whereas the other accepts only the latter and restricts Kyros' absence from Alexandria to a short period of time in 640–1.²⁴ The letter of Kyros to Sergios, his only known writing from this period, is the key piece of the puzzle. As we have seen, it can be read to suggest that at the time of its writing, in autumn 638, Kyros was not in Alexandria.

The vicissitudes of Kyros are known from two narrative sources. One is the *Short history* of Patriarch Nikephoros (806–15), a collage of three minimally retouched texts, of which the first is an account of the reigns of Heraclius and his sons.²⁵ Recent discussions of this text have identified Pyrrhos, the successor of Sergios as patriarch of Constantinople (638–41 and 654), as its instigator, if not author.²⁶ I subscribe to this identification. Kyros appears three times in this narrative: in chapter 23 on the Muslim invasion of Egypt, chapter 26 on his disgrace and

date the *Ekthesis* to 636/7 formulated in JANKOWIAK, *Essai* (quoted n. 2), pp. 155–60, and since then accepted in the scholarship.

²³ On Kyros' career, see JANKOWIAK, *Essai* (quoted n. 2), pp. 89–96, 150–5 (partly modified here); A. BEIHAMMER, *Nachrichten zum byzantinischen Urkundenwesen in arabischen Quellen (565–811)*, Bonn 2000, pp. 70–1; and an alternative reconstruction in P. BOOTH, The last years of Cyrus, patriarch of Alexandria († 642), *TM* 20/1, 2016, pp. 509–58.

²⁴ For the former position, see JANKOWIAK, *Essai* (quoted n. 2), pp. 150–5, now accepted by OHME, Die Konstantinopler Synoden (quoted n. 11), pp. 309–10; the latter is the *communis opinio*, see e.g. R. G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, Princeton 1997, pp. 589–90 (with some hesitation), or BOOTH, The last years of Cyrus (quoted n. 23), pp. 517–8 with n. 56, where three reservations against the former position are formulated: "first that Cyrus was exiled despite his plan of tribute being adopted [...]; second that his restoration occurred when the same plan was then abandoned (inverting the witness of the dependants of the eastern source); and third that he was back in the province in 639/40 (as witnessed in *P.Lond.* I 113.10) only to be soon exiled again and restored under Heraclonas (as said in John of Nikiu and indeed in Nicephorus)." These points are discussed in what follows.

²⁵ J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, Oxford 2011, pp. 237–56.

²⁶ C. ZUCKERMAN, Heraclius and the return of the Holy Cross, *TM* 17, 2013, pp. 197–218, at pp. 206–9; BOOTH, The last years of Cyrus (quoted n. 23), pp. 514–20; C. BOUDIGNON, Is the patriarch Pyrrhos (638–641 and 654) the author of the first part of Nikephoros' *Short history* (chapters 1–32)?, in *Christian Historiography between Empires, 4th-8th Centuries*, ed. by H. Amirav, C. Hoogerwerf & I. Perczel, forthcoming (he thinks rather of a supporter of Pyrrhos). For the sake of convenience, I refer to the author of this work as "Pyrrhos."

trial, and chapter 30 where his reinstatement is mentioned. Chapter 26 is of the chief interest to us. We learn from it that “some years” before the death of Sergios, which is correctly placed in the twelfth indiction (638/9), Kyros had been recalled by Heraclius to Constantinople under the accusation of “surrendering to the Saracens the affairs of all of Egypt.” The trial itself took place only later, around the time when Sergios died and was succeeded by Pyrrhos. Kyros was judged in front of the emperor and a “large gathering of citizens”; despite (or perhaps because of) a spirited defence, Heraclius found him guilty and “waxing incensed with him and threatening him with death, handed him over to the prefect of the City for punishment.”²⁷ The narrative ends here: we are not told what punishment was meted out to Kyros and we do not hear of him until his reinstatement as patriarch of Alexandria by Heraklonas, soon after the latter took power in April 641.²⁸

This narrative has rarely been taken seriously. It is usually dismissed as incompatible with other evidence, internally incoherent, and motivated in its partisan selection of events by an “apologetic scheme.”²⁹ These criticisms are exaggerated. Not only does an apologetic purpose not necessarily affect factual reliability, but the distrust towards Pyrrhos’ pamphlet seems to be due less to his own agenda as to its narrative of the Muslim conquest of the Near East, difficult to reconcile with the historiographical vulgate derived from ninth- and tenth-century Muslim accounts of the *futuh*. We should not, however, blame an authentic voice from seventh-century Constantinople for the lack of hindsight in the presentation of events that, importantly, interested Pyrrhos more as the backdrop for his own actions and opinions than in themselves. His recurrent criticisms of Martina, for instance, aim at dissociating himself from the fallen empress; they colour the narrative, but are unlikely to distort the facts that could easily be verified by those to whom the pamphlet was addressed.

This helps to explain why Pyrrhos does not always explicitly enunciate causal connections and does not tell us everything that we would expect to hear.³⁰ But when read not as a history composed for posterity, but as a pamphlet justifying his role in recent events with the view, perhaps, of **facilitating** his return to the patriarchal throne of Constantinople,³¹ the account of Pyrrhos inspires much confidence. Let us take the example of the trial of Kyros. It has not yet been appreciated how many similarities its brief description shares with the lengthy accounts of the trials of Pope Martin and Maximos composed a decade and a half later.³² The three men were all senior ecclesiastical figures judged for high treason, not religious dissent. The three trials followed the same procedure: the defendants were given the opportunity to defend

²⁷ Nikephoros, *Short history* §26, ed. and trans. C. MANGO, *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople. Short history* (CFHB 13), Washington DC 1990, pp. 74–6.

²⁸ Nikephoros, *Short history* §30 (MANGO 80). For the date, see below, note [45].

²⁹ As in BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 517–20 (quotation p. 517). See also MANGO, *Nikephoros* (quoted n. 27), pp. 11–4; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses* (quoted n. 25), pp. 241–56. A more positive assessment in HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* (quoted n. 24), pp. 574–5, 588–90, and ZUCKERMAN, *Heraclius and the return* (quoted n. 26), pp. 204–9.

³⁰ See e.g. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 518–20 on the “conspicuous failure of the *History* [i.e. Pyrrhos’ pamphlet] to indicate the realisation of the period of tribute” and its supposed “obfuscation” or “suppression” by Pyrrhos.

³¹ *Commemoratio*, PL 129, 597B, mentions heated debates on the past behaviour of Pyrrhos just before his reinstatement as the patriarch on 9 January 654, suggesting a possible context for the composition of the pamphlet. Others place it slightly earlier, cf. ZUCKERMAN, *Heraclius and the return* (quoted n. 26), p. 207 (c. 650), and BOUDIGNON, *Is the patriarch Pyrrhos* (quoted n. 26), p. 39 (before 647).

³² Martin: *Commemoratio*, PL 129, 587A–604A; Maximos: *Relatio motionis* and *Disputatio Bizyae*, in *Scripta saeculi VII* (quoted n. 18), pp. 13–51 and 73–149, trans. ALLEN & NEIL, *Maximus the Confessor* (quoted n. 18), pp. 49–73 and 77–117. See the magisterial analysis by W. BRANDES, “Juristische” Krisenbewältigung im 7. Jahrhundert? Die Prozesse gegen Papst Martin I. und Maximos Homologetes, in *Fontes Minores X*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, pp. 141–212, who, however, does not establish a parallel between the trials of Martin and Maximos and that of Kyros.

themselves publicly, in front of high officials, the senate, and sometimes a “gathering of citizens”; in all three cases the emperor himself was involved. All three churchmen were handed over to the prefect of Constantinople for punishment, which in all cases appears to have been the death penalty commuted into exile.³³ We know that Kyros and Martin were traumatised by this experience.³⁴ Their public hearings were all preceded by a lengthy imprisonment in Constantinople: ninety-three days in the case of Martin, a year or two in the cases of Kyros and Maximos.³⁵ Martin and Maximos were visited in their prison cells by various officials—a relatively junior clerk of the *sakellion* in the case of Martin, top state officials in that of Maximos—who were charged with gathering additional information or negotiating a compromise. They both communicated with the outer world by means of letters or oral messages transmitted to their supporters.³⁶ Pyrrhos’ description of the trial of Kyros thus matches one-to-one the accounts of the trials of Martin and Maximos, and suggests a similar context for the surprising visit of general Eustathios: namely that of a prison or exile where Kyros was expecting his trial, not in Constantinople itself, but no doubt in its vicinity.³⁷

Chapter 26 of the *Short history* devoted to the trial of Kyros has a transparent structure: it describes the death of Sergios and two events presented as its consequences, the election of Pyrrhos, a family friend of the Heraclian dynasty, as the new patriarch of Constantinople, and the trial of Kyros. The affair of Kyros is prefaced by a brief explanation of the accusations against him: “some years previously (χρόνοις τισὶ πρότερον),³⁸ he [*sc.* Heraclius] had recalled to Byzantium Kyros, the bishop of Alexandria, and held him under severe accusation of having surrendered to the Saracens the affairs of all of Egypt.” But it was only “at that time” (τηνικαῦτα), presumably shortly after Sergios’ death, that “he pursued these charges [...] in front of a large gathering of citizens.”³⁹ The charges against Kyros—the payment of tribute to the Arabs financed by a commercial tax and the plan to marry a daughter of Heraclius to ‘Amr—refer to the earlier narrative in chapter 23, from which we learn that after the defeats of two armies sent to defend Egypt from the Arabs, Kyros

informed the emperor that he was going to conclude an agreement with Ambros, phylarch of the Saracens [i.e., the future conqueror of the province ‘Amr ibn al-‘As],

³³ Kyros: Nikephoros, *Short history* §26.20–2 (MANGO 74–6); Martin: *Commemoratio*, PL 129, 595C. Maximos was threatened with death at his first trial in 655, cf. *Scripta saeculi VII* (quoted n. 18), p. 45.415–6 (trans. ALLEN & NEIL, *Maximus the Confessor* [quoted n. 18], p. 69); the sentence of his final trial in 662 suggests commutation of a death sentence, see *Scripta saeculi VII*, p. 151.833–4 (trans. ALLEN & NEIL, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 119).

³⁴ *Commemoratio*, PL 129, 596C–D; John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §120 (ZOTENBERG 462): learning of the fall of Martina, Kyros “pleurait sans cesse; car il craignait qu’il ne lui arrivât ce qui lui était déjà arrivé précédemment, et, dans cette affliction, il mourut selon la loi naturelle.”

³⁵ *Commemoratio*, PL 129, 593A; Maximos was probably imprisoned roughly at the same time as Martin (i.e., around June 653, see JANKOWIAK & BOOTH, *A New Date-List* (quoted n. 20), p. 21) and was judged in spring 655.

³⁶ Letters of Martin from prison and exile: *Commemoratio*, PL 129, 587A–590D and 600C–602B; of Maximos and his companions: *Scripta saeculi VII* (quoted n. 18), pp. 161–89, trans. ALLEN & NEIL, *Maximus the Confessor* (quoted n. 18), pp. 121–47.

³⁷ That Kyros was not in Constantinople when he wrote his letter to Sergios results from its first words, *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), p. 172.9: μελλόντων ἡμῶν ἀπολύειν ἀποκρίσεις κατὰ τὴν πανευδαίμονα (i.e., to Constantinople).

³⁸ These words are dismissed as a “chronologische Phantasie des Nikephoros” (P. SPECK, *Das geteilte Dossier: Beobachtungen zu den Nachrichten über die Regierung des Kaisers Herakleios und die seiner Söhne bei Theophanes und Nikephoros*, Bonn 1988, pp. 213–423, at p. 410 n. 910) or a “misguided addition of Nicephorus himself” to Pyrrhos’ pamphlet (BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* [quoted n. 23], p. 517). Such observations are unwarranted: the text is coherent as it stands.

³⁹ Nikephoros, *Short history* §26.6–11 (MANGO 74).

and <pay him> tribute which, he stated, he would raise by a commercial levy, while the imperial taxes would not be affected.⁴⁰

He also proposed that a daughter of Heraclius be married to ‘Amr, in the hope of winning the latter over to Christianity. Heraclius, however, “would not brook any of this” and sent a third army against the Arabs that met the same fate as the previous two.

We can only speculate why Pyrrhos discussed the trial of Kyros at such length in his pamphlet. Its implied date, at the beginning of his patriarchate, and the presentation of Kyros as a victim of the irrational wrath of Heraclius suggest that he tried to downplay his own role in it.⁴¹ But his account is consistent with what we know about other seventh-century political trials and helps to contextualize Kyros’ letter to Sergios, written probably between his arrest and trial.

The second source reporting the exile of Kyros, the chronicle of John of Nikiu, lost, in the course of its complicated transmission from the lost Coptic original to the extant Ethiopic translation, the section covering the years 610–40.⁴² The narrative resumes *in medias res* with the army of ‘Amr ibn al-‘As already engaged in the conquest of Egypt. Kyros plays no role in the events;⁴³ only gradually do we learn that he had been exiled and replaced as the Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria by one George, but returned to his see, triumphantly greeted by its inhabitants, on 14 September 641.⁴⁴ His arrest and deportation are briefly reported, apparently retrospectively, in connection with the death of Heraclius (January 641)⁴⁵ and the appointment of Constantine III as his successor:

And when Heraclius the Elder died, Pyrrhos, the patriarch of Constantinople, disregarded his sister [*sic*] Martina and her children,⁴⁶ and he appointed Constantine who was born of the empress Eudokia and established him as head of the empire after his father. And the two kings they settled with honour and glory. David and Martin arrested Kyros the Roman Chalcedonian patriarch and exiled him to an island in the west of the province of Africa, without anyone realizing that none of the words of the saints shall fail [to come true, *cf.* Judith 6:9].⁴⁷

The final clause introduces the prophecy of Severus of Antioch that no Chalcedonian emperor would be succeeded by his son, although it is unclear how this relates to the exile of Kyros.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Nikephoros, *Short history* §23 (MANGO 70).

⁴¹ This complicates the view identifying Kyros as a natural ally of Martina and Pyrrhos, for which see e.g. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 536–9.

⁴² The reasoning in BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 551–2, that the lacuna might be “original to John of Nikiu’s text” (i.e., that John intentionally omitted this period from his work) depends on the early dating of the rubrics, on which see below, note [60]. I follow P. BOOTH, *The Muslim conquest of Egypt reconsidered*, *TM* 17, 2013, pp. 639–70, at p. 645 n. 23 in preferring the French translation of trans. H. ZOTENBERG, *Chronique de Jean, évêque de Nikiou*, Paris 1883, to that of R. H. CHARLES, *The Chronicle of John, bishop of Nikiu*, London 1916. I warmly thank Marcin Krawczuk for discussing the Ethiopic text with me.

⁴³ Thus also BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 521–2.

⁴⁴ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §116, 119–20 (ZOTENBERG 444, 450–4). I accept the readings of the easily confused names of Pyrrhos and Kyros proposed by BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 522–6.

⁴⁵ For the date of Heraclius’ death (11 January rather than 11 February), see C. ZUCKERMAN, *La formule de datation du SB VI 8986 et son témoignage sur la succession d’Héraclius*, *JJP* 25, 1995, pp. 187–201, at p. 194. By implication, I place the death of Constantine III on 24 April 641.

⁴⁶ Martina could be considered a “sister” of Pyrrhos if her mother was his godmother, following a possible interpretation of Nikephoros, *Short history* §26 (MANGO 74, with commentary at p. 190).

⁴⁷ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §116, trans. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 522, who, however, translates the last sentence “without anyone knowing what had been done.” I follow ZOTENBERG, *Chronique* (quoted n. 42), p. 444: “sans que personne comprît que ce fût l’accomplissement d’une prophétie; car aucune parole des saints ne se perd.”

⁴⁸ ZOTENBERG, *Chronique* (quoted n. 42), p. 444 n. 3 (his reading of “Pyrrhos” for “Kyros” does not affect his interpretation). John of Nikiu quotes the same prophecy again in §120 (ZOTENBERG 461–2).

The narrative continues with the dispatch of a large fleet by the new emperor Constantine III “in order that they might bring him [Kyros] to him [Constantine III] and he might take counsel with him and give tribute to the Muslims—whether fighting were possible or not—and he might meet him in the imperial city during the Feast of the Holy Resurrection” i.e., at Easter (8 April 641).⁴⁹

Even if one accepts the readings of the names of Pyrrhos and Kyros proposed by Phil Booth, this passage remains puzzling.⁵⁰ Contrary to the first impression, it is clear that the exile of Kyros took place before the death of Heraclius, given that the first action of his successor was to recall him. The initiative of his arrest and exile is attributed to David and Martin, usually identified as the younger sons of Heraclius promoted to the rank of Caesar in 638–9.⁵¹ This is problematic given that the elder brother, David, was ten years old in 641. But there is no difficulty in abandoning this identification as other homonyms were active at that time: one thinks, for instance, of the “logothete” David whose role in Constantinopolitan politics during the struggle for the succession of Heraclius John of Nikiu describes at some length several chapters later, and who is more likely than not to be identical with the “*sparapet* [commander] of Armenia and Syria” Dawit’ Saharuni.⁵² The identification of Martin—or Marinos, as his name can also be read⁵³—is more difficult, but a possible candidate is Marinos, one of the three generals sent by Heraclius to Egypt against the Arabs according to Pyrrhos’ pamphlet, and the only to have survived his defeat. His campaign may well have caused frictions with the patriarch of Alexandria and thus provided a motive for their mutual hostility.

Kyros does not seem to have returned to Constantinople in time to find Constantine III alive. But the death of the emperor in April 641 did not stop his return to grace. As we learn from another notice in John’s chronicle, his successor Heraklonas confirmed Kyros’ recall from exile:

Kyros the patriarch then saw the younger Heraclius had become emperor through the plan of Martina his mother, though he was still in exile. And after he became emperor he recalled Kyros from exile on the advice of the soldiers [or: senators], and he abolished the penal decree which had been written by his brother Constantine and the emperors who preceded him. For they deposed him on the unjust accusation of Philagrius the deputy. And it was through his agency that the churches were in tribulation: for he put an end to the gifts which the emperors were accustomed to make

⁴⁹ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §116, trans. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 523 with n. 84. ZOTENBERG, *Chronique* (quoted n. 42), p. 444, hesitated how to construct the sentence.

⁵⁰ See BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 522–7.

⁵¹ First by ZOTENBERG, *Chronique* (quoted n. 42), p. 444 n. 3; see also BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 524. On the dates of their elevation, see C. ZUCKERMAN, *On the title and office of the Byzantine basileus*, *TM* 16, 2010, pp. 865–90, at p. 875, and JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes* (quoted n. 2). Even if they are not necessarily meant here, John of Nikiu is aware of their existence and mentions them elsewhere: *Chronicle* §120 (ZOTENBERG 460).

⁵² John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §120 (ZOTENBERG 459–60), with the discussion of his position (traditionally rendered as “logothete”) in BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 528 n. 109. On Dawit’ Saharuni, see Sebeos, *History* §41, trans. R. W. THOMSON, comm. J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Liverpool 1999, pp. 93–4 and 230–1; T. GREENWOOD, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Inscriptions*, *DOP* 58, 2004, pp. 27–91, at pp. 72 and 83 (A.7); and PLRE III David 6.

⁵³ ZOTENBERG, *Chronique* (quoted n. 42), p. 444 n. 2, interprets the Ethiopic *mardinus* (መርዲኖስ) as a faulty rendering of the Arabic *marīnūs* (مريئوس), misread *mardinūs* (مردنوس). It is true that one would expect in Arabic a long *yā* in Greek-Roman name endings -inus/-inos.

and increased the heavy charges [that were upon them]. And thereupon he appointed him for a second time to the city of Alexandria, and the priests who were with him.⁵⁴

The information that Kyros was still in exile at the death of Constantine III has been read as contradictory to the earlier report on his recall from the exile by this very emperor.⁵⁵ But we can envisage a number of scenarios to explain this apparent contradiction: that the return of Kyros from Tripolis in Libya⁵⁶ to Constantinople during the period of *mare clausum* required more time than the short reign of Constantine III, or that his recall was stopped by intrigues such as those that almost prevented his return to Alexandria several months later,⁵⁷ or that Heraklonas simply confirmed, or took the credit for, the earlier decision of his elder brother. We learn, furthermore, that Kyros' disgrace was caused by an unjust accusation of Philagrios, the *sakellarios* and effective regent of Constantine III, perhaps in connection with some financial matters, as suggested by the next sentence blaming Philagrios for increasing the fiscal pressure on the Church.⁵⁸ His deposition, John of Nikiu tells us, was confirmed by an edict issued by Constantine III and "the emperors who preceded him," a no doubt consciously cryptic reference to the imperial college responsible for the condemnation of Kyros that included Heraklonas himself.⁵⁹ In other words, Heraklonas now withdrew, on the advice of the soldiers or senators, his earlier support for the exile of Kyros.

There is thus no need to posit a glaring contradiction between the two notices of John of Nikiu on the exile and reinstatement of Kyros, or to assume that they came from two different sources:⁶⁰ they can be seen as complementary. Kyros' policies towards 'Amr were just as likely to offend the "fiscal party" of Philagrios (and Constantine III) as the "military party" of David Saharuni (and Martina); one can thus imagine a broad consensus around his removal from Egypt.⁶¹ But, more fundamentally, a bipartisan vision of Roman politics during the struggle for the succession of Heraclius is overly reductive: the allegiances that crystallised during the crisis of 641 were neither binary nor immutable. To take two examples, David Saharuni conspired to kill Martina's children before becoming her prospective husband, whereas the patrician Domentianos, a favourite of Martina, appears in the chronicle of John of Nikiu both as a former

⁵⁴ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §119, trans. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 525, slightly modified, with the penultimate sentence supplied from CHARLES, *Chronicle* (quoted n. 42), p. 191. Cf. also ZOTENBERG, *Chronique* (quoted n. 42), p. 452. The mention of an entourage recalls the greetings from Kyros and "those with me" concluding his letter to Sergios: *Concilium Lateranense* (quoted n. 1), p. 172.36–7; trans. PRICE, *Lateran Synod* (quoted n. 1), p. 236.

⁵⁵ BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 526–7.

⁵⁶ Identified as his place of exile by BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 524 n. 91.

⁵⁷ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §120 (ZOTENBERG 453).

⁵⁸ The hostility between Kyros and Philagrios is mentioned again by John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §120 (ZOTENBERG 462). See also BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 538–9. For the accusation that Kyros "gave to the Saracens the gold of Egypt," see below, note [102].

⁵⁹ *Pace* BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 526 n. 101, who regards this "as a later addition to the text" and refers it to Caesars David and Martin.

⁶⁰ BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 527–36, derives the two notices from two different sources (focusing on Constantinople and Egypt respectively) awkwardly combined by John of Nikiu at the final stage of the redaction of his chronicle. This reconstruction relies on the discrepancy between the text of John's chronicle and the rubrics prefacing it, and on the date of the latter, tacitly assumed by Booth to be early and taken to represent the original shape of the text. The rubrics seem, however, later than the lacuna (they have no knowledge of the lost section) and were probably added by the translator into Arabic, as thought by ZOTENBERG, *Chronique* (quoted n. 42), pp. 229 n. 4, 438 n. 2 and 456 n. 2. Their compiler was primarily interested in Egypt and as a rule ignored the material on Constantinople, not only in the final section of the chronicle: compare, for instance, the text of chapter 89 (ZOTENBERG, *Chronique*, pp. 368–81) with its rubric (p. 234) that ignores the long accounts of riots in Constantinople and Antioch, and of the revolt of Vitalian. The question of John of Nikiu's sources needs to be reconsidered independently of the rubrics.

⁶¹ See BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 538, for a suggestion in this direction.

friend of Kyros, incidentally his brother-in-law, and his staunch enemy at a later date.⁶² If the Constantinopolitan factions were divided on the conduct of the war against the Arabs, the differences seem to have been of a tactical, rather than strategic, order. The cleavage between the “hawks” and the “doves,” if at all pertinent, rather describes the tensions between the central government and local leaders ready to pay the Arabs off, such as Kyros or the governor of Osrhoene John Kataias.⁶³ Indeed, Kyros does not neatly fit into any of the court parties: irrespective of whether his arrest was due to David Saharuni, Caesar David, or Philagrios, his trial took place during the period of ascendancy of Martina and at the very beginning of the patriarchate of her ally Pyrrhos, both of whom later blessed his return to Alexandria.

We do not need, then, to choose one or the other account of John of Nikiu. As far as we can rely on the problematic text of his chronicle, his information on Kyros can be read as consistent both internally and with Pyrrhos’ pamphlet. Both sources speak of the reinstatement of Kyros by Martina and Heraklonas in spring–summer 641, even if John of Nikiu also notes his rehabilitation already by Constantine III several months earlier. Both ascribe to Kyros the same policies towards the Arabs: John of Nikiu alludes to his good relationship with ‘Amr b. al-‘As, associates him with the payment of tribute to the Arabs, and explains both the reinstatement of Kyros and the jubilation of Alexandrian populace on his return by the hope of achieving peace with the Muslims, implying that his earlier policy of appeasement was seen as successful.⁶⁴ Even if the detail of these earlier arrangements is, unfortunately, lost in the lacuna of John’s chronicle, this information is consonant with the narrative of Pyrrhos.

Finally, both sources know of Kyros’ exile. The extant section of John’s chronicle does not hint at its length,⁶⁵ but it contains a key indication: it names a certain George as Kyros’ replacement at the see of Alexandria during his exile.⁶⁶ A George indeed appears in the lists of

⁶² David Saharuni: see above, note [52]. Domentianos: John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §119 (ZOTENBERG 450–1). Domentianos’ first appearance in the narrative of John of Nikiu might suggest that he was a local commander in the Fayoum (§112 [ZOTENBERG 439], thus PLRE III Domentianus), but he is later named as a patrician and a leading personality in the circle of Martina (§120 [ZOTENBERG 453, 459]) which led BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 537–8 n. 138, to suggest that he was “a prominent member of the Constantinopolitan elite.” In that case, it is tempting to identify him with the patrician Dometios present at the procession of 1 January 639: see above, note [14]. He may have arrived in Egypt with the armada of 639/40, see below.

⁶³ John Kataias concluded a truce with the Arabs in exchange for tribute, but was recalled by Heraclius after a year (in 637/8?) and exiled, similarly to Kyros, to Africa: Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6128 (DE BOOR 340); Agapios, *Kitab al-‘unwan*, ed. A. A. Vasiliev (Patrologia Orientalis 8), Paris 1912, pp. 399–547, at p. 476; Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, 2, ed. J.-B. Chabot, Paris 1901, XI, 7 (p. 426); *Chronicle of 1234*, trans. J.-B. CHABOT, *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens. I* (CSCO 109), Lovanii 1937, §121 (p. 256). See also HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* (quoted n. 24), pp. 586–7, and BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 513.

⁶⁴ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §116, 119–20 (ZOTENBERG 444, 452, 453, 455): Constantine III recalls Kyros so that “he might take counsel with him and give tribute to the Muslims” (trans. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* [quoted n. 23], p. 523); Heraklonas gives him “the power and authority that he might make peace with the Muslims and not oppose them, and set up a law of governance as was fit for the governance of the province of Egypt” (trans. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus*, 525); Kyros “was not the only one who desired reconciliation with the Muslims” (trans. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus*, p. 537); Kyros goes to Babylon “auprès des musulmans, pour leur demander la paix, en offrant de leur payer tribut, afin qu’il fissent cesser la guerre en Egypte. ‘Amr l’accueillit avec bienveillance” (cf. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus*, p. 535 n. 126). See also BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus*, p. 522.

⁶⁵ Thus also reluctantly BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 521 n. 76, whose impression that “Cyrus’ political isolation cannot have lasted long” (p. 520) is based on his assessment of *P.Lond.* I 113.10 (on which see below), not on information provided by John of Nikiu.

⁶⁶ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §120 (ZOTENBERG 454), trans. BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 541–2 (my comments in square brackets): “before the arrival of the patriarch Cyrus, George was glorified by the lord Anastasius. For that man [Anastasius or George?] received office from Heraclius the Younger [possibly a mistake for “Heraclius the Elder,” see BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus*, p. 542 n. 159], and when he [Anastasius or George?] grew older he wielded power over all. The patriarch [Kyros or George?], moreover, also granted him

patriarchs of Alexandria before Kyros and is credited with a patriarchate of four or fourteen years.⁶⁷ Since Theophanes, historians preferred the latter reading to fill the gap in the list of the bishops of Alexandria between John the Almsgiver, who left Alexandria before its fall to the Persians in 619, and Kyros, who became patriarch in 633 at the earliest. Such a sequence is, however, unlikely: no Chalcedonian patriarch would have been tolerated by the Persians (and we do not hear about any hierarchy in exile), and the seat was initially left vacant by the returning Roman administration in the hope of a union with the miaphysite church. In fact, John of Nikiu demonstrates that George was patriarch in 641, when he was replaced by Kyros. This chronology is confirmed by the tenth-century chronicle of Eutychios of Alexandria that adds that when, having “sat for four years”, George “heard that the Muslims defeated the Rum, conquered Palestine, and were on their way to Egypt, he boarded a ship and fled from Alexandria to Constantinople. (...) After he had fled, Kyros became patriarch.”⁶⁸ We can therefore situate the beginning of George’s patriarchate in 637, a date that coincides remarkably well with Pyrrhos’ dating of the arrest of Kyros to “some years” before the death of Patriarch Sergios. At the same time, Kyros’ arrest is later than the synod of Cyprus at which he played one of the main roles and that probably met just before the Roman defeat on the Yarmuk (August 636).⁶⁹

All the sources—Kyros’ letter to Sergios, Pyrrhos’ pamphlet, John of Nikiu’s chronicle, lists of patriarchs of Alexandria, and, as we will see, the Syriac source used by Theophanes and other chroniclers—thus concur to place the exile of Kyros some time before the death of Sergios, perhaps in 637. Why, then, do modern historians reject their consensus? For two main reasons: because of the influential narrative of the Arab conquest of Egypt proposed 120 years ago by Alfred Butler, to which we will return, and, more importantly, the papyrus *P.Lond. I 113.10*.

P.LOND. I 113.10, DIANOMAI, AND THE “TRIBUTE OF KYROS”

The papyrus⁷⁰ is addressed by priests and elders of the village Kaminoi to the pagarch of the Arsinoïte nome (i.e., Fayoum) Flaouios Theodorakios.⁷¹ The villagers confirm the receipt of

[Anastasius or George?] power.” All the pronouns are ambiguous and are understood differently by Zotenberg and Booth. George is explicitly named “patriarch” in his second appearance in John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §120 (ZOTENBERG 451).

⁶⁷ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6111 (DE BOOR 302.10–4) etc. (14 years); Nikephoros, *Chronographikon syntomon*, in *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani Opuscula historica*, ed. C. de Boor, Lipsiae 1880, 129.14 (14 years); see the next footnote for Eutychios (4 years). See also JANKOWIAK, *Essai* (quoted n. 2), pp. 85–8, and BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 541–2. Patriarch George of Alexandria is also known as the author of a life of John Chrysostom, ed. F. HALKIN, *Douze récits byzantins sur Saint Jean Chrysostome* (Subsidia hagiographica 60), Bruxelles 1977, pp. 69–285.

⁶⁸ Eutychios, *Nazm al-jawhar*, in *Das Annalenwerk des Eutychios von Alexandrien*, ed. M. Breydy (CSCO 471), Lovanii 1985, p. 133, §276.

⁶⁹ S. BROCK, *An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor*, *AnBoll* 91, 1973, pp. 299–346, at pp. 316–17, §10–4. See, more in detail, JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes* (quoted n. 2).

⁷⁰ Edited in F. G. KENYON, *Greek papyri in the British Museum*, vol. 1, London 1893, pp. 222–3, and U. WILCKEN, *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde. 1, 2, Chrestomathie*, Leipzig 1912, pp. 14–6, no. 8; photograph at [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=papyrus_113_\(10\)_f001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=papyrus_113_(10)_f001r). The papyrus (also quoted as *W.Chr. 8* or *Chr.Wilck. 8*) has **been much commented on**, see e.g. E. WIPSYCKA, *The Alexandrian Church: People and institutions*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 168–9; BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 511; and S. SCHMIDT, *Between Byzantine and Muslim Egypt. Mobilizing Economic Resources for an Embryonic Empire*, *Journal of Ancient Civilizations* 35, 2020, pp. 241–66, at pp. 245–6. I thank Tomasz Derda and Ewa Wipszycka for discussing it with me. My interpretation engages, of course, only myself.

⁷¹ Fl. Theodorakios is attested in several documents dated between 639/40 (*P.Lond. I 113.10*) and 651 (*CPR XXIV 32*), see B. PALME, *Dokumente zu Verwaltung und Militär aus dem spätantiken Ägypten* (*CPR XXIV*), Wien 2002,

the payment for various goods that they delivered at the order of patriarch Kyros “in the present thirteenth indiction” i.e., in 639/40:

We recognise, having voluntarily sworn by God Almighty and the salvation of the emperors, that we received from Your Magnificence the full price of what was given by us for the community of our said village for various *dianomai* imposed in accordance with the order of our master Kyros, the most holy and God-honoured pope, for the present thirteenth indiction, namely of hides, wool, dry fodder, sheep, sheep skins, radish oil,⁷² and mats, that is for the price of one small hide 8 keratia, for the price of 25 *litrai* of wool [---] keratia, for the price of 31 sheaves of dry fodder one nomisma eleven and a half keratia, for the price of the sheep [---, for the price of sheep] sk(ins)...⁷³

The text breaks off here, in the middle of a word, even though the papyrus is well preserved: large blanks to the right and below the final word indicate that the document was left unfinished.⁷⁴ The papyrus is mutilated at the top, where remains of a regnal formula are extant, and on the left, where traces of “Stempelschrift” can be seen.⁷⁵ It has thus all the hallmarks of an official document written by an expert scribe working for a government bureau, no doubt that of the pagarch Fl. Theodorakios. In this sense, it does not represent a receipt, but a document produced by the pagarch’s office for its own records. It was certainly supposed to be signed by the recipients of the payment, but there is no trace of any signatures at the bottom of the papyrus. This reinforces the impression that the scribe interrupted his work abruptly.

The papyrus has attracted much attention as a rare testimony, according to most historians, of the Roman efforts to resist the Arab invasion of Egypt, the goods purchased by the pagarch from the villagers being interpreted as military supplies for the Roman army. It is, furthermore, thought to demonstrate that Kyros was in 639/40 the patriarch in charge, and possibly also the *augustalis* of Egypt, given that he could impose taxes on its population.⁷⁶ His exile must therefore be placed after this date, or, alternatively, both before and after it, to allow for his presence in Alexandria in 639/40.

pp. 197–200. For the village of Kaminoi, see T. DERDA, *Arsinoitēs Nomos: Administration of the Fayum under Roman rule*, Warsaw 2006, p. 275. Out of more than a dozen villagers, only the first two have the title πρεσβύτερος and were thus priests.

⁷² See F. MORELLI, *Olio e retribuzioni nell’Egitto tardo (V-VIII d.C.)*, Firenze 1996, pp. 6–7.

⁷³ *P.Lond.* I 113.10, lines 11–7: ὁμολογοῦμεν ἕκο[υ]σία γνώμη ἐπομνύμενοι θεὸν παντοκράτορα καὶ τὴν βασιλικὴν σωτηρία[ν εἰλη]φέναι καὶ πεπληρωσθαι παρὰ τ[ῆς] ὑμετέρας μεγαλοπρεπείας τὴν τιμὴν τῶν δοθέντων παρ’ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν π[α]ρ[ᾶ] τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς εἰρημένης ἡμῶν κώμης εἰς διαφόρους διανομὰς γενομένας κατὰ κέλευσιν τοῦ δεσπότης ἡμῶν Κύρου τοῦ ἀγιοτ[ά]του καὶ θεοτιμή[του] πάπα ἐπὶ τῆς παρουσίας τρισκαιδεκάτης ἰν(δικτιῶνος), λεγόμεν δὴ τῶν τε βυρσαρίων καὶ ἐρεᾶς καὶ χόρτου ξηροῦ καὶ πρωβάτων καὶ πρωβαίων δερμάτων φυλίων καὶ ῥαφά[νου] καὶ στρωμάτων, τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ [μ]ὲν τιμῆ[ς] βυρσαρίου ἐνὸς κεράτια ὀκτώ, ὑπὲρ δὲ τιμῆ[ς] ἐρεᾶς λτρῶν εἴκοσι πέντε κεράτια [- c. 9 - ὑπ]ὲρ δὲ τιμῆ[ς] χόρτου ξηροῦ δεσμ[ῶ]ν τριάκοντα ἐνὸ[ς] νόμισμα ἐν κεράτια ἐνδεκα ἡμισυ, ὑπὲρ δὲ τιμῆς πρωβάτων [- c. 15-20 - ὑπὲρ δὲ τιμῆ[ς] φυλ. The letter preceding the final φυλ, and connected with the φ, cannot be a νυ. A different, and partly faulty, translation in F. R. TROMBLEY, *Fiscal documents from the Muslim conquest of Egypt: military supplies and administrative dislocation, ca 639–644*, *REB* 71, 2013, pp. 5–38, at p. 23.

⁷⁴ This puzzling circumstance was noted by the editors—see KENYON, *Greek papyri* (quoted n. 70), p. 223, note *ad l.* 16, and WILCKEN, *Chrestomathie* (quoted n. 70), p. 16, note *ad l.* 18—but, to my knowledge, has never been commented on.

⁷⁵ See K. A. WÖRPER, *Regnal formulas of the emperor Heraclius*, *JJP* 23, 1993, pp. 217–32, at pp. 230–1, for a reconstruction of the dating formula that was probably preceded by an invocation, as suggested by traces of writing at the very top of the papyrus.

⁷⁶ On the cumulation of the patriarchate and the charge of *augustalis* by Kyros, see e.g. T. DERDA & J. WEGNER, *Naqlun in the 5th-7th Century: Papyrological and Literary Evidence*, in *Le Fayoum: Archéologie – Histoire – Religion*, ed. by M.-P. Chaufray, I. Guermeur, S. Lippert & V. Rondot, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 183–98, at pp. 190–3.

A careful reading of the papyrus undermines this interpretation. The document refers to various obligations called *dianomai* (εἰς διαφόρους διανομάς) imposed by the order of Kyros (γενομένας κατὰ κέλευσιν τοῦ δεσπότητος ἡμῶν Κύρου) and discharged by the villagers in “the present thirteenth indiction” (ἐπὶ τῆς παρούσης τρισκαιδεκάτης ἰνδικτίωνος). The date mentioned in the papyrus does not refer—and this is an important nuance—to the imposition of the *dianomai*, but to the settlement of a recurring obligation for this particular fiscal year. It is thus difficult to read the papyrus as an indisputable confirmation of Kyros’ presence in Alexandria in 639/40 and, *a fortiori*, as a “crucial chronological marker for the patriarch’s movements in the later phase of his career.”⁷⁷

The term *dianome* (διανομή), literally “distribution,” points in a different direction. It is well attested in the first century of the Muslim rule in Egypt, when it refers to levies of various goods for the Arab elite and for conscripts to the navy or major construction sites.⁷⁸ The London papyrus shows that it originated in the last years of Roman rule, even if it remains its sole attestation before the Muslim conquest of Egypt.⁷⁹ It is unlikely that its original purpose was to provide supplies for the Roman army given that the Roman taxation system could easily accommodate extraordinary levies. The creation of a new tax and its association with Kyros point to another possibility: namely that what the villagers of Kaminoi call, paraphrasing the papyrus, “various levies allocated by pope Kyros” was in fact the tribute promised by the patriarch to the Arabs. This is supported by a recent observation by Federico Morelli that sheep and mats (or blankets) were typically requisitioned for the Saracens after the conquest, and are not attested as supplies for the Roman army.⁸⁰

The unfinished state of the *recto* of the papyrus explains why it was soon reused, perhaps still in the same bureau of the pagarch of Arsinoe. The contents of the *verso* have so far received very little attention, even though they seem related to the *recto*.⁸¹ I currently understand them as follows. The document, written in the first person, speaks of a planned trip to Alexandria. Its author mentions orders from “our master, the most holy ...” (κελευσθέντα μοι παρὰ τοῦ δεσπότητος ἡμῶν τοῦ ἀγίω[τάτου] ...)—the name, if it was spelled out, is lost in the lacuna—and an unnamed “most famous duke” ([εὐκλ]εστάτου δουκός). He hastened to Alexandria “at the order of the same God-honoured man” ([κατὰ τὴν κ]έλευσιν τοῦ αὐτοῦ θεοτιμήτου ἀνδρός), in some connection with “the accusations of the above-mentioned man” (δέξασθαι τὰς ἐναγωγὰς τοῦ προειρημένου ἀνδρ[ός]). It is not clear if these accusations were raised by or against the man. The following lines are more difficult to understand. Below the letter, and at

⁷⁷ Thus BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 511.

⁷⁸ See F. MITTHOF, *SPP III*, 119–238: *Schuldscheine und Quittungen*, Wien 2007, pp. xxiii–xxiv; S. TOST, *SPP III*, 1–118: *Quittungen, Lieferungskäufe und Darlehen*, Wien 2007, pp. lv–lvi; A. MARTIN, “Unter einem Unglücksstern”. Fouilles berlinoises à Médinet Madi (Narmouthis), janvier 1910, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 55, 2009, pp. 374–9, at pp. 377–8; P. SIJPESTEIJN, *Shaping a Muslim state: The world of a mid-eighth-century Egyptian official*, Oxford 2013, pp. 69, 74 and 179. A convenient list of mentions of *dianome* in Greek papyri in SCHMIDT, *Between Byzantine and Muslim Egypt* (quoted n. 70), p. 243 n. 12.

⁷⁹ Cf. J. GASCOU, *De Byzance à l’Islam: les impôts en Égypte après la conquête arabe*, *JESHO* 26, 1983, pp. 97–109, at p. 101: “il n’est pas facile de mesurer les changements introduits par les Arabes, parce que le dernier état de la fiscalité byzantine à la fin du règne d’Héraclius n’est pas bien connu. (...) On doit donc s’attendre à trouver des antécédants byzantins directs à certaines « innovations ».”

⁸⁰ F. MORELLI, ‘Amr e Martina: la reggenza di un’imperatrice o l’amministrazione araba d’Egitto, *ZPE* 173, 2010, pp. 136–57, at p. 155 n. 65. He rightly concludes: “Certamente, una consegna delle *dianomai* di W. Chr. 8 ad arabi—chissà in quale ruolo e per quale motivo in Egitto o comunque riforniti dall’Egitto nel 639/640—, non va d’accordo con le cronologie e rappresentazioni tramandateci per la conquista, i diversi trattati, etc.: un motivo in più per interrogarsi sul loro reale valore.”

⁸¹ Published by K. WESSELY, *Griechische Papyrus des British-Museum*, *Wiener Studien* 12, 1890, pp. 81–97, at p. 91. See also SB I 5309; photograph at [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Papyrus_113_\(10\)](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Papyrus_113_(10)). I am preparing a new edition with Tomasz Derda. I warmly thank Federico Morelli and Lajos Berkes for their comments on this text.

some distance from its last line, a different hand added a note that appears to record the payment of, very tentatively, 8 solidi and 23 keratia.⁸² There follows a series of characters that can perhaps be read *LEGI* in Latin. This would suggest that, despite its letter-like style, the *verso* of the London papyrus had an official character and documented a monetary payment.

The *verso* of the London papyrus is too incomplete to allow any certitude as to the events that it records. Its date is unknown, even if it is likely that it was written soon after the *recto*. What stands out, however, is the central role of “our master”, the “God-honoured” and “most holy” man mentioned four times in the text. Unusually, on three occasions he is referred to as “man” (άνήρ), and not by his official title (the fourth noun is lost in a lacuna). The combination of prestigious honorifics—that mirror those applied on the *recto* to Kyros—with the ambiguous status of the “man,” as well as the possible mention of accusations against(?) him, suggest that Kyros may be meant here too. It is difficult, at this stage, to be more specific; all we can say is that both sides of the papyrus seem to indicate a rapidly changing, fluid situation.

The transaction described on the *recto* of the papyrus, namely the payment by the state for the requisitioned goods, brings to mind the construction of Kyros’ tribute to ‘Amr as described in Pyrrhos’ pamphlet. Kyros is said to have insisted that the payments be financed by extraordinary trade duties (δι’ έμπολαίου συνεισφορᾶς or δι’ έμπολῆς) so that the taxes due to the Roman state remain unaffected.⁸³ As showed by the papyrus, this new levy received a freshly coined name, *dianome*, that still rang unfamiliar to the villagers who spoke of “various” *dianomai*. Its purpose, to supply the Muslims with goods in kind, ensured its survival into the early Islamic period.

It is tempting to **connect** the characteristics of the early Islamic *dianomai*, best known from *P.Lond.* IV 1414, a long account belonging to the early-eighth century dossier of tax documents from Aphrodito, with the original tax devised by Kyros.⁸⁴ The collected goods were distributed among fifteen categories of recipients ranging from the caliph and the governor of Egypt to sailors involved in the raids against Byzantium (*koursa*). The *dianomai* themselves fell into two categories, *διανομαί άνευ τιμῆς* and *διανομαί τῆ τιμῆ* i.e., “*dianomai* without a price (or value)” and “*dianomai* at a price (or value),”⁸⁵ the former being agricultural products and the latter manufactured goods. They differed in how they were acquired—from the taxpayer within the fiscal unit of Aphrodito (ἀπό διοικήσεως), or bought on its market (ἀπό αγοράς τῆς διοικήσεως) or on an external market (ἀπό αγοράς ἔξωθεν τῆς διοικήσεως)—and how they were accounted, as illustrated in the table below.

origin of the good	type of goods	type of <i>dianome</i>	included in the quota of <i>dianomai</i> ?	credited against
ἀπό διοικήσεως	manufactured goods	διανομαί τῆ τιμῆ	yes	διανομαί τῆ τιμῆ (περιποίησης) and κανὼν τῶν δημοσίων (τιμή)
ἀπό αγοράς τῆς διοικήσεως	agricultural produce	διανομαί άνευ τιμῆς	yes	διανομαί άνευ τιμῆς

⁸² This line was left out in Wessely’s edition.

⁸³ Nikephoros, *Short history* §23.12–3 and 26.13 (MANGO 70 and 74).

⁸⁴ Published in H. I. BELL, *Greek papyri in the British Museum. 4, The Aphrodito papyri*, London 1910, pp. 124–53; partial translation in H. I. BELL, *Translations of the Greek Aphrodito papyri in the British Museum, Der Islam* 3, 1912, pp. 132–40, at pp. 136–40.

⁸⁵ BELL, *Greek papyri* (quoted n. 84), p. 124, read *διανομαί άνευ τιμήσεως* and *διανομαί τῆ τιμήσει*, which he translated as “requisitions not included in the schedule” and “requisitions included in the schedule” in BELL, *Translations* (quoted n. 84), p. 136. It is more intuitive to follow a simpler reading.

ἀπὸ ἀγορᾶς ἔξωθεν τῆς διοικήσεως both both items in excess of the quota κανὼν τῶν δημοσίων

What matters for us is the accounting of manufactured goods included in the quotas for διανομαὶ τῆ τιμῆ. Their value was split into the value of labour (probably to be read περιποίησις in the papyrus) and of the raw materials (τιμῆ).⁸⁶ As results from the calculations in the papyrus, the former was credited against the quota of the διανομαὶ τῆ τιμῆ, whereas the latter decreased the obligations due to the κανὼν τῶν δημοσίων i.e., the ordinary taxes paid by the villagers. In other words, only the former, the value added in the process of manufacturing, was accounted as *dianome*. Such distinction between the value of the raw materials and the value added through labour is absent from the accounting of agricultural produce, no doubt because of the negligible value of the raw materials (e.g. seeds or eggs).⁸⁷ They were, in this sense, ἄνευ τιμῆς: they had no initial value to be deducted from their final price in order to correctly evaluate the labour invested in producing them.

Should we then credit Kyros with the invention of a VAT-style tax, unique in late antiquity? The two sources that inform us about the trade tax introduced by him in order to offset the cost of goods given to the Arabs—*P.Lond.* I 113.10 and Nikephoros’ *Short history*—do not explain its mechanisms in sufficient detail. But we are probably on a safe ground assuming more, rather than less, continuity, or inertia, in the workings of the *dianome* in the post-conquest period. If anything changed, we can speculate, it was the direction of the flows of goods and cash: money was no longer collected from craftsmen in order to be paid to peasants in exchange for their goods, but the two contributions—both apparently in kind, not in money⁸⁸—became independent of each other and directly entered the fisc. The tax introduced by Kyros and the contributions recorded some 70 years later in early Islamic accounts have enough in common to make it likely that they had a common purpose: to supply goods in kind to the Arabs.

Finally, the titlature of Kyros in the papyrus—“our master” (δεσπότης ἡμῶν) and “pope” (πάπα)—should not cause undue confusion. The status of deposed patriarchs was somewhat ambiguous in late antiquity and later in Byzantium. Pyrrhos himself is a good example. After he resigned the patriarchate of Constantinople “without renouncing the priesthood” (i.e., the rank of bishop) in 641,⁸⁹ he went to Rome where he was received “as a bishop” by pope Theodore.⁹⁰ His case was, admittedly, complicated by doubts whether his deposition was canonical and the interest of the church of Rome in challenging the legitimacy of his successor. But no such doubts are known in the case of Anastasios of Antioch (561–70 and 593–9) whom Pope Gregory I addressed, even before Anastasios returned to his see, as “bishop,” “ex-patriarch” and simply “patriarch,” while recognising his successor.⁹¹ The ambiguity was due to the fact that deposition from a bishopric did not invalidate the sacrament of episcopal ordination: unless canonically condemned, the deposed bishop could decide whether to keep it

⁸⁶ On the distinction between the cost of raw materials and of manufacturing, see also F. MORELLI, *I prezzi dei materiali e prodotti artigianali nei documenti tardoantichi e del primo periodo arabo (IV ex.-VIII d.C.)*, Berlin 2019, pp. 63–4.

⁸⁷ This apparently concerned also the *kilikia*, clothing made of goat’s wool, the only textile among the διανομαὶ ἄνευ τιμῆς.

⁸⁸ As results, among others, from receipts for manufactured goods (e.g. *SPP* III² [quoted n. 78], nos 106, 108A, 119, 121, 180, 204; see also the discussion in the first two items of note [78]) and from the absence of fractions of animals among the goods sourced ἀπὸ ἀγορᾶς τῆς διοικήσεως, differently from contributions bought ἀπὸ ἀγορᾶς ἔξωθεν τῆς διοικήσεως.

⁸⁹ Nikephoros, *Short history* §31.25–6 (MANGO 82): τῆς ἱερωσύνης μὴ ἀφιστάμενος.

⁹⁰ *Commemoratio*, PL 129, 597B–598C (Pyrrhos is called *expatriarcha* at 597C). On Pyrrhos’ status, see also BOUDIGNON, Is the patriarch Pyrrhos (quoted n. 26), pp. 36–7.

⁹¹ See e.g. Gregory I, *Registrum epistularum*, ed. D. Norberg (CCSL 140), 2 vols, Turnhout 1982, 1.7, 24 and 25.

or not. This point is made explicit in the letters of resignation of later patriarchs, such as that written by Nicholas Mystikos in 907: “I retire from the throne (...); as for the office of archbishop and the functions dependent on it, God being favourable, I shall take it upon myself for my life long.”⁹² Several centuries later, the letters of resignation quoted by George Pachymeres demonstrate that both choices were conceivable: Athanasios I (1289–93, 1303–9) and John XII (1294–1303) resigned both the patriarchal throne and the ἱερωσύνη or ἀρχιερωσύνη, but Gregory II (1283–9) kept the latter “for the entire life.”⁹³ Finally, that a former patriarch retained the title of pope should not surprise us today: this is also the case of the retired pope Benedict XVI whose official style is “His Holiness Benedict XVI, pope emeritus.”⁹⁴

The interpretation of *P.Lond.* I 113.10 *recto* as evidence for Kyros’ tribute to the Arabs is, of course, conjectural. But, at the very least, it is clear that the papyrus cannot be treated as the inescapable proof of Kyros’ presence in Alexandria in 639/40. This simplifies significantly the chronology of his movements: we can now posit one long period of exile and date its beginning to c. 637. In this case, if the pamphlet of Pyrrhos correctly reports the fate of Kyros, should we not look more favourably also at its account of the Muslim conquest of Egypt?

THE MUSLIM CONQUEST OF EGYPT

Pyrrhos’ account of three Roman campaigns in defence of Egypt has found little favour in the eyes of modern historians, still influenced by its categorical, if somewhat whimsical, rejection by Alfred Butler more than a century ago.⁹⁵ Butler based his assertions on his assessment of the reliability of the sources: he ranked Arabic sources above Theophanes, and considered Nikephoros to be “even worse than Theophanes.”⁹⁶ Our knowledge of these texts has significantly evolved since then. In contrast to Butler’s peremptory dismissal of Nikephoros’ *Short history*, Pyrrhos’ pamphlet now appears as one of the earliest extant narratives of the Muslim conquests, perhaps written, what is more, by a confidante of Heraclius.

Non-Muslim sources mention five Roman campaigns in defence of Egypt, and five Roman defeats, in the period preceding the detailed narrative of the campaign of ‘Amr b. al-‘As in the chronicle of John of Nikiu, upon which Butler’s reconstruction is founded. The first three are known primarily from Pyrrhos’ pamphlet, but it is possible to detect allusions to them in other sources:

1. The first campaign was led, according to Pyrrhos, by John of Barkaina (i.e., Barka in the Pentapolis). The mission of Peter, *strategos* of Numidia, to Egypt “twenty-two years” before the trial of Maximos (who was accused of dissuading Peter from obeying the imperial order) in 655 may have been part of the same attempt to reinforce the defences of Egypt with north African troops c. 634 (counting years inclusively).⁹⁷

⁹² *Vita Euthymii patriarchae CP*, ed. P. Karlin-Hayter, Bruxelles 1970, p. 93: ἐξίσταμαι τοῦ θρόνου (...). τὰ δὲ τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης καὶ τῶν ταύτης ἐνεργειῶν, ἴλεω θεοῦ ὑπάρχοντος, διὰ βίου ἀναδέξομαι.

⁹³ Georges Pachymérès, *Relations historiques* (CFHB 24), ed. A. Failler, 4 vols., Paris 1984–99, VIII, 24, X, 29 and VIII, 9.

⁹⁴ See e.g. the letter of Pope Francis to Benedict XVI of 2 July 2020: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/letters/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200702_lettera-benedettoxvi.html (accessed 21 August 2021).

⁹⁵ A. J. BUTLER, *The Arab conquest of Egypt and the last thirty years of the Roman dominion*, Oxford 1902, pp. 207–9, 481–3 and 527. For Pyrrhos narrative, see Nikephoros, *Short history* §23 (MANGO 70–2).

⁹⁶ BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), pp. 207–8.

⁹⁷ *Relatio motionis*, in *Scripta saeculi VII* (quoted n. 18), p. 15 (trans. ALLEN & NEIL, *Maximus the Confessor* [quoted n. 18], p. 49). See also PLRE III Ioannes 249 and BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 515.

2. The leader of the second, Marinus, the “commander of the Thracian contingents,” is perhaps mentioned by John of Nikiu.⁹⁸
3. The third general, *koubikouliarios* Marianos, is known from the *History of the Patriarchs* that situates his death during the final campaign of ‘Amr b. al-‘As, that is in 639–40.⁹⁹ Nikephoros’ *Short History* points to a similar date: it connects Marianos’ offensive against the Arabs with the open rejection of Kyros’ policies by Heraclius, which probably alludes to the trial of Kyros that can be dated, as we have seen, to early 639.¹⁰⁰
4. The Syriac source used by Theophanes and several other chronicles, perhaps written by Theophilus of Edessa, a scholar and astrologer of Caliph al-Mahdi (775–85),¹⁰¹ reports that the tribute proposed by Kyros was actually paid to the Arabs over the course of three years after the Roman defeat on the Yarmuk, and that the payments irritated Heraclius who accused Kyros of “giving to the Saracens the gold of Egypt” and recalled him to Constantinople, replacing him as the *augustalis* by Manuel, “an Armenian by origin.” Manuel attacked the Arabs, was routed, but found refuge in Alexandria.¹⁰² Manuel’s survival makes it possible to identify him with Manuel Arshakuni, an Armenian aristocrat and a high official in the first years of the reign of Constans II known from the history of Sebeos.¹⁰³
5. Finally, the first lines of the chronicle of John of Nikiu after the lacuna covering the years 610–40 mention the death of John “the head of the forces” i.e., presumably the commander of the Roman army in Egypt.¹⁰⁴ His defeat took place shortly before July (the beginning of the Nile flooding in the Delta) of the year 640, the date of the first events reported in the surviving section of the chronicle. It must have been a major event, judging not only from the lament that the chronicler puts in the mouth of the *augustalis* Theodore,¹⁰⁵ but also from the reaction of Heraclius who seems to have considered that it sealed the fate of Roman Egypt:

Heraclius was grieved by the death of John head of the forces and John the general who had both been slain by the Muslims, as well as by the defeat of the Romans that were

⁹⁸ See above, note [53]; PLRE III Marinus 11.

⁹⁹ *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria. 2, Peter I to Benjamin I (661)*, ed. B. Evetts (Patrologia Orientalis 1), pp. 381–518, at p. 494; PLRE III Marianus 5; BOOTH, The last years of Cyrus (quoted n. 23), pp. 515–6.

¹⁰⁰ Nikephoros, *Short history* §23.19–21 (MANGO 72): ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ Μαρριανὸς ταῦτα ἐξήπιστατο, δίστατο τῆς τοῦ Κύρου γνώμης, καὶ συμβαλὼν Σαρακηνοῖς πίπτει τε αὐτὸς καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ στρατὸς ἰκανός. MANGO, *Nikephoros* (quoted n. 27), p. 73, translates the first part of the sentence “since Marianos, too, was aware of these matters,” but it is also possible to understand “when Marianos learned of these matters” i.e., of Heraclius’ opposition to Kyros’ recommendations, which hints at the trial of Kyros.

¹⁰¹ See R. G. HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the circulation of historical knowledge in late antiquity and early Islam*, Liverpool 2011, and the papers in *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. M. Jankowiak & F. Montinaro, *TM* 19, 2015.

¹⁰² Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6126 (DE BOOR 338–9); paralleled by Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* XI, 7 (CHABOT 425); *Chronicle of 1234* §118 (CHABOT 197–8); Agapios, *Kitab al-‘unwan*, pp. 471–4 (with additional details from the Islamic tradition, see below).

¹⁰³ Sebeos, *History* §47 (THOMSON & HOWARD-JOHNSTON 133–4); Manuel’s Arshakuni pedigree results from §32 (THOMSON & HOWARD-JOHNSTON 109), where Sebeos also suggests a family connection between him and Heraclius. See also PmbZ #4697 and 4698.

¹⁰⁴ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §111; PLRE III Ioannes 246. John also appears in §116 (ZOTENBERG 443) and perhaps retrospectively in §114 (ZOTENBERG 441) where he causes the defection of one “Sabendis” to the Muslims.

¹⁰⁵ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §111 (ZOTENBERG 434).

in the province of Egypt. And in accordance with the decree of God (...), Heraclius fell ill with fever and died.¹⁰⁶

Butler's account of the Arab conquest of Egypt, a monument of "orotund late Victorian prose,"¹⁰⁷ is flawed by his vigorous reproof of non-Muslim sources. Historians followed his lead, at best trying to reconcile the above reports with—or, rather, to force them into—the simple and clear narrative of a single decisive campaign led by 'Amr b. al-'As in 639–41 found in the Islamic tradition, and seemingly confirmed by the surviving section of John of Nikiu.¹⁰⁸ These attempts took various forms: John of Barkaina is often identified with John "the head of the forces," while Manuel is usually considered to be a double of the homonymous commander who, according to Muslim traditions, briefly reoccupied Alexandria in 645/6, or perhaps a corruption of Marianos (or the opposite).¹⁰⁹ Nikephoros' information on earlier campaigns is invariably qualified with more or less severe doubts; and if there were no earlier campaigns, there was also no tribute: "there is not a word of truth in the story of tribute paid to stave off the conquest of Egypt," *dixit* Butler.¹¹⁰

There is a simpler way out of the "quagmire" bemoaned by Butler:¹¹¹ to accept what the early sources tell us. That Egypt attracted the Arabs at an early stage of their conquests and that the Romans organised several campaigns to defend their wealthiest province is, to say the least, plausible; in fact, the opposite would defy the logic. The fragmentary state of our documentation makes it difficult to reconstruct the events, but the following narrative can be tentatively proposed on the basis of non-Muslim sources.¹¹² The first Arab inroads into Egypt probably took place after the Roman defeat at Gaza in February 634,¹¹³ but it was the conquest of Palestine and Syria that absorbed the attention of the Muslims in the following years. Egypt

¹⁰⁶ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §116 (ZOTENBERG 443), trans. CHARLES, *Chronicle* (quoted n. 42), p. 184, modified with BOOTH, *The Muslim conquest* (quoted n. 42), p. 649 n. 37. For "John the general," or John of Maros, see John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §111 (ZOTENBERG 434). The *Khuzistan Chronicle* also connects the death of Heraclius with the loss of Egypt: Th. NÖLDEKE, *Die von Guidi herausgegebene syrische Chronik, Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Classe* 128, 1893, IX, at pp. 45–6.

¹⁰⁷ H. KENNEDY, *The great Arab conquests*, London 2007, p. 140.

¹⁰⁸ Butler's reconstruction of the Arab conquest of Egypt has dominated the scholarship ever since 1902, but see L. CAETANI, *Annali dell' Islam*, 10 vols, Milano 1905–26, 4, pp. 166–96, for rare early criticism. Recent narratives of the conquest are often critical of Butler's work, but they remain equally sceptical of the account of Pyrrhos, see e.g. A. D. BEIHAMMER, *Quellenkritische Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Kapitulationsverträgen der Jahre 640–646*, Vienna 2000, pp. 27–31; P. M. SIJPESTEIJN, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Beginning of Muslim Rule*, in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*, ed. by R. S. Bagnall, Cambridge 2007, pp. 437–55; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses* (quoted n. 25), p. 186 n. 82; BOOTH, *The Muslim conquest* (quoted n. 42), esp. p. 641; and IDEM, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), esp. pp. 514–20. See also HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* (quoted n. 24), pp. 574–90, for the most systematic attempt to discard Butler's framework; but his recent narrative in R. G. HOYLAND, *In God's path: the Arab conquests and the creation of an Islamic empire*, Oxford 2015, pp. 69–70, is more cautious.

¹⁰⁹ The two Johns: ZOTENBERG, *Chronique* (quoted n. 42), p. 434 n. 1, followed by virtually all the scholarship. The two Manuels: BEIHAMMER, *Nachrichten* (quoted n. 23), pp. 221, 228, 241–2; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses* (quoted n. 25), p. 214; *contra*: BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 516. Manuel a corruption of Marianos: BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus*, pp. 515–7; *contra*: BEIHAMMER, *Nachrichten*, pp. 242, 280. Marianos a corruption of Manuel: HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses*, p. 262. See below on the supposed Roman reoccupation of Alexandria.

¹¹⁰ BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), p. 209, cf. also p. 481: "it is seen to be a fallacious inference from a misunderstood passage in a compressed and garbled narrative."

¹¹¹ BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), p. 208: "they [*sc.* the Greek and Coptic historians] neither examined nor understood what they recorded, and their confusion of dates and perversion of truth are such that they have served only as false lights, luring into quagmires nearly every modern writer who has followed them." Ironically, this is an apt description of the influence of Butler's own work.

¹¹² A similar narrative in HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* (quoted n. 24), pp. 574–90, who, however, places Kyros' exile only "very early in 640" and draws different implications from it.

¹¹³ A. PALMER, *The seventh century in the west-Syrian chronicles*, Liverpool 1993, pp. 18–9.

may have been raided again after the decisive battle of Yarmuk in August 636—which is perhaps when the defeat of Marinos should be placed—but the priority given by the Muslim command to the war against the Sasanians explains why it accepted Kyros’ offer of peace in exchange for an annual tribute of “200,000 dinars.”¹¹⁴ Kyros was buying time too: an early source claims that “the border [between Egypt and Palestine] was secured by the patriarch of Alexandria with an army and much power. He also sealed the entrances and the exits of the land and built walls along all the banks of the Nile in all the region.”¹¹⁵

Even though this arrangement was rejected by Heraclius—who recalled Kyros to Constantinople perhaps already in 637—, eastern Christian sources insist that Kyros’ tribute was actually paid for three years,¹¹⁶ no doubt in 637–9. The paradox is only apparent:¹¹⁷ the imperial government needed time to overcome the shock of the defeat of Yarmuk (August 636) and the loss of Syria and Palestine, and to work out a consistent response. The suppression of the widely popular conspiracy aimed at replacing Heraclius with his son Athalaric,¹¹⁸ the promotion of several of Martina’s sons to imperial dignities in the second half of 638, and the show trial of Kyros probably in early 639 signalled its readiness to counter-attack. The three campaigns of the *koubikouarios* Marianos, the *augustalis* Manuel, and “the head of the forces” John—or rather no doubt the single campaign that they commanded jointly or in turn—should certainly be placed in the campaigning season after the summer flooding of the Nile in 639.¹¹⁹ The detail of the operations is lost in the lacuna of John of Nikiu’s chronicle, but we can speculate that the “head of the forces” John was in charge of what was left of the expeditionary corps after the defeats of Manuel and Marianos. His death in early summer 640 sealed the fate of Roman Egypt, much to the dismay of Heraclius.

In this chronology, the collection of Kyros’ tribute documented in the London papyrus, which can have been written as early as July, or even May, 639,¹²⁰ took place when the Roman army was just about to launch an offensive against the Arabs, or was already involved in it. Here too, it is not necessary to see a contradiction. The events were no doubt unfolding very fast, and it is tempting to speculate about the reasons that caused the scribe of the *recto* to break off in the middle of a word. Does *P.Lond.* I 113.10 illustrate not only the reality of Kyros’ tribute to the Arabs, but also its discontinuation? Might the “complaints of the above-mentioned man,” perhaps Kyros, that the author of the *verso* was about to “receive” in Alexandria be related to Kyros’ trial in Constantinople several months or weeks earlier? We cannot know, but at the very least it is dangerous to interpret such a fluid situation with the benefit of hindsight.

What followed the death of John the “head of the forces”—i.e. the operations described in the extant narrative of John of Nikiu—was merely an epilogue to the failed Roman campaign. The image of a deeply disorganised and demoralised Roman defence that emerges from the

¹¹⁴ See note [102]. The figure seems realistic: it corresponds roughly to 5–7% of the tax revenue of Egypt after the conquest, see K. MORIMOTO, *Fiscal administration of Egypt in the early Islamic period*, Kyoto 1981, pp. 113 and 228.

¹¹⁵ NÖLDEKE, *Die von Guidi herausgegebene* (quoted n. 106), p. 45, trans. N. AL-KA‘BI, *A Short Chronicle on the End of the Sasanian Empire and Early Islam 590–660 A.D.*, Piscataway, NJ 2016, p. 106.

¹¹⁶ In addition to sources listed in note [102], see also *History of the Patriarchs* (quoted n. 99), p. 493.

¹¹⁷ Pace BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 517 n. 56.

¹¹⁸ Nikephoros, *Short history* §24 (MANGO 72); Sebeos, *History* §41 (THOMSON & HOWARD-JOHNSTON 92–4). Nikephoros suggests that the conspiracy of Athalaric took place in 637. See also JANKOWIAK, *Misdated popes* (quoted n. 2).

¹¹⁹ BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), p. 198, placed the entry of ‘Amr b. al-‘As to Egypt on 12 December 639 on the basis of Muslim sources.

¹²⁰ Depending on whether the Arsinoite indiction still began on 1 July in the seventh century, or was aligned on the Constantinopolitan, or perhaps on those of the nomes neighbouring to the south, see R. S. BAGNALL & K. A. WÖRPER, *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt*, Leiden 2004², p. 33.

chronicle is easier to account for if the bulk of the fighting took place earlier, in the section lost in the lacuna. The extant chapters record the aftermath of the defeat of the main Roman forces, beginning with the events that took place before and during the flooding season (July–October in the Delta) of 640:¹²¹ the Roman defeat at Heliopolis, fighting in the Arsinoïte (Fayoum),¹²² the Arab siege of Babylon, and the efforts of the general (and later *augustalis*) Theodore to organise resistance around Sebennytos in the northern Delta.¹²³ The latter were successful judging from John of Nikiu’s report that “‘Amr the leader of the Muslims spent twelve years [mistake for “months”?] warring against the Christians who were present in the north of Egypt, but he was not able to take their region.” The narrative then moves, a bit brusquely, to the “summer” (in our terms, spring) before the flooding season of 641, when ‘Amr, perhaps frustrated with his lack of success in the Delta, sent a diversionary force to Arsinoe in Upper Egypt; around the same time, he captured the two main fortresses still in Roman hands, Babylon (9 April) and Nikiu (13 May).¹²⁴ The road to Alexandria was open: after occupying the suburb of Kerion, the Arabs made an attempt on the walls of the city but were repelled. The flooding season must then have halted the operations; but as the surviving Roman armies were mobilised for the struggle for the throne in Constantinople, Kyros, who had returned to Alexandria on 14 September, was left with no option but to capitulate. He went to Babylon to negotiate the surrender of Egypt with ‘Amr,¹²⁵ and died in Alexandria on 21 March 642, several months before the evacuation of the city by the Romans on 17 September 642.¹²⁶

Many of these events can be recognised in Muslim traditions on the conquest of Egypt collected in the works of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam (d. 871), Baladhuri (d. c. 892) and Tabari (d. 922).¹²⁷ They

¹²¹ I summarise here John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §111–20 (ZOTENBERG 433–63).

¹²² There is no need to suppose a second Muslim army advancing down the Nile from the south to explain the Arab raid against the Fayoum, *pace* BOOTH, *The Muslim conquest* (quoted n. 42); see also p. 649 where the defeat of John the “head of the forces” is placed “to the south of the Delta”. This is unlikely, given that John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §111 (ZOTENBERG 434–6), separates the operations of John of Maros (in the Fayoum) from those of John the “head of the forces” (elsewhere), and describes the retreat of Theodosios prefect of Arkadia southwards towards Babylon after the defeat of John the “head of the forces”. It is tempting, then, to associate it with the battle of Bilbays known from the Muslim tradition, see below and note [137].

¹²³ Theodore is named as the general commander of Egypt in the first sentence after the lacuna, John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §111 (ZOTENBERG 433–4), and seems to have been promoted to *augustalis* in summer 641: he first appears with the title of “prefect of Alexandria” in §120 (ZOTENBERG 453, cf. also 223), during what seems to have been a conference of the Roman leadership at Rhodes at the beginning of the reign of Heraklonas. See PLRE III Theodorus 166, and BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 542–3 n. 163, for problems raised by the text of the *Chronicle*.

¹²⁴ The *History of the Patriarchs* (quoted n. 99), p. 493, seems to date the fall of Babylon (*Misr*) to 6 June 641, but its chronology cannot be trusted given that it dates the Muslim capture of Alexandria to December 643 (p. 494).

¹²⁵ BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), pp. 261 and 545, placed the negotiations of Kyros (“whose dark and tortuous mind was still haunted by thoughts of surrender”) and ‘Amr in October 640 which significantly affected his chronology; see HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* (quoted n. 24), pp. 581–2, and BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 521–2 n. 77.

¹²⁶ This chronology leaves out one piece of information provided by John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §120 (ZOTENBERG 454–5): the celebration by Kyros of an Easter in Alexandria soon after his reinstatement, and the accompanying prophecy that he would not live to see another Easter. This is not a mistake given that a little further on (ZOTENBERG 458) John speaks of its fulfilment and situates the death of Kyros on an Easter Thursday. I do not see a solution to this problem; for attempts to deal with it, see BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), pp. 536–40, and BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), pp. 526 n. 103.

¹²⁷ Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, *Futuh Misr*, ed. C. C. TORREY, *The history of the conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain, known as the Futuh Misr of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam*, New Haven 1922, trans. Y. HILLOOWALA, *The history of the conquest of Egypt, being a partial translation of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam’s ‘Futuh Misr’ and an analysis of this translation*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Arizona 1998; al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan*, ed. M. J. DE GOEJE, *Liber expugnationis regionum*, Leiden 1866, pp. 212–23, trans. P. K. HITTI, *The origins of the Islamic State*, vol. 1, New York 1916, pp. 335–51; al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, ed. M. J. DE GOEJE et al., *Annales quos scripsit Abu*

all share the same narrative of a single decisive campaign led by ‘Amr b. al-‘As. His progress was initially slow due to dogged resistance put up by the Romans along the eastern edge of the Delta. No heroic feats of arms were remembered from this phase of the operations. Only after the Romans had been defeated in three battles at Farama (Pelousion), Bilbays (c. 50 km northeast of Babylon) and Umm Dunayn (north-eastern suburb of Babylon) was ‘Amr, reinforced in the meantime by fresh troops sent by ‘Umar, able to approach Babylon. Its lengthy siege of perhaps seven months, and eventual conquest, persuaded the leader of the “Copts” al-Muqawqas (“the Caucasian,” a sobriquet of Kyros who indeed originated from what is today Georgia) to negotiate a treaty with the Arabs in exchange for the payment of a tribute.¹²⁸ This agreement was angrily rejected by Heraclius who sent a mighty army to Alexandria. Another series of engagements followed—Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam names Tarnut, Hill of Sharik, Sultays, and al-Kiryawn (no doubt John of Nikiu’s Keriu)—culminating in the siege of Alexandria, perhaps of fourteen months (twice as long as that of Babylon), and its capture by force. The Muslim sources broadly agree that ‘Amr entered Egypt in AH 19 (640), conquered “Misr” (either Egypt or Babylon) in AH 20 (640/1) and Alexandria in the same or next year.¹²⁹

This consistent, linear narrative is the result of a double rationalisation: by Abbasid scholars of the ninth century and European historians of the early twentieth, such as Alfred Butler or his subtler contemporary Leone Caetani.¹³⁰ They have “streamlined” the narrative of the Arab conquest of Egypt by eliminating what for the Abbasid historians were still divergent traditions worth preserving even if they could not be accommodated within the main narrative. These connected ‘Amr’s entry to Egypt with the important conference of the Muslim leadership at al-Jabiyah (south-western Syria) in AH 17 (638/9)—in time to have him open the canal connecting the Nile and the Red Sea in the “year of the drought”, that is in AH 18 (639/40)¹³¹—and placed the conquest of Egypt as early as in Rabi‘ I AH 16 (April 637),¹³² and the first truce between the Romans of Egypt and the Muslims already in the caliphate of Abu Bakr (632–4).¹³³ That such traditions—reflecting perhaps the first treaty between Kyros and ‘Amr, and the first encounter between the Muslims and John of Barkaina—belong to the early layers of the historical memory of these events is confirmed by a late seventh-century inscription from the region of Koptos that counts the “years of the Saracens” from 633.¹³⁴

Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari, 15 vols, Leiden 1879–1901, 1, pp. 2579–92, trans. G. H. A. JUYNBOLL, *The Conquest of Iraq, Southwestern Persia, and Egypt* (The History of al-Tabari 13), Albany 1989, pp. 162–75.

¹²⁸ On al-Muqawqas, see BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), pp. 508–26; K. ÖHRNBERG, Al-Mukawkis, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 7, pp. 511–3 (1993); and below.

¹²⁹ For a summary of the chronology provided by Muslim sources, see BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), pp. 526–46, and CAETANI, *Annali dell’Islam* (quoted n. 108), 4, pp. 96–103.

¹³⁰ On the former process, see HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* (quoted n. 24), and A. BORRUT, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: l’espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides* (v. 72–193/692–809), Leiden 2011.

¹³¹ Meeting at al-Jabiyah: e.g. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, *Futuh Misr*, pp. 53–5 (HILLOOWALA 31–4); on the meeting itself, presided in person by Caliph ‘Umar, see H. LAMMENS & J. SOURDEL-THOMINE, Al-Djabiya, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 2, p. 360 (1991). Canal: e.g. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, *Futuh Misr*, p. 162 (HILLOOWALA 166); al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 1, p. 2577 (JUYNBOLL 158–9).

¹³² E.g. al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, 1, p. 2580 (JUYNBOLL 163): “Alexandria was conquered in the year 16” and 1, p. 2592 (JUYNBOLL 175): “Misr was conquered in the month Rabi‘ I of the year 16”; compare also 1, p. 2594 (JUYNBOLL 176) on Roman sea raids dated to late 637. CAETANI, *Annali dell’Islam* (quoted n. 108), 4, pp. 310–1, dismissed these traditions as “absurd”.

¹³³ E.g. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, *Futuh Misr*, p. 53 (HILLOOWALA 30): “Abu Bakr al-Siddiq sent Hatib to al-Muqawqas in Egypt, and he **passed** by the district of the villages of the eastern area and concluded a truce with them”; see also HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* (quoted n. 24), p. 579.

¹³⁴ S. TIMM, *Das Christlich-koptische Ägypten in Arabischer Zeit. 5, Q-S*, Wiesbaden 1991, p. 2146, mentioned in HOYLAND, *In God’s path* (quoted n. 108), p. 260 n. 4. The inscription is dated to 10 October 697, in the year 55 of the Saracens.

In some cases, we can trace their formation. The Roman reoccupation of Alexandria several years after its fall was unknown to *History of the Patriarchs* and the dependants of the chronicle of Theophilos of Edessa; even for Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, it was still merely an episode of the main campaign.¹³⁵ A generation later, in the work of al-Baladhuri, it appears as a fully-formed account of the naval expedition of eunuch Manuel, dated to AH 23 (643/4) or 25 (645/6). Later narratives add a wealth of details on the evenly-fought decisive battle at Nikiu, the flight of the Romans, the conflict between Manuel and al-Muqawqas, and the final assault on Alexandria.¹³⁶ Such a transformation of a real event, the arrival of a relief force sent by Heraclius to Egypt in 639, was no doubt motivated by the debate around the legal status of Egypt and Alexandria, contingent on whether they were conquered by treaty or by force. The events lent themselves to both interpretations: it required only slight manipulations—such as postponing the expedition of Manuel after the capitulation of Alexandria, or merging the two agreements between Kyros and ‘Amr, of 636/7 and 641, into a single one—to invert the image conveyed by the chronicle of John of Nikiu, namely that of an Egypt conquered by arms and an Alexandria occupied by treaty.

This does not mean that the Muslim traditions cannot help to fill the gaps in the Christian sources. Their stress on the size of the expeditionary force sent by Heraclius, or the memory of three major battles at Farama, Bilbays and Umm Dunayn—the latter corresponding no doubt to the Roman defeat at Tendunias that opened to the Arabs the way to Babylon¹³⁷—may well correspond to reality, as does their perhaps most striking feature, the central role played by the Muqawqas in organising the Roman response to the invasion.

That they correctly remembered the attempt by Kyros “the Caucasian” to buy the invading Arabs off can be now argued with reference to *P.Lond.* I 113.10. The London papyrus perfectly illustrates the fluidity of the situation in Egypt on the eve of the Arab conquest: it documents the reality of the “tribute of Kyros,” but breaks off for an unknown reason in the middle of a word; it must have been soon discarded, but was reused to describe some tense situation that may have involved Kyros. It helps, above all, to solve the apparent contradictions between various traditions remembering Kyros as either the defender of the Roman Egypt or its traitor, a persecutor of the Copts or of the Romans, a chalcedonian, monothelete or jacobite. Such conflicting reports reflect the complexity of the career of this short-lived patriarch of Alexandria (633–7 and 641–2), imprisoned and nearly executed for his efforts to avert the Arab invasion, and of the quickly changing political and religious situation that he contributed to shape.

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¹³⁵ Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, *Futuh Misr*, p. 80 (HILLOOWALA 66–7). Later Christian texts, such as Agapios, *Kitab al-unwan*, p. 479, or Eutychios, *Nazm al-jawhar* in *Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales. Pars posterior*, ed. L. Cheikho, B. Carra de Vaux & H. Zayyat (CSCO 51), Beirut – Paris 1909, p. 32 (trans. B. PIRONE, *Eutichio. Gli annali*, Cairo 1987, p. 351), depend on Muslim traditions.

¹³⁶ Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan*, pp. 221–3 (HITTI 347–51); other sources in CAETANI, *Annali dell’Islam* (quoted n. 108), 7, pp. 103–19. See also BUTLER, *The Arab conquest* (quoted n. 95), pp. 465–83, and BEIHAMMER, *Nachrichten* (quoted n. 23), pp. 279–80; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses* (quoted n. 25), pp. 154, 214–5 and 477 (dating it to 646/7); BOOTH, *The last years of Cyrus* (quoted n. 23), p. 516.

¹³⁷ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* §112 (ZOTENBERG 437–8); on the location of Tendunias, see BOOTH, *The Muslim conquest* (quoted n. 42), p. 658 n. 84. Three battles, without any further details, are also remembered in the *History of the Patriarchs* (quoted n. 99), p. 494: “after fighting three battles with the Romans, the Muslims conquered them.” See above, note [122], for the possible identification of Bilbays as the place of the defeat of John the “head of the forces”.

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