Egypt under the Sasanians (619-629): "Stability, Continuity, and Tolerance"?[*]

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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades revisionist scholarship on the Sasanian occupation of the Roman Near East (603-629) has undermined previous constructions of the period, replacing a model of destruction and decline with one of broad continuity and even vitality. Arguing from the perspective of Egyptian evidence—and in particular its rich papyrological record, which includes documents composed by the conquerors in their own language, Pahlavi—this paper revisits this more recent model. It first points to significant complications around the dominant understanding of the course of the invasion in 618-620, including the contention that violence was restricted to the conquest. In the central sections it explores the nature of the Sasanian occupation and its fiscal and economic impact, highlighting significant gaps in our understanding, and the probable variation of that impact upon the conquered according to a range of contextual factors. As a conclusion, it takes aim at the notion that Persian rule was 'tolerant' of existing Christian communities, and points to scattered evidence for the interference of the conquerors in patriarchal and episcopal life, as well as for popular resistance to their rule.

1. Introduction

[*] Earlier versions of this paper were delivered in Oxford, Warsaw, and Tūbingen. I would like to thank all those present for their comments and criticisms. I must also thank Sophie Kovarik for her careful reading and generous advice, and above all Mary Whitby, for her constant guidance and encouragement.

For five years from 2008 to 2013 I had the pleasure of meeting with James Howard-Johnston each week in what came to be known as the 'Ethiopic Reading Group' (a name which James would exhibit, with some pleasure, on the public timetable of Oxford's Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies). Together we read various Ethiopic texts, but one to which we often returned, and which provided the original raison d'être of the group, was the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu, with its important but complex descriptions of the Heraclian revolt and the Arab conquest of Egypt. James has since published important contributions on both parts, and my own articles on the text were profoundly indebted to his infectious enthusiasm and to our innumerable discussions.[1] The *Chronicle* is nevertheless as frustrating as it is revealing, for between the aforementioned descriptions one discovers a large chronological lacuna, which leaps the reader from the accession of Heraclius (610) to the Arab campaign in Middle Egypt (640). It therefore omits the entire period of the Persian occupation of Egypt (619-629), a loss which James has rightly called 'irreparable'.[2] In the absence of other narrative sources, the historian who wishes to fill in the *Chronicle*'s lacuna must turn to a wider assortment of evidence, in particular to the tantalising world of papyri. In this paper dedicated to James, I want to set out something of the evidence which bridges John of Nikiu's lacuna, while also challenging some positions on the period which seem to me misconceived.

Since the turn of the millennium our appreciation of the Sasanian occupation of the Roman East in the period from 603-629 has undergone a fundamental revisionism. An older historiography—which was all too eager to accept reports of violence in texts, and to associate archaeological evidence for destruction or abandonment at different sites with the presence of the Persians—emphasised the deleterious effects of that occupation, seeing therein the effective

[1] See HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses*, pp. 181-9; id., *Last Great War*, esp. pp. 49-61.
[2] HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses*, p. 184; cf. id., *Last Great War*, p. 128.

end of Roman civilisation in the East, and a prelude to the subsequent conquests of the earliest Muslims. In more recent research, however, this older model has ceded to another, based in a wider pool of evidence, which has swung to the opposite interpretative extreme. This emphasises instead, after a violent conquest, the Sasanians' deliberate preservation of political and fiscal structures, continuities in administrative personnel, and tolerance for existing Roman culture and religion. This historiographical shift is epitomised in a remarkable and rightly famous article of Clive Foss, published in 2003. Foss began with a criticism of those scholars who persisted in the view that the Persian occupation brought an end to eastern prosperity. Drawing on an impressive range of textual, archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic, and documentary evidence from across the occupied territories, Foss proposed that, after the violence of conquest, the Persians maintained existing structures "with a minimum of change or disturbance." "Evidence from the occupied provinces," Foss here concluded, "reveals a consistent pattern: stability, continuity, and tolerance followed an initial period of violence."[3] In the final analysis, therefore, the consequence of the Persian occupation was not, for Foss, to compromise the basic infrastructure of the Roman east, and thus to pave the path for the armies of the caliphs; but it was nevertheless to demonstrate to provincials—many of whom, for Foss, had been alienated from Constantinople through doctrinal conflict—the benign realities of life under a foreign power, further weakening their ideological commitment to inclusion within the Roman empire.

There is no doubt that this shift in emphasis—which has been mirrored in a number of excellent recent publications on the Sasanian occupation[4]—is a welcome one, and that the older model of deliberate destruction and subsequent depression cannot now be revived. But the fact that the Persians maintained (some) existing Roman infrastructure and personnel, and that

[3] FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, at pp. 154 and 168.
[4] For the same sentiment see, for example, ALTHEIM-STIEHL, Sasanians in Egypt, p. 95; and, approving Foss, GARIBOLDI, Social Conditions, p. 339; SÄNGER, Administration of Sasanian Egypt, p. 654.

various aspects of life continued as before, should no longer be surprising, and I will suggest here that we now need to go further than the balance-sheet approach, which weighs continuities against discontinuities, and then embraces one side of the ledger. Indeed, I will argue that the maximalist position at which Foss ultimately arrives (of broad "stability, continuity, and tolerance") is limited in several respects, and in the end risks the same kind of reductionism evident in the earlier model: it does not do enough, for example, to acknowledge the significant limitations of our evidence in assessing the actual nature and impact of the Persian occupation; it ignores important questions concerning that occupation's possible effects on different regions, different social groups, and different aspects of life; and, in the end, it acknowledges but marginalises evident moments of transformation, conflict, and persecution in favour of its overarching vision.

Although Foss' model is constructed from a wide pool of evidence from across the Near East, this paper focuses in particular on Egypt. The region does not leave substantial textual sources focused on the Persian period; but it is unique in transmitting a large number of contemporaneous documents.[5] In particular, there exists an incredible corpus of almost one thousand texts which Persian immigrants have written on various media in their own language, Pahlavi. Dieter Weber has edited and published a number of the more important texts, including a large collection of over two hundred now in Berlin.[6] But the larger part of the corpus—in particular, the majority of a huge collection of over six-hundred Fayyumic texts once housed in Vienna but now in St Petersburg—remains unedited.[7] These Pahlavi documents, as well as

[5] For the Greek and Coptic documents cited below I have used the abbreviations in the Duke Checklist of Editions available at: https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/clist_papyri.html. For Pahlavi documents, which do not have standardised sigla, I have used the abbreviations listed in n. 0000 below.

[6] For this corpus see WEBER, *Ostraca, Papyri* [henceforth = *P.Weber* I]; ID., *Berliner Papyri* [henceforth = *P.Weber* II].

[7] See the account of WEBER, The Vienna Collection of Pahlavi Papyri. Thirty of the texts which remained at Vienna were published in WEBER, Die Pehlevifragmente, and later incorporated in *P.Weber* I. For those in more minor collections, many of which are still unpublished, see the description of WEBER, Pahlavi Papyri und Ostraca. Most of the texts consist of official and personal letters; see WEBER, Sassanidische Briefe aus Ägypten; also ID., A Pahlavi Letter from Egypt. But for an impression of the range of documentation, see the selection of texts in

their equivalents in Greek and in Coptic, present a number of limitations which must be made explicit from the outset. In particular, they are distributed unevenly across time and space, and exclude many places altogether; they focus on particular aspects of life, and omit others; and they offer (often isolated and fragmented) snapshots of particular moments, but little sense of context or of narrative. Nevertheless the unique and high-resolution glimpses which those documents afford us into the activities of both conquerors and conquered make them the most obvious basis against which to test current modelling, in particular because such modelling has made limited use of the materials.[8]

2. The Conquest

No written source describes the course of the Persian invasion. Instead, the progress of the Persians from Palestine into the Delta, under the famous *spāhbad* Šahrwārāz, must be reconstructed from a number of asides in scattered sources.[9] The advance from Palestine seems to have begun in 617/8;[10] the Persians passed, and perhaps captured, Pelusium at the entrance to the Delta, before marching south to the fortress of Babylon, at its apex;[11] after its capitulation, the invaders confronted and defeated a Roman force at Nikiu to the northwest,

ID., Die persische Besetzung Ägyptens. Useful also, but without reference to Weber's important work, is VENETIS, Sassanid Occupation of Egypt.

[8] Note that FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East—and earlier ID., The *Sellarioi*—had not consulted the crucial work of Dieter Weber (see esp. the edition of *P.Weber* I), and knows the Pahlavi texts from limited citations in older articles. Cf. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, pp. 153-64, who makes full use of Weber's editions but is inclined to accept Foss' model.

[9] For Šahrwārāz as the leading conqueror of Egypt (rather than Šāhēn, to whom it is attributed in some sources) see GARIBOLDI, Social Conditions, p. 330 n. 23; BANAJI, On the Identity of Šahrālānyōzān, pp. 31-32; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, p. 129.

[10] See the discussion in ALTHEIM-STIEHL, Wurde Alexandreia im Juni 619 erobert?, pp. 6-7.

[11] Pelusium: (Ps.-)Abū Ṣāliḥ, *Church and Monasteries of Egypt* (Evetts, p. 168).

opening up the path to Alexandria.[12] How the Persians captured Alexandria is uncertain.[13] But an otherwise well-informed chronicle suggests that Alexandria fell in June of 619, a claim which resonates with evidence from Egypt's south.[14]

Although no narrative source describes the Persians' capture of Middle and Upper Egypt, the disappearance of Roman regnal formulae from extant documents has been taken as a measure of their expanding presence, since scribes were then no longer recognising Roman rule.[15] Thus in Middle Egypt, the last regnal formulae belong to a document from Arsinoe, dated to the 11.May.619;[16] and to another contract from Oxyrhynchus, to the south of Arsinoe, dated to 5.Jul.619.[17] It has been suggested, however, that both cities had capitulated before the end of 619, for a surviving deed of surety written on the 12.Jan.620 within the Oxyrhynchite lacks a regnal formula, suggesting that the Persian occupation then extended at least that far south.[18] On this vision, therefore, we might suppose that after the capitulation of Alexandria in June 619, the Persians awaited the retreat of the flood (in September) and then extended their operations southwards along the Nile. It is certain that at some point the whole region, up to Elephantine in the distant south, fell under Persian control.[19]

[12] Fall of Babylon and Battle of Nikiu: Theodore of Paphos, *Life of Spyridon* 20 (Van den Ven, pp. 81-3).
[13] See the conflicting accounts in *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Guidi, pp. 25-26); *History of the Patriarchs* (Evetts, PO I, pp. 484-486); and the tensions evident in *Anonymous Life of John the Almsgiver* 13-15 (Delehaye, p. 25); *Epitome of the Life of John the Almsgiver* 13-15 (Lappa-Zizicas, pp. 277-8).
[14] *Anonymous Chronicle to 724* (Brooks, p. 146).
[15] See esp. ALTHEIM-STIEHL, Wurde Alexandreia im Juni 619 erobert?; EAD., Zur zeitlichen Bestimmung der sāsānidischen Eroberung Ägyptens. I update these studies here.
[16] P.Vindob. G 50349. I am grateful to Sophie Kovarik for this reference, which supplants BGU III 725 (Arsinoe, 21.Jul.618) in reconstructions of the conquests. In the Heracleopolite the last text bearing a regnal formula is *P.Stras.* V 328 (Apr.618).
[17] *P.Iand.* III 49. Note also that a Coptic document from Panopolis (*O.CrumST* 436) bears a regnal formula dating it to the 26th Koiak (22nd December) of the 8th indiction, reign of Heraclius, which means either 619 or 634. If the former is correct, it means that Panopolis, further south than Oxyrhynchus, was still not conquered in late December 619.
[18] *P.Oxy.* LVIII 3959. In the Arsinoite the earliest text without a regnal formula is *P.Lond.* I 113, 6C (2.Oct.620); in the Heracleopolite perhaps *P.Worp.* 37 (25.Feb.620?); in the Hermopolite, *P.Würzb.* 19 (22.Mar.622).
[19] For Elephantine as the limit of Sasanian power see *P.Weber* I 55; II 181; PERIXANJAN, Pechlevijskie papirusy sobranija (henceforth *P.Perixanjan*).

Although this vision of the conquest is now embedded in scholarship, it is not unassailable.[20] Its basic assumptions are that the conquest progressed in a single linear movement and from north to south, but neither of these is a given. Inconvenient for this narrative are two documents from Apollonopolis Magna in the far south: *P.Edfou* I 2 and 3. Of the two *P.Edfou* I 3 is, for our purposes, the least problematic. This is an acknowledgement of debt which bears a Heraclian regnal formula dating it to June 618 – this therefore must indicate that Apollonopolis was unconquered at that time, as we would expect.[21] *P.Edfou* I 2 is more challenging. It is dated to Pharmouth (March 27th–April 25th) of a seventh indiction, and lacks a regnal formula. Which seventh indiction? The document bears a Trinitarian invocation, something which was introduced under Phocas (r. 602-610), and which then persisted in Upper Egypt under Heraclius (r. 610-641). Our seventh indiction should therefore be 604, 619, or 634. Since 604 and 634 were periods of relative peace—during which notaries would use Roman regnal formulae—the most probable date for our document is 619, as certain prosopographical details also suggest.[22] While accepting this date, various scholars have nevertheless dismissed the document, supposing that the evidence from Oxyrhynchus supersedes it – that is, that if Oxyrhynchus had not been subdued in July 619 (as per the contract mentioned above), then nor had Apollonopolis Magna, to the distant south, months earlier.[23] In this case, then, we might be tempted to consider *P.Edfou* I 2 as an example of bad notarial practice (thus complicating

[20] For a recent example: HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, p. 130.
[21] For the date (based on the emperor's consular dating) see WORP, Regnal formulas; BAGNALL & WORP, *Chronological Systems*, pp. 97-98 (and cf. p. 96 n. 30). *Pace* ZUCKERMAN, La formule de datation, pp. 195-201; ID., On the Titles and Office, pp. 867-869, whose attempt to date *P.Edfou* I 3 to June 619 does not convince, not least because it would then come after *P.Edfou* I 2 (March/April 619), despite the latter lacking a regnal formula.
[22] One of the litigants, Theodore son of Charemon, also appears in *P.Edfou* I 3 (for Theodore see also GASCOU, Ostraca byzantins d'Edfou, pp. 360-364, nos 1-3).
[23] See e.g. ALTHEIM-STIEHL, Wurde Alexandreia im Juni 619 erobert?, p. 12, n. 37, with citations of earlier scholarship.

the entire method of mapping the Persian presence with reference to regnal formulae); but this is improbable, not least because the notary of *P.Edfou* I 2 and 3 is the same person.[24]

Might it be possible that Apollonopolis Magna indeed fell before April 619, and therefore *before* cities further north? A proposed solution to the enigma of *P.Edfou* I 2 is that the Persians proceeded in a piecemeal fashion, not reducing all regions en route to Apollonopolis.[25] But this produces an improbable scenario, in which the invaders marched into the deep south before reducing other crucial centres, including Alexandria. We might resolve this impasse, however, if we abandon the twin assumptions that the Persians invaded or moved in a single unit, and that the Delta provided the sole viable route for aspiring conquerors of the region. Elsewhere I have argued, on the basis of the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu (*c.*690), that the Muslim conquest of *c.*640-642 was carried out through two separate armies, and that while one of these armies indeed progressed from Palestine—as in the dominant tradition of Arabic *futūḥ* literature—another progressed northwards through central Egypt (having arrived there, perhaps, via the roads which ran across the eastern desert).[26] The problem of *P.Edfou* I 2 evaporates, in effect, if we presume that the Sasanian had done something similar a generation earlier.

Such a paradigm might also explain some curious references to Persian movements in scattered documents, none of which is dated, but all of which belong to the period of conquest or of occupation. Some such documents complement the traditional picture of a north-south movement of the Persians: in one from Western Thebes, for example, a widow speaks of an outstanding debt on some corn delivered 'before the Persians came south' (*hathē*

[24] An associated problem occurs in SB VI 8988 (Apollonopolis, 16.Jul.647), a settlement of a dispute which references an extant mortgage agreement (*P.Budge*; 9.Sep.622), but places it 'before the arrival of the Persians'. It nevertheless seems improbable that Apollonopolis remained unconquered in late 622, and we should think instead of a mistake or legal conceit. I am grateful to Sophie Kovarik for drawing this to my attention.
[25] See BAGNALL & WORP, *Chronological Systems*, p. 96 n. 30.
[26] BOOTH, Muslim Conquest of Egypt.

mpatempersos ei erēs); while in another from the same region, a woman seems to ask for instruction 'in the matter of the Persians, since they will be coming south' (*haphōb nnpersos ješauei erēs*).[27] Three further Coptic documents nevertheless present a challenge, for here we seem to find contemporaries fearing instead a *northward* advance of the Persians. One fragmented ostracon from Hermopolis speaks of the Persians coming north (*ješarempersos ei hēt*);[28] while on another recovered from Western Thebes the author—called Epiphanius and perhaps the famous archimandrite of that region, a known witness to the Persian invasion—hopes to harvest some crops, 'since the fear of man has not come northward' (*je mpe thote nrōme ei emhēt*).[29] In the fullest text (of which the provenance is uncertain) one Papas writes to a priest, Elisaius, and asks for his intervention in a matter which is not disclosed. He reports, however, that he has 'come northward because of the Persian (*eiei anhēt happersos*)', along with his wife and children. The reason, Papas states, is that his children lack for food, 'for no corn can come southward (*arēc*)', and he begs Elisaius to enquire as to the aforesaid matter, 'lest the Persian come northward (*emēpode emnte persos ei anhēt*) and has no patience waiting for (?) me, and there are words.'[30] The same text is sometimes cited as an example of the panic which the Persian advance caused amongst the general population.[31] But if it does indeed belong to the period of conquest, then the clear implication is that Papas is expecting an advance *from the south*, while a disturbance to the north is also disrupting supplies of corn. Considered alongside the pattern of disappearing regnal formulae, such documents reinforce the impression that the conquest did not in fact progress in a neat, linear movement.

[27] *P.Mon.Epiph.* 300, 433.
[28] *O.Cair.Monuments* 8074, with WINLOCK & CRUM, *Monastery of Epiphanius*, vol. 1, p. 101. n. 3.
[29] SB Kopt II 841, with DEKKER, *Episcopal Networks*, pp. 106-8 for Epiphanius and his dates.
[30] *O.CrumVC* 67. Note that the editor, Crum, take 'the Persian' as a synecdoche for 'the Persians', which I follow here.
[31] See e.g. ALTHEIM-STIEHL, Sasanians in Egypt, p. 94.

It is not impossible, of course, that such texts in fact refer to a Persian force retreating from its southern conquests, or to later northward movements in contexts which are now obscured from us.[32] Indeed, documents in which the authors point to violence at the hands of the Persians are not uncommon: in one, for example, a man who has fled to the Arsinoite complains that the Persians had then captured and tortured him;[33] in another a widow of Jeme requests that the bishop Pesynthius (of Koptos?) assist her, since the Persians have beaten her son and stolen her livestock;[34] while in another an Esaias, who calls himself the recipient's 'humblest slave', writes to his 'master' to inform him that he has fallen into 'the hands of the Persians', and that he therefore has no monies (*sc.* for rent or a debt).[35] Because the prevailing framework for appreciating the period posits a violent conquest and peaceful occupation, it is usual to assign such complaints to the period of expansion.[36] It is indeed probable that the conquest was violent and disruptive.[37] But none of these reports of violence bear dates, so that their assignment to the conquest is circular. If, however, some or all of those documents in fact belong to a later period, then a quite different, more conflictual, vision of the occupation comes into perspective, in which the experience of a benign Persian presence was, in fact, far from ubiquitous.

[32] Cf. WINLOCK & CRUM, *Monastery of Epiphanius*, vol. 1, pp. 101, 220, suggesting that our documents concern the expected retreat of the Persians from Nubia. A Persian assault on Nubia is alleged in the so-called 'eastern source' (HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, p. 65), but is uncertain.
[33] *P.Ross.Georg.* IV Anhang, p. 100.
[34] SB Kopt. I 295. Cf. *P.Mon.Epiph.* 170, in which a woman begs for assistance since 'the barbarians' (the Persians?) have carried off her husband and son. The verso of *O.Crum* 270 seems also to refer to thefts by the Persians.
[35] *P.Iand.* II 22.
[36] See ALTHEIM-STIEHL, The Sasanians in Egypt, pp. 92-3; FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, pp. 167-8, introducing the same documents with reference to an 'initial phase of brutality'; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, p. 163, 'most probably occurring at the outset of the occupation'.
[37] Nevertheless one should treat with extreme caution later (and oft-repeated) reports of the slaughter of monks at Alexandria and Nikiu; see *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* (Evetts, PO 1, pp. 485-6); (Ps.-)Abū Ṣāliḥ, *Church and Monasteries of Egypt* (Evetts, p. 168). Likewise, the destruction of the shrine and town of Abū Mīnā at the hand of the Persians, posited in various publications of P. GROSSMAN (e.g. *Abū Mīna I*, at pp. 182-5) and others, is based more upon assumptions about the Persian conquest from the narrative sources than compelling chronological indicators within the archaeological evidence. The evidence of coin hoards is also, in Egypt, meagre and ambiguous: see NOESKE, *Münzfunde*, vol. 1, pp. 77-9, 132-5.

3. The Administration

Recent literature often repeats that administrative change in Egypt occurred at the highest levels alone, and this at least seems certain. Under Justinian (r. 527-65), let us note, the administration of Egypt had seen significant reform. The office of the *praefectus Augustalis*, who had since Diocletian overseen the whole of the diocese, was dissolved, and regional dukes—with combined military and civil authority, and with the title *dux et Augustalis*—were established over the combined provinces of Aegyptus, Augustamnica (both in Lower Egypt), and the Thebaid (Upper Egypt). The province of Arcadia (Middle Egypt), however, seems to have remained under a civilian *praeses* subordinate to the duke of the Thebaid.[38] During the Persian occupation, however, the provincial dukes—who would reappear during the Roman resurgence in the 630s, and survive well into the Arab period[39]—are absent from our documents, suggesting their swift removal.

How the highest levels of administration were then organised is opaque. The most prominent individual within documents of the period, both Pahlavi and Greek, is a certain Persian called Šahrālānyōzān (Gr. Saralaneozan).[40] This is not, however, a personal name, but rather a soubriquet. In the late Sasanian period, the prefix 'Šahr-' or 'realm' is attested for several generals or high officials: for example, the aforementioned conqueror of Egypt, Šahrwārāz or 'boar of the realm'. Šahrālānyōzān's nickname, it has been argued, means 'realm's combater of the Alans,' suggesting that he too was a general.[41] His name appears, or

[38] See in brief PALME, Imperial Presence, p. 248.
[39] Cf. their maintenance in the Arab regime; see LEGENDRE, Neither Byzantine nor Islamic?.
[40] For excellent discussions of Šahrālānyōzān's role see SÄNGER, Saralaneozan, pp. 195-9; ID., New Masters, pp. 653-65.
[41] On the meaning and possible derivation of his name see WEBER, Ein bisher unbekannter Titel, pp. 231-3. It is doubtful that Šahrālānyōzān is another soubriquet for Šahrwārāz (real name, Farrukhān), as suggested in BANAJI, On the Identity of Šahrālānyōzān. Indeed Šahrwārāz appears under that name in *P.Perixanjan* 3, a fragment which

has been reconstructed, in various Pahlavi fragments.[42] In four of these he also bears the simple title *xwadāy* or 'Lord', which attaches to various persons throughout the corpus.[43] But it is evident that Šahrālānyōzān was a person of significant status. One document, dated to 624/5, mentions a 'steward of the court' (*kārframān ī dar*) who served him.[44] In others we discover him on some sort of progress. In one the sender announces to a Yazdāngird—to whom we shall return—that Šahrālānyōzān will tomorrow pass with the 'officers, nobles, and horsemen' through the village Ṭrwṭ (Copt. Terōt) which could be identified with known villages in the Arsinoite, Heracleopolite, or Hermopolite.[45] Elsewhere another sender announces the imminent presence of the 'Lord Šahrālānyōzān' in Oxyrhynchus.[46] In other Pahlavi texts his name guarantees different kinds of documents. He seals a permit for the transportation of goods issued to two Persians;[47] while in a text dated to 625/6, the 'seal of Šahrālānyōzān' guarantees a certificate of debt drawn up between one Farroxzād, 'troop leader' (*gundsālār*) and a Gušnaspdād.[48] From these Pahlavi texts, it is impossible to determine Šahrālānyōzān's precise jurisdiction; nor can we know if his unique prominence within those texts is a function of their geographical provenance. There is some suggestion that the Berlin collection, at least, derives

speaks of news reaching him while he was on a camel ten miles away, and also mentions a lack of horses – but the context is obscure.

[42] For instances where his name has been reconstructed: *P.Weber* II 256, 339.

[43] *P.Perixanjan* 13(3); *P.Weber* I 5, 58, 81. Other Persians bear the same title 'Lord': e.g. Yazdān-Xusrō in *P.Weber* I 19 (which mentions Oxyrhynchus); Burz-Ādur in *P.Weber* I 44.

[44] *P.Weber* II 172. Weber's edition shows that the title 'steward of the court' does not belong to Šahrālānyōzān himself, as was once thought and is still sometimes repeated. The word *kārframān* also appears in *P.Weber* II 293, but without context.

[45] *P.Weber* II 136, where I have emended the editor's Ṭwrṭ (*w* and *r* being interchangeable in Pahlavi script). For this document cf. WEBER, Ein bisher unbekannter Titel, p. 230. For the various Terōts see the discussions in DREW-BEAR, *Le Nome Hermopolite*, pp. 289-291; TIMM, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten*, pp. 2592-2598; FALIVENE, *The Herakleopolite Nome*, p. 212.

[46] *P.Weber* II 174.

[47] *P.Weber* I 81, reedited in WEBER, Three Pahlavi Papyri, p. 3; cf. also WEBER, Ein bisher unbekannter Titel, p. 231.

[48] Vienna *P.Pehl.* 373a, edited in WEBER, Eine spätsassanidische Rechtsurkunde. Farroxzād is perhaps identical with the person of the same name who appears in Vienna *P.Pehl.* 568, edited in WEBER, Minuscula Pahlavica, p. 139.

from the Arsinoite.[49] But the appearance of Terōt and of Oxyrhynchus in connection with Šahrālānyōzān suggests that his power extended even further, over the whole of Middle Egypt.

We can further refine our perspective on Šahrālānyōzān's role and remit when we turn to Greek texts. As we shall see below, three important Greek documents suggest that Šahrālānyōzān's office received the taxes of Oxyrhynchus and Cynopolis in Middle Egypt;[50] and it is probable that a certificate of debt for horse feed—perhaps intended for Persian cavalry, and issued to one Chosroes, 'magnificent *chartularius* of the [all-praiseworthy] Saralaneōzan'—also derives from this region.[51] It was indeed perhaps here, in Arsinoe, that Šahrālānyōzān has his private residence: one Greek text from the Arsinoite (*BGU* II 377) lists the various foodstuffs given on different days 'to the kitchen of our master the all-praiseworthy Saralaneozan';[52] while another from the same region seems to concern the internal administration of an estate belonging to him.[53] The location of his administrative capital, however, is uncertain.[54]

The Pahlavi and Greek texts discussed so far seem to place Šahrālānyōzān's field of operation in Middle Egypt, but a further archive from the period of occupation complicates the picture. The geographical origins of the archive of Theopemptus and Zacharias—which consists of around sixty Greek ostraca demanding grain and other goods—are uncertain, but several were acquired at Hermonthis in the Thebaid, and this is the most probable derivation of the texts.[55] It is certain, however, that the archive dates to the period of Persian occupation,

[49] See WEBER in *P.Weber* II, xxii-xxiii.
[50] See below pp. 0000.
[51] *P.Vindob.* G 20.601; see SÄNGER, Saralaneozan, pp. 191-5.
[52] BGU II 377; corr. SÄNGER & WEBER, Der Lebensmittelhaushalt, pp. 82-90.
[53] *SPP* X 251, with BANAJI, On the Identity of Šahrālānyōzān, pp. 27-8.
[54] It is tempting to speculate that this was at Babylon, since this appears in several Pahlavi texts and was no doubt an important centre; see *P.Weber* I 7, 15, 22 (?), 45; II 196. If so then it anticipated the Arab capital, and perhaps even the name *to fossaton*/Fusṭāṭ; see *P.Ross.Georg.* IV Anhang, p. 100, which includes this designation but no doubt belongs to the Persian period.
[55] For items acquired at Armant/Hermonthis see *O.Ashm.* 96, 101; and HICKEY, A Misclassified Sherd.

since in one text the pair are ordered to send the requested goods to the '*grammateus* of the all-praiseworthy Saralaneozan'.[56] Four more ostraca from the same archive, three of them dated to April 626, instruct Theopemptus and Zacharias to deliver measures of barley to the *kaballarioi* and *sellarioi*.[57] The former must mean Persian cavalrymen (*aswār*);[58] while the latter, which we encounter throughout our documents, is the Greek rendering of the Persian *sālār*, which means 'officer' and which was suffixed to the titles of Sasanian officials at various levels, high and low – thus, for example, we discover in our Greek documents a *sālār* placed over Antinoe and perhaps other cities; as well as a *sālār* in charge of a simple postal station.[59] Here then, a *grammateus* of Šahrālānyōzān seems to be involved in the process of securing food and goods for those in the service of the Persian regime. Indeed, Theopemptus and Zacharias each bear the title of *apaitētēs* – the designation for those Roman officials who had once collected supplies for soldiers or *annona militaris*.[60]

From these scattered Pahlavi and Greek texts we can conclude that Šahrālānyōzān's role was wide-ranging. Although his title suggests that he was a general, he now sealed documents, received taxes, and ensured the extractions of goods in kind for Persian soldiers and officials. He had a number of officials, including a *chartularius* and a *grammateus*.[61] In Pahlavi he was addressed most often with the simple title 'Lord', but in Greek documents he often bore a title, *paneuphēmos* ('all-praiseworthy'), reserved for the highest echelons of the Roman elite. His most apparent field of operation was Middle Egypt (the Roman Arcadia), but if the archive of Theopemptus and Zacharias indeed derives from Hermonthis, then his power

[56] *O.Petr.Mus.* 529, 532.
[57] *O.Bodl.* II 2125, 2126, 2127, 2131.
[58] See WEBER, On Middle Persian *aswār*.
[59] See FOSS, *Sellarioi*; also SÄNGER, New Masters, pp. 659-661. To the documents cited there can now be added *P.Gen.* IV 197 (provenance unknown), a fragmentary letter to a *megaloprepestatos sallarios* concerning feed for animals. For the *sālar* at Antinoe: see below p. 0000. For the postal station: see the *sālār* Rhemē in *P.Oxy.* XVI 1862, 1863 (624).
[60] For their title see *O.Petr.Mus.* 529 (625), 532 (623-7), 534 (626) 539 (627). For the office PALME, *Das Amt des ἀπαιτητής*.
[61] For a (pro)curator, who might have been a Roman, see below n. 0000.

must also have reached into Upper Egypt too (the Roman Thebaid). It has sometimes been suggested that Šahrālānyōzān's authority extended also over the Delta—and thus over all Egypt[62]—but an absence of documents from the region does not allow us to confirm it.[63]

The closest equivalent to Šahrālānyōzān's role in the former Roman administration is that of the *dux et Augustalis Thebaidos*.[64] But it is perhaps better, nevertheless, to conceive it in Sasanian terms. We know that the *spāhbad* Šahrwārāz, the conqueror of Egypt and no doubt the supreme military authority in former Roman territories, built a palace in Alexandria,[65] and was there for at least some time in the late 620s, and perhaps before.[66] It is best then to imagine Šahrālānyōzān as the *marzbān* for the combined zone of Middle and Upper Egypt (or perhaps for all Egypt), beneath Šahrwārāz and in the role of general-cum-administrator. Thus he would be equivalent to the much better-attested Šahrpalang ('realm's leopard'), the contemporaneous *marzbān* of Armenia, who controlled the administration but who sometimes also fought alongside the *spāhbads* Šahrwārāz and Šāhēn in their conflicts with Heraclius.[67]

Although the Pahlavi papyri are scattered with a wide range of Persian personal names, besides the *marzbān* other prominent Persians are difficult to trace.[68] The sole other person who features with some frequency is one Yazdānkard.[69] One document addressed to him seems

[62] See e.g. GARIBOLDI, Social Conditions, p. 345.
[63] Note however *P.Weber* II 159, which is a fragment of a few lines, but appears to have been sent from Alexandria, from one Dādōhrmazd, 'the noblest noble'.
[64] For earlier reflections on the role of Šahrālānyōzān cf. FOSS, *Sellarioi*, p. 172; SÄNGER, New Masters, pp. 662-3. But note that both misunderstand the shape of the previous Roman administration.
[65] *History of the Patriarchs* (Evetts, PO 1, p. 485): "[The Persians] call their leader, in their language, the *salār*, that is to say *amīr* … and it was he who built in Alexandria the palace which is called *Ṭarāwas* (and which is now called 'castle of the Persians'), its name being 'house of the king'." The Arabic *Ṭarāwas* is perhaps a corruption of Middle Persian *darbās*, 'palace'.
[66] Ps.-Sebēos, *History* 40 (Abgaryan, p. 129).
[67] See Ps.-Sebēos, *History* 34 (Abgaryan , p. 113); Theophanes, *Chronography* AM 6115 (de Boor, pp. 308-10); Movsēs Daskhurants'i, *History of Albania* 2.10-11 (Dowsett, pp. 81, 85); DOWSETT, The Name and the Role of Σαραβλαγγας; and HOWARD-JOHNSTON, Historical Commentary, pp. 204-5.
[68] Note the two (perhaps three) sons of 'Xusrōdādān' who appear in *P.Perixanjan* 13(3); *P.Weber* I 23, 58, 70-1, 75, and who appear to be members of a prominent Persian household.
[69] For instances in which there is little more than a name: *P.Weber* I, 71, 75; II 183, 321; also *P.Perixanjan* 5.

to offer a list of luxuries;[70] three others fragments, all addressed to 'Yazdānkard, remembered of the gods',[71] seem to be requests for allocations of rations, and two of them, at least, come from a cavalry leader (*aswārān-sālār*).[72] It has been proposed that he is Šahrālānyōzān's 'secretary', but this seems doubtful.[73] In the sole Pahlavi text in which the pair appear together, discussed above, the sender reports *to* Yazdānkard Šahrālānyōzān's imminent presence at Terōt, which would be unusual if the former were indeed a member of the latter's immediate staff;[74] and in the fullest of the aforementioned requests for rations, the unknown sender orders Yazdānkard to fulfil the allocation, and also reminds him that to transport said rations the shipowner must obtain a permit (*widar-nāmag*) from the office of an unnamed 'Lord' (which should be Šahrālānyōzān).[75] All this suggests that Yazdānkard was both inferior to, and separate from, the *marzbān* – a lesser, regional administrator of some sort, but still of significant status.

Elsewhere within the documentation we discover Persians with administrative responsibilities set over particular towns (Antinoe and Thebes), but the extent of their jurisdictions is uncertain.[76] It is nevertheless clear that Persian officials and soldiers were spread throughout the landscape. A Pahlavi fragment, for example, lists the distance, in Roman miles, between different towns—in the surviving text, Lycopolis, Hypsele, and Apollonopolis Parva—, perhaps for the purposes of military logistics.[77] More clear is a Pahlavi record of the composition of a new troop, and the numbers of men levied from across southern Egypt: first, in transliteration, Elephantine in the far south (23 men); then (moving from north to south)

[70] *P.Weber* II 139.
[71] For this epithet, which attaches to people of importance, cf. *P. Weber* I 10, 16, 44 (attached to a Lord), 71, 75; II 248, 250, 303, 305 (attached to an *aswār*); *P.Perixanjan* 2, 4, 5, 6, 13(1).
[72] *P.Weber* II 141, 247, 251.
[73] E.g. *P.Weber* II xxiii.
[74] See above n. 0000.
[75] *P.Weber* II 141. For a *widar-nāmag* approved through Šahrālānyōzān's office see above n. 0000.
[76] See n. 0000 above and below.
[77] *P.Weber* II 148.

Heracleopolis (21), Oxyrhynchus (24), Cynopolis (7), Theodosiopolis (10), Hermopolis (62), Antinoe (6), Koussai (6), Lycopolis (20), Diospolis (2), and Maximianopolis (1).[78] Although the text is incomplete, there are two significant implications: first, that the Persians stationed their units, probably cavalry, in more or less the same places where Roman units had previously been established; and, second, that the military administration of Middle and Upper Egypt was separate from that of Lower Egypt.[79] (This fact, let us note, supports the impression that Šahrālānyōzān's power was also limited to the regions south of the Delta.)

In order to provision such soldiers, and perhaps for reasons of security, the Persians also regulated the movement of people and goods. A Pahlavi document contains a permit (*widar-nāmag*) issued to one Samuel, a boat owner, who is therein permitted to purchase and transport a large amount of wheat between Oxyrhynchus and Tuphis (near Aphrodito).[80] The price of the wheat is specified within the permit, suggesting that it was intended for Persian troops. We do not know who issued the permit; but we can perhaps imagine a parallel situation to that revealed on a Coptic ostracon from western Thebes during the period of occupation, in which an unknown person is said to have sought permission from 'the Persian in Nē (i.e. Thebes)' for another to travel south and fetch some wheat.[81] This suggests that travel permits were issued through local Persian, and not Roman, administrators. Indeed, our Pahlavi document containing Samuel's permit is in fact addressed to local officials called *awestwārān* and *widarbedān* ('commissioners' and 'travel inspectors'), who must have existed at a lower level, regulating the movement of people and of goods along the Nile. These persons no doubt performed similar functions to the traditional Roman *euschēmones* and *archephodoi*;[82] but the

[78] *P.Weber* I 55 = *P.Bas.* II 69. Cf. also for discussion HARMATTA, Two Economic Documents, pp. 226-30.
[79] Cf. HARMATTA, Two Economic Documents, pp. 228-229.
[80] *P.Weber* II 137.
[81] *P.Mon.Epiph.* 324. Note that in ibid. 200 the sender seems to anticipate the imminent fall of Nē (Thebes), perhaps to the Persians.
[82] See the discussion in HARMATTA, Laisser-passer en Égypte, p. 168.

fact that the text is addressed to them in Pahlavi makes it probable that these too were Persians, rather than pre-existent Roman officials hidden under Persian titles.[83]

Nevertheless it seems that much of the civilian administration remained in Roman hands, including an equivalent of the *praeses* (the highest civilian official in Roman Arcadia, subordinate to the *dux Thebaidos*). In the case of several documents dealing with the Oxyrhynchite and Cynopolite in 624 (to be explored in more depth below), we find a high-placed Roman, the *endoxotatos* Marinus, forwarding the two cities' land taxes to the office of Šahrālānyōzān.[84] We might at once suspect that Marinus is pagarch of Oxyrhynchus and Cynopolis—a combination of districts witnessed in the decades before[85]—but he nevertheless bears the title *scholastikos*, and in one document a '*kellaritēs* of Heracleopolis' seems to be subordinate to him.[86] He perhaps therefore presides, like the Roman *praeses*, over the civilian administration of the pagarchies of Middle Egypt.[87] The continued existence of the pagarchs, too, is implied in the apparent survival of their administrative districts, and indeed one document from the period of occupation, dated to 622, witnesses 'Menas the *endoxotatos stratēlatēs*, pagarch of the Arsinoite and Theodosiopolite', who held the same position under Roman rule.[88] Although Menas is an isolated example, and the title of 'pagarch' does not otherwise appear in our documentation, it seems reasonable to presume broad continuities at the level of the pagarchate.[89] Beneath such persons as Marinus and Menas, we also discover various lower officials, bearing Roman titles and executing traditional functions;[90] and in one case we can

[83] *Pace* FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, p. 168.
[84] See below p. 0000.
[85] See *P.Oxy.* XVI 1909 (Oxyrhynchus, 582-602) (and below p. 0000).
[86] *P.Oxy.* XVI 1862 ll. 51-2.
[87] For a similar suggestion cf. FOSS, *Sellarioi*, p. 172, whose hesitations are based in a misunderstanding of the role of *praeses* in relation to the *dux Thebaidos*.
[88] See CPR XIX 32 (Arsinoe, 29.xii.622); cf. XXIV 30 (27.iv.622) (Menas' full title reconstructed *exempli gratia*); perhaps also SB 24 16287 (619-629?). His earliest attestation as pagarch occurs in P.Vindob. G 26585 (20.Feb.616), edited in VAN LOON, An Orchard Lease. For Menas see also PALME in CPR XXV, Exkurs 5, pp. 178-181, and n. 0000 below.
[89] So SÄNGER, New Masters, pp. 663, 665.
[90] See in the archive of Marinus the *notarius* Cosmas in *P.Oxy.* XVI 1863 (624); the *chartularius* George in ibid. 1864 (623/4) and LI 3637 (623?), perhaps *PSI* VIII 894 (624); or the *chrysonēs* Menas in ibid. LV 3797 (624).

trace—from 591 into the period of occupation—the career of one Magistōr, son of Kallinikos, as he progressed up the rungs of the tax office in the Hermopolite, even gaining promotion after the conquest.[91]

From one perspective, then, we can observe a number of obvious continuities with the previous administration: the Persians adopted Roman titles and honorifics; communicated with their new subjects in Greek; and left intact most levels of the administration. From this, it has been suggested that the *sālārs* (and perhaps the role of Šahrālānyōzān) were the sole innovation; that Persians were imposed "at the highest levels" alone; and that the conquerors therefore "maintained the normal administrative and economic practices and ruled the conquered regions with a minimum of disturbance".[92] But the observation of basic continuities should not be conflated with a 'minimum of disturbance', as though the occupation were almost imperceptible. Pahlavi documents, in particular, provide an important corrective to the more localised perspective of their Greek equivalents. For these show that across the landscape, Persian *sālārs* (of various status) and soldiers were established in towns, and intervened to regulate the movement of persons and goods along the Nile. Whatever the continuities with the Roman past, therefore, contemporaries cannot have laboured under the illusion of 'business as usual'.

4. Fiscality

Those who argue for minimal disruption in the transition from Roman to Persian rule within the occupied provinces have also used documents to establish basic continuities in economic

[91] The archive and its dating is treated in SIJPESTEIJN, Magistor, Sohn des Kallinikos; to which add *P.Berl.Cohen* 20, reedited in GONIS, Recent News.
[92] FOSS, *Sellarioi*, p. 72.

life: Roman solidi, for example, evidently continued to be the basic medium of exchange (new coinage being limited to the introduction of a bronze coinage in three denominations, and bearing the image of Khusrau II);[93] Roman exchange rates were maintained;[94] and commercial relations were soon established between Romans and prominent Persians.[95] In fiscal terms, we have seen in several places above how the new administration requisitioned (and issued receipts for) goods destined for officials and soldiers, in the manner of the *annona militaris*;[96] but most spectacular is a collection of documents which witnesses the continued extraction of land taxes in Roman solidi. The aforementioned archive of the scholasticus Marinus, from Oxyrhynchus, contains three Greek documents witnessing taxes paid to the Persians. The first of these, which is dated to October of the 12th indiction [623], is a receipt issued to Marinus for 3,962 solidi delivered as part of that indiction's 'first instalment' (*katabolē*). It is evident, however, that this was not the full amount of that instalment, for the sender, a Persian called Rasbanas, then encourages Marinus to forward the fulfilment within three days, reminding him of what 'our master the all-praiseworthy [S]aralaneozan' has written about this, and offering the ominous observation that, 'we want to dispatch the gold to the king of kings' i.e. Khusrau II himself.[97] It is therefore of great interest that we have, from the next month (November 623), a second text which concerns this 'first instalment'. It is written in the same hand as the first, and Rasbanas seems again to have signed it; it is probable that Marinus was the recipient.[98] The text acknowledges receipt of 2,016 solidi. But here this amount is specified to be the total from two equal sums of 1,008, and to represent 'the fulfilment of the first instalment of the 12th indiction' for two separate cities: Oxyrhynchus and Cynopolis. From this we might infer, then,

[93] See PHILLIPS, Byzantine Bronze Coins, pp. 230-2, 239. A mere handful of silver Persian drachms have been excavated in Egypt—see NOESKE, *Münzfunde*, vol. 1 p. 93—but evidence from elsewhere suggests their presence in large numbers; cf. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, pp. 157-8.
[94] See GARIBOLDI, Social Conditions, pp. 348-50.
[95] See e.g. *CPR* II 5 (Arsinoite, 626), in which a Persian pays villages 36 solidi for flax.
[96] So also SÄNGER, New Masters, p. 664.
[97] *P.Oxy.* LI 3637.
[98] Note that the same Rasbanas appears in P.Vindob. G 16459, cited in SÄNGER, New Masters, p. 655, n. 7.

that our earlier document also concerned the same two cities, and that the two documents together represent a staggered payment of the first instalment of that indiction's tax burden for those cities.[99] Our third and final text also relates to these instalments of tax in the 12th indiction, and is dated between the 26th April and 25th May (624). The sender is a 'procurator [or curator] of the all-praiseworthy Saralaneozan', who issues to Marinus a receipt for 5,040 solidi. This sum is described as a 'portion of the public taxes in gold', and as 'the third instalment of the 12th indiction', and again is paid for both Oxyrhynchus and Cynopolis (4,032 from the former, and 1,008 from the latter).[100] This suggests, then, that all our texts concern the taxes due in gold.

These three texts have been cited as proof that the Sasanians maintained existing structures of taxation, and that Egypt's cities could produce 'large sums';[101] thus "[i]f the provinces could pay tax, it was because they were still rich, and even prospering".[102] This conclusion seems premature. In respect of our documents, it is difficult to know what to make of the specified sums. The combination of the Oxyrhynchite and Cynopolite for fiscal purposes is a continuation of later Roman practice, as too is the payment of taxes through a series of three instalments. Nevertheless if we assume that all of our texts concern both the Oxyrhynchite and Cynopolite, that no interim or subsequent payments were made, and that the second instalment was equivalent to the first and third (that is, 5000-6000 solidi), then we are looking at taxes in gold of 15,000 to 18,000 solidi for that 12th indiction. In isolation, it is impossible to know how representative this figure is for other indictions, but the total figure seems at once to be low. In a document from Oxyrhynchus which seems to date *c.*600, we encounter a similar

[99] *P.Oxy.* XVI 1843.
[100] *P.Oxy.* LV 3797. The name of the (pro)curator is unclear, although SÄNGER, Saralaneozan, p. 197 suggests it should be Thomas, in which case Šahrālānyōzān might have had Romans in his service.
[101] FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, p. 167; cf. SÄNGER, Saralaneozan, pp. 196-7.
[102] FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, p. 169; cf. GARIBOLDI, Social Conditions, pp. 340-2. Far more cautious is HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, pp. 162-3.

shared assessment of the Oxyrhynchite and Cynopolite, thought to represent their annual tax burden: but the figure here is over three times higher, at 59,500 solidi, divided between 24,500 solidi of taxes in gold, and 350,000 artabae of wheat commuted into 35,000 solidi.[103] Our three documents of course demonstrate that taxes continued to be collected in Roman solidi; that an official with a Roman name, Marinus, presided over the process; and that the cities were not impoverished. But the same documents also leave various questions unanswered. In particular, we do not know how much gold was dispatched to Ctesiphon (nor how often, nor how it was replaced); how representative the figures are for other indictions or other cities; or whether the stated amounts existed alongside other forms of taxation.

Indeed, comparison with our document from *c.*600 highlights the absence in our texts of the *embolē*, that is, the corn tax used to support the civic *annona*, which fed Constantinople with wheat and which formed a crucial component of the global burden of Egyptian taxation.[104] Dislocation from the Roman Empire, and the transformation of the Mediterranean litoral into a frontier, brought the end of the *annona* as it had existed.[105] Modern research has demonstrated the significant fiscal reforms which at once resulted in the Eastern Roman Empire, as authorities in the capital scrambled for new sources of wheat in the western provinces.[106] But the corresponding consequences in Egypt are not, at present, possible to perceive. Unless the Persians somehow redirected the *embolē*—which does not appear in published documents from the period of occupation—then we might perhaps imagine that producers found themselves with an immediate surplus, which could then be offered for commercial sale; and perhaps too that opportunities arose for adapting agricultural strategies. If this was a positive development for some, we should also remember that the large-scale fiscal movement of grain northwards

[103] *P.Oxy.* XVI 1909.
[104] On the *annona* see esp. SIRKS, *Food for Rome*; CARRIÉ, L'institution annonaire.
[105] See the report of the cancellation of free distributions of bread in Constantinople, placed in 618, in *Paschal Chronicle* (Dindorf, p. 711); cf. Nicephorus, *Short History* 8 (Mango, p. 48).
[106] See PRIGENT, Le rôle des provinces d'Occident.

into the Mediterranean had no doubt helped to sustain others, since the state contracted private shippers to move fiscal grain,[107] and commercial exports could be placed alongside it, to be sold en route to or in the capital.[108] We might imagine, then, that in the period 618-629 some commercial enterprises, in particular along the northern litoral and in the Delta, suffered an immediate double blow – both the transformation of the Mediterranean into a contested frontier (including continuous disruptions to traditional markets in Anatolia and the Aegean); and the collapse of the fiscal infrastructure which gave local producers and merchants a commercial advantage.[109] In surmising such disruptions, however, we cannot go further, since the period of occupation cannot be perceived in significant chronological resolution on the basis of ceramic evidence,[110] and in any case the most significant Egyptian exports (grain, textiles, papyrus) leave no archaeological trace.[111] For our purposes, however, it at least seems clear that while our three documents might be used to counter some basic misconceptions about the occupation, they are insufficient to understand the nature, burden, and consequences of taxation even in their own contexts, let alone to posit a broad model of prospering communities.

At the same time, the continued extraction of large numbers of solidi might mask considerable changes in patterns of landholding. Once again our evidence is limited and ambiguous. In the Arsinoite, for example, it is possible to trace continuities in smaller-scale

[107] For the arrangement since Justinian see SIRKS, *Food for Rome*, esp. pp. 210-12; with FOURNET & GASCOU, Moines pachômiens.
[108] For this function of the *annona* see esp. WICKHAM, *Framing*, pp. 710-18.
[109] Cf. the possible effects of such disruptions to producers in the Syrian limestone massif, where prosperity seems linked to the production of oil for urban markets, and where church inscriptions end in 609/10 after an apparent period of stagnation from *c.* 550; see esp. TATE, *Les campagnes*, esp. pp. 335-42; and on the connection of Persian warfare and economic stagnation TROMBLEY, War and Society. On the end of the *annona* it is also instructive to compare the slow contraction of African exports after the Vandal conquest and the cessation of the western (Rome-Carthage) *annona*; see the overview in WICKHAM, *Framing*, pp. 711-12.
[110] Egypt was never a large-scale exporter of local amphorae (e.g. LRA 5/6, 7), but had imported large amounts of wine and oil (in LRA 1 and 4). For recent surveys see e.g. MAJCHEREK, Alexandria's Long-distance Trade; the papers in *Amphores d'Égypte* (esp. the editors' conclusion); and cf. BRUNING, *Rise of a Capital*, pp. 58-86, pointing to a gradual but near-complete decline in Mediterranean imports between the Persian, then Arab, conquests and the turn of the 8th c.
[111] On the flax/linen industry in the Delta (for which the Roman state might have been a significant investor and customer) see BLOUIN, *Triangular Landscapes*, pp. 233-9; in the Valley see CROMWELL, Threads that Bind Us; MARTHOT-SANTANIELLO, Flax Growing. On the papyrus industry see LEWIS, *Papyrus*.

landowning within particular families;[112] but also, the continued existence of several elite estates across the transitions between Roman, Persian, and Arab rule. Thus the large estate of the *stratēlatēs* Theodosius—who was later elevated, during the Roman restoration, to the role of *dux et Augustalis* of Arcadia[113]—seems first to be attested in *c.*620,[114] but also exists in the Arab period;[115] the same is true for the estates of the aforementioned pagarch and *stratēlatēs* Menas (d. before 629)[116] and the famous magnate Fl. Strategius Paneuphemos (d. 623-5?)[117]. Although we cannot discount significant shrinkage of estates, or short-term disruptions in ownership, this is nevertheless suggestive of basic continuities throughout the period of Persian occupation. The picture elsewhere is, however, more complex. Foss and others cite, as an example of continuities, the ongoing existence of the famous Apion estates across the Oxyrhynchite which, Foss states, "continued to flourish until at least 623, presumably because they had reached an accommodation with the new masters of the country."[118] But more striking is the precise fact that the last known document witnessing the Apion estates is dated to 623, and that the estates never reappear, either during the Roman reoccupation in the 630s, or in the Arab period.[119] If the apparent disappearance of the estate during the occupation is not somehow an illusion of our evidence, we might conclude that the Apions abandoned their estates, and/or that the Persians decided to seize or dissolve them.[120] The Apion estates were of course exceptional—for the eminence of the Apions themselves; for the size and spread of

[112] See the dossier of Iustus, *notarios* and later *oikonomos*, whose lands are attested from 621 to 635, in KOVARIK, Von Zitronen, Melonen und Pfirsichen.
[113] See *P.Prag.* I 64 (636).
[114] See SPP X 249 and *P.Lond.* I 113.6c (ind. 9), with the suggested dating of GONIS, Notes on the Aristocracy, pp. 206-7.
[115] For the estate of the pagarch and *stratēlatēs* Menas see above n. 0000.
[116] See SPP III 153, 344, both dated to a second indiction (629/644). On Menas see also above p. 0000.
[117] See CPR XXIV 33 (653); SPP X 1 (date uncertain). For Strategius see PALME, Die domus gloriosa; and for the date of his death, VAN LOON, An Orchard Lease, pp. 129-30.
[118] FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, p. 168; the same opinion in GARIBOLDI, Social Conditions, p. 339; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, pp. 163-4.
[119] For the final documents attesting to the *endoxos oikos* of the Apions see *P.Oxy.* LVIII 3959 (12.Jan.620), LXXXIII 5400 (17.Sep.620) LVIII 3960 (621), LXVIII 4703 (22.May.622).
[120] *Pace* HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, p. 159, who speculates that the estate was left as a 'going concern' under 'the managerial staff'. In this case the estates should have reappeared later.

their holdings; and for the abundance of documents which witness them—so that we cannot know to what extent their disappearance represents a broader pattern. But once again the considerable limitations and ambiguities of our evidence are patent; and so too the rashness of overemphasising continuities.

5. A Tolerant Regime?

I would like to conclude this article with some observations on one final pillar of the dominant model for the Persian occupation, which paradoxically posits *both* the broad 'tolerance' of existing Christian communities, *and* the active promotion of the 'miaphysite' church within the conquered territories.[121] Neither position seems tenable. There is no evidence that the Persians interfered in matters of worship; or attempted to suppress the Christian faith at large. Nor should we expect them to have done so. But interference at the level of the episcopate is a quite different matter. During the occupation, no Chalcedonians patriarchs sat upon their thrones. The Antiochene had been killed in 610;[122] the Jerusalemite was exiled to Ctesiphon;[123] and the Alexandrian fled.[124] None were replaced, which suggests not 'tolerance' but active suppression of the patriarchate. What became of the Chalcedonian patriarchs' bishops—who upon the conquests, we must remember, still dominated the ecclesiastical landscape across the Near East, including in Egypt—is uncertain, although the *Chronicle* of Michael the Great claims that upon the conquest of Roman Mesopotamia and Syria, at least, Chalcedonian

[121] See esp. FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, pp. 165-7, 169; but cf. also e.g. PAYNE, *A State of Mixture*, pp. 184-8; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, pp. 161-2.
[122] See the evidence of the 'eastern source' gathered in HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa*, pp. 58-9; also *Paschal Chronicle* (Dindorf, p. 699).
[123] See esp. Strategius, *On the Fall of Jerusalem*.
[124] See *Anonymous Life of John the Almsgiver* 13 (Delehaye, p. 25); *Epitome of the Life of John the Almsgiver* 13 (Lappa-Zizicas, p. 227).

bishops were removed and their 'orthodox' rivals elevated.[125] Upon these bases, then, Foss and others have argued for the Persians' patronage of 'the miaphysites', but elsewhere I have argued in detail that this is too simplistic. For 'the miaphysites'—divided for the most part between Severans and Julianists, and between Rome and Persia—were never a united group, and evidence from the Levant, Armenia, and Iraq suggests that the period was one of significant crisis for the Severan patriarch of Antioch, as Persian Severans encroached upon his prerogatives, and as Persian Julianists formed wider unions which denounced Severanism. Indeed, in *c.*615 the same patriarch, Athanasius the Camel-driver fled to Roman Alexandria, and soon formed a union with his Alexandrian counterpart, no doubt in an attempt to shore up his faltering authority.[126] It seems probable, in fact, that he, and other refugee bishops, then remained in Roman territories throughout the period of occupation.[127]

Our evidence for the fate of Egyptian bishops is much more limited. As has been said, we know nothing of the fate of Chalcedonian bishops. For the Severans, our main narrative, the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, informs us that the patriarchs Andronicus (*c.*618-*c.*625) and Benjamin (*c.*625-*c.*665) continued to operate under Persian rule, and this is not impossible.[128] But a text like this—which exists to emphasise the continuous occupation of the orthodox throne—has no interest in pointing to serious disruption in the patriarch's position or prerogatives. Elsewhere, the picture is also ambiguous. It is possible that the some of the documents contained within the archive of the Severan bishop Abraham of Hermonthis (d. *c.*621) stretch into the period of occupation; and that some, if not all, of the archive of his

[125] Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 10.25 (Chabot, vol. 4, pp. 390-1), with FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, pp. 155-6.
[126] See Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 10.26 (Chabot, vol. 4, pp. 392-9); *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* (Evetts, PO 1, pp. 480-3).
[127] BOOTH, From Alexandria to Dvin; *contra* FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, p. 157.
[128] See *History of the Patriarchs* (Evetts, PO 1, pp. 484-513). For the dates, which are far from secure, see JÜLICHER, Die Liste, pp. 11-15.

counterpart, Pesynthius of Koptos (d. *c.*631/2) belongs to the same period.[129] Both archives were recovered from monasteries in Western Thebes, a situation which seems to reflect the broader situation of the Severan episcopate in Egypt which, since its formation in the 570s, had been unable to encroach upon the cities, where Chalcedonian bishops still dominated.[130] Within our archives we discover both Abraham and Pesynthius conducting normal business,[131] with little to no indication of the Persian presence.[132] But we should also note that the conquest does not seem to have effected some triumphant return of the bishops from the monasteries to their titular cities.

At the same time, immediate continuities evident in the archive might mask more profound threats to episcopal life. For in an otherwise unparalleled notice contained within the Upper Egyptian recension of the Copto-Arabic synaxarium we are told that the contemporary bishop Pesynthius of Hermonthis (one of Abraham's successors) was made vicar over the see of Latopolis when its bishop died, because the Persians did not permit the appointment of new bishops.[133] It is difficult to know how we should interpret this striking statement, not least because Pesynthius himself succeeded during the occupation.[134] But if correct, it might indicate a localised or emergent attempt to suppress or control episcopal elections, that is, a significant intervention equivalent to that in Mesopotamia.[135] At the least, the episode underlines the meagreness of our knowledge of the fate of bishops along the Nile, while pointing to probable

[129] See DEKKER, Bishop Abraham of Hermonthis, pp 27-28; EAD., A Relative Chronology, pp. 755-67, esp. pp. 759-61; EAD., *Episcopal Networks*, pp. 90-1, 95-6.
[130] Note that the *Short Encomium on Pesynthius* (Budge, pp. 97, 121) suggests that the bishop fled to the 'mountain of Jeme' on account of the Persians, but this is uncertain; see WIPSZYCKA, Institutional Church, at p. 345.
[131] See esp. SCHMELZ, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*; and DEKKER, *Episcopal Networks*, for which the archives are central sources.
[132] See the reference in *P.Pisenthius* 1bis, in a context which is unclear. Revillout's reading of ibid. 1 to refer to the 'Assyrians' (*natsoor*) is doubtful. Ibid. 433 fears a Persian advance from the north. It is possible that the Abraham who appears in ibid. 466, and who is then in prison, is our bishop.
[133] *Copto-Arabic Synaxarium* (Basset, PO 3, p. 490; Forget, vol. 1, p. 346).
[134] A Pesynthius is listed as the current bishop of Hermonthis on the Moir Bryce diptych, which also places a bishop Moses between him and the famous Abraham; for discussion see BOOTH, Towards the Coptic Church, pp. 183-4.
[135] Cf. FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, pp. 166-7, who notes the episode but does not allow it to complicate his general model; so also HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, p. 163.

complexities across space and time. Indeed, that some Severan bishops did not altogether embrace Persian rule is suggested in their actions following the Persian withdrawal in 629, and the restitution of Roman rule. For, far from fleeing their supposed Roman oppressors, various prominent figures—both in Egypt and across the East—then rushed into an unprecedented communion with the emperor and patriarch at Constantinople.[136] For some, no doubt, the restoration and maintenance of Christian, Roman, rule proved far more important than continued conflicts over the minutiae of Christological doctrine.

Even if not persecuted for their religious convictions, it is likewise difficult to suppose that the region's inhabitants reacted to the Persian presence—and, in particular, the redirecting of their taxes to a state still at war with the empire in which their forbearers had lived for centuries—with widespread indifference. Nevertheless, evidence for popular resentment or resistance to Persian rule is, as for so much else, somewhat scattered. It is tempting, for example, to regard the novel title 'king of kings' applied to Christ in an extant document of 621 as a subtle rebuke of the Sasanian imperial titulature;[137] or to see in an account of Constantine the Great's (fictional) Persian campaigns, extant on a contemporaneous ostracon, the fantasies of the conquered.[138] But most spectacular is an intriguing but damaged Coptic document from the Thebaid. Therein one Teōs—who seems to be a local bishop, but whose confession and see are uncertain—addresses certain local rebels against Persian rule. He reports that following a summons and a meeting, 'the *sellarēs* [the Persian *sālār*] with us and Antinoe' has informed him that the recipients have now left an unnamed city, to which Teōs also evidently belongs, after burning it. This 'rebellion' (*antarsia*) has occurred, Teōs emphasises, even though '[since] the Persians arrived, God has allowed nothing bad to happen,' and 'they

[136] For this process, and later attempts to excuse it, in Egypt see BOOTH, Images of Emperors and Emirs; for the wider picture, BOOTH, *Crisis of Empire*, pp. 200-8.
[137] SB I 4483 (Arsinoite, 621).
[138] *P.Mon.Epiph.* 80 (Western Thebes, precise date uncertain).

have not wronged you'. Teōs asks the rebels to send a leader to discuss their grievances, but also offers to withdraw from the city should they consider him to have wronged them. He also claims that 'the Persian' has sent for his son to serve as a hostage, and offers indeed to send him to the Persians if the rebels' intentions are good.[139] The details are, then, rather sparse, but the document captures a complex situation. A Persian *sālār* in Antinoe is confronting a local insurrection, and calls upon a local bishop, Teōs, to mediate between the Persian regime and the rebels.[140] The bishop, moreover, sides with the regime, and even emphasises the benefits of Persian rule.

We will perhaps never know what motivated the rebels of our document; nor how representative the episode might be of wider tensions. But it is evident that those rebels did not share the opinion of Teōs, and of various modern scholars, that Persian rule was benign.[141] Indeed, the document epitomises three of the guiding arguments made in this article. First, it underscores how fragmented is our evidence for the occupation—even when it involves documents—and how single sources have the potential to transform understandings. Second, it points to the divergent experiences of different individuals under the occupation – the political, economic, and cultural impact of which must have varied between different regions, groups, and contexts. And third, it provides a precious witness to an actual insurrection against Persian rule, demonstrating that dissatisfaction could sometimes transform into active resistance. For all the material benefits which the occupation might have brought to some, there is little reason to suppose that this evident dissatisfaction with (non-Roman, non-Christian) Persian rule was a unique experience.

[139] *BKU* III 338.
[140] FOSS, *Sellarioi*, p. 170 claims this person is 'probably the *sālār* of governor of the Thebaid'; more precisely, SÄNGER, New Masters, p. 663 speculates that he might have replaced the *dux et Augustalis* of the Thebaid, who was indeed based in Antinoe; but it is more probable that Šahrālānyōzān occupied the equivalent of this position, and the location of his capital is uncertain (cf. above pp. 0000).
[141] The document is nevertheless acknowledged in passing in FOSS, Persians in the Roman Near East, p. 168; HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War*, p. 163.

The publication of further documents within the precious corpus of Pahlavi papyri will no doubt continue to transform our perspective on the occupation. But as such documents appear, it is important that interpreters are more sensitised to moments of innovation, disruption, and conflict, and to frameworks which complicate and transcend the recent emphasis on continuities. Due to the pioneering contributions of Clive Foss and others, an older paradigm around the Persian occupation of the Roman Near East, which presented it as the portal to eastern decline, can no longer stand. It was not in the interests of the conquerors to tear down existing structures, and various facets of administrative and fiscal practice therefore remained. But neither was the occupation invisible: the conquerors established garrisons; redirected taxes to Ctesiphon; regulated the movement of people and goods; punished recusants; and interfered in ecclesiastical life. The consequences of less direct but more fundamental interventions—for example, the transformation of the Mediterranean litoral into a frontier; the end of the civic *annona*; or the dislocation of high bureaucratic and episcopal elites from Constantinople—cannot be perceived in sufficient resolution, but should not therefore be excluded from our modelling. Indeed, if the Persian interlude had exposed some to the benign realities of foreign rule, it no doubt also reinforced for others the substantial benefits of inclusion in the Eastern Roman Empire, strengthening that commitment as the armies of Muhammad mustered upon the horizon.

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