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The rise of a capital: on the development of al-Fuṣṭāṭ's relationship with its hinterland, 18/639-132/750

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GENERAL CONCLUSION

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AL-FUṢṬĀṬ'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS HINTERLAND

This thesis presented four case studies that looked into the development of al-Fuṣṭāṭ as Egypt's main city. The point of view of these studies was that of the town's hinterland, predominantly Alexandria and Upper Egypt. Many of this thesis's chapters detected a three-stepped chronology along which al-Fuṣṭāṭ's relationship with its hinterland developed. As al-Fuṣṭāṭ was the seat of the political authorities, these authorities' policies actively contributed to this development. Interestingly, official policies also, but indirectly, affected non-political aspects of this relationship, that is, at levels not directly related to the Arab administration. Policies influenced levels of society for which they were not primarily intended. It is for this reason that the chronology corresponds to three political phases: the period of the Rightly-Guided caliphs (c. 18/639-40/661), that of Sufyanid and early-Marwanid rule (c. 40/661-80/700), and the period between the start of the Marwanid reforms and the Abbasid revolution (c. 80/700-132/750).

1. C. 18/639-40/661: *al-Fuṣṭāṭ and the Arabs' conquest polity*

Al-Fuṣṭāṭ originated from the Arabs' conquest tactics. Strategically located around the fortress Qaṣr aš-Šam' and near territory still in Byzantine hands, the initial settlement facilitated further conquests in the Nile valley and in the western half and heart of the Nile delta. Documentary sources studied in chapter 1 testify to the development of close administrative ties between the camp al-Fuṣṭāṭ and parts of Egypt that had been brought under Arab rule prior to the traditional date of al-Fuṣṭāṭ's becoming an administrative centre. These ties enabled the Arab authorities to levy imposts on the conquered areas and, via the thus gained financial and material revenues, to make al-Fuṣṭāṭ a back-up for the conquering

armies. Such tactics were not particular to the conquest of Egypt. Towns such as al-Kūfa and al-Baṣra in Iraq but, later, also al-Qayrawān in North Africa similarly began as frontier outposts.¹ The existence of fiscal-administrative relationships between the Arab authorities in their camp around Qaṣr aš-Šamʿ and administrations in Upper Egypt, prior to the surrender of Alexandria, must have considerably contributed to the Arabs' maintaining of their camp around the fortress and, soon, to al-Fuṣṭāṭ's central role in Egypt's administration.²

While the conquests unabatedly continued well into the 30s/650s in the far south of Egypt, a strong military presence and the imposition of taxes characterized the 'conquest polity'³ of the Arab authorities in the conquered territories. Religious militancy being one of the core tenets of Muslim belief at that time, modern scholarship holds this initial polity to have primarily encouraged a continuation of the conquests in order to expand the *dār al-islām*.⁴ The Arabs' wish to geographically establish their rule beyond Egypt's borders directly affected their polity within the province during these initial decades.

Whereas they left much of the existing civil administrative structures intact, the Arab authorities changed the military and set up a military network of co-believers, at this time predominantly consisting of Arabs. The religion and

¹ As to the initial role of al-Kūfa and al-Baṣra, see Donner, *The early Islamic conquests*, pp. 227-9. Prior to the foundation of al-Kūfa, al-Madā'in (Seleucia-Ctesiphon) served similar purposes (see, most explicitly, Dja'it, *Al-Kūfa*, pp. 52-3). Note that better possibilities to provide the Muslim conquerors with food and fodder figure prominently among the many reported reasons for the relocation of Muslim garrisons from al-Madā'in to al-Kūfa (Dja'it, *Al-Kūfa*, pp. 65-9; Donner, *The early Islamic conquests*, pp. 227-8). On al-Qayrawān, see E. Lévi-Provençal, "Arabica occidentalia, I", *Arabica* 1/1 (1954), pp. 17-33 and M. Talbi, "Al-Ḳayrawān", *Et*, IV, pp. 825-7 (note the emphasis on grazing areas around al-Qayrawān referred to in Kennedy, *The great Arab conquests*, p. 211).

² Cf. Denoix, "Founded cities", p. 118.

³ I take this concept from C.F. Robinson, "The rise of Islam, 600-705", *NCHI*, I, pp. 210-11, but in it clearly resonates the concept 'conquest society', mostly known from P. Crone's *Slaves on horses*, chs 3-8.

⁴ On role of the conquests and *ḡihād* in early-Islamic politics, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 554-5; K.Y. Blankinship, *The end of the ḡihād state: the reign of Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik and the collapse of the Umayyads*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, esp. pp. 11-35; Donner, *Muhammad and the believers*, pp. 82-6; P. Crone, "The first-century concept of *hiḡra*", *Arabica* 41 (1994), esp. pp. 380-6. See also Kubiak, *Al-Fustat*, pp. 78-9. For Egypt in particular, see e.g. Papaconstantinou, "Administering the early Islamic empire", p. 65 and Sijpesteijn, "Landholding patterns", pp. 125-6. See also P. Crone, "The early Islamic world", in K. Raaflaub & N. Rosenstein (eds), *War and society in the ancient and medieval worlds*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 311-2.

ethnicity that they shared with military commanders and their soldiers enabled the authorities in al-Fuṣṭāṭ to use loyalty as a means to secure their military powers. In Alexandria, the Arabs maintained the head of the city's civil administration, who bore the title *augustalis* after the conquest of the city, but deprived him of his military powers. Arab *amīrs* with direct ties with, and secured loyalty to, al-Fuṣṭāṭ assumed military authority in the city. These officials headed garrisons entirely consisting of Arab soldiers, loyal to their Arab commander. Thus, the central Arab administration secured its rule in Alexandria while leaving the city's civil (and fiscal) administration intact. At the same time, the Arab administration set up a socio- and religio-political centre in the heart of the city. This centre included a congregational mosque and the houses of Arab notables, amongst whom the governor seated in al-Fuṣṭāṭ. Via this centre, the central Arab authorities created further ties between them and the city of Alexandria.

Parallels are known for Upper Egypt. Here too, Arab *amīrs* with their Arab garrisons assumed military authority formerly held by Byzantine administrators. The civil administrations were kept unchanged. The unique documentary source material for the Arab military apparatus in Upper Egypt, studied in chapter 3, shows that the *amīrs* supervised and, at times, interfered with the local administrations in order to provision their soldiers.⁵ In spite of this decentralized character of the Arabs' military organization at that time, documents in which the central Arab administration directs pagarchs in their contact with and provisioning of these garrisons attest to a central command in al-Fuṣṭāṭ.

This support of the military enabled the new rulers to impose taxes in order to financially underpin their conquest polity. Both documents and medieval historiographical literature refer to the introduction of taxes and, thereby, attest to the Arabs' concern for bringing in tax revenues.⁶ In the present thesis, this

⁵ Sijpesteijn, "Landholding patterns", p. 122.

⁶ *P.Rain.Cent.* 144 (Fayyūm), a receipt for the payment of 'the new *diagraphon* tax' (line 2: νέου διαγράφου) which should probably be dated to 27/648. On prosopographical grounds, the editor of *P.Prag.* II 152 (comm. to line 2) dates *P.Rain.Cent.* 144 to 27/648 or 42/663 (a sixth indiction year). The latter year is an unlikely candidate. *SB VIII* 9756 (Ihnās), dated Ġumādā II 8, 32/January 14, 653 gives the first securely-dated reference to the *diagraphon* tax (see Gasco, "De Byzance à l'Islam", p. 102). Early references are also found in *BGU II* 681 (prov. unknown), *P.Lond.* I 116/a (Fayyūm), and *SPP VIII* 741

became most visible in the appearance of the top of the central Arab administration as a legal authority in a reformed oath formula. As this oath formula appears from as early as 29/649 in almost exclusively texts related to the tax administration (see chapter 4), it surely reflects the Arabs' early efforts to arrogate the entitlement to levies. Other scholars have showed other developments in the fiscal administration soon after the establishment of Arab rule.⁷ During this initial period, then, it was mainly fiscal and military contexts in which the authorities seated in al-Fuṣṭāṭ operated outside the town.

Nonetheless, al-Fuṣṭāṭ's role in the province soon exceeded the fiscal and military realm. For one thing, the influx of tax money and the related distribution of military pay among the ever-increasing number of tribesmen registered in the *dīwān* allowed for economic activity in the town soon after its foundation. Arabs themselves are recorded in the literary sources to have engaged in trade. Archaeological records show that al-Fuṣṭāṭ developed strong ties with its Egyptian hinterland and attracted artisans from other Egyptian towns. During the initial period, al-Fuṣṭāṭ was a nascent commercial centre. Its existence is not recorded to have affected the commercial position of Alexandria, Egypt's largest commercial centre at that time. Another realm in which al-Fuṣṭāṭ appears in this period is that of the judicial system. There is very limited evidence for the involvement of the central administration in judicial matters, both within the Arab community of al-Fuṣṭāṭ and outside the town. But the Arabs' dominance in the province and their keeping of existing administrative structures caused affiliation with the central Arab authorities in al-Fuṣṭāṭ via, *e.g.*, the taxation system to be a basis for judicial authority among local Egyptians soon after the establishment of Arab rule. In sum, although al-Fuṣṭāṭ must have been almost invisible for the average Egyptian in the

(Fayyūm), which possibly date from 25/645. See I. Poll, "Die διάγραφον-Steuer im spätbyzantinischen und früh-arabischen Ägypten", *Tyche* 14 (1999), p. 239, n. 9; *cf.* Papaconstantinou, "Administering the early Islamic empire", p. 63. Taking these early references into consideration, it is improbable that a document would still refer to the *diagraphon* as a 'new' tax as late as 42/663. This leaves us with 27/648 as the most probable date of *P.Rain.Cent.* 144. The interpretation of *CPR XXII 1* (al-Uṣmūn; early-20s/640s), which possibly refers to the introduction of the *andrismos* tax (Sijpesteijn, "The Arab conquest of Egypt", pp. 445-6) is not certain. See Papaconstantinou, "Administering the early Islamic empire", pp. 60-1.

⁷ See, most recently, Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim state*, pp. 69-76.

initial decades after the conquest, the Arabs' conquest polity stimulated contact, at both a political and non-political level, between the town and the rest of the province.

2. C. 40/661-80/700: *al-Fuṣṭāṭ and Sufyanid legitimacy, a first wave of centralization*

The period of Sufyanid rule over Egypt, which started in 38/658-9 with 'Amr b. al-Āṣ's second appointment as governor,⁸ saw a strengthening of al-Fuṣṭāṭ's relationship with its hinterland. A good number of the changes in this relationship were directly related to the rule of Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān. Perfectly in concord with an alleged pact between the caliph and 'Amr b. al-Āṣ which records that 'both [Mu'āwiya and 'Amr] will participate in the best of its [*i.e.*, Egypt's] government' (Ar. *innahumā yadhjulāni fī aḥsan amrihā*),⁹ the synchronism between these changes shows the close ties between Egypt and the central, imperial administration.¹⁰ Their abundance indicates that Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān's rule departed from the existing conquest polity and considerably elaborated the provincial administrative institutions, resulting, in Egypt's case, in an increase of al-Fuṣṭāṭ's role in the province.¹¹

The dynastic change occasioned by the civil war of the late-30s/650s necessitated the active establishment and legitimization of Sufyanid rule. The first decades after the civil war saw (at times heavily centralizing) administrative

⁸ Medieval historiography proposes various dates for 'Amr b. al-Āṣ's second appointment. Ibn Ḥaḡar al-Asqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz aṣ-ṣaḡāba*, ed. 'A. b. 'A. at-Turkī, 16 vols, Cairo: 1429/2008, VII, p. 414 [no. 5910], after Ibn Yūnus, *Ta'rīḥ*, I, p. 374, n. 6: Ṣafar 38/July 658; al-Kindī, *al-Wulā wa-l-quḏā*, p. 31: Rabī I 38/August 658; Ibn Yūnus, *Ta'rīḥ*, I, p. 374 [no. 1026]: Dū al-Qa'da 38/March 659.

⁹ A. Marsham, "The pact (*amāna*) between Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān and 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ (656 or 658 CE): 'documents' and the Islamic historical tradition", *JSS* 57/1 (2012), pp. 69-96; for the text and translation, see pp. 72 and 83 [§ 7]. The text, at § 5, purports a date prior to 'Amr b. al-Āṣ's appointment as governor of Egypt.

¹⁰ Cf. Sijpesteijn, "Army economics", pp. 262-3.

¹¹ Modern scholars disagree on the centralized or decentralized nature of Mu'āwiya's rule. See, *e.g.*, the references in Hoyland, "New documentary texts", pp. 395 and 398 and K. Keshk, *The historians' Mu'āwiya: the depiction of Mu'āwiya in the early Islamic sources*, Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008, pp. 99-100. Medieval historiography on Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān's administration is certainly not always forthcoming. See now Keshk, *The historians' Mu'āwiya*, esp. chs 4 and 5; but cf. T. El-Hibri, *Parable and politics in early Islamic history: the Rashidun caliphs*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, esp. pp. 278-94.

innovations which allowed the Sufyanid authorities in al-Fuṣṭāṭ to exercise more control over the province. During this period, Egyptian governors increased their power over Alexandria. From the mid-40s/660s on, they personally visited the city in order to claim authority over both Alexandria's non-Arab civil and Arab military administrations. Their visits were, as I argued in chapter 1, as much symbolic as they were practical and aimed to bring or keep the city under al-Fuṣṭāṭ's control.

Such interference in the military and civil administrations of Alexandria had direct parallels in Upper Egypt. The establishment of the southern frontier in 31/652 and the increased defence of Egypt's Mediterranean coast line, notably through the enlargement of Alexandria's Arab garrison, allowed for less emphasis on local military dominance and an increase of central control over the civil administrations. Whereas Arab garrisons in the pre-Umayyad period had enjoyed the authority to make *ad hoc* requisitions, such authority is not visible in the documentation on the Sufyanid and Marwanid periods. Instead, from the early-Sufyanid period on, the documentation shows a central body of government that determined the delivery and amount of requisitions for locally-stationed soldiers. Although our source base is patchy, such seems to have been the case throughout the rest of the period discussed in this thesis. The new system increased the soldiers' dependence on the central administration in al-Fuṣṭāṭ for their provisions. These changes were not exceptional and were part of a large military reorganisation under Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (see chapter 3).¹²

It is exactly the same period, that is, early after the establishment of Sufyanid rule, and for similar reasons that changes in Egypt's legal administration appear. Judicial innovations established ties between the Arab populace in al-Fuṣṭāṭ and the Sufyanid administration in Egypt. In contrast to the pre-Umayyad period in which the Arab authorities were not directly involved in local legal practices, it is within few years after the establishment of Sufyanid rule that we

¹² They may also be compared with the institutionalization of the *ṣurṭa* which reportedly took place during the caliphate of Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān as well. See Kennedy, *Armies of the caliphs*, p. 13 and M. Ebstein, "Shurṭa chiefs in Baṣra in the Umayyad period: a prosopographical study", *Al-Qanṭara* 31/1 (2010), pp. 113-6.

see the appearance of legal transactions outside al-Fuṣṭāṭ being concluded in accordance with *qaḍā'* endorsed by the central authorities.¹³ Together with the changes in the civil and military relationship between al-Fuṣṭāṭ and Alexandria and Upper Egypt, these changes greatly enhanced al-Fuṣṭāṭ's position in Egypt.

3. C. 80/700-132/750: *al-Fuṣṭāṭ and Marwanid reforms, a second and stronger wave of centralization*

In spite of such Sufyanid innovations, it is the period of Marwanid rule over Egypt, and especially the fifty years after c. 80/700, that saw the maturation of al-Fuṣṭāṭ as Egypt's capital. This development can partly be ascribed to the large-scale reforms of the Marwanid caliphs. Through reforms in the administration, the army, and the taxation system from the 70s/690s on, the Marwanids sought to legitimize and support their rule in the wake of the second civil war (64/683-73/692). In part, these reforms were ideologically motivated. They not only strengthened the position, and increased the influence, of the political élite or supported them financially, the reforms also propagated this élite's Arab/Muslim character. The centralizing effects of these reforms gave al-Fuṣṭāṭ a more central role in matters related to the Marwanid authorities. At the same time, changes indirectly related to the reforms brought by the Marwanids equally influenced al-Fuṣṭāṭ's relationship with the rest of Egypt.

Marwanid endeavours to Arabize the administration's personnel were meant to strengthen the ties between the central administration and administrative officials working outside al-Fuṣṭāṭ, including those in Alexandria. Prior to the Marwanid period, Melkite notables are reported to have held high posts in Alexandria's civil administration. From the turn of the second/eighth century on, our sources increasingly show Arabs or Muslims in their stead. Like their Sufyanid predecessors, governors seated in al-Fuṣṭāṭ visited the city soon

¹³ Cf. the formalization of penitentiary institutions during the caliphate of Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān and his successors noted in S. Anthony, "The domestic origins of imprisonment: an inquiry into an early Islamic institution", *JAOS* 129/4 (2009), pp. 595-6.

after they were appointed. But, as the *History of the patriarchs* tells us literally,¹⁴ visiting the city had become customary and was no longer politically necessary. For, the religious affiliation and/or ethnicity of these Arab or Muslim officials working in Alexandria created strong ties with the central administration in al-Fuṣṭāṭ.

The Marwanids had other means as well to draw authority, formerly held by Alexandria, towards the new capital. They positioned al-Fuṣṭāṭ and the central treasury there at the heart of the metrological system they introduced, which included a new gold standard. Second/eighth-century references to the old Alexandrian gold standard indicate that this standard only gradually passed into disuetude in the century after the Marwanids had come to power. Nonetheless, Egypt's new Marwanid standard, 'the standard of the central treasury', made al-Fuṣṭāṭ the politically endorsed reference point in financial transactions.

Increased involvement of the central authorities surpassed the civil administrative realm. As I argued in chapter 4, it is under the Marwanids that al-Fuṣṭāṭ gained unprecedented authority in legal practices outside the town. From the very beginning of Marwanid rule come the first indications that people living in Upper Egypt petitioned Arab administrative officials. From around 80/700, our documentation overwhelmingly shows the involvement of the Arab governor, seated in al-Fuṣṭāṭ, in the settlement of disputes in the Egyptian countryside. In concord with developments in Egypt's civil administration, Marwanid policies preferred legal authority outside al-Fuṣṭāṭ to be in the hands of Arabs. Similarly, *qāḍīs*, with close ties to al-Fuṣṭāṭ, appear around 80/700 outside the Arab capital. At times at least, they were appointed to places where they already enjoyed social standing. Since *qāḍīs* were administrative officials who stood between the top of the province's administration and the local population, such locally acknowledged authority greatly served the central administration's cause.

Changes in society that were only indirectly related to the Marwanid reforms equally contributed to al-Fuṣṭāṭ's relationships with the rest of the

¹⁴ See p. 55.

province, among them the acknowledgement of Arab legal authorities outside the capital. The Marwanids' reorganization of the military, which has left very little traces in Egypt beyond the settlement of Arabs outside the main garrison towns (see chapters 3 and 4), indirectly stimulated contact between Arabs and indigenous Egyptians. Arabs entered the Egyptian countryside, in greater numbers than before, in search for new financial means. The resulting commercial and legal interaction, documented to have followed Arab legal practices, must have been among the prime reasons for non-Arab Egyptians to acknowledge legal practices outside the financial realm current among the Arabs. This, then, increased the demand for Arab jurisdiction outside al-Fuṣṭāṭ and must have stimulated the appointment of local *qāḍīs* or the petitioning of high administrative officials.

Related to these developments is al-Fuṣṭāṭ's attainment of a national and international commercial position comparable to, but not at the cost of, that of Alexandria. From the turn of the second/eighth century on, various types of sources record the existence of a strongly increased role of al-Fuṣṭāṭ in domestic and international trade. The Marwanid authorities had a hand in this, but much of their policies influenced the town's economic development indirectly at best. Their above-mentioned monetary reforms and their elaboration of al-Fuṣṭāṭ's commercial amenities, discussed in chapter 2, illustrate the Marwanid authorities' direct involvement in the town's economy. But the diffusion of Arabs into the Egyptian countryside and their involvement in trade, referred to in the preceding paragraph, created ties between al-Fuṣṭāṭ and its hinterland that previously had only existed on a much reduced scale before.

This thesis addressed al-Fuṣṭāṭ's development from four perspectives within a provincial and, to a lesser extent, imperial context. The coherent image that appeared from its four case studies testifies to the value of combining sources from different scholarly disciplines. But, needless to say, the topics addressed in the present thesis, in addition to modern scholarship on the early-Arab administration, do not cover all roles the town played in the province. Perhaps two of the most obvious aspects of the relationships between al-Fuṣṭāṭ and the rest

of Egypt that have not received due attention in this thesis are the town's influence over religious matters, whether Muslim or other, and the role al-Fuṣṭāṭ played in early-Arab scholarship. Future studies into such and other topics will doubtlessly add to our understanding of the complexity of the dynamics of the (capital) city-hinterland relationship.