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Introduction

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Empire Studies and other scholarly fields have greatly advanced our insights into the functioning of macro political structures and their ways of controlling vast geographical areas and populations. An important observation has been that (the threat of) physical violence and force, however important in specific instances, do not sufficiently explain the establishment and maintenance of long-term and stable political and social entities. Especially pre-modern authorities were only capable to coerce individuals into hierarchical structures and to oblige them to certain behaviours in a limited way and for a restricted period. Compelling *and* convincing or seducing together are needed to have individuals participate and obey successfully in society – in other words, these two mechanisms are two sides of the same coin reference for the whole first part of this paragraph? Of these two sides, exercising control and the implementation of power and hierarchical arrangements are realised through formal institutions and infrastructures, such as the law, army, administration, prisons and garrisons, but they can also be the result of informal pressures through economic and social instruments. Seduction takes place by establishing loyalty and social inclusion through official arrangements and informal networks, but is also achieved by cultural projects such as the building of monuments, and literary and scholarly activities at the central and local courts.

This volume explores the different ways in which control was established outside urban settlements in the late Antique and early Islamic world. From military movements to agricultural economic policy and settlement patterns; from religious architecture to debates amongst scholars, the papers in this volume focus on the different mechanisms authorities had at their disposal to achieve control and implement a power structure over the countryside but look also at how local actors operated within these mechanisms. This introduction will highlight four overarching themes and one methodological point that run throughout the volume.

Most chapters presented here highlight one specific element or mechanism through which rulers as well as their subjects were able to extend their power base in political-military, economic and cultural terms in a specific spatial and temporal context. This allows for an examination of the interaction between rulers and subjects and how power relations were established and the relation between formal and informal networks connecting different groups and initiatives in society both vertically and horizontally. Extending chronologically

from the late antique period into early Islamic history, as well as geographically from Spain into Arabia and nowadays Afghanistan, the volume explicitly aims to use comparative perspectives to understand how these dynamics played out in different periods and places.

Many of the cases described operated simultaneously at multiple actual and symbolic levels, combining formal and informal mechanisms and associations, and by appealing to different sentiments and groups at the same time. The yearly spring grazing (*murtabaʿ*) of horses and other riding animals belonging to the soldiers in the Arab army as discussed by Sobhi Bouderbala for example, although taking place in a limited geographical area, for a definite period and a specific purpose, also functioned symbolically because of its regular occurrence – the grazers returned every year – and its clear military connotations – it preceded the raiding season, strengthening the animals for a summer of battles – which transcended the grazing grounds, the province of Egypt and even the frontiers of the Muslim Empire. By demanding conversion to join the Muslim enterprise second/eighth-century Medinese scholars rhetorically appropriated rural spaces, but also expanded their presence in a real sense through the manifestation of adherents, thus creating formal and informal control mechanisms for inter-religious interaction as Luke Yarborough shows. Elif Keser-Kayaalp discusses how restrictions on the Syrian orthodox community imposed by the Byzantines, were lifted in the early Arab state resulting in the physical taking possession of the rural space through experiments with architecturally innovative styles in church buildings leading in turn to a greater symbolic and moral presence of the Syrian orthodox community in the countryside. Another example is offered by Harry Munt. Control over wells and the responsibility for the water supply systems in Medina was on the one hand a way to economic power by providing access to important sources of agricultural wealth, while at the same time possessing strong moral and religious prestige. Through the granting of the privilege to distribute the water in Medina the authorities privileged certain families and groups, while on the other hand competition could result in changes in local power constellations which were then confirmed by central authorities. In all, this volume reveals the multiple processes, top-down and bottom-up, in the establishment of economic, social, religious and political power structures in the countryside.

The volume is divided into four sections, the topic of which are also overarching themes that can be drawn between several contributions.

1 A Question of Sources

An important point made by this volume is how the combination of different genres and layers of sources leads to the formation of new historical narratives. Especially significant hereby is the multiple viewpoint thus created: various ruling authorities at each hierarchical level interacting with local entities communicating and negotiating up and down the power structures that held them in place.

In this way documentary and narrative sources are used complimentarily in the papers by Khaled Younes, Marie Legendre, Petra Sijpesteijn, Alain Delattre and Sobhi Bouderbala. While their work, concentrating on Egypt allows for the combination of papyri and narratives, other areas offer rich archaeological sources which, in combination with literary texts offer similar layered historical reconstructions, as shown in the contribution of James Howard-Johnson, Javier Martínez, Arezou Azad and Hugh Kennedy. This comes out well also in the contribution by Annliese Nef and Vivien Prigent where coins form the documentary record.

Documentary sources can in fact show great geographical variation even within one province as Gesa Schenke's contribution shows. Similarly, Marie-Odile Rousset and Marion Rivoal's detailed reconstruction of settlement patterns in northern Syria shows the diversity of agricultural activities and the adaptation to local resources depending on local environmental conditions. Agrarian landscape and hydraulic systems were set up by a strong power: city of Chalcis ad Belum, imperial domains or tribal territories.

2 Territoriality

Documents and other written sources also functioned themselves as a tool for control, recording, but also overseeing and directing movements of groups and individuals. Arab troops in Egypt received documents informing them what village they were to take provisions from, as Sobhi Bouderbala discusses, by which the central state extended its control over the movement of the soldiers. The fiscal authorities aimed at controlling the movement of people as well by providing documentary records of tax payments which could be shown upon request by the authorities. Alain Delattre presents safe-conducts and other documents recording the movement of individual tax-payers in a very limited area in Upper Egypt suggesting (the aftermath of) a period of unrest. Petra Sijpesteijn on the other hand discusses how the failure to pay taxes timely or to present proof of having done so could result in an – albeit temporarily – seizing

of movement all together through imprisonment. Orders for the arrest or punishment of transgressors enable us to reconstruct the channels and manners of written communication in this process.

Through the use of proxies and representatives the authorities' power extended also over areas where their physical presence was limited or even absent. Before Arab-Muslims moved into the Central-Asian city of Balkh, they exercised control over the area through military-administrative impositions as Arezou Azad and Hugh Kennedy discuss. The process of Islamicization, which had an impact long before conversion became a significant movement, is an important factor here as well as they show. Marie Legendre's discussion of caliphal properties in Egypt also shows how the ruling elite could extend very real control over remote provinces without being there. Khaled Younes infers from the presence of documents in the Egyptian countryside that mention the province's governors not that those were necessarily physically present in the different localities where they left a documentary trace, but rather that their symbolic presence ranged far beyond the capital Fustat.

Imposing control was naturally also achieved through the imposition of military structures, fortresses, towers, walls and the presence of troops, in the form of garrisons, guards and checkpoints. The safe-conducts, presented by Delattre, which were carried around in Upper-Egypt showing a very limited geographical horizon indicate that such checkpoints must, at times, have been rather frequent and omnipresent. As James Howard-Johnston shows, the survival of the Byzantine Anatolian hinterland was achieved through a careful central division of resources by the state. This enabled certain settlements to build sufficient defence systems against the Arab armies, while others, sometimes because they were sufficiently deeply located in Byzantine terrain, were left as they were. Also in Visigothic Spain, as Javier Martínez demonstrates in his paper, the fate of the state determined the degree to which urban centres remained viable. The difference being that in the Visigothic case local urban elites channelled resources and power to the cities and hinterland where they held properties through their involvement in the political centre, while in the Byzantine case, the state handed out resources directly to the cities.

Beyond military reinforcements, the built environment formed an important stage to represent the central power in a more symbolic manner. Elif Keser-Kayaalp shows the architectural experimentation in the Syrian Orthodox churches, illustrating the changed position of the Syrian orthodox community vis-à-vis the ruling powers in the early Muslim empire. The Arab authorities' presence was indirectly visible through the more prominent position of this Christian community in the countryside. The built structures that facilitated the agricultural exploitation of the Syrian countryside can be connected to the

administrative-political organisation in the area and related economic activities as Marion Rivoal and Marie-Odile Rousset discuss. When Sasanian political powers no longer organised the keep-up of the dams in Iraq, disastrous floods resulted which significantly helped the Arab conquering armies in their efforts as Peter Verkinderen shows. The responsibility of the construction of dams and water ways was also used around Medina to determine power relations between local and central players as discussed by Harry Munt.

The physical taking control of land and property for economic exploitation was another obvious way to impose direct control over the countryside. Regime change resulted, albeit most often not directly, in a redistribution of property creating a new land-holding elite. Similarly, the economic and social power that extended from landed properties were used to further political goals. In this sense, changes in agricultural property holding patterns indicate the formation of new power constellations. In Umayyad Medina, where the importance of having a foothold in the heartland of Islam was combined with economic interests, members of the ruling families competed for landed properties, even if they were themselves physically not present in Arabia as Harry Munt discusses. Economic and political motives also lay behind the changes in land ownership in Sasanian and Arab Iraq as Michele Compapiano discusses.

That the taking control of lands and property had repercussions in theoretical discussions and vice versa, comes out well in several papers in this volume. The hadiths that Luke Yarborough discusses limited non-Muslim participation in the *umma* by prohibiting non-Muslim-Muslim military interaction while setting the discussion in a rural context. Jessica Ehinger shows how Muslim theology supported political and economic moves to take control of new land. In other words these debates reflect a competition between the long arm of the urban ecclesiastical centres and the right to act independently amongst rural priests, or between city-based religious-legal scholars and individual believers residing in and outside the cities. Urban centres with their dominant religious institutions exercised of course also control in a very real sense into their rural hinterland drawing believers in for religious festivals and authorised ritual celebrations, offering sanctified support to rural religious centres and forces, although religious establishments in the countryside, especially monasteries, shrines and other holy sites could form a competing power as well.

3 Land Use and Resources

As is clear from the discussion about land ownership in the previous section, access to resources was a major concern in the countryside. Economic and

symbolic power offered parties opportunities to extend their position. By the same token, extending the privilege to access resources was a powerful tool to exercise control over individuals and groups. By offering rights of entry and property or access to the land and its resources, authorities and individuals could execute great direct power, build support and create loyalties.

The competition over (control of) access to such resources is discussed in different context, from the highest social layers for example in the contention between local land-holding elites and the Umayyad ruling family over estates around Medina as discussed by Harry Munt. The provincial governor negotiated with local tax collectors for the rights to calculate and impose, collect and check the fiscal income from land, by far the largest source of income in the pre-modern period as Khaled Younes argues. At the local level, such as that of lands belonging to Egyptian monasteries, the rivalry for access and control over agricultural resources comes out as Gesa Schenke shows by having only monks work those lands.

Taxation was one terrain where these different dynamics played out. The privilege to raise taxes on lands or activities was used to bind groups and individuals to the administration. At the same time, competition over fiscal income and debates about the share of the taxes raised on the land were to be forwarded through the different administrative layers from village headmen and representatives at the community level, to regional officials, district overseers, provincial governors and the heads of state or central courts continued. Discussion over the role of tax-collectors and other financial officials, as well as the rights and responsibilities of land-owners and heads of communities as shown in Michele Campopiano's contribution.

The intake of a share of the income raised on the land could be organised differently. Direct control through the appointment of government, "salaried," interchangeable officials could be combined with the use of inherited posts held by land-holders themselves. In some sources of the Abbasid period, all land was considered to belong to the Muslim state, with taxes being interpreted as rents paid on lands not in possession of those working it. Sasanian great landholders, as Michele Campopiano discusses, functioned as agents of the state, paying taxes as a form of rent. Such a construction is also considered to underlie landholding in early Muslim Egypt.[1] Conflicts could still arise over the division of surplus amongst the ruling elite as Khaled Younes shows in his discussion of competition between the two highest functions in the province: the governor

1 Gladys Frantz-Murphy, *Arabic Agricultural Leases and Tax Receipts from Egypt 148–427 AH/75 Agricultural Leases and Tax Receipts from Egypt 148–427 AH/756–1035 AD*, Vienna: Brüder Hollinek 2001.

and financial official in charge of taxation. Similarly, the large land-owners that arose in fifth–sixth-century Persia witnessed revolts due to a perception of an unfair economic distribution writes Michele Campopiano.

When ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–644) took control over the lands which had been abandoned by the Sasanians and taken over by Arab tribesmen at the time of the conquest, returning them to Persian owners, he was not interested in restoring the rights of a dispossessed minority. He was also not rewarding the demands of local power holders who enforced such a transfer. As Peter Verkinderen discusses, ʿUmar could in this way on the one hand reward local power bases while at the same time create a new elite. In other words, the giving out of land grants was used to establish a new local elite loyal to the (generous) new rulers. Whether these grants were permanent transfers of ownership or temporary rental contracts is not clear. Local investors could also gain access to lands by offering to develop them. Low tax-rates stimulated such investments in Egypt (*baqṭ*) and Persia (*ʿushr*). These "gifts" were thus not entirely unconditional, coming with the obligation of up-keep and development of the land, organising the tax-collection, possibly only for a limited period of time. In Umayyad Egypt, it is clear, these conditions were not unanimously considered an economic attractive proposition as the imposed responsibility to develop lands as a kind of civil obligation or corvée labour is recorded in documents.[2] When the Sasanian state stopped investing in the up-keep of Iraqi waterworks local land-lords only took over this responsibility in a limited way with disastrous results for the agricultural infrastructure in Mesopotamia as Peter Verkinderen discusses. Similarly, the granting of lands and privileges to churches and religious communities came with explicit or implicit conditions of loyalty and support as Elif Keser-Kayaalp shows.

The form that taxes were collected in, whether in coin or kind, allowed for speculation on the side of the tax-collectors and land-owners.[3] Harry Munt and Michele Campopiano show how land-owners were able to make a profit by keeping taxes paid in kind by their land-holders until prices rose or by trading the goods on distant markets which required large-scale cash investments. Similarly, the manner in which Arab troops were paid, via cash (i.e. stipends from taxes gathered centrally) distributions by the state, in the form of land-ownership as discussed by Michele Campopiano, or by giving soldiers the right

2 Federico Morelli, "Agri deserti (mawât), fuggitivi, fisco: una κλήρωσις in più in SPP VIII 1183," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 129 (2000), 167–178.

3 See also the discussion of this very important tool in the hands of land-owners and authorities in Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*: *Wealth, the Fall of Rome and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 A.D.* Princeton: Princeton University Press 2012, 13–14.

to collect their own salaries in the countryside as discussed by Sobhi Bouderbala shows how the dynamics between a kind and cash economy was exploited. The relation between these approaches changed with political and economic developments and was related to legal and theological debates. In many of the papers (see for example the contributions by Marie Legendre, Michele Campopiano, Harry Munt and Annliese Nef and Vivien Prigent) a direct relation between patterns of land ownership and political history is clear.

4 Local Rule and Networks

Control can be exercised in different ways, militarily as discussed in the papers of James Howard-Johnston and Sobhi Bouderbala, for Byzantine Anatolia and the Egyptian countryside respectively, by police forces and punitive institutions as presented by Petra Sijpesteijn and through the use of checkpoints as shown by Alain Delattre. Pressure on how the rural landscape should be organised could also be imposed in theological and legal debates. Prophetic hadiths were used by Medinan scholars and rulers who wanted to demarcate clearer between Muslims and non-Muslims as Luke Yarbrough shows. Jessica Ehinger provides insights into the moral considerations of rulers and scholars in the early Muslim empire.

Social and political unrest could result in increased control, as in the case of Alain Delattre's very localised safe-conducts, but also allow for greater freedom. The period between the Arab conquest of Syria and the consolidation of Arab power in the ninth century saw little central control over (Syrian orthodox) churches and Christian communities allowing them much liberty in building and other activities which only seized when Arab central power was able and willing to impose control again as Elif Keser-Kayaalp shows. At the same time, periods of conquest and regime change obviously effected the ambitions and means of control available. Different concerns – safety of goods and people, political survival, the quick and 'easy' extraction of money in the form of tribute or taxes to finance the military efforts – prevailed.

The responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of public services, the investment in public works, especially those concerning agricultural activities – drainage of swamps, building of dams and irrigation works – was sometimes organised and paid out of central funds, sometimes it fell under the responsibility of local land-lords. The disastrous case of the failing Sasanian canal system when the authorities stopped organising and paying for its upkeep has already been discussed as has the (imposed) responsibility of Egyptian and Iraqi land-holders to invest in the agricultural infrastructure of their lands. On

the other hand, the control over water providing services could be considered very prestigious and was fiercely fought over as in the case of the Medinese wells and other ways of access to water as Harry Munt shows. That Medina formed a special case when it comes to the access of landed property and everything that is associated with comes also out clearly in the legal and theological debates presented by Luke Yarbrough.

Being able to control what happened in and on the land was another important consideration as this was of vital concern for security and economic reasons. Access to resources was the major motive for taking and keeping control of the land. The prestige associated with land ownership and possession was another obvious purpose for the additional power it offered. The degree to which the central and local authorities were able to determine and direct what happened in the countryside thus added in very real terms to their status but also functioned to build legitimisation for their rule. This applied to political authorities such as the caliph and emperor and his direct constituency, the provincial governor and local courts, but also to religious communities and local administrators. The paper of Luke Yarbrough shows that control over religious communities was as hotly debated as were the relative rights of local and central political-economic powers. Negotiating rights and responsibilities between groups, institutions and individuals were dynamic and interrelated processes whereby the taking and granting of privileges were not necessarily competing forces, but rather reflected a fluctuating dynamic on the axe of direct and indirect control, seduction and imposition, conviction and force, centralisation and decentralisation between the authorities and their dependents. This volume aims to show some of these dynamics at play in the late antique and early Muslim Mediterranean and Near East.

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