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Protective interventions by local elites in early Islamic Egypt

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Protective Interventions by Local Elites in the Countryside of Early Islamic Egypt

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Table of contents

List of Figures and tables	1
Abbreviations	1
Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	7
<i>Topic</i>	7
<i>Research questions</i>	9
<i>Embedding Conquest</i>	10
<i>Structure of the dissertation</i>	11
Chapter 1: Context and Methodology	15
1.1 <i>Introduction: Protection</i>	15
1.1.1 <i>Jeremias' protection letter</i>	15
1.1.2 <i>Protection in this dissertation</i>	17
1.1.3 <i>Backgrounds of the protection letter mechanism</i>	19
1.2 <i>The administration of Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries: immediate changes and gradual developments</i>	33
1.2.2 <i>Functions and personnel of the administration</i>	36
1.2.3 <i>Multilingual background of documentary production</i>	39
1.3 <i>"Local elites"</i>	45
1.3.1 <i>Clarification of the terms "elites", "local elites", "rural elites"</i>	45
1.3.2 <i>Rural elites: who appears in the corpus?</i>	49
1.4 <i>Coptic protection letters, a documentary source</i>	51
1.4.1 <i>Uneven distribution of the documentation</i>	52
1.4.2 <i>Problem of dating documents</i>	53
1.4.3 <i>Single documents, archives and dossiers</i>	54
1.4.4 <i>The "unmediatedness" of documentary papyri</i>	55
1.5 <i>My approach, what is new?</i>	56
1.5.1 <i>The existing research on the Coptic protection letters</i>	57
1.5.2 <i>Categorization and embeddedness</i>	59
1.5.3 <i>Functions of the protection letters in society</i>	61
1.5.4 <i>Solidarity, reciprocity, and patronage</i>	62
1.5.5 <i>Place of the rural elites in the empire</i>	65
Chapter 2: The Coptic Protection Letters: Overview of the Corpus	69
2.1 <i>History of editions and categorizations</i>	69

2.1.1 Schiller.....	69
2.1.2 Till.....	69
2.1.3 Delattre.....	71
2.1.4 Hasitzka: <i>SB Kopt. V</i>	72
2.2 <i>Core corpus: Coptic protection letters</i>	73
2.2.1. The term “Coptic protection letter”.....	74
2.2.2 Categorization.....	74
2.3 <i>Dating, provenance, and writing support of the Coptic protection letters</i>	75
2.3.1 Where.....	75
2.3.2 When.....	79
2.3.2 Writing support.....	83
2.4 <i>Terms used in the descriptions and analyses</i>	84
2.4.1 Instruction clause.....	84
2.4.2 Promise clause.....	85
2.4.3 Limitation clause.....	85
2.4.4 Exception clause.....	86
2.4.5 Protectee.....	87
2.4.6 Protector.....	89
2.4.7 Intermediary.....	90
Chapter 3: Patterns of Protection	93
3.1 <i>The protection letters as recognizable instruments of protection</i>	94
3.1.1 <i>The core formulas</i>	94
3.1.2 <i>Protective documents: expressions of protection</i>	96
3.2 <i>Procedures of protection</i>	102
3.2.1 <i>Presence of intermediaries</i>	104
3.2.2 <i>Various roles of intermediaries</i>	105
3.2.3 <i>Oral interactions as moments of negotiation</i>	107
3.2.4 <i>Logistics of the protection letter procedure</i>	108
3.2.5 <i>The protection letters between village and monastic contexts</i>	110
3.3 <i>Variability and uniformity</i>	114
3.3.1 <i>Patterns in the promises? The protection letters written by the village scribes of Djeme.</i>	114
3.3.2 <i>Specific references in the protection letters</i>	120
3.3.3 <i>The protection letter mechanism as an institution of village life</i>	124
Chapter 4: Problems Solved	129
4.1 <i>Taxation</i>	131

4.1.1	<i>Taxation in the Coptic protection letters</i>	132
4.1.2	<i>The pressure of taxation in the documents from Early Islamic Egypt</i>	141
4.1.3	<i>The place of Coptic protection letters as instruments to solve fiscal problems</i>	147
4.2	<i>Travel and fugitives</i>	149
4.2.1	<i>Travel in the Coptic protection letters</i>	149
4.2.2	<i>Problems and protection of travel in Early Islamic Egypt</i>	152
4.2.3	<i>How do the Coptic protection letters relate to the documents regulating travel?</i>	159
4.3	<i>Private legal issues</i>	174
4.3.1	<i>Private legal issues in the Coptic protection letters</i>	174
4.3.2	<i>Private legal issues: Petitions to the governor</i>	177
4.3.3	<i>Problem-solving rather than crime and punishment</i>	179
4.4	<i>Release of prisoners</i>	179
4.4.1	<i>Release of arrestees: requests, orders, guarantees</i>	179
4.4.2	<i>Release of prisoners: Guarantees and Coptic protection letters</i>	182
Chapter 5: The Integrated System: From Fustat to Djeme – and back	185
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	185
5.1.1	<i>Structure and arguments of the chapter</i>	185
5.1.2	<i>Methodological remarks</i>	187
5.2	<i>Translating orders from above</i>	190
5.2.1	<i>Orders arriving at the local elites</i>	190
5.2.2	<i>Pagarchy level: The local elites transmitting policies and demands</i>	195
5.3	<i>The integrated system: village elites and their documents and mechanisms in the administration</i>	203
5.3.1	<i>Case study 1: The involvement of the local elites in travel permit procedures</i>	203
5.3.2	<i>Case study 2: Protection letters beyond the village</i>	208
5.4	<i>Local elites and their interests between Djeme and Fustat (through the lens of the protection letters)</i>	214
5.4.1	<i>Activating social relationships in the village</i>	216
5.4.2	<i>The protectors as threat</i>	218
5.4.3	<i>Reciprocity</i>	220
5.4.4	<i>Dependency networks</i>	225
5.4.5	<i>Stakeholders in empire</i>	226
Conclusion	231
<i>What did each chapter accomplish?</i>		231
<i>Answers to my research questions</i>		233
<i>The timeframe of the Coptic protection letter mechanism</i>		237

Bibliography	241
Appendix: Overview of the documents in the corpus of Coptic protection letters	259
Summary	309
Curriculum Vitae	313

List of Figures and Tables

<i>Figure 1: Coptic protection letter: O.Bachit o. Nr., Deir-el Bachit, Theban area, ceramic shard. © Koptische Ostraka Online, München, Münster 2011-2014.</i>	17
<i>Figure 2: Map of the Theban region (M. Wachtal, © E. R. O’Connell). From: O’Connell Ruffini, Social Networks of late Antique Western Thebes.</i>	78
<i>Figure 3: Map of sites in Western Thebes known to have been reused in Late Antiquity (M. Wachtal, © E. R. O’Connell). From: O’Connell Ruffini, Social Networks of late Antique Western Thebes.</i>	79
Table 1: Appendix: Overview of the corpus of Coptic protection letters.....	259-306

Abbreviations

Coptic and Greek documents are cited according to the “Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca, and Tablets”, available online at <http://papyri.info/docs/checklist>.

Arabic documents are cited according to “The Checklist of Arabic Documents”, available online at <http://www.naher-osten.lmu.de/isapchecklist>.

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Introduction

Topic

The setting for the discussions in this dissertation is Egypt, in the seventh and eighth centuries CE, with a focus on the first hundred years after the Arab conquest in 641. During that time, the administration of the province went through some immediate and some gradual changes, including changes in the administrative personnel. Immediately the highest functions of the provincial administration in the capital were mostly filled by Arab-Muslims, while in the countryside, among the administrators of the dozens of districts, populated by towns and villages, Arabic names first appear around the turn of the seventh century. Similarly, an immediate change after the conquest was the introduction of Arabic as a language of administration and communication with the population. Together with Greek, which had been used for administrative purposes since the conquest by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE, Arabic became the language of the highest levels of the administration. Coptic, on the other hand, developed as a language of administration on the lower levels of the administration during the first century after the conquest. ensemble combination collection

This period is quite richly documented in terms of administrative practices in the province, which allows us to follow the developments sketched above. The Arabic, Greek, and Coptic documentary papyri available to us from this period were produced and kept in offices at different levels of the administration. Several archives of administrators were found, which included papers signed by the governor in Fustat, as well as those signed by village authorities. Monasteries also provide papers which show their involvement in the administration of the province. Documents found in villages do not only tell us about the private goings on of the village inhabitants, their private legal issues, testaments, sales, and debts, but also about their engagement with the provincial administration, e.g. in the form of tax-receipts. The context of the discussions in this dissertation is the village context, but as part of a broader rural context in which the villages are connected to monastic settlements and other villages around them, as well as to the capital of their district (*metropolis*), but eventually also to the provincial administration and government, and ultimately larger governmental structures, like the Early Islamic empire, as a whole.

The focus of this dissertation is a specific administrative, legal, and social village mechanism, with both written and oral components, which was in the hands of the local

rural elites. I argue that it is a bottom-up development which was not directed, regulated or installed by the administration, but at the same time contributed to the success of the provincial administrative system. It was a mechanism which affected both the local economy and social networks, and the provincial (fiscal) administration, and which shows the rural elites shaping fiscal practice. The mechanism is a testimony of a local response to tax evasion as well as a problem-solving instrument for resolving private conflicts in the village. This mechanism centers around the production and circulation of a type of document, written in Coptic: Coptic protection letter.

The Coptic protection letters were legal documents used in villages in Byzantine and early Islamic Egypt, in the seventh and eighth century, to facilitate the return of people stranded away from home. When someone had left home due to tax evasion,¹ or because of an unresolved private legal conflict, a return could mean being arrested, prosecuted, or facing any kind of aggression. Protection letters, issued by local elites, usually village heads or monastic leaders, provided a promise of amnesty, so that the holder of the letter could return home without facing a penalty. The Coptic protection letters, therefore, were documents which mitigated legal, social, and economic problems within villages (and monasteries). I consider them here as instruments of a mechanism, the Coptic protection letter mechanism (see below), which served to unblock impasses in rural society, and which involved documents and letters, and various actors in society. At the same time, many protection letters were also connected to fiscal practice, which shows how intimately the local Coptic protection letter mechanism was related to the provincial administration of Egypt. The protection letters, therefore, provide a point of entry to our understanding of the ways in which problems of flight, tax evasion and private legal issues, could be solved within villages in Late Antique and Early Islamic Egypt, and how this was connected to broader administrative structures. In other words, they lay bare relationships and networks in the countryside along which documents of protection could travel. At the same time, they also provide a point of entry to our understanding of the provincial administration, and the role played therein by the local elites and the documents which they produced.

While the Coptic protection letters as documents form the starting point of this dissertation, the people who are involved in the Coptic protection letters play an equally

¹ I use "tax evasion" to denote the active non-payment of taxes, whether someone was unwilling or unable to pay them.

important part in the discussions in the Chapters. The local elites, active in villages and monasteries in the countryside, take up the central space. These local elites issue the protection letters, or are asked to do so, or intervene in a different way for someone in need of a protection letter. They provide the protection letter itself, as well as the protection offered by the document, but are also those who can inflict the punishments from which protection is sought with the document. Different types of village officials, as well as monastic authorities, operate in the protection letter mechanism. Their authority to do so came from their position as intermediary between local communities and the central provincial government. These local elites had the authority to settle local disputes, and were generally responsible for running the villages and monasteries, including any landed property. Moreover, they often had responsibilities in fiscal practice, i.e. to assign tax burden, to collect taxes and forward them to the capital. These various functions of the local rural elites gave them considerable power over the local communities, both to abuse and to protect (on local elites see section 1.3).

Research questions

This dissertation aims to examine the mechanism of the Coptic protection letters and how this highlights the role of the local elites early Islamic Egypt. The Coptic protection letters will be questioned in order to garner information on social cohesion, interaction with the state, the self-regulation of the local communities and the role played by the local elites therein. This objective consists of three major research issues:

1. Can the Coptic protection letter be considered an institution of village life? In other words, was a Coptic protection letter a result of a routine, predictable and regulated, or rather an ad-hoc procedure? Can we identify patterns in their production (including their language) and circulation? This issue is the focus of Chapter 3.
2. What was the role and place of the Coptic protection letters in their contemporary documentary landscape, i.e. compared to (contemporary) Greek, Arabic, and Coptic documents with seemingly similar functions? This issue is the focus of Chapter 4.
3. What can the Coptic protection letters tell us about the role of local elites in Early Islamic Egypt, both as wielders of power in their own communities and as members of an administrative system in service of an Arab-Muslim provincial government? How does the study of Coptic protection letters help us understand that role? This issue is the focus of Chapter 5.

Embedding Conquest

This dissertation was written in the context of the ERC Consolidator project “Embedding Conquest. Naturalising Muslim Rule in the Early Islamic Empire”, led by Prof. Dr. Petra Sijpesteijn. The project aims at understanding the success of the Early Islamic Empire, with marked attention to documentary sources from various provinces as sources of history. Moreover, the project examines the history of the empire and its institutions through the lens of social relationships and the use of language to express such social relationships. While the focus on documentary sources, social relationships and language use are important methodological pillars of the project, one of the main research goals within the project is a better understanding of the role of local elites within the empire, and how they contributed to its success. The project started from the assumption that local elites formed an important link between the local population in which they carried a certain authority, and the central authority of the province or empire, and aimed to examine the variety of relationships between local elites and central authorities in different provinces.

This dissertation brings together many of the methodological and thematic aspects of the Embedding Conquest project, and contributes especially to its research goal related to local elites in the provinces. Through the lens of a particular type of document in use in seventh and eighth century Egypt, the Coptic protection letter, it examines the local elites in the social fabric of their own communities and their relationship with the state and its demands. A strong emphasis is placed on the patterns of language use in the documents. The language of the documents allows us to understand their importance and functions within the communities, as well as the social relationships which they activated. This local mechanism was one way in which the local elites, village and monastic authorities, exercised power within their own communities, solved problems of legal, fiscal, economic, and social nature, and navigated their position in the fiscal administration. The dissertation shows how the success of the early Islamic Empire was supported by Egyptian village and monastic elites participating in the protection letter mechanism and allowing tax evaders and other wayward absent community members a safe return to their homes. The Coptic protection letters did not belong to the sphere of the central administration, and yet, they

contributed to the security of the tax revenue, and the fiscal and economic health of the province, and as such to the success of the Early Islamic Empire.²

Structure of the dissertation

Chapter 1 serves as an introductory chapter, providing context for the analyses in the other chapters and addressing some methodological issues. I discuss the context in which the protection letter mechanism operated. The protection letters have connections to both Roman Byzantine legal mechanisms and are akin to Islamic legal concepts. The chapter gives the background of the consequences of the Arab-Muslim conquests of Egypt in the mid-seventh century, including a discussion of Coptic as an administrative language. A section is devoted to the meaning of “elites” in this dissertation, as the local, rural elites of Early Islamic Egypt are the protagonists of my analyses. After that I examine some of the opportunities and pitfalls of studying papyri. In the last section of Chapter 1 I discuss what is new about my approach to the protection letters.

Chapter 2 gives a detailed overview of the corpus that is central to this dissertation, the Coptic protection letters. I give an overview of the main studies and editions of Coptic protection letters which also provide a categorization of subgroups of Coptic protection letters. I also discuss dating and provenance of the corpus, as well as related methodological issues. The last part of the chapter explains terms that I use throughout the dissertation for certain elements of format and content of the protection letters.

Chapter 3 examines patterns in the Coptic protection letter mechanism: how standardized or uniform were the documents and the procedure to issue or obtain a protection letter? To that end, I first study the language of the documents, determining the key formulaic elements of the protection letters, identifying the various ways in which the documents express protection, and examining the uniform and the specific in the documents. I also compare a particular subset of the corpus, i.e. the protection letters penned and signed by village scribes of the village of Djeme. The second part of the chapter examines the procedural aspects of the protection letter mechanism: how and by whom were they circulated?

² Reza Huseini’s PhD research within the Embedding Conquest project has shown the local elites of Bactria in a similar role as small but important pieces within the administration, between the local population and the government: “Framing the conquests: Bactrian local rulers and Arab Muslim domination of Bactria 31-128/651-748”.

Chapter 4 delves more deeply into the content of the protection letters. It discusses 4 themes or societal areas and their relationship to the Coptic protection letters: taxation, travel, private legal issues, and the release of prisoners. For each area, I firstly discuss how these issues come up in the Coptic protection letters, and secondly how they come up in other, contemporary documents. The third element of the analysis is then a comparison: what was the specific role of Coptic protection letters when it came to solving those problems, compared to other documents with similar functions?

Chapter 5 looks at the Coptic protection letters and the local elites producing them in the context of Egypt as a caliphal province, between the village and the provincial capital. The chapter starts with orders from the capital and how they were transmitted, translated, and adapted by local elites in the countryside. The chapter moves on to argue that the local elites were connected to administrative processes and institutions beyond their own village context, through two case studies on Coptic protection letters. The last part of the chapter examines the interests of the local elites in their interventions through the protection letter mechanism. These interests are related to the relationships of the local elites in the village and in the fiscal administration of the province.

Chapter 1: Context and Methodology

1.1 Introduction: Protection

1.1.1 Jeremias' protection letter

In 725, in a village called Djeme, nearby modern day Luxor, a scribe named Aristophanes wrote this text in Coptic on a shard of pottery:

*“From Georgios and Aron, village headmen, they write to Jeremias, son of Basileios and his children: here is the promise by God (logos mpnoute) for you. Come to your house and appear, and we will not do any harm to you because you fled, nor will we prosecute you because of this instalment, nor your children, except for half a gold coin. So you will not doubt, we drew up this logos (promise, protection letter) and we sign it. Phaophi 6, indiction year 10. † Aristophanes, I wrote”.*³

This pot sherd featured a so-called “protection letter” for Jeremias and his children, who remain anonymous. It was signed by the headmen of the village of Djeme, Georgios and Aron. By the power of this letter, Jeremias and his children, who apparently had fled from the village, were allowed to return home without facing prosecution by the village heads, although they still had to pay half a gold coin of tax payment. One can imagine that this letter would have made a big difference in the life of Jeremias and his children: the fiscal references in the text make it likely that they had fled because Jeremias had defaulted on his tax payment and feared the legal consequences. With the document in hand, he had a promise of at least some reprieve: seemingly only partial payment was needed at this time, and Jeremias and his family would be able to live in their home. This document calls itself a *logos (mpnoute)*, a “word” or promise given while invoking God, but in the scholarly literature this type of document has come to be known as a protection letter.⁴ The protection letter for Jeremias and his children is one of the protection documents which form the core of this dissertation.⁵ The image in Figure 1 below shows another example of such a

³ *SB Kopt.* III 1368± + παρ γεωργιος υ αρων μεριζζ [...] | πευςζαι νιερημιας νβασιλειος | μη νεψωρηε χε εις πλο^ρ μη|νουτε ντοοτκ ντοκ νγει εζογ|ν επεκνη νγουωνε εβολ | χε ννενηρ πεθουγ | νακ χε ακρωτ ουδε | νενπαραγε μμοκ ζι | πειεζαгин μη νεκωη|ρε νσα ουπηωε | νζολοκ χε νη|εκαμφβαλε αν|σμη πειλο^ρ αγω | τνστοι^χ εροχ | φλωφι ε ι^α ι | Αριστοφ | εγραψα.

⁴ The formulary of the documents is analyzed in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁵ Chapter 2 gives a detailed overview of this core corpus of Coptic protection letters.

protection letter (*O.Bachit o. Nr.*), very similar to Jeremias' document. In this chapter I discuss broader issues of context and methodology, but I will use Jeremias' protection letter as a reference point, linking the various aspects of my discussion to this concrete example. This way, Jeremias' protection letter anchors my contextual and methodological remarks to the focus point of this dissertation: the protection letters and their actors. I will discuss the following points: the concept of protection offered by this document (1.1.2); the document's historical and legal backgrounds, both Roman and Islamic (1.1.3); the provincial administrative system Jeremias' protection letter fits in (1.2. 1.2.2), including the use of Coptic, the language of the protection letters, in that administrative system (1.2.3); the Georgios and Aron, the village headmen issuing Jeremias' protection letter and their status as "local elites" (1.3); the challenges which come with using Jeremias' protection letter as a historical source (1.4); my approach to the document, compared to existing scholarship (1.5); how I categorize the document, and which functions I believe it had in its context.

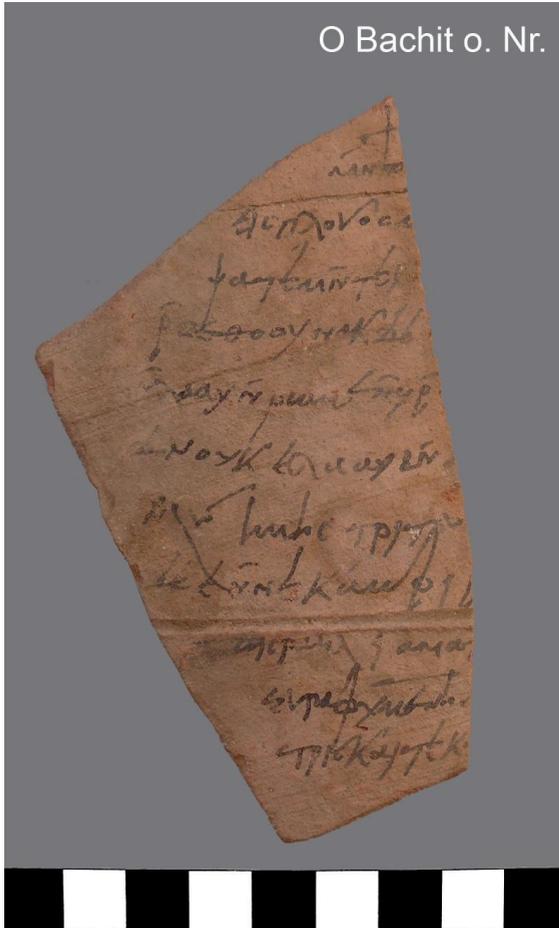


Figure 1: Coptic protection letter : O.Bachit o. Nr., Deir-el Bachit, Theban area. © Koptische Ostraka Online, München, Münster 2011-2014.

1.1.2 Protection in this dissertation

While no words related to “protection” are used in Jeremias’ protection letter, the document states that he will not be harmed or prosecuted. While “harm” is a rather general and vague term, the threat of prosecution is more specific.. The letter explicitly protected Jeremias from prosecution related to his tax evasion.

Generally, protection allows one to “avoid a threat or danger to one’s property, health or life”.⁶ Protection has an important social aspect, as it is an expression of social

⁶ Hayes and Scheerlinck, “Introduction,” 4.

relationships of reciprocity (see sections 1.5.3 and 1.5.4). Protection mechanisms created or maintained an asymmetric but often interdependent social relationship between the protector and the protectee.

I consider protection at three levels: the act of protection, the mechanism of protection, and the system of protection. The act of protection is an action: e.g. an offer or request for protection, or as in Jeremias' case, the issuance of a Coptic protection letter. The mechanism of protection involves procedure, written and oral interactions, and acts of protection from various individuals or groups in society. The Coptic protection letters are the instruments used in a protection mechanism: the Coptic protection letter mechanism. The system of protection involves the whole range of integrated protection mechanisms in the Early Islamic Empire.

While I focus on the Coptic protection letter mechanism in this dissertation, I also discuss other protection mechanisms. The various protection mechanisms discussed in this dissertation are linked to the administration of a village as well as to the administration of an imperial province. The relationships examined here are therefore often those between – in a general sense – ruler and ruled: e.g. between rural authorities in charge of local taxation and the tax payers,, but also between the higher provincial administrators and the tax payers, or ultimately between the caliph and the inhabitants of his territories. In section 1.1.3.2 I briefly discuss protection mechanisms between ruler and ruled in the Islamic Empire, including their shared characteristics with the Coptic protection letter mechanism of the Egyptian villages. Many protection mechanisms operated in the system of protection in early Islamic Egypt and in the empire generally, and the Coptic protection letter mechanism was just one mechanism.⁷

The Coptic protection letter mechanism is a protection mechanism in which the rural clerical or non-clerical authorities interceded for someone apparently in trouble who had left their home, and promising (partial) amnesty or some other protection when the latter returns home. I consider the Coptic protection letters as the instruments of this mechanism, while acts of protection in this mechanism are e.g. the issuing, requesting, forwarding, respecting such a protection letter, or negotiating the contents thereof. The context of this Coptic protection letter mechanism: the villages, monasteries, and monastic settlements making up

⁷ Chapter 4 compares the Coptic protection letters to documents used in other contemporary protection mechanisms.

the countryside of Egypt, especially those of the Theban region (section 2.3.1). The timeframe for this Coptic protection letter mechanism most probably starts in the first half of the seventh century and ends somewhere in the eighth century, possibly the 9th, with a marked spike in the evidence for the first half of the eighth century (see section 2.3.2). The term “protection letter” is a literal translation of the German term *Schutzbrief*, the term by which documents like Jeremias’ letter were designated in the most influential early study dedicated to them, Walter C. Till’s *Koptische Schutzbriefe*.⁸ This term – and its translations – is still the term mainly used in the literature for these documents. I use the term “protection letter” in this dissertation, as well as the emic term *logos (mpnoute)*, which is how the documentary sources themselves identify the protection letters.⁹ While I will question the nature of the protection offered, I do consider the Coptic protection letters instruments of a protection mechanism, i.e., the protection letter mechanism, both in the specific sense as well as in the general sense stated above. Jeremias was protected against the threat of harm from Georgios and Aron, but through a specific mechanism, that of the Coptic protection letter. The next section considers other protection mechanisms that operated in the background of the Coptic protection letter mechanism.

1.1.3 Backgrounds of the protection letter mechanism

The protection letter mechanism did not exist in a vacuum, and the background against which it operated was a rich tapestry of different political and legal systems, traditions, and practices. The four named actors in Jeremias’ protection letter: Jeremias, Georgios, Aron, and Aristophanes, as we understand from their non-Arabic names, were part of the at that moment still majority Christian population of Egypt. Egypt had been a province of the Islamic Empire for about 80 years in 725, when Jeremias’ protection letter was written, but it had been territory of the Roman empire for over six centuries, during which it had been Christian for three centuries.¹⁰ Jeremias and his peers were subjects of the head of the Islamic Empire, the Umayyad caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (r. 724 - 743), who ruled his territories from his imperial seat in Damascus. This section discusses relevant protection mechanisms tied to the two main facets of that background. First, the Coptic protection letter mechanism can be linked to late Roman law related to asylum practice in Egypt. Second,

⁸ Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe”. See sections 1.5.1 and 2.1.2.

⁹ On the meaning of λογος μπισουγτε (*logos mpnoute*), see section 2.1.2.

¹⁰ From 619 to 629 Egypt was part of the Sassanian Empire.

the protection letter mechanism continued and flourished in the first centuries of Egypt as a province of the caliphate. Therefore, certain concepts from Islamic law related to protection and the relationship between ruler and ruled, and how we see those concepts in practice in the province, form part of the background against which the Coptic protection letter mechanism continued to operate.

*1.1.3.1 Late Roman law: the *logoi asylias**

The Coptic protection letters were first studied for their value for legal history, and as such their possible link with late antique legal practice has been discussed in a number of publications.¹¹ Specifically, the discussion centers around the possible connection between the Coptic protection letters and the so-called *logoi asylias* (lit. word of asylum), an asylum mechanism known from late antique legal texts. I will give a brief overview of the discussion and state my opinion.

The *logoi asylias*, also simply called *logoi* in the sources, are mentioned first in legislation from the first half of the sixth century, namely several Edicts and Novellae of the Roman emperor Justinian (d. 565).¹² The *logoi (asylias)* were instruments of a protection mechanism which allowed people who had found asylum in, e.g., a church, to leave their place of asylum, e.g. to pay their taxes, for a limited period (30 days) without losing their immunity. They were issued by high-level civil administrators of the province, but also by bishops. In practice they were also issued by lower-ranking officials and clerical or monastic authorities, as is made clear by the Justinian texts which contain many restrictions to the use of *logoi (asylias)*, e.g. on who was allowed to issue them, and in which cases. The laws discouraged the issuance of *logoi (asylias)*, especially by lower officials in the countryside, and stipulated that they would be liable for any tax deficit that might occur because of the *logos (asylias)*. The legislation was especially strict in the case of tax defaulters. The emperor seems to have wanted to diminish the use of this particular protection mechanism as it was stemming the flow of revenue to the treasury.

There are several aspects of the *logos (asylias)* mechanism which are similar to the Coptic protection letter mechanism, and scholars have argued for a strong link between the two mechanisms or even have considered the Coptic protection letters as Coptic versions of

¹¹ Schiller, “Coptic λογος μνηογτε documents”; Böhlig and Böhlig, “Einige Bemerkungen”; Steinwenter, “Koptischen Schutzbriefen”; More recently, Palme, “Asyl”.

¹² Manfredini, “Taluni Aspetti”.

the Greek *logoi asylias*.¹³ Both instruments are called a *logos*, and seem to have functioned on the basis of someone giving someone else their “word”, a promise, although *logos asylias* has also been interpreted as “letter of asylum” rather than “word/promise of asylum”.¹⁴ Both instruments give the holder a certain immunity, and both instruments allow the holder to move away from their current place of residence, with immunity. They are both mechanisms that protect people who have left their home. In case of the *logoi (asylias)*, they left to find refuge in an official place of asylum, e.g. a church. The Coptic protection letters do not tell us where the person who needs the document is. Jeremias’ protection letter cited at the beginning of the chapter is an excellent example of this. We know Jeremias had fled his home, presumably with his children, but the document does not identify where Jeremias was when he received his protection letter. However, in some cases, it seems that the person in need of a protection letter had sought refuge with local monastic or clerical authorities, which is a similarity between the *logoi asylias* and the *logoi mpnoute* or Coptic protection letters.¹⁵

While these two protection mechanisms have considerable overlap, Liebesny and Till also pointed to three main differences between the Greek *logoi (asylias)* and the Coptic *logoi (mpnoute)*. First, while *logoi asylias* are valid for a certain amount of time (the legal literature mentions 30 days), none of the Coptic protection letters, like Jeremias’ letter, contains a similar time limit.¹⁶ Second, some Coptic protection letters might not have been issued by officials or clerical or monastic authorities, but rather by private individuals, which is never the case for the *logoi (asylias)*.¹⁷ Third, while the *logoi (asylias)* seem to be providing a general protection against molestation for the holder, only a minority of the Coptic protection letters seem to provide such general protection: most of the Coptic

¹³ Schiller, “Coptic λογος μνηογτε documents”; Steinwenter, “Koptischen Schutzbriefen”; Böhlig and Böhlig, “Einige Bemerkungen”. Palme, “Asyl” and Bagnall and Palme, “Franks” argue, based on Steinwenter’s work, that the Coptic protection letters can be seen as a Coptic form of *logoi asylias*. Schiller, Böhlig and Böhlig, as well as Woess, *Asylwesen*, trace the origin of the Coptic protection letters even further to the *pisteis*, Greek documents used in the Hellenistic period in Egypt. The *pisteis* were safe conducts providing general protection for a specific amount of time, to someone outside their place of asylum. On *pisteis*, see Schäfer, “Ptolemäischen Pisteis”.

¹⁴ Manfredini, “Taluni Aspetti”.

¹⁵ E.g., *O.CrumVC* 75. See section 3.2.5.

¹⁶ In some cases the Coptic protection letter seem to pertain to a particular (tax) year, see sections 2.4.3 and 4.1.1.1.3. The travel permits issued by state authorities were valid for a certain amount of months, on those see sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

¹⁷ Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe,” 129. On this issue, see section 4.3.1.

protection letters specifically protect the holder against different types of molestation by the party issuing the document.¹⁸ This is clear in Jeremias' protection letter: the village officials promise that they themselves will not harm or prosecute Jeremias, but do not promise protection against harm inflicted by anyone else. To these differences I want to add a fourth element, namely that the majority of the Coptic protection letters cannot be linked to asylum, as they do not contain any references to asylum practices. Exceptions to this rule are the letters implicating that the prospective holder of the protection letter had sought refuge with a clerical or monastic authority, but the majority of the Coptic protection letters does not mention asylum practices. As far as we understand from Justinian's texts, the *logoi asylias* had a very specific function, to allow someone who had found asylum to leave that place of asylum for a limited time period, with immunity. The function of the Coptic protection letters was more variegated, as I will discuss at length in Chapter 4. These points already indicate differences between the two mechanisms and how they operated, but I believe there is a more important reason to be cautious in linking the two mechanisms, namely the lack of documentary evidence for the *logoi asylias*.

There are no edited documents which explicitly identify themselves as or mention a *logos asylias*. Therefore we cannot make an effective comparison with the Coptic protection letters and their formulary which we see appear in the first half of the seventh century. Two publications cite two Greek documents which are requesting a *logos*, without qualifier.¹⁹ The authors interpret these letters as requests for a *logos asylias*. However, neither request explicitly qualifies the *logos* as a *logos asylias*, and neither request explicitly connects to asylum practices.²⁰ *Logos* could mean a written or oral promise or assurance generally, and there is evidence that a *logos* could mean a written or oral promise or assurance, with a different function than what we expect from a *logos asylias* or *logos mpnoute*.²¹ Even in one of the texts cited as evidence for the *logoi asylias* by Palme, a second *logos* is mentioned. From the content of the letter we understand that this second *logos* is not a *logos asylias* but

¹⁸ There are Coptic protection letters which include such a general promise of protection, see section 3.1.2 on the various phrases expressing protection in the Coptic protection letters. This is also an argument against tracing the origins of the Coptic protection letter and *logoi asylias* mechanism to the Hellenistic *pisteis*, which offer a similar general protection.

¹⁹ P.Oxy XVI 1944 and P.Vindob. G 14307, cited in Palme, "Asyl"; P.Vindob. G 14307 is edited in Bagnall and Palme, "Franks", as SB XXIV 16188.

²⁰ In SB XXIV 16188, a church is mentioned but it is not certain that that is where the person in need of the *logos* is.

²¹ E.g. SB Kopt. V 2306, according to Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," 120-121 (no. 90).

some sort of statement of assurance, possibly only made orally. Thus, *logos* can have different meanings, even in the context of protection and asylum.

For the reasons stated above, I would argue caution against tracing a direct line of influence between the Greek *logoi* (*asylias*) and the Coptic protection letters, and would definitely argue against an identification of the Coptic protection letters as essentially *logoi asylias* in Coptic.²² Instead, I consider the Coptic protection letter mechanism of the documentary sources and the *logoi asylias* mechanism as we know it from legal literature as distinct protection mechanisms operating in late antique Egypt.

1.1.3.2. Relationships between ruler and ruled in islamic law and provincial practice

This section turns to Islamic law and the practice of rule in the imperial provinces. It presents the Islamic legal concepts of protection *dhimma* and *amān* (1.1.3.2.1 and 1.1.3.2.2), and points to some shared characteristics between the Islamic legal concepts and administrative practice, and the Coptic protection letter mechanism (1.1.3.2.3). I do not suggest influence between the various mechanisms, but rather wish to put the Coptic protection letter mechanism against this contemporary background, in which Islamic concepts and mechanisms of protection, including ideals and practices of rulership related to protection, played an important role.²³ Indeed, the last part of the section shows how we see these legal concepts of *dhimma* and *amān* in practice in the papyri, the documentary evidence of the provincial administration contemporary to the Coptic protection letters (1.1.3.2.4).

1.1.3.2.1 Dhimma

Dhimma protection was the protection given by the central power to submitted non-Muslim peoples who were identified in Islamic law as "people of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*, in the first place Jews and Christians).²⁴ Just like *amān* discussed below, this protection mechanism was strongly connected to religion as the protection granted was in fact "God's protection" (*dhimmat allāh, amānāt allāh*). *Dhimma*, as well as other types of protection mechanisms in

²² The same goes for the Hellenistic *pisteis*. Similarities in formulary are notable but are not necessarily indicative of influence.

²³ For a brief overview of the various protection mechanisms and institutions and their development from the context of pre-islamic Arabia to that of the Islamicate societies, see Hayes and Scheerlinck, "Introduction", and the various articles in *Acts of Protection in Early Islamicate Societies*, dossier in *Annales Islamologiques* 54 (2020).

²⁴ de la Vaissière, "Sogdian *Ḍimmi*", shows how the newly conquered population of Sogdiana, although they were not "people of the Book", in practice were granted by the rulers the protection associated with *dhimma*.

Islamic law, is described as a contract or a form of *‘ahd* (treaty, agreement between conqueror and conquered).²⁵ The rights and obligations of this protection agreement pertain to different aspects of the relationship between subject and ruler. The submitted people (*dhimmī*) have to pay tribute to the central power, particularly the capitation tax or *jizya*.²⁶ The *dhimmī* in turn receive protection against attacks on their territories from outside, and are granted certain freedoms, such as in the area of religious worship: they are allowed to continue practicing their religion. E.g. for Egypt, historiographical narratives mention that a church was built in the new provincial capital Fustāṭ as early as 668-681.²⁷ The *dhimma* protection also permitted jurisdiction independent from Islamic law, while the *dhimmī* also had access to the Islamic legal system which developed in the centuries after the conquests.²⁸ Thus, generally, *dhimma* provided protection and certain freedoms for the protectees, while they were obliged to give tribute to the central power. The protection comes nominally from God, but it is the Muslim community’s obligation to uphold this protection.²⁹ We should be careful not to view the world in which Jeremias and his fellow villagers lived through the lens of this Islamic legal concept of *dhimma*, which assumes legally defined religious communities, which becomes a legal reality only in the 10th century.³⁰ Yet, the papyri show that *dhimma* as a protection mechanism influenced the relationship between Arab-Muslim administrators and their territories already by the end of the seventh century, as is shown in a rebuking letter from a high official in Palestine to his subordinates (*P.Ness. III 77 = P.HoylandDhimma 1*). I will discuss this letter in section 1.2.3.2.4.

1.1.3.2.2 *Amān*

A second Islamic legal mechanism of protection that is of interest here is the *amān*. *Amān* in its most general sense can be used in a similar way to *dhimma*, namely as protection for people who submit to the ruler. God’s protection (*amānat allāh*) was granted and guaranteed by the person or institution in power. The *amān* contract was in use in a variety of circumstances. E.g., the Christian literary source commonly known as the “History of the Patriarchs” (Arabic title: *Siyar al-bī’a al-muqaddasa*, “Biographies of the Holy Church”)

²⁵ Cahen, “*Dhimma*”; Schacht, “*Ahd*.”

²⁶ Hoyland and Cotton, “Earliest Attestation,” 56.

²⁷ Cahen, “*Dhimma*”; Legendre, “Islamic Conquest,” 245. For an overview, see Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*.

²⁸ Simonsohn, *Common Justice*, 4-5.

²⁹ Hoyland and Cotton, “Earliest Attestation,” 57.

³⁰ Papaconstantinou, “Between Umma and *Dhimma*”.

narrates how the caliph Marwan II (r. 744-750) issued a “decree of pardon” (*amān*) for a group of local rebels in the Egyptian Delta.³¹ In this case, the protection is given to people who should be punished, i.e. rebels, but they are protected from punishment, through the *amān*.³² *Amān* can also have the function of a safe conduct: Arabic historiography even presents us with the text of such an *amān* purportedly written by the caliph al-Mansur (r. 754-775) for his uncle ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī, who had tried to seize power away from al-Mansur.³³ Similarly to the rebels mentioned above, the uncle of the caliph was guaranteed protection although he was supposed to be punished.³⁴ An *amān* in the sense of safe conduct could also be given to people who lived outside the Muslim realm and wanted to travel to and in the Muslim realm for a limited period for the purpose of trade or pilgrimage.³⁵ As I will mention in section 1.1.3.2.4, the instances of *amān* mentioned in the papyri also seem to link to this function of safe-conduct.

1.1.3.2.3 Shared characteristics

The Coptic protection letters issued in the villages of early Islamic Egypt, or the mechanisms behind their existence, share certain characteristics with these protection mechanisms of *dhimma* and *amān*, which operated at a much larger scale and at higher levels of administration of the Islamic empire. The following paragraphs will briefly discuss these shared characteristics. I do not want to argue for influence of any kind between these practices, but the similarities in the mechanisms are worth noting, as they point to shared social norms and expectations, of which both *amāns* and Coptic protection letters are expressions.

The first aspect of protection mechanisms that I want to highlight is that they often take the form of agreements which are a result of a negotiation between the two parties. Agreements between fighting parties, or between conquerors and submitted, appear in

³¹ Trombley, “Documentary Background,” 133. On this composite literary work, see e.g. Pilette, “History of the Patriarchs”; Heijer, *Mawhūb Ibn Maṣṣūr Ibn Mufarrīj*.

³² Examples of *amāns* given to rebels in Sijpesteijn, “Closing”, Hagemann, “Muṭarrif”, Huseini, “Rebellion”.

³³ The text was transmitted by al-Azdī (d. 945) in his *Ta’rīkh al-Mawṣil*. Paragraph 6: “He permits him to come to him safely, confidently, protected, shielded (masturari) and guarded from his doing [him] harm and his betraying [him].” Marsham and Robinson, “Safe-Conduct”, citation on p. 254.

³⁴ The caliph famously did not respect the *amān* and had his uncle imprisoned.

³⁵ I discuss the relationship between the Arabic safe conducts on papyrus, the use of the term *amān* in two Arabic administrative letters on papyrus, and the Coptic protection letters in more detail in section 4.2.

different forms in Islamic law of war.³⁶ Such agreements could be written down in the form of treaties or contracts (‘*ahd*).³⁷ In the context of the conquest of Egypt, the literary sources tell us about the negotiations of patriarch Kyros, and the treaties he concluded with the conquerors.³⁸ A particular kind of such an agreement is a *sulh*, a treaty of peace between Muslim and defeated non-Muslim communities, for a specific amount of time.³⁹ Similarly, as I will argue in Chapter 3, the issue of a Coptic protection letter, and the inclusion of certain stipulations in the document in question, was the result of a previous negotiation between the local authority and the protectee, or a representative of the protectee. E.g. in Jeremias’ case, the stipulation that he needed to pay a gold coin, most likely was a result of a negotiation before the document was issued.

Secondly, the protection granted by these agreements and their written down forms was dependent upon the fulfilment of certain conditions by the protectee(s), which meant that the protection could be revoked if the protectees did not fulfil the conditions. Chase Robinson considers this conditionality of protection (particularly *dhimma*) an “apparently classical feature of muslim-non-muslim relations”.⁴⁰ This conditionality of protection is a striking feature of many of the Coptic protection letters, as well as some other related protection documents from early Islamic Egypt.⁴¹ The protection provided in Jeremias’ protection letter would most likely only take effect if he actually came to the village, but more importantly, if he paid the gold coin which is mentioned as an exception to the promise that he nor his children would be prosecuted because they defaulted on their taxes.

Thirdly, the narrative sources also tell us about moments when, even without apparent breaches by the protectees, protection agreements were not upheld. There is the case of caliph al-Mansur who granted and then broke an *amān* for his uncle. In protection mechanisms like *amān* and *dhimma*, God might have been the protector, but the mechanisms operated between humans who had to uphold the agreement. Violation of *amān* and

³⁶ Hayes and Scheerlinck, “Introduction,” n. 24.

³⁷ Hill, *Termination*; Kaegi, “Egypt”.

³⁸ Kaegi, “Egypt,” 55; Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, 49-50.

³⁹ Khadduri, “*Ṣulḥ*”.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *Empire*, 8-10, who quotes from Abu Ubayd (d. 223/837) a *ṣulḥ* given to the people of Edessa: “this is the letter (*kitāb*) from Iyad b. Ghanm and those Muslims with him to the people of Edessa: ‘I have granted them security (*amān*) for their lives, possessions, children and women, their city and their mills, provided they pay what they rightly owe.”

⁴¹ This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, esp. section 4.2.3.

dhimma, as religiously sanctioned agreements, was seen as a violation against God.⁴² Similarly, in the Coptic protection letters, God takes the role of, if not the actual protector, the promoter or guardian of the protection. The characteristic formula “This is the promise, by God, for you” usually opening the Coptic protection letters as it does Jeremias’ protection letter, is an indication of this role of God, whose invocation in that formula is similar to an oath.⁴³ Some protection letters also contain an actual oath, which further underscores the religious embedding of a document operating on the crossroads of administration, (public) law and social relationships. The punishment for the protector, if they should not uphold the protection letter is referred to twice in the Coptic documentation, and twice this punishment is related to God or religious practice.⁴⁴

Finally, two aspects of *amān* in particular, have a parallel in the Coptic protection letter mechanism. One of these aspects is that we see *amāns* providing amnesty to individuals or groups who were supposed to be punished for certain misdeeds, such as the acts of rebellion mentioned in section 1.1.3.2.3. On their smaller scale, the Coptic protection letters had a similar function: they provide protection against rightful punishments or claims by the local authorities issuing the protection letter. Jeremias had defaulted on his tax payments, but is promised he will not suffer the consequences, i.e. prosecution. The other parallel is related to the *amān*’s function as a safe conduct, mentioned in section 1.1.3.2.3. Travel was an important component of the Coptic protection letter mechanism as well, as it allowed people to travel to a certain place, usually their home, with amnesty. Jeremias’ protection letter states explicitly that he had fled, and that he should come to his house.⁴⁵

1.1.3.2.4 God’s protection in practice

In the previous sections I discussed *dhimma* and *amān* as important mechanisms of protection which were a part of the relationship between the rulers and the subjects of the caliphate, and the characteristics which they shared with the Coptic protection letter mechanism. In this section, I will address a few aspects of how “God’s protection” of *dhimma* and *amān* filtered down to the subjects in the imperial provinces, people like

⁴² Schacht, “Amān.” On the breaking of an *amān*, see the next paragraph.

⁴³ On the characteristic *logos mpnoute* formula of the Coptic protection letters, see sections 1.5.1 and 2.1.2.

⁴⁴ *SB Kopt. V 2226*: exclusion from service; *SB Kopt. V 2262* contains an oath: “If I forsake this promise, then God will forsake me”.

⁴⁵ On the role of travel in the Coptic protection letters, see section 4.2.1.

Jeremias and his children, via the words and actions of the representatives of the state in the provinces.⁴⁶

Terms related to *ahl al-dhimma*, “people of protection” or “protected people” appear in the Egyptian papyri in Arabic language from the Abbasid period. The term could be used when referring to the population of a certain region, but dividing it into two groups: Muslims and “protected people”, i.e. Christians (and Jews).⁴⁷ The term is also found in some documents related to tax collection.⁴⁸ In these Egyptian documents, the reference to the *dhimmī* status of the people in question is not connected to certain ideas on how they should be treated. On the other hand, one late seventh-century Arabic letter on papyrus from Nessana, situated in the Negev desert, provides a direct link between the religious concept of *dhimma* as God’s protection, and the treatment of conquered territories of the caliphate and their inhabitants. In this letter, an important official of the province – maybe the provincial governor – warns two subordinates about corruption of which he evidently has heard some reports.⁴⁹ The papyrus is fragmentary but it is clear that some officials, including the addressees, had been taking more than what was owed from the population of Nessana. The letter talks of injustice and corruption and the sender threatens to reclaim the money from the possessions of the corrupt officials themselves. Both God and the governor or high official, the sender, are shown as protectors in two parallelly structured arguments, in which God is named first, and then the sender:

*God does not like wrongdoing or corruption and as regards you, I did not appoint you to a job for you to act sinfully and behave unjustly in it...and the people of Nessana have the protection of God and the protection of His messenger. So do not reckon that we acquiesce to your corruption and injustice in respect of it.*⁵⁰

The worldly power, the sender of the letter, is guaranteeing and implementing God’s protection for the people of Nessana. *Dhimma* was supposed to protect these local people against excessive taxation and oppression by abusing officials, and complaints or reports of

⁴⁶ The role of the local elites in transmitting and implementing provincial policies is discussed in Chapter 5.

⁴⁷ *P. World*. p. 132 (793-794), *P.HindsNubia* (758).

⁴⁸ *P. World*. p. 132 (793-794), *P.DiemFrueheUrkunden* 7 (784), a tax-receipt with safe-conduct formulas.

⁴⁹ *P.Ness.* III 77 = *P.HoylandDhimma* 1.

⁵⁰ ll. 4-5 and 11-13, translation Hoyland. My emphasis.

abuse could result in reprimands from a higher office. Just rule, including avoiding oppressive behavior, is directly related to *dhimma* in this letter.

The edited papyri from Egypt do not seem to use terms related to *dhimma* protection in combination with admonitions about just governance of the province in the same way that we see in the letter from Nessana. However, the idea of protection of the local population through guaranteeing just governance, is found explicitly in different letters and other documents issued by higher government officials and directed down to lower officials or even to the individual taxpayer. This fair governance as it is represented in the papyri aimed to protect the local population from excessive taxation in case of bad harvests due to natural causes, but also from abuse by officials. Several scholars have noted that the papyrological record shows us how Arab-Muslim administrators took Islamic concepts of protection seriously, as well as the obligation it put on them and their colleagues to protect the conquered people. As part of his argument that early Islamic documents show “institutional or ideological elements we have associated with the state”, Fred Donner argues that they reflect “a notion of authority to rule on the basis of Law, and responsibility of the state for the welfare of its subjects according to that Law.”⁵¹ He cites papyri in which officials try to protect the population in times of agricultural difficulty: “in particular, we find them writing to subordinates demanding that they take specified measures to forestall food shortages, hoarding of grain, and famine pricing in certain localities.” A similar concern for the wellbeing of the taxpayers might be underlying the recurring advice in administrative correspondence not to collect the taxes before the harvest.⁵²

But the most common threat from which we see higher officials trying to protect the local population was abuse by officials further down the administrative chain.⁵³ We see this mostly in reactions to (reports about) abusive behavior by officials, whether they were village head men, tax collectors, or higher officials at the pagarchy level. Several letters

⁵¹ This again is part of his arguments that there was an Islamic state already in the seventh century: Donner, “Formation,” 292. See also there on p. 293: “Clearly there is a general concept of law or justice at work here, and officials of the state are expected to adhere to it.” Examples are given there on p. 292.

⁵² *P.MuslimState* 22, commentary to l. 9, with references.

⁵³ Reinfandt, “Crime,” n. 18, gives a list of Arabic papyri mentioning legal procedures related to abuse by officials. People experiencing or claiming unjust behavior from officials is definitely not a new phenomenon in the papyrological evidence from Egypt. Among petitions from the Ptolemaic period “misconduct or negligence by authorities” is by far the largest group in terms of subject, according to Baetens, *Survey*.

issued by higher officials to their subordinates contain comments on how officials should treat the local population. E.g., in the administrative letter *P.Berl.Arab* II 65, the senders summon the addressee(s), probably local tax administrators, to come to them. The senders had been appointed by the *amīr* as overseers of the tax collection in the Fayyum region, “and he (*i.e. the amīr*) has recommended us to approach the subjects friendly and to treat them well | . . . and to protect them from the damages which are mentioned in what came to me. (ll. 5-7).” Thus, this message of benevolence and protection as a characterization of the relationship between rulers and subjects becomes part of the preamble of the order sent by the two overseers. It trickled down the administrative ladder, as it was a message given to them by their superior, but they repeated it in this letter as a form of justification for their summons.

In the letters of Umayyad governor Qurra b. Sharik (709-714) to Basilios, district administrator of Aphrodito, comments about the correct behavior of officials towards the people in his purview are part of a variety of rhetorical strategies employed by the governor in order to make Basilios do what he was told.⁵⁴ Often this correct behavior consists of sending the right amount of taxes in a timely manner, but Qurra also warns Basilios not to be corrupt or to permit other officials in his district to be corrupt or oppressive.⁵⁵ The corrupt practices which Qurra tells Basilios to avoid were put in general terms like “cheating the population” but also refer to specific circumstances, see e.g. Qurra’s comments on the fair distribution of a fine imposed by the government on Basilios’ district.⁵⁶ Yet, there must have been reports of much more violent abuse: on one occasion Qurra strongly discouraged his subordinate from torturing locals with lime and vinegar.⁵⁷ Thus, higher officials used their administrative correspondence, including general recommendations and specific remonstrances, as an instrument to protect the local population from abuse by lower officials.

Other mechanisms of protection used by higher officials were related to the administration of justice and to the fiscal system. The papyri show that the local population in the countryside could lodge complaints about abusive behavior by their village head with

⁵⁴ Papaconstantinou, “Rhetoric”.

⁵⁵ This concern of Qurra’s with Basilios not oppressing the locals is already discussed in the earliest editions of Qurra’s Greek and Arabic letters (editions by Harold Bell and by Nadia Abbott cited in Papaconstantinou, “Rhetoric,” 277 and n. 50).

⁵⁶ *P.Lond.* IV 1345 (710).

⁵⁷ *P.Ross.Georg.* IV 16 (710).

governor Qurra b. Sharik, and that he would order that the case be investigated.⁵⁸ In the fiscal system, higher officials in charge of taxation could use tax documents themselves to protect the taxpayers from abuse by lower tax officials, by including in the tax demand note a warning not to pay the tax collector more than what was mentioned on the note, and, to notify the issuing official if the tax collector asked for more.⁵⁹

The comments about fair behavior towards the local population were often motivated religiously. This is of course most explicit in *P.HoylandDhimma* 1, in which both God and the governor are presented as the protectors of the local population, as discussed above. Religion thus is used as a “uniform language of behavior, values and expectations”, even if in this case it is not used by non-Muslims, it is definitely applied to them.⁶⁰ This is also visible in Qurra’s letters to Basilios in which he introduces God in his own expectations of a good official, as noted by Donner: “The governor then enjoins his pagarch, however, to act honestly and to be trustworthy (*muḥsin, mujmal, amīn*), and to ask God's aid, for, he says, God will help if one is trustworthy and concerned about the wellbeing of affairs. In this case, then, the governor is clearly playing on the pagarch's guilt or sense of responsibility, not merely as a government servant, but as a person subject to an absolute Law derived from God.”⁶¹ However, it should also be noted that not all mechanisms of protection by the government were motivated through explicitly religious language in the papyri, as we can see in the letter from the officials quoting the *amīr* on how the officials should behave towards the local population. Also, Qurra’s letters do not always religiously motivate his admonitions towards Basilios. Thus, while the protection “of God” of the legal sources is visible at times in the papyri, the religious component was not necessarily made explicit.

Who were the officials from whom the senders of these letters, or their superiors, are trying to protect the local population? These potentially abusive officials seem to have belonged to different levels of the administration: Qurra urged both the pagarch Basilios

⁵⁸ See section 4.3.2.

⁵⁹ See e.g. *P.Clackson* 45 and section 4.1.2.

⁶⁰ Sijpesteijn, “Success,” 30.

⁶¹ Donner, “Formation,” 292. Similar shared religious language in the papyri can be found in petitions and informal requests which, in various ways, name both God and the addressee as the helper or protector of the sender. For this in Arabic request letters, see Sijpesteijn, “Righting Wrongs”. For the addressee as an intercessor before God in Coptic debt-related requests see Papaconstantinou, “Women”.

himself to be just *and* to ensure that his subordinates behave fairly. Moreover, he gave the order for a legal inquiry as a response to a taxpayer's complaint about the abuse of his village head (the function of Georgios and Aron, who issued Jeremias' protection letter). On the other hand, the *amīr* mentioned in *P.Arab.Berl.* II 65, as well as the governor writing to his apparently corrupt subordinates in Nessana (*P.HoylandDhimma* 1), both gave warnings about the treatment of the local population in their respective provinces, to officials who themselves seemed to have belonged to the ruling elite, judging from their Arab names.

As a last point I would like to briefly mention the *amān* in the papyri. As mentioned in section 1.1.3.2.2, *amāns* are known to us from the literature, but there are also papyri which mention an *amān* issued to an individual. The references to *amāns* in the papyri suggest that those documents were in fact Coptic protection letters or similar documents, perhaps in Arabic, which have not been found or identified yet. 4.2.3. Another kind of document that is clearly related to the *logos mpnoute* documents are the Umayyad safe conducts, or rather travel permits, written in Arabic. These are known under a term different than *amān*, namely *sijill* and serve yet a different function of offering temporary immunity in early Islamic Egypt. These travel documents and their relationship to the Coptic protection letters are discussed at length in sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

In summary, the papyrological record shows the Arab-Muslim government's concern with fair rule, which included protecting the local population from abusive or corrupt behavior by officials, by way of different protection mechanisms. Administrative letters served to guide or remonstrate subordinates. In a unique case of the letter *P.HoylandDhimma* 1 from Nessana, the obligation to avoid corruption in the relationship between rulers and subjects is even explicitly tied to *dhimma* protection. But we also see God's protection in practice in tax demands which caution the taxpayer about tax collectors who ask too much, and judicial mechanisms which dealt with complaints about abusive behavior. We see the Arab-Muslim government not only invoke this obligation of protection in an effort to protect the local population from abuse by Arab-Muslim administrators, but also from abuse by local elites responsible for governance of districts or villages, like Georgios and Aron, the village heads who issued Jeremias' protection letter. Indeed, these various protection mechanisms involved the local officials who issued the Coptic protection letters, or their direct superiors, and as such they operated in the immediate context of the

Coptic protection letter mechanism, and can be compared to them.⁶² The same can be said of the instances of *amān* in the papyri, as well as the safe conducts or travel permits (*sijill*, *kitāb*) on papyrus. The letters and documents I discussed in this section were issued by representatives of the state to their subordinates, which often were members of the local elites responsible for administering the districts and villages in the countryside. The Coptic protection letter is another manifestation, at the village level and directly issued by local elites, of this expectation of an administrative system that offers *all* its participants justice and protection from abuse and unjust behavior. Through a top-down effect local elites were encouraged to behave according to principles of just rule. On the other hand, as I have argued above, one can also see the Coptic protection letters as expressions of a shared system of expectations about just rule.

Now that we have introduced the Coptic protection letter mechanism, as well as the legal protection concepts and mechanisms in the background of the Coptic protection letter mechanism, we turn to the administrative system of Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries, the period in which the Coptic protection letter mechanism was active is discussed more fully in the next section.

1.2 The administration of Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries: immediate changes and gradual developments

Jeremias' protection letter solved a very personal problem for him and for his children, as they were allowed to return to their home without facing harm from the village heads. However, the reason why the village heads could have harmed him, and most likely the reason why Jeremias had fled, i.e. his taxes, links this personal problem to the administration of the province, the caliphate even. Many of the Coptic protection letters are directly linked to the administration of the imperial province, whether because of their content or because people involved in them were involved in the (tax) administration of their village.⁶³ To provide context for this aspect of the Coptic protection letters, this section discusses the administration of Egypt as it evolved in the aftermath of the Arab-Muslim conquests. Georgios and Aron issue their protection letter for Jeremias and his children in 725, when Egypt had been a province of the Islamic empire for about 80 years. By this time, the

⁶² To my knowledge, these documents do not mention Coptic protection letters. *P.MuslimState* 7 and 31 might be exceptions, see section 4.2.3.6.

⁶³ See section 4.1.1.

administration of Egypt had undergone a number of changes, which are visible in the papyri. The conquerors introduced some immediate changes and adjustments to the administration of the province, but the seventh and eighth centuries also saw slower, more gradual developments of change in the administration of the province.

Petra Sijpesteijn has shown how the development of the Arab-Muslim administration of Egypt during the first centuries after the conquest can be roughly divided into two stages, with a turning point after 50 years, in the beginning of the eighth century.⁶⁴ A number of policies effecting change were enacted immediately or very quickly. Where the administrative language of Egypt had been almost exclusively Greek since the Hellenistic period, the new rulers immediately communicated in Arabic as well as in Greek with the local population. The new rulers also immediately started requisitioning labor and materials from the local population. In 643 a receipt for 65 sheep was issued in both Arabic and Greek.⁶⁵ The Greek documents in the archive of the official Senouthios working in Middle-Egypt also show that the new government was issuing requisitions of materials and labor from the inhabitants of the Nile Valley in the first years after the conquest.⁶⁶ On the other hand, during these first decades, the new rulers left the administration of the province largely in the hands of the local elites, instead of replacing them with officials from among their own ranks (see below, section 1.2.2). After the “first 50 years”, this also started to change.

Testimonies to the changes are the narrative and documentary sources concerning the late Umayyad period (705-750), which has been called in the literature a time of “radical departure from previous practice” in the administration of Egypt as a province.⁶⁷ In this period, the central administrative register (*diwān*) in the provincial capital was translated to Arabic, furthering processes of language change which were already underway since the conquest: a multilingual administration in which Arabic, Greek, and Coptic all had their particular roles developed (1.2.3).⁶⁸ Moreover, the administrative personnel in the countryside was being replaced with Muslim officials (see below, section 1.2.2).⁶⁹ However, these processes, developed gradually. The Coptic protection letters, attested until

⁶⁴ Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*; Sijpesteijn, “Arab Conquest”; Sijpesteijn, “New Rule”.

⁶⁵ *P. Grohmann Muhadara* II p. 12 = PERF 558.

⁶⁶ On Senouthios’ archive, see *CPR* XXX.

⁶⁷ Frantz-Murphy, “Economics”.

⁶⁸ On the translation of the *diwāns*, see Legendre, “Translation”, Sijpesteijn, “Policy”.

⁶⁹ Frantz-Murphy cited above. See also Sijpesteijn, “Archival Mind,” 172.

the eighth, maybe the 9th century (on dating the Coptic protection letters, see section 2.3), are testimonies to the gradual nature of the processes of Arabicization and Islamicization of the Egyptian countryside. Just like Jeremias' protection letter, they were written almost exclusively in Coptic and do not have Arabic parallels from this period.⁷⁰ Moreover, the lack of Arab names in these documents shows that the villages in which they were produced were still headed by locals (see below).

Another development in the administration of Egypt of the late Umayyad period, and one that is of direct importance to our understanding of the Coptic protection letters, was a heightened attention to the flow of revenue, which included tax payers' movements. These policies have their clearest expression in the Arabic and Greek documentary travel permits produced in that period by the highest offices of the province, but can also help explain a striking aspect of the chronological distribution of the Coptic protection letters.⁷¹ While the majority of the Coptic protection letters can only be dated roughly to the seventh or eighth century, the protection letters which can be dated more precisely were all produced in the first half of the eighth century, contemporary to the Arabic and Greek travel permits.⁷² In this dissertation, I argue that the Coptic protection letters had different functions and goals than the Arabic and Greek travel permits (4.2), but also that the Coptic protection letters were responses to the same governmental policies aiming at a greater control over taxation and mobility, but implemented and adapted by local authorities in the villages. The apparent "success" of the Coptic protection letters in the late Umayyad period should be seen as an indirect result of those policies, an intensification in the use of an instrument which had been in use before the conquests. While the Coptic protection letters were not direct products of Islamic law or even of specific policies of the Arab-Muslim government in Egypt, there was a greater need for them at a time when taxation and mobility were surveyed and regulated more. Since taxation and the control of mobility in the province will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 (respectively section 4.1 and 4.2), I do not discuss them here.

⁷⁰ Two Greek documents contain formulary that is very close to that of the Coptic protection letters: *SB* III 7240, and *CPR* VIII 84, both discussed in section 5.3.2). See section 1.2.3 on language change and especially the role of Coptic as a language of administration in Early Islamic Egypt.

⁷¹ These processes are analyzed in detail in Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*. On travel permits see sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

⁷² However, the Coptic protection letters are not an exclusively 8th-century phenomenon: see section 2.3.2, on the difficulty of dating Coptic documents, see below section 1.4.

These paragraphs have discussed, in broad strokes, both the immediacy and gradualness of the developments of the administration of Egypt after it became a province of the caliphate in the middle of the seventh century, and how the Coptic protection letters fit those developments. In the next sections, I will discuss in more detail two aspects of the administration of Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries which I have mentioned here: the changes in administrative personnel and offices in the countryside, and the multilingual nature of the administration. The discussion of the administrative personnel (section 1.2.2) in the countryside is especially relevant as background to my analyses in Chapter 5, which looks at the Coptic protection letters and the local elites in terms of how they were connected to the rest of the provincial administration. Section 1.2.3 serves as an introduction to the main language of the protection letters, Coptic, and to its role in the society and administration of Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries, in which it is accompanied by both Greek and Arabic.

1.2.2 Functions and personnel of the administration

Going back to the years of the conquest, the Arab-Muslim conquerors, whose governance was characterized by “confidence and pragmatism”,⁷³ chose to maintain some elements of the administration and change others. In the countryside, the local administrative structure was at first kept in place, together with its personnel.⁷⁴ This way, the new rulers could co-opt the expertise, manpower, infrastructure and power of these local authorities, without having to send their own manpower while they already were in a minority. Thus, the administrators of the five *eparchies* or regions which divided the province, and within those the *pagarchies* or districts in which the Egyptian countryside was divided, were still chosen from the local urban elites, residing in the *metropoleis* or capital cities of the districts. The administration of smaller administrative units, villages and settlements of different sizes, also remained in the hands of the local, rural elites, people like village heads Aron and Georgios, who issued Jeremias’ protection letter.⁷⁵ However, while the local elites maintained authority in the countryside, the ultimate authority in the province lay with the representatives of the empire, of the caliph, in the new capital of Fustat: in the first place

⁷³ Sijpesteijn, “Expressing,” 172.

⁷⁴ Sijpesteijn, “New Rule,” 190, for examples of officials retaining their posts after the conquest.

⁷⁵ On local elites in this dissertation, see section 1.3.

the provincial governor.⁷⁶ This authority of the state was present in the countryside through administrative correspondence, which communicated and forwarded orders to the relevant officials, but the presence of the state was also physical: there is evidence that military garrisons and their leaders were stationed in the countryside in the years after the conquest.⁷⁷ In Chapter 5, I discuss at length the interaction between local rural elites and the central government, including through a more indirect presence of the state in the villages in the countryside, e.g. by way of the transmission and translation of communications from the highest offices. The first changes in the administrative structure in the countryside happened at the higher levels with the disappearance of the function of the *dux*. Egypt as a province of the Byzantine empire had been divided into five *eparchies*, each headed by a *dux*, who was both an administrator and a military leader. At a first stage the new rulers had placed their own military commanders at the head of the *eparchies*, next to the *dux* who lost that particular part of his power.⁷⁸ The office of the *dux* seems to disappear from the record after the turn of the eighth century, and the *pagarchies*, headed by a *pagarch*, became the largest administrative units of the province.⁷⁹ The *pagarchs* communicated directly with the authorities in Fustat.⁸⁰ Moreover, around the same time, the function of district administrator (*pagarch*) starts being filled by people with Arab names.⁸¹ The districts were made up of a capital and villages in various sizes. It is in these village contexts that the Coptic protection letters were produced, mainly by various village officials involved in the general administration and taxation of the village.⁸² In section 1.3 below I will go into further detail on the administrative functions of these actors of the Coptic protection letters.

⁷⁶ Another important office was that of the *ṣāḥib al-kharāj*, the fiscal overseer of the province, whose agents issued the travel permits discussed in Chapter 4. On Fustat, see Bruning, *Rise*.

⁷⁷ Legendre, “Pouvoir,” Conclusion. Morelli in *CPR XXX*: administrative correspondence and military presence are both conspicuous in the papers of the official Senouthios, who was an administrator of the northern part of the Hermopolite district during the first years after the conquest. His papers include a number of references to letters from an *amir* received by Senouthios’ superior, and they show that garrisons were located in his district, the Hermopolite.

⁷⁸ Sijpesteijn, “Establishing”.

⁷⁹ Legendre, “Byzantine nor Islīc?” The latest attestation of a *dux* is in 749: Sijpesteijn, “Multilingual Archives”. Morelli *CPR XXII* introduction.

⁸⁰ Sijpesteijn, “Multilingual Archives”.

⁸¹ E.g. a *pagarch* official, maybe the *pagarch* himself, is Sufyān b. Ġunaym in the Greek tax-receipt SB XVI 13018, Hermopolis, 714.

⁸² The administration of these villages and the various functions therein has been examined in great detail by Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*. See also Papaconstantinou, “Great Men”

The papyri show that in the 730s-750s in the Fayyum, tax agents were still chosen among the local inhabitants of the villages by Arab-Muslim officials administering the region.⁸³ Another important element of the Egyptian countryside were larger and smaller monastic centers. Especially large monastic centers engaged in the administration of Egypt, e.g. through their involvement in the production of administrative documents related to taxation and the control of people's movement.⁸⁴ Smaller monastic settlements and their inhabitants were connected with the villages in their surroundings. Monastic authorities appear in the protection letters in several roles; I will discuss specific clerical and monastic titles and functions in section 1.3 below.

A striking point about the Coptic protection letters is the near absence of Arab-named individuals in them, even at a time that other documents show that there was a presence, albeit still small of Arabs in countryside.⁸⁵ This apparent near absence of Arab-Muslim individuals in the Coptic protection letters can be explained by the local nature of the production and circulation of the letters. The people involved in the protection letters were predominantly related to villages and monasteries, and bear local, Greek and Egyptian, names. Yet, in eighth-century papyri related to local, rural contexts in the Fayyum tax fugitives bearing Arab names appear alongside individuals with Coptic names.⁸⁶ Thus we might also expect to find protection letters issued to people bearing Arab names, but that is not the case. This could be purely caused by the chance of survival, and might change in the future, when more documents are edited. On the other hand, the fact that the large majority of the protection letters come from the Theban region, where Arabicisation and Islamisation

⁸³ *P.MuslimState* 23. On messengers as fiscal agents see also Schmidt, "Messengers".

⁸⁴ This is the focus of Palombo, "Christian Clergy". Examples of such monastic centers appearing in this thesis are the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit (Hermopolite district, Middle Egypt), the monastery of Apa Apollo at Deir el-Bala'izah (Apollonopolite district, Upper Egypt), and the monastery of Apa Ieremias near Manf (Memphis, Lower Egypt: Delta).

⁸⁵ The exception is a letter, in which the sender, Αβου Δεεια, Abū Diya', seemingly asks for the issuance of a protection letter for someone else. *P.Heid* XI 490: the name of the sender is written in Greek in the address on the back of the papyrus (l. 6). The letter is written in Coptic. Also, three documents contain an oath sworn by God the Almighty and, the wellbeing/head of those who rule over us: BKU III 473 and O.CrumVC 8 and 9.

⁸⁶ Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, 193, n. 417: a mid eighth-century fiscal register lists the names of fugitive Muslim peasants: *CPR* XXII 34.

developed slower and later than the more northern parts of Egypt, including the Fayyum, certainly plays a role here.⁸⁷

In the preceding paragraphs I gave a brief overview of developments in administrative personnel in Early Islamic Egypt, and placed the Coptic protection letters in their administrative context: they were issued by local Egyptian administrators and authorities in the villages and monasteries, rather than by Arab-Muslim (or convert) district administrators in the district capitals or higher officials in Fustat. In the following paragraphs I would like to address the language situation in Egypt in the period in which the Coptic protection letters were issued. This is also relevant because the Coptic protection letters were connected to other documents, written in Arabic, Greek and Coptic. To understand the role these documents fulfilled in the administration, it is useful to give an overview of the multilingual background of administrative documentary production in early Islamic Egypt. The role played by Coptic in this linguistic landscape will be the focus of the discussion.

1.2.3 Multilingual background of documentary production

The first section below gives a brief overview of the history of Coptic as a literary and documentary language, and as an administrative language of Early Islamic Egypt. In the following section I focus on two contexts, other than the village, in which Coptic is used to write administrative documents: monastic centers and the offices of district administrators (pacharchs). The Coptic protection letters were mainly village products, but they were connected to monasteries and exceptionally to higher offices such as the pagarch's office.

1.2.3.1 Coptic, an administrative language

Coptic developed as the last language phase of the Egyptian language towards the fourth century, a phase which ended in the fourth century, when the shift to Arabic in Egypt, which started with the conquest and accelerated in the following centuries, was complete.⁸⁸ Before the sixth century, Coptic appears in the written record especially as the language of

⁸⁷ The earliest dated Arabic documents in Djeme are protocols (*protokollon*: first sheet of a roll of papyrus) dated to 732 and 733: *CPR* III 109 and 110. There are no Arabic documents from Djeme from the first two Islamic centuries except for protocols.

⁸⁸ For the evolution of Coptic and its relationship to Greek and Arabic, see Richter, "Greek, Coptic"; Björnesjö, "L'arabisation" focuses on the papyrological evidence. On Arabic-Coptic language contact, see Boud'hors, "Degrés d'arabisation"; Legendre, "Perméabilité"; Richter, "Greek, Coptic," 422–426, with further bibliography. For the evolution of Coptic until the Arab conquest of Egypt, see most recently Fournet, *Rise*.

Christian literature and of private communication. As a literary language, it loses its pride of place to Arabic in the 10th century, when new works are composed in Arabic by Egypt's Christians, and older Coptic ones start to be translated..⁸⁹

As for documentary texts, Coptic gradually took over from Greek in Egypt in several areas of life from the sixth century onwards. In the sixth-century archive of Dioskoros, landlord, notary and poet in the Middle Egyptian town of Aphrodito, Coptic is attested as a language for writing legal documents.⁹⁰ However, until the seventh century, Coptic does not appear in the written record as an administrative language, which remained the domain of Greek, but as “vehicle of written communication related to everyday life.”⁹¹ However, at the same time that the new government of Egypt starts to use Arabic in their communication, together with Greek, Coptic starts to be used more and more for administrative purposes as well, while, seemingly, never becoming the language in which the highest echelons of the administration communicated with each other or for documents directed down the administrative ladder. The changes made in the administration of the empire by Umayyad caliphs ruling in the late seventh, early eighth century have been recognized as instrumental in this development.⁹² The papyrological record makes clear that Greek and Coptic were used for a long time after the conquest, for the purpose of writing private and administrative texts⁹³ Only from the 9th century onwards, Coptic was only rarely used for legal documents, even for documents used by Coptic speakers.⁹⁴ 10th-century legal documents written in Arabic could be orally translated into Coptic to the relevant parties, and 11th-century monasteries in the Fayyum could produce their accounts either in Coptic or in Arabic.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ It is at that time that the author of the co-called “Apocalypse of Ps.-Samuel of Qalamoun” wrote an impassioned warning about what he perceives as the Arabisation and, by consequence, the moral decadence, of the Christian population of Egypt. While this pessimistic image has been taken more or less at face value by modern scholarship, it has recently been argued that the text reflects rivalries between factions in the Christian church in Egypt rather than an exact picture of the linguistic situation of Egypt. Papaconstantinou, “They Shall Speak,” esp. 298.

⁹⁰ Fournet, *Rise*, Chapter 3.

⁹¹ Richter and Grossman, “Egyptian-Coptic Language,” 78.

⁹² Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*. On the multilingual policies, see Legendre, “Translation”, Sijpesteijn, “Policy”.

⁹³ Berkes, “Latest Identified”, presents the latest dating of a Greek papyrus document: 825 (SPP III² 577, belonging to church administration). Tax documents written partially in Coptic are attested with certainty up to the tenth (*CPR* IV 13, 942).

⁹⁴ Richter, “Greek, Coptic,” 421. Coptic documentary texts containing Arabic loanwords date from the 8th through the 12th century: 423–426.

⁹⁵ Papaconstantinou, ““They Shall Speak”” 296–297.

This section will focus on the role of Coptic as an administrative language in Egypt from the conquest throughout the eighth century, when Arabic gradually started to replace Coptic in the administrative functions where it was used (e.g. to write tax-receipts), at the same time that in the administration of the Egyptian countryside the Arab-Muslim officials started to replace the local elites (see above section 1.2.2). I will show how there is a substantial amount of Coptic documentation related to the administration of Early Islamic Egypt. Because of this volume alone Coptic documents should be considered as an important source for our understanding of the administration of Egypt. Moreover, although Coptic documents were produced at lower levels of the administration, they were nevertheless connected to administrative developments in the province, or even the empire. In that way, they show how the local elites issuing and using these documents in Coptic helped shape the administrative rule. The Coptic protection letters serve as an excellent example of this: a substantial amount of over 140 Coptic documents documenting the Coptic protection letter mechanism operating in the countryside in the seventh and eighth centuries show us the how the local elites dealt with the demands of the government, and shaped fiscal practice accordingly, from their position at the bottom end of the administrative ladder but at the head of their communities (Chapter 5).

Let us now turn to an overview of the use of Coptic in administrative documents in particular. Scholarship on the linguistic situation in Early Islamic Egypt, has tended to stress the private nature of written communication in Coptic.⁹⁶ Coptic is described as a language for private letters and legal documents.⁹⁷ Recent publications on the role of Coptic in the administration and society of late antique and early Islamic Egypt repeat the notion that Coptic never became an “official” language, in the same way that Greek and Arabic were.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Richter, “Greek, Coptic,” 405-406: “...Coptic, which clearly enjoyed its widest spread during the first two centuries after the conquest: it was then that a great many private records were drawn up in Coptic, and then did Coptic become a common medium of private expression in epigraphy. But Coptic never came anywhere close to the importance of Greek or Arabic as a linguistic means for administrative, public, and representative purposes, ...”

⁹⁷ Fournet, “Multilingual Environment,” 441.

⁹⁸ Richter, “Greek, Coptic”; Richter, “Language Choice”; Richter, “Unseren Herrn”; Berkes, “Griechisch”; Clackson, “Coptic or Greek?,” 103, considers Greek *and* Coptic “official languages” of post conquest Egypt. This statement is qualified by editor Arietta Papaconstantinou: n. 67: “What is meant here is probably that administrative documents at the local level, such as tax-receipts, were issued in Coptic at that time. However, Coptic never became an official language of the Arab administration” (with reference to Richter, “Language Choice”).

Studies emphasize that for administrative purposes, Coptic was used only locally, on low levels of the administration, while Arabic and Greek operated on the higher levels of the administration.⁹⁹ Coptic administrative documents issued directly by the highest offices of the imperial province of Egypt are indeed not attested. However, in order to understand the reach of the Islamic empire, and the role of the local elites in the society and administration in this province, it is fruitful to examine the non-negligible amount of Coptic written communication which records the relationship between government and its subjects, and which was produced and received at different levels of the administration.

Thousands of documentary papyri and ostraca from post conquest Egypt have been published. In about 2.500 of these papyri and ostraca Coptic was used.¹⁰⁰ In this amount both monolingual Coptic documents as well as bilingual Coptic-Greek or Coptic-Arabic documents are taken into account. The papyrological record also preserves trilingual Coptic-Greek-Arabic papyri.¹⁰¹ About 750 or 30% of these are documents related to the relationship between the government and the local population. The other 70% are documents pertaining to the private sphere, such as private letters and legal documents, and to the internal administration of monastic centers. Although the majority of the Coptic documents we have is private, there is a significant number of documents reflecting the official practices of the governmental administration. The sheer amount of documents alone shows that we cannot ignore Coptic as a language of administration, and not exclusively on the level of the village.¹⁰² Chapter 5 presents case studies that prove the importance of this attention to Coptic and Coptic document writers, as it allows us to understand the provincial

⁹⁹ Richter, "Language Choice"; Papaconstantinou, "They Shall Speak," 273: "In the centuries that followed the conquest, the use of Greek declined quite rapidly among the population, while Coptic became more and more commonly used all areas of life that have left a written record. For the first time it was used even in official documents addressed to the Arab authorities at the local level."

¹⁰⁰ This number is the result of combined searches in the *Trismegistos* database (*TM*, www.trismegistos.org) and the *Brusset's Coptic Database* (*BCD*, <https://dev.ulb.ac.be/philo/bad/copte/base.php?page=accueil.php>). This number is a very conservative result: I took into account only documents which were dated with certainty after the middle of the seventh century, according to the databases. Yet, many Coptic documents have been labelled seventh-8th century, and a large part of those probably belong to the Islamic period.

¹⁰¹ E.g. *P. Clackson* 45, Berkes and Younes, "Trilingual Scribe?"

¹⁰² In the Coptic protection letters, Greek script could be used in combination with Coptic, namely in some parts of the formularly protection letters, as Jennifer Cromwell has shown for the Djeme scribe Aristophanes' protection letters, who used Greek script for the opening address in e.g. Cromwell, *Recording*, 245-247, no. 9. On Aristophanes' protection letter production, see section 3.3.1.2.

administration as one system in which the three administrative languages and their users were integrated. The next section discusses two milieus, other than the village milieu but connected to it, where Coptic was used for administrative purposes: monastic centers and the district administrator's (pagarch) office.

1.2.3.2 Two non-village milieus in which Coptic was used for administrative purposes: monasteries and pagarch's offices.

That monastic centers were places where documents expressing the relationship between government and local population were received and produced, is very clear in the cases of the Apa Apollo monastery of Bawīt and the Apa Apollo monastery at Deir al-Balā'izah, both in Middle Egypt. Documents regarding taxation were received and produced by the monks of these monasteries. Monks received Coptic and Arabic-Coptic tax demands from the pagarch or district governor, and were involved in tax collection within the monastery and its surroundings, including the production of tax-receipts.¹⁰³

The same can be said in the specific case of the regulations regarding the circulation of people. Monastery-internal documents can be quite direct testimonies of governmental regulations regarding the local population, as e.g. the guarantee letters addressed by monks of the Apa Jeremias monastery of Saqqara to their superior, as part of the procedure of obtaining travel permits.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, communications between monastic or clerical authorities and village authorities can also reflect local measures taken to deal with these government regulations, e.g. in letters asking to issue a protection letter for a third party.¹⁰⁵

Other than in villages and monastic contexts, Coptic was also used to write administrative paperwork in the office of district administrators, located in the *metropolis* or capital of the district which was named after its *metropolis*. Sebastian Richter has shown how, in the case of the archive of the pagarch Basilios, the pagarch's office acted as a "relay station" between the governor's office and the local authorities in the pagarchy.¹⁰⁶ Bottom-

¹⁰³ The tax-receipts could be issued in Greek or Coptic. E.g., *P.Bal.* II 132-151, Coptic tax-receipts issued at the Balā'izah monastery. *P.Clackson* 45 is an Arabic-Coptic tax demand note connected to the Bawit monastery. The role of monastic centers in Early Islamic Egypt in the production of these administrative documents is a major focus in Palombo, "Christian Clergy".

¹⁰⁴ On the role of these documents in the government's efforts to control mobility, see Delattre, "Checkpoints," 535-536; Palombo and Scheerlinck, "Asking". See also section 4.2.2.

¹⁰⁵ On communications between monastic and lay village elites on Coptic protection letters, see 3.2.6. On the Coptic protection letters' connection with governmental policies, see section 5.4.5.

¹⁰⁶ Richter, "Unseren Herrn".

up communication from the villages in the pagarchy arrived at the office of the pagarch in Coptic in the guarantee declarations. Top down directed communication arrived in Greek and Arabic, in the form of the governor's letters on administrative matters, but also in the form of tax demand notes stipulating the taxes expected from a village.¹⁰⁷ The tax demands per individual tax payer are communicated to those tax payers in Coptic-Greek tax demands issued by the pagarch's office. These are not attested in the Basilios archive, but Richter cites as a parallel Coptic-Greek tax demands from Hermopolis, the *metropolis* of the Hermopolite district. Thus, the office of the pagarch or *dux* translated the tax related communications from the governor to the local authorities, by producing relevant documents (individual tax demand notes), but also by using the relevant language (Coptic and/or Greek).¹⁰⁸ I will argue in section 5.2.2 that similar translation mechanisms existed for the government's communications concerning fugitives, which is another subject on which the Arab-Muslim government communicated with the lower strata of the administration in the countryside, and through them with the Egyptian population.

The administration of Early Islamic Egypt was decidedly multilingual, including communications regarding taxes and the control of the tax payer's mobility, which were both domains of the Coptic protection letters. While Arabic, Greek, and Coptic were used in different types of documents and different contexts, the languages were all three used to discuss, instruct, order, and negotiate on those issues.

In this section I have discussed aspects of the administration of Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries, i.e. the changes in administrative personnel in the countryside and the multilingual nature of the administration. In the next section I focus on the local elites, the social groups with the authority and responsibility to issue Coptic protection letters or intervene for people in need of a protection letter.

¹⁰⁷ See Delattre, Pintaudi, and Vanthieghem, "Entagion Bilingue," 364-365 for such *entagia* issued by governor 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān. Pagarchs wrote to each other in Coptic as well as in Greek: Boud'hors, "Nouveau Départ," nos. 2 and 3. Most recently, Berkes and Vanthieghem, "Notes" provides an edition of a Coptic letter by Nājid b. Muslim as pagarch of Fayyum to village headmen, see also section 5.2.2.

¹⁰⁸ These documents are attested in Middle Egypt in Greek and Coptic, and in the Fayum in Greek: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, 236-237. See also Richter, "Unseren Herrn"; Vanthieghem and Delattre, "Ensemble Archivistique," 128-129; Berkes and Younes, "Trilingual Scribe?" shows how by the end of the 8th century trilingual individual scribes operated in the Fayum.

1.3 “Local elites”

The letter I cited at the beginning of this chapter, the protection letter for Jeremias and his children, was issued by Georgios and Aron, who are given the title *meizones* (*meizōn*: village head) in the document, and who were at that time the village heads of Djeme. About Jeremias’ role in the village, we know little, only that he has children and that he is a taxpayer of Djeme, who had fled from the village. There is another actor involved in the document, namely the village scribe Aristophanes, who wrote the document. There is no other actor visible in this particular document, but as I will discuss in detail in section 3.2, one or more intermediaries can be involved in the procedure for getting a Coptic protection letter. In this dissertation the “protectors”, issuing the protection letters, as well as the “intermediaries”, intervening in different ways in the protection letter mechanism, are most central in my analyses. They are the actors who use their power in society to intervene for the protectee, and they belong to the so-called local elites. I examine, mainly through the lens of the protection letters, their relationships both with the protectees and with the government of the province. In this section, I will first discuss terms like “elites”, “local elites”, and “rural elites”. Then I will give an overview of the local elites which appear in the corpus.

1.3.1. Clarification of the terms “elites”, “local elites”, “rural elites”

“Elites” as a formal category denotes socially dominant groups or individuals, whose dominance or “social capital” can come from a variety of resources.¹⁰⁹ These include wealth (including landownership), military power, religious or administrative office, and often a combination of several of these resources.¹¹⁰ Thus, one way of approaching “elites” is examining who were the socially dominant groups or members within a certain social structure and what were the resources of their power or status. The category of “elites” can be used relatively, as elites can be discerned in a variety of social structures in a variety of historical contexts. While this flexibility of the term can be seen as an advantage, it can also be confusing, when different groups in a given society are considered “elites”.¹¹¹ Another

¹⁰⁹ For a brief overview of “elites” in sociology and history in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Hagemann, Mewes, and Verkinderen, “Studying,” 24-28.

¹¹⁰ Robinson, *Empire*, defines “elites” in the preface “social groups whose assertions of high status were underpinned by economic and or cultural resources: land, descent, history and piety = the economic, cultural and symbolic “capital”. See the “sources of social power” in Mann, *Sources*.

¹¹¹ Hagemann, Mewes, and Verkinderen, “Studying”.

way of approaching “elites” is to examine how they expressed their status or power in their actions, their interventions in society. Starting from the sources, in this particular case the Coptic protection letters, we recognize the “elites” as those who were able to grant or guarantee the protection to others within the community. Going back to the protection letter for Jeremias, Georgios and Aron’s position as village heads allowed them to take the role of protector in that situation and to initiate or reinforce a relationship of protection with Jeremias (and his children). However, while protection relationships are necessarily uneven relationships, we should take into account that individuals considered elites in their community could be on either side of that relationship, and that Jeremias could have been a member of the village elite, even though at the time of the production of his protection letter he seemed to have been in need of protection from the village heads.¹¹²

In studies on empire and elites, the individuals who issued the Coptic protection letters, or who acted as intermediaries for the protectees, would be considered part of the “local elites”, “those whose power, influence, and contacts were mostly concentrated on the level of their own city or rural area.”¹¹³ Local elites in Empire Studies context are also understood as the elites of the conquered lands and their successors, who could be integrated in the empire and its administration: “most often, imperial rulers needed the skills, knowledge, and authority of people from a conquered society – elites who could gain from cooperation.”¹¹⁴ In the case of Egypt, as a province of the Islamic Empire, “local elites” in that sense is still a heterogeneous category, including clerical and non-clerical elites, and elites operating on different levels of the administrative and social hierarchy.

In a 2012 publication, Arietta Papaconstantinou discusses the “rural elites” visible in the papyri of late antiquity and the early Islamic period.¹¹⁵ These “rural elites” are groups and individuals among the inhabitants of villages in more rural areas, but also among the

¹¹² People belonging to the village elite also appear as protectees in the protection letters: in SB Kopt. V 2273 the protectee (likely a priest) is asked to pay 5 *holokottinoi*, a large sum, which could indicate that he was not destitute. . The content of request letters in Coptic and Arabic, in which the sender presents themselves as a person in need, sometimes reveals the sender as a well-off person: Papaconstantinou, “Women in Need”, Sijpesteijn, *Righting Wrongs*..

¹¹³ Hagemann, Mewes, and Verkinderen, “Studying,” 37.

¹¹⁴ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*. See Richardson, “The First ‘World Event’”, 484: “upholding a local identity while colluding with empire”. On the role of the village elites of the protection letters in the administration of the province and of the empire, see briefly below section 1.5 and Chapter 5.

¹¹⁵ Papaconstantinou, “Propriétaires.”

inhabitants of the cities in the Nile valley who owned landed properties.¹¹⁶ These rural elites gained their economic dominance at least partially from agricultural activities, but also through moneylending, and selling and renting out (parts of) houses.¹¹⁷ The rural elites combine economic, political and social power in their communities. The easiest people in the papyri from the Egyptian countryside to recognize in the papyrological record as rural elites, Papaconstantinou notes, are the local authorities, whose status is visible in the documents which they issue and by their titles mentioned therein.¹¹⁸ One type of documents issued by these rural elites, at least in the context of the villages, are the Coptic protection letters which form the core of this dissertation. Papaconstantinou discusses a number of characteristics and elements of the social and administrative role of these rural elites which I will highlight in my analyses of the documents related to mechanisms of protection, namely how they act as intermediaries with more central authorities, how they intervene in local disputes, and how they engaged in relationships of social dependency within their communities.

I distinguish three connected groups of rural or local elites in the Coptic protection letters, of which the first two are the most prevalent.¹¹⁹ The first, and most prominent or most easily recognizable in the protection letters, are the lay elites in the villages, village authorities bearing various titles and functions, as well as other local elites with a certain authority, such as estate managers, possibly connected to a monastery,¹²⁰ and soldiers.¹²¹ The village scribes, who were part of the village elite and whose scribal production also included Coptic protection letters,¹²² do not appear with a scribal title as actual protectors

¹¹⁶ About the diminishing difference in size and function between villages and cities in 6th- and seventh-century Egypt, see Papaconstantinou, “Propriétaires”, n. 14, with bibliography.

¹¹⁷ Papaconstantinou, “Propriétaires”, for the elites of the village of Djeme, where a large part of the protection letters comes from.

¹¹⁸ In this article, Papaconstantinou only discusses lay elites.

¹¹⁹ Different aspects of the nature and the administrative and social roles of the local elites who are the main focus in this dissertation have been studied in a number of publications (see also section 1.5). Wickham, *Framing*; Papaconstantinou, “Propriétaires”; Papaconstantinou, “Great men”; Ruffini, “Village Life”; Ruffini, *Life*; Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung* (focus on administrative responsibilities) Sijpesteijn, “Landholding”; Sijpesteijn, “Establishing”. On clerical and monastic elites: Wipszycka, “Resources”; Palombo, “Christian Clergy”.

¹²⁰ *O.Crum* ST 394, *SB Kopt.* V 2279.

¹²¹ *O.Crum* 113.

¹²² In Papaconstantinou, “Great Men,” they are described as power actors; Papaconstantinou, “Propriétaires,” 409 mentions their prestige in the village and economic status; Cromwell,

or intermediaries in those documents, but were nevertheless involved in the Coptic protection letter mechanism. The second group are clerical and monastic elites, i.e. priests and individuals who held authoritative functions in monastic settings. The third group, namely officials in higher offices, like the pagarch and the dux, who operated in urban centers in the countryside. I mention these here, because while they are only rarely visible in the Coptic protection letters, they do appear – often together with village elites and/or monastic elites – in other documents related to protection mechanisms, such as travel permits and different types of guarantee documents. I compare the form and function of the protection letters with such related documents in Chapter 4. The protection letters, as well as the related documents, show the interconnectedness of these groups of elites. They operate in different but overlapping contexts, and have different but overlapping areas of influence.

I only touch on the Arab-Muslim elites in Fustat and the lay and clerical elites in the urban centers in the countryside in as far as the Coptic protection letters and related documents give evidence of their relationships with the main actors in the Coptic protection letters, i.e. the lay and clerical elites in village and monastic settings. The protection mechanisms and protection relationships expressed by the Coptic protection letters functioned mainly on a local level that mostly did not reach beyond the district boundaries, in contrast with other documents or types of documents which can be compared to the Coptic protection letters, e.g. the Arabic and Greek travel permits, which seem to have functioned on a larger geographical scale and in which the intervention of the government in Fustat is much more visible (see section 4.2, especially 4.2.3). Thus, while my analyses of the Coptic protection letters argue that they can be seen as local implementations and adaptations of provincial policies by the local elites, and that they are as such testimonies of the reach of the state in the Egyptian countryside, they also show how the local elites engaged in mechanisms and relationships of protection which functioned more or less independently from provincial administrative structures.¹²³ In the next section I will discuss the various titles and terms used in the Coptic protection letters to denote the local elites issuing them, and briefly discuss their functions.

Recording discusses the elite status of the Djeme scribe Aristophanes in 6.1. On the village scribes shaping the protection letters see section 3.3.1.

¹²³ This is the focus of Chapter 5.

1.3.2. Rural elites: who appears in the corpus?

In order to have a clearer view of the function in society of the actors in the Coptic protection letters, we can examine the various titles that accompany their names. However, it should first be noted that in many cases the names of the protector, protectee, or intermediary were not accompanied by any title or another type of identification, e.g. their place of residence or even a patronymic.¹²⁴ In many of those cases, however, the documents can be recognized as products of the village administration.¹²⁵

1.3.2.1 Lay elites in the villages

By far the main group of protectors and intermediaries in the Coptic protection letters are the lay village elites. In the Coptic protection letters in which the protectors or intermediaries are named explicitly with a title indicating their administrative function in their village, those titles are ΔΙΟΙΚΗΤΗΣ (*dioiketès*), ΛΑΨΑΝΕ (*lashane*), ΜΕΙΖΩΝ (*meizōn*), ΑΠΕ (*ape*).¹²⁶ These all denote functions on various levels of the village administration, with different but overlapping areas of influence (see below). The administrative structure, including titles and number of officials, in late antique and early Islamic Egypt varied regionally.¹²⁷ The protection letters are sometimes issued by one village official, but often also by two, three or even four village officials.

The most common title in late antique and early Islamic village administrative documents in general, as well as in the Coptic protection letters, is that of *lashane*, who was in charge of the general administration of the village. One or two individuals were usually the *lashane*, but the office could be carried out by up to four people at the same time, and they could be

¹²⁴ Moreover, due to the fragmentary state of many of the documents (see below, section 1.4), even the names of the actors can be lost. This could be partially due to the fact that the actors were mentioned in areas that easily break off: near the top and near the end of the document (in the address formula and in the signature). By “protector” I mean the party who issues the protection letter, and by “protectee” I mean the party on whose behalf the protection letter is issued. On the terminology I use for various elements in the Coptic protection letters, such as “protector” and “protectee”, see section 2.4.

¹²⁵ An example is protection letter the Coptic protection letter *SB Kopt.* V 2247, which is issued by 4 men without accompanying titles. The document mentions various taxes and is most likely a product of village administration: see section 4.3.1.1.

¹²⁶ The village administration of late antique and Early Islamic Egypt has been examined in detail by Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, and the following paragraph leans heavily on this publication. For the terms used for village officials in the Arabic papyri, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, 158-159.

¹²⁷ Berkes, cited above. See his diagrams of different village administration structures on p. 189, 205 and 206.

in office for several years at a time, which was good for the stability of the village.¹²⁸ Especially in Djeme, where many of the extant Coptic protection letters come from, the *lashane* were the general administrators of the village, together with the *ape* (ἀπε pl. ἀπηγε (apèue), whose function was more related to taxation. A term that is used in the Coptic sources, mostly in those found in the Theban region, to denote the village elites is ⲛⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲣⲟⲙⲉ (*nnoc nrōme*), “great men”. They were the group among whom the village officials were chosen.¹²⁹ The term itself only appears twice in the Coptic protection letters.¹³⁰ The areas of responsibility of the village elites included tax assessment and tax collection, but they also judged in disputes and generally had great influence in village disputes and how they are resolved. They are also seen controlling debt prisons in the villages.¹³¹ The areas of responsibility listed above are all related to the protection letters and the village elite’s authority as well as motivations to issue such documents, as I will explain in section 5.4. One important aspect of the role of the village officials in society is that they functioned as intermediaries between the local population and government officials. This position came with power and status in the community, but also with responsibilities: the village heads were sometimes held liable, with their own possessions, by the government in Fustat for deficits in the tax revenues from their villages, or for individuals to be punished by the governor.¹³²

1.3.2.2 Monastic and clerical elites

Individuals with clerical or monastic titles also appear in the Coptic protection letters, although less often than the lay village elites discussed above. Protection letters are found in monastic contexts and in some cases they were issued on behalf of monks.¹³³ Among the protectors and intermediaries in the protection letters we find a bishop, active in the first half of the seventh century, before the Arab conquest, who holds the highest rank among

¹²⁸ Berkes, cited above, 175.

¹²⁹ Wickham, *Framing*; Papaconstantinou, “Great Men”.

¹³⁰ *SB Kopt.* V 2304 (singular), *SB Kopt.* V 2261 (plural).

¹³¹ Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 177-178.

¹³² See the letter sent by governor Qurra b. Sharik to the district administrator or pagarch Basilios in Aphrodito: “If you do not find him, send me his son or sons, and if he does not have sons, send me his wife, and if he does not have anyone to stand guarantor for him, send me his village headman.” *P.Heid.Arab.* I 4.5-10, cited in Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, 159, with more examples.

¹³³ *O.GurnaGórecki* 69, *SB Kopt.* V 2300. On the finding contexts of the protection letters, see section 2.3.1.

the monastic and clerical elites appearing as protectors and intermediaries in the Coptic protection letters.¹³⁴ However, also priests and heads of monasteries issued protection letters, and were asked by village officials to issue them. Cecilia Palombo has argued that the involvement of clerical and monastic elites in the production and circulation of Coptic protection letters was part of their active role in the administration of early Islamic Egypt.¹³⁵ The clerical and monastic titles that used in the protection letters are *presbuteros* (priest), *archimandrites*,¹³⁶ *hegoumenos*,¹³⁷ *proestōs*,¹³⁸ and probably *prōtos*,¹³⁹ (all different titles for heads of monasteries). Honorary titles such as “your paternity” and “Apa”, or “Papa” also appear in the Coptic protection letters, indicating a monastic or clerical elite status.¹⁴⁰

In this section I discussed the actors in focus in this dissertation, the local elites of the seventh and eighth Egyptian countryside. In the next section I turn to the sources which tell us, albeit often fragmentarily, of their interventions, their positions, their roles in society: the papyrological record. In other words, we move on from village heads Georgios and Aron, to the potsherd inscribed by the scribe Aristophanes.

1.4 Coptic protection letters, a documentary source

Georgios and Aron’s protection letter for Jeremias, as a source for historical research, is a document, the text of which was inscribed with ink on a potsherd, a fragment of a ceramic vessel reused as a writing surface. Other documents, including protection letters, were written on pieces of papyrus or on flakes of limestone.¹⁴¹ Because of their Egyptian provenance and their writing support, these documents are considered part of the papyrological record.¹⁴² This section of the chapter addresses some issues that arise when

¹³⁴ Bishop Pesynthios of Coptos, who is asked to issue a protection letter in two letters (see section 3.2.5). On this aspect of the bishop’s legal authority, see Dekker, *Episcopal Networks*, 57-58 and 266-267.

¹³⁵ Palombo, “Christian Clergy,” 125-126.

¹³⁶ *P.Ryl.Copt.* 289.

¹³⁷ *SB Kopt.* V 2253.

¹³⁸ *SB Kopt.* V 2291.

¹³⁹ *SB Kopt.* V 2274: l.1 $\mu\pi\rho\tau\eta\varsigma$. The title was originally interpreted by Till as an abbreviation of *prōtokomētēs*, a village official, but Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 252, has argued that it should be interpreted in this document as the title for a head of a monastery.

¹⁴⁰ On such titles, see Derda and Wipszycka, “L’emploi”.

¹⁴¹ See Chapter 2. On the materiality of papyri see Bülow-Jacobsen, “Writing”; See also the contributions in Hoogendijk and Van Gompel (eds.), *Materiality*.

¹⁴² In other areas around the Mediterranean papyri have also been preserved in much smaller numbers. For the late antique and early Islamic contest especially the papyri from Nessana in the

using documentary texts, specifically those belonging to the papyrological record, as a source for historical research in general, and more specifically as a source for our understanding of Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries. Where relevant, I will also discuss the specific issue when it regards the Coptic protection letters in particular.

1.4.1 Uneven distribution of the documentation

The first issue that needs to be acknowledged when using papyri as a historical source is that the papyrological record has notable geographical, chronological and social “holes” in it. The papyri that have survived are distributed unevenly. In general, in the wetter area of the Delta and cities which have been populated continuously, like Alexandria, only few papyri have survived. Most papyri were found in areas that were lost to the desert at some point in history. For the seventh and eighth centuries, most Coptic papyri excavated and now preserved in collections come from Western Thebes, Ashmunayn /Hermopolis, Fayyum/Arsinoe, Kòm Ishqàw/Aphrodito, and Aswàn/Syene. However, the majority of the published Coptic documents comes from the Theban region. There are also large dossiers of Coptic documents from Middle Egypt, especially from the important monastic centers at Bawit and Bala’izah. It is important to point out that a combination of Coptic, Greek, Arabic, or multilingual papyri were discovered in most of these areas, also as parts of the same dossier or archive (see below). As I have discussed in section 1.2.3, the three administrative languages of Egypt operated in a multilingual system, even in the Theban region where Arabicization developed later than in other parts of the province. The Coptic protection letters themselves were mostly found in Western Thebes, which includes Jeremias’ protection letter.¹⁴³ However, the Greek, Arabic and multilingual documents that connect the Coptic protection letters and their actors to the government, were mainly found in Middle Egypt. There, a small number of protection letters and references to them were found, and documents from the Theban area which link explicitly to documents produced in more northern regions of Egypt.¹⁴⁴ Thus, while the geographical distribution of the Coptic protection letters is uneven, and concentrated in Western Thebes, there are connections with documentary production in other regions of Egypt as well.

Negev desert and from Petra are worth mentioning (check and put in references): *P.Ness* III and *P.Petra* I-V. On using papyri to write history see in the first place Bagnall, *Reading*.

¹⁴³ I will discuss this in more detail in section 2.3.1.

¹⁴⁴ These documents and their relationship to the Coptic protection letters, will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

The documentation is unevenly distributed in other ways as well. The papyri are considered relevant sources for social history because they reflect everyday concerns of individual, “normal” people as opposed to the literary sources’ tendency to focus on high-level “important” historical events and people.¹⁴⁵ However, certain groups are definitely favored by the documentation. Monastic and clerical actors are well represented in the edited papyri of seventh and eighth-century Egypt, especially but not only in the Coptic documents. Even on the village scale, local elites such as the village heads of Djeme are much better documented than lower social strata. Women and children play a much less prominent role in the papyri than adult men. Lastly, the papyrological material is notoriously fragmentary in the most literal sense. Jeremias’ protection letter is complete, but the majority of the documents used in this dissertation are missing parts of the original text. Holes and tears caused by insects or other destructive sources, smudged or faded ink can make texts very difficult to read. Portions of the original document written on papyrus can be torn or cut off, e.g. for reuse in the past, or for sales on the antiquities market. Discarded documents on ostraca can break into pieces. Lacunae in documentary texts can be completed only with elements of which we already have knowledge. Fortunately, thanks to the relatively large amount of published Coptic protection letters, and our knowledge of the formulas used to write them, editors have often been able to fill certain lacunae in several texts.¹⁴⁶

1.4.2 Problem of dating documents

A second challenge of the documentary record is the dating of the documents. This is especially relevant for Coptic documents, including the Coptic protection letters.¹⁴⁷ There are two challenges with dating Coptic documents. If they contain a date, it is usually a so-called indiction date, a relative type of dating common in late antique Egyptian documents, indicating the number of the year in a 15 year cycle related to taxation, preceded by the month and the day.¹⁴⁸ Without other information tying the document to a specific timespan, such as the mention of a person which can be dated, the indiction date does not give us

¹⁴⁵ Sundelin, “Introduction,” 9.

¹⁴⁶ In Chapter 3 I discuss at length the formulary and the relative uniformity of the protection letters, which makes filling in lacunae possible but not certain.

¹⁴⁷ On Coptic monastic documents having been dated too early, see Palombo, “Christian Clergy”, p. xxvi ff.

¹⁴⁸ Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems*; Boud’hors, “Issues”.

information about the year in which the document was produced. The Coptic protection letters generally contain an indiction date, which means that they can be dated to a specific date in a number of cases, particularly when they were written by certain scribes from Djeme.¹⁴⁹ The second challenge in dating Coptic documents particularly regards paleography. There are certain developments in the Coptic documentary writing styles which can help indicate a dating to a certain century or a couple of centuries for a given document.¹⁵⁰ This is still quite rough, and moreover, handwriting styles common in earlier documents are also found in documents that were written centuries later, especially when the writer writes in a book hand.¹⁵¹

1.4.3 Single documents, archives and dossiers

Another issue to keep in mind when working with papyri is their relationship to other documents. Were they found in the same finding spot, e.g. a jar like the documents of pagarch Flavius Papis from Edfu, together with other documents (archive), were they found in different finding spots but do they refer to the same person, family, or institution (dossier)?¹⁵² Most papyri are actually “single documents”, whose connection to other documents is now lost. The people in them often cannot be linked to other people known from other documents. However, the papyrological record of the seventh and eighth centuries contains a number of multilingual archives and dossiers. Important multilingual corpora centered around a *pagarch* or another official in the local administration in the countryside are e.g. those of Senouthios (643-644), Papis (648-688), Flavius Atias (696-703), Basilios (705-721).¹⁵³ Documentary corpora of large monastic centers such as those of Bawit and Balai’zah have also been preserved.¹⁵⁴ The dossier of Aristophanes, village scribe of Djeme and the scribe of Jeremias’ protection letter, has been studied in detail by

¹⁴⁹ See section 3.3.1. See also Cromwell, *Recording*, 2.4 on the chronology of the Theban Coptic documents in particular.

¹⁵⁰ Boud’hors, “Issues”.

¹⁵¹ E.g., the eighth-century Theban monk and book producer Frange, whose correspondence is edited in *O.Frange*.

¹⁵² On archives and dossiers in the papyrological record, see Vandorpe, “Archives”.

¹⁵³ Sijpesteijn, “Multilingual archives” discusses these as well as smaller multilingual archives, such as the archive of headman Menas son of Senouthios with tax documents in Greek and Arabic-Greek, and the small archive of correspondence from Qasr Ibrim in Arabic and Coptic between the Nubian governor and the governor in Egypt.

¹⁵⁴ Palombo, “Christian Clergy”, on the role of these monasteries in the administration of post-conquest Egypt, and especially Chapter 2 on these monasteries as archival places.

Jennifer Cromwell.¹⁵⁵ Other than Jeremias' letter, Aristophanes produced at least four more Coptic protection letters. However, the majority of these documents that form the core of this dissertation is not part of an archive or a dossier, but are rather stand alone documents, which usually means that we have less information on their context.¹⁵⁶

Now that I have briefly discussed some challenges involved in using papyri as a historical source, in the next section I make a remark about a characteristic that is often ascribed to documentary sources, namely that they give us an unmediated view on the past.

1.4.4 The “unmediatedness” of documentary papyri

Documentary sources such as papyri are valued because of a perceived unmediated quality: the papyri reflect situations that happened more or less at the time when they were written (e.g. drawing up a contract, drafting a petition about a grievance), as opposed to literary accounts which were almost always written centuries after the events by an author imposing his own interpretative framework.¹⁵⁷ However, a definition of documentary papyri as accounts of “what really happened” – as opposed to literary texts which are necessarily written through a lens which deforms the facts – is not very fruitful when trying to understand the situation that gave rise to the production of a document, of which the document is just one reflection. E.g., in the case of legal texts such as petitions it has already been argued that they could be “shaped” similarly to narrative texts.¹⁵⁸ Rhetoric also plays an important part in correspondence between higher officials in the capital and local

¹⁵⁵ Cromwell, *Recording*.

¹⁵⁶ In section 3.3.1 I compare the protection letters produced by the various scribes of Djeme who appear in the Coptic protection letters.

¹⁵⁷ Sundelin, “Introduction,” 7. Also Turner, *Greek Papyri*, 127, who puts this approach to documentary papyri in these words: “Those who require writing about everyday experience to be touched and transfigured by art regard non-literary papyri as humdrum, if not downright rubbish; the investigator, however, who is trying to learn of things as they really were will be excited at being put in immediate touch with concrete and vivid facts that have not been interpreted by the mind or imagination of a third party. He will feel something of the fascination of the eavesdropper: the text of 2,000 years ago which he is reading, unless it is a proclamation or public notice, was written to be seen by relatively few eyes, and not to be given publicity. Chance has caused the survival of what in this, as in most civilizations, has been thrown away. The investigator can therefore find evidence all the more valuable for being unselected and unrevised for public view. In this respect papyri are unlike inscriptions, which were designed for public exhibition and consequently have a certain self-consciousness.” On the next page he briefly qualifies this statement.

¹⁵⁸ Papaconstantinou, “Hagiography,” 2, citing (n. 4) Jean-Luc Fournet, “À propos de *SBXIV 11856* ou quand la poésie rencontre le document”, *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 93 (1993), 223–235.

administrators in the regions, as well as in petitions or more informal requests for justice or help.¹⁵⁹ The Coptic protection letters are quite concise documents and do not often contain phrases outside of a relatively fixed group of formulas and their variations. However, Coptic protection letters were written from a top-down perspective. They were issued by and thus “tell the story” from the point of view of the “protectors”, the local authorities who held a certain power in their communities, which included the “protectee” of the protection letter. Moreover, the large majority of letters in which Coptic protection letters were discussed, e.g. requests for protection letters, were exchanged between local authorities who could issue the protection letters and those who intervened for people in need of one, with three published exceptions. As such, again the point of view of the “protectee” is only rarely seen. The Coptic protection letters operated in a reciprocal society, and they expressed and activated social relationships which were not symmetrical. The fact that our documentation was written for the most part from a top-down perspective results in a rather one-sided view of these protection relationships. While my focus in this dissertation is on the role of exactly these local elites who intervene as protectors in the Coptic protection letter mechanism, through the lens of the protection letters, it is important to study the Coptic protection letters not exclusively through the lens of the protectors. Without all parties’ perspective, the documents do not grant us access to “what really happened”. However, keeping this in mind, and scrutinizing the language of the Coptic protection letters to understand how we can read these documents against the grain instead of taking their words at face value, I will evaluate different aspects of the social relationships at work in the Coptic protection letter mechanism (see especially Chapter 5).

This section has discussed the challenges surrounding using documents such as Jeremias’ protection letter as historical sources, which concludes the discussion of the context of the Coptic protection letters. In the last section of this chapter, then, I turn to my approach to these documents in this dissertation.

1.5 My approach, what is new?

This section presents several aspects of my approach to the Coptic protection letters and the research questions I set out in the Introduction. First, I discuss the directions taken by the existing research on the Coptic protection letters, and how this dissertation relates to that (1.5.1). Second, I propose my approach to the categorization of Coptic protection letters

¹⁵⁹ Papaconstantinou, “Rhetoric”; Papaconstantinou, “Women”.

(1.5.2). Third, I discuss what I view as the three main functions of the Coptic protection letters (1.5.3). The last two sections introduce my main interests in the protection letters: the social relationships underlying them (1.5.4), and their relevance for understanding the role of the local elites in the administration of the province, and the empire (1.5.5).

1.5.1 The existing research on the Coptic protection letters

Here I briefly survey how the Coptic protection letters have been studied or used as sources for historical research. The existing scholarly research involving the Coptic protection letters falls broadly into two strands. One strand is concerned with the edition or reedition of these documents, and categorizing the large corpus into smaller groups. Because the first scholars who did this were especially interested in the protection letters as legal documents, these first categorizations and (re)editions also involve discussions of legal history, particularly on the protection letters' possible link with older types of legal documents related to asylum, i.e. the Hellenistic *pisteis* and especially the late antique *logoi asulias*, known from Justinian's legal texts. The first main studies are Schiller, "The Coptic λογος μνηουτε documents" in 1933, and by Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe", in 1938. The latter included 103 texts, divided into 9 categories, with German translations of the Coptic protection letters and a number of other Coptic documents that relate to them in varying degrees. It corrects and adds to Schiller's categorization and discussion. It also features an essay by legal historian Liebesny, precisely on the issue of the protection letters' link with the *logoi asulias*, which he and Till were less inclined to emphasize compared to other studies, as I have discussed in section 1.1.3.1. Till (and Liebesny)'s seminal study now counts as the starting point for the study of the Coptic protection letters, and many publications follow them in the use of the term "Schutzbrief" or a direct translation thereof.¹⁶⁰ However, the influence of Till and Liebesny's study reaches further than the name given to the documents: Till's interpretation of the characteristic formula εις λογοσ μνηουτε ντοοτκ (*eis plogos mnpoute ntootk*) as "Here is the promise, by God, for you" is commonly accepted.¹⁶¹ Delattre, "Les lettres de protection", in 2007, updated the corpus, with a list of protection letters published since Till, including (re)editions of documents, and proposed some changes to Till's categorization, without going into the legal historical

¹⁶⁰ Schiller uses "logos mnpoute documents", which is less interpretative than "Schutzbriefe". Not all scholars use (a translation of) Schutzbrief, see section 2.1.2.

¹⁶¹ Exceptions in 2.1.2.

discussion. He also added to the corpus of Coptic protection letters with reeditions and editions of documents. Furthermore, editions of protection letters appear within larger thematic corpora, e.g. as part of the documents belonging to a certain collection, area, or scribe,¹⁶² or are published in small groups.¹⁶³ Most recently, 89 protection letters have been collected in *SB Kopt. V*, including a large number of texts from Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe”, with corrections by editor Monika Hasitzka. Thus, the protection letters have received attention in the form of editions, reeditions, or as sources for the study of the legal history of late antique and early Islamic Egypt. They have been categorized into smaller, mainly formal, categories.

A second strand of the scholarship involving the Coptic protection letters has been using them as sources for the administrative history of late antique and early Islamic Egypt, mainly as the protection letters relate to travel and the restrictions thereof by the Arab-Muslim government.¹⁶⁴ The Coptic protection letters are documents related to fugitives and taxation, two aspects of the administration of the Arab-Muslim government which have received some attention from scholars, also because they are prominent in the papyrological record. The protection letters have also been discussed in the context of the responsibilities of local authorities.¹⁶⁵

This dissertation builds on the work that has been done, but aims at a more inclusive approach to the Coptic protection letters, with a stronger emphasis on the social mechanisms and relationships which they reflect. The Coptic protection letters serve as a way into understanding the functioning of the local, specifically rural, elites and their relationships with the local village population and with the government. The protection mechanisms I am examining of course constitute just a small part of village life, let alone the Islamic Empire, but they are, just like the Coptic protection letters themselves, at the crossroads of important, interrelated aspects of society, namely law and custom, administration, and social relationships. If we think back to Jeremias’ protection letter I cited at the beginning of this

¹⁶² E.g., respectively, *P.Stras.Copt.* 66, *O.Marc* 322, Cromwell, *Recording village life*, 245-247, no. 9.

¹⁶³ Boud'hors, “Coptic Ostraca”.

¹⁶⁴ Delattre, “Checkpoints”; Schaten, “Reiseformalitäten”; Selander, “koptische Schutzbriefe”; Selander, “Travel”.

¹⁶⁵ Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 176-177 on *lashanes*; Dekker, *Episcopal Networks*, 57-58 and 266-267, on the responsibilities of bishop Pesynthios of Coptos; Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, on clerical elites.

chapter, I believe there are three main facets to the document. Jeremias' protection letter was, firstly, a legal document, a text which was signed, which contained specific formulae, and which pertained to Jeremias' taxes and the administration of the village. This facet of the protection letters, its content and form, has received most attention in the past. However, secondly, Jeremias' document was a letter, in the sense that it was a communication between participants in an (asymmetrical) relationship of protection: the tax evader and his children, and the village administrators who had the power to harass him, but also to grant him amnesty. And thirdly, it was a material object, which had to be produced by and delivered to the relevant parties, as part of the protection letter mechanism. In this dissertation all three of these aspects are integrated in my analyses.

1.5.2 Categorization and embeddedness

This dissertation does not analyze the Coptic protection letters per formal subcategory as they were set out by Till, and amended by Delattre. Within Till's and Delattre's categories, the texts can still differ quite a lot in terms of structure and content, and often certain texts from one category feature characteristics similar to those of another category, making the boundaries often more constricting than useful. I discuss the existing categorizations and the issues listed above in more detail in section 2.1. Generally I avoid rigid categorization of the Coptic protection letters and instead opt for a more flexible analysis of the corpus as a whole as well as the separate texts. There are multiple advantages to this flexible, "organic" approach to the corpus, and in what follows I discuss the two main advantages.

The concept of "family resemblance", made popular by Wittgenstein, is useful as a way to understand the corpus and its boundaries.¹⁶⁶ According to this approach, in any given category the elements in it are characterized by a network of overlapping similarities. The separate elements do not all have to contain specific characteristics to be considered part of the category, but rather these characteristics run as strands through the category.¹⁶⁷ As the Coptic protection letters are characterized by a very high degree of variability in their structure and content, this approach is appropriate. I apply this concept of "family resemblance" on two scales. On a smaller scale, it helps me to keep the category of Coptic protection letters open, while still being able to define what are the formal conditions to call

¹⁶⁶ This concept is also used to describe the connections between Fatimid state documents in Rustow, *Lost Archive*, 84; and Arabic letters of request on papyrus in Sijpesteijn, "Righting Wrongs".

¹⁶⁷ Wittgenstein uses the category of games as an illustration in his explanation of "family resemblance" in *Philosophical Investigations*, §66-68.

a document a Coptic protection letter. In section 3.1.1, I point to a constellation of formulaic elements which in my opinion form the core of the Coptic protection letter, as they are shared by the largest number of documents. The *eis plogos mpnoute ntook* formula, or some variant of it, is chief among them. However, not all of the formulaic elements need to be part of the document for the document to be considered a Coptic protection letter. Thus, the category is formally defined, but not restricted. On a larger scale, this fluid approach of “family resemblance” also encourages the inclusion in my analyses of Greek, Arabic, and other types of Coptic documents which are not considered protection letters but which share certain formal or functional characteristics with them, such as safe conducts, guarantees, private letters, etc. Rather than studying the Coptic protection letters as a certain type of document functioning in a certain way in a certain context, I look for and examine the ties which they have with other (types of) documents. This way, I examine the mechanisms and relationships of protection underlying the documents across documentary types, languages and administrative, geographical, and social contexts. Studying the Coptic protection letters as elements in a much larger network, I highlight how they can help us understand how Early Islamic Egyptian society was woven together.¹⁶⁸

Not examining the Coptic protection letters as defined by their membership of a certain formal subcategory has a second advantage. It allows me to group and analyze the documents along other lines, which can be related to form, but also content. E.g. in Chapter 3, I define different types of expressions of protection featured in the documents (section 3.2.1), and I draw a formal comparison of the protection letters written by the scribes of Djeme, individually and as a group (3.3.1). In Chapter 4, I make use of another way to group and analyze the protection letters, and tie them into the network of “protection documents”, and that is to focus on the kind of protection they are offering, i.e. is the protection related to legal or administrative issues, what are the addressees of the protection letters protected from? The social or administrative function of the people involved in the protection letters, and the related other protection documents, as well as the contexts in which these people operated (e.g. village heads, monastic authorities, officials on different levels of the administration etc.) are also useful points of departure for bringing together documents and comparing them, as it helps to understand the social relationships of the world in which this

¹⁶⁸ The publications mentioned in note 164 do this to a certain degree. This approach is especially prominent here in Chapters 4 and 5.

network of documents was produced, which is more in focus in Chapters 4 and 5. This multidimensional way of grouping, comparing and analyzing the fluid corpus allows me to focus on the different functions of these documents in society and the mechanisms underlying their production and circulation. I explain my approach to the functions of the Coptic protection letters in the next paragraph.

1.5.3 Functions of the protection letters in society

When it has dealt with their function, the scholarship on Coptic protection letters has mainly examined, in greater or lesser detail, two functions of these documents: as legal documents (guarantees) providing a certain amnesty for debtors, and as a type of safe conduct in a context of policies of restriction of travel by the government. I define the general function of the Coptic protection letters as instruments to solve problems in village contexts. I will emphasize how this problem-solving goes in different directions: the issuance of a protection letters can solve a problem for the party receiving the protection letter, but also for the party issuing it. These problems and their solutions are related to the two interrelated domains of law and administration, with taxation playing an important role. However, there is a third dimension to the purpose of the protection letters, and that is their social function in the milieus in which they operated. The protection letters activated social relationships between the various people involved in their production and circulation. My emphasis on the social function of the Coptic protection letters is related to my interest in the “social role” of the rural elites.¹⁶⁹ This key concept of sociology is defined as “patterns or norms of behavior expected from the occupant of a particular position in the social structure”.¹⁷⁰ I examine the rural elites’ protective interventions in village life, e.g. through the issuance of protection documents, as a part of their social role. This focus on the social aspects of village life in late antiquity and early Islam, based on documentary sources and with a particular focus on local elites, is not new.¹⁷¹ However, the Coptic protection letters specifically have not been subject to an elaborate analysis in that light until now.

¹⁶⁹ This is similar to the approach to Coptic legal documents mentioned by Richter, “Coptic Papyri”.

¹⁷⁰ Burke, *History*, 47-50, esp. 47.

¹⁷¹ On local elites’ mechanisms of dependency and power in village life: cf. Ruffini, “Village Life”; Ruffini, *Life*; Papaconstantinou, “Great Men”; Papaconstantinou, “Propriétaires”; Papaconstantinou, “Hagiography”; Wilfong, *Women*; Sijpesteijn, “Loyal and knowledgeable supporters”.

Emphasizing the social functions, closely intertwined with legal and administrative functions, of the documents, and the people involved in them, begs the question of how they fitted into larger societal mechanisms and systems. The paradigm of the opposition between reciprocity and solidarity has been used to examine social relationships in medieval Egypt.¹⁷² How this might be of use when thinking about the way Coptic protection letters, and related protection documents, operated in society, will be the subject of the next paragraph.

1.5.4 Solidarity, reciprocity, and patronage

Relationships based on reciprocity involve the exchange of goods, services and favours, which can be material or symbolic, whereby reciprocating is obligatory. These are personal relationships that can be between equals but are often between people of unequal power or status, and the content of the exchanges depends on the power differential in the relationship, whereby “[t]he most powerful members of the group generally offer protection and economic or other support to its weakest members, in exchange for various forms of services.”¹⁷³ In systems based on reciprocity, the individual is more important than the group. Patronage relationships are part of reciprocity based systems.¹⁷⁴ In solidarity based systems, on the other hand, group belonging is more important than individual interests. The solidarity or group belonging is based on a unifying idea such as a shared ideology, e.g. religion. In a solidarity system you are bound to every member of the group, even if you do not have any other relationship with them. Reciprocity and solidarity can be seen as opposite ends of a spectrum which coexist in any “real” society.¹⁷⁵

The different kinds of rural patronage which existed in late antique Egypt have been examined by Lopez through his analysis of the sermons of Shenoute of Atripe, abbot of a group of three monasteries located near the city of Panopolis, in southern Egypt, during the

¹⁷² Rustow, “Patronage”; Papaconstantinou, “Hagiography”. Their approach follows Schwartz, *Were the Jews?* My discussion of this paradigm in the next paragraph is based on these sources. However, the concepts of solidarity and reciprocity as lenses through which to understand societies go back to Emile Durkheim (*The Division of Labour in Society*, 1893) and Marcel Mauss (*The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, 1924) respectively.

¹⁷³ Papaconstantinou, “Hagiography,” 15.

¹⁷⁴ A classic study on reciprocal relationships and patronage in the Islamic world is by Mottahedeh, *Loyalty*.

¹⁷⁵ This coexistence can create tension, as e.g. shown in the case studies by Schwartz, *Were the Jews?* and Rustow, “Patronage”.

first half of the fifth century.¹⁷⁶ Rich and powerful landowners could become rural patrons, providing “rural clients with a protection that may take multiple and diverse forms: loans, help with irrigation, work opportunities, access to land tenancy, contacts with the powerful, protection from the demands of the state and other landowners (taxes, rents, liturgies), and—crucially in a late Roman context—legal protection at court.”¹⁷⁷ However, monasteries also sought to engage in patronage relationships, and the tensions in which this rivalry resulted are palpable in Shenoute’s sermons: while Shenoute considered his own patronage of the population as “care for the poor”, the patronage offered by his rivals, the rich landowners, was “exploitation”.¹⁷⁸

In his comparative historical study, *Framing the Middle Ages*, Chris Wickham has argued, based on arguments by Patricia Crone about the effects of Arab-Muslim rule on existing networks of patronage, that when Egypt became a province of the Islamic empire “patronage and all the other complex mediations of the Roman world were much less available in Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd society”. Because the Arabs brought their own patronage system of *walā’*, he argues, you could only be part of a patronage network by converting and becoming a *mawlā*.¹⁷⁹ However, forms of local patronage still existed in the eighth century. E.g., Arietta Papaconstantinou has defined the society of the eighth-century Theban area as “a reciprocity based group with a strong culture of patronage and obligation”, in the context of her analysis of the child donation documents of the Saint Phoibammon monastery.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, the village societies of the late antique and early Islamic Egyptian countryside also seem to have included elements of solidarity. While warning us that the idea of a “Christian community of Egypt” as we see it in the medieval literary sources, is not visible in the documentary sources, Arietta Papaconstantinou argues that “in the few cases where a sense of community does emerge, it is invariably the village”,

¹⁷⁶ Lopez, *Shenoute*, Chapter 3.

¹⁷⁷ Lopez, *Shenoute*, 48.

¹⁷⁸ Lopez, *Shenoute*, 49.

¹⁷⁹ Wickham, *Framing*, 143. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 214-225 gives an overview patronage mechanisms in late antique Egypt. My discussion on patronage in these paragraphs does not concern *walā’*, the Arab-Muslim patronage system, in which non-Arabs non-Muslims could enter by converting. It was both a social phenomenon and legal institution. For the different aspects of *walā’*, see the articles collected in Bernards and Nawas, *Patronate*, Rustow, “Formal”.

¹⁸⁰ Papaconstantinou, “Hagiography”.

pointing to documentary sources in which a village seems to act as a whole.¹⁸¹ Moreover, she points to “village solidarities”, which led villagers to hide and protect fugitives, although they risked a fine that was twice as high as the fine for the fugitives themselves.¹⁸² Of course, it is possible that behind this “village solidarity” was a pre-existing relationship based on reciprocity, and that the people hiding and protecting fugitives were already associates of the fugitives, who might have had to reciprocate the favor. The act of protection may have even sparked the reciprocity relationship.

Do the protection letters reflect a form of local patronage, or more broadly a social exchange based on reciprocity? Or do they reflect solidarity alliances? Marina Rustow offers a definition of what she calls the “informal” type of patronage to be found in medieval Islamic societies, which I find useful here: “using one’s influence, power, knowledge or financial means on behalf of someone else, with an eye toward benefiting both that person and oneself at the same time.” This type of patronage can be engaged in by rulers, but also by “village big men”.¹⁸³ As I mentioned above, I consider the Coptic protection letters to be problem-solving instruments which had the capacity to benefit both parties involved. Thanks to the protection letter, the addressee can return to his home without fear of punishment. This letter was in its turn produced because of the power of the local authority, and their responsibilities in the administration. The favor they are asking is for the addressee to generally come home and take up their role in village life, in many cases contributing a partial payment, which directly or indirectly might solve a problem for the local authority, in terms of tax revenue or (agricultural) labor. This in turn helps to strengthen the local authority’s position in the administration and the village community. I will elaborate on this point in section 5.4.

On the other hand, we might ask if there is some form of local solidarity at play in the way these documents operated, by which belonging to a certain village community forged such a strong tie that tax evaders and fugitives could receive amnesty from their village heads or monastery leaders? Villages as a whole, or rather a group of village representatives, could issue a protection letter, and in some protection letters the issuing party promises to not ask

¹⁸¹ Papaconstantinou, “Great men”. It has been argued that the terms for “village community” (*koinon*, *koinotès*) indicate the authoritative elite group of the village rather than the whole community, e.g. in the so-called communal tax agreement P.CL.T 6: Cromwell, *Recording* 90-91, Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung* 171-172.

¹⁸² Papaconstantinou, “Great men”, based on the Qurra-Basilios correspondence.

¹⁸³ Rustow, “Formal”. The formal type of patronage in her analysis is *walā’* (see above).

anything from the addressee, exempting them from payment of taxes or a (tax) debt. Still, also in these cases the return of the villager could have benefits for the authority issuing the document not related to tax revenue, but rather to labor or even social issues, e.g. through the return of a family member to their family. Ties of reciprocity are much easier to recognize in the Coptic protection letter mechanism than ties of solidarity, as I will discuss in section 5.4.3.

Did the protection letters confirm or create ties of dependency between the parties? In other words, did the addressee owe something, a service, a favor, to the issuing local authority, other than their return to the village and their role therein? It is difficult to answer these questions, as the documents themselves do not directly indicate it. While definite answers to the questions asked here might not be within reach, the concepts of solidarity and reciprocity as systems underlying protective interventions are useful to try to understand the social role of the rural elites in their local context. In the next paragraph, I discuss how I move beyond this local context, and use the Coptic protection letters and related documents to examine the role of the rural elites in Egypt as a province of the caliphate, and in the caliphate itself.

1.5.5 Place of the rural elites in the empire

My multidimensional approach to the functions of the protection documents, on the crossroads of the legal, the administrative, and the social, leads to an examination of what were or could be the different motives of a member of the local rural elite to issue a protection letter in a general sense, and why they would issue a specific protection letter. These motives are related to the local elites' relationships with the local village population as well as with the government, to the responsibilities and role of these elites in the administration of the province as well as in their own communities. But these motives are also related to the position of the rural elite in the empire at large. Recent insights and concepts from Empire Studies will be underlying my analysis particularly in section 5.4. I will examine whether the protection letters can be seen as reflecting the position of the rural elites as "stakeholders in empire".¹⁸⁴ In their analysis of the Spanish colonial state in America as a stakeholder model, Grafe and Irigoien argue that local elites had an active interest in the success and expansion of the empire, in large part because they had a stake in

¹⁸⁴ Grafe and Irigoien, "Stakeholder Empire". See also Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, 13; Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*.

both collection and expenditure of taxes. I will try to understand the relationship between the interests of the rural elites to the interests of the empire and its representatives.

The ties that bound the rural elites together with other actors in the society and administration of the province of Egypt and eventually the empire is the main subject of Chapter 5. I argue that the whole administrative apparatus at work in Egypt, with its Arab-Muslim *amīrs* and its “local” *dioiketeis* and *lashanes* was an integrated system in which all different actors contributed, not always necessarily consciously, to keep the Islamic Empire running. Actors of different religious, ethnic, social communities were tied together in the same administrative structures and knew how to work within these structures to integrate the demands of empire with their own goals. However, administrative and social hierarchy, a dichotomy between (new) rulers and subjects was both a political construct and a lived reality in day-to-day situations.¹⁸⁵ Managing “difference” was one of the main tasks of an empire in order to be successful.¹⁸⁶ It is more fruitful, though, to study these different actors, and their actions and motives, as parts of the same world, not working in isolation.¹⁸⁷ This can help us to move away from thinking about this world in opposed categories such as Muslims and Christians, Fustat and countryside, official and unofficial languages and documents, Arabic/Greek and Coptic, but rather as an integrated system in which different actors had sometimes aligned and sometimes different or opposed interests.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, I favor a vertical rather than horizontal perspective on the history of Empire: rather than studying the society of early Islamic Egypt as a layered cake of social strata, I will examine it through the actions and communications of “people pushing and tugging on relationships with those above and below them, changing but only sometimes breaking the lines of authority and power”.¹⁸⁹ This holistic approach to the administration and society of Egypt

¹⁸⁵ While we cannot know for sure people’s day-by-day social experiences, the papyrological evidence seems to suggest that this dichotomy was rather felt on a socio-political (rulers vs subjects) rather than a religious (Muslims vs Christians) level: Cromwell, “Religious Expression”.

¹⁸⁶ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*; Lavan, Payne, and Weisweiler, *Cosmopolitanism*.

¹⁸⁷ While this dissertation focuses on actors and the mechanisms which they employ to work within a structure or system, rather than on social networks, documentary sources such as papyri have proven to be an excellent source base for social network analysis, see e.g. Ruffini, *Social Networks*; Dekker, *Episcopal Networks*. In 2015, the Leiden Papyrological Institute organized the international conference “Papyri and Social Networks” (Renate Dekker, Cisca Hoogendijk, Mattias Brand).

¹⁸⁸ This becomes especially important when some of these lines become more blatantly blurred, e.g. in the gradual processes of Arabisation and Islamicisation of the Egyptian province. See also Legendre, “Neither Byzantine?”

¹⁸⁹ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, 14.

as a province of an Islamic Empire, is also related to my comments on the advantage of tying the Coptic protection letters to other documents with which they share a “family resemblance”. When we embrace the combined evidence of the documents in the three administrative languages of Islamic Egypt: Arabic, Coptic, and Greek, rather than dividing the extant documentary sources into official documents in Arabic and Greek, and unofficial in Coptic, we can see this integrated system reflected in them.

Chapter 2: The Coptic Protection Letters: Overview of the Corpus

This Chapter serves as an overview of Coptic protection letters, the document type which forms the basis of my discussions in this dissertation.¹⁹⁰ Section 2.1 discusses the studies which since the 1930s have defined the documentary genre, assigned subcategories and added editions and reeditions to the corpus. In Section 2.2 I elucidate my use of the term “Coptic protection letter” and list which documents are – and which are not – considered to be part of the core corpus in this dissertation. The table in the Appendix provides a list of all these documents, with metadata and a short description. Section 2.3 focuses on the metadata of the Coptic protection letters: where do they come from, when were they produced, what are their writing supports? In Section 2.4 I discuss some terms that I use to designate specific formal elements of the Coptic protection letters, as well as the different parties which play a role in them. I will use these terms throughout the dissertation in my discussions of the documents.

2.1 History of editions and categorizations

2.1.1 Schiller

The first systematic study of the *Coptic protection letters* appeared in 1935, when A. A. Schiller dedicated an essay in the field of legal history to “The Coptic ΛΟΓΟΣ ΜΠΝΟΥΓΤΕ documents”, in which he discussed Coptic texts which bear the *eis plogos (mpnoute) ntook* formula. His main argument is that the ΛΟΓΟΣ ΜΠΝΟΥΓΤΕ documents, especially the “Safe Conduct Type”, which constitute the “kernel” of the corpus, are the direct successors of the Byzantine λόγοι ἀσυλίας, known from literary sources but not attested in the papyrological record (see also section 1.1.3.1). Moreover, Schiller divided the texts into five categories: “Safe Conduct Type”, “Summons Type”, “Judgement Type”, “Tax-receipt Type” and “Private deeds with logos formulae”. The first four types are grouped in the category of “technical documents”.

2.1.2 Till

Three years after Schiller’s essay, W. C. Till’s publication of the “Koptische Schutzbriefe” (1938) appeared. The publication would become the standard reference work for the study of these documents, and the term “Schutzbrief” or its translation is commonly used for

¹⁹⁰ Related documents in Arabic, Coptic, and Greek will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

them.¹⁹¹ Till added 35 previously unpublished documents to the corpus, and reedited two others.¹⁹² While Schiller translated $\pi\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ $\mu\eta\pi\omicron\upsilon\gamma\tau\epsilon$ as “the word of God”, Till interpreted the characteristic formula in the texts in a different way, which is now commonly accepted and which I also follow.¹⁹³ Till interprets $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ as “promise”, κ as preposition meaning the “by” which is used in oaths. Thus, the formula would mean: “Here you have the promise, by God, for you”. Till argues that this interpretation makes more sense in the situations in which these documents are used, as swearing by God is a good way to show that you are serious about your intention to protect someone in a certain way. The fugitive needs to be able to trust the protector, and this trust is gained by swearing by God. Moreover, a more literal interpretation of this formula, “this is the word of God for you” (as Schiller interpreted it) would imply that the person issuing the document, usually a local authority, would equate their following promise with the “word of God”. Thus the promise in the document, issued by a local authority, would essentially be God’s own promise to the addressee. While we cannot be certain, this seems unlikely.

Till divided the Coptic protection letters into 9 categories, numbering the texts he included in his publication from 1 to 103. After the discussion of nos. 1 to 3, which are part of an introduction to the genre of the “Schutzbrief” and its use in society, Till subsequently lists the categories. (1) General protection letters: “Allgemein gehaltene Schutzbriefe” (nos. 4-16); (2) Protection letters with exceptions: “Schutzbriefe mit vorgesehenen Ausnahmen” (nos. 17-41); (3) Protection letters without order to return: “Schutzbriefe ohne Aufforderung zurückzukehren” (nos. 42-49); (4) Invitations for discussion/negotiation: “Einladungen zu Verhandlungen” (nos. 50-54); (5) Assurances connected to other documents: “Zusicherungen in Verbindung mit anderen Urkunden” (nos. 55-64); (6) Unclear cases: “Unklare Fälle” (nos. 65-68); (7) Requests to issue a protection letter: “Ansuchen um Ausstellung eines Schutzbriefes” (nos. 69-84); (8) Requests to transfer a protection letter: “Ansuchen um Übermittlung eines Schutzbriefes” (nos. 85-89); (9) Other cases: “Sonstige

¹⁹¹ In the *Brussel’s Coptic Database (BCD)* they are named “lettre de protection”. In the *BCD* and *Trismegistos (TM)* the texts in Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe” are also registered under their siglum of *P.Schutzbriefe*.

¹⁹² For an overview, see Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe”, 71-72.

¹⁹³ Delattre, “Lettres” , 174. But see e.g. in the editions of *SB Kopt.* V 2251 and 2311, where the editor translates the formula with “It is the guarantee of God (to you)”, citing this as the “literal meaning” in the introduction to the editions (Albarrán Martínez, “Coptic Ostraca”, 1306), and Cromwell, “Recording”, 245-247, no. 9 translates: “Here is the assurance from [God...”. Cromwell uses the term “safe conduct pass”.

Fälle” (nos. 90-101). In the Appendix, Till edits two more texts, nos. 102 (Category 3) and 103 (Category 4).

Till designates only his three first categories explicitly as “Schutzbriefe”. The documents in the other categories are described as e.g. “ΛΟΓΟΣ (ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ) documents”,¹⁹⁴ or documents in which a *logos mpnoute* formula is connected to other documents,¹⁹⁵ or letters.¹⁹⁶ In most of his classification, Till links the formulary of the documents to distinctions in their functions. E.g. he maintains that the documents in category 4 were not issued for fugitives, because they contain promises that allowed the protectee to leave again. However, the texts in category 3 are grouped together only because of a formal aspect which according to Till did not have consequences for their function: while they lack a certain formula (the instruction clause, cf. infra section 2.4) present in categories 1 and 2 – and many other Coptic protection letters – Till argued that the function of these *Schutzbriefe* did not differ from those in categories 1 and 2.

2.1.3 Delattre

After Till, the main editor of the Coptic protection letters has been A. Delattre.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, in his 2007 publication, Delattre lists the “Schutzbriefe” which had been published since the appearance of Till’s work and makes some comments on Till’s categorization of the protection letters in Till (1938).¹⁹⁸

Delattre’s 2007 classification follows Till’s loosely, but allows only 4 categories. The first groups the general protection letters and those with limitations and exceptions together (Till’s categories 1 and 2). Delattre interprets all these documents as issued on behalf of fugitives. The second category is Till’s Category 3. In contrast to Till, however, Delattre argues that the distinctive formal characteristic of these texts – they lack an instruction clause, a formula which most often asks the addressee to come home (see section 2.4) – is an indication of their distinctive function, namely not as documents issued on behalf of a

¹⁹⁴ Category 4, Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe,” 99.

¹⁹⁵ Category 5, Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe,” 103.

¹⁹⁶ Category 7, Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe,” 109.

¹⁹⁷ Delattre, “Lettres”; Delattre, “Nouveau”; P.Stras.Copt. 66.

¹⁹⁸ Delattre, “Lettres,” 175-176. He publishes three new texts on 176-178: see below my list of Coptic protection letters in this dissertation. Revisions of texts previously edited in Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe,” are listed on 174.

fugitive but as documents with a function similar to that of the official Greek and Arabic travel permits.¹⁹⁹

Delattre's third category groups together protection letters linked to other documents, in the same way as Till's Category 5. Delattre asserts that the "protection letters" in these cases are only protective formulas attached to legal or fiscal documents, especially in the case of the tax-receipts with Coptic protection letter formulas.²⁰⁰ Delattre's fourth category ("Utilisations variées) contains the documents which do not fit in the first three categories, e.g. letters concerning protection letters, which I also include in the corpus (see below, section 2.2).

2.1.4 Hasitzka: *SB Kopt. V*

The *Koptisches Sammelbuch V* (2020), pp. 46-104, nos. 2223 – 2311, edited by Monika Hasitzka, provides under the heading "Schutzbriefe" reeditions for 86 Coptic protection letters. Many of the texts in Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe" are included, but also 4 documents published elsewhere.²⁰¹ The reedited texts from Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe" also include letters which mention a *logos*, and are also classified as "Schutzbrief". From Till's category 9 "Sonstige Fälle", Hasitzka only includes nrs. 90, 91 and 96.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ I discuss these briefly in 4.2.1.1.

²⁰⁰ I discuss these and their particular format in section 4.1.1.1.

²⁰¹ *SB Kopt. V* 2223 – 2224 = P.Scholl 11 – 12; *SB Kopt. V* 2225 = Delattre, "Nouveau"; *SB Kopt. V* 2226 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," no.1; *SB Kopt. V* 2227 – 2246 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," nos. 4 – 23; *SB Kopt. V* 2247 – 2248 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," 25 – 26; *SB Kopt. V* 2249 – 2250 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," 28 – 29; *SB Kopt. V* 2251 = Albarrán Martínez, "Coptic ostraca," no. 1; *SB Kopt. V* 2252 – 2268 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," nos. 30 – 46; *SB Kopt. V* 2269 – 2279 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," nos. 48 – 58; *SB Kopt. V* 2280 – 2285 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," nos. 60 – 65; *SB Kopt. V* 2286 – 2297 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," nos. 69 – 80; *SB Kopt. V* 2298 – 2307 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," nos. 82 – 91; *SB Kopt. V* 2308 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," no. 96; *SB Kopt. V* 2309 – 2310 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," nos. 102 – 103; *SB Kopt. V* 2311 = Albarrán Martínez, "Coptic ostraca," no. 2. Four texts included in Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe" had been reedited in previous issues of the *Koptisches Sammelbuch*: *SB Kopt. III* 1368 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," no. 27; *SB Kopt. II* 915 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," no. 59; *SB Kopt. II* 916 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," no. 47; *SB Kopt. II* 917 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," no. 24. *SB Kopt. II* 914 = P.Laur. III 125, included in Delattre, "Lettres".

²⁰² *SB Kopt. V* 2306; *SB Kopt. V* 2307; *SB Kopt. V* 2308. I only include here *SB Kopt. V* 2307 = Till, "Koptische Schutzbriefe," no. 91.

2.2 Core corpus: Coptic protection letters

The documents included in Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe” form the basis of the corpus of documents studied in this dissertation, together with the documents listed and (re)edited in Delattre, “Lettres de protection”, *SB Kopt.* V and other Coptic protection letters edited since Delattre, “Lettres de protection”. Thus, I collected all documents which have been designated “Coptic protection letters” or a variant term by their editors. Moreover, the corpus here also includes three unpublished documents. I was able to access the preliminary editions prepared by other scholars of two of these documents, as well as my own preliminary edition of the third.²⁰³ There are undoubtedly many more unedited protection letters in various collections.²⁰⁴

I exclude a number of documents in Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe” from the corpus of Coptic protection letters in this dissertation. Some of these documents are still relevant for the discussions in this dissertation, but they are not Coptic protection letters.²⁰⁵ In other documents in Till’s “Koptische Schutzbriefe”, there is not enough evidence that they are related to the Coptic protection letters, because there is nothing conclusive in the text that allows us to connect the document to the Coptic protection letters, their formulary, or the issues to which they are connected, which Till also acknowledges.²⁰⁶

A complete list of documents I include in the corpus of Coptic protection letters is given in the table in the Appendix, including metadata and short descriptions of the documents.

²⁰³ The edition of Otorino S. 5911 and Otorino S 5945+S 5937 is being prepared by Matthias Müller (Basel), Heike Behlmer (Göttingen), Claudia Gamma (Basel) and Alain Delattre (Brussels). On Deir-el-Rumi, the finding context of these ostraca, see Müller, “Andreas”. The preliminary editions of the documents was made available to me by Matthias Müller in August 2019. I made a preliminary edition of P.Katoennatie 685/1 in the context of the Coptic Papyrology seminar at Leiden University in December 2018 (lecturer: Renate Dekker).

²⁰⁴ E.g AF2301, Musée du Louvre, Paris: see Calament, “Reglement de comptes” (= *SB Kopt.* III 1367), 41; Kelsey Museum inv. 2.5149, Ann Arbor (Jennifer Cromwell: private communication).

²⁰⁵ They refer to other protection mechanisms. *P.Schutzbriefe* 3 = *P.Lond.* IV 1540; *P.Schutzbriefe* 95 = *CPR* IV 170; *P.Schutzbriefe* 98 = *SB Kopt.* IV 1760. I would include here also the three literary anecdotes Till discusses: *P.Schutzbriefe* 99-100.

²⁰⁶ *P.Schutzbriefe* 90 = *SB Kopt.* V 2306; *P.Schutzbriefe* 92; *P.Schutzbriefe* 93; *P.Schutzbriefe* 96 = *SB Kopt.* V 2308; *P.Schutzbriefe* 97 = *P.CLT* 5.

2.2.1. The term “Coptic protection letter”

Till’s inclusion, mostly based on the presence of an *eis plogos (mpnoute) ntook* formula, of all these texts in a study entitled “Koptische Schutzbriefe”, has led to the designation of all texts included in Till’s publication, as well as similar texts which have been published since, as Schutzbriefe or “(Coptic) protection letters”. Following this tradition, I also use the term “Coptic protection letters” for the core corpus of this dissertation. I acknowledge that many if not most Coptic protection letters are technically more legal documents rather than letters, as they are related to issues of private law as well as taxation and control of mobility by the government.²⁰⁷ However, I consider the Coptic protection letters testimonies of social mechanisms and relationships in the Egyptian countryside. The term “letter” emphasizes the interaction between the different parties, as well as the underlying social relationships and expectations. Moreover, many documents in the corpus cannot be qualified as legal documents, but rather as letters, e.g. request letters to issue a *logos* (protection letter). For those reasons, I will continue to use the term “protection *letter*”, rather than e.g. “protection *document*”.

The documents call themselves *logos* or *logos mpnoute*, lit. word or promise given by (invoking) God. E.g. in the signature in Jeremias’ protection letter: “So you will not doubt, we drew up this *logos* (promise, protection letter) and we sign it.” *Logos (mpnoute)*” or “*logos (mpnoute)* document” are valid designations, but they are mainly useful to a specialized public, and obscure the function of the documents. Most of the Coptic protection letters explicitly offered a protection to the receiver, as they allow the receiver to avoid the threat or danger of a general “harm”, prosecution, arrest, requisition of taxes, etc.

For all the reasons stated above, “Coptic protection letter” will be the overlying designation for the documents in the core corpus in this dissertation.

2.2.2 Categorization

In section 1.5.3, I set out my fluid approach to the corpus, in which I avoid categorization. I also pointed to the advantages of that approach. Thus, I will not be using the categories proposed by Till or Delattre described above, but rather I will use the term “Coptic protection letter” for protection letters that are directly addressed by a protector to a protectee (“Here you have the promise (*logos*), (made) by (invoking) God), as well as more

²⁰⁷ Richter, “Coptic Papyri”. In her edition of O.GurnaGorecki 69-72, Boud’hors groups them under “official legal documents”.

“indirect” protection letters: i.e. communications about protection letters (E.g. “I ask you to issue a protection letter (*logos*) for NN”). All of these documents are interventions which use the instrument of the Coptic protection letter to solve one or more problems for the people involved. Moreover, the “indirect” protection letters often contain the Coptic protection letter formulas, or even contain a complete “direct” protection letter.²⁰⁸ This further erodes the “direct vs indirect” distinction, and allows us to use the term “Coptic protection letter” for all the documents in the core corpus of this dissertation (see Appendix). However, not all of the documents in the corpus are central to my discussions. These are, firstly, the two documents which were initially only described and partially translated in *P.Mon.Epiph.*²⁰⁹ I take them into consideration as evidence of the production of Coptic protection letters, but because there is no edition available I cannot include them in e.g. my analysis of the formulary (sections 3.1.1-3.1.3). Secondly, the contracts which include certain formulas that are part of the Coptic protection letter formulary are also included in the core corpus of Coptic protection letters.²¹⁰ However, the functions of those formulas incorporated in the contracts are difficult to understand. The contracts are not explicitly related to “typical” protection letter issues such as fugitives or taxation, but the protection letter formulas may have added a certain protection for one of the parties.

The previous sections discussed the categorizations of the Coptic protection letters in the existing scholarship, and presented my own designation and delineation of the corpus. In the next section, I will present the distribution of the documents, both chronologically and geographically, as well as the distribution of writing supports.

2.3 Dating, provenance, and writing support of the Coptic protection letters²¹¹

2.3.1 Where

The overwhelming majority of the Coptic protection letters have been assigned as provenance the larger Theban area, with 117 texts retrieved from this southern Egyptian region, which centers around Western Thebes but also comprises a larger area to the North

²⁰⁸ *O.Crum VC* 64. Other examples of this are *SB Kopt.* V 2295; *SB Kopt.* V 2301, 2302; *O.Crum VC* 82; *O.Vind.Copt.* 66; *SB Kopt.* V 2288 (without signature); *SB Kopt.* V 2290; *SB Kopt.* V 2294.

²⁰⁹ *P.Schutzbrieife* 66 = *P.Mon.Epiph.* 265; *P.Schutzbrieife* 81 = *P.Mon.Epiph.* 120.

²¹⁰ *SB Kopt.* V 2276; *SB Kopt.* V 2277; *SB Kopt.* V 2278; *SB Kopt.* V 2279; *SB Kopt.* II 915.

²¹¹ This overview is the result of combined searches in *TM* and *BCD*. Where possible, corrections to the editions in more recent publications, concerning the metadata of the texts, have been taken into account, e.g. in the case of the texts written by the scribe Aristophanes, son of Johannes: Cromwell, *Recording*.

and South of Western Thebes (see below). For 15 texts the provenance is in Middle Egypt,²¹² 1 document might be located in a village in the Delta.²¹³ The provenance of 9 documents is wholly unknown.²¹⁴ I can make this picture considerably more detailed. Sixty-three texts from the larger Theban region can be located in a specific site.²¹⁵ Sixty of these come from what is known in the scholarly literature as Western Thebes, the area near modern-day Luxor but on the opposite bank of the Nile, where excavations have unearthed thousands of ostraca and papyri from late antiquity in numerous sites: foremost among which the well-known Djeme, also called Kastron Memnonion in some documents,²¹⁶ built in and around the mortuary temple of Ramesses III. The area also contains numerous sites of monastic settlements in the surrounding pharaonic Theban necropolis. The remaining 3 documents attributed to the Theban region come from the larger Theban area: 1 from the Apa Samuel monastery (Deir-el-Gizaz) in the Coptite nome to the North of Western Thebes, and 2 from the Apa Hesekiel monastery in the pagarchy of Hermonthis (Armant), neighboring Western Thebes to the South: *O.Lips.Copt.* II 103 and *O.Lips.Copt.* II 170.²¹⁷

²¹² *BKU* III 356; *BKU* III 357; *BKU* III 473; Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001), 176-177 (= *P.Akoris* 36); Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001) 177 (= *P.Akoris* 54); *P.BawitClackson* 65; *P.Köln.Ägypt.* II 25; *P.Heid.* XI 490; *SB Kopt.* II 914; *SB Kopt.* V 2223; *SB Kopt.* V 2224; *SB Kopt.* V 2235; *SB Kopt.* V 2236; *SB Kopt.* V 2277; *SB Kopt.* V 2300.

²¹³ *P.Lond.Copt.* 1227 (Thmui (“the Island”) in Lower Egypt, Delta.

²¹⁴ *BKU* II 298; *O.CrumVC* 82; *O.CrumVC* 106; *P.Ryl.Copt.* 289; *P.Ryl.Copt.* 385; *SB Kopt.* I 38; *SB Kopt.* I 39; *SB Kopt.* II 915; *SB Kopt.* V 2226. Of uncertain provenance are *P.Laur.* III 125 (Oxyrhynchos?); *P.Lond.Copt.* 1227 (Thmui (“the Island”) in Lower Egypt, Delta (?)); *SB Kopt.* V 2235 (Middle Egypt: Hermopolite nome?); *SB Kopt.* V 2261 (Theban area?); *SB Kopt.* V 2287 (Theban area?); The lack of knowledge about the provenance is a common problem when using papyrological sources, when the artifacts come from excavations where the finds were not adequately documented, or was sold at the antiquities market without (transfer of the) knowledge of the original context of the artifact. On the methodological challenges involved in using papyri as a historical source, see section 1.4.

²¹⁵ The remaining 54 have not been located more precisely than “Theban region”. For my attribution of documents to a certain location, I also have included those which have been assigned to that location with uncertainty.

²¹⁶ Including in the Coptic protection letters, see e.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2249, *O.CrumVC* 8, Cromwell, *Recording*, 245-247, no. 9.

²¹⁷ The pagarch in the city of Hermonthis (20 km South of modern-day Luxor) was the direct supervisor of the *dioiketeis* of Djeme, the well-known village – and important place of production of Coptic protection letters – in Western Thebes.

Within the group of Coptic protection letters from Western Thebes, 29 documents were either found at the village of Djeme or at least produced there.²¹⁸ The remaining 31 texts were found at and/or are connected to specific monastic settlements in Western Thebes. They are distributed over the region in this manner (see also the maps below).

- Sheikh abd el-Gurna: *topos* of Apa Epiphanius (9 documents): *P.Mon.Epiph.* 120; *P.Mon.Epiph.* 265; P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited);²¹⁹ *SB Kopt.* V 2273; *SB Kopt.* V 2294; *SB Kopt.* V 2295; *SB Kopt.* V 2302; *SB Kopt.* V 2305; Van der Vliet, “A Letter to a Bishop (O. APM Inv. 3871).”

- Sheikh abd el-Gurna: TT (Theban Tomb) 65: Monastery of Kyriakos (3 documents): *SB Kopt.* V 2225; *O.Mon.Cyr.* 5; *O.Mon.Cyr.* 6.

- Sheikh abd el-Gurna: Hermitage at pharaonic tomb MMA 1152 (4 documents):²²⁰ *O.GurnaGorecki* 69; *O.GurnaGorecki* 70; *O.GurnaGorecki* 71; *O.GurnaGorecki* 72;

- Qurnet Mura’i: *topos* of Apa Markos (2 documents): *O.Saint-Marc* 322, *O.Saint-Marc* 323;

- Dra' Abu el-Naga: Deir el-Bachit: monastery of Apa Paulos (6 documents): *OBachit* o. Nr.; *O.Bachit* 1800; *O.DanKopt.* 36;²²¹ *O.CrumVC* 075; *SB Kopt.* V 2250 + 2251;²²² *SB Kopt.* V 2278; *SB Kopt.* V 2297;²²³

- Deir el- Bahri: monastery of Apa Phoibammon (1 document): *SB Kopt.* V 2276;²²⁴

- Monastery of Apa Phoibammon, (1 document): *O.Mon.Phoibammon* 4;²²⁵

²¹⁸ Or at least issued by village officials of Djeme and/or written by a Djeme scribe, such as O.CrumVC 8 and O.CrumVC 9. These documents are addressed to the same or two different monastic communities surrounding Djeme (on these documents see in particular section 5.3.2).

²¹⁹ Two documents, the letters addressed to bishop Pesynthios, were most probably written in the Coptite nome, the place of Pesynthios’ diocese, to the North of Western Thebes, and later found in or near the monastery of Apa Epiphanius in Western Thebes, where the other documents of Pesynthios’ dossier have been found: P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited) and Van der Vliet, “Letter”. See Van der Vliet, “Letter,” 260; Dekker, *Theban Networks*. On these two documents, see also section 3.2.2.

²²⁰ Górecki, “Scavenging”.

²²¹ Found at ancillary complexes belonging to the main monastery, which were built into the pharaonic double tomb complex K 93/11-12 located below the monastery (Dra abu el-Naga): Hodak, “Ostraca”.

²²² Albrán Martínez, “Coptic Ostraca”, 1301 ff.

²²³ Hodak, “Ostraca,” 727, n. 16.

²²⁴ Where Abraham moved to when he became a bishop, larger than the other Apa Phoibammon monastery. See Dekker, *Theban Networks*.

²²⁵ The smaller monastery where bishop Abraham of Hermonthis lived before he became a bishop.

- Biban el-Harim (Valley of the Queens), Deir el-Rumi (2 documents): OTorino S 5945+S 5937 (unedited); OTorino S. 5911 (unedited);²²⁶
- El-Khokha: TT39 (Tomb of Puyemre) (1 document): *SB Kopt. V2289*;
- Ramesseum (mortuary temple of Ramesses II) (1 document): *SB Kopt. V2269*.

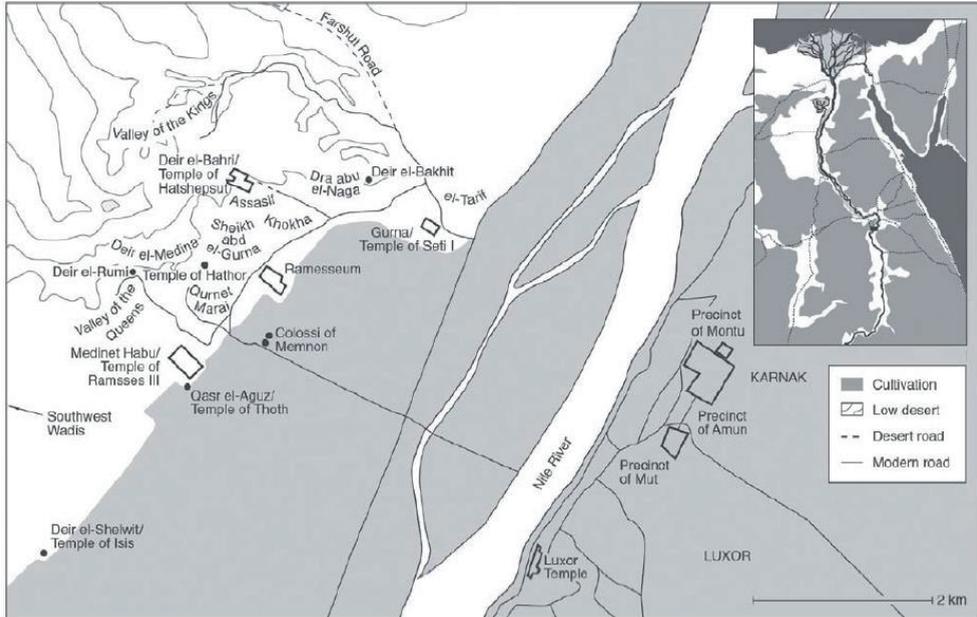


Figure 2: Map of the Theban region (M. Wachtal, © E. R. O’Connell). From: O’Connell & Ruffini, *Social Networks of late Antique Western Thebes*.

²²⁶ Müller, “Andreas,” 223.

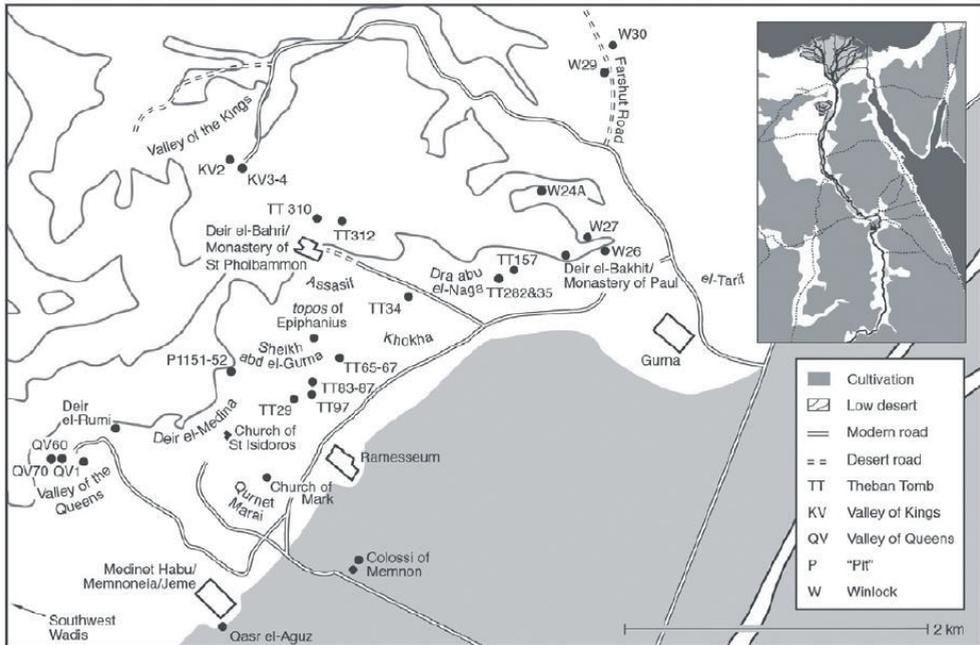


Figure 3: Map of sites in Western Thebes known to have been reused in Late Antiquity (M. Wachtal, © E. R. O'Connell). From: O'Connell & Ruffini, *Social Networks of late Antique Western Thebes*.

In Middle Egypt, almost all documents come from the Hermopolite nome,²²⁷ both from village contexts (e.g. Akoris, 2 documents)²²⁸ and monastic contexts (e.g. Bawit, 2 documents).²²⁹ The reading of the Coptic toponym for Oxyrhynchus in *SB Kopt.* II 914 is not entirely sure: $\Phi\text{M}\chi$; see note to l. 5 in the ed. pr. and *SB Kopt.* II 914. One document from Middle Egypt is part of the dossier of the monastery of Apa Apollo at Deir el-Bala'izah.²³⁰

2.3.2 When

The dating of the Coptic protection letters is less certain than their provenance. The Coptic protection letters have been dated in a range between the sixth- seventh and 9th centuries,

²²⁷ Attributed to the district generally are *BKU* III 356; *BKU* III 357; *BKU* III 473; *P.Heid.* XI 490; *SB Kopt.* V 2223; *SB Kopt.* V 2224; *SB Kopt.* V 2235; *SB Kopt.* V 2236; *SB Kopt.* V 2277.

²²⁸ Delattre, Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001), 176-177 (= *P. Akoris* 36); Delattre, Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001), 177 (= *P. Akoris* 54).

²²⁹ *P. Bawit* Clackson 65; *P. Köln ägypt.* II 25.

²³⁰ *SB Kopt.* V 2300.

and 56 documents have not been assigned a date at all. Some of the protection letters are now lost or are kept in private collections since their first edition, which makes examination of the material object, the handwriting and the contents, e.g. in order to check the dating, impossible.²³¹ Even when we know the provenance of the protection letters, assumptions about that place of provenance can also play a part in their dating. The 9 texts from the Apa Epiphanius monastery are all attributed to the seventh century in the available metadata, presumably because until recently it was assumed that there was no textual evidence from the monastery after the seventh century. However, thanks to the discovery and edition of the dossier of the eighth-century monk Frange, who also appears in the Apa Epiphanius documentation, the dating of the texts from the context of this monastery can possibly be pushed further, namely to the first half of the eighth century, and in this dissertation I place these texts in the seventh – eighth century.²³²

In section 1.4.2 I mentioned that a number of the Coptic protection letters can be dated to a specific date or a range of a couple of decennia, thanks to the combination in these documents of an indiction date and the mention of a person known from other, absolutely dated documents – often the official(s) issuing the document, or the scribe writing it,²³³ or because certain people mentioned in the document can be associated with others

²³¹ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 223; *SB Kopt.* V 2257; *SB Kopt.* V 2286. Some documents which in the databases are listed as part of a private collection seem to have been transferred to institutional collections: *SB Kopt.* III 1368 is listed as being at Walter Crum’s private collection in Oxford in *TM* and *BCD* but as Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Bodl.Copt.Insc. 294 in Cromwell, *Recording*, 216.

²³² Boud’hors, “L’Apport”. Van der Vliet, “A Letter to a Bishop (O. APM Inv. 3871)” and P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited) have been dated to the first half of the seventh century because of the identification of the addressee in both documents as bishop Pesynthios of Coptos.

²³³ E.g. Cromwell, *Recording*, 245-247, no. 9: late 720s; *O.Bachit* o. Nr.: according to the editor: 734/5-738 but a correction was proposed by A. Delattre: oral communication: “Langues et sources documentaires coptes”, Paris, 7 December 2018: the date is either 728/729 or 744/745 (13th indiction); *O.CrumVC* 8; *O.CrumVC* 9: both 698 or 713 (Cromwell, “Village Scribe”). See my interpretation of *O.CrumVC* 8 and *O.CrumVC* 9, including their possible dates in section 5.3.2; *O.Vind.Copt.* 67: 738; OTorino S 5945+S 5937 (unedited): 709 or 724 or 739; P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited): 600-631; *P.Stras.Copt.* 66: 698-728: the editor argues that the scribe is probably Psate, son of Pisrael. On Psate’s dates, see Cromwell, “Village Scribe”. I discuss Psate’s protection letters in section 3.1.4; *SB Kopt.* III 1368: 725 (Cromwell, *Recording*, 58); *SB Kopt.* V 2233: 730 (Cromwell, *Recording*, 58); *SB Kopt.* V 2246: 730 (Cromwell, *Recording*, 58); *SB Kopt.* V 2249: 729 (Cromwell, *Recording*, 58); *SB Kopt.* V 2268: 708; *SB Kopt.* V 2280: 695 or 725; Van der Vliet, “Letter”: 619-629.

whose dates are better known.²³⁴ It is striking that these documents, with the exceptions of the two letters addressed to the early seventh-century bishop Pesynthios, are all dated to the end of the seventh and especially the first half of the eighth century.²³⁵ All these internally dated documents come from Western Thebes. The chronology and prosopography of this region is relatively well-known, thanks to the mass of source material and specialized studies.

Thus, the earliest internally dated Coptic protection letters are dated to the first half of the seventh century, while the latest internally dated is either 744/745, if the later date for *O.Bachit* o. Nr. is to be preferred, 739 if the later date for OTorino S 5945+S 5937 (unedited) is to be preferred, or 738: *O.Vind.Copt.* 67. Some documents have been given a range that starts at the sixth century, but that seems to be related to the general timeframe of their production context, e.g. the protection letters belonging to the monastery of Apa Ezekiel in Hermonthis, or those found at the topos of Apa Markos, both sites of which documentary activity is attested starting from the sixth century. Two documents have been dated later than the eighth century, *SB Kopt.* V 2236 (eighth – 9th century, Hermopolite nome) and *SB Kopt.* V 2253 (ninth century, a protection letter issued by a priest and monastic leader of the “mountain of Djeme”). Thus, the large majority of the documents are dated to the sixth-eighth and especially seventh-eighth centuries. Because of the prevalence of the first half of the eighth century among the internally dated documents, it is highly likely that a substantial number of those “sixth-seventh-eighth-century” documents was also produced in the first half of the eighth century. While a seventh-century starting date for the Coptic protection letters falls within the patterns of the use of Coptic for documents of administrative, fiscal and legal nature,²³⁶ the apparent scarcity of Coptic protection letters dated past the eighth century is more difficult to understand. Coptic keeps being used, sometimes in combination with Arabic, in fiscal documents issued by local authorities after

²³⁴ *O.GurnaGorecki* 71: 710-730: assigned to this period by the editor because of one of the officials issuing the document’s association with the monk Frange. On Frange’s dating see the introduction to *O.Frange*, 10.

²³⁵ Cromwell, Recording village life, p. 245-247, no. 9: late 720s; *O.Bachit* o. Nr.: 728/729 or 744/745; *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9: 698 or 713; *O.GurnaGorecki* 71: 710-730; *O.Vind.Copt.* 67: 738; OTorino S 5945+S 5937 (unpublished): 709, 724, or 739; *SB Kopt.* III 1368: 725; *SB Kopt.* V 2233: 730; *SB Kopt.* V 2246: 730; *SB Kopt.* V 2249: 729; *SB Kopt.* V 2268: 708; *SB Kopt.* V 2280: 695? or 725?

²³⁶ See section 1.2.3.1.

the eighth century, at least until the beginning of the 11th century.²³⁷ Moreover, some of the monastic centers in which Coptic protection letters are attested, were active until centuries after 750, which is evident from their internally dated documentation as well as material evidence from the sites.²³⁸ So why are there hardly any Coptic protection letters dated after the eighth century, or even to the second half of the eighth century? One possible explanation is that at least some of the “sixth- seventh-eighth-century” documents should receive a (much) later date, and that their dating has suffered from a tendency in the scholarship to date late antique papyri earlier rather than later.²³⁹ Future publications of Coptic protection letters internally dated after 750 would help, but with the information available now another possibility for the apparent disappearance of Coptic protection letters in the latter half of the eighth century should be entertained. Several legal documents produced in the latter half of the eighth century were produced in Western Thebes, the place of production and circulation of so many documents in the corpus.²⁴⁰ While the people living in the area were still selling and leasing parcels of land and houses, and donating their children to monasteries, did they not need Coptic protection letters anymore?²⁴¹ It is possible that the particular instrument of the Coptic protection letter was not in use anymore, either because it was replaced by other mechanisms and instruments, or because changes in the administration had made such local problem-solving instruments irrelevant. E.g., changes made to the fiscal system after the Abbasid dynasty came into power as rulers of

²³⁷ E.g. Berkes-Vanthieghem, “Late Coptic Tax-receipt” (886-887); *CPR* IV 13 (tax-receipt, 942); Torallas-Tovar, “10th-Century List” (fiscal register, 10th century); *P.Ryl.Copt.* 464 (tax-receipt, 1006/1007). These later documents are often written on paper – of the examples given in this footnote all but the first are written on paper – which starts being used for Coptic documents from the end of the 9th century: Legendre, “Perméabilité,” 326-328. Unfortunately no Coptic protection letters on paper or parchment, which was also used for legal texts in Middle and Lower Egypt from the 10th century onward, have been published yet, which might be remedied in the future if more paper documents in collections will be published. For an overview of Coptic legal documents, including their writing support, see Richter, “Koptische Rechtsurkunden”.

²³⁸ E.g. Deir el-Bachit (associated with 6 protection letters) and Bawit (associated with 2 published protection letters and at least 2 unpublished ones: Delattre, “L’administration,” 393-394. See Palombo, “Christian Clergy,” xxvi-xxix, specifically n. 22.

²³⁹ For Greek papyri, see Morelli’s introduction to *CPR* XXII, 6-13.

²⁴⁰ E.g. *CPR* IV 26 (contract of sale, 760); *P.KRU* 6 (contract of sale, 758), *SB Kopt.* II 947 (contract of sale, 759).

²⁴¹ On the donations of children to monasteries, see Papaconstantinou, “Theia Oikonomia”; Papaconstantinou, “Hagiography”.

the caliphate, might have had an impact on local practices and instruments such as the Coptic protection letters.²⁴²

2.3.2 Writing support

The Coptic protection letters in mostly follow general geographical patterns of late antique Egyptian documents when it comes to their writing support. All documents from Middle and the one document from the Delta were written on papyrus, as well as 6 out of 10 of the documents of which the provenance is unknown. Within the documents from the Theban area, however, only 5 were written on papyrus, the others were all written on ostraca, some on limestone flakes, but the great majority on shards of pottery.²⁴³ In his overview of Coptic legal texts, Richter has pointed out that the Theban area was the only region making use of ostraca for the purpose of writing legal documents, and in large numbers, especially for shorter legal texts such as receipts and debt acknowledgements, while longer and more complex texts were most often written on papyrus. The Coptic protection letters are usually fairly concise, so it doesn't come as a surprise that they should be written mainly on ostraca.²⁴⁴ Two of the Theban documents written on papyrus, *O.CrumVC* 8 and *O.CrumVC* 9, two protection letters for a – possibly the same – monastic community, the choice of writing support might indeed have been determined by their longer length, especially in the case of *O.CrumVC* 8, which has a longer and more complex formulary in comparison to the protection letters generally.²⁴⁵ The letters addressed to bishop Pesynthios were written on different writing supports: one on papyrus (P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited)) and the other on pottery (Van der Vliet, “A Letter to a Bishop” (O. APM Inv. 3871)). The papyrus letter contains a text which is shorter than the one written on the potsherd.²⁴⁶ Thus, the length of the text does not always determine the writing material.

²⁴² The ERC project “Caliphal Finances” led by Marie Legendre at Edinburgh University aims to fully understand Abbasid fiscal practice, in Egypt and other provinces of the caliphate, on the basis of documentary as well as literary sources.

²⁴³ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2278 and *SB Kopt.* V 2289 were written on limestone.

²⁴⁴ Richter, “Koptische Rechtsurkunden,” 44. *O.CrumVC* 75 and 82, two letters to clerical authorities, start with the polite phrase: “Forgive me that I have not found papyrus”.

²⁴⁵ On *CrumVC* 8 and 9, see section 5.3.2. The use of papyrus, as a generally more expensive writing material, might also have given some more weight to these protection letters, which were addressed to a community of monks, rather than individuals or a family, who were the usual addressees of the Coptic protection letters.

²⁴⁶ The two other Theban protection letters on papyrus were on the longer side: *SB Kopt.* V 2240, *SB Kopt.* V 2294. The dossier of bishop Pesynthios contains both ostraca and papyrus documents,

I have given an overview of the geographical and chronological context of the Coptic protection letters, as well as their writing support. The last section of this chapter discusses 7 terms which I will use throughout the dissertation in my discussions of the protection letters, 4 of which relate to the specific “building blocks” which make up the formulary of the protection letters (instruction clause, promise clause, exception clause, limitation clause),²⁴⁷ and 3 which designate the main actors in the documents (protector, protectee, intermediary).

2.4 Terms used in the descriptions and analyses

2.4.1 Instruction clause

The instructions reflect the actions which the protectee can or should undertake according to the protection letter.²⁴⁸ The instruction follows the εἰς πλογοῦς μῆνοῦτε ντοοῦκ formula and is written in the conjunctive, in the second person.²⁴⁹ Most often νγεἰ εἰσοῦν ἐπεκῆνι “Come (to your house)” clause is used, with many variations.²⁵⁰ Most, but not all documents have an instruction clause. In fact, both Till and Delattre see the documents without instruction clause as a separate subcategory of the Coptic protection letters, although they differ in their interpretation.²⁵¹ Other instructions are to “stay”²⁵² or to “appear”²⁵³. Other types of instruction often reflect the very specific situations for which the document was written.²⁵⁴ On the importance of the instruction clause as a “building block” of Coptic protection letters, see section 3.1.3.

the presence of both writing supports among the Coptic protection letter documentation related to Pesynthios is therefore not surprising.

²⁴⁷ For the term “building-blocks”, see Grob, *Documentary Arabic Letters*, 25.

²⁴⁸ The “exception” seems to give the protectee an instruction as well, but more implicitly. See below.

²⁴⁹ On the formula *eis plogos mēnoute ntōotk*: “Here is the promise, (made) by (invoking) God, for you”, see sections 1.5.1, 2.1, and 3.1.1.

²⁵⁰ E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2241*: νγεἰ εἰσοῦν | ἐπεκῆνι.

²⁵¹ Cf. above section 2.1. In 4.2.1.1, I discuss my interpretation of these.

²⁵² E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2255*: ν]γεἰ εἰσοῦν ἐπεκῆνι ν]εμοῦς: “come to your house and stay”.

²⁵³ E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2253*, where this is the only instruction clause, as in *SB Kopt. V 2252* and *SB Kopt. V 2250 + SB Kopt. V 2251*: νγοῦωνε εἰσοῦν.

²⁵⁴ E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2224*: νγεἰ νγεἰσ | εἰτεργασῖα: “come and go to your work.” O.Crum.VC 64: νγεἰ εἰσαἰ ἐπεκῆνι νγεἰ εἰσοῦν εἰσοῦν μετὰ τὴν κάμηλον: “that he comes to his house and works with his camel”. On protection letters written in the third person, see section 3.2. Procedures of protection.

2.4.2 Promise clause

The promise clauses express the protection which the protectee can expect. They are usually written in the Negative Future III, introduced by $\chi\epsilon$, in the first person, from the point of view of the protector. Because they are negative verb forms, the promise clauses express who or what the protectee is being protected from and, therefore, the danger in which the protectee would be if they did not have a protection letter.²⁵⁵ The protection offered can be against a general “evil” or “harm”,²⁵⁶ prosecution²⁵⁷ and the “asking” (usually money, e.g. in the form of taxes).²⁵⁸ Other recurring promises protect the protectee against harassment²⁵⁹ or detainment.²⁶⁰ The promise clause can protect the protectee from the protector himself, but also from an unspecified third party.²⁶¹

A positive promise clause which recurs in several documents is the “observe” or “respect” clause, in which the protector or the intermediary promises that he will make sure that the promises made in the protection letter are upheld. This clause is a recurring feature of some letters requesting a protection letter to be issued for a third party, but occurs also e.g. in *SB Kopt.* V 2240, as part of an oath.²⁶² In section 3.1.2 I delve deeper into the different ways in which protection was expressed in the Coptic protection letters.

2.4.3 Limitation clause

The limitation appears in Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe”, from no. 17 (= *SB Kopt.* V 2240) onwards. Indeed, according to Till it was, together with what is here called the exception (see below) a special characteristic of his second category (“Schutzbriefe mit vorgesehenen Ausnahmen” (nos. 17-41)) and one which particularly distinguishes the latter from the first category. A limitation limits the validity of the promise made in the document to a certain

²⁵⁵ See sections 3.1.4 and 5.4.2.

²⁵⁶ E.g. *SB Kopt.* III 1368: $\chi\epsilon$ NNENEP NEΘOY | NAK : “that we will not do you harm” (literally, “that we will not do evil to you”).

²⁵⁷ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2239: $\chi\epsilon$ EN|E|PARAGE MMOK : “that I will not prosecute you”.

²⁵⁸ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2250 + *SB Kopt.* V 2251: $\chi\epsilon$ NNE|N|XNOYK ELAY : “that we will not ask anything of you”.

²⁵⁹ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2240: XNNEIKAY NAMAZE MOK ELAY PZ[WB] : “that we will not harass you (for) anything”.

²⁶⁰ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2292: $\chi\epsilon$ NNELAY NPOME GONH : “that no man will arrest him”.

²⁶¹ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2240: XNNEIKAY NEP NEΘOY : “that I will not let harm be done to you”.

²⁶² *SB Kopt.* V 2240: EIOPK NH|NOYTE H|HANTOKPATW[P] TAREIPOE|IC EPEILOGOC | NAK PROC TEPOOM : “I swear by God the Almighty that I will uphold (this promise) for you according to its validity”.

period of time, e.g. for a specific year, which could be the year in which the protection letter was issued.²⁶³ The limitations of the protection refer mostly to periods of time (years) and certain forms of taxation or more general matters. In *SB Kopt. V 2254* both occur: $\text{Ⲛ Ⲙⲉⲗⲗⲁϥⲉ ⲛⲏ ⲛⲓⲣⲟⲙⲡⲉ ⲟⲩⲁⲉ | ⲛⲁ Ⲙⲉⲗⲗⲁϥⲉ ⲛⲡⲓⲣⲁⲓⲙⲁ}$: “(not) on account of anything else in this year nor on account of any other business.” The limitations are most often introduced by the prepositions ⲛⲏ (“in”) and ⲛⲁ/ⲛⲁⲓ (“on account of”).²⁶⁴ E.g., a protector can promise not to “ask” or “prosecute” a protectee ⲛⲁ ⲛⲓⲣⲟⲙⲡⲉ , “on account of this year” (*SB Kopt. V 2262*) or ⲛⲏ | ⲛⲓⲣⲟⲙⲡⲉ ⲛⲏⲣⲥ , “in this entire year” (*SB Kopt. V 2257*).²⁶⁵ The limitation clause can often link the Coptic protection letter to fiscal practice: see section 4.1.1.1.

2.4.4 Exception clause

The exception appears often but not necessarily together with a limitation in a number of the documents in the corpus. This exception is expressed in terms of sums of money or specific names of taxes.²⁶⁶ Here, a promise made in the document seems to be valid, “excepting” the amount or tax stipulated in the exception. Sometimes the interpretation of this passage in the document is quite straightforward, namely when the protector promises not to ask anything from the protectee, “excepting” a certain amount or a certain tax. But when the text reads: “I will not prosecute you, excepting...” How is this to be understood? If the protectee fails to pay, will he be prosecuted for this sum only or for the, presumably much larger, sum he owed? How was the amount of the exception determined?²⁶⁷ In any case it seems that the protectee is only protected by the protection letter if they manage to pay the sum or tax in question.²⁶⁸

The four terms discussed until now refer to elements of the formulary of the Coptic protection letters. I use the three following terms to designate the (most important) actors in the documents: the protectee, the protector, and the intermediary.

²⁶³ E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2256*: ⲛⲏ ⲛⲓⲣⲟⲙⲡⲉ : “in this year”

²⁶⁴ E.g. *SB Kopt. III 1368*: ⲛⲁ | ⲛⲉⲓⲉⲗⲁⲓⲛ , on account of this *exagion*. ⲛⲁ and ⲛⲁⲓ are used in the same way in the actual tax-receipts, e.g. in the texts in Delattre-Vanthieghem, “Sept Reçus”.

²⁶⁵ See also *SB Kopt. V 2259*, where probably the same limitation of one year is expressed in a different way: ⲟⲩⲁ ⲕⲉⲣⲟⲙⲡⲉ “until another (*i.e. next*) year”.

²⁶⁶ E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2244*: $\text{ⲉ|ⲙⲏⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲢⲁⲛⲙⲟⲥⲓⲟⲩ}$: except for your (money) tax; *SB Kopt. III 1368*: $\text{ⲛⲥⲁ ⲟⲩⲛⲏⲟⲩⲉ | ⲛⲁⲟⲗⲟⲕ(ⲟⲩⲧⲓⲛⲟⲥ)}$: “except for ½ *holokottinos* (*nomisma*, golden coin).

²⁶⁷ In Chapter 3 I argue that the exception amount is likely the result of a negotiation between the protectors and one or more intermediaries for the protectee.

²⁶⁸ See section 4.1.1.1.

2.4.5 Protectee

The protectee is the party to whom is promised a certain type of protection by the document. The protectee's name is mentioned in the document, and more often than in the case of the protector, accompanied by a patronymic²⁶⁹ and sometimes by a title,²⁷⁰ and in a couple of cases with their provenance: the village where they are from.²⁷¹ While there are several explicit references to the flight of the protectee in the documents, they are never designated as a fugitive, or a "stranger", with the terms which we find in contemporary Coptic and Greek documents.²⁷²

The protectee is one individual in 93 cases, which is about 65% of the corpus. This includes documents in which the name of the protectee is lost but they are referred to with singular pronouns.²⁷³ In the other documents the protectees are two or more people, sometimes all named by name, and often without specification of any relationship between them.²⁷⁴ In 12 cases, the protectee is a family: a man named by name accompanied by his unnamed children, or by his unnamed wife and/or children.²⁷⁵ Protection letters were also issued for other types of groups, e.g. for communities of monks, as in the case of *O.CrumVC* 8 and *O.CrumVC* 9, which are both addressed to a group of monks by two *lashane* of Djeme,

²⁶⁹ E.g. P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited): Papnoute, son of Johannes of Psjelch; *P.Stras.Copt.* 66: NN, son of Konstantinos; *SB Kopt.* III 1368: Jeremias s. Basileios and children.

²⁷⁰ By title I generally mean any description of the person's occupation, e.g. "camel herder", administrative function, e.g. "lashane", clerical or monastic function or status, e.g. "priest" or "monk", or honorific title, e.g. "your holy paternity". In *SB Kopt.* V 2289 and *SB Kopt.* V 2296, a protection letter is requested for someone who is designated as "poor". In the latter case, the protectee is imprisoned.

²⁷¹ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2229: NN, from Djeme; *SB Kopt.* V 2249: Peschate, s. Elias, from Djeme; *O.GurnaGorecki* 70: Kurikos, from Tkousht. The editors interpret Tkousht as a toponym, although it is unknown.

²⁷² *fugas, xenos, ὄμμο*: on these terms in the Greek and Coptic early Islamic documents, see section 4.1.2.2.

²⁷³ 6 documents are too fragmentary for identification of the protectee.

²⁷⁴ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2233: Shenoute, son of Petros and Stephanos; *SB Kopt.* V 2230: Zacharias and his son Johannes; *SB Kopt.* V 2275: Stephanos, Papnoute, Shenoute and Demetrios.

²⁷⁵ *O.GurnaGorecki* 70: Kurikos and his children; *O.Mon.Phoibammon* 4: Elias and his children; *O.Saint-Marc* 322: Isak and his wife and children; *O.Vind.Copt.* 66: Isak and his wife; OTorino S. 5911 (unedited): Philotheos and wife and children; *SB Kopt.* III 1368: Jeremias s. Basileios and his children; *SB Kopt.* V 2225: NN? Plural, and their wives; *SB Kopt.* V 2262: Markos, his wife and children; *SB Kopt.* V 2303: Samuel and his children; Van der Vliet, "Letter": Phllo the son of Moses, and Theodore and their wives and their children and their cattle. In *SB Kopt.* V 2294 the children of Andreas, son of Kalasire, need a protection letter.

but neither document specifies which of the many monastic communities in Western Thebes are meant, nor is any of the monks named by name.²⁷⁶ In other cases, similar to the protection letters for families, a sort of representative of the group is named, but the other members remain unnamed.²⁷⁷ Women appear as protectees, unnamed together with their named husband, but also without male companions.²⁷⁸

In several cases the protection letters give some more information about the occupation of the protectee, by means of a title or because of a reference to their work. Among the protectees there are camel herders,²⁷⁹ a jar maker,²⁸⁰ vine dressers,²⁸¹ a date farmer,²⁸² a deacon,²⁸³ and several monks.²⁸⁴ One protectee is a priest, which emphasizes my observation in 1.3.1 that “elites” could find themselves in the role of the protectee as well as protector or intermediary. In some cases, the designation of the protectee as a “son” or a “brother” of the protector could indicate that the protectee was a monk, but it is not certain.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁶ In section 5.3.2 I argue that they are likely the monks of the monastery of Apa Paulos (Deir-el Bachit) in Western Thebes.

²⁷⁷ The protectee of *SB Kopt.* II 916 is Psan, his son Jeremias, and “anyone belonging to you”: ρΩΜΕ ΕΠΩΚ: this could be a reference to his family, or to his larger household; *SB Kopt.* V 2234 is issued for “you, priest of Terkôt and everyone who is with you: ΝΤΟΚ ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ | ΝΤΕΡΚΩΤ ΜΝ ΡΩΜΕ ΝΙΜ ΕΨΑΖΤΗΚ”. The letter mentions that the addressee had left (plural forms). Terkôt was a village in the pagarchy of Hermonthis, like Djeme: Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 6, 2590f. *SB Kopt.* V 2269: Theophilos and all his brothers. It is unclear what exactly the relationship between Theophilos and his brothers was.

²⁷⁸ *SB Kopt.* V 2236: Sakana, the wife of Abraham; *SB Kopt.* V 2244: a woman (name lost) and her daughter (unnamed); *SB Kopt.* V 2304 is a letter which contains a protection letter for a woman named Thabais. The protectee of *SB Kopt.* V 2285 is Kyra, whom the document allows to live in the house of her son. The unpublished protection letter AF12301, Musée du Louvre, Paris is also issued for a woman (name lost, but on the photograph online I read the instruction clause on l. 2: ΝΤΕΙ ΕΞΟΥΝ Ε[...]: “Come to...”, but in the second-person feminine singular).

²⁷⁹ *O.Crum VC* 64; *SB Kopt.* II 915; *SB Kopt.* V 2279. The last two are contracts for the use of a camel which include protection letter formulas.

²⁸⁰ *O.Crum VC* 75.

²⁸¹ *P.Ryl.Copt.* 385.

²⁸² *SB Kopt.* V 2263.

²⁸³ *SB Kopt.* V 2301.

²⁸⁴ *O.Lips.Copt.* II 170; *O.GurnaGorecki* 69: monk Haron; *P.Ryl.Copt.* 289; *SB Kopt.* V 2253; *SB Kopt.* V 2300.

²⁸⁵ *P.KölnÄgypt.* II 25: to Apollo (“his son”), from Daniel (“father”), a monk who lives in a hermitage; *SB Kopt.* V 2223: to “our son Jeremias”, issued by a priest; *SB Kopt.* V 2224: to “my brother Timotheos”, issued by a certain Viktor; *SB Kopt.* I 38: “Your honoured brotherhood”.

2.4.6 Protector

This is the party who issues, i.e. signs, or who is asked to issue the protection letter.²⁸⁶ The protector is nearly always identified, at least by their name. Rarely a patronymic is given,²⁸⁷ or the provenance of the protector.²⁸⁸ In all of the documents but one, the protectors are men.²⁸⁹ The protector is most often 1 person (88 cases), but also two people or more can act together as protectors, which happens often in the protection letters issued by village officials.²⁹⁰ In several cases, the village “community” (*koinon* or *koinotès*), (or rather the college of village officials? see 1.5.4), acts as the protector.²⁹¹

Similarly to the protectees, the protectors are sometimes further identified with a title which allows us to understand their position in society which gave them the authority to issue the protection letter. In the majority of the cases the titles of the protectors point to their role as village officials, with *lashane* being the term that is used most frequently.²⁹² In Djeme, the *lashanes* could also be called *meizones*, and officials signed protection letters also with that title.²⁹³ The *ape* was a village official with particular fiscal responsibilities, often connected

²⁸⁶ Due to the fragmentary state of the documents, in 7 cases any information on the protector has been lost.

²⁸⁷ E.g. *O.CrumVC* 8.

²⁸⁸ E.g. Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001) p. 176-177 (= *P.Akoris* 36) (Tehnè).

²⁸⁹ *SB Kopt. V 2277*: “Lady Marou”. This is a document which was added to a rental contract about a piece of land. Women, like Marou, could wield considerable economic and social power in their communities and acted as creditors in private debt (Wilfong, *Women*). It is remarkable that women generally do not occur as protectors in the Coptic protection letters. This might be due to coincidence and might change with the publication of other documents, but could also further point to the Coptic protection letters as closely linked to the (fiscal) administration and the officials with fiscal tasks in the village communities (section 4.1), which seem to have been at least predominantly men.

²⁹⁰ E.g. 3 *lashane* sign *O.GurnaGorecki* 71.

²⁹¹ E.g. *O.GurnaGorecki* 69, *SB Kopt. V 2236*, *SB Kopt. V 2259*; *O.CrumVC* 9, *O.CrumVC* 8, which is signed by several village authorities, as well as the *koinon* of the village of Djeme. Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*: the *koinon* or *koinotès* is not the whole village, but rather the college of village officials. *P.Lond.Copt. 1227* is a tax related document issued by the *koinon* of Thmui which mentions a protection letter. In *O.MedinetHabuCopt. 136* the sender asks for a request letter to be issued “in the name of the *lashane* and of the whole village”: ἀπρὰν μπλαῶνανε | ἀγῶ ἐπρὰν μπτίμε τηρῆ (ll. 3-4).

²⁹² *O.CrumVC* 8; *O.CrumVC* 9; *O.CrumVC* 82; *O.GurnaGorecki* 70; *O.GurnaGorecki* 71; *O.GurnaGorecki* 72; *O.MedinetHabuCopt. 136*; *O.Saint-Marc* 322; *SB Kopt. III 1365*; *SB Kopt. V 2227* (Apa Viktor); *SB Kopt. V 2238*; *SB Kopt. V 2254*; *SB Kopt. V 2261*; *SB Kopt. V 2262*; *SB Kopt. V 2268*; *SB Kopt. V 2271*; *SB Kopt. V 2280*.

²⁹³ Cromwell, *Recording*, 245-247, no. 9; *SB Kopt. III 1368*; *SB Kopt. V 2245*; *SB Kopt. V 2249*.

with tax collection, and this title also appears among the protectors.²⁹⁴ The highest ranking village official among the protectors are *dioiketeis*.²⁹⁵ In exceptional cases, administrators beyond the village level have the role of protector in the documents.²⁹⁶ A soldier signs *SB Kopt. V 2239*, which seems to be related to a legal issue concerning gold between the protectee and the protector.

Clerical and monastic elites also appear as protectors, especially but not only in letters in which they are asked to issue a protection letter (see also below, *Intermediary*). Priests could issue protection letters, and the title *presbuteros* appears several times.²⁹⁷ The highest ranking clerical authority among the protectors is a bishop, namely bishop Pesynthios of Coptos.²⁹⁸ Heads of monasteries could take the role of protector, and they are visible e.g. through the use of titles such as *archimandritès* or *hegoumenos*,²⁹⁹ but a head of the monastery of Bawit can be recognized in one document from the opening formula in use in the monastery's internal correspondence.³⁰⁰ Other honorific titles, such as "Your (holy) Paternity" or "Apa", also seem to point to a monastic or clerical authority.³⁰¹ A manager of monastic estates (*pronoètès*) could issue protection letters, as is shown by *SB Kopt. V 2226*, in which two estate managers who issued a protection letter in name of the *topos* and broke it, are excommunicated by a priest.³⁰²

2.4.7 Intermediary

The third important role in the Coptic protection letters is that of the intermediary. We recognize the intermediaries most easily as the senders or addressees of letters in which

²⁹⁴ Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001) 176-177 (= *P.Akoris* 36); *SB Kopt. V 2242*; *SB Kopt. V 2266*; *SB Kopt. V 2283*; *SB Kopt. V 2284*.

²⁹⁵ *SB Kopt. V 2240*; *SB Kopt. V 2265*.

²⁹⁶ *O.Lips.Copt. II 103*; *SB Kopt. V 2309*. On the role of these regional administrators in the Coptic protection letters and related documents, see section 5.3.2.

²⁹⁷ *SB Kopt. V 2223*; *SB Kopt. V 2253*; *SB Kopt. V 2273*; *SB Kopt. V 2290*; *SB Kopt. V 2311*.

²⁹⁸ P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited); Van der Vliet, "Letter".

²⁹⁹ *P.Ryl.Copt. 289* and *SB Kopt. V 2253*, respectively. The title πρωτης who is protector in *SB Kopt. V. 2274* has been interpreted as πρωτος or monastery head by Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 252.

³⁰⁰ "It is our father who writes": *P.BawitClackson 65*.

³⁰¹ BKU II 298; *SB Kopt. V 2307*; *SB Kopt. V 2292*. "Father": *P.KölnÄgypt. II 25*; *SB Kopt. V 2296*. "Apa" can also simply be part of a name (e.g. Apadios in *SB Kopt. V 2286*, see Derda, Tomasz & Wipszycka, Ewa, "L'emploi", but in these cases, other elements in the text or context of the document also point to a clerical or monastic identification: *O.CrumVC 075*; *SB Kopt. V 2288*; *SB Kopt. V 2289*; *SB Kopt. V 2297*; *SB Kopt. V 2291*: Papa Elias.

³⁰² *SB Kopt. V 2279* is a contract, with protection letter formulas, for the use of a camel belonging to a monastery, with a *pronoètès* in the role of protector.

Coptic protection letters are requested or otherwise discussed. The procedure to obtain a protection letter often passed through one or more intermediaries between the protectee and the protector.³⁰³ The intermediary can be the party who asks the protector to issue a protection letter.³⁰⁴ He can state that he will ensure that the promises mentioned in the protection letter are upheld for the protectee.³⁰⁵ In these cases, it is sometimes difficult to make the distinction between the intermediary and the protector, as the intermediaries sometimes sign the promise to uphold the protection letter, binding themselves to that promise.³⁰⁶ In other cases, the intermediary is the addressee of the letter, who is (sometimes implicitly) asked to transfer a protection letter to the protectee.³⁰⁷ Sometimes it appears that this letter serves as the actual protection letter.³⁰⁸ The intermediaries in the corpus are invariably male and sometimes identified by a title.³⁰⁹

This chapter has given a complete overview of the core corpus of this dissertation, the Coptic protection letters, including their geographical, chronological material distribution. The last section has discussed important elements of the formulary of the protection letters, as well as the three main actors in the documents and the ways in which these were produced and circulated. The discussions of the protection letters in the next chapter will make use of the terms and concepts that I have presented in order to analyze their language and understand their role in village society.

³⁰³ On the procedures related to the protection letters, and the importance of intermediaries in these protection mechanisms, see section 3.2.1.

³⁰⁴ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2288, in which the *lashanes* of the village of Trakatan ask an Apa Jakob to issue protection letters.

³⁰⁵ E.g. *O.CrumVC* 75.

³⁰⁶ E.g. *O.CrumVC* 82. On the promise to uphold or respect the protection letter issued by someone else as an expression of protection, see section 3.1.2.

³⁰⁷ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2290.

³⁰⁸ E.g. *O.CrumVC* 64.

³⁰⁹ E.g. *O.CrumVC* 64: *presbuteros*, “priest”; *O.CrumVC* 075; *O.CrumVC* 082; *SB Kopt.* V 2288; Van der Vliet, “Letter”: all *lashane*.

Chapter 3: Patterns of Protection

This Chapter's overarching goal is to provide answers to my first set of research questions: *Can the Coptic protection letter be considered an institution of village life? In other words, was a Coptic protection letter a result of a routine or rather an ad-hoc procedure? Can we identify patterns in their production (including their language) and circulation?* The first part of the chapter examines the formulary of the Coptic protection letters in detail, in order to ascertain whether from their language they could have reasonably been recognized as a specific document type, and in which ways/whether they could be recognized as instruments of protection in particular. Therefore, the first section of this chapter individuates the core formulas, or rather formula types, of the Coptic protection letter (3.1.1), and I discuss four ways in which the protection letters express or reflect protective interventions within the Coptic protection letter mechanism (3.1.2). Protective interventions are expressed through 1. negative promise clauses, 2. positive promise clauses, including 3. phrases promising conversations and agreements, 4. specific phrases reflecting steps in the procedure to obtain a protection letter.

The second part of the chapter builds directly onto this discussion of the formulary, and examines in detail the procedure to obtain a Coptic protection letter. The protection letters have been called products of "routine procedure",³¹⁰ but my analyses show that there was not a routine procedure to obtain a Coptic protection letter. There could be several different people, letters, and conversations involved, which is again reflected in the language of the documents. I discuss four main aspects of the procedures that were in place when someone needed a protection letter: The presence of intermediaries (3.2.1); The various roles of intermediaries (3.2.2); Oral interactions as negotiations (3.2.3); Logistics of the protection letter procedure (3.2.4); The interaction and cooperation between village and clerical elites in these procedures, with particular attention to the two letters in the corpus addressed to bishop Pesynthios in the early seventh century (3.2.5).

The third part of the chapter links the language of the protection letters to the protection letter mechanism in the villages. Two sections will examine the relationship between patterns of formulary and unique phrases, the universal and the exceptional, in these documents. The first, as a case study, compares the protection letters written and

³¹⁰ Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 177 and n. 49.

signed by the village scribes of Djeme (including Jeremias' protection letter cited in Chapter 1) (3.3.1). The second examines more closely references to the particular situation at hand in the protection letters (3.3.2). The last section, building on the findings of the previous sections, argues that the Coptic protection letters can be seen as a social institution of village life (3.3.3): they were a recognizable type of document, often produced by the village administrative apparatus, and there are recurring patterns in the procedure to obtain a protection letter. However, importantly, their contents were in part determined by the specific circumstances of each case, and there was not a streamlined and fixed process in terms of how they could be requested and circulated, and who would request or be approached, who would issue, write, and circulate.

3.1 The protection letters as recognizable instruments of protection

3.1.1 The core formulae

Was a protection letter recognizable as a specific document? The material and visual aspect of the documents does not favor recognizability. The writing support (mostly ceramic shards or limestone flakes, but also small pieces of papyrus) and the visual layout, or apparent lack of an standardized, document-specific layout, make them look very similar to other types of Coptic documents, like private letters or tax-receipts.³¹¹ Their recognizability lies in their formulae. This section will focus on those formulae, particularly the ones that were essential to write a protection letter.

“Although some standard formulae survive, the text contains some unusual features...”³¹² This is a recurring remark in editions of protection letters. Editors note again and again that the document in question contains standard phrases or formulae of the documentary genre, or is clearly recognizable as a protection letter, but that the text also contains uncommon features.³¹³ Indeed, no two protection letters are exactly the same, in terms of which formulae or variants of the formulae are used or in which order.

However, a few formulae constitute the core of the protection letter. Their (almost) universal use in the documents shows that they are essential to the genre. First, and very

³¹¹ Although they are generally short documents, the length of the protection letters varies, which they have in common with (private) letters more than with tax-receipts.

³¹² Cromwell, *Recording*, 245 on O.BM EA 44848.

³¹³ See also, e.g.: “While the upper part follows the **usual formulaic** expressions of such kinds of texts, the expression of agreement by the two mentioned officials contains a disjunction (ll. 1–3) that **seems less common.**” oTorino no 17 (142); “Le formulaire présente ici **plusieurs traits inhabituels**”: *O.Saint-Marc* 322. (both my emphasis)

generally, there are two elements of the formulary that are present in all of these documents, taking into account only the texts that are complete: some form of the εἰς πλογοῦς (μῆνοῦτε) ντοοτκ, *eis plogos mpnoute ntootk*, formula and one or more promise clauses.³¹⁴ The εἰς πλογοῦς (μῆνοῦτε) ντοοτκ formula can open the document (often preceded by a cross) or comes after a more letter-style opening.³¹⁵ In second place, most of the documents contain a signature of the protector and an instruction clause. When the document opens with the εἰς πλογοῦς (μῆνοῦτε) ντοοτκ formula, rather than a letter-style opening, the protection letter usually contains the signatures of the protectors.³¹⁶ The signature can be omitted when there is another mention or claim of authority or validity.³¹⁷ Signatures of the protectors were evidently not necessary to draw up a protection letter deemed valid.

The instruction clause does appear in most (complete) protection letters, but is conspicuously absent in some, which has even caused those to be grouped in a special category in previous studies. As I have mentioned in section 2.1.3, while Till only saw them as formally deviant, Delattre argues that they serve a different function, namely that they are addressed to people who are not in fact fugitives, but rather prospective travelers, the protection letter serving as their travel permit, and I believe that they mainly serve to record tax exemptions (see below 4.1.1).³¹⁸

³¹⁴ On my use of the terms “instruction clause”, “promise clause”, “limitation clause”, “exception clause”, “protectee”, “protectors”, “intermediary”, used in this chapter and the following chapters, see section 2.4. On the *eis plogos mpnoute ntootk* formula, see 1.5.1 and 2.1.

³¹⁵ This letter-style opening, which functions as an internal address, takes on different forms, but usually contains the names of the protector (senders) as well as the protectee (addressee).

³¹⁶ There are exceptions to this rule, of course, as is so characteristic of the Coptic protection letters. E.g., *SB Kopt. V 2272* starts with the εἰς πλογοῦς (μῆνοῦτε) ντοοτκ formula, and ends with a what in a letter would be an external address, rather than the signatures of the protectors: “εἰς πλογοῦς μῆνοῦτε | ντοοτκ νγει εἶροι | ἐκῆφωλκ μεκῆφωλκ | νγῆωκ ἐπεκμα | τας νανδρεας | ζιτην μωυσης | μη θεοκζις: “Here you have the promise by God. Come to me and settle (the case) with me. Not settling, go to your place. Give to Andreas from Mouses and Theoxis.”

³¹⁷ E.g. clauses such as: “so that you do not doubt, we drew up this promise and we sign it” and variants, or “For your security we drew up this promise for you: it is valid and effective in every place it will be shown”: *O.GurnaGorecki 69*. The Coptic protection letters which open with an internal address of the style παπα NN (+ title) πρσζαι νNN: from NN who writes to NN, do not contain signatures, although they do contain a mention of drawing up or signing the document. Cromwell, *Recording*, 164-165, 181, observes this for the protection letters written by the Djeme scribe Aristophanes.

³¹⁸ Delattre, “Lettres”.

These core formulas were not only used in protection letters addressed to protectees, but also in letters between intermediaries and protectors. These letters use the terms “*logos*” (here translated as “promise”) or “*logos mpnoutē*” (“promise (made) by (invoking) God”) to indicate protection letters addressed to the protectee. These expressions echo the opening formula: *eis plogos mpnoutē ntootk*. Moreover, often the contents of the intended protection letter were given, which could include an instruction clause or a promise clause.³¹⁹ These clauses are then written using the third person (“we will not harm him”), instead of the second person (“we will not harm you”).

The fact that we can identify a set of core formulas for the Coptic protection letters is one indication that they functioned as a recognizable instrument employed repeatedly in certain types of situations, which usually involved someone who was stranded away from home. The combination *logos* formula and promise clause makes them recognizable, and in second instance the instruction clause also functions as an identifier. The authority signature was important too, but is a characteristic shared by other documentary types, such as legal documents and tax-receipts.³²⁰ In the following section I will continue paying attention to the formulary of the protection letters, focusing particularly on the various formulae reflecting protective interventions, in order to ascertain to what extent and in which way the documents could be recognized as a mechanism of protection. In the first place these are the promise clauses, which I have identified as one of the most important parts of the protection letter formulary. In second place these are expressions which are related to the protection letter procedure: the interventions through which the documents were requested and circulated.

3.1.2 Protective documents: expressions of protection

The Coptic protection letters never mention any Coptic words that are explicitly related to protection. However, the first editors of these documents recognized them as protective documents, and that identification could only have been caused by their interpretation of the

³¹⁹ E.g. *O.Crum VC* 64, ll. 3-8: “You have written to me concerning Sabinos the camelherder, to issue a *logos* (promise) for him and for his camel, that the comes to his house. So here is the promise by God for him and his camel, that he comes to his house *επειδη ατετνςδαϊ ναϊ ετβε σαβινος | πμανκαμογλ ετρα† λογος ναγ μνηεγ |καμογλ ν[χει ε]ρραϊ | επηηι τενογ εις | πλογος μνηουτε ντοτγ μνηεγκαμογλ | νχει ερραϊ επεγνη επεγνη νγρ ρωβ ριπεγκα|μογλ*. As in this case, some letters “quoting” a protection letter would have functioned as a *logos* itself: see section 3.2.1.

³²⁰ Richter, “Koptische Rechtsurkunden”..

language of the documents. I see four different ways of expressing protection in the Coptic protection letters. First, the promise clauses mention the punishment from which and the people from whom the protectee is protected. Second, more affirmative promise clauses. Relatedly, affirmative promise clauses indicating conversations and settling disputes. Third, expressions related to the document itself: to issue it, to write it, to draw it up, to respect it (by the intermediary). These expressions reflect acts of protection or protective interventions by protectors and intermediaries: it is not only the document which protects you, but also the person who decides or promises to issue it for you or respect its stipulations for you.³²¹

3.1.2.1 Promise clauses: negative

The promise clauses in the protection letters are mostly written in negation sentences.³²² They use Negative Future III, which conveys a meaning of promise in Coptic. The verbs used always have the protectee as an object, be it directly or through a preposition. They can be quite general, related to an unspecified evil or harm (see below). Another verb commonly used is “will not ask of you”, which in the documents is often explicitly related to money or taxation.³²³ Other commonly used verbs designate an action fitting in a legal context: “will not prosecute you”, and “will not arrest you”.³²⁴ Several documents use other verbs to phrase the protection, but in one case the verb used can be associated with the general idea of doing harm,³²⁵ while in the other cases the verb indicates a link with either taxation specifically, or money/property more generally.³²⁶ In one document the protector promises the protectee that he will not “hit him this time”. That this was an exceptional way of phrasing the protection letter is highlighted by the fact that this particular promise was

³²¹ As we see in the case of the man who was issued a logos by two village officials but they violated it: *SB Kopt.* V 2286.

³²² See also section 2.4.2.

³²³ “to ask”: $\chi\iota\eta\sigma\upsilon\gamma\kappa$. E.g. *O.CrumVC* 10, ll. 5-6: $\chi\iota\eta\eta\chi\sigma\upsilon\gamma\kappa$ | $\Gamma\epsilon\lambda\lambda$ $\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\rho\eta\eta\eta\epsilon$ $\tau\epsilon\tau\alpha\rho\tau\epsilon$: “that I will not ask anything of you in this fourth year”.

³²⁴ “to prosecute”: $\eta\alpha\rho\alpha\gamma\epsilon$ ($\eta\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\gamma\epsilon\iota\nu$), in 26 cases. “to arrest/seize”: $\delta\mu\alpha\zeta\tau\epsilon$: e.g. *O.CrumVC* 11; $\sigma\omega\eta\epsilon$ in *SB Kopt.* II 916 and *SB Kopt.* V 2292.

³²⁵ *SB Kopt.* V 2254: ll. 5-6: $\chi\epsilon$ $\epsilon\eta\epsilon\eta\sigma\gamma\upsilon\omega\rho\epsilon\iota$ $\eta\lambda\lambda\gamma\epsilon$ | $\eta\rho\omega\mu\epsilon$ $\epsilon\pi\alpha\rho\epsilon\lambda\theta\epsilon$ $\mu\mu\omicron\kappa$: “We will let no man mistreat/transgress against you”.

³²⁶ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2261: “to assign taxes”: $\eta\eta\epsilon\eta$ | $\kappa\lambda\lambda\gamma$ $\epsilon\iota$ | $\sigma\omega\rho$ | ... | $\lambda\lambda\lambda\gamma$ η | $\zeta\omega\beta$ $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ | $\epsilon\iota\chi\omega\kappa$: “we will not allow anyone to assign anything to you”;

SB Kopt. V 2274b, l. 4:

$\uparrow\eta\alpha\kappa\omega$ $\lambda\lambda\lambda\gamma$ $\eta\zeta\omega\beta$ $\delta\eta$ $\delta\chi\iota$ $\delta\rho\omicron\kappa$: “I will not let anything be taken from you” (and 2274c, l. 4: $\kappa\omicron$ $\lambda\lambda\lambda\gamma$ $\eta\zeta\omega\beta$ $\delta\chi\epsilon\iota$ $\epsilon\rho$ [$\omicron\kappa$...]).

added almost as an afterthought, after the date. Dates generally occur at or near the end of the documents.³²⁷

The party who “will not” do any of the things can be the protector himself (or themselves). E.g., *SB Kopt.* III 1368, the protectors, the lashanes of Djeme promise: $\chi\epsilon$ $\text{N}\text{N}\text{E}\text{N}\text{E}\text{P}$ $\text{N}\text{E}\text{O}\text{O}\text{Y}$ | $\text{N}\Delta\text{K}$: “that we will not do you harm” (literally, “that we will not do evil to you”), and in *SB Kopt.* V 2239, the protector promises: $\chi\epsilon$ $\text{E}\text{N}|E\text{I}\text{N}\text{A}\text{P}\text{A}\text{R}\text{A}\text{G}\text{E}$ $\text{M}\text{M}\text{O}\text{K}$: “that I will not prosecute you”.

Thus, often the protectee is actually protected by the document against actions of the protector.³²⁸ However, in some clauses the protectee is protected against a more general source of harm, literally anyone. In those cases the promise clause is sometimes introduced by the protector’s statement that “I will not allow anyone to...”. E.g. in OTorino S. 5911: “[...for we will not al]low anybody to punish/prosecute you with anything evil.” *SB Kopt.* V 2292: $\chi\epsilon$ $\text{N}\text{N}\text{E}\text{A}\text{A}\text{Y}$ $\text{N}\text{P}\text{O}\text{M}\text{E}$ $\text{C}\text{O}\text{N}\text{H}$: “that no man will arrest him”, and *SB Kopt.* V 2240: $\chi\text{N}\text{N}\text{E}\text{I}\text{K}\text{A}\text{Y}$ NEP $\text{N}\text{E}\text{O}\text{O}\text{Y}$: “that I will not let harm be done to you”.

3.1.2.2 Protection clauses: affirmative

In some cases the documents contain affirmative expressions of protection. These can complement the formulaic negative expressions discussed above but more often they occur by themselves. *O.Crum VC* 11 is an example of a protection letter which contains both negative and affirmative expressions of protection. The text is fragmentary but the protector promises to not permit that anyone prosecutes the protectee for anything, and promises to not imprison the protectee. Immediately following these formulae, the text reads: ΔN $\text{N}\text{T}\text{A}\text{O}\text{W}\text{P}\text{E}$ $\text{E}\text{I}\text{O}\text{N}$ $\text{T}[O\text{O}\text{T}\text{K} (?)$ | $\text{N}\text{T}\text{A}\text{C}\text{E}\text{N}\text{E}\text{L}\text{E}\text{I}$ $\text{N}\text{M}\text{M}\text{A}[\text{K}$ | NIM $\text{E}\text{P}\text{P}\text{E}\text{T}\text{N}\text{A}\text{N}\text{O}\text{Y}[\text{H}$ | $\text{N}\text{M}\text{M}\text{A}\text{K}$ NAT [: “but I will be of help to you and I will come to your aid (in) every(thing) good with you”. This last expression is reminiscent of some of the clauses discussed below in section 3.1.2.3.

The same mix of negative and affirmative expressions of protection can be found in *SB Kopt.* V 2253, in which the protector Kyriakos, *hegoumenos* of the “mountain of Djeme”, a local monastery, promises the monk Psmo: “that I will not do you harm, because you fled, neither will I permit any harm to reach you but I will discuss amicably with you

³²⁷ *SB Kopt.* V 2224, ll. 4-8: $\chi\epsilon$ NNA | $\Delta\text{M}\text{A}\text{Z}\text{T}\text{E}$ $\text{M}\text{M}\text{O}\text{K}$ $\text{E}\text{F}\text{O}\text{H}$ N | TAK .. Δ $\text{E}\text{T}\text{B}\text{H}\text{H}\text{T}\text{H}$ + $\mu(\eta\text{N}\iota)$ $\text{T}\acute{\upsilon}(\beta\iota)$ ι $\acute{\iota}(\nu)$ δ ($\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\omega\text{N}\text{O}\varsigma$) ξ | $\Delta\text{Y}\text{W}$ $\chi\epsilon$ $\text{N}\text{N}\text{A}\text{Z}\text{I}\text{O}\text{Y}$ $\text{E}\text{P}\text{O}\text{K}$ | $\text{M}\text{H}\text{E}\text{I}\text{C}\text{O}\text{P}$ + $\text{V}\text{I}\text{K}\text{T}\text{O}\text{P}$ $\text{C}\text{T}\text{O}\text{I}\text{X}(\text{E}\text{I})$ +: I will not detain you for the affair of ... (?) Tubi 10, indiction year 5. And I will not beat you this time. + Victor signs +

³²⁸ See section 5.4.2.

in everything good, neither will I ask anything except the 3 *keratia* and you must give a *trimission*.³²⁹

These two examples contain the same affirmative protective expression: $\text{CYNEL\Theta EI ZN ZWB NIM EPNETNANOY\text{C}}$: “to agree in everything good”.³³⁰ A very similar expression is used in *SB Kopt. V 2233*, only $\text{EPNETNANOY\text{C}}$ is not added: $\text{ALLA NTNCENEL\Theta E | NMMAK ZN ZWB NIM}$: “but we are in agreement with you on every matter.” One promise clause, most often negative, sufficed to produce a protection letter. In the cases in which various types of protective expressions are combined, the extra protective expressions might have been added in order to convince the protectee, or because they were relevant in the specific case.

3.1.2.3 Talk and settle

A number of protection letters was grouped by Till and Schiller in a specific subcategory, because of their affirmative protective clauses referring to conversations, negotiations, and settlements which differ from the usual negative Future III clauses, discussed in the previous paragraph.³³¹ It is clear from the examples cited in the previous section, that protective promises related to talking could occur in combination with the negative promise clauses, making that distinction less relevant.

These “talk” and “settle” expressions often refer to interaction between the protector or intermediary and the protectee. Some documents state that they should “talk” (see below) or “settle”, come to an agreement. Moreover, sometimes the protectee is given the right to go away again after the interaction, without any problems, if no agreement can be concluded. A good example is *SB Kopt. V 2271*, ll. 2-5: $\text{NGEI NTA\Omega\text{A}\chi\text{E} | NMMAK EI MEN \Delta\text{PZWB } \Delta\text{P}\text{I}\text{K}\text{K}\text{E} \text{ NAK } \Delta\text{C}\Delta\text{P}\text{I}\text{C}|\text{K}\text{E} \text{ E}\omega\text{P}\text{E} \text{ } \Delta\text{E} \text{ MMON NG}\omega\text{K} \text{ NAK | META KALOU}$: “Come and I will talk with you. If the thing pleases you, it is well. But if not, go freely (or: without problem).” The expression *meta kalou* is used several times in the corpus.³³² In their

³²⁹ $\text{XE MEIP\Theta\Theta O O | NAK XE AKPOY\text{T} \text{ OY}\Delta\text{E} \text{ NN}\epsilon\text{C}(\text{Y})\text{NX}(\text{OPEI}) | \text{NTE}\lambda\lambda\text{AY} \text{ MPE}\theta\theta\text{OY} \text{ TAZOK | ALLA EIN}\Delta\text{CENEL}\theta\text{E} \text{ NMMAK ZN | ZWB NIM EPNETNANOY\text{C} | \text{OY}\Delta\text{E} \text{ NN}\epsilon\text{I}\chi\text{NOY} \text{ K}\epsilon\lambda\lambda\text{AY} | \omega\Delta\text{PK}\epsilon\text{P}\omega\text{M}\text{MNT} \text{ N}\gamma\text{A}\text{†}|\text{P}\text{T}\text{P}\text{IM}(\text{ECCION})$.

³³⁰ See also *P.Heid. XI 490*: $\text{I}\epsilon[\text{T}]\text{NANOY\text{C}} \text{ T}\epsilon\text{T}\text{N}\epsilon\text{C}\text{ZAI} \text{ OY}\lambda\text{O}\text{GOC} \text{ NAC}$: “... good and that you write him a *logos* (promise)”. It is improbable that it refers to the actual content of the protection letter which needed to be written, as you would expect such information after the mention of issuing or writing the document, but I do not think it is a coincidence to find those words together.

³³¹ Till, category 5: “Einladungen zu Verhandlungen”. Schiller: “Summons Type”.

³³² An appendix to the edition of *O.GurnaGorecki 70* presents an overview of the use of this expression in Coptic literature and documents.

protection letter for Kurikos of Tkousht, Elisiaios the lashane and Joannes stipulate: “either/whether you agree with my way of discussing with you or not, you will go to your place freely.”³³³ These expressions, recurring repeatedly in the Coptic protection letters, show that within the Coptic protection letter mechanism there was an openness to negotiation between the protector and protectee. Moreover, the positive protection statements express reassurance and seem more intent on convincing the protectee to return, in contrast with the negative promise clauses the formulation of which points to the threat or punishment.

3.1.2.4 Protective expressions referring to steps in the mechanism

In the previous paragraphs, I have discussed the expressions of protection that form an important part of the formulary and the content of the protection letters. These clauses indicate from what and from whom the protectee will be protected (negative Future III clauses) or give positive assurance of help or amnesty in the future, provided by the protector to the protectee. However, there is another type of protective expression in these documents: the expressions referring to the document itself. They are the expression of the interventions needed to produce, request, circulate the protection letter, expressions of the Coptic protection letter mechanism.

The clause “So that you will not doubt, I drew up this *logos* and I sign it”, with variants, occurs in many of the protection letters addressed to protectees, especially in those produced by village officials.³³⁴ The verbs used by the protectors are “to draw up”, “to write”, “to sign/agree”, “to undersign”.³³⁵ Other expressions which do not occur in protection letters addressed to protectees, but in other letters documenting the protection letter mechanism, such as “to issue a protection letter”, “to receive a protection letter”, “to respect a protection letter” are useful for our understanding of how the documents circulated and functioned in society (see in particular section 3.2). They are discussed below.

³³³ O. GurnaGorecki 70.

³³⁴ E.g. ⲬⲈ ⲢⲚⲈⲚⲔⲁⲙⲢⲓⲃⲓⲗⲗⲈ ⲁⲢⲤⲘⲢⲢ ⲢⲈⲓⲗⲟⲩⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲢⲤⲟⲩⲱⲩⲥ | Ⲉⲣⲟⲩ: SB Kopt. V 2228. Other examples are SB Kopt. V 2233, 2245, 2246, 2247, 2249, 2253, 2265, 2275, SB Kopt, III 1368.

³³⁵ “I drew up”: ⲁⲓⲤⲘⲢⲢ, “I wrote”: ⲁⲓⲤⲁⲓ, “I sign”: ⲧⲥⲧⲟⲩⲱⲩⲥ, “I have underwritten”: ⲁⲓⲈⲘⲢⲟⲩⲣⲁⲢⲉ (this expression in SB Kopt. V 2290, 2293, 2294: letters requesting that a *logos* is issued.)..

Issue a logos

The phrase used to indicate “to issue a protection letter” is †ΛΟΓΟΣ, “*tilogos*” (or “*ti plogos*”).³³⁶ It is notable that this expression is never used in the protection letters addressed to protectees, but rather in the correspondence between protectors and intermediaries (see below). The expression appears both in letters in which someone asks for a protection letter to be issued for a third party as well as in letters from people asking their addressee to issue a protection letter for them. To indicate the person to whose advantage the protection letter is issued, the protectee, the expression uses the Coptic “dative” preposition Ν-: ΝΑϠ, ΝΑΙ: for him, for me.³³⁷

Receive a logos

ΧΙΛΟΓΟΣ (“*jilogos*”, to receive a promise) occurs much less frequently than †ΛΟΓΟΣ, “to issue/give a promise”, and seems to point to a step in the procedure when an intermediary receives the protection letter written on behalf of a third party, from the protector.³³⁸ However, it can also point to the protectee actually receiving the protection letter. Both meanings are used in the following letter:

*Be so brotherly and get the logos (promise) for me in the name of the lashanes and in the name of the whole village; but get it for Pkamoul also, and for all my men and all my goods. You know that I am wont to get a promise each year. Moreover, Pkamoul said: “I will not go South unless you get the promise for me.” Send it to me tomorrow, quickly. Give it to Apa Koukle from Petronius.*³³⁹

Respect the logos

In letters in which the sender asks the addressee to issue a protection letter for a third person, the sender could include in the letter a promise that he would uphold or respect the protection letter of the protector. The Coptic verbs to indicate “to observe/uphold/respect (the promise) are ΡΟΕΙC and ΖΑΡΕZ.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ In *P.Heid.* XI 490, cited above, the sender uses the verb C2ΑΙ, “to write” when asking for for he issuance of a protection letter,.

³³⁷ Coptic: Now, please, / write and bring Taammonikos / to you so that he issues a / promise for him: *SB Kopt.* V 2286.

³³⁸ *O.Lips.Copt.* II 170, discussed in more detail in 3.2.1.

³³⁹ *O.Medin.HabuCopt.* 136, Djeme, seventh-eighth century.

³⁴⁰ *O.CrumVC* 75; *O.Vind.Copt.* 184; P.Katoennatie 685/1; Van der Vliet, “Letter”; *SB Kopt.* V 2291; *SB Kopt.* V 2294.

In *O.Crum VC 75*, Johannes, the lashane of the village of Trakatan, asks a certain Abba Paham to issue a protection letter for a jar maker (†ΝΟΥ ΜΑΤΚΝΜΝΤ|ΕΙΩΤ ΤΙΛΟΓΟC ΝΗΚΩΚ). In his letter, Johannes combines negative protection clauses usually found in the protection letters themselves, as well as the “respect” clause, and an extra affirmative promise of protection: “and I will observe for him the promise, that naught of ill befall him, whether from me or from other men; rather I will contend for him until I shall deliver him at thy holy *topos* (monastery)”.³⁴¹ In his edition, Crum noted that the protective expression with “to defend/to contend for” did not appear in the Schutzbriefe discussed by Till, and it remains unique in the corpus until today. However, it is an interesting addition to the affirmative promises of protection discussed in section 3.1.2.2.

This first part of the chapter has focused on the elements of the formulary of protection letters which make them recognizable as examples of a documentary genre and as instruments of a protection mechanism. I have presented what I believe to be the core formulas of the protection letters, the formulas that, especially when used together, identify the document as a protection letter. I have also shown the various ways the language of the protection letters expressed protection, as well as particular acts within the protection letter mechanism: issuing, receiving, upholding a protection letter. The next section will build immediately onto this last point. I discuss the various interactions and steps taken by various actors when someone was in need of a protection letter. The discussion is divided into four aspects: the importance (3.2.1) and various roles (3.2.2) of intermediaries, the role of oral interactions (3.2.3), the logistics of the protection letter procedure (3.2.4), and the interaction between village and monastic contexts in these procedures (3.2.5).

3.2 Procedures of protection

In this section I will discuss what we can understand from the documentation on the Coptic protection letters about the procedure to obtain such a protection letter. Which kind of interactions preceded the production of a protection letter, and who was involved?³⁴² I will discuss 5 aspects of the protection letter procedure which come to the fore in a careful reading of the documents. First, the interventions of one or more intermediaries was a frequent step on the road to the production of a protection letter. Intermediaries are seldom

³⁴¹ Π. 6-11: ἀγὼ †ΝΑΡΘΕΙC | ΝΑϞ ΕΠΛΟΓΟC ΜΝΤΕΛΔΟΥΕ ΝΠΕΙ|ΘΟΟΥ ΤΑ2ΟΥ ΕΙΤΕ 2ΑΡΟΙ ΕΙΤΕ 2Α ΚΕ | ΡΩΜΕ ΔΛΛΑ †ΝΑϞΩΧΕ ΕΧΩϞ | ΝϞΔΝΤΑΚΑΤΑCΤΑΖΕ ΜΜΟϞ | ΕΠΚΤΟΠΟC ΕΤΟΥΔΔΒ.

³⁴² This section is partially based on Scheerlinck, “Procedures”. The section summarizes and adds to certain arguments from the article, and discusses new examples.

seen in protection letters addressed by the protector to the protectee (the “standard” *logos mpnoute* document), but many other documents in the corpus document their interventions in the procedure. Second, the intermediaries play different roles in the documentation: we see them address protectors with requests for a protection letter for a third party,³⁴³ but we also see them discuss who would be the most appropriate person to issue the protection letter,³⁴⁴ and we see them even punish protectors who did not respect a protection letter issued by themselves.³⁴⁵ Moreover, the intermediaries, as well as the protectors, played different roles in rural life: both village authorities and monastic authorities acted and interacted in different parts of the process. Third, oral as well as written interactions were part of these procedures. While the eventual result of the protection letter procedure was a written document, the documents testify on several occasions of oral interactions that were integral steps on the road to the eventual document. I understand these oral interactions as moments of negotiation which could determine the contents of the eventual protection letter. Fourth, I will make some remarks on the logistics of the protection letter procedure: how did the protection letters arrive in the hands of the protectees? Fifth, I will highlight the interactions between village and monastic contexts in the protection letter mechanism. I will pay special attention to the two letters in the corpus addressed to bishop Pesynthios of Coptos.

Before I can address these topics, I should make a brief remark about the documents which inform us about the Coptic protection letter procedure. The majority of our information about the protection letter procedure comes from letters between protectors and intermediaries. The protection letters issued by protectors to protectees almost never mention an intermediary or the steps that led to the protection letter. Moreover, there are only 3 published letters in which the protectee writes to the protector or an intermediary with a request for a protection letter.³⁴⁶ Although few in number, these letters show that people needing a protection letter seemed to know how to obtain one, as in their letters they point out the measures to be taken and the people who should take them. They used their knowledge of the relationships and competencies of their fellow villagers in order to try and

³⁴³ E.g. *O.CrumVC* 75.

³⁴⁴ *SB Kopt.* V 2286.

³⁴⁵ *SB Kopt.* V 2226.

³⁴⁶ *SB Kopt.* V 2300; *O.MedinetHabuCopt.* 136; *O.GurnaGorecki* 72.

get what they wanted.³⁴⁷ While these letters from protectees are valuable for our understanding of the protection letters and their role in society, the mechanisms of protection letter procedure are brought to light rather in the more numerous letters between protectors and intermediaries, and therefore it will be those letters which will be the center of the discussion below.

3.2.1 Presence of intermediaries

The first characteristic of this procedure which we learn from the letters is the importance of the interventions of intermediaries, in spite of their near absence in the protection letters addressed by protector to protectee. An exception to this near absence is *SB Kopt.* V 2234, a protection letter for a priest and “the people who are with him”: “The master Apa Apion and Abraham ... informed me (?) that you (pl.) went. Now here you have the promise, priest of Terkot and all men who are with you (sing.),...”³⁴⁸ The production of this particular protection letter seems to have been the consequence of a communication from intermediaries Apa Apion and Abraham to the protector, who signs the document but whose name is lost.

However, the other letters of the corpus indicate that direct communication between protectors and protectees concerning the procedure to obtain a protection letter was much less frequent than the involvement of intermediaries in such communications. Among the corpus are examples that show the interventions of often 1, or 2, but even up to 3 individuals who would in all probability not be mentioned in the eventual protection document.³⁴⁹

That intermediaries should be involved in the protection letter procedure is easily conceivable: the protectees generally seem to have been away from their home, and were not willing or able to return to their home without an offer of (partial) amnesty. The authorities who could issue the document ensuring that amnesty were often also those who could punish them. Direct contact would have been risky, and the use of an intermediary, who could not only transfer the document but in all probability also negotiate its contents

³⁴⁷ This is part of the conclusions in Scheerlinck, “Procedures”.

³⁴⁸ *SB Kopt.* V 2234, ll. 1-5: ΕΠΕΙΔΗ ΑΠΚΥΡ(ΙΟΣ) ΑΠΑ ΑΠΙΩΝ | ΜΝ ΑΒΡΑΞΑ[Μ].....ΔΜΟΪ | ΧΕ ΔΤΕΤΝΩΚ ΝΗΤΝ ΤΝΟΥ ΕΙΣ ΠΛΟ|ΓΟϚ ΝΤΟΤΚ ΝΤΟΚ ΠΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟϚ | ΝΤΕΡΚΩΤ ΜΝ ΡΩΜΕ ΝΙΜ ΕΨΔΑΣΤΗΚ.

³⁴⁹ Two intermediaries, including the sender, are intervening for (the protection letter of) Samuel in *SB Kopt.* V 2287. In the interventions mentioned in *SB Kopt.* V 2286, 3 people are involved who would not feature in the eventual document: the document is discussed in more detail in Scheerlinck, “Procedures”.

(see below), would have been preferable. We see intermediaries make a variety of interventions, which is the second aspect of the protection letter procedure that I would like to discuss.

3.2.2 Various roles of intermediaries

One role which intermediaries could play in the procedure is as senders of a request for a protection letter for a third party.³⁵⁰ E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2288* is such a request from three village headmen (*lashane*) to a monastic authority: “Johannes, Pisrael and Saua, the *lashanes* of Trakatan write to Apa Jakob: Please, your Paternity, issue a promise for Johannes, son of Paternouthios, that he comes and we talk with him...” The three *lashanes*, in this case the intermediaries, seem to detail the contents of the eventual protection letter to be written by Apa Jakob, expressing the instruction clause and a clause reminiscent of affirmative promise clauses in the third person.³⁵¹

However, intermediaries also come into play after a protection letter has been produced. E.g., they can be on the receiving end of a letter from the protector in which the protection letter for the protectee is embedded.³⁵² In these letters as well the protection letter formulae can be written in the third person instead of in the second person.³⁵³ *SB Kopt. V 2303*, a protection letter for Samuel and his children, has the protection letter formulary in the third person, but it seems to be a stand-alone document, not embedded in a letter, as the document opens with the *eis plogos mpnoute* formula instead of a letter opening or some form of justification for sending the document, as in the other letters with an embedded protection document. Only the first 4 lines are (fragmentarily) preserved, but the beginning of the *eis plogos mpnoute* formula reads: ll. 1-2 : + ΕΙΣ ΠΛΟΓΟΣ | ΝΤΟΤΗ ΝΣΑΜΟΥΗΛ...: “Here you have the promise for him, (*i.e.*) Samuel...”. Although the document is fragmentary, we might interpret it as follows: this is a document addressed by the protector to the intermediary, who would pass it on to the protectee (Samuel and his children). Apparently the sender did not think that the receiver of his letter, the intermediary, needed an explanation why they received this protection letter for Samuel, and it is plausible that intermediary and protector had communicated about Samuel’s situation beforehand. The

³⁵⁰ E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2288*.

³⁵¹ A detailed discussion of this letter in Palombo and Scheerlinck, “Asking”.

³⁵² E.g. *O.CrumVC 64* (discussed in detail in Scheerlinck, “Procedures”; *SB Kopt. V 2301*; *SB Kopt. V 2302*; *O.Vind Copt. 66*; *SB Kopt. V 2290*; OTorino S. 5911.

³⁵³ E.g. *O.CrumVC 64*; *SB Kopt. V 2301*; *SB Kopt. V 2304*..

corpus contains references to the intermediaries receiving the protection letter from the protector and passing it on to the protectee. E.g., Petronias asks Apa Koukle to get his protection letter, issued by the village authorities of Djeme, and give it to him.³⁵⁴ The senders of *O.Lips.Copt.* II 170, probably 3 monks of the monastery of Apa Ezekiel,³⁵⁵ tell their “brother”, probably another monk, that they have received a protection letter for him.³⁵⁶ They tell him not to be afraid and come to “the village” that same night, immediately after reading their letter, presumably to give him the protection letter, although that is not explicitly stated.³⁵⁷

When intermediaries asked a protector to issue a protection letter, they could insert in their request a statement that they would respect said protection letter once it was produced. I have discussed this expression also in section 3.1.2.4. E.g., in *SB Kopt.* V 2292, the sender asks the receiver to give a certain Triphanios a protection letter, and states that he will respect it. Although the sender uses protection formulary in his letter, namely a promise clause on ll. 9-11, this letter was probably not meant as the protection letter for the protectee. That document was probably issued by the receiver of the letter, clearly a clerical or monastic authority.

Before anything I greet and kiss the footstool of the feet of your holy Paternity. I ask you to give a promise for Triphanios, that he comes to his house. I will respect the promise for him, that nobody seizes him to ask anything from him, except your Paternity. In this case, “nobody” most likely includes the sender of the letter, who will be prevented by the addressee’s protection letter from taking anything from Triphanios. The expression of “respecting” the protection letters seems to have been used mostly by village authorities in situations in which the protectee received the protection letter in a monastic context, while needing to return to his village (3.1.2.4). In cases such as this, the difference between intermediary and protector becomes most blurred. Upon the protectee’s return to the village, the village head, instead of issuing a protection letter for the protectee (which we see most often in the corpus), considers the monastic or clerical authority’s protection letter as

³⁵⁴ *O.MedinetHabuCopt.* 136. Discussed in detail in Scheerlinck, “Procedures”.

³⁵⁵ According to the editor.

³⁵⁶ Ll. 3-4: εἰς πλογοῦς ἀνηχίτη | νηκ.

³⁵⁷ The senders of the letter also refer to a certain Mena, who was going to Hermonthis the next day, but it is not clear what his exact role in the situation was.

valid.³⁵⁸ Other interventions of intermediaries in the corpus are, e.g. punishing with excommunication two protectors who had transgressed against a protection letter they had issued,³⁵⁹ discussing who should issue a specific protection letter,³⁶⁰ accompanying the protectee during travel.³⁶¹

The intermediaries and protectors also have various roles in rural Egypt: they are generally local authorities in their region, but monastic or clerical authorities as well as village authorities both issue protection letters and act as intermediaries. Eg., in *SB Kopt. V 2288 lashanes* ask Apa Jakob to issue a protection letter, but in *O.MedinetHabuCopt. 136* Apa Koukle serves as an intermediary between the *lashanes* and the protectee. The interaction and cooperation between monastic and village authorities are discussed in section 3.2.5 below.

3.2.3 Oral interactions as moments of negotiation

While the eventual product of the protection letter procedure was a written document, intermediary steps could be both oral and written interactions. I have discussed elsewhere two documents which very clearly document this combination of oral and written steps.³⁶² I have argued there that the moments of oral interaction were probably moments of negotiation, between the protector and an intermediary as a representative of the protectee. I believe that during those conversations or negotiations the stipulations in the protection letters, in particular the limitations and exceptions, would have been fixed.

SB Kopt. V 2295 is another example of these oral interactions in the (fragmentary) Coptic protection letter mechanism. The sender, who acts as the protector in this case, received an oral request for a *logos* and is now sending the *logos*. ll. 2-5: ΝΤΑ-|ΠΑΤΕΡ ΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΙ ΝΑΝ ΕΨΩ | ΜΜΟ]C ΧΕ † ΛΟΓΟΣ ΝΠΕΑ-| [...]: “Patermoute came to us and said: Issue/give a *logos* (promise) to his (= likely “my”)... Thus, the actual protectee is an acquaintance or dependent of Patermoute, who acts as a first intermediary for the protectee. The sender writes the protection letter in *SB Kopt. V 2295*, with an instruction to “Come home/to his house” in the third person. The addressee of *SB Kopt. V 2295*, whose name is lost but who

³⁵⁸ See section 3.2.2 on the interaction and cooperation between lay and monastic or clerical elites in the protection letter procedure.

³⁵⁹ *SB Kopt. V 2226*.

³⁶⁰ *SB Kopt. V 2286*.

³⁶¹ *SB Kopt. V 2301*; *O.Mon.Cyr. 5*; *O.Crum VC 75*.

³⁶² *SB Kopt. V 2286*; *O.GurnaGorecki 72*. Scheerlinck, “Procedures”.

must be a person acting as a second intermediary for the protectee, will presumably give the protection letter to the protectee (or maybe to Patermoute to forward to the protectee).

That conversations played an important role in mechanisms of problem-solving in the villages is also evident in a number of protection letters in which the protectee is invited to come and talk to someone, usually the protector, to come to an agreement.³⁶³ In some cases the document mentions that if the conversation should not produce an agreement, the protectee is guaranteed a safe return by the protection letter.³⁶⁴ Those conversations might have led in turn to the production of another document.³⁶⁵

3.2.4 Logistics of the protection letter procedure

The Coptic protection letters functioned on a very local level, and the different actors were for the most part probably not far away from each other (see also section 4.2.3.5 on the limited geographical scale of the Coptic protection letters). The protection letters document the protection mechanisms between e.g. the village of Djeme and surrounding monastic settlements, which were at the most at a couple of kilometers distance.³⁶⁶ Petronias expected his protection letter on the day after he put in the request with Apa Koukle, who had to receive the protection letter from the lashanes and then send it to Petronias.³⁶⁷ This suggests very short distance between all actors, as well as direct or short lines of communication.³⁶⁸ When the instruction clause mentions that the protectees should “come South” or “come North”, this indicates that the protectee is at some distance, likely another village or maybe even a different district (like possibly in Van der Vliet, A Letter to a Bishop (O. APM Inv. 3871), discussed in 3.2.5).³⁶⁹

³⁶³ They are discussed in more detail in section 4.3.1.2. See also section 3.1.2.3. Both lay officials asking bishop Pesynthios to issue a protection letter for a third party mention that they want to talk with the protectees.

³⁶⁴ Such situations are documented in e.g. *SB Kopt.* III 1365; *SB Kopt.* V 2271; *SB Kopt.* V 2272; *P.KölnÄgypt.* II 25; *SB Kopt.* II 914; *O.GurnaGorecki* 70.

³⁶⁵ Like the settlements as products of arbitration discussed in Fournet, *Rise*, Chapter 3. See also Gagos, Van Minnen, *Settling*.

³⁶⁶ See also section 3.2.2. The officials writing to bishop Pesynthios with requests for protection letters probably wrote from his diocese of Coptos to the *topos* of Apa Epiphanius in Western Thebes, at about 40 km distance.

³⁶⁷ *O.MedinetHabuCopt.* 136.

³⁶⁸ I will further discuss this local nature of the protection letters in Chapter 4, in particular in contrast with the Arabic and Greek travel permits.

³⁶⁹ *SB Kopt.* V 2301, *SB Kopt.* V 2274. See also *P.Ryl.Copt.* 289, in which the sender tells the addressee that some youths had fled their monastery and had convinced sailors to take them North,

The documents testify in different ways about the circulation of documents and people in the procedure. First, there are internal references to such logistics in the text. Petronias expects his letter to be sent rather than handed to him by Apa Koukle. The monks in O.Lips.Copt. II 170 seem to have invited their brother to come so that they can hand him the protection letter which they had received for him. *SB Kopt.* V 2286 refers to different trips that the actors should make to talk to one another about a required protection letter, as well as to letters and documents that should be written in the process.³⁷⁰ These internal comments provide small glimpses into the movements of people and documents in the protection letter procedure.

Second, the presence, or rather absence, of external addresses on the documents in the corpus should be noted. Most protection letters from protectors to protectees do not contain an external address.³⁷¹ The protection letters were legal documents, and their formulary in general is less reminiscent of letters than legal documents, which did not include external addresses in their formulary. At the same time, these documents also functioned as letters, and they did have to reach the protectee in some way or another for them to be able to make use of them. If the protectees were away from home, and wishing to avoid direct contact with the village authorities, their protection letters would be “sent” rather than given to them in person by the protectors. In the majority of the cases we can imagine that the protection letter was personally given to the protectee by an intermediary, someone who might have already intervened and negotiated with the protector on behalf of the protectee.³⁷² In those cases an address seems unnecessary, also because the name of the protectee was always part of the protection letters, so there was no risk that they could not be identified.

A third way in which the protection letters can give us insight in how they might have circulated, is where they were discovered. E.g., *O.GurnaGorecki* 70 is a protection

and now the sender wants to make sure that the youths receive a protection letter with which they can return to the monastery.

³⁷⁰ Scheerlinck, “Procedures”.

³⁷¹ Exceptions are *SB Kopt.* V 2236 and the very brief *SB Kopt.* V 2272, which asks the protectee to come and settle his case, and in which the address takes up 3 out of 7 lines: ΤΑC ΝΑΝΔΡΕΑC | ΣΙΤΝ ΜΟΥCΗC | ΜΝ ΘΕΟΚΣΙC. The external addresses are of the type ΤΑC Ν+Χ ΣΙΤΝ Υ and variations, see the overview in Biedenkopf-Ziehner, “Untersuchungen”, 204-205 (Tabelle I). Otherwise, the majority of the documents with an external address are letters between intermediaries and protectors.

³⁷² Such a transaction was what I understand to be the goal of the letter *P.Lips.Copt.* II 170, discussed above, under “Various roles of intermediaries”.

letter issued by the *lashanes* of a village for Kurikos and his children. While the document was produced in the village, it was found in a monastic hermitage in Western Thebes, together with many other documents, among which other protection letters.³⁷³ The editor postulates that either Kurikos and his family had sought and found refuge at the hermitage and that therefore the protection letter was sent there, or otherwise that the document was sent to the hermitage because of an assumption that the inhabitants there knew where Kurikos and his family might be. We do not know who brought the protection letter to the hermitage, and it is possible that Kurikos himself brought it with him. In any case, the protection letter remained in the hermitage, suggesting that either Kurikos and his children were not found by the monks of the monastery, or that Kurikos and his children did not go back to the village. It seems unlikely that they would return to the village without the document giving them the protection to do so without consequences.

The protection letter for Kurikos and his children was transported between the village and the hermitage where it was found. This contact between village and monastic contexts, and thus between village and monastic authorities, is evident in several letters in the corpus of protection letters. This interaction and cooperation between village and monastic elites in the protection letter mechanism will be the topic of the next section.

3.2.5 The protection letters between village and monastic contexts

In section 2.3.1 I mention that 31 protection letters were found in monastic or church contexts in Western Thebes. Three more documents were found in monasteries in Middle Egypt. One explanation for these documents to be found there is that the monasteries and churches were places of refuge. On the other hand, especially in the case of churches and larger monasteries, we could postulate that they were archival places, as Anne Boud'hors suggests in the case of *O.Saint-Marc* 322 (and 323). It is likely that in the case of Kurikos which I discussed above, however, the hermitage was rather a place of refuge than a place where documents were stored. This interpretation is supported by the protection letters of which the contents show that monastic or clerical authorities were involved, whether the documents were found in a monastic or church context or not. The protection letters record several situations in which authorities in monasteries, such as priests and monastery heads, interacted and cooperated with village officials in the protection letter mechanisms. I

³⁷³ *O.GurnaGorecki* 69, 71, 72.

mentioned several examples of such interactions in the previous sections in passing, but I wish to discuss here two specific letters in more detail.

Two letters requesting protection letters were addressed to bishop Pesynthios, bishop of the diocese of Coptos.³⁷⁴ The bishop's documents were found near the *topos* of Apa Epiphanius in Western Thebes, where Pesynthios sojourned for a certain period from 619 onwards, when Egypt was under Persian rule. However, both letters seem to have been sent from locations in Pesynthios' diocese. The sender of one letter is the *lashane* of Pmilis, a village in the diocese of Coptos.³⁷⁵ The other letter was sent by a certain Stefanos, who is known in the Pesynthios dossier, and was probably a civil official, either a *lashane* or an urban magistrate.³⁷⁶ Both officials ask Pesynthios to issue a protection letter for a third party. In one case the protectee is a man by himself, in the other they are two men, their wives, and their cattle. Aside from their general aim, the letters are fairly similar. Both senders state that they want to talk with the protectees, and in one letter there seems to be a more elaborate "settle" clause (3.1.2.3), which is broken off. Both senders also promise to "respect", but in different terms: ΝΤΝΞΑΡΗΞ ΝΑϢ ΕΠ|ΔΙΚΑΙΟΝ: "I will respect what is just for him"³⁷⁷ and †Ν[Δ]|ΡΟΕΙϢ ΝΗΥ ΕΠΛΟΓΟϢ: "I will respect the promise for them".³⁷⁸ What is interesting about the letter from Stefanos, is that the bishop seems to have written about the protectee's case to Stefanos, and that the letter is Stefanos' reaction. The first lines of the letter read: "I received the letter from your godliness, holy lord and father Apa Pesynthios. And concerning Papnoute, son of Johannes of Pshelch, I ask your holy lordship and father that you issue a promise (*logos*) for him and that you send him to me, that I talk with him."³⁷⁹ Given that Stefanos' letter deals only with the protection letter for Papnoute, it makes sense

³⁷⁴ P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited); Van der Vliet, "Letter".

³⁷⁵ Van der Vliet, "Letter".

³⁷⁶ P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited). The identification of Stefanos as official in Coptos is made in *O.CrumST* 174, see Dekker, *Theban Networks*, 229. It is of course possible that Stefanos of P.Katoennatie 685/1 is a different person by the name of Stefanos.

³⁷⁷ P.Katoennatie 685/1, ll. 8-9.

³⁷⁸ Van der Vliet, "Letter", ll. 13-14. On these expressions, see section 3.1.2.4.

³⁷⁹ P.Katoennatie 685/1, ll. ΔΙΧΙ ΝΣΖΑΙ ΝΤΕΚΜΝΤΜΑΙΝΟΥΤΕ | ΝΧΟΕΙϢ ΝΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΒ ΑΥΩ ΕΤΒΕ | ΠΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΠΩΝ ΙΩΣΑΝΗϢ ΝΠΩΛΞ [Τ]|ΠΑΡΑΚΑΛΕΙ ΝΤΕΤΝΜΝΤΧΟΕΙϢ Ν[ΕΙΩΤ] | ΕΤΟΥΔΑΒ ΕΤΡΕΤΕΤΝΤΙ ΛΟΓΟϢ ΝΑϢ | ΝΤΕΤΝΤΝΟΟΥϢ ΝΑΙ ΝΤΑΩΔΧΕ ΝΕ|ΜΑϢ. This is my own transcription and translation of the text, on the basis of photographs provided by the Katoen Natie collection. The document will be published in the complete edition and reedition of Pesynthios' dossier (by Jacques van der Vliet, Renate Dekker).

that Pesynthios' letter to which he refers had been about Papnoute's case. Stefanos asks the bishop to send Papnoute to him, which indicates that Pesynthios must have had at least relatively easy access to Papnoute. It is plausible that Papnoute had for some reason sought the protection of the bishop in the *topos* of Apa Epiphanius, but wanted to go home.³⁸⁰

These two letters document interactions between bishop Pesynthios in a hermitage in Western Thebes and lay authorities in Pesynthios' diocese in Coptos. While there is ample evidence that village officials could issue protection letters, in these two cases, the protection letter for the protectee would be issued by a clerical or monastic authority.³⁸¹ Van der Vliet postulates that this choice might be caused by the fact that the protectees were simply closer to the bishop than to the officials in their home village or town, but also because a letter infused by the authority of a clergyman would especially inspire confidence in those who were doubtful whether they could return home. I believe that a combination of those factors probably made monastic and clerical elites the most effective protectors. Moreover, as Renate Dekker argues, issuing protection letters was part of a bishop's duty, and fell under his legal authority.³⁸² The protectees might have sought refuge from their problems in the village, including any conflicts with the village officials who could detain or punish them, at a monastic settlement or with a clerical authority. Therefore, once they were there and needed a document to return to the village, they could either wait for a protection letter from the village officials, as seems to have been the case in *O.GurnaGorecki* 70, discussed above,³⁸³ or obtain one from a local monastic or clerical

³⁸⁰ In the other letter to Pesynthios, the sender mentions that the protectees should go North in order to talk with the sender. The diocese of Coptos lies to the North of Thebes. Thus also in this case the protectees were probably close to the bishop, as the editor also remarks.

³⁸¹ Other examples in the corpus of *lashanes* asking a monastic or clerical authority to issue a *logos* are *O.CrumVC* 75 and *SB Kopt.* V 2288. As in the Pesynthios cases, there did not seem to have been a problem between the monastic authority and the protectee, but rather the protectee was needed in the village. *O.CrumVC* 75: for an urgent business. *SB Kopt.* V 2288: the protectee should speak to several people in the village (to resolve a conflict?). Other letters addressing monastic or clerical authorities with a request to issue a *logos* might have been sent by *lashanes* or other village officials, but either they did not use their titles or the titles were lost. Examples of such letters are *SB Kopt.* V 2290, 2291, 2292, 2294, 2296.

³⁸² Dekker, *Theban Networks*, 57. Bernhard Palme sees the protection letters also as a measure against overcrowding of places of asylum: in this interpretation the relevant monastic authorities also have an extra incentive to issue a protection letter. Palme, "Asyl", 215.

³⁸³ See also *O.CrumVC* 64. OTorino S. 5911 (unedited) is protection letter for protectee Philotheos and his wife and children, but the ostrakon was addressed to Victor, probably Victor II, abbot of the monastery of Phoibammon in Western Thebes in the early 8th century (according to the editors).

authority.³⁸⁴ The protection letters show how authorities in village and monastic context communicated and cooperated concerning the production of protection letters, and how these documents and the people involved circulated between these different contexts. They communicated about problematic (“urgent”) cases in the community, and in order to solve them the village authorities needed help from the clerical and monastic authorities, to issue documents, i.e. Coptic protection letters, which in other circumstances could be issued by the village officials themselves. However, the village authorities gave suggestions for the content of these protection letters in their requests to their addressees, and added their own promise of protection, to respect the protection letter issued by the monastic or clerical authority.

This second part of the chapter has examined the processes and procedures through which the protection letters were requested and how they circulated. Some of these processes occurred regularly, were standardized and took place repeatedly: they can indeed be said to form a pattern. This applies e.g. to village officials requesting monastic or clerical authorities to issue a protection letter for the protectee, which the village authorities promised to honor. This pattern is emphasized by the language of the document, as the same expressions are repeated consistently in similar situations. On the other hand, the various examples discussed here show that there was not one standard procedure to follow in order to obtain a protection letter.

Now that we have established that there was variation within a recognizable and predictable corpus and procedure leading to the corpus, we will delve a bit further in to the question of variation and standardization, starting with an examination of a fixed interrelated group of texts. The first section focuses on the variability and uniformity of the protection letters produced in the formal environment of the village administration of Djeme. The second section then focuses on the relative importance of patterned, formulaic language, and unique, situation-bound phrases in the Coptic protection letters. The concluding section of this part, and of the chapter, brings together the discussions and findings of this part and of the rest of the chapter, in order to discuss the role of the Coptic protection letters as an institution of village life.

³⁸⁴ See also, e.g., *SB Kopt.* V 2288: in which the lashanes of Trakatan ask Apa Jakob to issue a protection letter; *O.CrumVC* 75: in which a *lashane* of Trakatan asks an Apa Paham to issue a protection letter.

3.3 Variability and uniformity

Jeremias' protection letter, cited in section 1.1.1, is unique. Not one of the other published protection letters contains exactly the same formulae in the same order. The same goes for every other document in the corpus: not one of them matches another one completely. This is also reflected in the frequent comments made by modern editors about the peculiarity of individual protection letters (cited in section 3.1.1). As I will show in the following section, which discusses the protection letters produced by the village scribes of Djeme in the first half of the eighth century, the Coptic protection letters were formalized to a certain degree, but at the same time very variable, even when composed in the same village, or by the same scribe.³⁸⁵

3.3.1 Patterns in the promises? The protection letters written by the village scribes of Djeme.

The majority of the protection letters are products of village administration. The village administration of Djeme is particularly well represented in the corpus: seventeen protection letters addressed to protectees are signed by scribes from the village.³⁸⁶ Two Djeme scribes are especially present. Psate, son of Pisrael and Aristophanes, son of Johannes. Psate, son of Pisrael left us probably nine protection letters.³⁸⁷ Of the hand of Aristophanes, son of Johannes, five protection letters have been published.³⁸⁸ One protection letter each is written by Theodoros, son of Psate,³⁸⁹ by Joannes, son of Lazaros, and by Komes. All five of these scribes are known from other documents produced in the town of Djeme or the larger Theban area.

³⁸⁵ This stands in marked contrast with the other short type of public or official legal document, i.e. the tax-receipt, of which the formulary can vary regionally, but is much more consistent.

³⁸⁶ More protection letters were issued by village officials of Djeme, but do not bear a scribal signature. In this section I discuss those explicitly signed by scribes. SB Kopt. V 2242 is a Djeme protection letter written by a certain Patapè. OTorino S 5945+S 5937 (unpublished) was issued by Djeme lashanes and written by a Theodoros (according to the editor a different Theodoros than the Theodoros (son of Psate) who wrote SB Kopt. V 2265 (different patronymic). These two might then be two more protection letter produced by Djeme village scribes.

³⁸⁷ SB Kopt. V 2266; SB Kopt. V 2228; SB Kopt. V 2284; O.CrumVC 8; O.CrumVC 9; P.Stras.Copt. 66. Possibly also SB Kopt. V 2268, identified by Alain Delattre as probably penned by Psate: see O.GurnaGorecki 70, comment to l. 2, as well as SB Kopt. V 2281 and 2283.

³⁸⁸ SB Kopt. V 2233, SB Kopt. V 2246; SB Kopt. III 1368; SB Kopt. V 2249 and Cromwell, *Recording*, no. 9. Jennifer Cromwell is preparing an edition of a 6th protection letter, in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology in Ann Arbor (inv. 2.5149).

³⁸⁹ SB Kopt. V 2265.

In this section I discuss those signed by scribes, to be able to gauge individual variations in their protection letter production, but it is important to keep in mind that the village administration of Djeme issued more protection letters than those explicitly underwritten by scribes. On the other hand, one protection letter which has a scribal signature was not issued by the office of the village officials in Djeme, although it was issued by a village administrator. *SB Kopt.* V 2271 is a protection letter issued by a *lashane* or village headman by the name of Swai. The ostrakon comes from the Theban region but it is unclear exactly from where. The scribe of the document styles himself as “the most humble deacon”: ΔΝΟΚ ΝΙΣΑΡΑΥ ΠΙΕΛΑ[Χ(ΙΣΤΟΣ)] | ΝΑΙΔΑΚ(ΟΝΟΣ) ΔΙΣΜΝ ΠΙΛΟΓΟΣ ΝΤΑΒΙΧ | ΚΑΤΑ ΤΕΧΑΙΤΕΣΙΣ: I, Niharaw, the most humble deacon, drew up this *logos* according to his wish. The document contains an instruction clause, settle clauses, and Swai’s signature, but no date.

The following paragraphs compare the documents written by each of these scribes: do they use certain formulae consistently in their own protection letter production? And how do they differ amongst each other? This comparison shows how variable the protection letters are, even when they are written within a small chronological window and inside a small geographical area (700-750, Djeme), even in the production of one scribe. I will start with the scribes who wrote the most protection letters in the corpus, Psate and Aristophanes, and then I will discuss the other three Djeme scribes’ protection letters together.

3.3.1.1 Psate, son of Pisrael

Psate, son of Pisrael is a well-known scribe active in Djeme between 698/713 and 726/728.³⁹⁰ We know him from tax-receipts and other fiscal and legal documents written by him.³⁹¹ Psate is known for writing εicc instead of εic in the opening formula of his tax-receipts,³⁹² but he does not do that in the εic ΠΛΟΓΟΣ ΜΗΝΟΥΤΕ formula of his protection letters. *P.Stras.Copt.* 66, a tax-receipt with protection letter, does have εicc in the tax-receipt formula, which is the reason why it has been attributed to Psate, but not in the protection

³⁹⁰ On Psate, see most recently Cromwell, “Village Scribe”. See also Albarrán Martínez et al., “Ostraca. Le Dossier Des Reçus”, 231-234.

³⁹¹ On his tax-receipts, see Tax-receipt Albarrán Martínez et al., “Ostraca. Le Dossier Des Reçus”, 231-234. 142 Coptic and 50 Greek tax-receipts by Psate’s hand have been published: Cromwell, “Village Scribe”, 131.

³⁹² Albarrán Martínez et al., “Ostraca. Le Dossier Des Reçus”, 233.

letter formula, which is in line with his other protection letters. In *SB Kopt.* V 2284, Psate wrote both tax-receipt and protection letter formulae with εἰς.

Psate's protection letters are heterogeneous and are perfect examples of the notion "the exception is the rule" which applies so well to the protection letter corpus generally.³⁹³ Four are tax-receipts with a protection letter,³⁹⁴ one is a protection letter without instruction clause, two others are addressed to a group of monks (possibly the same) and these are longer and include exceptional formulae,³⁹⁵ and one is a protection letter without a promise clause, which is the only instance in the corpus. In line with his other work, Psate signed his name alternatingly ψατε and ψατη³⁹⁶ in his protection letters. In *O.CrumVC* 9 he signs ψατε πμακαριος πισραελ. Moreover, comparing the formulae used in Psate's protection letters, the heterogeneity becomes even clearer. The tax-receipts with protection letter formulae seem to be quite consistent in the tax-receipt section, but again use different formulas in the protection-letter section: e.g. the *eis plogos mpnoute* formula is written in at least three different variations: εἰς πλογοσ μπνουτε (*SB Kopt.* V 2281), εἰς πλογοσ μπνουτε (with *plogos* abbreviated, *SB Kopt.* V 2283), εἰς πλογοσ μπνουτε παντοκρατορ (*SB Kopt.* V 2284).³⁹⁷ Psate used two different abbreviations for λογοσ.³⁹⁸ He did not write a date in his protection letter without promise clause (*SB Kopt.* V 2228), while he did so in the other protection letters. His *O.CrumVC* 8, one of the protection letters addressed to a group of monks, has the only attestation in the protection letter corpus of an opening invocation with the Holy Trinity. The picture we get of Psate's protection letter

³⁹³ While at first glance Psate's tax-receipts seem more uniform than his protection letters, an in-depth study of Psate's corpus of nearly 200 tax-receipts (and the rest of his scribal production) is needed to understand whether the same variability occurs in his other work. One example of variability: he used three different scribal signatures in his tax-receipts: Cromwell, "Village Scribe", 132.

³⁹⁴ *SB Kopt.* V 2284, 2283, 2281 and *P.Strass.Copt.* 66. The last three do not contain Psate's signature but have been attributed to him on the basis of the characteristic use of εἰς (instead of εἰς) to open the tax-receipt (for *SB Kopt.* V 2281 and 2283: Cromwell, "Village Scribe", 132, n. 21. *P. Strass.Copt.* 66 identified by the editor.

³⁹⁵ *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9. Those documents can be dated either to 698 or 728: if they are dated to 698 as I think, if they are linked to Flavius Atias' *sigillion* (*SB* III 7240), then Psate, son of Pissael had at least 28 years of scribal career. On my interpretation of *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9, including their date, see section 5.3.2.

³⁹⁶ Psate in *SB Kopt.* V 2266; *SB Kopt.* V 2228; *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9, and Psate in *SB Kopt.* V 2284. In *P.Strass.Copt.* 66 the actual signature is missing.

³⁹⁷ *P.Strass.Copt.* 66 is too fragmentary to include here.

³⁹⁸ *SB Kopt.* V 2228 and *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9 (πλο^ϛ) vs *SB Kopt.* V 2266 (πειλ.).

production is one of great variety. Some of these variations, such as using different abbreviations for ΛΟΓΟΣ, or not using an abbreviation at all, were most likely inspired by his scribal activity, maybe the amount of space on the writing support, rather than dictated by the situation which gave rise to the production of the protection letter. Other variations, however, definitely were a product of that situation: the formulary used in O.CrumVC 8, with its abundance of clauses, was chosen deliberately to reference the situation of the monks, who are the protectees in that case (see section 5.3.2).

3.3.1.2 *Aristophanes, son of Johannes*

The great variability of Psate's protection letters contrasts with the other well-known Djeme scribe, Aristophanes, who was active mostly after Psate's time. Aristophanes was active as a scribe in Djeme from 724 to 756-758.³⁹⁹ His work has been the subject of extensive research by Jennifer Cromwell, in which context she has discussed Aristophanes' production of protection letters.⁴⁰⁰ He wrote five protection letters in the corpus, among which Jeremias' protection letter cited in section 1.1.1. His protection letters are dated between 727/728 and 729.⁴⁰¹ The protection letters written by Aristophanes vary less than those written by Psate. The general structure of the documents especially exhibits a strong uniformity. They all contain the same structural elements: opening address, instruction clause, promise clause, a clause which recurs in other protection letters: "So that you do not doubt, I have drawn up this promise and I sign it.", followed by a date, and a scribal signature. Moreover, all promise clauses, where extant, in all documents contain the verb "to prosecute", and the instruction clauses all only read "come to your house", only once supplemented by "appear" (*SB Kopt.* III 1368, l. 5: ΝΓΟΥΩΝΣ ΕΒΟΛ).

Aristophanes' protection letters are quite uniform in their structure and formulary, they lack the scribal variability of Psate's protection letters. However, it is clear that Aristophanes' documents were drawn up with specific situations in mind, which required different formulae and stipulations. *SB Kopt.* V 2233 is his only protection letter which does not stipulate a condition to the protection, and it has an affirmative promise clause (see section 3.1.2.2). *SB Kopt.* III 1368 (Jeremias' protection letter cited in section 1.1.1) is the

³⁹⁹ Cromwell, *Recording*, 58: Table 2.2.

⁴⁰⁰ Cromwell, *Recording*, section 4.5.

⁴⁰¹ Cromwell, *Recording*, 121, table 4.1. *SB Kopt.* V 2233: 5 June 729, *SB Kopt.* V 2246: 11 July 729, *SB Kopt.* III 1368: 3 October 728, *SB Kopt.* V 2249: 728/729, Cromwell, *Recording*, 245-247, no. 9: date lost but likely 727/728.

only protection letter by Aristophanes which mentions that someone had fled and has a second promise clause, apart from “we will not prosecute you”: $\chi\epsilon\ \nu\eta\epsilon\eta\epsilon\rho\ \pi\epsilon\theta\theta\omicron\omicron\gamma\ |\ \nu\alpha\kappa\ \chi\epsilon\ \delta\kappa\eta\omega\tau$: “and we will not do any harm to you because you fled”. *SB Kopt.* III 1368 and *SB Kopt.* V 2246 contain limitations and conditions which do not occur anywhere else in the corpus. Thus, while two out of five of Aristophanes’ protection letters are fragmentary, the overall picture seems to be one of regularity, with space for alterations based on specific situations.

3.3.1.3 Other Djeme scribes

I discuss three more Coptic protection letters written by three different Djeme village scribes known from other documents written by them.⁴⁰²

Joannes, son of Lazaros gradually replaced Psate, son of Pisrael in the spring of 726 as a scribe responsible for drawing up tax-receipts in Djeme. The bulk of his tax-receipt production – about 30 have been published – can be dated to that year.⁴⁰³ The protection letter written by him *SB Kopt.* V 2264 is very short and does not include an instruction clause. It is similar to Psate’s *SB Kopt.* V 2266. It contains variations on the promise clause and scribal signature. The promise clause is written $\epsilon\tau\mu\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\gamma\epsilon$ where you would expect $\nu\eta\epsilon\eta\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\gamma\epsilon$ (or $\epsilon\eta\eta\epsilon\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\gamma\epsilon$ as a regional variant). This form of the promise clause also appears in *SB Kopt.* V 2280, written by Djeme scribe Komes, as well as *SB Kopt.* V 2281, possibly written by Psate but not signed.

The scribe Komes wrote *SB Kopt.* V 2280 (695 or 725), a tax-receipt with protection letter. The tax-receipt is for the capitation tax ($\pi\epsilon\kappa\delta\iota\alpha\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\omicron\upsilon$: “your capitation tax”) for an amount of one *holokottinos*, for the first instalment of the ninth year, which is also the year in which the document was produced. The tax-receipt is signed, probably by the tax collector, and then follows the protection letter. The *lashanes* promise that they will not prosecute the protectee for anything in this, ninth, year, except for the *holokottinos*, and they will not let anyone else prosecute him. This document is the longest among the tax-receipts with added protection letters, as it contains two promise clauses, an exception, and the signature by the *lashanes*.

⁴⁰² *SB Kopt.* V 2242 was written by a certain Patapè.

⁴⁰³ Albarrán Martínez et al., “Ostraca. Le Dossier Des Reçus”, 234.

It has been suggested that the scribe Theodoros, son of Psate was the son of the scribe Psate, son of Pisrael.⁴⁰⁴ Two tax-receipts by his hand are known, of which one can be dated to 733. The protection letter from his hand lacks an instruction clause (*SB Kopt. V 2265*). In this it follows the previously discussed protection letters produced by Psate (*SB Kopt. V 2266*) and Joannes (*SB Kopt. V 2264*). He writes in name of the “*dioiketeis* of *Kastron Memnonion*”, i.e. the village administrators of Djeme who were one rank up from the *lashanes*.⁴⁰⁵ Theodoros’ protection letter has formal similarities to those written by his father, but also to those written by Aristophanes. Theodoros consistently uses the same abbreviation for *logos* which Psate uses in *SB Kopt. V 2271* and *O.CrumVC 8* and 9, and abbreviations generally characterize Theodoros’ protection letter. In terms of structure and formulae, his protection letter is very similar to those written by Aristophanes.

Examining the Coptic protection letters produced by the village scribes of Djeme, in a period of roughly 30 years, we can draw the following conclusions.⁴⁰⁶ The scribes, except for Aristophanes, wrote different protection letters with variegated formulaic structures: among their protection letters there are protection letters without instruction clauses, protection letters with affirmative promise clauses of the “settle” type, and tax-receipts with protection letter formulae. It is clear that there was no fixed “Djeme” format for protection letters, although there is overlap in the formulae used by the different scribes. The two scribes who produced more than one surviving protection letter, did not use the same formulae consistently, although Aristophanes’ production is much more uniform than Psate’s. But also in Aristophanes’ protection letters there was room for variation. However, it is clear that the scribes knew the formulaic building blocks which were necessary to compose a protection letter, but that they chose and combined them in many different ways, which probably reflected their own preferences, and/or the preferences of the village administrators in whose name they were writing, as well as the specific situation at hand. The protection letter was part of the repertoire of the village scribe, in the same way that tax-receipts, or (private) legal documents were.

⁴⁰⁴ Albarrán Martínez et al., “Ostraca. Le Dossier Des Reçus”, 237.

⁴⁰⁵ See sections 1.3.2 and 5.3.1.

⁴⁰⁶ If *O.CrumVC 8* and 9 were written by Psate in 698. *SB Kopt. V 2233* and 2246 were written by Aristophanes in 730.

This section focused on the Djeme village scribes and their varying use of the protection letter formula. Beyond issues of variability and uniformity in the use of formulaic structures, there are the appearances of unique expressions in the documents. Several documents in the corpus contain such unique phrases which seem to refer to the specific situation in which they were created, and I will discuss those in the next section.

3.3.2 Specific references in the protection letters

The content of the protection letters is generally “poured” into formulaic structures. What the protectee is supposed to do, the amount of money that they should still pay, the protection that is offered, were all written down in certain formulae which for the most part follow fixed grammatical patterns – e.g. the instruction clause in the conjunctive, a negative promise clause in negative future III – and a specific order in the document: the εἰς πλοῦτος (μῆνοῦτε) (ντοοτκ) formula was usually followed by the instruction clause, and thereafter came the promise clause, and possibly a limitation and/or exception. The verbs used in these clauses varied, but for the most part they were chosen from a limited number which recur throughout the corpus (see sections 2.4.1-2.4.2, and 3.1.2). The influence of these formulaic structures is the strongest in protection letters addressed to protectees, but is also present in the letters addressed to protectors or intermediaries, which can contain instruction clauses and promise clauses, and in some cases a complete and signed protection letter embedded within the letter.⁴⁰⁷ However, in these letters to protectors and intermediaries there was markedly more room for comments about the situation. This is not wholly surprising, as these letters were for the most part letters rather than signed legal documents, while the reverse is true for the protection letters addressed to protectees. At the same time, even in the protection letters addressed to protectees, sometimes there are phrases so specific that they seem to apply directly to the situation which gave rise to the document.

There are different ways in which those specific references were integrated in the protection letters. A: They could be molded into the formal structure, e.g. as the verb in an instruction clause or a promise clause. B: An addition could be made to a clause, which made it more specific. C: Additional comments outside of the formula could also point to the specific circumstances of the problem to be solved. I cite two examples to show what this looks like in the documents. First, *SB Kopt. V 2224*, the protection letter from protector Victor to

⁴⁰⁷ E.g. *O.Crum VC 64*, see section 3.2.1.

protectee Timotheos is very concise, yet some very specific elements are integrated in the formulary of the document.⁴⁰⁸

Biktor who writes to brother Timotheos: here is the promise (logos) for you. Come and go to your work. I will not detain you for the affair of ... (?) Tubi 10, indiction year 5. And I will not beat you this time. + Biktor signs +

The instruction clause includes a reference to the protectee's work, added to the standard "Come to your house", which is written in the grammatical form of the instruction clause (A-B). Moreover, instead of a general promise clause that Biktor will not detain Timotheos, which we find in other protection letters, Biktor had added a reference to the reason for which Timotheos might have been detained, although unfortunately the details are lost: "the affair of..." (B). This addition is reminiscent of the instances in which a negative promise clause is followed by the addition "because you fled".⁴⁰⁹ The most fascinating specific phrase in this document is a negative promise clause added after the date, in which Biktor promises Timotheos not to beat him *this time*, which is a very rare explicit reference to violence in the protection letters (A-B-C).⁴¹⁰

In the second example, Isak writes a letter with instructions to take steps that would hopefully free him from prison.⁴¹¹ Below these instructions, he wrote a protection letter for a woman named Thabaïs. It seems likely that the protection letter is part of his strategy to solve his problem, but it is unclear how, as we do not know anything else about the context, e.g. the nature of the relationship between Isak and Thabaïs, or why she needed a protection letter. Unfortunately, only the first lines of the protection letter for Thabaïs have been preserved. The instruction clauses are written in the third person, which tells us that the receiver of Isak's letter should transfer the protection letter to Thabaïs.⁴¹² This instruction clause, written in the conjunctive, is unique in the corpus and certainly refers to a very particular action that Thabaïs should take (A/B): "... and here is the promise by God for

⁴⁰⁸ *SB Kopt.* V 2224: + ΒΙΚΤΩΡ ΠΥΣΔΑΪ ΝΠΑ|ΣΟΝ ΔΙΜΟΘΕ ΧΕ ΠΛΟΓΟΣ | ΝΤΟΟΤΚ ΝΓΕΙ ΝΓΒΩΚ | ΕΤΕΚΡΓΑCΙΑ ΧΕ ΝΝΑ|ΔΜΑΖΤΕ ΜΜΟΚ ΕΦΩΓ Ν[...] | ΤΑΚ .. Δ ΕΤΒΗΗΤΓ + μ(ηνὶ) Τύ(βι) ἰ(ν)δ(ικτίωνος) ε | ΔΥΩ ΧΕ ΝΝΑΖΙΟΥ ΕΡΟΚ | ΜΠΕΙCΟΠ + ΒΙΚΤΩΡ CΤΟΙΧ(ΕΙ) +

⁴⁰⁹ E.g. *SB Kopt.* III 1368: ΧΕ ΝΝΕΝΕΡ ΠΕΘΟΟΥ | ΝΔΚ ΧΕ ΔΚΠΩΤ: "that we will not do you harm because you fled." On the evidence of flight in the protection letters, see section 4.2.1.

⁴¹⁰ See also *SB Kopt.* V 2234, in which the protectee is protected against ΣΟΝC, meaning violence (or injustice): Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 822a.

⁴¹¹ *SB Kopt.* V 2304.

⁴¹² See section 3.2.1.

her, Thabaïs. That she comes ... and prays to her father...”⁴¹³ Again, the non-standard clause “that she prays to her father” is added to the standard clause “that she comes”, and shaped into the formulaic mold of the instruction clause. It is possible that Isak intended for Thabaïs to ask her father to help Isak in his plight in some way.

What was the role of these integrations or specific references in the documents? On the one hand, in some cases it must have been important that the protectee performed a particular task, which needed to be detailed in the protection letter. This was certainly the case in Isak’s protection letter for Thabaïs, he wanted her to “pray to her father”, which presumably would help Isak’s case as well. This could also be the reason why in a few protection letters, usually in the instruction clauses, there are references to the protectee’s work or occupation.⁴¹⁴ As I will explain in more detail in section 5.4, the intermediary or protector offered their support and protection for a specific goal which served their interests as much as those of the protectee.

On the other hand, references to the protectee’s personal situation might have been more effective in convincing them to return home. In the case of *SB Kopt. V 2288*, a letter from three village heads requesting a monastic superior to issue a protection letter for a third party, the village heads detail contents of the future protection letter in the third person, as is expected (on this, see section 3.2.2). However, towards the end of the letter, the text mentions that “your friends” received a protection letter and that they came home. This might have been the village heads directly addressing the protectee or it might have been a form of reported speech, expressing the words of someone else, in which case we do not know who is addressed. In any case, this unique addition to the letter was not technically necessary for the request to issue the protection letter. The reference to other people, or friends, receiving an making use of protection letters, could have been a means to convince the protectee, to whom the letter was presumably read, or in any case meant to be read, to accept the protection letter and come to the village.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ *SB Kopt. V 2304*:... ΛΥΩ ΕΙΣ ΠΛΟΓΟΣ ΜΠΝΟΥΓΤΕ | ΝΤΟΤΣ ΝΘΑΒΔΕΙΣ ΝΣΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ |.ϫ. ΝΣΠΡΟΣΥΧΗ ΕΠΕΙΣΙΩΤ.

⁴¹⁴ See the example discussed here, *SB Kopt. V 2224*, but also e.g. *SB Kopt. V 2263*, a fragmentary protection letter in which the protectee is instructed to “Come and gather your dates”.

⁴¹⁵ On this particular letter, see also Palombo and Scheerlinck, “Asking”. With this in mind, the affirmative promise clause “I will contend for him”, unique in the corpus and added to more standard promise clauses in *O.CrumVC 75*, might have been written to convince the protector, i.e. the addressee of the request letter for a protection letter, but possibly also as an extra assurance for the protectee, in case the letter was indeed read to him.

As I have discussed at length in this chapter, the language of the protection letters consists mostly of formulaic clauses or formulae which are specific to the genre and which make the documents identifiable as protection letters. At the same time, the contents of these clauses, and the combination or order in which they appear in the documents, are extremely variegated. The protection letters were formulaic, but they were not forms to fill out.⁴¹⁶ Based on the protection letters that have been published until now, this variation cannot be ascribed to chronological evolution or local tradition, and not even to the custom or preference of individual scribes. I believe that this extreme variation in the protection letters should be understood as a reflection of the situations which prompted their creation. When a protection letter was issued for a protectee, the clauses were chosen deliberately, determined by the specific problem at hand, and by how the protector aimed to solve it. This does not mean that the protection letters give us a detailed or clear insight in that situation or problem. The language of the protection letters consisted for the most part of highly varied formulae, and only on occasion the documents seem to refer to specific aspects of the underlying situation. Interestingly, these references are often fully integrated in the formulary of the protection letters, following their formal structure. The general image of the language of the protection letters which emerges from my discussions, is that that of repeated and recognizable patterns which still allowed a high degree of variation. The variation, including the specific references, connects the documents to the particular problem situations they were supposed to solve.

The next and last section of the chapter brings together the observations made in the preceding sections, and discuss how embedded the protection letters were as an institution of village life.⁴¹⁷ There is no question that the village was the central context in which the Coptic protection letter mechanism operated. In the majority of the cases, village administrators played the role of protector, or of the intermediary. They interacted and cooperated with monastic and clerical elites within the protection letter mechanism. But to

⁴¹⁶ Such form-like documents were in use in the fiscal administration of Early Islamic Egypt: *entagía* or tax-demand notes such as CPR XXII 7, SPP 1199 and 1200 were written with blank spaces left for the name and residence of the tax-payers. Apparently they were prepared to be filled out, but were never used.

⁴¹⁷ This chapter focuses on the documents and their actors in their local context. The relationship between the protection letters and larger governmental policies and practices will be discussed in Chapter 5.

what extent was the protection letter mechanism a formalized institution in the village, maybe even a routine solution to certain problems in the village?

3.3.3 *The protection letter mechanism as an institution of village life*

I use the word institution here in a similar way as Krakowski and Rustow (2014): “a set of established and predictable practices that convey social meaning, are normative, and come to have such a seemingly objective reality that they govern future possibilities of social behavior.”⁴¹⁸ Lajos Berkes has argued that protection letters were issued as a matter of routine, on the basis of the relatively large number of such documents that have been preserved: “Die Ausstellung solcher Dokumente war ein Routinevorgang, zahlreiche Schutzbriefe sind überliefert, zwei sogar vom selben Tag.”⁴¹⁹ I would agree with this statement only to a certain extent. The relatively large amount of evidence for the production and circulation of protection letters over a relatively short period of time, as well as other features which I will discuss below, allow us to consider the protection letters mechanism as firmly embedded in village life as an instrument that was repeatedly used to solve a certain range of problems. They were instruments tied to different aspects of life in the villages: fiscal, economic, legal, and social.⁴²⁰ A careful reading of the protection letters uncovers a network of protective interventions, frequently linking the village elites, villagers, to monastic centers and monastic elites. The language of the protection letters corroborates this view of the protection letters as a social institution of village life: the documents refer to themselves and are referred to with a specific term: *logos mpnoute* (2.2). In many cases only the more general *logos* is used as a designation, but then the formulaic context usually corroborates the identification of the document as a protection letter. Indeed, the Coptic protection letters have a recognizable and genre-specific, if variegated, formulaic structure, which even pervades protection letters between protectors and intermediaries. Moreover, clear patterns emerge that show the most important formulaic building blocks of the Coptic protection letters. Thus, they had a certain degree of standardization which

⁴¹⁸ Krakowski and Rustow, “Formula”, 114. Their definition of institutions is based on Nathan Hofer, *The Popularization of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt*, 1173–1325. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

⁴¹⁹ Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 177 and n. 49, referring to *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9, which were issued on the same day. I discuss these two documents in detail in section 5.3.2.

⁴²⁰ Chapter 4 will elaborate on those issues.

allowed for variegated expressions. This standardization supports the idea that the Coptic protection letter mechanism functioned as an institution in village life.

Several features of the procedure to obtain a protection letter also point to the “predictability” of the protection letters, as patterns can be identified in the procedure. E.g. there are several instances of intermediaries asking for a protection letter, and stating they will respect it. Another example of a procedure pattern are letters from a protector to an intermediary with the protection letter for the protectee embedded within the letter.⁴²¹ Moreover, one protectee stated that he received a protection letter each year. (We do not have evidence for such repetition in the corpus.) One letter mentions that people other than the protectee, possibly his friends, had received protection letters and that they came home (i.e. made use of the document as intended). This letter illustrates the idea that a protection letters was something you could expect, you could count on, that the Coptic protection letter mechanism followed established patterns in local rural society. Similarly, the recurrence in the corpus of village heads requesting monastic or clerical authorities to issue a protection letter for a third person, and promising that they will uphold the protection letter, show us that this was a repeated, predictable way of solving problems in the countryside. .

While I believe those aspects of the Coptic protection letter procedure also support the identification of the Coptic protection letter mechanism as an institution, I believe that the evidence does not allow us to consider the protection letters or their issuance in these contexts as “routine”. The high degree of variation in the formulary – including sometimes very specific references to the situation at hand – even in those written in the same village or even by the same scribe, shows that indeed there was not one go-to routine format for a protection letter, a template to be filled out. As such they differ from tax-receipts, with which they otherwise share characteristics: they were also documents related to public law, relatively concise and highly formulaic. This high degree of variation in the language of the protection letters rather points away from routine, and towards deliberate choices in the formulary of each document, tailored to the particular situation at hand. The different types and amounts of exceptions in the protection letters can be understood in this respect. They were not a fixed fine or a routine amount, but rather the product of a deliberation of the protector or of a negotiation between the protector and (a representative for) the protectee.

⁴²¹ Martin, *Social Structures, passim* for the usefulness of “patterns” to understand social relationships, structures and institutions.

In terms of the procedure to obtain a protection letter, the many different interventions of a varying number of intermediaries documented in the corpus also suggest that obtaining a protection letter was less than routine. Moreover, the procedure was not always straightforward for the people involved, as is shown by the letters discussing who was most appropriate to issue a protection letter,⁴²² or whether a protection letter should be issued at all.⁴²³

In conclusion, I consider the Coptic protection letter mechanism an institution of village life. The mechanism used the Coptic protection letter as a recognizable and legally valid – at least in its local context – type of document, and there were certain patterns of interactions between the actors, as we see clearly in the documents which testify to the procedures to obtain a protection letter. The repeated patterns in the language, and in the way the mechanism operated, show that in certain circumstances, a protection letter, characterized by a number of document-specific formulaic elements, would be issued. One could, to a certain extent, expect a protection letter to be issued when one was in need of it, and expect it to be upheld when one was in possession of it.⁴²⁴ However, it was a malleable and flexible institution, which is shown not only by the great variability in the formulary, but also by the fact that there were different ways to request or obtain a protection letter, for oneself or for a third party. An integral characteristic of the mechanism was an emphasis on the situation at hand, references to which are often molded and poured into the more fixed formulaic structures of the documents. In my opinion these references include references to the human interactions behind the production of the protection letter, e.g. negotiations about the conditions of the protectee’s return and protection.

This chapter has examined the “patterns of protection” in the corpus of Coptic protection letters, connecting their language and the processes of their production and circulation among the villages and monastic settings of seventh and eighth century Egypt. In the next Chapter, I move on from issues of form and procedure to questions about content:

⁴²² *SB Kopt.* V 2286.

⁴²³ *P.Ryl.Copt.* 385: the sender states that he will not issue a protection letter for certain fugitive vine dressers. In the fragmentary letter *SB Kopt.* V 2307, the sender seems to advise or mention a decision against issuing a protection letter for someone: ll. 6-8: ΟΥΔΕ † ΛΟΓΟΣ ΝΑΨ | ΑΛΛΑ ΕΤΑΝΩΣΕ Ν|ΠΕΘΟΟΥ ΕΤΑΨΑΨΥ: “to not issue (?) a *logos* (promise) for him, but we have written (down) the evil things he has done”.

⁴²⁴ And expect punishment for those who did not:

what kind of problems are these problem-solving instruments trying to solve? And how do the Coptic protection letters compare to other, contemporary, documents which have similar functions?

Chapter 4: Problems Solved

In section 1.5.3 I stated that the Coptic protection letters were problem-solving instruments in the village context in which they were produced and circulated, and that they moved at the crossroads of administration, law, and social relationships. Each protection letter solved a particular set of problems for a certain amount of actors involved, and it is around these problems that this chapter is centered. Protector, protectee, and intermediaries could benefit from the document, as well as possibly actors who were not mentioned in the evidence, e.g. family members or other dependents of the protectee. In this chapter I examine the nature of the problems solved. These seem to have revolved around the overlapping areas of taxation, fugitives, and travel on the one hand, and on the other hand around arbitration and mediation of legal conflicts, including prisoners and their release. However, the Coptic protection letter was only one instrument among different instruments which were used by locals and local elites in order to solve certain problems with taxation, fugitives, and legal issues. Moreover, due to their connection with taxation, travel, and fugitives, the Coptic protection letters are embedded in governmental policies regarding the control of movement, which generated types of documents similar to protection letters. Examples of such documents with similar functions were request letters or petitions, travel permits, and guarantees. Thus, the goal of this Chapter is to understand the place of the Coptic protection letters in the Early Islamic documentation regarding the problems they are trying to solve. Therefore, the discussions in this chapter open up towards the documentation in Greek, Arabic and Coptic, extending beyond the corpus of Coptic protection letters.

In order to achieve this goal, the Chapter divides the problems solved by the Coptic protection letters into four closely interrelated areas of society and administration in Early Islamic Egypt: taxation (4.1), travel (4.2), private legal issues (4.3), and the release of prisoners (4.4). There is an especially strong link between taxation and travel. Much of the evidence is related to taxation, and in different ways. Therefore I will start with problems and protective interventions related to taxation. For each of the areas, I discuss how the Coptic protection letters are linked to these issues, as well as how these issues were being addressed in other types of documents from Early Islamic Egypt, and how the Coptic protection letters related to those other contemporary documents.

Before we turn to the first area, taxation, I want to remark that the problems solved by the Coptic protection letters are not always easily recognized, due to the fact that these

documents do not explain these problems, they do not explicitly state the reasons why the protectee is in need of a protection letter. In many cases, we can infer what the problem was from the language used in the documents, but in other cases the language does not give us such clues, and different interpretations are possible. Moreover, in many cases the text of the document is not complete, and relevant information might be lost. While the Coptic protection letters as a whole solved problems in the areas I will discuss, it is not possible to say for each protection letter in the corpus in which area it was aiming to solve a problem. The following paragraphs list how many protection letters in the corpus can be tied explicitly to the areas of taxation, travel, and private legal issues.

Taxation

Of the Coptic protection letter corpus, 45 documents can be linked with certainty to fiscal practice, because of specific references in the text, discussed in 4.1.1.1. There might be more documents in the corpus which solved a problem related to taxation, but this link is not made explicit (see below).

Travel and fugitives

In 10 letters, maybe 11,⁴²⁵ the protection letters mention that the protectee had fled, 5 of which are in the group of those explicitly related to taxation. Some form of freedom of movement (going North and South, being allowed to leave again) is mentioned in 7 documents, 1 of which belongs to the group of those explicitly related to taxation.

Private legal issues

In 3 cases, the language in the protection letters point to a context of litigation, without any mention of fiscal issues, or even money, but rather family disputes or property issues. Similarly, fiscal issues do not play a part in the documents in which protection letter formulas are used in permissions to till a plot of land or work with someone's camels (5 cases). Those are cases in which private parties felt it necessary to add this layer of protection to an agreement.

⁴²⁵ *SB Kopt.* V 2234 states that the protectee had “gone away”, using the verb $\epsilon\omega\kappa \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ rather than $\nu\omega\tau$ (“to flee”) which is used in the other cases.

Uncertain

The majority of the Coptic protection letters, however, do not contain language that clearly indicates which type of problem they are aiming to solve. Underlying issues with litigation, private debt, or taxation are not made explicit. This is the case in the protection letters that mention amounts of money, e.g. in an exception clause (11 cases, see section 4.3.1.1), or which contain a promise clause “not to ask anything” without any other clear references to the fiscal system (E.g. *SB Kopt. V 2292*). Those are clearly related to financial issues, but not necessarily to fiscal issues. A protection letter mentioning money but not referring to the fiscal system, issued by the *lashanes* of Djeme (*SB Kopt. V 2249*), is likely related to taxation, but might possibly be referring to their judgement about a debt, as both fell in their areas of authority in the village.

Another ambiguous group are the protection letters which contain expressions about a conversation which should take place or an agreement/settlement which should be reached between the protectee and the protector, or between the protectee and another party. Because such expressions almost exclusively occur in documents which are not explicitly linked to the fiscal system, it is likely that they are instruments in mediation in legal issues, and I discuss them in section 4.3.1. However, when a *lashane* asks a bishop to issue a protection letter for a family, and states he wants to talk with them, this might be related to taxation as well as litigation, since the village heads had responsibilities in both those areas in the village.

Lastly, it is impossible to say which kinds of problems are solved by the protection letters which contain instructions and promise clauses, but lack specificity (“we will not let any harm befall you”) or added details which could clue us in about the situation at hand.

4.1 Taxation

Taxation played various roles in protection mechanisms: the pressure of taxation could create a problem, it could be something to be protected from, but payment of taxes could also be a condition for a certain protection, especially related to travel (see section 4.2.3.3). In the present section I will first discuss the multifaceted relationship between the Coptic protection letters and taxation (4.1.1). I will explore the different ways in which the documents indicate this relationship. Then I will discuss the various ways in which taxation created problems for several actors in the society of Early Islamic Egypt, and the situations in which protection against those fiscal problems was sought or offered through written

documents (4.1.2). As many different people were involved in the administration of the fiscal system, in the capital as well as the pagarch's office, the monasteries and the villages, these problems ranged from e.g. abuse by local officials, to the pressure to comply with orders from one's superior, and inability or unwillingness to pay one's taxes.

Protection mechanisms related to taxation are visible not only in the Coptic protection letters, but also in e.g. administrative letters warning subordinate officials not to abuse tax payers, in tax-demand notes containing warnings against abusive officials, in documents offering tax exemption, and in replies to petitions about abuse. I will show how the Coptic protection letters fit in this landscape of documents, which characteristics they shared with other documentary types and how they were different from them (4.1.3).

4.1.1 Taxation in the Coptic protection letters

The large majority of the Coptic protection letters from which we can infer which type of problem they are trying to solve, are dealing with fiscal issues. However, the Coptic protection letters' link to taxation is not straightforward. They cannot as a whole be grouped together within the category of fiscal documents like tax-receipts or tax-demand notes. They were produced to solve certain problems in their specific context, and many, if not all, of those problems seem to have been tax-related.

There are two aspects to how taxation and references to the fiscal system appear in the Coptic protection letters: protection against taxation was offered to the protectee (4.1.1.1), or tax-payment was a condition for protection (4.1.1.2). These two aspects could appear together in a protection letter, as I will show below. Tax-payment as a condition for protection is a characteristic which the Coptic protection letters shared with the travel permits in Arabic and Greek which I will discuss in section 4.2.3.3. In the paragraphs below, I will discuss Coptic protection letters which illustrate the various ways in which references to taxation are made in these documents. These references varied in their degree of explicitness, but they all link these documents, and the underlying situations, to the fiscal system.

4.1.1.1 Offering protection against taxation: (partial) tax exemption

Many protection letters exempt, completely or partially, the protectee from having to pay their taxes. This mechanism is visible in the protection letters in different ways. References to taxation as something to be protected from appear in the Coptic protection letters through the names of certain taxes, references to fiscal procedures such as the fiscal year or tax

instalments, and the appearance of tax officials. Examples are given in the paragraphs below. The protectors promised the protectees in these tax-related protection letters not to “ask”, thus offering (partial) tax exemption, but also not to “prosecute” or even more generally not “to harm”. It is unclear whether these promises were made preemptively before tax collection, or rather after the protectee had already defaulted on their payment after which they were offered a certain amnesty. This (partial) tax exemption solved problems in the fiscal system in two ways. First, it offered protection against fiscal demands which forced or would force the tax-payer in question to flee. Second, it supported the fiscal system because it ensured contributions to the revenue through partial payment. The following paragraphs provide examples of the fiscal references mentioned above, but first, I discuss a specific way in which protection letter formulae were integrated in fiscal documents, i.e. as additions to tax-receipts.

4.1.1.1.1 Tax-receipt + protection letter

A strong link between a tax payment and the issuance of a protection letter features in the tax-receipts which are, on the same ostrakon, followed by protection letter formulae.⁴²⁶ E.g., *SB Kopt. V 2280* reads:

+ One holokottinos, reckoned came to us from you, Patermoute son of Abraham, for your capitation tax for the first payment (katabolè) of the 9th year. Written in the month Phaophi (...) Elias son of Zacharas, I sign; and here is the promise by God (logos mpnoute) for you, to not prosecute you on account of anything in this 9th year, except for this holokottinos, and we will not permit anyone to prosecute you. We, Severus and Johannes the lashanes, sign this promise. I, Komes, wrote this promise by my hand and I sign it. +

Patermoute only had to pay his capitation tax for the first payment that year. It seems plausible that these tax-receipts with protection letter formulae were the result of a negotiation about the conditions for the protection offered.⁴²⁷ These documents do not have an instruction clause mentioning coming home or any other travel. The protectees did not need to “come home”, as they were in the village to pay their taxes, which is reflected in the wording of the documents. With regard to Patermoute’s tax-receipt + protection letter,

⁴²⁶ *SB Kopt. V 2280, 2281, 2282, 2283, 2284; O.Crum VC 10, P.Stras.Copt. 66.*

⁴²⁷ See section 3.2.

three taxes allows us to interpret quite clearly the situation behind the document: the protectee had fled because they could not or simply did not pay their taxes, and the village authorities offered them partial tax exemption, allowing the protectee to return to the village without facing negative consequences.

4.1.1.1.3 Limitation clauses related to taxation: (fiscal) year and payments or instalments

Besides direct references to the fisc in the form of names of taxes, several protection letters contain an indirect reference in the form of a mention of the term which the payment due refers to. Some Coptic protection letters have a limitation clause “in/on account of this year” ⲛⲚ/ⲛⲗ ⲧⲣⲓⲣⲟⲙⲛⲉ or a variation of this. The limitation clause in the Coptic protection letters is described in more detail in section 2.4.3. E.g., in *SB Kopt. V 2257*, a fragmentary document, Pape issues the following promise to Samu(el?).

ⲛ Here is the promise by God for you, Samu(el?). Come to your house, that I will not ask you anything (ⲭⲈ ⲚⲈⲒⲬⲚⲠⲠⲠⲠ ⲈⲖⲖⲖⲖⲖ) in the entire year (ⲛⲚ ⲧⲣⲟⲙⲛⲉ ⲧⲛⲣⲥ), except for [...] I swore [...] Pape, I sign.⁴³¹

The validity of the protection is limited to one year, plausibly the year in which the protection letter was issued.⁴³² In that year, Pape promises not to ask anything from Samu(el?), except for a certain amount of money or something else. The addition of “entire” to the limitation clause gives emphasis to the statement, which might have instilled in the protectee some confidence about the promise. In any case this was not a standard addition in the Coptic protection letters, reflecting again the variety within the formulary of these documents. A plausible explanation for these limitation clauses is that they were related to the yearly taxation cycle.⁴³³ This explanation is supported by documents such as the tax-

is not certain. Foerster, *Wörterbuch*: “a tax”, but *SB Kopt. V 2247* is mentioned as the only attestation of this meaning in the Coptic documents. In the Greek papyri a tax named *diplo* is attested for the Roman period, and in the Greek papyri after 500 CE there is one attestation where the term seems to have been used as a tax: a Greek ostrakon with a debt acknowledgement from Elephantine with strong linguistic and scribal Coptic influence (Worp, “Berliner Ostrakon”), which has been dated to the 6th – seventh century: *SB XX 14230*.

⁴³¹ + ⲈⲒⲢ ⲡⲖⲠⲒⲢ ⲚⲠⲚⲠⲠⲧⲣⲉ | ⲚⲧⲠⲠⲧⲕ ⲚⲧⲠⲕ ⲥⲖⲖⲠⲠⲠ | ⲚⲖⲈⲒ ⲈⲛⲠⲠⲛ ⲈⲚⲈⲕⲚⲒ ⲭⲈ | ⲚⲈⲒⲬⲚⲠⲠⲠ ⲈⲖⲖⲖⲖⲖ ⲛⲚ | ⲧⲣⲟⲙⲛⲉ ⲧⲛⲣⲥ ⲈⲒⲖⲚⲧⲈ | ...] ⲚⲠⲠⲚⲧ .. ⲛⲛⲈ ⲖⲠⲠⲠⲕ | ...] Ⲗ ⲚⲠⲚⲛⲛ ⲧⲥⲧⲠⲠⲕⲈ.

⁴³² This is clearer when the clause has “*this* year”, ⲧⲣⲓⲣⲟⲙⲛⲉ, instead of “*the* year”, ⲧⲣⲟⲙⲛⲉ, which we have in this case.

⁴³³ The limitation of the year is also reminiscent of the letter in which the sender asks the receiver to get him his protection letter, and mentions that the receives one every year, *O. Medinet Habu Copt. 167*, discussed in 3.2 Procedure. The letter does not mention fiscal issues.

receipt with protection letter cited above in section 4.1.1.1.1, in which both the tax-receipt and the protection letter mention the ninth year, as the fiscal year in which the tax was paid, and the year in which the protection letter was valid, respectively. Another link between the limitation of a year and taxation is made explicit in the fragmentary ostrakon *SB Kopt. V 2260*, which I partially cite here.

Come to your house, and we will not ...because you fled nor will we sign anything bad for you, and we will not ... demosion of the eleventh (year) (ΔΕΜΩΣΙΟΝ ΝΕΝΔΕΚΑΤΗΣ), except for ...and we will not make you pay a holokottinos ... instalment ([...ΚΑΤΑ]ΒΟΛΗ), we drew up this promise for you... ”⁴³⁴

In spite of the fragmentary state of the document, it seems that the protectors promise that the protectee will not have to pay the *demotion* tax (either generally taxes levied in money, or the land tax specifically, see section 4.1.1.1.2) for the eleventh year, except for either a certain sum or a specific tax, as in *SB Kopt. V 2247* discussed above in 4.1.1.1.2. Whether this is the current year or another, previous or following, year is not clear, as no date has been preserved on the ostrakon. The mention of an instalment, apparently related to a *holokottinos* or gold coin, further ties the document to taxation. On terms for instalments in the protection letters, see below. In the 2 cases cited above, an exception clause was added to the promise, which meant that the protectee still had to pay or do something to ensure their protection. However, in other cases, no such exception was included in the document. E.g., in *SB Kopt. V 2264*, the protectors, *lashanes* of Djeme, promise “not to prosecute you on account of the eighth indiction year”.⁴³⁵ In this case, it seems that the protectee has been exempted from tax payment for the eighth year, but it is not clear whether the eighth year was the current year or another (previous) year.

Other limitation clauses do not mention a (fiscal) year, but rather a tax instalment. Tax-payers paid their taxes often in various payments or instalments throughout the year. The two main yearly payments were the *katabolai* (s. *katabolè*. See e.g. ΚΑΤΑΒΟΛΗ in *SB Kopt. V 2260* cited above), which could be divided into smaller *exagia* (s. *exagion*).⁴³⁶ The specific payment or instalment could be indicated on the tax-receipt, although this was not

⁴³⁴ [...], ΝΓΕΙ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΕΚΗΙ ΧΕ ΝΝΕΝ| [...ΧΕ] ΔΚΗ[Ω]Τ ΟΥΔΕ ΝΝΕΝΣΤΟΙΧΕΙ| [...]ΠΕΘΟΥ ΝΑΚ ΔΥΩ ΝΝΕΝ| [...]ΔΕΜΩΣΙΟΝ ΝΕΝΔΕΚΑΤΗΣ ΝΣΑ | [...]ΔΥΩ ΝΝΕΝΕΙ ..Κ†. ΣΟΛΛΟΚ(ΟΤΤΙΝΟΣ) Η | [...ΚΑΤΑ]ΒΟΛΗ ΔΝΣΜΝ ΠΕΙΛΟΓΟΣ ΝΗΤΝ.

⁴³⁵ ΕΤΜΠΑΡΑ|ΓΕ ΜΜΟΚ ΣΔ ΟΚΤΟΗΣ ΙΝΔ(ΙΚΤΙΩΝΟΣ).

⁴³⁶ Crum in intro to *P.Lond. IV 1412*. On the use of these terms in Coptic documents see also Cromwell, “Managing”.

always the case.⁴³⁷ Both *katabolè* and *exagion* appear in the Coptic protection letters.⁴³⁸ E.g. in *SB Kopt.* II 917, the protectors, Mercurios and Theodoros, the *lashanes* of Djeme, promise the protectee Thomas, son of An[...], that they will not “prosecute you on account of my payment (ΤΑΚΑΤΑΒΟΛΗ), except for 2 *trimessia*”.⁴³⁹

4.1.1.1.4 Tax officials

If a number of Coptic protection letters were connected to taxation, we should also see agents/actors within that system operate in these documents. That is indeed the case. Most Coptic protection letters were issued by village authorities responsible for the running of the village, and as part of that they also handled the organization of tax distribution and collection in the village. More specifically, two official titles appear in the corpus which are particularly tied to the fiscal system: *ape* (ἀπε) and *shaliou* (ϣαλιού). The *ape* was especially in Djeme, where the majority of the Coptic protection letters come from, an official involved in tax collection. An *ape* is often the signatory of tax-receipts.⁴⁴⁰ Five protection letters in the corpus are signed by an *ape*.⁴⁴¹ Two of these are tax-receipts with protection letters, which fits the fiscal responsibilities of the office.⁴⁴² A *shaliou*, another fiscal official, is mentioned in *SB Kopt.* V 2261, neither as protector or protectee, but in the exception clause: the protectee has to pay what he owes to the *shaliou*.⁴⁴³

⁴³⁷ Cromwell, *Recording*, 94.

⁴³⁸ Both *SB Kopt.* III 1367 and *SB Kopt.* III 1368 have a limitation clause with *exagion*, meaning that the protection offered is limited to the present *exagion*, but exceptions are included: of 1 *trimession* + ½ *holokottinos* and ½ *holokottinos*, respectively. A *katabolè* or partial payment, seemingly of 2 *holokottinoi* is the content of the exception clause of *SB Kopt.* V 2267. This is the highest amount among the exceptions expressed in amounts in the Coptic protection letters. Two *holokottinoi* could constitute the total amount of capitation tax paid in a year, see Cromwell, “Managing”. The two *holokottinoi* then are probably a contribution to another tax, or a group of taxes (e.g. the *demosion* or taxes paid in money).

⁴³⁹ To compare with the capitation tax paid by a certain Daniel during one year in the mid-8th century (Cromwell, “Managing”), the two *trimessia* asked for in *SB Kopt.* II 917 would have been 2/3 of a *katabolè* for Daniel’s capitation tax.

⁴⁴⁰ Delattre and Vanthieghem, “Sept reçus”. The *strategos* mentioned there as a plausible synonym for *ape* does not appear in the corpus. An *ape* is a protector in Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001) 176-177 (= *P.Akoris* 36); *SB Kopt.* V 2242; *SB Kopt.* V 2266; *SB Kopt.* V 2283; *SB Kopt.* V 2284.

⁴⁴¹ *SB Kopt.* V 2242; *SB Kopt.* V 2266; *SB Kopt.* V 2283; *SB Kopt.* V 2284; Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001) 176-177 (= *P.Akoris* 36).

⁴⁴² *SB Kopt.* V 2283; *SB Kopt.* V 2284.

⁴⁴³ The *shaliou* has been interpreted as the Coptic equivalent of the term *pistikos* in Greek. While the exact responsibilities of the tax official *shaliou/pistikos* are not clear, they seem to have been attached to regional administration, or to the governor himself. *P.Bal.* II 303b, n. to l. 9. On monastic

But we also recognize individuals with fiscal duties in the Coptic protection letters because of certain descriptions in the documentation. The letter *SB Kopt. V 2286* reports on the search for the person who ought, or had the authority to, issue a protection letter for a certain protectee, concluding that it should be the person who imposed the taxes on the protectee:

“Your paternity asked me: go to Apadios on account of the matter of Petros. Now, I went and I spoke with him (i.e. Apadios). He said: the matter does not concern me, but Taammonikos. Now, please, write and bring Taammonikos to you so that he (i.e. Taammonikos) issues a promise (logos) for him (i.e. Petros) that he (i.e. Petros) should go to his (i.e. Petros’/Taammonikos’) residence, since he (i.e. Taammonikos) imposed taxes on him (i.e. Petros).”⁴⁴⁴

However, village officials could act in the Coptic protection letters in their function of representatives of the fiscal administration, without using a title: in *SB Kopt. V 2247* (discussed in 4.1.1.1), the protectors mention several taxes that they will and will not ask the protectee to pay, which indicate that they were officials involved in taxation. However, they are mentioned by name only.⁴⁴⁵ As a private person one would not decide on someone’s tax payments, the protectors here clearly are village officials acting in that role. Thus, a village official could issue a protection letter without mentioning his title. What is more, he could issue, without mentioning his title, a protection letter which offered protection related to fiscal matters, i.e. the protectee’s tax payments, rather than a private debt (see section 4.3.1.1).

In all of these cases, the fact that these authorities acting as protectors and intermediaries, are mentioned in connection with and performing their role in the fiscal system, shows that the protection letter in question, the underlying situation, the problems it was solving or trying to solve, were related to taxation.

headmen and churchmen in the role of *shaliou* (and *pistikos*), see Palombo, “Christian Clergy”, 109-203.

⁴⁴⁴ “...since he (i.e. Taammonikos) imposed taxes on him (i.e. Petros)”: ⲬⲈ ⲚⲦⲠⲘ ⲁⲩⲮⲗⲁⲓⲁⲤⲤⲈ ⲚⲠⲠⲘⲘ. *SB Kopt. V 2286*, Theban region, undated. It is not clear whether it is meant that Petros should go to his own residence or to Taammonikos’ residence. On the basis of the formulary of the Coptic protection letters, the former is somewhat more likely.

⁴⁴⁵ *SB Kopt. III 1367* has a limitation clause mentioning an *exagion* (installment, see 4.1.1.1), tying it to taxation. Again, the protector is not named with a title. The examples given by Palme might very well have been issued by village officials: in both documents there are a pair of protectors. The documents were issued in Djeme, where the village heads often worked in pairs.

An especially good example of the integration between the fiscal procedure and the Coptic protection letter mechanism is *SB Kopt. V 2261*. With this protection letter, he *lashane* of the village of Longine offers the protectee Viktor, son of Elias, partial and limited tax exemption. Viktor still needs to contribute what he owes to the *shaliou*, according to the exception clause of the document. Moreover, the limitation clause in this protection letter does not mention the (fiscal) year, but “until has been allotted the next payment (*katabolê*)”, a clear reference to fiscal procedure.⁴⁴⁶ This document shows how the tax payers often paid their tax by instalments, and that the tax burden was allotted in instalments. This verb $\sigma\omega\rho$, “to allot (taxes)” is used a second time in the document, in a promise clause: “we will not allow anything to be allotted upon you on account of the great men, and again if we come again we will observe the just thing for you, according to the authority (of the promise?)”.⁴⁴⁷ Till interprets this phrase as referring to the role of the “great men” as arbiters in village disputes.⁴⁴⁸ If this is the case, the *lashane* thus promises that any fines or amounts imposed on the protectee in the resolution of disputes by the “great men” will be annulled by the protection letter. The promise clause also seems to point to a further meeting between protector and protectee (“if we come again”) in which the protection letter would be valid and respected by the protectors. The wording is unclear to me. Might it refer to a further moment of tax collection? This document shows how embedded the protection letters could be in fiscal procedures, with the promise clause, exception clause, and limitation clause all related to taxation.

The protection letters show that their recipients could count on promises of (partial) tax exemption, shown most clearly by the documents which combine an “I will not ask you” promise clause with a limitation of a (fiscal) year or a tax instalment. However, most often the exemption was not complete, as an exception to the exemption was in place. Moreover, in certain cases where the limitation of a fiscal year is mentioned, the document does not explicitly promise that the protectee does not need to pay anything, but e.g. that they will not be mistreated, or that nothing evil will befall them. In those cases the link between taxation and protection is still likely, even though the nature of the protection is more vague. It is possible that in these cases the protectees were implicitly exempted from paying tax,

⁴⁴⁶ II. 9-11: $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\alpha\tau\omicron\upsilon\gamma\sigma\omega\rho\ \tau\mu\epsilon\zeta\sigma\upsilon\lambda\tau\epsilon\ \kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\beta\omicron\lambda\eta\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$.

⁴⁴⁷ II. 12-22: $\delta\upsilon\omega\ \nu\eta\epsilon\lambda\ \kappa\alpha\lambda\upsilon\ \epsilon\iota\sigma\omega\rho\ |\ \dots\ |\ \lambda\alpha\lambda\upsilon\ \nu\zeta\omega\beta\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ |\ \epsilon\iota\chi\omega\kappa\ \epsilon\iota\tau\ |\ \beta\epsilon\ \nu\eta\omicron\sigma\ \nu\omega\ |\ \mu\epsilon\ \delta\upsilon\omega\ \omicron\lambda\ \epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\ \epsilon\iota\theta\eta\ \omicron\lambda\ \epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\ \rho\omicron\epsilon\iota\sigma\ \pi\alpha\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\lambda\ \omicron\lambda\ \nu\mu\mu\alpha\kappa\ |\ \pi\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\sigma\omicron\mu$.

⁴⁴⁸ Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe”, 93, n. 4.

and explicitly protected against harassment from tax officials or prosecution upon indeed defaulting on the tax payment. In *SB Kopt. V 2254*, a *lashane* promises to “not permit any man to mistreat you, on account of anything else in this year nor on account of any other business.”⁴⁴⁹ While the mention of “this year” points to a fiscal background for this protection letter, this fiscal background does not fully explain the scope of the document’s power, as the phrase “nor on account of any other business” shows. This is reminiscent of *SB Kopt. V 2261* discussed above, which protects the protectee against taxation but also against payment of sums imposed through legal procedures, i.e. the sum imposed on the protectee by the “Great Men” of the village. The reasons why someone needed a protection letter could be multifaceted, with fiscal issues being only a part of them, albeit an important part, and the protection letters reflect this.

4.1.1.2 Payment of taxes a condition for protection in the Coptic protection letters

In the paragraphs above I have shown the various ways in which the Coptic protection letters indicate exemption from tax payment, at least partially, and how they are related to taxation more generally. But in several cases, the situation was presented in reverse. In other words in those protection letters the payment of (at least a certain amount) of taxes is demanded as a condition for the protection offered in the documents.⁴⁵⁰ This is most explicit when the name of a tax, or the title of a tax official, is given in the exception clause. E.g., in *SB Kopt. V 2247*, which is discussed above, the protectees are still asked to pay their *demosion* tax, in this case probably the land tax. That is to say, the protectees have to pay *only* the *demosion* to obtain protection from other demands or dues. The *demosion* tax is also the exception to the protection letter in *SB Kopt. V 2244*, one of the few protection letters addressed solely to women.⁴⁵¹ The protectors promise that “we will not ask you anything nor your daughter except for her *demosion* tax.”⁴⁵² Again, *demosion* could refer to the land tax or to general taxes in money (which in this case would not include the capitation tax, as women did not pay it). The daughter seems to have had to pay the tax in order for the protection letter for her mother to be effective, maybe the daughter acted as a kind of guarantor? The document is quite fragmentary, but in the legible text all pronouns are

⁴⁴⁹ *SB Kopt. V 2254*, ll. 5-8: ⲬⲈ ⲈⲚⲈⲚϢϢϢϢϢϢⲈ ⲚⲗⲗⲨⲈ | ⲚⲢⲱⲘⲈ ⲈⲚⲢⲈⲘⲗⲗⲈ ⲘⲘⲐⲐ | ⲉⲗ ⲖⲈⲗⲗⲨⲈ ⲉⲚ ⲠⲣⲐⲘⲚⲈ ⲐϢⲗⲈ | ⲉⲗ ⲖⲈⲗⲗⲨⲈ ⲚⲢⲢⲗⲘⲗⲗ.

⁴⁵⁰ See also section 4.2.2.3 on payment of taxes as a condition for travel.

⁴⁵¹ See section 2.4.5.

⁴⁵² *SB Kopt. V 2244*, ll. 3-5: ⲬⲈ ⲚⲚⲈⲚϢⲚⲐⲐⲐ ⲈⲗⲗⲗⲨ ⲐϢⲗⲈ ⲧⲈϢⲢⲢⲈ ⲈⲗⲘⲢⲢⲈ ⲢⲈϢⲗⲢⲢⲐⲘⲐⲐⲐⲐⲐ.

singular, and only in this clause is a second protectee (i.e. the daughter) mentioned. This mixing up of singular and plural in the protection letters is not uncommon throughout the corpus, but it seems significant that the exception relates to taxes to be paid by the daughter. Another tax explicitly mentioned as an exception to the promises of protection is the *dioikésis*, a tax recurring in eighth-century Theban tax-receipts, although its nature is unclear.⁴⁵³ A little bit less explicit but still clearly linked to taxation are the protection letters in which the limitation clause clearly refers to a tax payment (*katabolè, exagion*, fiscal year), and the exception clause is given as an amount of money. While this is not explicitly stated in the documents, I interpret these exception clauses as conditions for the protection offered, conditions which plausibly were negotiated by the protectee or rather an intermediary on behalf of the protectee with the protectors.⁴⁵⁴ If there was no obligation for the protectees to pay these sums, there was no reason to record them specifically in the individual documents. Now that I have shown the embeddedness of at least part of the Coptic protection letters in the fiscal system, both as ways to grant (partial) tax exemption to protectees and to guarantee (partial) tax payment as a condition for the protection offered, I will discuss how issues with taxation are visible in the contemporary Egyptian documentation in Coptic, Greek and Arabic (4.1.1.2), so that I can better define the place of the Coptic protection letters in this documentation regarding fiscal problems and how they were being solved (4.1.1.3).

4.1.2 The pressure of taxation in the documents from Early Islamic Egypt

For any government, effective taxation means receiving an adequate amount of taxes. This was a point of concern for the provincial governor of Early Islamic Egypt, who had to collect part of the revenue for the empire, and was answerable therefore to the caliph.⁴⁵⁵ But it was also a point of concern for the pagarchs or regional administrators, who had to send taxes to the governor, and to the village officials or the tax collectors, who had to send taxes to the pagarch, as well as to the tax-payer outside of the administration, who had to pay their taxes to the tax collector. Tax-related pressure could trickle down: a pagarch under pressure from the governor might put pressure on his lower officials and village authorities, who in

⁴⁵³ SB V 2245 and 2228. Albarrán Martínez et al., “Ostraca. Le Dossier Des Reçus”, 217.

⁴⁵⁴ See section 3.2.

⁴⁵⁵ Marie Legendre reckons that, in the early 8th century, the portion of revenue actually sent to the capital of the empire was about 10%: “Central or Provincial Rationale? An Inquiry on Fiscal Centralization in the Early Islamic Empire”, oral communication at The Reach of Empire - The Early Islamic Empire at Work, conference at Hamburg University, 11-13 October 2018.

turn might pressurize the tax-payers. The opportunities for abuse were numerous. References to the pressure of taxation, as well as references to abuse, and solutions for the problems the pressure of taxation could create, are attested in the papyri originating from different levels of the administration.

4.1.2.1 Pressure on the regional and village administrators

Fiscal pressure on regional and local administrators and authorities is visible in top-down and bottom-up administrative correspondence. There are numerous examples of letters from higher officials lecturing, admonishing, and threatening lower officials about late or inadequate revenue deposits.⁴⁵⁶ From the bottom-up perspective, in *P.Lond.* III 1081, a pagarch or maybe a lower official, asks a bishop or monastic authority to use his influence to help him with a problem concerning fiscal requisitions, in this case animals. The official wrote that the *amīr* has asked him, “to send word to the hamlet of my brother, the lord Germanos alias Theon, to take there three ponies and two donkeys, and to deliver them to the groom. And you know that I cannot disobey.” This sentiment of not being able to disobey the orders of an *amīr* is also expressed in letters addressed to Papas, the pagarch at Edfu in the mid-seventh century.⁴⁵⁷

Requisitions of labor from the government, e.g. for sailors on the fleet for the yearly raids against Byzantium, or for workers on said fleet at the shipyard-wharf in Babylon, also placed stress on the administrative units where these requisitioned workers came from. The pagarchy or village was doubly “taxed”, as it lost labor locally and in some instances had to pay for the sustenance of the worker.⁴⁵⁸ *P.Apoll.* 26 is a letter to the pagarch Papas about requisitioned workers for the maintenance of a canal in another pagarchy, where apparently not enough men had been found to do the work. Thus, the help of other pagarchies was requested in sending men to work on the canal. The sender, another official, mentioned the

⁴⁵⁶ This is an important theme in the letters sent by Qurra to Basilios: Papaconstantinou, “Rhetoric”, 269. The undated Greek letter from a certain Abdella...Patrikios *SBXVI* 12575 scolds its receivers about tax arrears. ExCromwell, “Religious expression”, examines Coptic examples: P.Mich.Copt. III 15. On the various rhetorical techniques employed by governor Qurra b. Sharik in his letters to pagarch Basilios, see Papaconstantinou, “Rhetoric”.

⁴⁵⁷ E.g. *P.Apollo.* 26, 27 and 40: “I cannot disobey the orders of our lords”.

⁴⁵⁸ See P.Lond. IV, Introd. xxxi-xxxii. E.g. in P.Lond. IV 1334, Qurra reminds Basilios that a skilled workmen was requisitioned, to work on the fleet in Babylon, from his district, including six months worth of supplies, and provisions (for the journey), in money. In P.Lond. IV 1337 Qurra urges Bailios to send the salaries for sailors who had been requisitioned from his district. More examples are listed in Richter, “Language Choice”, 197.

misery and depopulation of the addressee's pagarchy, but that the addressee should try to get, if not all, at least half of the workers requisitioned, that the *amīr* had asked for the impossible but that he should be obeyed, and that the work should be done as quickly as possible, before the tax collection, and that the workers should return to their own jobs. The pressure of requisitions and the effect on the local population were felt also by the regional administrators who had to manage the area. The solution proposed in the letter, to send only part of the workers requisitioned, is reminiscent of the Coptic protection letters with exception clauses (see section 4.1.3).

Keeping in mind the actors in the Coptic protection letter mechanism, references to fiscal pressure felt or problems experienced by the individual tax-payers as well as by the local village elite are particularly relevant. Organizing taxation in the village in order to be able to send enough revenue on to the central administration was the responsibility of the people who issued the protection letters in the majority of the cases: the village authorities. They could be held accountable for the (lack of) tax payment of an individual tax payer.⁴⁵⁹ Similarly, village authorities also acted as guarantors for the presence of requisitioned laborer at the job in question. If those laborers fled, the guarantors were liable for compensation.⁴⁶⁰ As a monk at the monastery of Apa Jeremias, you could avoid complying with an order of requisition, if someone hired a man to go in your place. Such a protection mechanism was the cause of the drawing up of a guarantee document, in which the guarantor claims to have hired a man to replace a monk who had compulsory service in Klysmā. The guarantor stands guarantee for this third person to the head of the monastery, and states that he already received the salary for the third person in gold coins from the monastery.⁴⁶¹

4.1.2.2 Pressure on the individual tax-payer

That individual tax payers were pressured to be able to pay (enough of their) taxes can be understood e.g. from the loans made in order to pay taxes.⁴⁶² Alternatively, instead of

⁴⁵⁹ See section 1.3. Local elites had to swear oaths that they would collect the taxes correctly. See e.g. *P.Lond.Copt.* 1079, which show that local elites swore that they correctly carried out a census locally, and that anyone forgotten will be counted among their household.

⁴⁶⁰ The archive of the pagarch Basilios of Aphrodito contains several of such guarantee declarations for requisitioned laborers, listed in Richter, "Language Choice", 205. E.g. in *P.Lond.* IV 1494, one of the three guarantors uses the title *hypodektēs*, tax collector, and in *P.Lond.* IV 1499 two *lashanes* stand guarantor for the sailors requisitioned from their settlement. .

⁴⁶¹ Calament, "Coup".

⁴⁶² Papaconstantinou, "Debt".

getting a loan, a tax-payer could also approach someone in their network with a complaint or request for help to organize a tax reduction. One papyrus letter shows the reaction of a pagarch who had heard that a farmer had complained, probably concerning excessive taxation, about the pagarch to the pagarch's colleague (*P.Lond.* III 1075). This colleague had told the pagarch about the complaint of the farmer, and as a result, the pagarch wrote to the bishop, or another clerical or monastic authority, on whose land the complaining farmer worked, that he would visit the addressed clerical authority and return the goats and sheep which he had requisitioned from the farmers of the addressee. However, the letter proceeds with a sort of reprimand for both the farmer and the addressee, if the farmer should complain again. The pagarch tells the addressee to write and warn the complaining farmer, and reminds the addressee that pagarchs.

Another option for tax evasion or evading of labor requisitions was to flee. Requisitioned laborers were a flight risk, as shown by the guarantees for requisitioned laborers mentioned above, and by the evidence of actual flight, e.g. the requisitioned caulkers in *P.Apoll.* 9 (see section 4.2.2). Thus, tax-payers who were unable or unwilling to pay their taxes or fulfil a requisition, whatever the type, had different options for how to deal with their issues, e.g. borrowing money, make a complaint using their network, or flee. A fourth option, also building on local relationships, is presented in the document under discussion in the next paragraph.

The so-called tax agreement of the Djeme elite (*P.CLT*6) also attests to this burden which could become too heavy for the tax payer, and it emphasizes the requisitions for labor for the raids.⁴⁶³ The document, produced in 724 in the same region in which most of the protection letters were found, shows how local elite members formally organized solidarity among themselves in the face of the burden of fiscal demands, considered heavy.⁴⁶⁴ In the case that someone is taxed more heavily than the others, especially in the case of naval duty, they will bear the burden together, through financial compensation to be paid by the signatories as a group. The signatories also give a motive for drawing up this formal agreement: “so that we can dwell undisturbed (ἀταραχος) in the *Kastron* (Djeme)”⁴⁶⁵ This

⁴⁶³ In this document the local village elites appear in their role as tax-payers, not in their function as responsible for tax organization of the village. Till and Steinwenter, “Neue”, 312-313, provide a corrected translation of a large part of the document.

⁴⁶⁴ l. 14: *πβαρος νοηποθεσις*: “the heaviness of the matter/the heavy matter”. l. 17 *πβαρος*: “the burden”.

⁴⁶⁵ l. 18.

phrase is rather vague. It might mean simply that by paying (communally) instead of letting the person in question go and perform naval duty, everybody can physically stay in the village instead of going to perform naval duty. Or it might mean that by taking these measures they would avoid people having to flee, be it from performing the actual naval duty or from paying for it (alone).

This tax agreement is one of the ways we see elites intervene to protect, in this case each other, from taxation considered too heavy, included labor requisition.

While the government expected correct or adequate amounts of taxes to be paid, and laborers to be sent, by the tax payers as a group, sometimes higher governmental officials felt the need to protect tax payers from being asked for too much by local officials.⁴⁶⁶ Local officials could use the power they gained through their taxation responsibilities, for example by asking more from the tax payers and keeping some for themselves⁴⁶⁷ In these cases, higher officials were intervening for the tax payers with a local official, whom they suspected or knew to be abusing their powers to the disadvantage of (some of) the tax payers, or whom they wanted to transmit orders to local tax officials to not abuse the tax-payers. However, these higher officials did not address the tax payers themselves, and in that sense protected them indirectly.⁴⁶⁸

On the other hand, this direct protective communication between higher official and tax payer existed as well, in the form of certain tax-demand notes which also show that tax payers needed protection against excessive taxation by their local tax collectors. The party issuing the note, the pagarch, warns the tax payer not to pay more than is written on the document. Should the tax collector ask more, the note states, the tax payer should write to the pagarch.⁴⁶⁹ These cases show that taxation was vulnerable to abuse at different levels of the administration, that the government was aware of this and that it tried, at least in these cases, to counteract these practices of abuse, by either admonishing the responsible party,

⁴⁶⁶ Moreover, effective taxation also meant to tax correctly and fairly. One of the most salient examples of this correctness is the declaration made by a priest and preserved in the Aphrodito archive of Basilios, to confirm that after having paid two solidi as a tax payment for a hamlet, a half solidus which he had paid too much was returned to him: Schenke, "Overpayment".

⁴⁶⁷ *P.MuslimState* 23: The pagarch Najid gives instructions to his subordinate 'Abd Allah about local tax collection in the region, emphasizing that the local tax collectors appointed by 'Abd Allah should not collect more taxes from the population than asked by Najid.

⁴⁶⁸ See section 1.1.3.2.4.

⁴⁶⁹ E.g. *P.Clackson* 45, with more examples in commentary to ll. 20-22..

or their superiors, or by directly addressing the tax payers themselves, and what is more, giving them access to their protection, cutting out the influence of the abusive middleman.

Another form of protection against the detrimental effects of (abusive) taxation was to take away (part) of the tax-burden. This could be done in reaction to a complaint about excessive or illegal fiscal impositions, as in the example of the complaint raised against a pagarch discussed above. Tax-exemption could also be granted for other reasons, for example when the tax-payer was for whatever reason unable to pay (all of) the taxes imposed. We see such (partial) tax exemption in the Coptic protection letters (4.1.1.1), but also in a well-documented large monastic center. The rich papyrological documentation from the Apa Apollo monastery in Bawit included several documents in which the abbot of the monastery orders the so-called “brothers of the capitation tax”,⁴⁷⁰ an office at the Bawit monastery responsible for taxation issues related to the monastery and nearby villages, to not hold a certain individual liable for the capitation tax. I cite *P.BawitClackson* 3 as an example:

ⲛ (Coptic) *It is our father who writes to his sons the brothers of the capitation tax. Do not hold Phoibamon of the piggery liable for capitation tax until I speak with you.* ⲛ (Greek) *Pharmouthi 18, indiction (sic). I, Georgios, wrote. ⲛ Keri ⲛ.*

The abbot did not need to justify or explain his decision to the brothers of the capitation tax (although he might have done so in a conversation).⁴⁷¹ As I have discussed above, tax exemption, often partial, also seems to be one of the most often used mechanisms of protection in the Coptic protection letters (see 4.1.1.1).

There are several ways attested in which local elites intervened so that requisitioned workers would not have to leave for those work posts. The guarantee mechanism that we know from the documentation of the Apa Jeremias monastery is one (see above). Another is the individual local person of influence writing to an official in the administration, with a request that a certain person who had been requisitioned should be allowed to remain instead. There are three such requests in the dossier of Senouthios.⁴⁷² Like the rest of the dossier, these request letters date to the first years of Egypt as a province of the caliphate.

⁴⁷⁰ Ⲛⲏⲏⲩ ⲘⲠⲁⲛⲁⲣⲓⲘⲟⲥ.

⁴⁷¹ *P.Bru.x.Bawit* p. 103-104 gives other examples of similar interventions at Bawit, whereby monastery superiors interfered on behalf of (monastic) tax-payers with the monastery’s tax officials, e.g. by ordering them to accept a payment in kind rather than money.

⁴⁷² For the Senouthios archive, *CPR* XXX.

The requests come from local elite members, who ask that respectively a farmer, a builder, and a man whose profession is unspecified, all requisitioned to work at Babylon, will not be sent or are to be allowed to return home.⁴⁷³

Those are all different ways in which we see stress related to taxation in the papyrological record, on different levels of the administration. We also see that various protection mechanisms could be activated with the use of written documents. Administrative officials, in various administrative contexts, provided a buffer for tax-payers either against illegal abusive fiscal demands or apparently unbearable impositions. Moreover, the tax payers themselves found ways of dealing with such issues. In the following section, I will show how the Coptic protection letters, as problem-solving instruments for fiscal issues, related to the mechanisms and documents I discussed.

4.1.3 The place of Coptic protection letters as instruments to solve fiscal problems

The Coptic protection letters were legal documents with local authority. Through them, local rural authorities of the villages and monasteries of the countryside communicated with the individual tax-payers in their communities. The communications about the protection letters between intermediaries, protectors and protectees also took place in this rural, local context.⁴⁷⁴ References to Coptic protection letters do not appear in the published documentation originating from the provincial administration, and only rarely in the published documentation originating from the pagarchical offices. While the administrative correspondence on those levels is full of references to unsatisfactory fiscal practices (4.1.1.2) and the Coptic protection letters were intrinsically linked to the fiscal system (4.1.1.1), the use of these documents to solve fiscal issues in the villages does not seem to have been a topic of conversation or concern at higher levels of the administration.

The protection letters functioned almost exclusively at the village level. The interventions made by the Coptic protection letters were not appeals to officials with a higher authority. Such appeals to higher administrative offices are made by local elites in order to get someone out of a labor requisition for example. The protection letters were direct interventions by the clerical or monastic and lay elites in their communities. The intermediaries involved in the procedure of the particular protection letter generally seem to have been individuals from the same local community as well. As discussed above there

⁴⁷³ *CPR XXX* 18, 20, 21.

⁴⁷⁴ In a few exceptions, higher levels of the regional administration were involved: see section 5.3.2.

are other documents that operate at this same low administrative level providing tax-payers a way out of problematic fiscal situations, but these nevertheless work in a slightly different way. These are the statements of tax exemption issued by the abbot of the monastery of Bawit (4.1.12) which form a close parallel to the Coptic protection letters in terms of context, content, and type of document. However, in those cases the abbot addresses the capitation tax office of the monastery, about the condition of a tax-payer, rather than the tax-payers themselves as is the case in the Coptic protection letters.

Similarly, there is a clear relationship between the Coptic protection letters and the guarantees to the government for tax payments or requisitioned laborer, but these too operate slightly different from the protection letters. Similarly to the Coptic protection letters, the guarantees are official legal documents by which someone with the power to do so intervened in matters of taxation and requisitions. The guarantees emphasize the personal liability of the guarantor. The rural authorities who were protectors in the protection letters were liable for the revenue generated by the tax-payers in their communities, but in contrast to the guarantees, this liability is not made explicit in the protection letters. Again, the guarantees were not, like the Coptic protection letters, addressed to the tax-payer himself, but rather to a third party, who could legally lay claim to the guarantor's personal effects on the basis of the document.⁴⁷⁵ The only other documents attempting to solve fiscal issues by addressing the tax-payers themselves are the tax-demand notes sent by regional administrators aimed at protecting against tax abuse. However, these communications did not (partially) exempt the tax-payer, as the Coptic protection letters could do, but rather warned the tax-payer not to pay more than the amount stated in the note. Thus, the Coptic protection letters linked to taxation took a very specific place within documentation of fiscal problem-solving in Early Islamic Egypt, and their use and function did not overlap completely with other (types of) documents. Through the protection letters, local authorities such as village or monastery heads could directly adjust the fiscal burden imposed on individual tax payers, and addressed these individuals directly, without the need for the authority of officials of higher levels or more specialized tax officials.

⁴⁷⁵ A guarantee made by a monastic authority of the monastery of Bawit to another monk of the capitation-tax office of the monastery, links the language and functions of the Coptic protection letters with that of guarantees, and with the issues related to taxation: see discussion in section 4.4.2.

4.2 Travel and fugitives

Connected to taxation were issues of traveling, of the tax-payers' mobility, and how the government dealt with fugitives. These issues are already visible in the papyri of the seventh century, but especially in the first half of the eighth century, under Marwanid rule, many documents were produced in Egypt which testify to the government's desire to heighten the control over people's movements. Measures were taken and documents were issued to regulate travel and combat fugitivism.

This section follows the same structure as the previous section 4.1.1. First, in 4.2.1, I discuss how the Coptic protection letters were connected to issues of travel and fugitivism, how they were used as instruments to solve problems related to those issues. In 4.2.2, I discuss references to such problems and proposed solutions in contemporary documentation in the three administrative languages of Early Islamic Egypt. Regulating travel, and protection during travel, produced very specific documentation in this period. In 4.2.3, I compare the form and function of these travel documents to the Coptic protection letters and their links to travel and fugitivism. This comparison will show that the Coptic protection letters not only operated on a different administrative level and geographical scale, but that they also had a different function.

4.2.1 Travel in the Coptic protection letters

4.2.1.1 "Because you fled" and "Come to your house"

The most explicit references in the Coptic protection letters to fugitivism appear in seven documents which have a specific addition to the promise clauses, pointing out that the protectee had fled, e.g. "and we will not do any harm to you because you fled."⁴⁷⁶ The implication here is that the protectors could have caused harm to the protectee, or would have been in entitled to harm them, *because* the protectee had fled, but that they promise not to.

Other references to mobility and travel in the Coptic protection letters are much less explicit about the nature of the travel. The instruction clauses used most frequently, "Come to your house" and "Appear", seem to indicate that the protection letter addresses someone who is not there, who is away from their home.

⁴⁷⁶ *SB Kopt.* III 1368, ll. 6-7: $\chi\epsilon$ NNENEP PEOOCY | NAK $\chi\epsilon$ AKNWT . The sender of *P.Ryl.Copt.* 385, upon finding out that a group of vinedressers had fled, decided against giving them protection letters.

Do these instruction clauses also mean that the protectee had fled? References to mobility, even those as vague as an instruction to “appear”, suggest that the protectee was hiding from the consequences of this trouble, i.e. the prosecution, arrest, financial demands, or “harm” against which the protection letter offered protection.⁴⁷⁷ This does not necessarily mean that the protectee travelled far away, e.g. crossing district boundaries.⁴⁷⁸ In fact, there are several indications suggesting that the Coptic protection letters generally operated on a limited geographical scale (see 4.1.2.3).

A number of Coptic protection letters does not refer to any form of movement: they do not contain an instruction clause at all. These include the tax receipts with added protection letters, discussed in 4.1.1.1. It is likely that the very short *SB Kopt. V 2264*, which lacks the name of the protectee, is also such an addition to a tax-receipt: “Here you have the *logos* (promise) by God for you, that you will not be prosecuted, on account of the eighth indiction year. Antonias and Swai, we sign. Iōannes, son of Lazaros, executed (the *logos*) ⲧ”.⁴⁷⁹ The formulary in this document conform to the Coptic protection letters added to tax receipts, including the lack of an instruction clause, and including the lack of the name of the protectee, which is present in the tax-receipt section of the document. Moreover, it fits a fiscal context, as it was written by a Djeme village scribe and issued by two village heads. In this case, the tax-receipt was probably written on a different *ostrakon*.

Other Coptic protection letters without instruction clauses did contain other common clauses such as the promise clause, the *eis plogos mpnoute ntootk* clause, and signatures by the protectors, but also limitations and exceptions which tie them to fiscal practice.⁴⁸⁰ The protectees are not asked to “Come home”. Would the protectees in these cases have been

⁴⁷⁷ However, not all Coptic protection letters contained an instruction clause, let alone an instruction clause related to mobility. In the context of taxation, I have discussed the tax-receipts followed by protection letter formulas, and the importance of the absence of “Come to your house” instruction clauses in those particular documents (4.1.1.1). A small group of protection letters lacking such an instruction clause have been interpreted by Alain Delattre as documents with a similar function to travel permits. On my differing interpretation of these, see 4.1.2.3.

⁴⁷⁸ As did the travelers requesting travel permits, see 4.1.2.2. In some cases, it seems that protection letters and/or protectees travelled between neighboring districts: the two instances in the corpus in which bishop Pesynthios, at the time in Western Thebes, is asked to issue a protection letter for someone, so that they can go and talk to an official in Pesynthios’ diocese of Coptos (see chapter 2 and section 3.2).

⁴⁷⁹ εἰς πλ]ογος | μπνουτε ντοοτκ ετμπαρ]γε μμοκ ρα οκτοης ινδ^ο /]αντωνιος μν σουαι τν]στοιχ | ιω^α πλαζαροσ σωματ ⲧ.

⁴⁸⁰ *SB Kopt. V 2265, 2266, 2267, 2268.*

present in the village, as I have postulated for the tax receipts with added protection letters?⁴⁸¹

4.2.1.2 Other types of travel

While most of the Coptic protection letters focused on the return of the protectee, some protection letters permitted a larger freedom of movement, namely when the protectee, including his family, is given the instruction, or in these cases rather the permission to “go North and go South” , e.g. *SB Kopt. V 2262*, the first lines of which read: “Here is the promise by God for you, Markos and your wife and your child. Come to your house and go North and go South. And we will not permit any harm to reach you and we will not ask anything on account of this year ... [...] *trimission...* (ll. 1-6).”⁴⁸² To go North and South, up and down the Nile, likely meant a general permission to travel, secured by the protection letter. This protection letter, issued by a *lashane*, is also related to taxation, as evidenced by the limitation to “this year” (see section 4.1.1.1.3), which might further point to a function like a local travel permit for this protection letter (see section 4.2.3). Yet how far the “North” and “South” went is difficult to say.

Yet another type of freedom of movement is provided in some of the Coptic protection letters which offered protection in the context of conflict resolution. These documents summon the protection receiver in order to reach an agreement on some unspecified issue. Moreover, in these documents, discussed further in section 4.3.1, travel is not limited to the one direction of returning to the village, the protectee could leave the place where he had been summoned to if they so wished. As an example, see *SB Kopt. V 2271*: “Ⲫ Here you have the promise by God, Mena. Come and I will talk with you. If the thing pleases you, it is well. But if it does not, go away happily (undisturbed). I, Swai, the *lashane*, sign this promise. I, Niharau, the very humble deacon drew up this promise by my hand according to his wish.”⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Delattre, “Lettres”, interprets these documents differently, namely as local travel permits: section 2.1.3.

⁴⁸² ⲈⲢ ⲡⲓⲬⲟⲢ ⲙⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲈ ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧⲕ ⲛⲧⲟⲕ | ⲙⲀⲢⲔⲐⲐ ⲙⲛ ⲧⲈⲔⲔⲠⲓⲙⲈ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲈⲔⲰⲛⲣⲈ | ⲛⲒⲒⲈ ⲈⲑⲐⲛ ⲈⲡⲈⲔⲛⲒ ⲛⲒⲖⲟⲕ Ⲉⲛⲑⲛⲧ | [ⲛ]ⲒⲖⲟⲕ ⲈⲢⲛⲔ ⲕⲈ ⲈⲛⲈⲛⲔⲛⲨⲟⲣⲈ ⲛ[ⲗⲗⲎⲒ] ⲛⲡⲈⲐⲐⲟⲩⲩ ⲈⲧⲀⲑⲟⲕ ⲗⲎⲱ ⲕⲈ | [ⲈⲛⲈⲛⲨⲛⲟⲩ]ⲕ ⲈⲗⲗⲎⲒ ⲑⲀ ⲧⲈⲢⲟⲙⲡⲈ | [...]ⲛ ⲛⲧⲈⲢⲙⲛⲔⲓⲒⲛ. The expression “to go North and to go South” also appears in an instruction clause of *SB Kopt. V 2279*.

⁴⁸³ See also *O. GurnaGorecki 70*: “Either you agree with my way of discussing with you or not, you will go to your place freely.”

To sum up, while explicit references to fleeing from fiscal obligation occur rather infrequently in the Coptic protection letters, most protectees seem to have been stranded away from home and unable or unwilling to return home without the promise of amnesty offered by the protection letter. The majority of the protection letters offered amnesty against certain harmful consequences upon the protectees' return. They facilitated the return of the protectees, but also their reintegration in the village society, often under certain conditions and/or with the amnesty offered only for a limited time (see 4.1.1.1).⁴⁸⁴ Some protection letters offered greater freedom of movement to the protectees, e.g. the protection letters containing summons to settle a conflict: the protectees could both come to settle and go away again without having to fear harmful consequences of their movements back and forth. Now that I have discussed how the Coptic protection letters were regulating people's – the protectees' – travel and freedom of movement, in section 4.1.2.2 I will discuss issues of travel and fugitivism in contemporary documents in Coptic, Greek, and Arabic, so that in section 4.2.3 I can better define the place of the Coptic protection letters within that documentation and the role they played in dealing with issues of regular and irregular travel.

4.2.2 Problems and protection of travel in Early Islamic Egypt

4.2.2.1 Fugitives

The papyri document several reasons why people fled. E.g., in the years following the conquest, a pagarch wrote a letter to a subordinate saying that he was worried that people might flee because of the levying of the capitation tax.⁴⁸⁵ Indeed, tax evasion seems to have been an important motivation for protectees of the Coptic protection letters to leave their homes (see 4.1.1.1 and 4.1.2.1). In the discussion of labor requisitions above I mentioned that the requisitioned laborers were considered a flight risk, as evidenced e.g. in guarantees to the governor for their presence.⁴⁸⁶ However, there could be other reasons why someone would flee away from their home.⁴⁸⁷ For example they might have run from a punishment

⁴⁸⁴ The importance of the protectees' reintegration in the village society is visible in e.g. the instruction clauses which indicate that the protectee should "stay" or "dwell (in your house)", e.g. *O. Crum VC 106, SB Kopt. V 2225*.

⁴⁸⁵ *CPR XXII 1*. Papaconstantinou, "Administering", nuances the view of the document's editor that this document is a testimony to the introduction of the capitation tax in the Egyptian province.

⁴⁸⁶ See also other efforts made to escape this requisitioned labour, by paying someone to go instead of you, or by request letters to administrators sent on your behalf by local authorities, discussed in 4.1.1.2.

⁴⁸⁷ Morelli, "Prigioni".

for a crime or damage caused. This is probably what happened in the case of *P.Lond.* III 1032, a Greek letter which tells the story of a farmer who had fled to a doctor, because of damage caused, presumably by the refugee farmer, to a vineyard. A conflict with someone in the community, like litigation, might have been the reason why some people fled, which is reflected in the protection letters inviting the protectee to come and settle their case with the protector (see section 4.3.1).

The Egyptian government's concern with such irregular travelers or fugitives is attested in all the major dossiers and archives related to the administration of Early Islamic Egypt, and crops up in a variety of documents in Arabic, Greek and Coptic, on different levels of the administration. This seeming omnipresence of fugitives in the seventh and eighth century documentation has led historians to attribute a "désertion en masse" to "la politique religieuse et fiscale et les mesures d'oppression" of the Arab-Muslim government.⁴⁸⁸ The question whether there were more fugitives in Early Islamic Egypt than in other periods of Egyptian history, and whether this perceived higher degree of flight was caused by a tax burden that was heavier than in the centuries before the conquest, are, due to the nature of our evidence, difficult to almost impossible to answer. What we do know is that, during the end of the seventh, and the first half of the eighth century, i.e. under the rule of the Marwanids, the government implemented and recorded more measures to control revenue flow, and therefore control the tax payers' mobility.⁴⁸⁹ These measures are visible in the papyri – many of which are coming from administrative contexts – in the form of administrative correspondence on issues of fugitives and what to do with them, travel permits, applications for travel permits, fiscal registers mentioning fugitives, lists of fugitives arrested, etc. Why did the government care about people fleeing or moving away from their place of origin?⁴⁹⁰ Loss of revenue due to the tax payers not being there when tax is collected could be one reason, although there is some evidence that people were still paying taxes in one place although they lived somewhere else.⁴⁹¹ But more importantly, when farmers left their village, there was a risk that plots of land would no longer be cared for, which was detrimental for the revenue at a longer term.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁸ Rémondon (editor) on *P.Apoll.* 9. Legendre, "Islamic Conquest", elaborates her opposing view.

⁴⁸⁹ Shaping, 101-102 and *passim*. Delattre, "Checkpoints".

⁴⁹⁰ With respect to requisitioned labourers, the government did not want to lose the labor force which they needed for the project in question.

⁴⁹¹ Gonis, "Arabs, Monks".

⁴⁹² Morelli, "P. Brook. 26"; Morelli, "Agri"..

The government's preoccupation with registering fugitives is a better explanation for the large presence of fugitives in our sources than a supposed heavier tax burden forcing people to flee their fiscal duties. The introduction of new taxes by the government, not in the least the capitation tax, could give us the impression that there were more taxes, without the tax burden being actually heavier.⁴⁹³

The Greek papyri use several words to denote people who had moved away from their place of origin: *φυγάδες* (*fugades*) or fugitives, *φυγόντες* (*fugontes*) or people who fled or fugitives, and *ξένοι* (*xenoi*) or strangers (*Ⲫⲙⲙⲟ* (*shmmō*) in Coptic). *Xenoi*, is a term, known already from the pre-conquest period, denoting people living in one district, but originally coming from another district. The term is used from the point of view of the new district: they are "strangers" in this new district.⁴⁹⁴ While Qurra uses the term *fugades* in his letters, in the administrative papers of Basilios the term *xenoi* is also used once.⁴⁹⁵ In the Papas archive as well, both *xenoi* and *fugontes* are used. This use of both terms in the same archives suggests a difference of meaning between the terms. Were all displaced people, or *xenoi*, fugitives on the run from conflicts, debts, or taxes? Marie Legendre emphasizes that moving and travelling did not necessarily mean fleeing.⁴⁹⁶ On the other hand, as I will show below in section 4.2.2.2, the papyri do make the connection between travel and flight: if you did not have a certain travel document during your travel to and in another district, you were considered a fugitive, whatever your motives for traveling might have been. In any case, the papyri, especially top-down administrative correspondence attest to the efforts made by the government at several moments to track down, arrest, and list fugitives (*fugades/fugontes* and *xenoi/shmmō*), and to send them back to their villages or to the governor to be punished.⁴⁹⁷

From these top-down administrative letters, we understand that the high officials sending them expected the local administrators to aid them in combating irregular travel, as they are sending orders to that effect. At the same time they at least suspected that these

⁴⁹³ Legendre, "Perceptions of administrative violence: a tie that binds the early Islamic empire?", oral communication, *Ties that Bind: Mechanisms and Structures of Social Dependency in the Early Islamic Empire*, conference Leiden University, 3-6 December 2019.

⁴⁹⁴ Morelli, "P.Brook 26".

⁴⁹⁵ *P.Lond.* IV 1446, fiscal register listing *ξένοι* settled in a certain district (ll. 28-39).

⁴⁹⁶ Legendre, "Islamic Conquest".

⁴⁹⁷ See also Chapter 5 for an elaborate analysis of one such communication in Coptic: *P.Ryl.Copt.* 277. Qurra orders fugitives to be sent back to their village in e.g. *P.Lond.* IV 1343.

local administrators and the local population in general were obstructing their measures to deal with the fugitives, by protecting and hiding them.⁴⁹⁸ Both in Qurra's letters to Basilios and in the letters in Papas' archive, locals are being accused of hiding fugitives, and threatened with high fines for doing so. *P.Apoll.* 13 and 14 mention a fine of three *solidi* for each fugitive, while Qurra in *P.Lond.* IV 1384 states that each found fugitive will be fined five *solidi*, and anyone hiding them ten *solidi*.⁴⁹⁹ Arietta Papaconstantinou argues that there must have been underground networks of locals hiding fugitives.⁵⁰⁰ People also turned to monasteries as places of refuge, e.g. *P.Bal.* II 386 seems to indicate the presence of three *fugades* at the Apa Apollo monastery at Deir-el-Bala'izah.⁵⁰¹ The protectees of the Coptic protection letters also chose to turn to monasteries and monastic authorities for refuge in several cases, as I have discussed in section 3.2.

While this paints a picture of rural communities, or at least of some individuals within them, conspiring against the government to hide and protect irregular travelers, the reality is that local authorities also helped the government to combat flight, voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously. Apart from the possibility that they actually followed the instructions sent to them by their superiors, local elites also signed sureties, guaranteeing to produce captured fugitives whenever the governor should ask them to, as I will discuss in section 4.4.1. On the other hand, village authorities also issued Coptic protection letters to people who fled from their village, promising (conditional and limited) amnesty upon return, rather than punishment. I will argue in section 5.4.5 that the Coptic protection letters, while seemingly in tension with governmental policies and orders regarding fugitives, actually supported the government in their efforts to contain land flight. The government's concern with fugitives is highly visible in the papyri, and it finds its expression not only in search actions and (threats of) punishments discussed in this section, but also in documents which permitted limited mobility. I will discuss these documents and their connection to fugitives in the following section.

⁴⁹⁸ *P.Lond.* IV 1525.

⁴⁹⁹ Caulkers in *P.Apoll.* 9.

⁵⁰⁰ Papaconstantinou, "Rhetoric".

⁵⁰¹ Gonis, "Arabs, Monks".

4.2.2.2 “So that you are not among the fugitives”: the link between fugitives and travel permits

The documents that best exemplify the government’s attempts to regulate the tax payers’ mobility are the travel permits written in Arabic, together with a few very similar documents in Greek.⁵⁰² The travel permits in Arabic allow the holder to travel to and in a certain area for a certain number of months, but they do not refer to fugitives. The documents mention that the permit holder needs to travel in order to earn his sustenance and pay his capitation tax.⁵⁰³ From this perspective, Gladys Frantz-Murphy’s interpretation of these documents as work permits rather than travel permits is defensible.⁵⁰⁴ However, taking also into account their Greek counterparts, I believe that the main reason these permits were issued was not as a work permit but rather to allow the permit holder to travel a great distance and not be considered a *xenos* or *fugas* (on these terms see above, section 4.2.2.1), which I will explain in more detail below. Thus I will use the term “travel permit” for these documents. The work and payment of tax mentioned in travel permits rather act as a justification for the proposed travel. The travel permits have these justifications in common with some of the Coptic travel permits (see 4.2.3.4), and similar justifications are mentioned in *P.Sijp. 25* and *P.CLT 3*, two request letters connected to the procedure to obtain a travel permit. In both these letters, the monks needing the travel permits are said to have to travel for work. In *P.CLT 3* this is to sell basketry which they had produced, the sender of *P.Sijp. 25* keeps it more vague: “for working and so that they may take care of their things”.⁵⁰⁵

The Arabic travel permits, while their focus is on details that define the limitations of the travel (discussed in more detail in 4.2.3.1), they also contain an expression of protection: “and whosoever meets him, of the agents of the *amīr* or others, let him not treat him within this period otherwise than well.” What exactly are the permit holders protected from? The answer is given by two Greek documents which have much in common with the Arabic travel permits. The protection which travel permits provided was that the permit holder was not considered a fugitive. I will briefly discuss these two Greek documents.

⁵⁰² On the Arabic travel permits, Ragib, “Sauf-Conduits”; Vanthieghem, “Plus Ancien”; Pilette and Vanthieghem, “Nouveau sauf-conduit?”; Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*. The Greek documents I will discuss are *P.Sijp. 25*, P.Würzb.Inv. 62 (unpublished), and *P.Lond. I 32 = Chr. Wilck. 24*.

⁵⁰³ I discuss more details of the formulary of the travel permits in section 4.1.2.3, where I compare them with the Coptic protection letters.

⁵⁰⁴ Frantz-Murphy, *Arabic agricultural leases*.

⁵⁰⁵ The travel permits themselves also keep it vague.

P.Sijp. 25 is a Greek document that seems to be both a travel permit for monks and a request to an *amīr* to confirm said travel permit. It does not call itself a *sigillion* (which was how (travel) permits were named in Greek and Coptic, *sijill* in Arabic literature) but rather a *paraklētikon gramma* (request letter), although the sender does mention that he signs the letter with his seal. It is addressed to the “*amīr* of the fugitives who are dwelling abroad of Upper Chora”. The sender, named Horion, calls himself the slave (*doulos*) and servant (*hypourgos*), of the governor of Egypt. Horion had received the tax payment guarantee for the monks from their monastery. The monks wanted to travel to the pagarchy of Heliopolis, in Lower Egypt, to work and take care of their affairs. Horion had given the monks six months to travel. Horion's request to the *amīr* is framed in these terms:

*So I entreat my lord to order that they will not be returned (made to return), because they are free (eleutheroi); since in order that it is not thought that they are (among the) fugitives (fugades) I issued the present request letter having put on it also my seal.*⁵⁰⁶

A similar expression is used by the issuing party of the Greek papyrus P.Würzb.Inv. 62, prepared for publication by Janneke de Jong, which contains the bottom part of a Greek travel permit granting 6 months of travel time to an unknown permit holder. The last sentence on the papyrus is the most interesting for our purposes:

*And in order that it is not suspected that you belong to the strangers (xenoī), I have taken care that proof of your freedom (emfānian [tēs] eleutherias humōn) is made through the present letter, to which I have put my seal.*⁵⁰⁷

The reason or justification for travelling might have been work, but the reason for issuing a travel permit was for the permit holder to avoid the consequences of being considered a “stranger”, or fugitive, which could include being sent back, imprisonment,⁵⁰⁸ and punishment in the form of fines or corporal punishment.⁵⁰⁹ As is clear from the cited sections given above, both these documents mention the status of being “free” when referring to the permit holders. This freedom is related to the payment of taxes, which was a condition for receiving a travel permit, as I will discuss in the next paragraph.

⁵⁰⁶ *P.Sijp. 25*, ll. 9-13.

⁵⁰⁷ P.Würzb.Inv. 62, ll. 7-8.

⁵⁰⁸ E.g. *CPR XXII 35* is an eighth century list of imprisoned fugitives.

⁵⁰⁹ Qurra's letter to Basilios *P.Lond. IV 1384*, ll. 26-27, mentions lashing fugitives and nailing fugitives to wooden yokes as physical punishments. .

4.2.2.3 Tax payment as a condition

In the previous paragraphs I have discussed how the protection and permission of travel was related to the issue of fugitives. Protection of travel was also related to taxation, as (earning money to be able to) paying your taxes in some cases acted as a justification for the travel in travel permits. However, having paid your taxes and/or having someone stand surety for the payment of your taxes was also a condition to receive a travel permit. That paying your taxes was a condition to receive a travel permit and the protection that it entailed, is especially salient in the documentation regarding the procedure to obtain a travel permit. This state of having paid your taxes could be defined as “free” in documents related to travel documents, although references to a “free” status of the permit holder are not made in the permits themselves.⁵¹⁰ A Coptic request letter sent by the *lashanes* of Djeme, requesting an *amīr* to issue a travel permit for three monks from a nearby monastery, states explicitly that the monks for whom they were writing had paid their taxes, and moreover that the *lashanes* guarantee for their tax payments: “They also are free men, and see, we give surety of their persons”.⁵¹¹

Guaranteeing for the tax payment of a travel permit applicant is attested in the eighth-century tax guarantees from the Apa Jeremias monastery in Saqqara, in which monks stand guarantor for another monk’s taxes, in order for the latter to obtain a travel permit. The documentation of the monastery at Saqqara includes a list with a summary of tax-receipts of monks whom we know as receivers of Arabic travel permits. This summary might have been part of the procedure of application for the travel permits, in which the tax-receipts of the monks proved their status as “free men”.⁵¹² The procedure to obtain a travel permit involved the interventions of different people, including intermediaries who sent the requests on the applicants’ behalf to the relevant authorities and/or acted as guarantors for the applicants’ taxes.⁵¹³ The papyri documenting this procedure clearly show that a tax payment or at the least a guarantee thereof was a condition to obtain the travel permit, including the protection it entailed. A similar mechanism is visible in the Coptic protection

⁵¹⁰ Except for the Greek permit P.Würzb.Inv. 62, cited above, section 4.2.2.2.

⁵¹¹ *P.CLT3*, l. 9.

⁵¹² Berkes-Vanthieghem, “The Trilingual Archive(s) of the Monastery of Apa Ieremias in Saqqara in the 8th Century and the Birth of Arabic Papyrology”, oral communication at the 29th International Congress of Papyrologists, Università di Salento, Lecce, 28 July – 3 August 2019.

⁵¹³ On *P.CLT3*, see section 5.3.1.

letters. The following section will examine these similarities and the differences between the various types of travel documents in Coptic, Greek and Arabic.

4.2.3 How do the Coptic protection letters relate to the documents regulating travel?

The Coptic protection letters fulfil a particular place and role within the different types of travel documents of Early Islamic Egypt. I will show this by comparing them to other documents regulating mobility, in particular the Arabic (and Greek) travel permits, with regard to five aspects of their contents and function: permission, protection, condition, justification, and relations. These aspects of the documents have come up in the previous paragraphs, and will now serve as hooks for the comparison. “Permission” is what the documents allowed the holders to do, while “Protection” means that the travel document protected the holder against danger. “Condition” is a condition which needs to be met for the travel document to be issued or to be effective. “Justification” is the reason for travel stated or implied by the documentation. “Relations” is connected to the social actors and networks that were involved in producing the travel documents.

4.2.3.1 Permission

What did the travel permit or the protection letter allow the permit holder or protectee to do? To make this comparison, I here give an example of an Arabic travel permit:

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. This is a document from ‘Abd A[l]lāh b. U[bai]d Allāh, administrator of the Amīr ‘Ubaid Allāh b. a[l]-Ḥabḥāb over Upper-Ashmūn,

for Constantin Papostolos (Qusṭantīn Babuṣṭulus), a young man, flat-nosed, on his cheek being a scar and on his neck two moles, having lank hair, one of the people of Basqanūn Bāha belonging to (the district of) Upper-Ashmūn. I have permitted him to work at Lower-Ash[mūn] to pay his capitation tax and to obtain his subsistence, and I have appointed to him (as a term) two mo[nt]hs [fr]om the [lu]nati[on of Dhū al-Ḥijja to the end of Muḥarram of the year one hundred and sixteen; and whosoever meets him, of the agents of the Amīr or others, let him not treat him within this period otherwise than well. And hail to him who follows the guidance, and Ṭulayq wrote it just <at the time> of the new-moon of Dhū al-Ḥijja of the year one hundred and twelve.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁴ *P.Cair.Arab* 175 (731).

The Arabic travel permits all follow the same basic structure. After the *basmala* follows the statement “this is a document from X for Y”. X, the permit giver, is identified with a name and function, usually he is an agent of an *amīr*.⁵¹⁵ The permit receiver is identified by his name, a physical description and his provenance. Then follows the content of the permit, introduced by “I have permitted”. The document specifies that the permit receiver can go to a certain place, for a certain period (one to six months) and for a specific goal, usually to earn their capitation tax and subsistence (see “Justification”). Then follows, almost always, a protection or safe conduct formula (see “Protection”), and a blessing. The document ends with a scribal signature, including the precise date. Thus, the first impressions which one gets are of uniformity and of precision, in terms of the who, when, where, and why.

There is a big difference between the Arabic and Greek travel permits and the Coptic protection letters regarding both the nature of the travel that was allowed by the document, and the way the document defined the permitted travel. The Arabic and Greek travel permits allowed the permit holder to travel long distance, away from home and outside of their district. The travel involved for the protectees of the majority of the Coptic protection letters was returning home, although in some cases they were allowed to leave again, or more freedom of movement seemed to be permitted (see 4.2.1.2). In the Arabic and Greek travel permits the parameters of the permitted travel in terms of where, how long, and who, are defined in detail within a uniform document structure, while the Coptic protection letters contain hardly any such information and are very variegated in terms of structure and formulary (see mainly section 3.1 and 3.3). In the Arabic and Greek travel permits it is clear exactly where the permit holders were from, and where they were allowed to travel. For the protectees of the Coptic protection letters, we hardly ever know either their place of temporary residence – where they were when the protection letter was issued, nor their exact destination (e.g. the frequent “Come to your house” is to us fairly unhelpful information, without context). Sometimes the documents give us some more information, e.g. some texts mention the name of the village as part of the title of the protector: it can then be reasonably assumed that the protectee’s destination would be his house within that village. However, this usually does not tell us yet how far they would have to travel to return home.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ Ragib, “Sauf-conduits”.

⁵¹⁶ This information can be deduced in some letters which represent steps in the protection letter procedures: see 3.2, e.g. from the expectations of the sender of *O.MedinetHabuCopt.* 136 (discussed in 3.2) we understand that the protectee, protector and intermediary were all at short distance from

An important conclusion from this comparison is that the Arabic and Greek travel permits, with their detailed and precise information, focus heavily on the “Permission” aspect of a travel document, while this attention and emphasis is lacking in the Coptic protection letters. They, on the other hand, generally pay more attention to the “Protection” aspect, which I will discuss in the next section. This stark difference in emphasis cannot be explained only by a difference in the context, including language and scribal tradition, in which they were produced – mainly Coptic speaking villages and monasteries vs Arabic and Greek provincial chanceries, see “Relations” below – but should in my view be attributed at least partly to a difference in function: the travel permits regulated mobility, the Coptic protection letters mainly provided (partial) amnesty. That language and administrative context cannot fully explain these differences, is corroborated by a group of travel permits, which were written in Coptic and operated on a local level, like the Coptic protection letters. However, the function of those Coptic travel permits was much more akin to that of the Arabic and Greek travel permits. Therefore, before I discuss the protective elements of the Arabic and Greek travel permits in comparison to the Coptic protection letters, I want to discuss these Coptic travel permits which seem to have been a permit without any protective function.

The Coptic travel permits which were found in the tomb-used-as-living-space of the eighth-century monk Frange in the Theban mountains, were written on papyrus and sealed.⁵¹⁷ A dozen of such documents, were very fragmentary, have been edited by Anne Boud’hors. The permits read like letters, and were addressed probably by a local official to the guard of a check point. Alain Delattre has argued that they were produced and used in a limited geographical and chronological context, i.e. the Theban region in the late seventh century, in a particular time of unrest, when control of travel was a part of the governmental measures that were taken.⁵¹⁸ The message in the permits tells the guard not to hinder the permit holder to travel beyond the checkpoint, in the example below this is to the town of Djeme. Thus, these permits allow the pass holder to travel in a certain area, but they do not provide

each other. This geographically local nature of the Coptic protection letters goes hand in hand with their socially local nature, which I discuss below in “Relations”.

⁵¹⁷ They were among the monk’s possessions as materials to be recycled for his bookbinding activities. On Frange’s activities and writings, see O.Frange, Introduction.

⁵¹⁸ Delattre, “Checkpoints”.

protection from harm along the way, like the Arabic travel permits, nor on the place of arrival, like the Coptic protection letters. This is an example of these Coptic travel permits: † *Do not hinder Papas and Theodorake to go to Djeme, since they go because of their work (?). Month Hathur, 3, 3rd indiction (year). † Give to Halakotse † From Pha...*⁵¹⁹

The only expression in this document that could be approximated to a protective phrase is “Do not hinder to go”.⁵²⁰ However, as these permits were addressed to the guard at a checkpoint at a specific location whence the permit holders were allowed to travel to Djeme, this protection against “hindering” only refers to the passing of the checkpoint, not to protection along the road to Djeme. This may seem a minor difference, but it points to a major contrast between the functions of various mobility-related documents. If you did not have a Coptic travel permit, you would simply be stopped at the checkpoint and not be allowed to continue your journey – in other words without the Coptic travel permit you would be hindered. The Greek and Arabic travel permits functioned in a similar way to the Coptic travel permits in the sense that they focused on the “Permission” aspect: the document allowed you to travel to (or through) a certain place. However, the aspect of protection present in the Arabic and Greek travel permits is what causes the main differences between the Coptic travel permits and the Arabic and Greek travel permits, and the similarities between the Coptic protection letters and the Arabic and Greek travel permits, as I will discuss in the next section.

4.2.3.2 Protection

The Arabic and Greek travel permits contained an element of protection, expressed in the Arabic travel permits in the phrase: “and whosoever meets him, of the agents of the *amīr*, or others let him not treat him within this period otherwise than well.” This negative form in which the protection is described is reminiscent of the Coptic protection letters, in which the majority of the promise clauses are also written in the negative form (see section 3.1.2). The blanket nature of the protection also reminds of some Coptic protection letters (“we will not allow anyone to harm you”). Having a valid travel permit made sure the holder was not being considered a fugitive when traveling outside their place of residency (see section 4.1.2.2). Conversely, not having the proper papers when travelling around had serious

⁵¹⁹ Boud’hors, “L’Apport”, 120-121: Papyrus no. 291972 (pl. 5), 8th century, Sheik abd-el Qurna (TT 29, Thebes).

⁵²⁰ ΜΠΡΚΩΛΕ [name permit holder] ΕΒΟΚ.

repercussions, and some travel permits give us information on what would happen if you were found travelling with an expired permit. Put differently, these documents tell us what the protection of the valid travel permit entailed. This is especially the case in the Greek travel permit which I will discuss in more detail here.

P.Lond. I 32 = Chr. Wilck. 24 is an interesting papyrus document for several reasons. It is the only Early Islamic travel permit written in Greek published today.⁵²¹ Moreover, it is the only travel permit which allows the permit holder to travel outside of the province of Egypt, to the “east” (Ἀνατολή, *anatolē*), possibly Byzantine territory.⁵²² The document has been dated to either 698 or 713 (on the basis of paleography), but according to Delattre, a dating to 728 could be possible as well, if you would want it to fit in the timeframe of the published Arabic travel permits.⁵²³ The earliest dated published Arabic travel permits date to 717, and the latest to 750/751.⁵²⁴ A date of 728 would place the document square within the period in which the published Arabic permits are attested. Historiographical narratives also place the use of the travel permits to the first decades of the eighth century.⁵²⁵ The formulary and structure of the document is similar, if not completely parallel to the Arabic travel permits.⁵²⁶ Just like the Arabic travel permits, it gives a number of months, here in the lacuna, during which the permit holders were allowed to travel, from the day on which the document is issued onwards. It also mentions where the permit holders were permitted to go.⁵²⁷ The parallels to the Arabic travel permit formulary are too obvious to not see this

⁵²¹ P.Wuerzburg inv. 62 is a Greek travel permit as well, in preparation for publication by Janneke de Jong. I am grateful to her for showing me drafts of her edition, on which I draw in my analyses in this chapter, see section 4.2.2.2. *P.Sijp. 25* is a Greek document closely connected to the travel permits, but it is in fact a request letter, not a permit.

⁵²² In the Greek papyri from Early Islamic Egypt, the *kourson anatolēs* means the yearly raids against Byzantium, cf. *CPR XXII 44*, commentary to l. 7. *P.Lond. IV*, Introd. xxxii-xxxv.

⁵²³ *BL (Berichtigungsliste der griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten) III*, p. 257 (W.Chr. 24) and *BL V*, 49. Delattre, “Checkpoints”.

⁵²⁴ Vanthieghem, “Plus ancien”.

⁵²⁵ The Christian literary source commonly known as the *History of the Patriarchs* credits the introduction of travel permits in Egypt to financial director Usāma b. Zayd al-Tanūhī (714–717 and 720–723).

⁵²⁶ Delattre, “Checkpoints”, 534, notes this as well, when discussing the Arabic travel permits: “On trouve des formulaires similaires dans deux documents grecs, *P.Sijp. 25* et *Chrest. Wilck. 24*. ... Il pourrait bien s’agir ici de la partie grecque d’un sauf-conduit bilingue grec-arabe.”

⁵²⁷ “Anatolē” is a much larger geographical area as destination than “al-Fustat” which we find in some of the Arabic travel permits (E.g. *P.RagibSaufConduits 4, 5, 6*), but there are also other Arabic travel permits mentioning a district in general as a destination (e.g. *P.Cair.Arab 175* cited above).

document serving a similar function, as a travel permit, issued for people who intended to travel..⁵²⁸The document's main interest for this section lies in its Greek adaptation of the protective formula of most Arabic travel permits.

In *Chr. Wilck. 24*, this clause was written:

So whoever will meet them, of the agents of the amīr-al-mu'minīn of those who are in Anatolē or in Egypt after the term given to them by us, he will arrest them and bring them to [their own place/houses (?)]. He will demand from each of them three nomismata (monetary unit of a gold coins, equal to holokottinos or solidus)...

The clause was written in the same place in the structure of the document as in the Arabic travel permits, namely right after the dates between which the permit was valid. The clauses start in the same way, but I note two striking differences between them. First, the agents are called here the “agents of the *amīr-al-mu'minīn*”, i.e. the agents of the caliph, rather than the agents of the *amīr* or provincial finance director, which we see in the Arabic travel permits. The explanation for the difference probably must be sought in the fact that *Chr. Wilck. 24* allows the permit holder to travel outside of the Egyptian province, thus outside of the scope of power of the financial director of Egypt.⁵²⁹ Second, and more relevant here, is that the clause focuses more on punishment than on protection, and the document does not contain a further protective formula.⁵³⁰ According to this document, the punishments for travelling with an expired travel permit are 1. arrest 2. being brought somewhere 3. a fine of 3 gold coins. A few of the Arabic travel permits also mention that travelling with an expired travel permit would get you arrested and brought to “a city”.⁵³¹

The monks in *P.CLT3* wanted to go from the neighborhood of Djeme to “the Fayyum”, without any further specification.

⁵²⁸ *Chr. Wilck. 24.* .

⁵²⁹ The term *amīr-al-mu'minīn* was also used in the papyri to indicate not the caliph himself, but more generally to the Arab-Muslim administration: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, 63, n. 102 with further references.

⁵³⁰ The document is missing a number of lines at the top, and there are a number of lacunae in the papyrus where such a phrase could have been, but on the other hand it doesn't seem like the formula would fit there, in terms of structure of the document, especially when compared to the Arabic travel permits.

⁵³¹ *P.RagibSaufConduits 2*, 4-5 and *P.Cair.Arab.* 174, 9-10 not read by Grohmann but by Ragib. Vanthieghem, “Plus Ancien”, ll. 5-6: the permit holder of an expired permit has to be brought to the capital of the pagarchy (where he is registered). It is possible that the Greek also had a reference to a city rather than their domicile.

However, none of the Arabic travel permits mention a fine as a consequence for being found travelling with an expired permit, we have this information thanks to this Greek document.⁵³² Thus, the protection formula is adapted so that it describes rather the punishment that would result from travelling with an expired permit.

In short, the aspect of protection in the Greek and Arabic travel permits is not dwelled upon, except when the document describes what would happen when you are caught without a permit. Most Arabic travel permits have a short and general protection clause which offers protection against harm done by government officials during the period in which the permit was valid. This lack of attention to the protection aspect stands in contrast to the elaborate and exact information related to the permission aspect of the travel permits (see above, “Permission”).

In the Coptic protection letters, on the other hand, the protection aspect is much more pronounced. We see this especially in the promise clauses. As I have shown in Chapter 3, they can be written in the negative or positive form, or a combination of the two. They are subject to great variety, can be very specific, and are often repeated, with one protection letter being able to contain up to four different promise clauses.⁵³³ In the majority of the Coptic protection letters, the promise clauses take up the majority of the text, and are usually (much) longer than the instruction clauses which contain the references to the protectee’s travel (see above, “Permission”). Again, the difference in the emphasis placed on the aspects of permission and protection in the Coptic protection letters and the Greek and Arabic travel permits, cannot be explained only by the difference in language and context, as the Coptic travel permits found in the monk Frange’s residence do not contain any protective formulas either (see above, “Permission”). The difference should rather be explained by a difference in function. The Coptic protection letters offered a protection in the form of amnesty. But

⁵³² This is a comparable amount to the 5 dinar to replace a damaged travel permit, mentioned in *History of the Patriarchs*: “If a mouse ate a man’s passport, or if it were injured by water or fire or any accident, whether part or the whole of it remained to his possession, if its lettering were damaged, it could not be changed for a new one until he paid five dinars as a fee for it, and then it could be changed for him.” Transl. Evetts, “History”. Another anecdote from the same literary source tells the story of a widow who had to pay 10 dinar because of a lost travel permit. The travel permit had been her son’s, and it was lost in a crocodile attack.

⁵³³ E.g. SB Kopt. V 2253, ll. 5-10: $\chi\epsilon\ \mu\epsilon\iota\rho\ \nu\epsilon\theta\theta\omicron\ \textit{(sic)}\ |\ \nu\alpha\kappa\ \chi\epsilon\ \delta\alpha\kappa\omicron\upsilon\gamma\tau\ \omicron\upsilon\gamma\delta\epsilon\ \nu\eta\epsilon\varsigma\ (\gamma)\nu\textit{N}^{\times}\ (\omicron\rho\epsilon\iota)\$
 $\ |\ \nu\tau\epsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\upsilon\ \mu\eta\epsilon\theta\omicron\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\alpha\zeta\omicron\kappa\ |\ \delta\lambda\lambda\alpha\ \epsilon\iota\lambda\alpha\varsigma\epsilon\eta\epsilon\lambda\theta\epsilon\ \nu\mu\mu\alpha\kappa\ \textit{?N}\ |\ \textit{?}\omega\beta\ \nu\iota\mu\ \epsilon\pi\pi\epsilon\tau\eta\lambda\alpha\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \ |\ \omicron\upsilon\gamma\delta\epsilon\$
 $\ \nu\eta\epsilon\iota\chi\eta\omicron\gamma\kappa\ \epsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\upsilon\textit{:}$ “that I will not do you harm because you fled, nor will I allow any harm to befall you, but I will agree with you in everything good, nor will I ask you anything...”

this was not limited to protection during or related to travel, as in the case of the Arabic and Greek travel permits. Some of the protectees had fled and were stranded away from home, not able or willing to return without this promise of amnesty. But in other cases the protection letter was issued for people who seemingly were not away from home, as is evidenced by the protection letters without instruction clauses, not in the least the tax-receipts with protection letter formulas (see section 4.1.1.1). In other, individual cases, there is no indication in the protection letter that the protectees are away from home. E.g. *O.CrumVC* 8, a protection letter issued by the lashanes of Djeme for a monastic community in the environs, reads: “This is the *logos* of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost onto you, that you may dwell in your holy place, for none shall [molest] you, ...”.⁵³⁴ While the Coptic protection letters did not necessarily allow and protect the protectee’s travel, they always promised protection. They are less focused on permission of and protection during travel and more on amnesty once the holder is at home.⁵³⁵ Going back to the Coptic travel permits then, there are two main differences between them and the Arabic and Greek travel permits, and both derive from the “Protection” aspect present in the Arabic and Greek travel permits, but not in the Coptic travel permits. 1. The Arabic and Greek travel permits protected the permit holders during their travel, with varying degrees of explicitness, against all checking authorities and offered permission to travel around, not to pass one specific checkpoint, and 2. not having a Arabic and Greek travel permit when travelling outside your district would mean being arrested, while showing up at the checkpoint without a Coptic travel permit would mean you would not be let through.

4.2.3.3 Condition

Conditions could be in place in order for a travel document to be issued or to be effective. This aspect is most pronounced for the Arabic and Greek travel permits, but also seems to have been in a part of how the Coptic protection letters functioned. What these documents have in common, is that these conditions were usually related to taxation, in particular

⁵³⁴ I discuss this document and its possible connections to similar Coptic and Greek documents in Chapter 5.

⁵³⁵ *O.CrumVC* 75 is an exception: the lashane writes to the head of the monastery that he will accompany the protectee to the monastery as part of the promise clause, thus as part of the protection offered. Interestingly, it is not the lashane who issues the protection letter in this case, but rather he asks the monastery head to do so. This promise of protection during travel is thus given in a private letter from intermediary to protector.

(partial) tax payments by the protectee or permit holder.⁵³⁶ In most cases it is clear that these tax payments were part of the protectee or permit holder's yearly tax payment, not an extra tax imposed on travelers. I have discussed this aspect of condition for the Arabic and Greek travel permits in section 4.2.2.3 and for the Coptic travel permits in section 4.1.1.2. While tax payments are in place in both document types as conditions for permission and/or protection, there are differences in how these conditions operated. In the case of the travel permits, the conditions are not stipulated in the permits themselves, but, from the documentation concerning the procedures that led to obtaining a travel permit, we understand that there needed to be a confirmation by local officials that the permit holders had paid their taxes, that they were not tax evaders.⁵³⁷ On top of that the documentation also shows that the permit holders needed guarantors for the permit holders' (future) tax payments.⁵³⁸ These were conditions that needed to be met before the travel permit could be issued. The condition aspect of the Coptic protection letters is less straightforward. The documents themselves do not explicitly mention conditionality, and the letters that document the Coptic protection letter procedures do not mention any conditions either. However, there is one clause which is often, if not always, part of the Coptic protection letter formulary, which can be understood as describing a condition for the protection promised in the document: the exception clause. When the document states: "...and we will not do any harm to you because you fled, nor will we prosecute you because of this installment, nor your children, except for a half *holokottinos* (*nomisma* or gold coin)", it means that the protectors are expecting a payment of a half gold coin from the protectee.⁵³⁹ It is likely, although not certain, that the protection offered, i.e. the protectee will not be prosecuted for not paying the tax instalment, and is effectively granted exemption for this instalment, is conditional upon this payment. However, not all protection letters contain exception clauses, in which case the protection seems to have been unconditional. In Chapter 3 I argued that the contents of the exception clauses were tailored to each individual case instead of being standard fines, and suggested that the amounts were the results of

⁵³⁶ *SB* III 7240, a permit issued by the *dux* Flavius Atias, will be discussed in section 5.3.2. This document gives permission to a group of monks to stay in their monastery. It is a permit offering certain protection, but not a travel permit. But the protection promised is dependent on the monks paying their capitation tax.

⁵³⁷ *P.CLT* 3.

⁵³⁸ E.g. *CPR* IV 20 and 21. Delattre, "Checkpoints"; Schaten, "Reiseformalitäten".

⁵³⁹ *SB Kopt.* III 1368.

negotiations between the protectors and an intermediary intervening for the protectee. We must also take into account the possibility that the contents of the exception clauses could have been unilaterally decided upon by the protectors. I would also entertain the possibility that the sums mentioned were paid by the intermediaries on behalf of the protectees, which would give the protectors a guaranteed contribution to the tax revenue. In that way, tax payment as a fulfilment of a condition for protection could be part of the procedure to obtain a Coptic protection letter, similar to the travel permits. Unfortunately there is no evidence for such a practice, although the role of intermediaries in the procedure seems to have been quite important (see section 3.2). Thus, in order to obtain a travel permit you needed a local official to confirm that you have paid your taxes and that your tax payments were guaranteed. In case of the Coptic protection letters on the other hand, the exception clauses can be interpreted as conditions for the effectiveness of the protection offered in the document.

4.2.3.4 Justification

The justification aspect of the travel documents is related to the reasons for travelling and/or needing the document that could be noted either in the documents themselves or the documents connected to the procedures towards obtaining the travel document. The Arabic travel permits themselves state: “I have permitted him to work at Lower-Aš[mūn] to pay his capitation tax and to obtain his subsistence”,⁵⁴⁰ or more simply “I have permitted him to work at al-Fustat”.⁵⁴¹ As I mentioned in section 4.2.2.2, the three monks applying for a travel permit to go to the Fayyum wanted to “sell their small amount of basketry which is the result of their labors.”⁵⁴² The monks in *P.Sijp. 25* wanted to travel “to work and so that they may take care of their things.”⁵⁴³ Thus, the reason why someone needed a travel permit is that they wanted to earn money outside of their own region. As an added justification, the permit could state that the permit holder needed to earn this money to pay their capitation tax and sustenance. These justifications have an echo in the Coptic travel permits, which although very brief, hint at the reason why the permit holder needed to pass the checkpoint:

⁵⁴⁰ P.Cair. Arab. 175, cited above.

⁵⁴¹ Pilette and Vanthieghem, “Nouveau Sauf-conduit?”.

⁵⁴² i.e. basketwork; *P.CLT* 3 l. 5 and 8

⁵⁴³ *P.Sijp. 25* l. 6.

because of work, taxes, or because their domicile was there.⁵⁴⁴ Another similarity between the Coptic and the Arabic and Greek travel permits is that they were written on papyrus and sealed, which stands in marked contrast with the Coptic protection letters, especially those from the Theban region which is also where the Coptic travel permits are from.⁵⁴⁵

The justification aspect in the Coptic protection letters is again less straightforward than for the travel permits. The protection letters are issued so that the protectee can come home. Only rarely do the protection letters hint at *why* exactly the protectee wanted or should come home, probably because coming or being home is not such a particular activity or state that it needed justification. However, some documents in the corpus do hint at reasons why it is important that the protectee obtain a protection letter and/or why they needed to travel home, e.g. to be able to live in the monastery like the other monks, without additional – punitive – tasks;⁵⁴⁶ for an urgent matter;⁵⁴⁷ to do work with a camel;⁵⁴⁸ to do work for a certain Severus;⁵⁴⁹ to do their work.⁵⁵⁰ In the protection letters addressed by a protector to a protectee, as is the case for the last three examples, this type of justification is part of the instruction clause and is usually preceded by “Come to your house”. As is clear from the examples, some form of “work” is the main justification of the of the travel home in the document. This is similar to what we see in the travel permits, both those in Arabic in Greek and those in Coptic. Another reason for travelling given in the Coptic protection letters is to settle a dispute, which I will discuss in more detail in 4.3.1.

⁵⁴⁴ Respectively nos. 2911972 (ⲉⲗ ⲛⲉϥⲓⲥⲉ: “on account of their work”), 295014 and 295106 (in both, the *dēmosion* or taxes in money are mentioned), and 295028 (ⲛⲉϥⲟⲕ ⲉⲛⲉϥⲛⲓ: “that he goes to his house. The phrasing is similar to the instruction clause of many Coptic protection letters “Come to your house” (ⲛⲉⲓ ⲛⲉⲕⲛⲓ, but note the difference in direction: “Go home (by passing the checkpoint)” vs “Come home” from the point of view of the village where the protectors are). Boud’hors, “L’Apport”.

⁵⁴⁵ Boud’hors, “L’Apport”, 119. The Coptic protection letters from that region were almost invariably written on ostraca: section 2.3.2..

⁵⁴⁶ *SB Kopt.* V 2300: “...and, what is more, if I come again, I shall be seized for even some care of the monastery as they are advising me here. And if you will give me a promise by God, and I am permitted (to come) into (my) dwelling place like everyone, I shall come South; if not, it is not possible for me to dwell within the boundaries (?)/comply with the orders (?) of the monastery”.

⁵⁴⁷ “Now, your Paternity, issue a protection letter for the jar maker and let him come for this urgent matter.”: *O.Crum VC* 75.

⁵⁴⁸ “So here is the promise by God for him and his camel, that he comes to his house and works with his camel”: *O.Crum VC* 64.

⁵⁴⁹ *O.DanKopt.* 36: ll. 4-5: ⲛⲉⲓ ⲛⲉⲣⲟⲩⲱⲩ | ⲛⲉⲥⲉϥⲛⲣⲟⲥ: “Come and do work for Seueros.

⁵⁵⁰ *SB Kopt.* V 2240: “[Come] to your house and do your work [...]”.

4.2.3.5 Relations

The relational aspect of the travel documents concerns the individuals and networks invoked by the documents. The documents inform us about the various social interactions and layers of dependency that were involved in the procedures that led to the production of a travel document.⁵⁵¹

While there is a certain overlap in the actors involved, the Arabic and Greek travel permits and the Coptic protection letters were produced and circulated in different contexts. The permit holders of the Arabic and Greek travel permits were non-Muslim tax payers, in several cases they are identified as monks.⁵⁵² The permit holders seem to have travelled on their permit either alone or in small groups of up to three people.⁵⁵³ This is all similar to the protectees of the Coptic protection letters, who were also local individual tax payers, traveling alone or in small groups, sometimes as families.⁵⁵⁴ However, while the travel permits and protection letters might have been issued for people of more or less the same social status, the individuals or offices issuing them were vastly different. In the Arabic and Greek travel permits we see a greater involvement of state officials, although the papyri documenting formal applications for the permits do show the contribution of local networks as well. The Arabic travel permits were issued by the agents of the finance director of the province of Egypt. They were the representatives of the Arab-Muslim government in the countryside.⁵⁵⁵ The application papers to obtain the travel permits were sent up the administrative ladder: village heads wrote on behalf of the monks to the local *amīr*, and the Saqqara monks guaranteeing for the taxes of permit applicants address their monastery

⁵⁵¹ For the Coptic protection letters I have discussed this at length in Chapter 3. I have touched upon the steps involved to obtain a travel permit in 4.2.2.3. On the multiple layers of interaction and social dependence in travel documentation from Early Islamic Egypt, see Palombo and Scheerlinck, “Asking”.

⁵⁵² I mean the permit holders of the published travel permits, as well as the individuals seen applying for travel permits in the documentation.

⁵⁵³ *P.RagibSaufConduits 7* is issued for two monks who want to travel to Upper Egypt. The request letters *P.CLT3* and *P.Sijp. 25* both ask for a travel permit for three monks.

⁵⁵⁴ Families or women, both appearing as protectees in the Coptic protection letters, have not been attested yet as travel permit holders. This might be related to the importance of capitation-tax payments in the travel permits: as women did not pay the capitation-tax, does that mean they could travel without travel permits? An anecdote from the literary source *Siyār al-bī'a*, otherwise known as the “History of the Patriarchs”, tells the story of a widow who was fined 10 dinar for entering Alexandria without a travel permit (see above).

⁵⁵⁵ Ragib, “Sauf-conduits”, Legendre, “Pouvoir”.

head, who presumably would in turn write to the local *amīr* or the office of the finance director in Fustat. The travel permits were governmental documents, which is not only evident from the people issuing them, but also from their uniformity and from the fact that they were written on papyrus, and were sealed. They operated over larger distances, they involved and had to be acceptable to government officials at higher levels of the administration.

The Coptic protection letters were direct communications between the tax payer and someone who held immediate authority over them in the countryside. This could be village officials, monastery heads, or bishops. The procedures to obtain a protection letter could involve several other people, but these were all part of the same, local networks as the protectees and protectors, or intermediaries.⁵⁵⁶ When titles of officials are mentioned, they refer almost exclusively to village officials.⁵⁵⁷ In the Coptic protection letters, toponyms are rarely mentioned, and there is a general low degree of characterization of the people mentioned in these documents. Neither protectors or protectees are identified often by more than their name, sometimes accompanied by identifiers such as ‘*lashane*’ or ‘priest’. A good example of this is *O.GurnaGorecki 69*, a protection letter for a monk named Haron, which opens: “Ⲡ We, all the brothers of the college, write to Haron the monk. Here is the promise by God for you *etc.*”⁵⁵⁸ The promise clause concerns the monk’s taxes. The protectors are the group of village authorities, who do not mention the name of the village nor their individual names. In this case, *koinotēs* refers certainly not to the entire village but to a specific group. Indeed, as most protection letters opening with a letter-style formula or internal address, the protectors do not even sign the document (see section 3.1.1).

All this indicates that there was no need for detailed characterization of people or place, and that the Coptic protection letters performed their function on a geographically, socially, and administratively much more local level than the Arabic and Greek travel permits. The Coptic protection letters functioned in a social and geographical space in which most people knew each other, and in which fugitives were probably not so far away as to escape everyone’s notice. There were intermediaries, who were part of the network of both protector and protectee, who could intervene for the protectee. We see these local protection

⁵⁵⁶ See section 3.2.

⁵⁵⁷ I discuss the protectors, protectees, and intermediaries of the protection letters in section 2.4.

⁵⁵⁸ Ll. 1-5: Ⲡ ΔΝΟΝ ΝΕΣΝΗΥ ΤΗ|ΡΟΥ ΝⲠϢΙΝΟΤΗϢ ΕΝ|ϢΔΙ ΝϢΑΡΩΝ ΠΜΟΝΟΧΟϢ | ΧΕ ΕΙϢ ΠΛΟϢ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ | ΝΤΟΟΤΡ.

mechanisms also at work in the letter I cited above (*P.Lond.* III 1032, section 4.2.2.1), in which the sender asks the receiver to retrieve a farmer who had fled probably because of his share in “harm done to the estate”. Even if the sender does not know where the farmer is exactly, he is confident that the receiver knows where he is or would be able to find him. The Coptic protection letters also operated in such local networks, which sometimes included cooperation between villages and monastic settlements (see section 3.2.5). In the Coptic protection letter mechanism, an intermediary might function as a buffer between you and the authorities who could arrest or prosecute you, and who might issue your protection letter promising not to do so. In the corpus, we see intermediaries receive and forward protection letters between protector and protectee. Intermediaries also served as means of getting access to the protectors, as e.g. in the letter in which the sender asks the addressee to ask the addressee’s brother to talk with the *lashane* about a protection letter for the sender (*O.GurnaGorecki* 72). Thus, the intermediaries acted as negotiators (see section 3.2), and possibly even guarantors for the protectors.

An important indication of the difference between the Coptic protection letters and the Arabic and Greek travel permits is of course the language of the documents. The Arabic and Greek travel permits were documents issued by and theoretically inspected by the representatives of the government in the countryside (the “agents of the *amīr*” as they are called in the documents). The permits were results of decisions to give access to inter-district travel, decisions made on a level where administration was in Arabic and/or Greek. The Coptic protection letters were produced and circulated in village and monastery administrations, environs in which Coptic was the main administrative language in this period.⁵⁵⁹

The comparisons made in these sections show the specific role of the Coptic protection letter mechanism in the landscape of documents offering protection, or permission, related to travel. The Coptic protection letters then stand out as documents which not so much regulated the mobility of the protectee, but rather offered a solution for their problems related to taxation or legal issues, by providing amnesty or (partial) tax

⁵⁵⁹ Greek was used to a lesser degree in the villages, certainly in the Theban region, where the majority of the Coptic protection letters were found. Some Coptic protection letters contain a Greek formulaic elements, such as the date, signature of the protectors, or scribal signature, e.g. OTorino S. 5911 (unedited), *P. Köln ägypt.* II 25, *SB Kopt.* II 914, *SB Kopt.* III 1368, *SB Kopt.* V 2246, 2293, 2294.

exemption. This amnesty might include the freedom to leave again in case the protectee could not reach an agreement, but providing or protecting this freedom of movement was not the core function of the protection letters. Rather they were intent on solving problems within the village, or monastery.

4.2.3.6 Arabic protection letters?

As I have shown in the previous sections, the Arabic travel permits fulfilled a significantly different function than the Coptic protection letters. However, there are some indications that an Arabic equivalent to the Coptic protection letters existed. In Arabic documents and literature, the travel permits are called *sijill*, while they refer to themselves as *kitāb*, meaning letter or document.⁵⁶⁰ However, two Arabic letters sent to ‘Abd Allāh b. As‘ad, the administrator of a part of the Fayyum, mention an *amān* given to a man named Marcus (*P.MuslimState* 7) and a village head (*māzūt*; *P.MuslimState* 31). The editor interpreted these *amāns* as examples of the Arabic travel permit I have discussed here. In his review of *P.MuslimState* (= Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*), Naïm Vanthieghem has cast doubt over this assumption.⁵⁶¹ He suggests: “Dès lors, il se pourrait que le terme ‘*amān* puisse être employé à dessein dans ces deux textes pour désigner un document qui non seulement donne aux fugitifs le droit de circuler librement, mais leur accorde en sus l’amnistie.”⁵⁶² A document

⁵⁶⁰ For the use of *sijill* in documents to refer to travel permits, see Denoix, “Les notions de « privé » et de « public » dans le monde musulman sunnite médiéval.” Vanthieghem, “Compte rendu Sijpesteijn”, 239.

⁵⁶¹ Vanthieghem, “Compte-rendu Sijpesteijn”, 238-239.

⁵⁶² Vanthieghem, “Compte-rendu Sijpesteijn”, 239. His differing interpretation seems to me to be most convincing for *P.Shaping* 31. In *P.Shaping* 7 it seems, from the word order, that Marcus, who is said to be absent at the moment, had an *amān* and then absconded, and needs to be returned to the sender, district administrator Nājid b. Muslim. This scenario could possibly also fit in the interpretation of Marcus’ *amān* being an Arabic travel permit, as originally proposed in the edition. His permit might have lapsed and he escaped the notice or control of his employer. It is in any case not clear from the phrasing of the text that Marcus had fled already and only then obtained the *amān* in order to travel safely and obtain amnesty. Still, I would agree with Vanthieghem that a different term (*amān*, not *sijill*: Vanthieghem or Sijpesteijn 239) likely denotes a different type of document, and in *P.Shaping* 31 the receiver of the *amān* is explicitly referred to as a fugitive (l. 5), while travel permits were not issued for fugitives, as I have discussed in detail in this section. Moreover, the fact that the two letters were sent by two different senders also excludes an idiosyncratic use of the term *amān* with the meaning of travel permit. *P.Shaping* 31, l. 8, mentions another term for a document or letter that is supposed to give protection to the holder: *hurūf*, lit. letter characters, translated as “papers”, and interpreted as “some kind of documents of the same kind as the *amān*: commentary to l. 7-8.

which combines a permission to travel with a promise of amnesty for someone who is away from home is very much alike the Coptic protection letters. The documents called *amān* in the two letters might be Coptic protection letters, in that case referred to with the term by which they would then be known by the Arabic-speaking representatives of the government who are the sender and receiver of the letters. However, the two *amāns* in question might also be documents written in Arabic with a similar function to the Coptic protection letters, more akin to certain *amāns* known from legal and narrative sources.⁵⁶³ As far as I know, there is no hard evidence favoring either of these hypotheses, and it is difficult to understand from the letters in which context the documents had been issued originally, although in the letters they are discussed by mid- to high-ranking officials of the Arab-Muslim government.

4.3 Private legal issues

The third area or category of protective interventions performed by local authorities is help with private legal issues. While taxation and control of mobility were matters of public law and as such very much connected to the legal aspect of various protection documents I am discussing in this chapter, including the Coptic protection letters, this section will focus in particular on the role these documents played in solving problems related to private conflict resolution (litigation).⁵⁶⁴ Again, I will first examine these issues in the Coptic protection letters (4.3.1), then discuss a mechanism with similar aim but visible in documents produced on a much higher level of the administration (4.3.2), in order to present in 4.3.3 a better understanding of the role and place of the Coptic protection letters regarding these issues.

4.3.1 Private legal issues in the Coptic protection letters

Sections 4.1.1 and 4.2.1 have shown how exactly the Coptic protection letters were embedded in two important and interrelated aspects of the administration of the province of Egypt: taxation and control of mobility. In this section, I examine the function of the Coptic protection letters as a problem-solving instrument in private legal issues, including the role private debt might have played in these documents.⁵⁶⁵ I elaborate on this issue in the first

⁵⁶³ See section 1.1.3.2.2.

⁵⁶⁴ Denoix, “Notions”.

⁵⁶⁵ Bernhard Palme has argued that the Coptic protection letters generally are agreements between a (private) creditor and (private) debtor, rather than documents between representatives of the (fiscal) administration and tax-payers. In other words, he argues that they deal with private debt, not tax debt: Palme, “Asyl”, partially based on Liebesny’s emphasis on the presence of debt in the Coptic protection letters, in Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe”. He observes that the Coptic protection letters are not always related to taxation, citing two examples which indeed are not: *SB Kopt.* V 2228 and

section below. In the following section, I briefly discuss a number of Coptic protection letters which seem to have been especially issued in order to facilitate conflict settlements. There are indications that the conflicts in which Coptic protection letters were used to come to a solution could be related to issues other than financial ones.⁵⁶⁶

4.3.1.1 Private debt in the Coptic protection letters?

I have mentioned in my introduction to this chapter that a number of documents in the corpus are related to financial issues, but do not contain an explicit link to fiscal practice, and as such might be related to private debt.⁵⁶⁷ However, debts between protector and protectee are never mentioned explicitly – as opposed to taxes and tax payments, see section 4.1.1.1 – and while some of the promise clauses could refer to private debt, they are at least ambiguous and can very well apply to fiscal practice too: e.g. “I will not ask of you” (and variants), “I will not prosecute you” (and variants), could be applied to private debt or taxation. Moreover, in section 4.1.1.1 I have discussed in detail the different ways in which Coptic protection letters were tied to the fiscal system. The money owed in such cases, mentioned in e.g. an exception clause, would then be contributions to the fiscal revenue of the village rather than debt payments.

An interesting link between (private) debt and taxation is provided in protection letter for Haraw, *SB Kopt. V 2243*, in which the instruction clause reads: “Come to your house and give a *holokottinos* to Poow, who paid taxes⁵⁶⁸ on your behalf”. Haraw is expected to pay back his debt to Poow, who might have been a village official, or someone not involved in the village administration. The only promise clause in the document is written on the verso, almost as an afterthought after the document had been concluded with a date on the recto.⁵⁶⁹ Moreover, this promise clause is not related to Haraw’s taxes, but rather to his son and his

SB Kopt. V 2233, and that the protectors are not the authorities, as they often have no title, and if they have a title they are “the most humble ones, village headmen etc”. Palme compares the Coptic protection letters with the Greek *logoi asulias*, which were indeed issued by authorities higher than the village heads of the Coptic protection letters (see section 1.1.3.1).

⁵⁶⁶ *O.Crum VC 106, SB Kopt. V 2269, SB Kopt. V 2285.*

⁵⁶⁷ *O.Bachit o. Nr., P. Mon. Epiph. 265, SB Kopt. V 2241, SB Kopt. V 2242, SB Kopt. V 2246, SB Kopt. V 2248, SB Kopt. V 2249, SB Kopt. V 2250 + 2251, SB Kopt. V 2252, SB Kopt. V 2311* all contain exception clauses for payments in money, without other references to fiscal practice. *SB Kopt. V 2273* instructs the protectee to pay 5 *holokottinoi*, and identifies two other parties who will also contribute 5 *holokottinoi* each. Is this an agreement regulating a large private debt?

⁵⁶⁸ Βαστάζω, Preisigke, “Wörterbuch”, 261.

⁵⁶⁹ See also *SB Kopt. V 2224*, discussed in section 3.1.2.1.

affairs: “ⲉⲧⲏ and we will not be able to have the power to hold you because of your son from this year onwards ⲉⲧⲏ”.⁵⁷⁰ While Coptic protection letters could possibly have played a role in solving problems with private debts, tax debts or issues with taxation are much more visible in the documents.⁵⁷¹ Whether aimed at solving private debts or debts to the tax office, the Coptic protection letters involving payments all intended to facilitate the return of someone who owed money, and to ensure at least a partial payment was made.

4.3.1.2 Conflict resolution in the Coptic protection letters

A number of Coptic protection letters were issued explicitly with the goal to facilitate settlements in local conflicts.⁵⁷² *SB Kopt.* V 2269 is related to property (“through buying or selling: ⲉⲗ ⲁⲓ ⲉⲗ ⲧⲓ (l. 9)”, maybe an inheritance (the document mentions a father and a mother).

SB Kopt. V 2285 gives the order or rather permission to a mother (the protectee) to live in her son’s house.⁵⁷³ Like most protection letters, these documents combine the idea of travel with protection at the destination, but contrary to most protection letters some of them often explicitly allow the protectee to leave again – if they should not come to an agreement with the other party or parties (see section 4.2.1.2).⁵⁷⁴ These documents refer to a future conversation or negotiation. E.g. in *SB Kopt.* V 2288, a request to issue a protection letter, from the *lashanes* to a clerical or monastic authority, the protectees are instructed to come and talk to several people in the village, including the senders of the letter, the *lashanes*. This conversation (ⲡⲗⲁⲭⲉ) or negotiation (ⲡⲟⲗⲗⲉ) should take place between either the protectee and the protector, or between the protectee and a third party. In that case, the

⁵⁷⁰ + ⲁⲅⲱ ⲉⲛⲉⲛ|ⲉⲱⲉⲙⲉⲟⲙ ⲛⲁ|ⲙⲁⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ | ⲉⲗ ⲛⲉⲕⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲅⲓⲛ | ⲛ ⲧⲣⲟⲙⲛⲉ ⲧⲁⲓ | ⲉⲃⲟⲗ +. The mention of the year does seem to tie the document to fiscal practice, see section 4.1.1.1.3.

⁵⁷¹ The difference between a tax debt and a private debt between a village headman and villager/taxpayer, when the village headmen are personally responsible for the tax collection, might not have been all that clear-cut.

⁵⁷² This particular function is most visible in these protection letters: *O.GurnaGorecki* 70, *P. KölnÄgypt.* II 25, *SB Kopt.* II 914, *SB Kopt.* III 1365, *SB Kopt.* V 2271, *SB Kopt.* V 2272, *SB Kopt.* V 2274, *SB Kopt.* V 2302, *SB Kopt.* V 2310, P.Katoennatie 685/1 (unedited). In Till, “Koptische Schutzbriefe”, Till discussed 5 documents under the heading “Einladungen zu Verhandlungen”. On Till’s categorization, see section 2.1.2.

⁵⁷³ *O.CrumVC* 106 might be related to a litigation case, but is very fragmentary.

⁵⁷⁴ E.g. *SB Kopt.* III 1365, *SB Kopt.* V 2271, *SB Kopt.* V 2274, *SB Kopt.* V 2302. Not always, in some cases the protectee is asked to come home and is allowed to stay in his home whether he agrees with the protector or not: e.g. *O.GurnaGorecki* 70: Either you agree with my way of discussing with you or not, you will go to your place freely.

protector intervenes as a kind of mediator, a facilitator for the resolution of the conflict.⁵⁷⁵ The Coptic protection letters were instruments which could be used to solve disputes between private persons. However, such private disputes between persons were not always solved locally. The local, non-Muslim population had access to Islamic legal institutions in the province and could turn to the governor to seek redress, by sending a petition.

4.3.2 Private legal issues: Petitions to the governor

In this section, I discuss the governor Qurra's responses to petitions presented to him by private persons from the district of Aphrodito. I discuss these because they show how conflicts between private persons in the countryside were resolved when they went through official legal channels, rather than arbitration and mediation in the villages as we see in the Coptic protection letters. Moreover, they show a different aspect of the relationship between village headmen and villagers: in two cases, the petitioners were seeking protection against abuse by their village headman.⁵⁷⁶

The Umayyad governor Qurra b. Sharik received petitions from private persons from the district of Aphrodito, and delegated in his responses the eventual resolution of the dispute to the district administrator, Basilios.⁵⁷⁷ The governor's letters to Basilios explain the procedure to be followed by Basilios and the conflicting parties, and contain some information about the nature of the case. Basilios is told to confront the parties with each other, and find out whether the petitioner was telling the truth. Qurra's responses also include an instruction of protection: to make sure that no wrong is done to the petitioner, unless he is in the wrong.⁵⁷⁸ The complaints all involve sums of money, of 10 dinars or more, which should be in the hands of the petitioner, but for different reasons are held by the accused party.⁵⁷⁹ Qurra's responses do not allow us to gauge the social status of the

⁵⁷⁵ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2302. *SB Kopt.* V 2310: letter to mediator about protector wanting to talk to protectee and being willing to write him a(nother) logos.

⁵⁷⁶ See also 4.1.1.2.

⁵⁷⁷ *P.BeckerPAF* 1, *P.Cair.Arab.* III 154, *P.Cair.Arab.* III 155, *P.Heid.Arab.* I 10, *P.Qurra* 3, *P.BeckerPAF* 2, *P.Heid. Arab.* I 11. Mathieu Tillier reconstructed the procedures involving these petitions: Tillier, *L'Invention*, Tillier, "Pagarque".

⁵⁷⁸ E.g. *P.Cair.Arab.* III 154, l. 16. In *P.BeckerPAF* 1 and 2, 9-11, Qurra tells Basilios not to act violently against the petitioner.

⁵⁷⁹ *P.BeckerPAF* 1 (Description of case: about debt); *P.Cair.Arab.* III 154 (someone called mark is asking 23 dinar from a peasant who took it from another peasant who died);

petitioners, as they are named by name only.⁵⁸⁰ The accused party, on the other hand, is often designated with the label of “peasant”. The responses discussed so far do not contain information about the relationship between the parties.

However, two responses deal with a complaint which was lodged against the petitioner’s local headman. *P.Heid.Arab. I 11* is Qurra's reaction to a petition by a petitioner who complained to Qurra about a headman of his village, and maintained that this headman violently took a certain amount of dinars from him. A similar case is presented in Qurra’s response to the petition of David, who complained that the *māzūt* (village head) of his village, using violence, stole some possessions of the petitioner and put them in his own house.⁵⁸¹ What happened afterwards? In these cases, Basilios is ordered to look into the case, and again one of the steps in this inquiry was to confront both parties.⁵⁸² In his reaction to David’s petition, Qurra warns Basilios to be strict about keeping the headmen away from the houses of the locals. This extra comment is important, as his other reactions to petitions are more standardized in terms of the expressions used. Assuming Basilios obeyed Qurra’s orders, we do not know, , what the results of Basilios’ inquiries and the confrontations were, and how the village officials reacted to villagers complaining about them.

These responses show how conflicts regarding debts and thefts, could be brought before the highest authorities and go through a legal procedure organized by the provincial administration, in a period – the early eighth century – in which Coptic protection letters were also used in mechanisms to settle private conflicts.⁵⁸³ The amounts of money, much higher than what is usually mentioned in the protection letters, might have something to do with the petitioner’s choices to bring their complaint to higher authorities.⁵⁸⁴ Moreover, as

P.Cair.Arab. III 155 (a peasant owes the petitioner 11 dinars); *P.Heid.Arab.* I 10 (to the pagarch of Upper-Ushmūn) (theft of 18 dinars); *P.Qurra* 3 (Arabic name? about farmers denying him something over 10 dinars, if he is not right, write to me.)

⁵⁸⁰ The relatively high sums of money suggest that they were at least not the poorest of the poor.

⁵⁸¹ *P.BeckerPAF2*.

⁵⁸² Sijpesteijn, “Policing”, 155-6; The unpublished document AP 1943 in the papyrus collection of the Austrian National Library is a similar response to a petition from a certain Yuḥannis b. Sanūd, and will be published in Sijpesteijn, “Righting”.

⁵⁸³ More examples in Tillier, *L’Invention*. There are no protection letters in the Basilios archive. See also Wilfong, “Women”.

⁵⁸⁴ The exception is *SB Kopt.* V 2273, in which a priest is either asked or is asking someone else to give 5 *holokottinoi*, while two other parties, a man and a group of men, will also contribute 5 *holokottinoi* each. This large a sum of money is unique in the Coptic protection letters, and the

I discuss in the next section, the goals of Coptic protection letters and the petition mechanism seem to be different.

4.3.3 Problem-solving rather than crime and punishment

The Coptic protection letters do not promise amnesty to protectees because they are innocent. In the letters with requests for protection letters, or in any other Coptic protection letter, there are no appeals or claims of innocence. The exiled monk who wanted to return to his monastery uses the protection letter mechanism to negotiate the conditions of his return, but freely – and seemingly contritely – admits to his guilt.⁵⁸⁵ The protection letters often offer amnesty for actions which were punishable, such as tax evasion (section 4.1.1). Moreover, through a Coptic protection letter, the protectee was protected during settlements or negotiations, regardless of the outcome (section 4.3.1). This is very different from the procedure outlined in Qurra's responses to the petitions discussed section 4.3.2: Basilios is told to hear both parties, which is similar, but in this procedure there does not seem to have been room for a non-agreement: either the petitioner speaks the truth, or the accused. While this procedure was meant to judge (and presumably punish), the protection letter mechanism did not involve either.

The fourth and last type of problem which local elites aimed to solve through their protective interventions in society is the release of prisoners, or men who were detained to be sent away to carry out requisitioned labor. This topic is a bit different than the other three, since such problems were not usually solved by Coptic protection letters. However, these mechanisms are akin to the Coptic protection letters mechanism because they allow, through interventions made by local elites acting as intermediaries, and documents issued by local elites, for someone who is stuck in an unfavorable position (i.e. imprisonment or detainment) to literally get out of that position and take up their life in the village, often under certain conditions.

4.4 Release of prisoners

4.4.1 Release of arrestees: requests, orders, guarantees

Two mechanisms through which local elites could effect the release of arrestees or prisoners are sending request letters and standing guarantor for a released prisoner. As in the case of

situation behind the document is unclear, whether it concerns a sizeable debt, to which several parties contribute, or monetary contributions with a different goal.

⁵⁸⁵ *SB Kopt.* V 2300.

the petitions sent to the governor, these mechanisms show a different aspect of the administrative and social roles of the village headmen, who were the typical protectors of the Coptic protection letters. Village headmen could be put under pressure by local pagarchical officials to release certain individuals who had been detained because of a debt or because they were needed for requisitioned labor.

Local elites were able to effect the release of people who had been seized in order to fulfil labor requisitions, or who were imprisoned, because of a debt or as captured fugitives.⁵⁸⁶ One way in which local elites could effect the release of arrestees or prisoners was to send a request letter to the right official. E.g. one local dignitary and land owner put in a request, in Greek, with an administrative official in his pagarchy about an employee (lit. “man”) of the addressee’s winemaker: this employee had been arrested.⁵⁸⁷ The sender asks that the addressee, the official, informs with higher authorities (*chartoularios* and pagarch) to find out if this arrest was their intention, and to ask them to release the winemaker’s man. If the addressee cannot do so, he should write back to the sender, upon which the sender will ask higher officials, e.g. the pagarch himself to help him.⁵⁸⁸ That such interventions by local authorities were successful at least in some cases is shown by the Greek orders to release prisoners sent by pagarchs or officials at the pagarch’s office, to relevant local officials.⁵⁸⁹ These local officials then had to make sure that the village heads of certain villages obeyed the order. From these orders we understand that the village authorities, while responsible for collecting laborers for the labor requisitions, were also put under pressure through orders by officials at the level of the pagarchy, to exempt certain individuals, or generally not to requisition any material or labor from the estates of important people in the pagarchy.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁶ On debt prisoners, see Sijpesteijn, “Policing”; Tillier and Vanthieghem, “Régistre”. For imprisonment of fugitives, see e.g. *CPR* XXII 35; Morelli, “Prigioni”.

⁵⁸⁷ *CPR* XXX 17. See also the Coptic request letter from Bawit, *P.KölnÄgypt* II 43 (VII-VIII) in which the sender asks the abbot of the monastery to pay his tax debt, in order to get out of detainment and return to work (on land belonging to the monastery).

⁵⁸⁸ *CPR* XXX 23 seems to be a scribal exercise on this topic.

⁵⁸⁹ *CPR* XXX 24 Introd., *P.Sijp.* 24 Introd. A pagarch who wanted to effectuate the release of a prisoner in another pagarchy, could use his influence as a powerful individual and request the release of the prisoner, but not order: see Morelli’s comments on *CPR* XXV 32 in *CPR* XXX 24 Introd. It is difficult to say if the letter would have been less effective than an “official” order.

⁵⁹⁰ *CPR* XXX 19 is a list, summarizing such cases and naming the relevant actors: the arrestee, the person intervening for the arrestee, and the arresting village officials (mentioned only with the name of their village, “those from X”: *CPR* XXX 19 Introd. The request letters and orders are products of

The second mechanism I want to discuss are guarantees. In order to release a person from prison, a guarantee could be asked in order to lessen the chances that the prisoner would flee. A third party would pledge their possessions and guarantee that they would produce the released prisoner whenever asked by the relevant authorities.⁵⁹¹ This process is described in *CPR XXX 29*: “He (i.e. the pagarch) has ordered that you take the guarantees of the workmen who had fled and the arrested workmen, and release them until he will ask for them”.⁵⁹² Guarantors could effect the release of a debt prisoner, who might have to work off his debt with the guarantor afterwards.⁵⁹³ Several Coptic and Coptic-Greek guarantees for released fugitives have been found.⁵⁹⁴ Similarly to the Coptic protection letters, guarantees were a type of legal document, but when they concern fugitives, they are embedded in the administration of the province.⁵⁹⁵ A number of such guarantees are among the papers of Basilios, the pagarch of Aphrodito, although they were formally addressed to the governor and the fisc, and some guarantees stipulate that the governor would set the fine in case of a breach of the guarantee.⁵⁹⁶ Guarantors often seem to have been of a similar administrative and social positions as the protectors of the Coptic protection letters, i.e. powerful figures in the villagers.⁵⁹⁷ Thus we see such village authorities put under pressure by the government in its efforts to control fugitivism and the supply of labor, but they could also be put under pressure by pagarchical elites who were protecting their own dependents and their own interests in keeping their labor force. Labor is an important link between

a powerful patronage network that could go against matters of the state in the first years after the conquest..

⁵⁹¹ Sijpesteijn, “Policing”, 564.

⁵⁹² *CPR XXX 29*, ll. 6-8 (my translation).

⁵⁹³ Tillier and Vanthieghem, “Régistre”.

⁵⁹⁴ The main study of these documents is Till, “Koptischen Bürgschaftsurkunden”.

⁵⁹⁵ The same goes for the guarantees for tax payments which were part of the application to obtain a travel permit, and for the guarantees about requisitioned workers, in which guarantors pledged for the presence of the workers (and their subsistence).

⁵⁹⁶ E.g. *P.Lond.* IV 1521, in which the guarantors, among whom at least one *lashane*, pledge all their possessions. They are supposed to guard and “relieve the wants” of a number of fugitives who had been captured by government officials, and give them over to the government when asked to do so.

⁵⁹⁷ Title of *lashane* accompanies guarantors in *P.Lond.* IV 1521, 1524, and 1528. In the last example the guarantor references carelessness with fugitives in the past, and promises to not let any escape. The list of requisitioned labourers and their guarantors *CPR XXII 54* shows that women could take the role of guarantor in such documents.

guarantees for released prisoners and Coptic protection letters, which I will discuss in the next section.

4.4.2 Release of prisoners: Guarantees and Coptic protection letters

Why were arrestees and prisoners released? The releases effectuated by request letters and orders discussed above show that this had often to do with labor: the arrestees or prisoners were released so that they could do their work.⁵⁹⁸ This is phrased literally in a Coptic guarantee document issued most probably at the monastery of Bawit.⁵⁹⁹ A man named Kolthe was being held by the brothers of the capitation tax in the monastery of Bawit, until a brother Biktor declared, that he would stand guarantor for him, and ordered that Kolthe should be released so that he could “go and do his work.”⁶⁰⁰ That this phrasing is so reminiscent of some of the instruction clauses: “Come and do your work”, is an indication of their similar functions.⁶⁰¹ Similarly to the Coptic protection letters, guarantees such as this acted as problem-solving instruments, by which local authorities helped release someone out of a situation in which they are of no use to the village, or the monastic estate. Similarly, but perhaps to a greater degree for the guarantees, both document types tied the protector and protectee together in a relationship of dependency.⁶⁰² The guarantees from the papers of pagarch Basilios emphasize the ties between the local authorities and the government who is the formal addressee of the documents, while the Coptic protection letters – similarly again to the Bawit guarantee – are rather expressions of more autonomous problem-solving in the villages and monasteries, often still within the framework of administration and governmental demands. The Coptic protection letters, similarly to the guarantee mechanism, and contrary to the petition mechanism discussed in section 4.3.2, are much more involved with problem-solving, rather than with crime and punishment.

⁵⁹⁸ This loss of labour is used as an argument once in *CPR XXX 18* explicitly, and probably also with the same idea in *CPR XXX 25*.

⁵⁹⁹ *P.Sorb.Copt.* 8.

⁶⁰⁰ Ll. 4-5: ⲛⲓⲃⲟⲩ[ⲕ] ⲛⲁⲛ | ⲛⲃ[ⲉ]ⲓ ⲛⲃⲉⲣ ⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲛ.

⁶⁰¹ Coptic protection letters with instruction clauses with “do your work” and variants: *O.DanKopt.* 36, *O.Phoibammon 4*, *O.Saint-Marc 322* (uncertain), *SB Kopt.* V 2224, *SB Kopt.* V 2240. See also the protection letters which functioned as permissions to work with a camel: *SB Kopt.* II 915, *SB Kopt.* V 2279, and *O.CrumVC 64*, and as permissions to till a plot of land: *SB Kopt.* V 2277 and 2278.

⁶⁰² See section 5.4.

This chapter has discussed the various problems which Coptic protection letter mechanism, and related mechanisms, aimed to solve in the village context. Taxation, travel and fugitivism, and litigation, are the three main areas in which Coptic protection letters solved problems. I also discussed a fourth issue, i.e. the release of prisoners or requisitioned laborers, because I believe it is similar in many ways to the general problem a person in need of a protection letter faced: being, or being under threat of being, stranded or stuck in a position which does not permit taking up normal life at home, and which often involves a (tax or private) debt. My discussions have shown in detail how exactly the Coptic protection letters and the other mechanisms were connected to the various issues, and how they aimed at solving the specific problems at hand. Moreover, the discussions have shown how the Coptic protection letters were linked to these other mechanisms and structures which existed in society. I have made extensive comparisons between these various protection mechanisms, in order to elucidate the role of the Coptic protection mechanism within this system of protection.

Chapter 5: The Integrated System: From Fustat to Djeme – and back

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Structure and arguments of the chapter

In the previous chapter, I have discussed four areas of life, i.e. taxation, travel, litigation, and the release of prisoners, in which the local village and monastic or clerical elites of Early Islamic Egypt made protective interventions in their communities through Coptic protection letters, as well as how the Coptic protection letters were related to and functioned differently than other mechanisms of protection which were in use in the province of Egypt in the seventh and eighth century (Chapter 4). Building on the analyses in the previous chapters, where the emphasis lay on the role of the language of the protection letters, how they were produced and circulated in village and monastic contexts, and which problems they aimed to solve in those contexts, this chapter will focus on the main agents of protection in the Egyptian countryside, the local elites, and their relationships with the local population on the one hand and the provincial government and its representatives on the other.

This chapter will discuss the participation of the local elites in the administration of the province and their position between the government in Fustat and the local population, through the lens of their documentary production related to protection mechanisms, including the Coptic protection letters. While it should be noted that relationships of protection could also be forged which omitted the middle man of the local elites, generally they formed an essential intermediary layer between government and local population.⁶⁰³ This chapter argues that the local elites were not simply transmitting orders from the government to the local population, and inversely, that they were not simply following orders, collecting revenue in the villages and sending it to the government, but that they were knowledgeable and active parts of an integrated system of administration and control of the province, and that they made use of their position in that system to their advantage. Throughout the various sections in the chapter, I will show how the local authorities in the countryside of Egypt were not acting in isolation and unaware of procedures involving higher echelons of the administration, nor were they merely executing the orders of the government in Fustat, but rather interacting with the commands. The fiscal process from a single tax-demand note sent by the governor of Egypt to a shipment of collected taxes sent

⁶⁰³ See section 4.1.2.2.

back up the Nile to the governor was not necessarily straightforward, as these local elites shaped the policies and demands of the government to further their own interests and to fit the realities of life on the ground.

This chapter has a dual focus. First, the chapter aims to show the integration of village elites in the administration of the imperial province. This includes the use of their main language of (private and administrative) communication, Coptic. The protection letters and the related documents discussed in this chapter provide a point of entry to the functioning of various levels of elites (pagarchical and rural) in Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries. My analyses of the documents stress the interconnectedness of these various groups of elites, and especially the village elites' high level of integration in provincial administrative procedures. The documents studied in the various case studies in this chapter, while they are not all Coptic protection letters, relate to societal and administrative areas in which the protection letters solved problems, in particular travel and fugitives or tax evaders (Chapter 4, section 4.2).

Second, this chapter aims to show how the village elites' participation in the Coptic protection letter mechanism allowed them to shape their position as members of their village communities and as actors in the administration. I examine the local networks of dependency relationships that are underlying the Coptic protection letter mechanism, which lays bare the ambiguity of those relationships. The village elites' participation in the Coptic protection letter mechanism was motivated by their desire to entertain local relationships, build up social capital, and maintain their position in the administration. Supporting the fiscal system through their participation in the Coptic protection letter mechanism, served the village elites' own interests.

The first focus of the chapter is the subject of sections 5.2 and 5.3, and the second focus is the subject of section 5.4. The approach in these sections, as did Chapter 4, will explore different levels in the administrative hierarchy in the province. This interconnected approach to locally circulating documents like the Coptic protection letters allows us to study different scales of networks of authority in the imperial province. Section 5.2 provides a wider perspective of government policies and their reception in the countryside. The section will emphasize, through a case study, the importance of Coptic as an administrative language. Coptic was the language in which the village elites and their mechanisms functioned. It was important, also to higher functionaries, that communications coming from above reached those the messages were intended for in the relevant language, i.e. Coptic.

Section 5.3 focuses even more on the “integrated system” of the chapter title. It discusses the connections of village elites’ mechanisms and documents with higher levels of the administration, through case studies analyzing requests for travel permits, and protection letters which link village inhabitants to higher officials. Section 5.4 then discusses the role of the Coptic protection letter mechanism in the social relationships in the village, the various overlapping interests that could motivate the village elites to participate in the Coptic protection letter mechanism, and how the Coptic protection letter mechanism supported the goals of the provincial administration of Egypt, and ultimately of the Islamic Empire.

5.1.2 Methodological remarks

As I discuss in more detail in section 1.5.5, one of the central arguments of this dissertation and of this Chapter in particular is that the whole administrative apparatus at work in Egypt, with its Arab-Muslim *amīrs* and its “local” *lashanes* was an integrated system in which all different actors actively contributed, consciously or unconsciously, to keep the province of Egypt, and eventually the Islamic Empire running. This approach has been part of the methodology of several recent Empire Studies publications not focusing on Islamic empires. See for example the collection: *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800*. The contributions of this 2016 collection examine the mechanisms by which European state empires and informal empires, self-organized networks, worked together and strengthened the empire. Moving away from a state-centered approach in the analyses to an actor-centered approach entailed, in the words of the editor:⁶⁰⁴

“...a very rewarding process of bringing to the fore the role Europeans and non-Europeans played in the construction of formal and informal empires worldwide. This attempt to treat equally, or as equally as the primary sources have allowed authors, metropolitan and colonial actors as members of the same world, sharing similar interests and engaged in comparable activities, not separately but rather as members of the same networks has helped authors to break with their own historical categories without falling in the trap of either telling a tale of the colonizer or of the colonized.”

One step further goes the idea that the local elites were not only fully integrated in the fabric of empires, but even actively furthered the interest of the empire of which they were a part. This idea is part of the identification of those local elites as “stakeholders in empire”, which

⁶⁰⁴ Antunes and Polónia, *Beyond Empires*, 279.

was proposed in Irigoien and Grafe's 2012 article "A stakeholder empire: the political economy of Spanish imperial rule in America". The authors argued that the local elites of the Spanish colonies had a great economic interest in the empire, as they had the same authority to locally reinvest tax revenue, the collection of which they also partially controlled. They were (economic) stakeholders in the empire.⁶⁰⁵ Examining the local elites of Early Islamic Egypt as "stakeholders", embedded in larger structures of power and dependency such as administration and tax collection, rather than as mere subjects or taxpayers, does justice to the evidence which can be found in the papyrological record. However, this identification of the local elites as stakeholders in empire cannot be transposed directly from the context studied by Grafe and Irigoien to the local elites of Early Islamic Egypt. While the local elites did play an important part in tax assessment and tax collection, they were obliged to forward the amount collected to the central administration, rather than reinvesting it as in the Spanish stakeholder model. If they kept money for themselves this would have been considered a deed of corruption.⁶⁰⁶

The local elites' actions, including the protective interventions studied in this dissertation, did affect the province, by providing the social cohesion in the countryside which allowed fugitives to return home and contribute to the (tax) economy of the province. By implementing the policies of the government the local elites furthered their own interests, and by adapting the policies to the realities on the ground and to their own interests, they furthered the interests of the empire. Inversely, supporting the fiscal efforts of empire, they supported their own position and interests. Other than securing and advancing their social position in their communities, there were financial incentives for the local rural elites to support the fiscal efforts of empire: since the rural elites were responsible for collecting and forwarding taxes of their communities, it is likely that they would have had to make up the difference themselves if tax-payments were lacking because tax-payers were not in the village to pay their taxes. I will elaborate on these intertwined interests of empire and local elites in section 5.4.

⁶⁰⁵ Grafe and Irigoien, "Stakeholder Empire". The theory is also discussed in Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, 13.

⁶⁰⁶ See also the warnings in the tax-demands not to pay more than owed to the tax collector discussed in 4.1.2.2. From the ninth century onwards, tax farmers committed to maintaining the land under their control and its infrastructure, as well as paying the taxes.

Since this chapter is partially built on documents that fall beyond the central corpus of Coptic protection letters, I wish to comment on a point of methodology. The point of view of the local elites, the bottom-up perspective, is well represented in the documentary sources, the papyri and ostraca. However, in its focus on the transmission of governmental orders and policies, this chapter will actually adopt a predominantly top-down perspective. This top-down perspective is inherent to many of the sources used in this chapter. An important type of documentary source for the issues discussed in this chapter is administrative correspondence, in Coptic, Greek and Arabic, generated at various levels of the administrative hierarchy. The extant administrative letters show us mostly top-down communication, from higher levels of the hierarchy down the administrative chain. Most of these are sent one level down the administrative ladder, and only one person is explicitly mentioned as the recipient, although other people were often eventually involved in the execution of the orders in the letter, e.g. a governor writes to a pagarch about collecting and dispatching the taxes, mechanisms which would eventually have involved many people who were subordinate to the pagarch. However, in a few instances this relationship is more complicated, and the sender's words reach further down the ladder, or many different people are addressed by the sender's message, more or less in the way that a circular letter might work. I will discuss such more complicated cases in section 5.2.

Thus, the majority of our evidence is written from this top-down perspective, albeit at many different levels of the administrative ladder. However, there are also documents which reflect bottom-up communication: a request from village officials in which they ask the district administrator to order that a travel permit be issued for three monks (section 5.3.1), guarantee documents addressed by village elite members to the district administrators or addressed by monks to their head of the monastery.⁶⁰⁷ There is also indirect evidence of such bottom-up lines of administrative communication. We know that individual locals could petition the governor, because we have Qurra b. Shariks decisions on what to do with the petitions, although we do not have the original petitions themselves.⁶⁰⁸ The papyrological record also contains horizontal communications, where officials of similar level transmit, certain orders and ask requests and favors from each other. This is especially visible in the archive of Flavius Papas, the pagarch of Edfu in the second

⁶⁰⁷ Section 4.2.

⁶⁰⁸ Discussed in section 4.3.2.

half of the seventh century, and in Basilios' archive which both contain several epistles exchanged between pagarchs.

Each of these documents played its part in the administration of the Egyptian province, be it at Fustat, in a district capital such as Hermopolis/Ashmun, or in larger and smaller villages in the countryside. These documents were the instruments by which the people issuing, requesting, receiving them negotiated their place in the administration and society of the province, and ultimately, the empire. Because of the particular focus of this dissertation, I will focus on documents related to problems solved by Coptic protection letters discussed in Chapter 4, but the Coptic protection letters themselves are also part of the analyses. They feature in particular as instruments by which the local elites adapted governmental policies to the realities of life in their communities. Their production and circulation was geographically limited, but, through their connections to documents, individuals, and offices from other levels of the administrative hierarchy, they are testimonies of the reach of the government in the countryside and the negotiation of its orders and policies by the local elites (5.4). Coptic protection letters take pride of place also in section 5.3.2, which pays special attention to those protection letters in which officials on an administrative level higher than the village are mentioned. These protection letters are examples of how the village elites' documents and mechanisms could be connected to the documents and mechanisms of higher levels of the administration.

Now that I have introduced the various arguments of this chapter, as well as the type of documents which are discussed, in the next section I will focus on the transmission and reception of communications from the central government, and the translation mechanisms which allowed the multilingual administration of Early Islamic Egypt to function efficiently.

5.2 Translating orders from above

5.2.1 Orders arriving at the local elites

In order to control the province, not only a certain amount of force – or the threat of such force – but also effective communication was important.⁶⁰⁹ How did the local weavers, farmers, monks, fishermen etc., know what the governor wanted from them and decided for them? The government had to ensure that the locals knew who was ruling the province, and what was expected of them. This need for efficient communication was also felt at the highest levels of the empire: the literary sources mention and cite numerous letters sent by

⁶⁰⁹ Delattre, Legendre, and Sijpesteijn, *Authority*.

the caliph to the local governors of the provinces of his empire, detailing his demands and scolding his governors for not meeting them.⁶¹⁰ The thousands of papyri which have been found in Egypt that can be dated to the seventh century and beyond, contain a large amount of administrative communication, either between officials of different or similar rank, or between officials and (members of) the local population.

The main instrument by which we see the Arab-Muslim government transmitting their policies and demands to the province of Egypt is sending letters with instructions and orders down the administrative chain. The dozens of Greek and Arabic letters issued between 709-710 by governor Qurra b. Sharik to Basilios, pagarch/district administrator of Afrodito/Ishqaw, are well known.⁶¹¹ Letters which contain orders for delivering certain goods could be accompanied by a list (γνώσις, *gnōsis*), written in a different style of handwriting underneath the closing of the letter, and detailing the separate categories and the amounts requested.⁶¹²

The letters were, however, often accompanied or paralleled by officers sent from the central chancery to execute or supervise the execution of policies announced in the letters. The presence of this person is several times mentioned in the letters as a mechanism of control: not only will this deliverer of the letter presumably bring back Basilios' written answer to the governor, Qurra writes in his letters to Basilios that "his man" will not leave until Basilios complies with the instructions of the governor and gives the man whatever he is ordered in the letter to send to the governor.⁶¹³ Other than messengers the central government could also send out agents with a specific task to all corners of the Egyptian countryside, as a way of communicating and carrying out governmental policies. E.g., Qurra wrote in several letters that he sent agents to search and arrest fugitives.⁶¹⁴ In *P.Apoll.* 9, a

⁶¹⁰ Cobb, "White Banners" examines such dynamics for Abbasid Syria..

⁶¹¹ For a detailed overview of all documents in the archive, see Richter, "Language Choice". A general introduction: *P.Lond.* IV.

⁶¹² E.g. *P.Laur.* IV 192 (Greek). An Arabic example, from a different administrative dossier, of such an administrative letter with an added list is *P.MuslimState* 23, which gives instructions on the delivery of wheat for the tax collection.

⁶¹³ *P.Lond.Copt.* IV 1343, ll. 9-11: ἐπετ[ρ]έψ[αμ]ε(ν) | γὰρ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ ἡμῶν μὴ ἀποκινηθῆναι ἐκ σοῦ/ ἄχρις ἂν ἐκπέμψῃς | ἐντελῶς τὴν ὑστέραν ψυχὴν τῶν εὐρισκομένων ἐν τῇ διοικ(ήσει) σοῦ/[υ]/: since we instructed our messenger not to move away from you until you send out the very last soul of those found in your district".

A messenger with this function is also mentioned in *P.Ryl.Copt.* 277 (section 5.2.2).

⁶¹⁴ E.g. *P.Lond.* IV 1518.

complex letter dealing with fugitive caulkers (see below), this same tactic is mentioned. The postal service controlled by the caliph, the *barīd*, was also active in Egypt and in the papyri members of the βερεδάριοι bearing Arab names bringing letters back and forth are mentioned on several occasions.⁶¹⁵

The demands and instructions of higher authorities were passed down to lower ranking officials again by letter, sometimes indicating the origin of the instructions: a letter issued in 643 from the pagarch Athanasios to his underling Senouthios mentions that “the emir decided that...”. Athanasios’ instructions to Senouthios – he is told to organize police forces to prevent people from travelling – follow from the decision and instructions which the *amīr*, Athanasios’ superior, had previously given him – presumably also by letter.⁶¹⁶ It has been noted on several occasions that many of these top-down administrative letters contain not also orders and demands, but also justifications for those, the reason why certain instructions were given or certain goods were requested.⁶¹⁷ This practice shows a deliberate inclusion of the administrative apparatus at lower levels by officials of the central government. Letters sent between administrators from among the local elites can also transmit governmental policies and orders, as e.g. in *P.Apoll. 27*, in which one administrator, a *notarios*, asks the pagarch Flavius Papas for help, as he received a letter with orders from the *amīr*, which he cites – in indirect speech – extensively in his own letter to his colleague.⁶¹⁸

An interesting case is *P.Apoll. 9*, a layered letter in which the voices of different officials are represented.⁶¹⁹ Federico Morelli has shown how the messages of different officials are embedded in the text. This letter contains a message, named *sigillion*, from an *amīr* to a *dux* named Iordanes regarding caulkers who had fled. They need to be found and whoever hides them will have to pay an exorbitant fee. This sigillion from the *amīr* is then distributed by the *dux* to all the pagarchs in the region. The document which we have was found in the archive of one of those pagarchs, Flavius Papas.

⁶¹⁵ On the *barīd* of the Early Islamic period, and the various responsibilities of its employees, see Silverstein, *Postal*, 53-89. Foss, “Egypt”, 13-14. There are 28 references to *beredarii* in the Greek papyri from Early Islamic Egypt, the large majority belongs to the Basilios archive.

⁶¹⁶ *CPR XXII* 1.

⁶¹⁷ Morelli *CPR XXX*, Introd. On this feature in the Qurra’s letters to Basilios, see Papaconstantinou, “Rhetoric”.

⁶¹⁸ For more examples of local administrators asking each other for help regarding the orders see Foss, “Egypt”, esp. 10-11.

⁶¹⁹ Morelli, “Duchi”.

Aside from letters with orders and instructions addressed to a person within the administration, the government of the province also issued communications with tax demands for an entire village, the tax-demand notes being sent to the district administrator. There are examples of those in the early eighth century documentation related to governor Qurra b. Sharik and district administrator Basilios. The governor demands a certain amount of tax from a village, although the actual document was clearly sent to the office of the district administrator, as it was found among his papers. In section 5.2.2 below, I will discuss how these demands eventually reached the individual tax payer.

In most of this communication, the issuing officials seemed mainly concerned with getting their message to the relevant recipient, which was another official. However, there are some indications that government officials also thought of how to bring their message to the ears and heads of the local population, the taxpayers or fugitives about whom they were writing in their letters. In two Greek letters on fugitives, governor Qurra b. Sharik ordered Basilios that he should order local authorities such as village heads and policemen to come and listen to Qurra's instructions as Basilios' reads the letter aloud to them. After the reading, the governor orders, these locals should write a copy of the letter and hang it in their churches, where the message will be read aloud again. E.g. in *P.Lond.* IV 1343, the governor orders:

*Therefore read the present letter to all the people of your district, charging them to write a copy of it to each place and to publish it in their churches, exhorting and urging them to keep unbroken our command and to make known to you all the fugitives they know from the above mentioned administrative district of the Arsinoite, in order that we may not find any ground for proceeding against them whatever, or otherwise their life and property will have to answer for them.*⁶²⁰

Section 5.2.2 below analyses a Coptic document which in my interpretation is likely the product of a similar mechanism of transmission and dissemination of governmental orders and policies concerning fugitives.

The letters discussed and mentioned above were all written in Greek. It is well known that, from their very earliest communications, the Arab-Muslim government used both Arabic and Greek to transmit their demands in Egypt, sometimes using either of these

⁶²⁰ Translation by Bell, "Translations", vol. 1, 275. In *P.Lond.* IV 1384 the governor details the same procedure but specifies the people to whom Basilios should read the letter with "headmen and police", which I think might be also what was meant by "all the people of your district".

languages in a document, sometimes both.⁶²¹ Coptic, which had hitherto not had a role to play as an administrative language, starts to take pride of place in administrative communication on a lower level.⁶²² As such, it played a pivotal part, as I will show, in the transmission of governmental policies to the local population throughout Egypt.

In the Coptic documentation, the Islamic Empire is predominantly represented by the office of the governor of Egypt.⁶²³ Over twenty Coptic documents which explicitly mention the governor have been published until now. The governor in Egypt is called σύμβουλος (*symbolos*) in the Greek as well as in the Coptic documents. The majority of these documents are part of the Basileios archive. These are guarantee declarations by locals, regarding taxes, requisitioned laborers or fugitives, which I have discussed in several sections in Chapter 4. The guarantee declarations were addressed by the local guarantors to the governor (and the tax office), but only in an indirect way, i.e. via the pagarch.⁶²⁴ In those documents, the governor is the representative of the highest authority of the empire in the province.⁶²⁵ Particular, direct orders or decisions of the governor are referred to in a couple of Coptic letters. *P.Ryl.Copt.* 321 is a Coptic letter written to a Muslim official which mentions conflicting orders from the governor and from the letter's addressee, the Muslim official. *P.Bal.* II 187 is a private letter written by a person in the service of the governor. This sender relates how after an application to the governor he had been released from his service. The governor, especially as representative of the empire but also as an individual official, is thus not wholly absent from the Coptic documents. However, from the documents that are published thus far, it seems that Coptic documents were not produced by the office of the governor. Moreover, while the guarantee documents regarding fugitives or requisitioned laborers were formally addressed to the governor (and the tax office), they were actually received and kept at the office of the pagarch, to whom they were also

⁶²¹ *P.GrohmannMuhadara* II p. 12 = PERF 558 (643). Sijpesteijn, "Multilingual Archives".

⁶²² Richter, "Language Choice", Richter, "Unsern Herrn Kurrah"; Papaconstantinou "Speak Arabic"; Clackson, "Coptic or Greek?". I discuss the language distribution of Early Islamic Egypt and especially the importance of Coptic as an administrative language in section 1.2.3.

⁶²³ The caliph, named πρωτοσύμβουλος or ἀμυρολμουμνιν in the Greek documents, is mentioned in Coptic-Greek tax-demand note from the first half of the 8th century *P.Bal.* 130, but in the Greek part of the text and as part of the name of the tax (*dapanè* or expenses tax "for *amiralmoumnin*").

⁶²⁴ E.g. *P.Lond.* IV 1518, *P.Lond.* IV 1519, *P.Lond.* IV 1520, *P.Lond.* IV 1521, *P.Lond.* IV 1523, *P.Lond.* IV 1526.

⁶²⁵ See also *O.Crum VC*49, which is a letter from a Muslim official regarding the post horses "of the governor".

addressed. Coptic documents effectively play a role in the communication and relationship between the government and the local population at the level of the village and pagarchy, but to see how that worked we have to go a step down the administrative structure of Egypt, to the level of the administration of pagarchies (districts), as I will discuss in the next section.

5.2.2 Pagarchy level: The local elites transmitting policies and demands

I discussed above how top-down directed communication arrived in the hands of local district administrators in the form of the governor's or other high officials' letters on administrative matters, but also in the form of tax-demand notes or *entagia* stipulating the taxes expected from a fiscal community.⁶²⁶ However, the tax-demands per individual taxpayer are communicated to those taxpayers in bilingual Coptic-Greek tax demands issued by the local pagarch's office. In fact, among the earliest documents using Coptic to express the relationship or communication between government and subjects after the Islamic conquest are some tax demand notes from Hermopolis. These early documents were issued by the office of the dux Flavius Atias at the end of the seventh century and were written in Greek and Coptic.⁶²⁷ Jenny Cromwell has shown how the two languages are distributed in the *entagia*: Greek is used for the address, the total amount to be paid, and the date. The formulas constituting the largest part of the text, however, are written in Coptic.⁶²⁸ Sebastian Richter describes a similar pattern of language distribution in the guarantee declarations in the Basilios archive. Greek is used in the introductory invocation of the Holy Trinity, but also throughout the documents for very specific parts, namely in the lists of the requisitioned workers and their place of origin, the list of witnesses, the scribal signature and the docket on the verso which identifies the document as a guarantee declaration and repeats the names of the interested parties. The linguistic distribution, Richter argues, is thus mostly functional: even a person who knew Greek but not Coptic, could have extracted the

⁶²⁶ See also Delattre, Pintaudi, and Vanthieghem, "Entagion Bilingue" for such *entagia* issued by governor 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān.

⁶²⁷ Cromwell, "Coptic Texts"; Delattre, "Cinq Entagia".

⁶²⁸ Cromwell, "Coptic Texts". In the Coptic-Arabic *entagion P.Clackson* 45, issued in 753, each language is used to write a complete tax demand note, although neither text is an exact translation of the other: *P.Clackson* 45, p. 103. The Greek comment added at the top of this document presumably indicated that the tax had been paid.

relevant information from the document.⁶²⁹ Thus, the office of the pagarch or dux translated the tax-related communications from the governor to the local authorities, by producing relevant documents, i.e. individual tax demand notes for individuals members of the population), but also by using the relevant language, i.e. Coptic and/or Greek.⁶³⁰ The next section provides a detailed case study which, in my interpretation, exemplifies this mechanism of translation by which the district administrators transmitted the orders and instructions of higher officials down the administrative ladder to the villages.

Case study: Transmitting and translating: P.Ryl.Copt. 277

Besides transmitting orders from above by paraphrasing them in their correspondence with colleagues and subordinate officials, a second way in which local officials, pagarchs and *Ishanes*, likely transmitted the instructions and demands of the government was by literally translating Arabic or Greek letters which they had received from the higher officials into Coptic, in order to communicate and carry out their contents on a village level. *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* is a document, written in Coptic, in which the sender orders the receiver to remove emigrants from other districts living in the receiver's district by sending them to the sender. The receiver is likely a pagarch or at least an important official within the pagarchy, as the sender refers to "your pagarchy" several times.⁶³¹ The sender is someone who has the authority to give the receiver orders such as this. Moreover, he has an agent whom he sent to the recipient and whom he instructed to stay until the recipient sent the people along with the sender's agent. The tone in the document is quite authoritative and even threatening towards the end. It is safe to assume that the sender is a superior of the recipient, someone who has the authority within the administration to write to a pagarch in this way. Both the first editor of this document, Walter Crum, and the specialist of the Greek Qurra letters, Harold Idris Bell, suspected that it was issued by the Umayyad governor of Egypt Qurra b. Sharik, and therefore belonged to the archive of the pagarch Basilios. However, that interpretation can be challenged. We might take into account the chronology of the findings of *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* on the one hand, and the Basilios archive on the other. This document

⁶²⁹ Richter, "Unseren Herrn", 129. In section 5.3.1, I will discuss how *P.CLT3*, a request for a travel permit, presents a similar distribution of Greek and Coptic in the document.

⁶³⁰ These documents are attested in Middle Egypt in Greek and Coptic, and in the Fayum in Greek: Sijpesteijn *Shaping*, 236–237. See also Richter "An unsern Herrn"; Vanthieghem and Delattre, "Ensemble Archivistique", 128–129; Berkes and Younes, "Trilingual Scribe?" show how by the end of the 8th century trilingual individual scribes operated in the Fayyum.

⁶³¹ *P.Ryl.Copt. 277*, ll. 14, 21, 36.

was already published in 1898 by Crum, while the Basilios archive was only brought to light in 1901. It is therefore unlikely that this document was part of it.⁶³² On the other hand, my discussion below will present several similarities in terms of content and style between *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* and letters sent by Qurra b. Sharik to Basilios. However, as I will also show, the apparent similarities to Qurra's letters should not weigh too heavily, as we find similar topics and similar tone in the correspondence issued by other high government officials, as I will discuss below. Since the early nineteenth century, many early Islamic documents from Egypt (and other regions within the empire) have been discovered and published, and it is highly possible that without those newly discovered texts as material for comparison, earlier scholars such as Crum and Bell were influenced by a "Qurra bias".

The subjects and tone in *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* are reminiscent of Qurra's letters to Basilios and other letters from high officials to their subordinates. The main subject of the letter concerns the issue of fugitives, who in this letter are called "strangers" (ϠΜΜΟ, Greek: ξένοι). In Byzantine and Islamic papyri, "strangers" are the immigrants who are considered outsiders from the point of view of the district to which they moved.⁶³³ How to deal with these strangers was indeed a recurrent theme in Qurra's Greek and Arabic letters to Basilios, but in those letters he always calls them "φυγάδες", fugitives.⁶³⁴ The term ξένοι, however, is used in governmental correspondence on fugitives in the Flavius Papas' archive of the second half of the seventh century.⁶³⁵ In this case, the topic or theme of fugitives, immigrants or strangers thus connects this letter to those written by Qurra to Basilios, but the vocabulary used to describe the wandering tax-payers is different. Another example of

⁶³² I thank Naïm Vanthieghem for pointing this out to me. On the other hand, and while I still do not want to defend the idea that the document belongs to the Qurra-Basilios correspondence, I want to point out that if, as I will argue, this document was indeed used in a village rather than kept at the pagarchy administration, it is likely that it would not have been found together with the other documents of the archive. The provenance of the Coptic documents of the Rylands Library in Manchester, where *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* is kept, is mostly unknown, although some documents can be placed in the Hermopolite region and some in Fayyum. *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* is not included in Sebastian Richter's overview of the multilingual contents of this archive: Richter, "Language Choice", nor in Richter, "Unsern Herrn".

⁶³³ Morelli, "P.Brook. 26". See section 4.2.2.

⁶³⁴ *P.Lond. IV 1446*, a fiscal register in the Basilios archive, lists ξένοι settled in a certain district (ll. 28-39).

⁶³⁵ *P.Apoll. 13* (2nd half seventh cent), l. 5, from topoteretes Helladios to pagarch Flavius Papas: τὴν γνῶ]σιν τῶν ξένων τῶν ὄντων εἰς τὴν παγαρχίαν ὑμῶν: (the list) of strangers who are in your pagarchy. Compare *P.Ryl.Copt. 277*, ll. 20-21: ελλαγ νϠΜΜΟ ΝΤΕΙΜΙΝΕ ΕΒΟΥΗΖ ΖΗΤΚΠΑΓΑΡΧ(ΙΑ): "every stranger of this sort, who is dwelling in your pagarchy". See also : *P.Apoll. 9*, l. 4.

the similarities between this letter and the letters from Qurra to Basilios, (section 5.2.1), is the function of the messenger bringing the letter. The mention of the sender’s “man” staying with the recipient until he executes the sender’s order is echoed in *P.Lond.* IV 1343, which deals with the same theme of sending away people from Basilios’ pagarchy who had moved there from another pagarchy.⁶³⁶

The authoritative tone, including threats against the life of the recipient of *P.Ryl.Copt.* 277 are also reminiscent of the impatient and sometimes downright threatening comments which appear sometimes in the administrative correspondence of Qurra and other high officials writing to their subordinates.⁶³⁷ Towards the end of *P.Ryl.Copt.* 277, the sender writes: I. 29-31: ...**ΝΚΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΕΧΘΗΩ ΝΡΗΚΑΤΑ- | ΦΡΟΝΕΙ ΕΒΩΟΟΠ ΖΑΟΥΘΟΡΗΘ** **ΝΒΩΠ ΕΤΥΨΥΧΗ | ΔΝ ΖΟΛΦΘ:** ...you are a man in danger, who is neglectful, who is liable to be ensnared, who does not value his life at all (transl. Crum). We can compare this with examples from Qurra’s letters, e.g. *P.Lond.* IV 1359, l. 20-21: **λοιπὸν ἐὰν ἀγαπᾶς τὴν ψυχὴν σο(υ) μὴ καταφρονήσης | ἐν τούτῳ:** So if you love your life do not be negligent in this matter.⁶³⁸ However, other high officials wrote in a similar tone to their subordinates, e.g. *P.Apoll.* 9/*PSI*XII 1266), l. 3-4: **ἴνα...[κ]αὶ κινδυνεύσατε εἰς τὴν ψυχ[ήν] | ὑμῶν:...**and you risk your life.⁶³⁹ *P.Mich.Copt.* 15 is a short Coptic letter, from a certain Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān to Theodore, from the village of Titkooh in the Hermopolite region, demanding that the recipient pay his taxes himself rather than letting another individual pay for him. After this order, the sender writes: **ΕΚΩΙΝΕ ΝΣΑ ΟΥΟΘΠ̄ | ΕΛΛΑΥ ΖΙΩΩΘ ΩΑΙΤΝΟΟΥ**

⁶³⁶ *P.Ryl.Copt.* 277, 24-26: **ΔΠΑΡΑΓΓΕΛΕ ΝΠΑΡΩΜΕ| ΧΝΝΗΘΑΔΑΤΚ ΕΒΟΛ ΩΔΑΝΤΥΧΙ ΝΕΩΜΜΟ** **ΝΤΕΙΜΙΝΕ | ΝΤΟΤΚ ΝΤΚΤΝΟΥΓΟΥ ΝΑΙ ΝΜΜΑΧ:** “I ordered my man that he will not return from you until he receives the aforesaid strangers from you, and you send them to me with him.” *P.Lond.Copt.* IV 1343, ll. 9-11: **ἐπετ[ρ]έψ[αμ]ε(ν) | γὰρ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ ἡμῶν μὴ ἀποκινήθῃναι ἐκ σοῦδ/ ἄχρις ἂν ἐκπέμψῃς | ἐντελῶς τὴν ὑστέραν ψυχὴν τῶν εὐρισκομένων ἐν τῇ διοικ(ήσει) σο\[\upsilon]:** “since we instructed our messenger not to move away from you until you send out the very last soul of those found in your district.”

⁶³⁷ Certainly not all administrative top-down correspondence was written in such a style. On the various rhetorical strategies used by Qurra in his letters to Basilios, see Papaconstantinou, “Rhetoric”. On the correspondence in Coptic between Muslims and Egyptians in Early Islamic Egypt, see Cromwell, “Religious Expression”.

⁶³⁸ Transl. by Bell, “Translations”.

⁶³⁹ The undated letter from a certain Abdella...Patrikios *SB* XVI 12575 scolds its receivers about tax arrears and threatens with violence. The letters opens with: I. 1: **σώσατε τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν:** “Save your lives”.

ⲡⲉⲧⲉⲱⲗⲁϥⲉⲛⲧⲓ | ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲁⲛ ⲛⲉⲕⲕⲥⲉ: “If you seek to break anything in it, I will send one who will extract it from your bones”.⁶⁴⁰

The fact that a letter such as *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* was written in Coptic is noteworthy, as it does not fit the patterns of language distribution that have been identified in Early Islamic Egypt, i.e. that communications between the pagarchical elite and higher-ranking officials, the government in Fustat, was conducted in Arabic and Greek, while Coptic was reserved for communications between the pagarchical elites and the villages.⁶⁴¹ As in the example just cited, individuals bearing Arab names did send letters with administrative orders in Coptic to Egyptians recipients.⁶⁴² However, these letters are much shorter letters than *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* and the recipients, as in *P.Mich.Copt. 15* seem to have functioned at a village level. These letters do not contain titles which would allow us to precisely identify the administrative status of the senders or the recipients.⁶⁴³ It is only in very rare cases that in a Coptic letter we can with some degree of certainty identify the recipient as a district administrator and the sender as an official ranking higher than that. One such letter is *P.Ryl.Copt. 277*. One other possible instance is a fragmentary letter from the archive of the Flavius Papas, the pagarch of Edfu in the second half of the seventh century, who received a letter in Coptic with instructions concerning the fleet, from someone who is interpreted by the editor as a Muslim official.⁶⁴⁴ *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* is almost certainly sent to a pagarch – someone in charge of a pagarchy – by someone who outranks the addressee and has the authority to give them orders and threaten them. Palaeographically it is possible to date this letter to the eighth century, and the parallels and similarities in content and style to other administrative letters from the Early Islamic period sent by Arab-Muslim officials (see

⁶⁴⁰ *P.Mich.Copt. 15*, transl. Jennifer Cromwell, “Religious Expression”. On the reading of the name Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, which was not read by the original editor, see Delattre, “Monastère de Baouît,” 47 (cited in Cromwell, “Religious Expression”).

⁶⁴¹ The multilingual administration of Early Islamic Egypt is discussed in 1.2.3..

⁶⁴² Cromwell, “Religious Expression”.

⁶⁴³ *P.Ryl.Copt. 324* concerns a village head embezzling tax money. *P.Ryl.Copt. 346* concerns the fodder to be supplied by a certain village. In *CPR II 237* the recipient is asked to collect and deliver 1/3 *nomisma*, an amount that corresponds to a common capitation-tax instalment.

⁶⁴⁴ This interpretation is based mostly on the letter’s final greeting ⲧⲣⲏⲛⲏⲛⲏ ⲛⲁⲕ “Peace (be) upon you”. Berkes, “1. Letter from a muslim official about requisitions for the fleet”, in Boud’hors et al., “Nouveau Départ”. More examples of Coptic letters in the Papas archive bearing this final greeting are cited as further evidence of Muslim officials writing to the pagarch. Cromwell, “Religious Expressions” states that this formula is also used in letters between Christians. . The letter mentions an *amir*, but he is not the sender of the letter.

above), make it highly likely that the sender in question was such an Arab-Muslim governor or other high official.

I argue that it is probable that this document was not issued directly from the office of governor or other high official who issued it, but that it is rather a translation made at the level of the pagarchy or maybe even at village level, of a Greek or Arabic letter issued from the governor's office in al-Fuṣṭāṭ, or from the office of another high official with similar authority over issues regarding fugitives.⁶⁴⁵ Why would anyone need a Coptic translation of such a letter? As I have shown in section 5.2.1, Qurra explicitly ordered that some of his letters on fugitives in the villages of Basilios' district should be read aloud to all the inhabitants of those villages, so that his message would be heard by all of them. He ordered that to that effect copies of his letter should be made in the pagarch's office. However, in order for the villagers, and probably even village heads and local policemen, of the countryside of Early Islamic Egypt to understand fully any governmental message, this message would have had to be read – and written – in Coptic. By the seventh century, Coptic was the main language in most of the Egyptian countryside for lower level administration and private legal documents, replacing Greek.⁶⁴⁶ It is most likely that *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* is a Coptic translation made for consumption at the village level.

Most probably the translation process itself was done at the office of the respective pagarch who had received the Greek or Arabic letter from a higher office. It was at the office of this kind of district administrator, after all, that Greek-Arabic tax-demands of lump sums were “translated” into Coptic-Greek tax-demands for the individual taxpayer. Moreover, taking an example once again from the archive of the district administrator Basilios, we know that he had both Greek and Arabic scribes in his office. *P.Lond. IV 1434, 229-230*: ...δαπάν[η(ς)] (καὶ) τρ[ο]φ(ῆς) ἀλόγ(ων) Ἀραβικ(οῦ) νοτ(αρίου) | συ(ν)όντ(ος) ἐνδ(όξω) παγάρχ(ω): ...maintenance of an Arab notary belonging to the esteemed/glorious pagarch and the keep of his (sc. that notary's) horses”.⁶⁴⁷ The presence of these Arabic scribes in the pagarch's office meant that Arabic documents were read and produced at the pagarch's office level and sent to Fustat, as Richter argues, but also, I would add, that Greek and Arabic letters and other documents could be translated into Greek/Coptic at the pagarch's

⁶⁴⁵ E.g. the “*amir* (in charge) of the fugitives who dwell abroad, the addressee of *P.Sijp. 25, l. 2*: ἀμῖρ(ᾶ) τῶν ἐπιξενουμ(ένων) φυγάδων”.

⁶⁴⁶ Section 1.2.3.

⁶⁴⁷ Translation in Richter, “Language Choice”, 212.

office level and distributed in the villages. The content of the orders given in *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* definitely fits such a context. The letter concerns people who should have been identified and prepared for sending, and tells the receiver that they should be sent from their villages to the sender of the letter. The message is thus directly relevant to the villages and their inhabitants.

There are also formal aspects of *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* which seem to corroborate this interpretation. The document seems to start with a sort of title or subject line, stating that the document concerns men from different localities in Egypt, but is not followed by an internal address.⁶⁴⁸ Moreover, although there was still space for it, a closing statement at the end of the text is also lacking. This lay-out seems to suggest that the document was not sent as a letter per se. Giving only the content of a letter, cutting out the less relevant opening and closing parts. However, while Coptic letters usually do contain formulas opening and closing the letter, they are not always necessary. In fact, *P.Mich.Copt. 15*, cited above, presents the same lack of internal address and closing. This letter also has authoritative and threatening tone, and contains several orders to the recipient, presented in imperatives. This letter *does*, however, seem to have been sent as a letter itself.⁶⁴⁹ We can thus imagine that *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* was sent as a letter without opening and closing phrases, or as a separate document accompanying another piece of conveyed information and instructions.

Conversely, the lack of reference to the authority of the issuing official, including his titles, in *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* might actually be an argument against an interpretation of this document being read out loud in the villages. It is also possible, then, that *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* functioned as an instructive document containing the relevant information for the village officials who would be responsible for rounding up the fugitives and drawing up the lists requested in the message. Coptic, again, would be the most relevant language for this, and a translation of a Greek or Arabic message an efficient mechanism for transmitting orders. This interpretation is given additional weight by a recent brief discussion of a Coptic administrative letter, from Nājid b. Muslim, district administrator of the Fayyum in the 730s

⁶⁴⁸ Some of the letters from Qurra also have such titles, yet also include the internal address. E.g. *P.Lond. IV 1353*.

⁶⁴⁹ The text is only preceded by the non-linguistic marker double oblique strokes, which signals the beginning of the letter. The external address on the back of the papyrus gives us the names of sender and recipient: Cromwell, “Religious Expression”.

to the headmen of the village of Arsinoe.⁶⁵⁰ Nājīd b. Muslim used Arabic in his administrative letters to his fellow Arab-Muslim administrators.⁶⁵¹ The use of Coptic seems to have been a deliberate choice in order to communicate effectively with the village heads. These language choices point to the integration of the local, village elites in the administration of the province.⁶⁵²

In this section, I have discussed two ways in which the local administrators of Egypt transmitted policies to the local population, including village officials. In both processes, pragmatic concerns were connected to language use, namely Coptic (and Greek) instead of Greek or Arabic, which I will also discuss below in section 5.5.3. Translating tax-demand notes of lump sums to individual tax demands in the language used by the taxpayer does transmit the demands of the government, but they are mediated by the intervention of the local administrator's office, aside from the translation: the provincial government decides that taxes need to be paid, but the district administrator tells the taxpayer exactly how much.⁶⁵³ In other words, demands of the central administration are digested and reformatted by lower administrative offices, requests are divided amongst tax-payers, conveyed to fellow administrators, assigned to specialized agents and the like. In these cases the provincial authorities are present through a cascade of communications from the center outwards, and along the way they were 'translated' into new executive orders. By contrast, some instructions were transmitted directly as exact quotes albeit translated linguistically into Coptic. Such orders of an official of high rank, giving instructions about the potentially delicate social subject of fugitives, threatening the life of the original receiver if he does not do as he is told, brings this high provincial authority very close to the daily lives of the local

⁶⁵⁰ Berkes and Vanthieghem, "Notes", 158-159 identify Nājīd b. Muslim as the sender of this letter (*KSB* II 912) through the reading of the address on the papyrus. Of the content of the letter the original editor could understand only that it was an administrative letter about a money, possibly tax, issue. On the dossier of Nājīd b. Muslim see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*.

⁶⁵¹ Berkes and Vanthieghem, "Notes", 159, note that the Coptic letter in question is Nājīd's only attested Coptic letter.

⁶⁵² Tax-demand notes to individual tax-payers in the Arsinoite (Fayyum) district and the Heracleopolite district were issued by Nājīd b. Muslim in Greek (Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, 124-125). The difference in language choice might be related to the formulaic nature, including a high amount of abbreviations and numbers in dates and amounts, of the tax-demand notes vs a custom letter addressed to the village heads. The original editor of the Coptic letter,

⁶⁵³ The latter part of the translation process could also be made on the level of the village, as Aristophanes wrote *entagia* in Jeme: Cromwell, *Recording*, 179-180; Gonis, "Reconsidering", 198-199.

population - or the village officials, who would be part of the village's elite group. We do not know where exactly in Egypt *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* was produced and circulated, but it seems clear that it was produced in Coptic in order to communicate effectively the orders of a high official in the provincial government, possibly the governor in Fustat. This translation mechanism, paralleled in Nājid b. Muslim's Coptic letter to the village elites of Arsinoe, indicates the integration of these village elites as actors in the administration. Deliberate linguistic effort was made by the offices of higher officials to ensure efficient communication with the village elites, who were taken into account as integral parts of the administrative system.

Section 5.2 has focused on the communication and transmission of policies and orders down the administrative ladder, and the role of language choice in those mechanisms. In the following section 5.3, I discuss through two shorter case studies, the extent to which village elites of Djeme, and the protection documents which they issued, were knowledgeable of and integrated into the administrative processes and customs of higher levels of the administration.

5.3 The integrated system: village elites and their documents and mechanisms in the administration

5.3.1 Case study 1: The involvement of the local elites in travel permit procedures

The first case study examines a request for a travel permit and which was sent by Chael and Johannes, the *dioiketeis* or village administrators of Djeme, to an unnamed *amīr*.⁶⁵⁴ In 728, three monks, named Joseph son of Patzuen, Theodoros son of Athanasios, and Marcus son of Taurinus, from the monastery of Apa Paul next to the town of Jeme wanted to go to the Fayyum, about 600 km North down the Nile, to sell the basketry which they had produced. We know this thanks to the measures taken by the Egyptian government to control people's movements: the monks needed a passport to travel this distance, and their application for the permit has been preserved. The document was written by the well-known scribe

⁶⁵⁴ *P.CLT* 3. Till, "Koptischen Bürgerschaftsurkunden", 184–185, Delattre, "Checkpoints". I also discuss this document in Chapter 4. On the date, see Cromwell, *Recording*, 76–77. Cromwell *passim* on several aspects of the production of the document. As Palombo notes they apparently had to go to the *dioiketeis* of the nearby town instead of their abbot to start this process, in contrast to the monks at the Apa Jeremias monastery in Saqqara, who could ask their superior to ask that a travel permit be issued. Palombo, "Christian Clergy", . The documentation related to travel permits from Apa Jeremias monastery in Saqqara is discussed in Chapter 4.

Aristophanes.⁶⁵⁵ It was kept in the monastery of Saint Paul’s archive and as such probably a copy of the letter sent to the *amīr*.⁶⁵⁶

Till interprets the addressee of the letter as the pagarch, although this title is not explicitly mentioned in the text. Cromwell argues that this *amīr* is likely Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh, pagarch or district administrator of Hermonthis/Armant at the time. In the Coptic letter he is called ΕΥΚΛΕ(Ε)ΣΤΑΤΟΣ ΔΜΙΡΑ (*eukleestatos amira*), which is an honorific and title used for the *amīr* of the pagarchy of Hermonthis/Armant (in which pagarchy Jēme lay) in 750 and for the *amīr*, pagarch, of Latopolis in 724.⁶⁵⁷ This is the only attestation of *dioiketeis* of Jēme writing to an Arab official.⁶⁵⁸

The *dioiketeis* ask that a travel permit (ΟΥΓΙΓΕΛΛΙΝ, l. 5) be issued for the three monks. If we compare the contemporary Arabic travel permits from Egypt and the documentation related to them, to the information given in the request letter, we can see that *P.CLT3* provides all the information needed for the production of such a travel permit.⁶⁵⁹ First, the document mentions that the monks have paid their taxes for the year: ΑΥΘ ΑΥΤΙ ΠΕΤΡΙΧΩΟΥ 2Ν ΝΔΗΜΟCΙΟΝ ΝΙΒ Ι(ν)Δ(ικτίωνος), “Moreover, they have paid what was due of them in the taxes (in money) of the 12th indiction year” (l. 10), and they are described as “free men” (ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΟC ΝΡΩΜΕ ll. 8–9). Having paid your taxes, or having a guarantor for said taxes, was a condition for receiving a travel permit. As discussed in section 4.2.3.1, the actual travel permits contain a standardized amount of information: how many months the permit holder can travel, where they are travelling to, and aside from the names of the permit holders, also a physical description. *P.CLT3* tells us that the monks want to travel for three months, to the Fayyum (which is quite far away, about 600 km North down the Nile), in order to sell their basketry products. Below the Coptic text a summary is added in Greek,

⁶⁵⁵ On the Coptic protection letters written by Aristophanes, see section 3.3.1.2.

⁶⁵⁶ Cromwell, *Recording*, 61.

⁶⁵⁷ Respectively *P.KRU70 + SBI 5591* and *P.KRU50 + SBI 5582*. On the other hand, *P.Sijp. 25* (698 or 713), a Greek letter concerning a travel permit for seven monks, is addressed to an *eukleestatos amiras* responsible for the fugitives of Upper Egypt. Could *P. CLT3* also be addressed to such an *amīr*, responsible for the fugitives of the region? The same question can be asked of the addressee of *CPR IV 19*, recently read as an *amir* ‘Ubayd Allāh (see below).

⁶⁵⁸ Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 180, n. 68. The *dioiketeis*’ position in the administration was immediately under the that of pagarch of Hermonthis and above that of the *lashanes* or village headmen: Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 129-135 and 180-181 specifically on the *dioiketeis* of Jeme. Coptic protection letter *SB Kopt. V 2265* is issued by two *dioiketeis* of Jeme, the office could also be carried out by 1 person.

⁶⁵⁹ See sections 4.2.2.3 and 4.2.3.1.

repeating the timeframe and destination of the proposed travel, as well as the names and physical descriptions of the three monks. These details would all be mentioned in the eventual travel permit, as the extant examples show.

The distribution of the languages in this letter is very similar to that identified in the Coptic-Greek guarantee documents from the Basilios archive in Aphrodito and the Coptic-Greek tax-demand notes from Hermopolis: the more narrative part of the document is written in Coptic, while Greek is used for specific but important information like the address (including names), amount and date in the tax-demand notes, and lists of names and origins of the individuals who are the subject of the guarantee declarations in those documents.⁶⁶⁰ Even if the person responsible for issuing the travel permit did not understand Coptic, the Greek parts in the application letter provided all the information on the applicant monks that were needed for the permit. The scribe Aristophanes writing the request and the two village administrators issuing it, apparently knew exactly which elements of information were needed to write an effective request letter for a travel permit, including the specific details on the proposed travel and on the permit holders which would be “filled out” in the travel permit template. They were well informed about the formal requirements of a travel permit. There is no direct evidence as to where the *dioiketeis*, or the scribe, acquired this knowledge of chancery-issued travel permits. The *dioiketeis* of Djeme were the highest officials in the town and worked directly under the district administrator of Hermonthis. Thus, they could have had access to documents produced at higher levels of the administration. As for the scribe Aristophanes, Jennifer Cromwell has argued that he had received training from outside the village of Djeme, but that it is unclear how and where this happened.⁶⁶¹ In any case, the content and form of the letter show how integrated the knowledge of the *dioiketeis* was in the scribal and administrative practice at the highest levels of the administration.

⁶⁶⁰ Richter, “Unsern Herrn”; Cromwell, “Coptic Texts”. See also above, section 5.3. Cromwell, *Recording*, 175, notes the similar pattern in language distribution between *P.CL73* and *P.Lond. IV 1518*, a guarantee declaration about captured fugitives. The Coptic letter to pagarch Papas about the requisitions for the fleet presents a similar pattern: the narrative part of the letter is written in Coptic, and followed by a summarizing list of items requisitions in Greek. Berkes, “1. Letter from a muslim official about requisitions for the fleet”, in Boud’hors, “Nouveau Départ”.

⁶⁶¹ Cromwell, *Recording*, 177, “There are two options, neither of which is supported by the extant material. Either Aristophanes left the village to receive his technical training (perhaps at Hermonthis, the closest nome capital), or a master scribe was sent to the village to train scribes in this particular style.”

The closest parallel to *P.CLT3* in the papyrological record is *CPR IV 19*, dated to the eighth century, as it is also a request for a travel permit for a third party, consisting of several individuals. The addressee of the document was not deciphered in the ed.pr., but Lajos Berkes has notified me that he reads ΝΑΜΕΛΛ ΟΥΠΕΤΑΛΛΑ on l. 1 of the document, rather than the ΝΑΓΕΛΛ ΕΥΠΕΡ, ΛΑ read by Till.⁶⁶² This would mean that the request for the permit was addressed to “our Lord of all honor [worthy], the *amīr* ‘Ubayd Allāh, who is Lord...”. The identification of the addressee of the letter with an *amīr* would constitute a noteworthy parallel to *P.CLT3* discussed above, in which an anonymous ΔΜΡΑ is the addressee of the request.⁶⁶³ The text of *CPR IV 19* is unfortunately very fragmentary, and there are 5-6 lines in the document where only traces of letters have been read. The following is my attempt of a reconstruction of the situation behind it. The senders of *CPR IV 19* (possibly an Apa Isaak and the others whose names have been lost mentioned on l. 3) seemingly from the district of the city of Akhmim/Panopolis,⁶⁶⁴ ask the *amīr* ‘Ubayd Allāh for a travel permit for several people: we can read the names Daveid, Kostantinos, Askla and Johannes on l. 5. They are then probably referred to with ΝΑΥ (*nau*, “for them”, on l. 6 (see below).

From a comparison of what is extant of the document with *P.CLT3*, I raise a couple of points of similarity and difference. Both request letters were made for a third party. Both were directed at an *amīr*; (probably) by local authorities.⁶⁶⁵ Both requests seem to have been made for several people at once.⁶⁶⁶ However, in *CPR IV 19* their names seem to have been mentioned in the text itself (l. 5), while in *P.CLT3* the applicants’ names, provenance and physical description are included in the Greek summary below the Coptic text, while in the main text in Coptic they are only stylized as “some monks of the (community of the) Jar of Apa Paul on the mount of Djeme”. In his edition of *CPR IV 19*, Till noted that the document had a different style than *P.CLT3*, without going into details. One of these differences is

⁶⁶² Private communication by email.

⁶⁶³ That *P.CLT3* does not contain the name of the *amir* might be a result of the document probably being a copy of the letter sent to the *amir*, for the purposes of the monastery’s record keeping. Cromwell, *Recording*, 181.

⁶⁶⁴ In the lacuna, a more exact location of the senders within the district might have been written: a village or a monastery, as in *CPR IV 20*, l. 2-3.

⁶⁶⁵ It is difficult to say anything about the senders of *CPR IV 19*. If Apa Isaak is indeed one of the senders, he might have been a monastic authority, which would strengthen this document’s similarity to the Coptic letters related to the travel of monks from the Apa Jeremias monastery in Saqqara, see Chapter 4.

⁶⁶⁶ More than one person can appear on a travel permit, see Chapter 4.

how the actual request is made: In *P.CLT* 3 the *dioiketeis* write: ΤΗΠΑΡΑΚΕΛΕΙ ΟΥΝ ΝΤΕΤ[Ν]ΜΝΤΧΟΕΙΣ ΕΤΤΑΙΕΙΗΥ ΕΤΡΕΤΕΤΝΚΕΛΕΥΕ ΝΟΟΥΤΙ ΟΥΣΙΓΕΛΛΙΝ | ΝΑΥ : “Therefore, we request your revered lordship to order that a permit be given to them.” (ll. 5-6). In *CPR* IV 19, the senders also include God in their request: ΤΑΡΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΝ ΤΕΚΜΝΤΜΝΧΟΕΙΣ †ΣΥΚΕΛΙΟΝ ΝΑΥ: “that God and your lordship give them a travel permit” (l. 6).⁶⁶⁷ *CPR* IV 19 calls itself a “guarantee and declaration” on the other side of the document: ΤΕΝΚΥΕ (ἐγγύη) ΑΥΩ \†/ ΤΞΟΜΟΛΟΓΙΑ (ὁμολογία). This document thus acted as a request and at the same time as a guarantee for the applicants’ taxes, which was confirmed by the signing of several witnesses at the bottom of the document.⁶⁶⁸ *P.CLT* 3 does not contain witness signatures, but the senders state that the monks had already paid their taxes for the year and were thus “free men” (see above). However, in the Greek list there is a reference of a guarantee next to at least one of their names.⁶⁶⁹ The fragmentary state of *CPR* IV 19 does not enable us to draw conclusions about the information given in the document related to the proposed travel. If this request letter was indeed sent to the *amīr*, the letter might have contained information similar to what can be read in *P.CLT* 3. There doesn’t seem to have been a Greek γνῶσις or list attached to the text as in *P.CLT* 3. In any case, both documents, show how the local elites, in the case of *P.CLT* 3 the administrators of a village, and in *CPR* IV possibly monastic or clerical elites,⁶⁷⁰ actively contributed to the administration of the control of the countryside by the Arab-Muslim government. In this case it concerned the supervision of movement of Egyptian tax-payers through the distribution of the travel permits necessary at the time for undertaking long-distance travel. What these documents, and especially *P.CLT* 3, show also, is the local elites’ knowledge of the procedures involved in obtaining and honoring requests for travel permits, i.e. the importance of the tax payment or the guarantee of it, as well the formulation of the eventual travel permit itself, and all the

⁶⁶⁷ This combination of God and “your lordship” is repeated on ll. 7 and 8, but nothing else has been read on those lines. Till in ed.pr. notes that this is a common characteristic of request letters in Coptic. On the other hand, this inclusion of God in (public) legal documents is also part of the Coptic documentary tradition: MacCoull, “Coptic Documentary Papyri”. Moreover, the juxtaposition of God and a worldly administrator as the providers of a protection document related to travel, is reminiscent of the role of God in the Coptic protection letters: see Chapter 1.

⁶⁶⁸ See the guarantees for the tax payments of monks from the Apa Jeremias monastery in Saqqara: *CPR* IV 20, 21.

⁶⁶⁹ *P.CLT* 3, l. 12 ὑπὸ ἀγτ(ιφ)ω(νήτου), l. 13 and 14 only have ὑπὸ.

⁶⁷⁰ Apa Isaak might have been a priest, or monastic leader. The names and titles of other senders of the letter have been lost.

bits of information that were needed to compile the permit. They corresponded, as far as we can understand in an effective manner, with the higher officials of the administration, in order to procure travel permits for members of the local population.

The next section will also examine documents showing the involvement of the local elites in the government's control of the countryside in early Islamic Egypt. I will particularly pay attention to the Coptic protection letters which reached outside the village or monastery context: those which mention the involvement of a pagarch or *dux*. I will also discuss two Greek documents issued by the *dux* Flavius Atias that are similar to the Coptic protection letters.

5.3.2 Case study 2: Protection letters beyond the village

As a protection mechanism, the Coptic protection letters mainly operated on a very local level, in the context of villages, monastic centers, and the interaction between them.⁶⁷¹ The individuals issuing the protection letters (protectors), or the intermediaries in the protection letter mechanism, were mostly clerical or monastic authorities and lay village officials, the highest-ranking of which were, respectively, Pesynthios, bishop of Coptos in the early seventh century, and the *dioiketeis* of Djeme who issued *SB Kopt. V 2265* for Johannes, son of Samuel.⁶⁷² However, a small number of Coptic and Greek documents show that the protection letter mechanism could involve officials at higher levels of the administration, namely to the pagarch and *dux*. Three Coptic protection letters who are products of village administration, also seem to refer to a higher official who was involved in the situation at hand. The structure and content of *SB Kopt. V 2248*, a fragmentary ostrakon from Djeme, is fairly standard: it opens with the εἰς πλοῦτος μῆνοῦτε formula, an instruction clause (“Come to your house”), a promise clause (“we will not sue you”) and exception clause (1 *trimession*). However, it also mentions a “lord the *dux*” (ΧΘΕΙC ΠΔΟΥΞ), after the promise and exception clause, at the beginning of l. 6. Unfortunately, the text is too fragmentary to understand the role of the *dux* in the procedure. The name of the protectee is Elias, son of Petros (?), but the name(s) of the protector(s) are lost.

⁶⁷¹ On the production and circulation of the protection letters, and the procedure to obtain the protection letters, see section 3.2.

⁶⁷² See also *SB Kopt. V 2240*, which is fragmentary, but probably issued by Palots, the *dioiketēs* (ll. 1-2).

In *SB Kopt.* V 2309, the respective roles in the protection mechanism of the various actors mentioned in the document are clearer, as the text is complete.⁶⁷³ The text, written on an ostrakon, was issued by Moyses and addressed to Moses. The address is followed by the standard *eis plogos mpnoute ntoutk* (“Here is the promise, by God, for you”) formula, but then the phrasing starts to deviate. Moyses promised “that he will uphold the validity of the *logos* of our lord the pagarch (ll. 3-4).” Similar phrases are found in protection letters in which village heads promise to uphold the *logos* issued by a third party, who is however usually a clerical authority.⁶⁷⁴ Then follow three promise clauses from the point of view of Moyses, and a date. Thus, formally, the text is a protection letter in and of itself, with the *εις παλογος μνουγτε* formula and the promise clauses. Those elements frame the promise to uphold the *logos* of the pagarch. The pagarch had apparently issued a protection letter for Moses, and Moyses now adds his own protection letter for Moses, to confirm not only the protection letter issued by the pagarch, but also to add his own promises. Unfortunately, the document does not preserve the text of the *logos* of the pagarch.

Before discussing the third protection letter mentioning an official ranking higher than the village level, I discuss a Greek letter, *CPR VIII 84*, issued by Flavius Atias the *dux*, which has been identified by Jean Gascou as a protection letter written in Greek.⁶⁷⁵ This document is issued for one person only, a certain Theodore. The document orders Theodore to go with his *logos* (most probably *CPR VIII 84* itself) to the city where he is registered, without fear: “τὸν λόγον ἔχων | εἰ(σ)ελθε εἰς τ(ήν) ἰδίαν σου πόλιν ἀφόβως” (ll. 3-5). An *eis plogos mpnoute* formula is lacking in the text, but the phrasing is still reminiscent of the Coptic protection letters. Thus, ll. 4-5 can be read as an instruction clause, and ll. 6-7 as a promise clause: οὐκ ἀφῶ σε ἀδικηθῆ(ναι) | ἀλλ(ὰ) τὸ δίκαιόν σου ποιῶ σε: “I will not permit that you will be treated unjustly, rather I will treat you justly.” The involvement of God in this promise is mentioned right before the promise clause: θεοῦ κελευόντ(ος): “If God

⁶⁷³ *SB Kopt.* V 2309.

⁶⁷⁴ See Chapter 3.1.2.4.

⁶⁷⁵ Gascou, “[Review of] *CPR VIII*”, 338. Lajos Berkes reads on l. 8]ε μη ἀμφιβ(ά)λ(ης) rather than the φιβ λ() read in the *editio princeps* (private communication by email). This reading further approximates the formulary in *CPR VIII 84* to that of the Coptic protection letters, in which the signature of the protector was often preceded by an assurance clause “so that you do not doubt” (the Coptic equivalent of the proposed Greek reconstruction): *ξε ννεκαμφιαλε* (I drew up this *logos* and I sign it). Atias was active as *dux* of the Thebaid between 697 and 703, or 712: Legendre, “Byzantine nor Islamic?”, 11ff, on the dates and activities of the *duces* of the Thebaid after the conquest until the beginning of the 8th century, when the office seems to have become obsolete.

orders (it)". Their might be a link between the fact that Theodore seems to have been at least registered as an inhabitant of a city and the involvement in his protection letter of an official residing in a city, like the *dux*. Unfortunately the document is not complete, the bottom part is lacking.

The third Coptic protection letter which mentions a lay official on a higher administration level than the village was issued for a group of monks. This is i.e. *O.CrumVC* 9, which mentions a *dux*: [ΚΕΛΕΥ?]ΣΙΣ ΜΠΕΝΧΟΕΙΣ ΠΕΡΦΥΕΣΤΑΤ[ΟC - ?-] | ΝΤΟϠ ΠΕΥΚΛΕ(ΕCΤΑΤΟC) ΝΧΟΕΙC ΝΔΟΥΞ : “(the order of) our lord the most excellent... the most famous lord the *dux*” (ll. 4-5). This document is also interesting because of its possible links with one other Coptic protection letter, *O.CrumVC* 8, and a Greek *sigillion* *SB* III 7240. Both *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9 were written or issued on the same day, Mecheir 30 of the indiction 11, or 24/25 February 698 or 713.⁶⁷⁶ Both documents were issued by the *lashanes* of Djeme, Severus and Johannes, and written by the village scribe Psate, son of Pisrael.⁶⁷⁷ Both protection letters were issued for a group of monks: *O.CrumVC* 9 is addressed to CННУ ТНΡΟΥ, “all the brethren” (l. 2) and *O.CrumVC* 8 ΝΝΕΝCННУ ΕΤΟΥΔΔΒ ΝΘΕΝ[ΕΕ]|ΤΕ ΜΝΝΕΤΩΟΟΠ ΝΜΜΔΥ ΤНΡΟΥ ΚΑΤΑ ΝΕΥΡΑΝ: “to the holy brethren of the monastery, and all those that are with them, according to their names (ll. 3-4)”. Both protection letters are thus addressed to a monastic community as a whole, which is an exceptional occurrence in the corpus. The documents do not mention to which monastery these monks belonged, and the documents could be issued on behalf of two groups of monks, or both documents for the same group. In the following, I examine the possibility that at least one of these documents, and maybe both, were addressed to the monks of the monastery of Apa Paul in the neighborhood of Djeme,⁶⁷⁸ and that they were written around the same time as *SB* III 7240, the *sigillion* by the *dux* Flavius Atias issued for the monks of the monastery of Apa Paul.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁶ On the dating of these two document to either 698 or 713, contrary to Crum’s proposed dates to 698 or 728, see the arguments by Cromwell, “Village Scribe”, 133. If dated to 698, they would be the earliest dated documents for the Djeme village scribe Psate son of Pisrael.

⁶⁷⁷ On Psate’s protection letters, see Chapter 3.

⁶⁷⁸ This is the monastery of the three monks on whose behalf the *dioiketeis* of Jeme would write a request for a travel permit in 728, thirty to fifteen years after *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9 were written. The possibility that the addressees of *O.CrumVC* 8 and *O.CrumVC* 9 are monks of the Apa Paul monastery is also entertained by Cromwell, “Village Scribe”, 133, the scribe of these documents also having written two other documents in which the monastery was a party (*P.CLT* 1 and 5).

⁶⁷⁹ Delattre, “Checkpoints”, 544 on this document and its connection to tax-related unrest in the region. On Flavius Atias, *CPR* VIII 72-84; Cromwell, “Coptic Texts”.

Comparing *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9, it is clear that *O.CrumVC* 9 is more concise in length and phrasing than 8. The text of *O.CrumVC* 9 is more fragmentary than that of 8, but what remains of the text follows the standard content, structure and formulae of a Coptic protection letter more than 8, except for the conspicuous mention of the *dux*, lacking in *O.CrumVC* 8.⁶⁸⁰ *O.CrumVC* 9 opens with the address, followed by the εἰς πλογοῦς μνηοῦτε formula and the instruction clause (“Come and stay in your place”), the mention of (order of) the *dux*, and then the promise clause (“We will not prosecute you (παράγει) for anything...), followed by signatures, the date, the scribal signature, and an oath, which is uncommon but not unique in the corpus, but is also present in *O.CrumVC* 8.⁶⁸¹ The text also mentions the “brethren who are with you” after the promise clause.⁶⁸² The mention of (the order of) the *dux* thus comes between the instruction clause and the promise clause, which usually follow each other. It is plausible that the “order of the *dux*” refers to the instruction clause, i.e. that it is according to the order of the *dux* that the monks should “come and stay in their place”.⁶⁸³ *O.CrumVC* 8 also contains formulaic elements typical of the protection letters, but was written in a more elaborate style, e.g. the unusual and unusually long εἰς πλογοῦς μνηοῦτε formula which was noted in Chapter 3, and also contains some additions to the “usual” formulary. The elaborated εἰς πλογοῦς μνηοῦτε formula is followed by the instruction clause (“Stay in your holy place”) and the promise clause (“that no one will [...] to you, and we will not permit that anything new be imposed on you, beyond your deceased fathers that were before you”). The monastic community is thus protected by the document against a higher taxation than the community had to pay in the past.⁶⁸⁴ The *lashanes* also promise to uphold this protection against claims from civil or ecclesiastical authorities, which is a unique occurrence in the Coptic protection letters, and which is a type of protection more often associated with higher offices (sections 4.1.2, 1.1.3.2.4). The *lashanes* also mention that they will uphold the validity of the *logos*, which is a formula commonly used by intermediaries, i.e. in the letters which mention that a third party issues the *logos*

⁶⁸⁰ See Crum’s note 1 in *O.CrumVC* 9: “What is their connexion, if any? The formulae in this are usual, in 8 not.”

⁶⁸¹ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁸² Reminiscent of *SB Kopt.* V 2234, a protection letter issued for a priest who “went away”, and for the “men who are with you”.

⁶⁸³ Does the use of the common “Come” instruction clause imply here that the community of monks had left their monastic dwelling?

⁶⁸⁴ Protection from taxation see Chapter 4, section 4.1.

and the sender of the letter promises to uphold it.⁶⁸⁵ E.g. in the example of *SB Kopt. V 2309* above, sender Moyses promises to uphold the validity of the *logos* of the pagarch for Moses. Aside from lashanes Severus and Johannes, three more people sign *O.CrumVC 8*, among which one former lashane of Djeme. The text also mentions that the community (*koinon*) of Djeme signs the protection letter.⁶⁸⁶

Both *O.CrumVC 8* and *9* are reminiscent of *SB III 7240*, the *sigillion* issued by the dux Flavius Atias on 17 October 697 to monastic community of the monastery of Apa Paul.⁶⁸⁷ The monks had not paid their taxes ἐν καιρῷ τῆς ἀνταρσίας “during the period of insurrection” (l. 13). When the dux inquired about this, the monks had shown him a *sigillion* issued by the dux’s predecessor, “providing that you should remain in your domicile, on condition however that you paid your quotas of capitation tax.”: περιέχον τοῦ μείναι ὑμᾶς | εἰς τὸν τόπον ὑμῶν συντελοῦντας μέντοι τὰ διάγραφα ὑμῶν (ll. 14-15). Atias’ letter served as a confirmation of the earlier *sigillion*, and promises protection for the monks, under certain conditions. καὶ ἐπιβεβαίω | τὸ τοῦτο σιγίλλιν τῷ παρόντι σιγίλλιω ἐχρησάμην, δι’ οὗ ἐπιτρέπω ὑμῖν | ἀφόβως μείναι τῇ ταυτότητι εἰς τὸν τόπον ὑμῶν καὶ λόγον ἔχειν τοῦ μὴ | συγχωρησαί με παρελθεῖν δι’ ὑμῶν τινα ὑμῶν μέντοι φυλαττόντων | τὴν εἰρηναίαν ὑμῶν κατάστασιν καὶ συντελούντων τὸ διάγραφον ὑμῶν | ὅπερ ἠγνωμονήσατε ὡς εἴρηται ἐν καιρῷ τῆς ἀνταρσίας: “Now, in confirmation of the said sigillion, I have issued the present *sigillion*, by which I permit you without molestation to remain as heretofore in your domicile and to have the promise that I will not suffer anyone to transgress against you, on condition however that you continue to live peaceably and pay your capitation tax, in which you defaulted as aforesaid during the period of the insurrection” (ll. 15-20).

While the Greek text of Atias’ *sigillion* and the Coptic texts of the two protection letters are certainly not translations of one another, there are striking similarities in the documents. All three of them were issued for a community of monks, permitting them to stay in their place and protecting them against transgressions. Both *O.CrumVC 8* and *SB III 7420* are explicitly related to taxation, but in different ways.⁶⁸⁸ Whereas *O.CrumVC 8*

⁶⁸⁵ Section 3.1.2.4.

⁶⁸⁶ Probably represented by the three individuals signing.

⁶⁸⁷ On the date see *BL VIII*, 326-327.

⁶⁸⁸ *O.CrumVC 9* might be related to taxation too: the words following the promise clause $\text{NAPARE MIMOTN ZALLAY NZWB}$: “...prosecute you for anything” (l. 6) are in the lacuna, and the legible text resumes on the next line. In this lacuna an exception to or limitation of the protection promise, related to tax payment could have been written, as is often the case in the Coptic protection letters.

promises the monks that they will not have to pay more than their predecessors had done in the past, the protection offered in *SB III 7240* is conditional upon the monks paying their capitation tax. However, both documents refer to certain elements from the past from which the monastic community seems to derive certain rights regarding their situation. *SB III 7240* mentions a *sigillion* issued by the predecessor of Flavius Atias, by which, it is said, the monks were allowed to live in their place, on condition of paying the capitation tax. Whether this document also contained the protective promises included in *SB III 7240* is not stated. The monks had shown Atias this previous *sigillion* when he had asked them about their lacking capitation tax payment. Atias' *sigillion* explicitly states that it confirms the previous *sigillion*, including its promises and conditions. *O.Crum VC 8* on the other hand, confirms that the amount of taxes paid by the monastic community in the past, by the current monks' "ΝΕΝΕΤΝΕΙΟΤΕ ΜΜΑΚΑΡ(ΙΟΙ) ΝΤΑΥΩΩΠΕ | ΣΑΤΕΤΝ: "deceased fathers who were before you" (ll. 8-9) was what was expected from them in the present, and nothing more.

Which other connections can be made between these three documents? They might all be placed in the same specific time and place: as discussed they all seem to be addressed to the same monastic community. Moreover, the dates of their production might be only four months apart, if we assume the earlier date for *O.Crum VC 8* and 9: 24/25 February 698, while *SB III 7240* was written on 17 October 697. If this was the case, the Greek *sigillion* and the Coptic protection letters could be considered more or less contemporary responses, on different levels of the administration, to the same or related problems concerning the monastery of Apa Paul. The "order of the *dux*" mentioned in *O.Crum VC 9* could then very well be a reference to *SB III 7240* and its contents, and *O.Crum VC 9* could be considered a sort of confirmation, on the administrative level of the village, of the stipulations in Atias' *sigillion*.⁶⁸⁹ Ideally, the Coptic protection letters would have included a phrase such as the one we find in *SB Kopt. V 2309* discussed above, by which the *lashanes* stated that they would uphold the *sigillion* of the *dux*. But even if we assume the later date, 24 February 713, for *O.Crum VC 8* and 9, a narrative can be constructed in which all three documents play a role. Apparently, at that time the *lashanes* of Djeme had the authority to

⁶⁸⁹ Crum reads ΔΟΥΞ Δ[, suggesting that the name of the *dux* would have started with a D, which would make an identification with Atias impossible. This would date the document to 713, as in 698 Atias would have been the *dux* of the Thebaid. He is however, considered the last *dux* of the Thebaid: Legendre, "Byzantine nor Islamic?". An inspection of the original document is necessary to ascertain the reading.

issue documents with the same function as those issued by the *dux* only 15,5 years earlier. This could be a testimony to the contemporary changes in the administration, i.e. the growing obsolescence of the office of the *dux*, and of an increase in the authority and effectiveness of local protection mechanisms such as the issuance of Coptic protection letters.⁶⁹⁰

Another question remains, namely why two Coptic protection letters were written for the monks of Apa Paul, on the same day, by the same scribe, in name of the same village officials? There is a possibility that they are two different drafts of the same letter, which could account for the consistent differences in style between the documents. However, the more concise and “standardized” protection letter, *O.CrumVC 9*, does include the phrase about the *dux*, which is lacking in the more elaborate and “deviating” letter *O.CrumVC 8*. Whatever the extent was to which these three documents were interrelated, they show that in around the turn of the eighth century, monastic communities in the neighborhood of Djeme were experiencing and/or creating problems, related to taxation, for which they received collective protection documents from officials at different levels of the administration. These problems were clearly related to a certain friction between the expectations of the administration and those of the monks concerning their tax payments. While the *lashanes* of Djeme in their protection letters refer to the higher authority of the *dux* in the matter at hand (*O.CrumVC 9*), they also assert their own authority and power to provide protection for the monastic community, even when, they claim, it would be challenged by another lay or clerical authority (*O.CrumVC 8*).

5.4 Local elites and their interests between Djeme and Fustat (through the lens of the protection letters)

In section 5.2 I have shown how the local, pagarchical, elites adapted the communications and orders from the government, when transmitting them to the villages, in such a way that these communications and orders made sense in those villages and to the people who were supposed to hear them and carry them out. The villagers and the language which they spoke, and in which they issued their documents, were acknowledged and used as part of the administration. In section 5.3 I argued that the village elites, on their part, were not just receiving orders from above and issuing documents which were only authoritative within their village. They were knowledgeable actors within the administration who, at least in

⁶⁹⁰ Legendre, “Byzantine nor Islamic?”, 11-18.

some cases, were well aware of the contents and formats of documents which were issued at the highest levels of the provincial administration, and their own documents connected seamlessly to those. Moreover, while most Coptic protection letters seemed to have been issued for village use only, I discussed a few examples which show that the protection letter mechanism could reach the offices of higher administrators, or could be connected to similar protective documents issued by those offices.

I showed how the documents and mechanisms of the village elites did not circulate and operate in isolation. The Coptic language and the Coptic language-using village elites appear as integrated, active, knowledgeable, and authoritative participants in the administration of the province.

Thus far, the chapter has focused on the village elites as administrative actors in the same integrated system in which district administrators and officials of the central government operated. The next and last section of the chapter will address the second focus of the chapter. This section will delve deeper into the village elites as protectors and intermediaries in the Coptic protection letter mechanism, and what this meant for their role, relationships, and interests in the village, as well as in the provincial administration. At first sight, the Coptic protection letter mechanism seems to contradict some of the fiscal policies of the government: with their protection letters, the village elites offered protection for tax evaders, rather than arresting them, and allowed tax exemption for these individuals. The Coptic protection letters, in my view, show how the local elites did not just passively carry out the governmental orders and demands which were communicated to them, but adapted to the realities on the ground, including the interests of the village and their own interests. The interests of the village elites were connected to their position in their local social network on the one hand, and on the other to their position in the provincial administrative network. These interests were related, overlapped and influenced each other. I argue that this active, apparent “disobedient” participation in the administration was in fact an essential element in the administrative system and supported the goals of the empire through the social, economic, and fiscal stability and continuity of the village. I argue that through the Coptic protection letter mechanism we can see the village elites in their role as stakeholders in empire: the Coptic protection letters helped the village elite further their own interests in various ways, while furthering the interests of the empire (see section 5.1.2).

5.4.1 *Activating social relationships in the village*

The Coptic protection letters operated for the most part in the villages and monasteries, and the relationships which they represent were part of those local contexts. In Chapter 3 I stress the importance of intermediaries in the protection letter mechanism, and I argue that the issuance of a protection letter was not a matter of routine, but rather part of a negotiation in which several people were involved. In this section, I wish to highlight what these negotiations and social interactions tell us about the social fabric and the social relationships in place in the rural communities of Early Islamic Egypt.

The people involved in the protection letters would have, for the most part, been part of each other's personal networks:⁶⁹¹ village official and villager; bishop and lay administrator in his diocese; monastery head and monk; a brother, a sister, and a father;⁶⁹² village officials and monks of a nearby monastic community. The Coptic protection letter mechanism activated these relationships, through the procedures, the various letters and oral interactions involved in the mechanism.⁶⁹³ All the documents testifying to these various steps represent moments in which social relationships were activated. What I mean by the activation of a relationship, within the context of the protection letter mechanism, is that a new relationship could be formed, e.g. between a protector and protectee, through the issuance of the protection letter. Another type of activation could be that a pre-existing relationship was triggered and strengthened or weakened by the interactions surrounding the production of a protection letter.⁶⁹⁴ Indeed, these relationships were not just created out of nowhere. It is plausible that the actors involved in the protection letters in most cases had been involved with each other before, e.g. when the village official (protector) had assigned an amount of taxes to the village tax payer (protectee). Various relationships between the actors of the Coptic protection letters preceded the offering of protection. Most importantly, relationships related to taxation, i.e. between tax collectors, guarantors and tax payers, but also to private debt. The generally local nature of the Coptic protection letters makes it

⁶⁹¹ On the protection letters in village life, see chapter 3. Local nature see Chapter 4.

⁶⁹² We do not know whether the kinship terms represented biological relationships or other types of relationships for which kinship terms could be used.

⁶⁹³ On the procedure see Chapter 3.

⁶⁹⁴ For a "weakened" relationship within a protection letter mechanism, see the letter in which the sender declares that he will not issue a protection letter for vinedressers who had fled: *P.Ryl.Copt.* 385. I would also argue that not respecting a protection letter you had issued weakened your protective relationship with the protectee: SB Kopt. V 2226.

plausible that the actors were part of each other's social networks and had pre-existing and different types of ties to each other.⁶⁹⁵ While these relationships are not difficult to imagine, the protection letters generally tell us little about them in specific terms.

Among the different types of pre-existing ties between people, I am most interested in evidence of pre-existing ties of protection in these documents. Protective relationships could involve multiple acts of protection, and such protective interventions performed in the past, could be used as a justification for the request of another one. I cite an example also mentioned in section 4.1.2.2: in *CPR XXX 21*, a land owner named Georgios asked a regional administrator to intervene on behalf of a farmer, probably working on Georgios' estate. The farmer's brothers had been requisitioned together to work on the caliphal fleet, and Georgios asked the addressee to order that the brothers could alternate their work at Babylon, presumably so that enough people would be present to do the necessary work locally. As a justification for this request, which is in fact how he started his letter, Georgios wrote that he had written to his addressee about the farmer before, and that on that occasion the addressee had helped the farmer.⁶⁹⁶ Letters of request asking for help used not unfrequently such an argument of precedence.⁶⁹⁷ As for the Coptic protection letters, the argument of precedence was used by the sender of *O.Medinet.Habu.Copt.* 136, in which he requests a Coptic protection letter and mentions that he gets one every year.⁶⁹⁸

The protection letters and related documents do testify to compound relationships of protection, confirmations, and extra layers of protection. A pre-existing relationship of protection, including a document of protection, was what led the *dux* Flavius Atias to issue

⁶⁹⁵ See e.g. the man from prison writing to one sister with a protection letter for another sister who should ask her father for help: *SB Kopt.* V 2304. While we do not know the nature of those relationships, it is clear that the relationships activated here were pre-existing and of a more personal nature than an administrative relationship between a tax official and a tax-payer.

⁶⁹⁶ † καθὼς καὶ ἄλλοτε παρεκάλεσα τοὺς θεοφυλά(κτους) ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν οἰκτρῶν μου γραμμᾶτων χάριν τοῦ | γραμματιφ[ό]ρου ἀναγνώστου καὶ τὸ ἔλεος ὑ(*)μῶν κατέλαβεν/ | αὐτὸν: "As at another time I have entreated you, protected by God, through my piteous letter on behalf of the letter-bearer, a reader/lector, your compassion also reached him."

⁶⁹⁷ *CPR XXX 21*. The editor categorizes this letter as a crossover between a petition and a recommendation letter. On precedence as an argument in Arabic letters of request, see Sijpesteijn, *Righting wrongs*, Chapter 4 (forthcoming).

⁶⁹⁸ On this document, see also sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.4, and Scheerlinck, "Procedures". The corpus of Coptic protection letters does not contain two or more protection letters addressed to the same protectee. O.CrumVC 8 and 9 are probably exceptions, but they were issued or rather written on the same day and might have been different versions of the same document: see 5.3.2.

his sigillion for the monks of the monastery of Apa Paul.⁶⁹⁹ The protection relationship existed between Atias' predecessor and the monastic community, and clearly Atias saw it as a valid argument for the renewal of the sigillion. The monks had used this precedent as an argument in their negotiations with the dux. As I have argued above in section 5.3.2., the Coptic protection letters *O.CrumVC* 8 and 9 might have been confirmations of or additions to the dux's *sigillion* and his tie of protection with the monks. In the other protection letters in which the protectors state that they are following the order of an administrator, or intermediaries' promises to uphold a protection letter, we can recognize again such compound protective relationships between the actors of the protection letter mechanism.

The protection letter mechanism created and strengthened networks of dependency relationships in the local communities. The Coptic protection letter was the perfect instrument for the village elites to maintain their position of power in the village, although as I will discuss in section 5.4.4, this is not the whole story. However, I will first show how the village elites' position of power is reflected in the seemingly contradictory characteristic of the protection letters, namely that the protectors in these documents, i.e. the village elites, often constitute the threat from which protection is offered by the document.

5.4.2 The protectors as threat

One of the most striking features in the Coptic protection letters, is that many promise clauses suggest that the main danger from which the protectees are protected, are actions performed against them by the protectors themselves. These are the promise clauses formulated with a negative verb, which are used most commonly: "I will not prosecute you", "I will not ask of you", "I will not do you harm", "I will not arrest you", etc.⁷⁰⁰ The protectors issuing the documents had the right and authority to prosecute, ask, harm, or arrest the protectee, but are prevented, or rather prevent themselves from doing that by the document. This right and authority came from their official position, e.g. as tax administrators, and could be caused by the actions of the protectee ("We will not prosecute you because you fled").

Many protection letters mention "harm" or "evil" as a danger from which the protectee is shielded by the protection letter, be it harm or evil done by the protector or by

⁶⁹⁹ Section 5.3.2.

⁷⁰⁰ In contrast with these negative promise clauses (3.1.2.1) are the affirmative promise clauses discussed in sections 3.1.2.2 and 3.1.2.3.

others. What exactly this harm or evil entails is not clear. One of the protection letters mentions protection against – implicitly referring to – physical violence. In his protection letter to his brother Timotheos, Biktor promises not to detain the protectee for a certain affair, and adds – almost as an afterthought – after the date and before his signature, that “I will not hit you this time”.⁷⁰¹ The addition of “this time” (ΜΠΕΙCΟΝ) is a clear testimony of this identification of the protector and the threat: Biktor had already physically assaulted Timotheos in the past. We do not know the relationship between Biktor and Timotheos. We do know that physical violence was something that tax payers had to fear from village officials: That people needed protection against the abuse by officials is a theme that recurs frequently in the papyri, discussed in section 4.1.2.2.

The protectors in the protective relationships offer the protection, and that protection is sometimes explicitly against threats posed by others (see e.g. *O.Crum VC 8* which offers protection against fiscal claims by ecclesiastical and lay offices). However, in most cases, the protectors are also the source of the threat. Do they protect against abuse and violence performed by themselves or against legitimate punitive actions such as a rightful prosecution or arrest or simply legitimate actions such as collecting (back) taxes from the protectee? When the document offers protection against prosecution or a requisition (“We will not ask”), these “threats” seem legitimate actions, or at least they are presented as such. When the promise is against doing harm or evil, the threat becomes a little vaguer, and possibly violence is referred to.⁷⁰² In the case of Biktor and Timotheos, the threat seems to be a legitimate action, even justified in the letter, as Biktor takes the trouble to mention the affair for which he apparently could – but will not – arrest Timotheos, combined with the protection against physical violence which had already happened at least once in the past (see section 3.3.2).

The protection letters present the protectors in a position of power, both literally by referring to their authority concerning taxation and their ability to decide on legal matters or detain people, but also as the person holding the power in the social relationship: the protector (or intermediary) is extending protection, a favor, to the protectee. The next section will discuss

⁷⁰¹ *SB Kopt. V 2224*; on this document see also section 3.1.5.

⁷⁰² The references to the “what is just” or “fair share” in e.g. *SB Kopt. V 2240* (exception clause I. 7: ΠΑΡΑ ΠΕΚΔΙΚΑΙ[ΟΝ], “other than your fair (share)”) and *SB Kopt. V 2261* (promise clause II. 20-22: ΕΝΝΑ|ΡΟΕΙC ΠΔ|ΚΑΚΑΙΟΝ ΝΜΜΑ|Κ: we will respect/observe what is fair for you”) have been interpreted by Till as testimonies in the Coptic protection letters of the phenomenon that tax-payers had to fear unjust behaviour or abuse in their dealings with the village officials.

the reciprocal nature of these relationships. This will also lead us to complicate that position of power of the village elites: they also needed something from the protectee in order to maintain their position of power, and the Coptic protection letters supported them therein.

5.4.3 Reciprocity

In section 1.5.4, I introduced solidarity and reciprocity (including patronage) as concepts to help understand social cohesion of a society. The society of the late antique and early Islamic Egyptian countryside has been characterized as heavily reciprocal. However, it has also been argued that both reciprocity and solidarity can be recognized in any “real” society.⁷⁰³ This section aims to show how the Coptic protection letters reflected the reciprocity based system of the Early Islamic Egyptian countryside, but also to examine whether any part of the protection letter mechanism can be seen as a reflection of solidarity-based relationships in that context.

Reciprocity relationships are based on the exchange of favors, so the question is, how do we see these exchanges in the Coptic protection letters? The protection letter documentation is rather one-sided, most of the extant communication is directed top-down, from protector to protectee. E.g., the corpus does not contain a letter in which a protectee explicitly offers certain services or goods if their addressee helps them obtain a protection letter. In his request letter to his superior, Shenoute, the banned monk, does offer his addressee help if the superior or the monastery should need anything, although this help is not – explicitly – referred to as offered in exchange for the protection letter.⁷⁰⁴ The same goes for communications between protectors and intermediaries: the exchange of favors triggered by a protection letter is never mentioned. However, the protection letters addressed from protectors to protectees do include clauses that at least hint at reciprocity, or in which we can see the reciprocal system at work, particularly the instruction clause and the exception clause. Exchanges in reciprocity relationships are personal, and are felt to be obligatory. When these exchanges are put in a legal document, this emphasizes their obligatory nature. As I mentioned in section 5.4.1, the formulary of the protection letters reflect personal relationships rather than highly impersonal bureaucracy. However, in the Coptic protection letters the reciprocity relationships interact with administrative regulations, and the interests

⁷⁰³ Papaconstantinou, “Hagiography”. See section 1.5.

⁷⁰⁴ *SB Kopt.* V 2300, discussed in more detail in Scheerlinck, “Procedures”.

of the village elites issuing the protection letters concern their position in the administration, as well as their status in the village.

I argue below in detail that both the instruction clause and the exception clause can be seen as reflecting reciprocal relationships. The clauses do not explicitly mention advantages to the protector, but I am interpreting them with the context in mind. Because we know the responsibilities of the protectors, we can understand how they benefited when a fugitive returned to the village, or when someone contributed a partial amount of their taxes. So from that knowledge, I argue that the instruction clause and the exception clause reflect reciprocity, and I will discuss this in more detail below.

5.4.3.1 Instruction clause

The instruction clause tells the protectee what to do. It is usually the first clause of the document after the characteristic opening formula “Here you have the promise, by God”.⁷⁰⁵ As I have discussed in other sections, the instruction is usually to “Come to your house”.⁷⁰⁶ Whether taken literally, or metaphorically, being at home was an obvious condition for the protectee to take up his life in the village, including doing his work. I have also shown that instruction clauses could also include references to the protectee’s work.⁷⁰⁷ Often this work will have been on the land as the society was agriculture based, and this is explicit in e.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2263, where the protectee is told to Ⲡⲟⲧ ⲛⲉⲕⲉⲛⲛⲉ, “gather (*lit.* cut) your dates”.⁷⁰⁸ The protectors would have benefited from the protectee’s taking up his economic tasks in the village or monastery. Directly if they were the proprietors or agents on the land on which the protectee worked, or indirectly if they were in some way responsible for the taxes of the land that the protectee was assigned to work. Looking at the Coptic protection letters in the framework of reciprocity, we can interpret the action in the instruction clause as a service rendered to the protector by the protectee in exchange for the protection offered

⁷⁰⁵ An internal address and letter opening formulas could precede the *eis plogos mpnoute* formula.

⁷⁰⁶ Instruction clause: section 2.4.1.

⁷⁰⁷ *O.DanKopt.* 36, *O.Phoibammon* 4, *O.Saint-Marc* 322 (uncertain), *SB Kopt.* V 2224, *SB Kopt.* V 2240. See also the protection letters which functioned as permissions to work with a camel: *SB Kopt.* II 915, *SB Kopt.* V 2279, and *O.CrumVC* 64, and as permissions to till a plot of land: *SB Kopt.* V 2277 and 2278

⁷⁰⁸ See also the vinedressers who were mentioned in the letter *P.Ryl.Copt.* 385, in which the addressee states he would not give them a protection letter. Palme has interpreted references to the protectee’s work in the instruction clauses as possible indications that the protector and protectee had a pre-existing – dependency and reciprocity based – relationship of land owner and dependent farmer: Palme, “Asyl”, 213.

by the protection letter. While being at home might not literally be a particular service or favor, when the protectee took up his life and work again, this generally directly and indirectly benefited the protector. The instruction clause indirectly points to the benefits gained by the protector from the protectee's labor and social role in the local communities, and can as such be considered an expression of reciprocity.

5.4.3.2 Exception clause

The exception clause mentions an amount of money or the name of a tax that the protectee had to pay – hence my identification of it as exception clause: the protectee was freed from duties *except* for the amount mentioned in the exception clause. I have argued that this payment stipulated in the exception clause was a condition for the protection offered in the protection letter to take effect (see section 4.1.1.2). These payments can be interpreted as services rendered in exchange for (the protection offered in) the protection letter, and as such as expressions of reciprocity. *SB Kopt. V 2292* contains an interesting variation of the exception clause. This variation emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the relationships between protector and protectee: the exception is not expressed as a sum of money or a tax, but rather as a person: "... I ask you to issue a protection letter for Triphanios, that he comes to his house, I will uphold the protection letter/promise for him, that no man seizes him or asks anything of him, *except your Paternity*." The exception clause is placed right after the promise clause, just like the more "standard" exception clauses.⁷⁰⁹ The sender of the letter asks the protector, a high-ranking cleric, to issue the protection letter: it is plausible that the sender intended the protector to stipulate an exception clause according to the protector's wishes – which could include a negotiation with the protectee – in the protection letter. We do not know what the protectee owed the protector, or what the protector could ask the protectee in the context of their relationship. In many other cases, as I have mentioned above, we do not know the exact relationship between the actors of the protection letter mechanism either. This is related to the issue of private debt vs taxation in the protection letters: were the Coptic protection letters concerned with private debt and as such did they reflect (private) debtor-creditor relationships? Or were they rather concerned with taxation and tax debt and did they reflect tax payer – tax official relationships? In section 4.1.1 I showed the embeddedness of the Coptic protection letter mechanism in fiscal practice. In

⁷⁰⁹ On the different ways in which unique, situational, phrases are integrated in the formulary of the Coptic protection letters, see section 3.3.2.

any case, the interdependency of a debtor-creditor relationship is also an aspect of the protectee-protector relationship, even when they are tax payer and tax official – or rather village official or monastic authority in their role as tax administrator. Therefore, I would say that generally, the exception clause, similarly to the instruction clause, highlights benefits gained by the protector from the protectee’s return, specifically their contributions to the tax revenue of the local community. The exception clause and the instruction clause are two elements of the protection letter formulary which allow us to recognize the reciprocity of the mechanism behind the documents. What is more, the clauses suggest that the protection letters were in more general terms determined by concerns of reciprocity, as the issuance of a protection letter, or acting as an intermediary on behalf of a protectee, would strengthen the protector’s position in local dependency networks (see section 5.4.4).

5.4.3.3 Solidarity

In the sections above I have argued that the protection letters reflected reciprocity relationships, and that this is especially apparent in the instruction and exception clauses. It is more difficult to recognize relationships of solidarity in the Coptic protection letter mechanism (on solidarity, see section 1.5.4). There is even less tangible evidence in the language of the protection letters for solidarity relationships than for reciprocity relationships (see beginning of section 5.4.3). Solidarity based groups are usually considered to include people who do not necessarily know each other, but who share a common characteristic on which the solidarity is based, e.g. a religious or political ideology. The Coptic protection letters are rife with Christian verbiage and symbols, but so are other types of Coptic legal documents, not to mention Arabic and Greek documents as well: religious language was part of scribal traditions in this context.⁷¹⁰ It is thus unlikely that the elites participating in the Coptic protection letter mechanism did so out of piety, as sort of act of charity because they were Christians. Moreover, the Coptic protection mechanism is a very local mechanism, built on networks of relationships between people from the same village, people who would have known each other.⁷¹¹ Then can the Coptic protection letters be seen as reflecting a type of village solidarity, through which individual reciprocal relationships are put in second place after a communal village bond? In a number of protection letters the protector is the “community”, *koinon* or *koinotès* of the village in

⁷¹⁰ MacCoull, “Coptic Documentary Papyri”.

⁷¹¹ See section 4.2.3.5.

question.⁷¹² Arietta Papaconstantinou has interpreted these acts by “village communities” as the only evidence we have for village solidarities in late antique and early Islamic Egypt.⁷¹³ At the same time, *koinon* and *koinotès* should be understood, not as the whole village community, but as a smaller group within, the group of elites, responsible for running the village and from among whom the village officials were chosen.⁷¹⁴ The expression “brothers of the *koinotès*”, in a protection letter for a monk, suggests that indeed the protectors are individuals, representatives of the *koinotès*, rather than the community.⁷¹⁵ The sender of *O.MedinetHabuCopt.* 136, sends a request for a *logos* to be issued for him “in the name of the *lashane* and in the name of the entire village”.⁷¹⁶ I have discussed in section 4.1.2.2 one document, produced in Djeme in 741-742, in which the local elites of the village formally organized solidarity among themselves in the face of the “burden” (*pbaros*) of taxation. Again, we should keep in mind that the people involved in this agreement of solidarity, and protected, could be the village elites only, not the entire village. When it comes to the Coptic protection letter mechanism, I believe it favored vertical bonds over horizontal ones: resources and services, i.e. tax exemption and other types of protection, were distributed preferentially to some and not to others. People who fled from the village to evade taxes or were threatening to do so could negotiate their position and obtain a protection letter with exemptions. Protection letters allowed the protectees to pay less taxes if any, which is rather a preferential treatment, as it seems unlikely that every villager would have obtained a protection letter.⁷¹⁷ Other people might have resorted to taking out loans or selling possessions in order to pay their taxes, rather than fleeing the village and hoping for a protection letter. In that sense, the protection letter mechanism favored socio-economic inequalities and thereby could actually have weakened any existing village solidarities.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹² *O.MedinetHabu Copt.* 136; *O.CrumVC* 8; *O.GurnaGorecki* 69; *SB Kopt.* V 2236; *SB Kopt.* V 2259. *P.Lond.Copt.* 1227 might be another example but is unclear.

⁷¹³ Papaconstantinou, “Great men”.

⁷¹⁴ Berkes, *Dorfverwaltung*, 171-172.

⁷¹⁵ *O.GurnaGorecki* 69.

⁷¹⁶ Il. 3-4: ΔΡΑΝ ΜΠΑΩΔΑΝΕ | ΔΥΩ ΕΡΑΝ ΜΠΤΙΜΕ ΤΗΡΑ. Compare to the *logos* that had been issued by two estate managers “in the name of the *topos*” (*SB Kopt.* V 2226, likely the *topos* of Apa Epiphanius) The same expression (ΠΤΙΜΕ ΤΗΡΑ, *p̄time tèrf*: entire village) occurs in legal documents from Djeme: see the discussion in Papaconstantinou, “Great men”.

⁷¹⁷ We know that fleeing did not mean an automatic triggering of a protection letter procedure.

⁷¹⁸ Woolf and Garnsey, “Patronage”, 157 on patronage weakening solidarities.

Thus, in my view, the relationships activated through the Coptic protection letters were reciprocal in nature. They represented negotiations between protector, protectee, and intermediary, through which a compromise was reached that could be beneficial to everybody, although the distribution of power in the relationships was not equal. The relationships activated in the mechanism were not simple unilateral relationships, but formed networks of dependency, in which the several parties could be dependent upon one another, which I will discuss in the next section.

5.4.4 *Dependency networks*

There were various levels of dependency at work between the protector, protectee and intermediary in the protection letter mechanism.⁷¹⁹ Of course the protectees were dependent on the protectors for issuing the protection letter and upholding it. But the protectees were also dependent on their intermediaries, e.g. for communicating with and convincing the protectors to issue the document, but also for physically transporting the letter.⁷²⁰ I argued that the intermediaries probably negotiated the conditions stipulated in the document. Moreover, when an intermediary promised to uphold a protection letter issued by someone else, the protectee was also dependent on the intermediary to do so. However, you could also argue that in such cases the intermediary was dependent on the protector, who was asked to issue the protection letter so the protectee would come to the intermediary's village. The fact that letters from intermediaries requesting a protection letter for someone sometimes contain arguments to convince the addressee or indirectly the protectee, that the protectee should come home, puts a spotlight on this dependency. The protectees are needed at home, but the intermediary – village officials – cannot achieve this without the help of the protector.⁷²¹ In other cases protectors were dependent on intermediaries, to have access to the (hidden or run-away) protectee and transmitting the protection letter to them.⁷²² While arguably the balance of power and dependency in these protection letter relationships mostly worked to the disadvantage of the protectees – especially given that the protectors often

⁷¹⁹ On the multiple levels of dependency in request letters, specifically those related to travel documents, see also Palombo and Scheerlinck, "Asking".

⁷²⁰ E.g. *O.MedinetHabuCopt.* 136, O. Lips. Copt. II 170.

⁷²¹ The *Iashane* who sent *O.Crum VC 75* repeatedly mentioned the urgency of the case for which the protection letter was needed. This is complemented by the comment, found in two of the three letters with requests for a protection letter sent by the protectees themselves, that they could or would not travel without a protection letter: *O.MedinetHabuCopt.* 136 and *SB Kopt.* V 2300.

⁷²² E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2295, discussed in section 3.2.2..

constituted the threat, as discussed in section 5.4.2 – the protectors were also dependent on the protectees in the protection letter mechanism, especially on their tax contribution and their labor, but also on their contributions to the social fabric of the village (e.g. families left without a father, entire families leaving the village).⁷²³ I will elaborate this point further in the next section, where I discuss the protection letter mechanism in the light of the role of the protectors, particularly the village officials, in the administration of the caliphal province. That these dependency relationships – or rather dependency networks – were unbalanced is highlighted by the letter in which the sender states that he will not issue a protection letter for vinedressers who had fled, but that new men had to be hired.⁷²⁴ Not everyone who might have occasion and authority to issue a protection letter for someone decided to do so. Even if there was such an expectation, for which I have argued in section 3.3.3, not everyone felt bound to it.

5.4.5 Stakeholders in empire

In this final section I argue that through the Coptic protection letter mechanism we see the village elites operate as stakeholders in empire. The village elites furthered the interests of the empire by issuing and requesting protection letters for villagers who had left their home, which furthered their own interests as well as the interests of the village.

How did the protectors and intermediaries in the Coptic protection letter mechanism further their own interests? When people were absent from the village, whether because they had fled or were away performing duties for the government, this caused stress on the socio-economic fabric of a village. Families could be left without their breadwinner, the absentee's work in the village did not get done, land did not get tilled.⁷²⁵ Moreover, when people fled, this cut down on the tax revenue collected in the villages, both in the short and long term. The fled individuals would not be there to pay their taxes that year, and their plots of land would be neglected, endangering revenue flow in the future.

The village elites, among whom would be the local landowners and the village officials responsible for collecting and forwarding the taxes to the central tax administration,

⁷²³ See Papaconstantinou, “Credit”, for a similar interpretation of the dependency relationships between debtors and creditors in Early Islamic Egypt.

⁷²⁴ *P.Ryl.Copt.* 385.

⁷²⁵ On the inconvenience of labor requisitions for the villages, see section 4.12.

had high stakes in supporting the flow of revenue to the capital.⁷²⁶ Their position of power in their communities benefited from their authority in the fiscal system, and at the same time supporting at least adequate tax collection was likely also in their benefit financially, not just socially. I have discussed above in section 5.4.3, how the instruction clause and the exception clause of the protection letter formulary indicated the reciprocal “favor” to be performed by the protectee, and pointed to how this benefited the protectors and intermediaries. First, the exception clauses stipulated a certain amount of money or tax that still needed to be paid by the protection receiver. The variability of this amount indicates that this was not a fine for fleeing, but rather a sum on which the protectors issuing the document had decided in this particular case – possibly in negotiation with an intermediary. The protection letters likely reflect a type of negotiation between the village officials, and the person who had fled, who was not “at his house”. If the village officials were responsible for collecting and forwarding the taxes towards the central tax administration, it was in their interest to collect as much as possible, so as to avoid reprimands and loss of station. If the local tax administrators were expected or obligated to pay the tax deficits out of their own possessions, this would constitute an immediate financial incentive to prefer a partial payment to no payment at all. Indeed, collecting as much as possible might mean not the correct or full amount from everyone, but a negotiated and partial amount from fugitives, rather than not receiving any contributions from them. The instruction clauses of the protection letters also seem to hint at another motivation why they would provide amnesty to people who are presented as deserving of punishment. The fugitives are needed in the village to keep (the economy of) the village running (“do your work”), which eventually was necessary for an enduring flow of taxes to the capital. Thus, the Coptic protection letter mechanism represents a balancing act between sending enough taxes in the short term and keep tax revenue going in the longer term. This supported the local elites of the Coptic protection letters to maintain their position in the fiscal administration of the province, which also helped strengthen their position of power in the village.

In order to consider the protectors and intermediaries of the Coptic protection letter mechanism as “stakeholders in empire”, the mechanism should benefit the Islamic empire. It did, in two main ways. Firstly, as I discussed above, by securing revenue flow in the

⁷²⁶ Papaconstantinou, “Propriétaires”. In section 4.1.1, I show the different ways in which the Coptic protection letters were connected to fiscal practice in the countryside.

shorter and longer term, through partial payments and socio-economic continuation in the village. Secondly, the Coptic protection letter mechanism benefited empire by limiting the displacement of village inhabitants and the creation of so-called “strangers” or fugitives. I have discussed several examples of governmental correspondence ordering to arrest and fine fugitives (see section 4.2.2 and *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* discussed in section 5.2.2), yet, the Coptic protection letters suggest that this not always happened in the villages. Rather than arresting, the village heads granted (conditional) amnesty to fugitives. As I have discussed in sections 4.2.2. and 4.2.3, the arrested or to be arrested fugitives in the Greek papyri are usually located in districts that are different from the one they are said to have come from. The local nature of the protection letters (see section 4.2.3.5) suggests that the people receiving them had not gone that far. In other words, the fugitives who were allowed to return to their place of residence had not ventured beyond the borders of their district. The protectors offering them amnesty were indeed those responsible for the fugitives’ administrative and fiscal tasks, in charge of the geographical area within which the fugitives operated. By allowing fugitives who were still close to home to return to the village, these are kept in the district and the creation of more “strangers” or “fugitives”, in the sense of those tax-payers who had moved away from their place of residence where their taxes were typically due, was avoided.⁷²⁷ This benefited the central provincial administration directly, as it saved on the labor of government representatives, in the form of searching and arresting fugitives, and generating the related paperwork. While the Coptic protection letter mechanism does not show us the local elites as reinvesting collected taxes locally, as did the “stakeholders in empire” in Grafe and Irigoien’s example, the mechanism does show us how intimately the interests of these local elites and the interests of the province, and ultimately the empire, were intertwined. Using their authority in the village and in the fiscal administration to adapt governmental policies, in order to support the flow of revenue to the capital, and acting to their own benefit as well as the benefit of their local communities, the local elites engaging in the Coptic protection letter mechanism supported the success of the Early Islamic Empire.

This Chapter has partly adopted a top-down view. I have discussed how the orders from the government were transmitted to the Egyptian population, and shown how these

⁷²⁷ Of course we do not know how far they would have gone without the existence of such a local protection mechanism.

processes can provide evidence of the integration of the village elites in the provincial administration. The case studies reveal how the choice for a certain language, including the translation of administrative correspondence (5.3.1), or for a certain language distribution in a single document (5.4.1), was a deliberate strategy to ensure effective communication, not only top-down, but also bottom-up. It is not possible to examine these processes fully without involving the view from below. The officials working at village level worked as an integrated part of the administration, were knowledgeable about administrative and documentary procedures, and issued the corresponding paperwork (5.4.1). The documents discussed in section 5.4.2 show that the protection letter mechanism did not only operate on a village level, but that higher officials in urban contexts such as the pagarch or dux could also be involved. The Coptic documents discussed in that section show the village elites as intermediaries between the dux or pagarch and the protectee, while also producing and issuing their own documents under their own authority. I have shown how the protective interventions by the local elites can be seen as local expressions and adaptations of provincial policies and demands regarding the control of the countryside, particularly concerning taxation and the control of people's movements. The Coptic protection letters, promising (partial) tax exemption and other types of amnesty for fugitives, in first instance seem to oppose governmental policies and demands regarding fugitives, visible in the administrative letters and other documents discussed in Chapter 4. By providing protection in specific cases on their terms, the local elites negotiated and adapted the policies and demands of the government to the realities of village life on the ground which benefited the protectees, but especially the protectors and via them the empire which they formed a crucial part of.

Conclusion

The following pages provide some conclusions of this dissertation. First, I state briefly what each chapter of the dissertation has accomplished, and then I will formulate answers to the research questions I posited in the Introduction. As a third part to these conclusions, I would like to return to the different contexts that form the wider and narrower environment in which the protection letter mechanism operated. This will elicit some reflections on the lifespan of the Coptic protection letter mechanism, and how we can tie the seeming rise and fall of its popularity to the historical context.

What did each chapter accomplish?

Chapter 1 provided the historical context for the protection letter mechanism, as well as methodological comments on using (Coptic) documentary papyri as a source for historical studies, notably the difficulty of dating these documents. I discussed the meaning of “protection” in this dissertation, as well as two wider sources of processes and concepts in the background of the Coptic protection letters in seventh and eighth century Egypt: 1) Concepts of protection in Islamic law and examples of protection of subordinate people by government officials in the papyri, and 2) Roman or Byzantine asylum law, with special attention to the *logoi asyliais*. I argued that the Coptic protection letters should not be seen as Coptic versions of or successors to the *logoi asyliais*, but rather that they were distinct instruments of protection mechanisms of late antique Egypt. I also set out what was specific and new about my approach to the Coptic protection letters with respect to preceding scholarship, i.e. the inclusion in my analysis of the social relationships that underlay and were activated in the Coptic protection letter mechanism.

Chapter 2 examined in more detail on the corpus and categorizations of the Coptic protection letters as they were set out in previous editions and discussions. I pointed out where I disagree with the existing scholarship on the function of documents in certain subcategories (2.1.3). The chapter also presents a list of the 142 documents which I consider as Coptic protection letters in this dissertation. The chapter showed how the majority of the published Coptic protection letters were in fact written on ceramic or limestone shards, and were found in Western Thebes, in the town of Djeme (Medinet Habu) and surrounding monastic settlements. Moreover, the Coptic protection letters which have been dated to a certain year or a couple of decennia, are all dated to the first half of the eighth century.

Regarding chronology, the chapter also touched upon the apparent disappearance of Coptic protection letters after 750, a point which I will discuss further below in the last section of this conclusion.

Chapter 3 presented a detailed discussion of the formulary and of the procedures of the Coptic protection letter mechanism. The chapter argued that the Coptic protection letter mechanism was an institution embedded in local, rural communities, predominantly based in the village, and countered the claim in existing scholarship that the Coptic protection letter procedure was a matter of routine. I will discuss the results of these comparisons in more detail below, under the first set of research questions.

Chapter 4 expanded the discussion beyond the local context of the Coptic protection letter mechanism, similarly to Chapter 5. It provided a clear positioning of the protection letter mechanism among similar mechanisms operating in late antique and early Islamic Egypt. It discussed the 4 main categories of problems – taxation, fugitives, and private legal issues – which the protection letters aimed to solve, and compared the protection letters, both in terms of function and format, with (contemporary) documents with similar aims. I countered the argument in existing scholarship that the protection letters were essentially debt agreements between private debtors and creditors. Rather, I emphasized the importance of taxation in the protection letters, while acknowledging the role played by debt in the mechanism, while pointing at the ambiguity of the boundary between official/public and private in these contexts. I also refuted the idea that the Coptic protection letters functioned as short-distance versions of the Arabic (and Greek) travel permits, by comparing both mechanisms in detail. I will discuss the results of my comparisons in more detail below, under the second set of research questions.

Chapter 5 used the protection letters as well as other documents to argue that the village elites and their mechanisms were integrated in the provincial administration. It also focused on the social relationships and networks of dependency underlying the Coptic protection mechanism, and the motivations of the local elites to participate in it. I propose a new interpretation of the Coptic letter *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* as a translation to Coptic of the missive of a high government official to a pagarch, likely originally written in Greek or Arabic. I propose that the translation was made in the pagarch's office, and meant for consumption in the village, either to be read out loud to the villagers, or as a reference for the village authorities on what was expected from them according to the letter. I also propose new connections between the Greek *sigillion SB III 7240* and Coptic protection letters

O.CrumVC 8 and 9. These documents might have been issued for the same community of monks, four months apart, and illustrate the tensions between the expectations of the monks and those of the government regarding their tax payments.

Answers to my research questions

1. *Can the Coptic protection letter be considered an institution of village life? In other words, was a Coptic protection letter a result of a routine or rather an ad-hoc procedure? Can we identify patterns in their production (including their language) and circulation?*

This question was the focus of Chapter 3. The Coptic protection letter was an institution of village life, predictable and recurring, but with variable expressions. I showed how there are recurring patterns in the formulary of the documents, including the combination of certain formulae which form the core of a Coptic protection letter. On the other hand, I showed that the well-known variability of the Coptic protection letters appears down to the level of the individual scribe. The chapter argued that this patterned variability was a reflection of the specific situation behind the production of the document. The chapter provided a similar conclusion with regard to the procedure of the Coptic protection letter mechanism. Some practices were repeated, as is clear from the language in the documents, but overall there was not a fixed procedure to obtain a protection letter. Therefore, the chapter concluded that the Coptic protection letter mechanism was an institution of village life in seventh-eighth-century Egypt. The issued document itself would not have been a filled-out template, but rather containing formulas and stipulations adapted to the specific situation. Villagers could expect to obtain a Coptic protection letter in certain circumstances, and there is evidence in the documents that they indeed expected it. However, the issuance of a protection letter was not routine, nor even guaranteed, as the evidence shows. Moreover, some protection letters seem to contain additional comments aimed at convincing the protectee to accept the protection letter, which might indicate that protectees sometimes hesitated to participate in the mechanism.

The Coptic protection letter was an institution of village life, but as such was connected to other contexts as well. The Coptic protection letter mechanism was primarily the domain of rural elites, especially village authorities, as the production of Coptic protection letters seems to have been mostly linked to the village. However, the occurrence of district

administrators in a few protection letters shows that the mechanism could go beyond the level of the village (Chapter 5). Moreover, monks and especially monastic authorities also played an important part in the Coptic protection letter mechanism, as protector, intermediary, or protectee, and the finding of these documents in monastic sites gives additional weight to their involvement. Chapter 3 discussed the collaboration between village elites and clerical or monastic elites in the procedures to obtain a protection letter. The corpus presents in particular a recurring pattern of village elites requesting that a monastic leader should issue a protection letter for a third party, and in the same letter promising that they will respect said protection letter. This pattern points to a practice of cooperation between village and monastic elites, to bring villagers who had sought refuge at a monastic settlements back to the village, even temporarily.

2. *What was the role and place of the Coptic protection letters in their contemporary documentary landscape, i.e. compared to (contemporary) Greek, Arabic, and Coptic documents with seemingly similar functions?*

This issue is the focus of the discussions in Chapter 4, where I argue that the Coptic protection letters were problem-solving instruments. They solved problems of various types, which were often related to taxation, or private legal issues, and the need to return home. They solved problems for the protectee, but also for the protector, and in some cases also for the intermediary, e.g. in some cases where the intermediary was a village administrator, asking the monastic authority to issue a protection letter for a villager who was needed at the village. Each protection letter resolved, or aimed to solve, a specific, individual situation, which is visible in the variable language of the documents.

Other types of documents in seventh and eighth-century Egypt similarly aimed to solve comparable problems. However, Chapter 4 has discussed in detail which unique role the Coptic protection letters played in the wider documentary landscape. First, when it came to fiscal matters, the Coptic protection letters discern themselves from other documents solving similar fiscal problems related to fiscal pressure and tax evasion in two main ways: 1) Coptic protection letters were issued by the lowest officials with responsibilities in the fiscal administration, 2) and they addressed the tax payer (or tax evader) themselves. In the Coptic protection letters, with very few exceptions, there was no interference from district or province administrators, in contrast to other mechanisms solving similar problems for the protectee.

There are various documents regulating travel contemporary to the Coptic protection letters, especially dating to the first half of the eighth century (see below). Travel was an important component to most of the protection letters, but the Coptic protection letters differed in many ways from the Arabic and Greek travel permits issued by higher representatives of the Arab-Muslim government in Fustat, or from the very local Coptic travel permits used in Western Thebes. While it has not been stated or discussed explicitly in publications, on various occasions at academic meetings scholars have described to me the Coptic protection letters as essentially travel permits, but in their local, Coptic, form, instead of their provincially central, Arabic (or Greek) form. Through a comparison between the Coptic protection letters and the Arabic/Greek and Coptic travel permits I argued that these types of documents were issued with different principal aims: the travel permits' chief aim was to regulate mobility, while the Coptic protection letters' chief aim was to provide (partial) amnesty in order to solve a problem in the village. Yes, Coptic protection letters often explicitly allowed (or ordered) the protectee to travel (home), but the protection offered was not focused on the travel away from home, but rather on the protectee's life once returned to the village.

In some cases, the protection letters seem to aim at providing a safe space for a settlement of a conflict of some sort. Rather than mentioning fiscal elements, these protection letters seem to be instruments of private conflict resolution, asking the protectee to talk and settle, sometimes with the protector, sometimes with others, and allowing them to leave in peace if a settlement was not reached. The key element explaining the specific role of the Coptic protection letter mechanism as a private legal mechanism is that the protection letters did not aim at punishing the protectee or another party, but rather at leading to a solution between the protectee and other parties, to the extent that the protectee could leave again unharmed if a solution should not be found.

3. *What can the Coptic protection letters tell us about the role of local elites in Early Islamic Egypt, both as wielders of power in their own communities and as members of an administrative system in service of an Arab-Muslim provincial government?*

The Coptic protection letters were instruments of negotiation and power in the local communities in which the protectors and intermediaries of the Coptic protection letter mechanism had an authoritative role. Issuing such a document could strengthen the protector's position in the village community, through the activation of a reciprocal

relationship with the protectee, which functioned through the exchange of favors and/or services. I have shown how this reciprocity is worded in the documents. My discussions of the procedures which led (or not) to the issuance of a Coptic protection letters have shown that there were multiple relationships behind the documents. In fact, Chapter 3 has shown the importance of intermediaries in the Coptic protection letter mechanism. Chapter 5 then, has argued that these multiple relationships between the various parties actually could form networks of dependency relationships, in which protector, protectee, and intermediary needed something from each other. The formulary of the protection letters focuses on the position of power of the protectors, but the dissertation has argued that the protection letters are also a result of a negotiation. I have proposed in Chapter 3 that oral interactions between intermediaries and protectors could take the form of negotiations, performed before the issuance of a protection letter, shaping some of the contents of the document (e.g. the amount of money still to be paid in the exception clause). The local elites engaged in the Coptic protection letter mechanism in their capacity of authority figures in their communities, leveraging that authority and their responsibilities in the communities to solve problems and facilitate the return of villagers stranded away from home.

However, I have argued that we also often see the local elites engage in the Coptic protection letter mechanism in their capacity as low-level fiscal administrators, functioning within the provincial administration. I have shown that the so-called Coptic protection letters, if not all of them, were embedded in fiscal practice. This makes them excellent points of entry into the study of the provincial administration of the caliphate in the seventh and eighth centuries, including the relationship between local elites and the central provincial government. The Coptic protection letter mechanism protected the protector's position in the administration of the province, through the ensuring of the flow of revenue to the central administration. The recipients of the protection letters presumably returned home, paid often a part of their taxes, resumed their work, and might hopefully be counted on to be there to pay taxes for the next tax instalment, rather than be lost to the desert or another village, or even another district.

I have argued that the Coptic protection letter mechanism, and the local elites engaged in it, contributed to the success of empire, through insuring the flow of revenue, and, relatedly, curbing flight from the village. These documents show the fiscal practice of local village authorities, beyond following orders from above and collecting taxes: they acted creatively in the fiscal administration, combining governmental policies with the realities on the

ground, to their own interests and those of the village. Yet, the Coptic protection letters as a whole were not “fiscal documents”, in the way that tax-receipts or tax-demands are, they were not instruments of the fiscal administration of Egypt. They are, in the first place, problem-solving instruments based in the variegated responsibilities and competencies of the village elites. The Coptic protection letters show the village elites shaping the fiscal practice of the province as part of a protection mechanism of their own, by which they solved various problems in their communities, a mechanism which operated autonomously from the central provincial administration, yet had a direct impact on it.

The timeframe of the Coptic protection letter mechanism

In Chapter 2, I discussed two interesting facets of the chronological distribution of the Coptic protection letters: 1) all protection letters which could be dated to a specific year or within a timeframe of a few decades, were dated to the first half of the eighth century, and 2) with one exception, none of the Coptic protection letters have been attributed a date after the eighth century. Thus, the mechanism seemed to thrive in the first half of the eighth century – at least in Western Thebes and in the village of Djeme specifically. Yet, while we have to take into account that some protection letters should receive a later date, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, by the end of the eighth century the Coptic protection letter mechanism seems to have become obsolete. The Coptic protection letter mechanism already existed in seventh-century pre-conquest Egypt, as evidenced by the letters sent to bishop Pesynthios included in the corpus. In Chapter 1 I have set out the reasons why I do not believe the Coptic protection letters as a whole, and certainly not those produced in Djeme in the first half of the eighth century, were Coptic versions or direct successors of the so-called *logoi asylias*, known only from sixth-century legal literature. The Coptic protection letters, in my view, were instruments of a similar yet different mechanism of protection functioning in seventh and eighth century Egypt, specifically designed to meet the needs of the situation, and located in village and monastic communities, at times tying those communities together. While the first attestations of the Coptic protection letter mechanism thus predate the incorporation of Egypt into an Islamic empire, I believe it is empire which allowed the Coptic protection letter mechanism to thrive when it did. Umayyad (Marwanid) policies of survey, control, and documentation of revenue and mobility, from the end of the seventh century to the middle of the eighth century, well documented in the sources and addressed in scholarly literature (see section 4.2), coincide with the period in which all the

more precisely dated protection letters can be dated. I have discussed several Arabic and Greek documents which were products of those policies in Chapters 4 and 5. Above I have stated that the Coptic protection letter mechanism operated independently from the central provincial administration, that is was not a product of it. However, I believe that the apparent blossoming of the Coptic protection letter mechanism was connected to the Marwanid policies, as local reactions to the heightened attention to and control of revenue flow and mobility of people from the provincial government.

Could a change in governmental policies also explain the apparent disappearance of the Coptic protection letters after the eighth century? Taking into account the linguistic situation of Egypt at the time, we might expect that by that time Arabic might take over from Coptic to issue the protection letters, similarly to the evolvement of tax-receipts which were more often produced in Arabic as opposed to Greek and Coptic from the second half of the eighth century onwards. However, there does not appear to have been an Arabic equivalent to the Coptic protection letters. Arabic letters reflecting similar mechanisms have been published, but these were not instruments of a particular protection mechanism comparable to the Coptic protection letters. We might consider indeed changes in the policies regarding taxation and mobility after the middle of the eighth century, when the Abbasid dynasty supplanted the Umayyads and commenced their rule over the caliphate. The range of dates for the published Arabic travel permits is 717-751, making them seemingly obsolete as well, while limited phrases from the travel permit formulary recur in published Abbasid Arabic tax-receipts, as well as in tax-receipt produced in the Fatimid periods.⁷²⁸ Were the Arabic travel permits and the Coptic protection letters both “victims” of transitioning fiscal policies, in which taxation and mobility were regulated differently, and/or less strictly? In the second half of the eighth century, lists of fugitives were still compiled in the Fayyum region.⁷²⁹ At this moment, there is no satisfying answer to these issues, which might be provided in the future by an in-depth and all-encompassing investigation of the fiscal documentation in Arabic, Greek, and Coptic of the Abbasid period.

⁷²⁸ Abbasid tax-receipts: *P.DiemFrueheUrkunden* 7 (784), *P.GrohmannProbleme* 18 (812), CPR XVI 1 (821). On this topic, oral communication by Marie Legendre, at the International Congress of Papyrology, Paris, 25 to 30 July 2022.

⁷²⁹ *CPR* XXII 35(750-769?).

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Appendix: Overview of the documents in the corpus of Coptic protection letters

Edition	Date	Provenance	Material	Protectee	Protector	Intermediary	Short description
BKU II 298 ⁷³⁰	VII- VIII?	Egypt	pottery	Kyriakos?	Addressee: monastic/clerical authority ("Your Paternity" 1. 2)	Sender?	Fr. (Fragmentary) The sender asks the addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> .
BKU III 356	VII- VIII?	Middle Egypt: Hermopolite	papyrus	NN male singular	NN singular		No instruction legible but there is space for one (fr.). Promise not to do harm to the protectee, nor to let anyone do harm to the protectee, nor let harm befall the protectee. Mention of signing with a ring.

⁷³⁰ Included because it seems to be a letter asking a monastic or clerical authority to issue a protection letter: ll. 1-3: + ⲱⲣⲏ ⲙⲉⲛ[...] | ⲧⲉⲕⲙⲏⲧⲉⲱⲓⲧ ... | ⲛⲧⲉⲛⲧⲏⲧⲏⲧⲏⲧ ⲛⲗⲟⲣ[ⲟⲥ ...]: "+ Before all things... Your Paternity... that you issue a promise (*logos*). Moreover, the verb ἀποκαλοῖσθαι, "to pay a deficit, to reimburse expenses" (Foerster, *Wörterbuch*, 80) on l. 7 points to a plausible context for a protection letter.

BKU III 357	VII- VIII?	Middle Egypt: Hermopoli te	papyrus	Daminos son of Mena	NN singular		Promise not to ask. Limitation: one year (from today). Exception: four <i>keratia</i> . Provenance of protectee in Greek, as well as an amount of money (exception).
BKU III 473	VII- VIII?	Middle Egypt: Hermopoli te	papyrus	NN: male singular	Fr.: opening: “we”: Penōte, then signatures: Enōch, Ma(kare) (?), B(asile) (?), Iōhannēs		Fr. Signatures “I sign this <i>logos</i> ” on the verso. Instruction with “your house” legible on recto l. 6. Oath sworn by “God the Almighty and the wellbeing of those who rule over us”.
Cromwell, Recording village life, p. 245-247, no. 9	late 720s, likely 727/72 8	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	NN ? and? Ammonios	Georgios and Aron <i>meizonēs/me izoterōi</i> of Kastron		Fr. Instruction not legible, Promise not to prosecute. Opening line (internal address) written in Greek. Written by scribe Aristophanes.

		Paulos (Dra' Abu el-Naga): monastic centre	pottery	Solomon	Mōysēs			
O. Dankopt. 36	VII- VIII?	West Thebes, Dra' Abu el-Naga: Deir el- Bachit monastery = Apa Paulos					Instruction to come and work for Seueros. Promise to not let... (fr.)	
O. Lips. Copt. II 103 ⁷³¹	VI- VIII?	Larger Theban area: Hermonthi s, Apa		? P1	Dux	?	Fr. Letter in which a <i>logos</i> of the <i>dux</i> is mentioned. The letter mentions movement to North and South, the <i>logos</i> is probably related to that.	

⁷³¹ Included based on the restitution by the editor [... λο]ρος μαλοϋζ (l. x+11) and the mention of travel to the South (l. x+12).

O. Lips. Copt. II 170	VI- VIII?	Ezekiel Monastery	Larger Theban area: Hermonthi s, Apa Ezekiel Monastery	“our brother Sourous”	? Not mentioned in the letter	Sabinos, Apadios, Patermouthès = senders, also intermediarie s: they "received" the logos for the protectee	The senders tell the addressee not to be afraid and to come to the village that night, as they have received a <i>logos</i> for him.
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O.Crum VC 008	698 or 728; Crom well Villag e Scribe 698 or 713	Western Thebes: Djeme and a monastery (maybe Apa Paul/Deir el-Bachit) around it are involved	papyrus	Community of monks: “the holy brethren of the monastery and all those that are with them”	<i>lashanes</i> Severus and Johannes; stoichei: ex- lashane Athanasios, s. Papnoute, Zebedaeus, s. George, Constantine, s. Solomon, whole <i>koinon</i> (community/ college of village authorities) of Djeme	Instruction: stay in their “holy place”, promise against harm and imposition of taxes beyond what their “fathers” paid. Oath sworn by God the Almighty and the wellbeing of those who rule over us. Written by scribe Psate.
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<p>O.Crum VC 009</p>	<p>698 or 728; Crom well Village Scribe 698 or 713</p>	<p>Western Thebes: Djeme and a monastery (maybe Apa Paul/Deir el-Bachit) around it are involved</p>	<p>papyrus</p>	<p>Community of monks</p>	<p><i>lshanes</i> Severus and Johannes/the <i>dux</i>?</p>	<p>Fr. Shorter than O.CrumVC 8. Mentions an order of the <i>dux</i>. Instruction to come and stay in their place. Promise of protection against prosecution on account of anything. Oath sworn by God the Almighty and the wellbeing of those who rule over us. Written by scribe by Psate.</p>
<p>O.Crum VC 010</p>	<p>VIII, first half</p>	<p>Theban area</p>	<p>pottery</p>	<p>Johannes</p>	<p>Epiphanius and Athanasius</p>	<p>Tax receipt for <i>diagrafon</i> tax, one <i>holokottinos</i>, first instalment, with added protection letter. Promise not to ask anything. Limitation: this (fourth) year. Exception: “this” <i>holokottinos</i>.</p>
<p>O.Crum VC 011</p>	<p>VII-VIII?</p>	<p>Theban area</p>	<p>pottery</p>	<p>? Singular</p>	<p>? Singular</p>	<p>Fr. Promise not to let any one prosecute the protectee on account of anything, promise not to arrest the</p>

O.Crum VC 064	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Camelherd er Sabinos and his camel	Sender: Iōhannēs, “your son”	Addressee: priest Apa Mōysēs	protectee, positive promise of help. Possible reference to flight: 1. 2 (ἀκνο[for ἀκνωτ: you fled). Addressee had asked sender for a <i>logos</i> for Sabinos and his camel. The sender now sends the <i>logos</i> within his reply to the addressee. External address. Instruction to come home and work with camel. Promise to not allow harm to befall the protectee. Signature and date.
O.Crum VC 075	VII- VIII?	Said to come from Deir el- Bakhit = <i>topos</i> of Apa Paulus.	pottery	NN jar maker	Addressee priest Apa Paham / Sender (will uphold <i>logos</i>)	Sender Iōhannēs <i>lashane</i> of Trakatan	The sender asks the addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> for the jar maker. The sender promises that he will uphold the <i>logos</i> and that no harm will befall the protectee. The sender will return the jar maker to the <i>topos</i> . Urgency of the matter repeated.

O.Crum VC 082	VII- VIII?	Egypt	Pottery	Pkōl	Addressee: my holy lord father Apa Abraham, who is asked to issue the protection letter / Sender: lashane who “signs this <i>logos</i> ”	Sender: <i>lashane</i> Witness: Philoxenus, priest	After having discussed other topics, the sender asks the addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> for the protectee, with instruction in the third person: “that he comes”. The sender then signs with the formulary of protection letters. Epistolary external address: “Give to ... from...”. The letter ends with a witness statement.
O.Crum VC 106	VII- VIII?	Egypt	pottery	NN Singular	NN Addressee	NN Sender	Fr. Letter possibly about a litigation. Possibly description of the situation, then the sender asks the addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> for someone, incl. probably the instruction in the third person to “dwell in his house”.

O. GurmaGor ecki 69	VII- VIII	Theban area: Hermitage MMA 1152	pottery	monk Haron	all the brothers of the <i>koivotés</i> = college of village authorities		Instruction. Promise not to prosecute. Limitation: on account of anything from these the taxes (lit. gold). Exception: a <i>trimission</i> more (lit. again).
O. GurmaGor ecki 70	VII- VIII	Theban area: Hermitage MMA 1152	pottery	Kurikos and his children	Elisaïos the <i>lashane</i> and Ioannes his brother		Instruction. Promise not to transgress against the protectee. Positive promise that the protectee is free to go to his place if he does not come to an agreement with the protector, in a conversation.
O. GurmaGor ecki 71	710- 730	Theban area: Hermitage MMA 1152	pottery	Addressee Psis?	three <i>lashane</i> . Johannes, David and Maenkhnout	Addressee Psis?	Fr. letter. A <i>logos mpnoute</i> is mentioned twice, the second time towards the end of the letter, right before the epistolary address and a final greeting. No instruction, and positive promise to “not overlook the good”. Not clear if the addressee of

O.GurmaGor eckl 72	VII- VIII	Theban area: Hermitage MMA 1152	pottery	Sender	NN <i>lashane</i>	Addressee/br other of the addressee	the letter is an intermediary or the protectee. Fr. The sender asks the addressee for help to obtain a <i>logos</i> . The addressee's "brother" should talk with the <i>lashane</i> .
O.MedinetH abu Copt. 136	VII- VIII	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Sender Petronius; Pkamoul, "and all my men and all my goods"	<i>lashane</i> + whole village	Addressee Apa Koukle	The sender wants the addressee to go to the <i>lashane</i> and get <i>logoi</i> for the sender and Pkamoul. The sender mentions he receives a <i>logos</i> each year. "Send it to me tomorrow, quickly."
O.Mon.Cyr. 5 ⁷³²	VII- VIII	Theban area, Sheikh abd el- Gurna,	pottery	Thanaël and Onnophrios	monk Abraham = addressee	Arsenios = sender	Sender asks addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> for the protectee.

⁷³² Corrections by Delattre, "Nouveau", 418-419.

O.Mon.Cyr. 6	VII-VIII	Theban area, Sheikh abd el-Gurna, Monastery of Kyriakos TT 65	pottery	NN Singular	Arsenios = Sender?	?	Letter mentioning a <i>logos</i> . The sender will accompany the protectee home.
O.Mon.Phoi bammon 4	VII-VIII?	Theban area, Apa Phoibamm on monastery (NOT deir el-bahari)	pottery	Elias and his children	Leontios and Ezeikeel		Instruction to come home, go to work. Promise that no evil will befall the protectee.

O.Saint- Marc 322	VII – VIII, first half?	Theban area, <i>Topos</i> of Saint- Marc. Qurnet Mura'i	pottery	Isak and his wife and children	<i>lashanes</i>		No promise clause, but instruction to go and do something related to rent or work of the protectees wife and her sister. With epistolary address.
O.Saint- Marc 323	VII – VIII, first half?	Theban area, <i>Topos</i> of Saint- Marc. Qurnet Mura'i	pottery	NN man singular	Sender? Kolō...from Djeme		Fr. Not clear whether this document is related to the protection letters. Contains words that could be part of promise clauses (of the type “that no evil will befall you”).
O.Vind.Copt .66	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Isak (and his wife)	Senders Enoch, Andreas, Jacob	Apa Psente (= addressee) ?	Fr. Document related to Isak and his wife. The link with protection letters: the verso mentions a <i>logos</i> for them, with promise: that no one will ask them (anything).

O.Vind.Copt . 67	738	Theban area	pottery	NN	Athanasios and Joannake		Fr. End of protection letter: Signatures by protectors and scribal signature (priest and <i>hegoumenos</i> Nöhe) + date. End of protection letter. Promise not to allow anyone to prosecute the protectee with anything evil. Signatures, date, scribal signature (Theodōros. Editor: unlikely that this is Theodoros son of Psate who wrote <i>SB Kopt.</i> V 2265).
OTorino S 5945+S 5937 (unpublished)	709, 724, or 739	“Valley of the queens”: Dayr el- Rumi	pottery	NN singular	Elias and Petros (maybe those of P.KRU 9.8-10)		
OTorino S. 5911 (unedited)	VII- VIII	“Valley of the queens”: Dayr el- Rumi	pottery	Philotheos and wife and children	Sender ..., son of Abraham (?); but signature and promise clauses are in plural; signed by ...l and Ezekiel.	Addressee: Apa Biktōr (most probably) Victor II, abbot of the monastery of Phoibammon in Theban	After epistolary address from sender to addressee follows the text of the protection letter for the protectee. Instruction (come to your house). Promise: will not ask anything of you. Exception: <i>diagrafon</i> tax. Date in Greek.

P. Bawit Clackson 65	VIII	Middle Egypt, Hermopoli te nome, Bawit, Apa Apollo monastery	papyrus	?	Our father who writes = superior of the monastery	area, early VIII century	Fr. On l. 3 possibly start of <i>eis plogos mpnoute</i> formula (variation), or mention of a <i>Iogos (mpnoute)</i> .
P. Köln ägypt. II 25	VIII	Middle Egypt, Apa Apollo monastery Bawit	papyrus	Apollo ("his son")	Daniel (superior of the monastery: "It is our father who writes")		Instruction to come to the protector's hermitage (lit. "grave"). The protectee should bring wine. Conversation between protector and protectee. Date in Greek.

P. Lond. Copt. 1227	VIII	Lower Egypt, Delta?	papyrus	Georgi ? = addressee	<i>koinon</i> of Thmui? = sender		Legal document recognizing the receipt of taxes by Georgi, with reference to a <i>logos mproute</i> .
P. Mon. Epiph. 120	VII- VIII	Theban area, Apa Epiphaniu s <i>topos</i>	pottery	Zael	?	?	Text not edited, only description available. Seems to quote from a protection letter.
P. Mon. Epiph. 265	VII- VIII	Theban area, Apa Epiphaniu s <i>topos</i>	pottery	priest?	? Two people		Text not edited, only description available. Possibly: promise clause with exception: the protectee needs to pay his share.
P. Ryl. Copt. 289	VII- VIII	?	papyrus	Youths, fled from the monastery	Addressee: x, archimandrit e of a monastery?	Sender: Sarapamon, of community of "rock" of Apa Thomas (sender)/ deacon Germanos	The sender asks the addressee to authorize that the protectees receive a protection letter. They had fled from the monastery, convincing sailors to take them North. The sender had sent a deacon to find the protectees.

P. Ryl. Copt. 385	VIII, recto: first half, verso: second half	?	papyrus	Vinedresser s	Addressee (... and Silas)	Sender Shenoute	After other topics, the sender mentions that the vinedressers have fled, but that he will not issue a <i>logos</i> for them/give them a <i>logos</i> . The addressee(s) should find new vinedressers.
P.Heid. XI 490	VIII	Hermopolites	papyrus	Man sing. <i>shai</i> <i>oulogos naf</i>	Severos?	Sender: Abū Diya'	Fr. The sender asks the addressee to write a <i>logos</i> for someone.
P.Katoennati e 685/1 (unedited)	600- 631	Found in: possibly in or near Apa Epiphanius <i>topos</i> in	papyrus	Papnoute, son of Johannes of Pselch	Bishop Pesynthios	Stefanos, <i>lashane</i> or city official	The sender asks the addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> for the protectee.

P. Stras.Copt. 66	Early VIII	Theban area	pottery	x, s. Konstantin os	?			Fr. Tax receipt for <i>diagrafon</i> tax, followed by protection letter. (Probably) Written by scribe Psate.
Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001) p. 176-177 (= P. Akoris 36)	VII- VIII	Middle Egypt, Hermopoli tes, Akoris	papyrus	Djedjoi of Tehnè	Papnoute van Tehnè			Fr. Instruction not legible. Promise not to arrest, promise not to let anyone prosecute the protectee. Oath sworn by God the Almighty.
Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001) p. 177 (= P. Akoris 54)	VII- VIII	Middle Egypt, Hermopoli tes, Akoris	papyrus	? Markos, Daniel?	? Singular			Likely the end of a protection letter. Exception of one <i>holokottinos</i> . Limitation of this year. Oath sworn by God the Almighty and on the head of those who govern over us.

Pap. Congr. XXIII (Vienna 2001) p. 178 (= O.Ashm. Copt. 3)	VIII	Theban area	pottery	Apadios	Damianos and Phoibamon		Instruction to come and ... Promise to not prosecute the protectee.
SB Kopt. I 38	VII-VIII?	Egypt	papyrus	“Your honored brotherhood”	?		Fr. A letter which contains a protection letter.
SB Kopt. I 39	VII	Egypt	papyrus	?	?		Fr. <i>logos mpnoute</i> mentioned on l. 3.
SB Kopt. II 914	VII, first half?	Oxyrhynchus?	papyrus	pious brother Papa, ape of Oxyrynchus (?)	<i>proestōs</i> Apa Ananias		Instruction to come, the protector will speak with the protectee. Promise that no evil will befall the protectee. Signature of protector and date written in Greek.

SB Kopt. II 915	VIII	Egypt	papyrus	Camelherd er Theona	scrimarius and dioiketês Mêna.		Permission to work with the bishop camels for a year, but in the form of a protection letter.
SB Kopt. II 916	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Psan, his son Jeremias, anyone belonging to you	Petros		No instruction. Promise not to ask, nor to seize. Limitation: <i>dêmosion</i>
SB Kopt. II 917	VII- VIII	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Thomas, s.o An...	Merkourious and Theodôros, <i>lashanes</i> of Djeme		Instruction to come home. Promise to not prosecute. Limitation: "my" instalment. Exception: two <i>trimessia</i> .
SB Kopt. III 1365 ⁷³³	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Charachte	Biktôr the <i>lashane</i> of el- Tod		Letter with several formulae from the protection letters (instruction, negative and positive promise clause, mention of settling), but without the

⁷³³ Corrections in Delattre, "Bemerkungen", no. 520.

SB Kopt. III 1366	?	Coptite nome, Deir el-Gizaz, Apa Samuel monastery	pottery	Iohannes	Makarios		<i>eis plogos mpnoute</i> formula nor a signature from the protector. Address: "Give...to..." Fr. Instruction to come to a field.
SB Kopt. III 1367	VIII	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Shenoute (son of) Joannes	Georgios		Instruction to appear. Promise not to ask anything. Limitation: the instalment. Exception: one <i>trimission</i> .
SB Kopt. III 1368	728	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Jerèmias s.o. Basileios and children	<i>meizonas</i> = <i>lashanes</i> Georgios and Aron (of Kastron Memnonion = Djeme)		Instruction to come home and appear. Protectee had fled. Promise not to do harm, not to prosecute. Limitation: this instalment. Exception: ½ <i>holokottinos</i> . Date written in Greek. Written by scribe Aristophanes.

SB Kopt. V 2223	VI-VII	Middle Egypt, Hermopoli te	papyrus	Jeremias “our son”	Priest Dionysios		Instruction to come to the monastery. Promise to not cause harm.
SB Kopt. V 2224	VI-VII	Middle Egypt, Hermopoli te nome	papyrus	Timotheos “my brother”	Biktōr		Instruction to come and go to work(shop). Promise not to arrest, nor to hit.
SB Kopt. V 2225 ⁷³⁴	VII	Theban area (TT65: monastery of Cyriacus)	pottery	? Plural and their wives	? Singular		Fr. Instruction to dwell (in your house). Promise that no harm will befall the protectee.
SB Kopt. V 2226	VI- VIII?	Theban area, possibly <i>topos</i> of	pottery	A man	<i>Pronoêtes</i> Patese and Himai, “in name of the <i>topos</i> ”	Priest Iōhannēs	The sender, a priest, excludes the addressees, estate managers, from Holy Communion, since they had disrespected the protection letter they had issued for someone.

⁷³⁴ Reedition of O.Mon.Cyr. 38 in Delattre, “Nouveau”, 415–419.

			Epiphanius							
SB Kopt. V 2227	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery/li mestone	Akas	<i>lashane</i> Apa Biktōr				Instruction to come and stay home. Promise that no harm will befall the protectee.	
SB Kopt. V 2228	VIII: beginning	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Kolnēue (?)	Petros and Pesynthios				Coptic protection letter, but without promise clause. Instruction to “come to your house” and a mention of <i>diōikēsis</i> , a tax. Written by scribe Psate.	
SB Kopt. V 2229	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	NN, man of Djeme	? Singular				Fr. Instruction to come. Promise not to prosecute	
SB Kopt. V 2230	VIII (737 or 767?)	Theban area	pottery	Zacharias and your son Johannes	Theon				Instruction to come and stay home. Promise that no harm will befall the protectee.	

SB Kopt. V 2231	VII- VIII?	Theban area?	pottery	Iōan and your children	? “I, P...”		Instruction to come and stay home. Promise that no harm will befall the protectee, and not to allow anyone to... (lost).
SB Kopt. V 2232	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Psyros, s.o. Elias	Petros and Swai		Instruction to come home. Promise not to cause harm to the protectee, nor to let anyone else to cause harm to him, nor to let anyone prosecute him.
SB Kopt. V 2233	729	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Shenute s.o. Petros and Stephanos	Geōrgiō and Pesate		Instruction to come home. Promise not to prosecute the protectee, and affirmation that protectors are in agreement with the protectee. Written by scribe Aristophanes.
SB Kopt. V 2234	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Priest of Terkōt, and people with him	? Singular	<i>Kurios</i> (Lord) Apa Apion and Abraham	Promise that no harm or violence (or: injustice) will befall the protectee. The intermediary had informed the protector that the protectee had “gone away” (= flight?). Instruction clause possibly lost.

SB Kopt. V 2235	VIII	Middle Egypt, Hermopoli tes nome?	papyrus	? singular, has fled	? Someone with a ring seal	Instruction to come to your house. Promise not to cause harm to the protectee, and not to let anyone ... (lost). "I seal this <i>logos</i> with my ring.)
SB Kopt. V 2236	VIII- IX	Middle Egypt, Hermopoli tes nome	papyrus		We, Kuriakos (s.o.) Shenoute, Anobion (s.o) Ermias and Kosma (s.o.) Phoilemōn, "remaining men"; the <i>koimotēs</i> Tbake npestratē (?)	Fr. Issued by the <i>koimotēs</i> (village community/college of village elites) of Tbake npestratē (?). The names of individual protectors are legible, as well as the <i>eis plogos mpnoutē ntootk</i> formula. The wife of Abraham is mentioned, as protector? protectee?, and the back of the papyrus probably contains an address (fragmentary).
SB Kopt. V 2237	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Iakkōbos	?	Fr. Instruction clause "Come to your house".

SB Kopt. V 2238	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	? Singular	<i>lashane</i> Paham		End of Coptic protection letter, promise not to let anyone prosecute the protectee.
SB Kopt. V 2239	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Mathios	Soldier Kolluthos		Instruction to appear, wander/return, and receive “your share” in gold. Promise not to prosecute.
SB Kopt. V 2240	VII- VIII	Theban area	papyrus	Phoibamm ōn s.o. She...	<i>dioikètēs</i> Palōts		Instruction to (come to) your house and do your work, mention of harvest (fr.). Protection against asking (above “your fair share”), arrest, harm: from anyone (I will not let anyone...). The protectee had fled. Oath by Almighty God.
SB Kopt. V 2241	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Ganah	Kalè		Instruction to come home. Promise not to ask anything, except for an immaculate <i>holokottinos</i> . Written “for him” by Paulos.
SB Kopt. V 2242	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Ieremias s.o. Esdra	<i>apè</i> Papnoute		Instruction to come home. Promise to not ask anything, except for “one share/portion”. Written by Patapè.

SB Kopt. V 2243	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Haraw (and son? verso)	? Plural	Pow, betaalt belasting voor Haraw	Instruction to “come” and give a <i>holokottinos</i> to Pow, who had paid taxes for the protectee. Promise clause on verso (signature and date on recto): no arrest “because of your son” this year.
SB Kopt. V 2244	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Woman and her daughter	? Singular		Instruction to come home. Promise not to ask anything of protectee, except for daughter’s <i>démosion</i> tax.
SB Kopt. V 2245	VII- VIII	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Joseph, s.o. Petros	Leontios and the meizonēs (?) = <i>lashanes</i> of Kastron Memnonion (Djeme)		Instruction to come home. Promise to not prosecute, except for the <i>diokésis</i> tax.
SB Kopt. V 2246	729	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	? Singular	? Plural		(Fr.), instruction and promise clause are lost. Mention of payment: “until you pay this <i>holokottinos</i> ”. Written by

								scribe Aristophanes. Date and scribal signature in Greek.
SB Kopt. V 2247	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	? Plural	Klautès, Kyriakos, Kamoul, Èpate			Beginning lost. The protectee had fled. Promise not to ask the <i>diagrafon</i> tax nor <i>dip/è</i> except for the <i>dèmosion</i> .
SB Kopt. V 2248	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Èlias, s.o. Petros (?)	? Singular			Instruction to come home. Promise not to prosecute. Exception: another <i>trimission</i> . Mention of “Lord, the <i>dux</i> ”.
SB Kopt. V 2249	728/72 9	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Peshate, s.o. Èlias, man of Djeme	<i>meizonès</i> = <i>lashanès</i> Geōrgiō and Aarōn (of Kastron Memnonion - Djeme)			Instruction to come home. Promise not to prosecute. Exception: ½ <i>trimission</i> . Written by scribe Aristophanes.

SB Kopt. V 2250 + 2251	VII- VIII	Theban area: Deir el-Bachit	pottery	Iōhanēs s.o. Iakōb	Pisraël and Anatolios		Instruction to appear. Promise not to ask anything. Exception: οὐσίκη (ζύγη): “a pair” (?).
SB Kopt. V 2252	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Dēmétrios, s.o. Psyre	Markos		Instruction to appear. Promise not to do harm, nor to require anything from the protectee. Exception: εὐσίκη (ζύγη): “a pair” (?).
SB Kopt. V 2253	IX?	Theban area	pottery	monk Psmo	priest and <i>hegoumenos</i> of the mountain of Djeme Kyriakos		Instruction to appear. Protectee had fled. Promise not to do harm, and to not allow that harm befalls the protectee. Protector will be in agreement with the protectee on everything. Promise not to ask anything. Exception: three <i>keratia</i> . The protectee also needs to give a <i>trimesion</i> .
SB Kopt. V 2254	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Petros	lashane Pekōsh		Instruction to come home and “do service”. Promise not to let anyone transgress against the protectee on

SB Kopt. V 2255	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Patermoute, s.o. Tapeu (?)	Isak		account of anything. Limitation: this year. Instruction to come home and stay. Promise that no harm will befall the protectee. Limitation: this year.
SB Kopt. V 2256	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	? singular	? singular		Fr. Instruction to come. Promise not to ask anything from the protectee. Limitation: this year. Oath sworn by God the Almighty.
SB Kopt. V 2257	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Samou(el)	Papè		Instruction to come home. Promise not to ask anything. Limitation: the entire year. Content exception (εΙΜΗΤΕ: except for) lost. Oath sworn.
SB Kopt. V 2258	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	? Singular	Parchon		Fr. Instruction to come. Promise not to prosecute (? fr.). Limitation: this year.
SB Kopt. V 2259	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	? Singular	Azarias and the whole community/c ollege of		Fr. Instruction to come home. Promise not to ask. Limitation: until next year.

SB Kopt. V 2260	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Iob, s.o. ...	village officials (<i>koinotés</i>) Apadios	Fr. The protectee had fled. Promise not to agree to..., not to do harm to the protectee, not to... (lost). Limitation: mention of the <i>démision</i> of the eleventh year. Exception: NCΔ but content lost. Mention of a <i>holokottinos</i> and a tax instalment (<i>katabolé</i>).
SB Kopt. V 2261	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Biktōr, s. Èlias	<i>lashane</i> Shenetōm of Longine	Instruction to come home. Promise not to ask anything (incl. bread and “service”). Exception: what the protectee owes to the <i>shaliou</i> . Limitation: until the tax burden for the second instalment is distributed. Promise not to assign taxes to the protectee. Promise to treat the protectee fairly. Promise to not let

SB Kopt. V 2262	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Markos, wife and children	<i>lashane</i> ...oute	Instruction to go North and South. Promise to not let harm befall the protectee. Promise not to ask anything. Limitation: this year. Mention of a <i>trimeission</i> , probably an exception. Written by ...pōn, s.o. Elisaïos. Verso: oath.	anyone dissolve the <i>logos</i> . Mention of “great men” (ll. 18-19)
SB Kopt. V 2263	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	? Singular	Pachōm	Fr. Instruction to pay each year. Promise not to prosecute. Mention of a liturgy, of an exception, of an instalment. Towards the end again the <i>eis logos mpnoute ntootk</i> formula, and an instruction to “gather your dates”.	
SB Kopt. V 2264	VIII, first half	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	? Singular	Antōnios and Swai	No instruction. Promise to not prosecute. Limitation: eighth (indiction) year. Written by scribe Iōannes.	

SB Kopt. V 2265	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Ioannès, s.o. Samuel	<i>dioiketeis</i> Zebedaios and Swai	Promise not to prosecute. No instruction. Limitation: this year. Exception: ½ <i>holokottinos</i> . Written by scribe Theodoros.
SB Kopt. V 2266	VIII, first quarter	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Senouthios, s.o. Patermoute	ape Senouthios; Joseph and Pheu	Promise not to prosecute. No instruction. Limitation: this year. Exception ½ <i>trimission</i> . Written by scribe Psate.
SB Kopt. V 2267	VIII, first half	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	? Singular	? Singular	Promise not to let anyone overpower/harass the protectee. Promise not to ask anything “by law”. No instruction. Exception: two <i>holokottinoi</i> (of a?) tax instalment.
SB Kopt. V 2268	VIII, 708	Theban area	pottery	Danièl	<i>lashanes</i> Abraam and Seuèrus	Promise not to ask anything. No instruction. Limitation: this sixth year. Exception: 1 <i>holokottinos</i> and 1 <i>trimission</i> . Oath sworn by God Almighty to uphold the <i>logos</i> . Written by scribe Psate (?)

SB Kopt. V 2269	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Ramesseu m	pottery	Theophilos and all his brothers	? Singular	Fr. No instruction. Mentions a father and mother, and buying and selling: related to property, probably inheritance dispute. Exception of one golden <i>holokottinos</i> .
SB Kopt. V 2270	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Jerejmias and ...kos(?)	?	Fr. Promise not to arrest. No instruction.
SB Kopt. V 2271	VII- VIII	Theban area, Deir el-Bahari, Phoibamm on monastery (<i>SB Kopt.</i> V 2271)/Dje me (<i>TM</i>)	pottery	Mèna	<i>lashane</i> Swai	Instruction to “come”, the protector will talk with him. If the result of the conversation does not please the protectee he can leave. Written by Niharau, deacon.

SB Kopt. V 2272	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Andreas	Mōysēs and Theokxis	Instruction to come to the protector and come to a settlement. If not, the protectee can leave to his “place”. Instruction to wait in his house, the protector will find the protectee in the village. The protectee should pay 5 <i>holokottinoi</i> , and two parties will each pay another 5 <i>holokottinoi</i> .
SB Kopt. V 2273	VII- VIII	Theban area, Apa Epiphaniu s topos	pottery	? Singular	priest Lilou	Two texts on outside, one on inside of <i>ostrakon</i> . One text on the outside has the formulary of a protection letter. Instruction to come South and reach a settlement. Promise not to let anything be taken from the protectee. The other text on the outside has similar instruction and promise, with limitation: “nor on account of taxes nor debts”. The text on the inside seems to be a letter from the <i>prōtos</i> to
SB Kopt. V 2274	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Kouloudj	<i>Prōtos</i> (head of monastery)	

									Kouloudj. Mention of assigning of taxes and the <i>démision</i> .
SB Kopt. V 2275	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery/li mestone	Stephanos, Papnouthe, Shenoute and Démétrios	Iôsèph and Pheu				Promise not to do harm and not to allow anyone to do harm to the protectee.
SB Kopt. V 2276	VII- VIII?	Theban area, Deir el-Bahari, Apa Phoibamm on monastery	pottery	Iakōb, s.o. K...	Apa Biktōr				Permission to till a plot of land, with at the end protection letter formulary. Promise not to ask (something/anything?) until a certain month (Pauni).
SB Kopt. V 2277	VII- VIII?	Middle Egypt, Hermopoli te nome	papyrus	Farmer Mōèsès	Lady Marou				Additional document to a <i>mishōsis</i> (lease contract). Protection letter formulary: <i>eis plogos mpnoute ntoutk</i> . Permission to till a plot of land for three years.

SB Kopt. V 2278	VII- VIII?	Theban area, dra about el- naga	limestone	Patlōle	Phaustos		Fr. Protection letter formulary: <i>eis plogos mpnoute ntootk</i> , permission to till plot of land of the protector.
SB Kopt. V 2279	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Camelherd David	<i>pronoētés</i> Golthè	Apa Philotheos, <i>proēstos</i> of Apa Georgios monastery.	Permission to use a camel, with protection letter formulary. Instruction to go “North and South”, promise to not ask.
SB Kopt. V 2280	695? or 725?	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Paternute, s.o. Abraham	<i>lshanes</i> Seberos and Iōhannès		Tax receipt for the <i>diagrafōn</i> tax, one <i>holokottinos</i> , first instalment, with added protection letter: promise that he will not be prosecuted on account of anything in that year and to not let anyone prosecute on account of anything. Exception: the <i>holokottinos</i> paid. Written by scribe Komes. No instruction.

SB Kopt. V 2281	VIII, first half	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Ananias, s.o. Psès	? Singular		Tax receipt for <i>diagrafon</i> tax, one <i>holokottinos</i> , first instalment, with added protection letter: promise that protectee will not be prosecuted on account of anything. No instruction. Written by scribe Psate (?)
SB Kopt. V 2282	VIII, first half	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Zacharias, s.o. Daueid	? singular		Tax receipt for <i>diagrafon</i> tax, two <i>trimessia</i> , first instalment, with added protection letter: promise that protectee will not be prosecuted on account of anything. No instruction.
SB Kopt. V 2283	VIII, first half	Theban area, Djeme	pottery	Ananias, s.o. Andreas	<i>apè</i> Daueit		Tax receipt for <i>diagrafon</i> tax, one <i>holokottinos</i> , first instalment, with added protection letter: promise to not ask anything other than the “2.5 portions”. No instruction. Written by scribe Psate (?)
SB Kopt. V 2284	VIII, first half	Theban area	pottery	Kollouthos, s.o. Paam	Zekelios s.o. Phib, <i>apè</i> Samouèl		Tax receipt for <i>diagrafon</i> tax, ½ <i>holokottinos</i> and one <i>trimession</i> , second instalment, with added

SB Kopt. V 2285	VII- VIII (<i>SB</i> <i>Kopt.</i> V: VIII, first half)	Theban area	pottery	Kyra	? Singular	Kyra's son Mèna	protection letter (fr.). Written by scribe Psate. No instruction. Instruction (permission?): live in your son's house. Mention of a guaranteee.
SB Kopt. V 2286	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Petros	Taammonikos, who imposed taxes	Apadios (refused to be protector), sender and receiver (monastic or clerical authority)	Letter on a protection letter to be issued for a third person, with report on a conversation who should issue the protection letter (person who imposed taxes on the protectee).

SB Kopt. V 2287	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Samouèl	Andronikos (?) (s.? ...) Mena	sender Samouèl (different from protectee), addressee Apa Pesnte	Sender asks addressee to ask Andronikos to issue a <i>logos</i> for Samouèl (protectee), who should come so that Andronikos/Apa Pesnte confers with the protectee about the protectees imprisoned son. Indirect speech makes it unclear who is meant. Address.
SB Kopt. V 2288	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Johannes, s. Patermouth ios	addressee: Apa Iakōb	senders: <i>Ischianes</i> van Trakata, Iōannēs, Pisrèel and Saa	Senders ask addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> for the protectee. The senders want to speak with the protectee, who should also speak with the <i>actuarius</i> . Mention of a <i>logos</i> written in name of Mena, bishop of Koptos. Mention of friends who received a <i>logos</i> and came home (possibly indirect speech). Address.
SB Kopt. V 2289	VII- VIII?	Theban area, tomb of Puyemre =	limestone	Pdjui	Addressee: Apa Paulos	sender P...m	Letter starts with many politeness formulas. The protectee had asked the sender to ask the sender to issue a

									<i>logos</i> for him (fr.). Protectee is characterized as “poor”. Address.
SB Kopt. V 2290	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Pdjoui, and his son, and Pateese?	Addressee Priest NN	Sender NN		Fr. Sender asks the addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> for the protectee. Instruction clause in third person pl. “I have underwritten” + date. Address.	
SB Kopt. V 2291	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Theophilos	Addressee <i>proestās</i> Papa Ēlias (receiver)/als o sender Iakōb	Iakōb (sender)		Starts with external address: “Give to...” Sender asks addressee to issue a <i>logos</i> for the protectee, and promises to uphold the <i>logos</i> . Instruction in third person: “that he comes to his house”. Ends with signature by sender.	
SB Kopt. V 2292	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Triphanios	Addressee NN: monastic/cler ical authority (“Your Paternity”)/	Sender NN		Sender asks addressee to issue <i>logos</i> for protectee. Instruction in third person. Promise to uphold the <i>logos</i> , promise in third person: no one will ask anything of the protectee.	

SB Kopt. V 2293	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	A...phei, man of O...?	Addressee NN?/ Geōrgios, who signs at the end (= sender?)	Sender (Geōrgios?)	Fr. Request to issue a protection letter. Promise clause in third person: sender will not allow anyone to prosecute the protectee, and promises to respect the <i>logos</i> . "I have underwritten". Date in Greek + Geōrgios signs in a second hand.	Exception: the addressee (can ask something of the protectee).
SB Kopt. V 2294	VII- VIII	Theban area, Apa Epiphaniu s <i>topos</i>	papyrus	Children of Andreas, s.o. Kalasire (?)	Sender NN, who signs the letter/ <i>logos</i> Addressee: monastic/cler ical authority, who is asked	Sender NN, who will respect the <i>logos</i> .	Fr. Probably request to issue a <i>logos</i> . Mention of respecting the <i>logos</i> . The request is also valid as <i>logos</i> : "I have underwritten this letter with the value of a <i>logos</i> ". Date in Greek, signature in second hand.	

SB Kopt. V 2295	VII- VIII	Theban area, Apa Epiphaniu s <i>topos</i>	pottery	Man connected to Patermoute	Sender NN	(?) to issue the <i>logos</i>	Addressee NN	Sender received an oral request for a <i>logos</i> and is now sending the <i>logos</i> . Instruction in third person, start of promise (fr.).
SB Kopt. V 2296	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	?	Addressee Pesnte (monastic/cle rical authority)		Sender priest NN	Fr. Request to issue a <i>logos</i> ? Mention of Iakōb, who is poor and imprisoned. Mention of death.
SB Kopt. V 2297	VII- VIII/ first half VIII	Theban area: Deir el- Bachit	pottery	?	Addressee (?) Apa Zacharias		Senders (?) NN and Anatolios?	Fr. Address and mention of issuing a <i>logos</i> . Part of the Anatolios-Zacharias dossier of Deir el-Bachit: See SB Kopt. V 2251 p. 1306.

SB Kopt. V 2298	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	NN	Addressee: my Lord Apa Pesynte	Sender NN	Request to issue a <i>logos</i> (here: <i>logos mpnoute</i>).
SB Kopt. V 2299	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	?	? Singular	?	Fr. Letter opening. l. 5: εις παρορος [: start of a protection letter?
SB Kopt. V 2300	End of VII, beginn ing of VIII	Middle Egypt, Deir el- Bala'izah, Apa Apollo Monastery	papyrus	Sender: monk	Addressee: head of monastery		Protectee requests <i>logos</i> from the protector.
SB Kopt. V 2301	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Deacon Dionysios	Sender: Zacharias of Pshinsion	Addressee: Elias, <i>ara</i> of Djeme	The sender asks the addressee to find the protector and give him the <i>logos</i> , which is contained within the letter. Instruction and promise clauses with references to the protectee in third person. Instruction to come home (North). Promise that no harm will befall the protectee. Exception:

SB Kopt. V 2302	VII- VIII	Theban area, Apa Epiphaniu s <i>topos</i>	pottery	Hapion	Sender: Zacharias, Soulōmōn and Apadios	Addressee: Paham and Wanafre	<p><i>démision</i> tax. The protector promises to bring the protectee back in case he cannot protect the protectee (? unclear). Zacharias signs the letter/<i>logos</i>.</p> <p>The protection letter for Hapion is written in between the address (Give to...from...) and an epistolary ending formula (Rejoice in the Lord). Instruction and promise clauses with references to the protectee in third person. The protectee should come South and settle with someone named Papas, protectee can leave if an agreement/settlement is not reached.</p> <p>Beginning of protection letter in the third person.</p>
SB Kopt. V 2303	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Samouèl and his children	NN		

SB Kopt. V 2304	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Thabais	sender Isak (from prison!)	Addressee: sister T... of sender	Sender writes a protection letter from prison, in third person when referring to protectee. Instruction to come and “pray to her father”. Mention of the “great man” (l. 5).
SB Kopt. V 2305	VII- VIII	Theban area, Apa Epiphaniu s <i>topos</i>	pottery	brother Kyrikos?	NN third person singular?	Addressee: Apa Enoch and Apa Johannes; Sender Samouël	The sender talks about a <i>logos</i> which had been given to him by someone who is not named in the letter. The sender asks the addressees to write to this person to respect that <i>logos</i> . Brother Kyrikos is likely the protectee, whom the addressees are asked to send.
SB Kopt. V 2307	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	? Singular	"Your paternity" = Addressee	Sender	Fr. It seems that the sender of the letter advises the addressee against issuing a <i>logos</i> for a third person (l. 6- 8).
SB Kopt. V 2309	VII- VIII?	Theban area	pottery	Addressee: Mōsès	Pagarch (not named);	Sender Mōysès, uphold the	Promise to respect the <i>logos</i> of the pagarch. Promise to not let any harm

						Sender Mōysès	pagarch's <i>logos</i> .	befall the protectee, promise not to let anyone do harm to the protectee.
SB Kopt. V 2310	VII- VIII	theban area	pottery	Anthase	Addressee?	Sender? Wants to talk with Anthase	Sender asks addressee to issue (? lost) a <i>logos</i> for Anthase, sender wants to speak with protectee. If Anthase is satisfied with the affair, that is good. If not, the sender will respect (? lost) the <i>logos</i> .	
SB Kopt. V 2311	VII- VIII	Theban area	pottery	Patermoute	priest ...ōthios		Fr. <i>eis logos mpnouite ntook</i> formula can be reconstructed, as well as instruction ("Come to...") and possibly exception of (one? 1/2?) <i>trimission</i> .	
Van der Vliet, A Letter to a Bishop (O. APM Inv. 3871).	619- 629	Found: Theban area, probably Epiphaniu s topos. Written:	pottery	Philo the son of Moses, and Theodore and their wives and their	addressee: bishop Pesynthios/ Peter the lashane of Pmilis, who will respect	addressee: bishop Pesynthios/ Peter the lashane of Pmilis who will respect	The sender asks the addressee to issue the <i>logos</i> for the protectee, and promises to respect the <i>logos</i> . The protectees should come North, the sender will talk with them.	

Summary

This dissertation is dedicated to the Coptic protection letters, a group of documentary texts from seventh and eighth-century Egypt. They are the instruments of a specific administrative, legal, and social village mechanism, with both written and oral components, which was in the hands of the local rural elites. This dissertation examines the mechanism of the Coptic protection letters and what it can tell us about the role of the local elites in early Islamic Egypt. The Coptic protection letters are questioned in order to garner information on social cohesion, interaction with the state, the self-regulation of the local communities and the role played by the local elites therein.

Chapter 1 provides the historical context for the protection letter mechanism, as well as methodological comments on using (Coptic) documentary papyri as a source for historical studies, notably the difficulty of dating these documents. I discuss the meaning of “protection” in this dissertation, as well as two wider sources of processes and concepts in the background of the Coptic protection letters in seventh and eighth-century Egypt: 1) Concepts of protection in Islamic law and examples of protection of subordinate people by government officials in the papyri, and 2) Roman or Byzantine asylum law, with special attention to the *logoi asylías*. I argued that the Coptic protection letters should not be seen as Coptic versions of or successors to the *logoi asylías*, but rather that they were distinct instruments of protection mechanisms of late antique Egypt. I also set out what is specific and new about my approach to the Coptic protection letters with respect to preceding scholarship, i.e. the inclusion in my analysis of the social relationships that underlay and were activated in the Coptic protection letter mechanism.

Chapter 2 examines in more detail on the corpus and categorizations of the Coptic protection letters as they were set out in previous editions and discussions. I point out where I disagree with the existing scholarship on the function of documents in certain subcategories (2.1.3). The chapter also presents a list of the 142 documents which I consider as Coptic protection letters in this dissertation. The chapter shows how the majority of the published Coptic protection letters were in fact written on ceramic or limestone shards, and were found in Western Thebes, in the town of Djeme (Medinet Habu) and surrounding monastic settlements. Moreover, the Coptic protection letters which have been dated to a certain year or a couple of decennia, are all dated to the first half of the eighth century.

Regarding chronology, the chapter also touched upon the apparent disappearance of Coptic protection letters after 750.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed discussion of the formulary and of the procedures of the Coptic protection letter mechanism. The chapter argues that the Coptic protection letter mechanism was an institution embedded in local, rural communities, predominantly based in the village, and countered the claim in existing scholarship that the Coptic protection letter procedure was a matter of routine.

Chapter 4 expands the discussion beyond the local context of the Coptic protection letter mechanism, similarly to Chapter 5. It provides a clear positioning of the protection letter mechanism among similar mechanisms operating in late antique and early Islamic Egypt. It discusses the 3 main categories of problems – taxation, fugitives, and private legal issues – which the protection letters aimed to solve, and compared the protection letters, both in terms of function and format, with (contemporary) documents with similar aims. It also discusses the Coptic protection letters' connection to documents and mechanisms related to the release of prisoners. I counter the argument in existing scholarship that the protection letters were essentially debt agreements between private debtors and creditors. Rather, I emphasize the importance of taxation in the protection letters, while acknowledging the role played by debt in the mechanism, while pointing at the ambiguity of the boundary between official/public and private in these contexts. I also refute the idea that the Coptic protection letters functioned as short-distance versions of the Arabic (and Greek) travel permits, by comparing both mechanisms in detail.

Chapter 5 uses the protection letters as well as other documents to argue that the village elites and their mechanisms were integrated in the provincial administration. It also focuses on the social relationships and networks of dependency underlying the Coptic protection mechanism, and the motivations of the local elites to participate in it. I propose a new interpretation of the Coptic letter *P.Ryl.Copt. 277* as a translation to Coptic of the missive of a high government official to a pagarch, likely originally written in Greek or Arabic. I propose that the translation was made in the pagarch's office, and meant for consumption in the village, either to be read out loud to the villagers, or as a reference for the village authorities on what was expected from them according to the letter. I also propose new connections between the Greek *sigillion SB III 7240* and Coptic protection letters *O.CrumVC 8* and *9*. These documents might have been issued for the same community of

monks, four months apart, and illustrate the tensions between the expectations of the monks and those of the government regarding their tax payments.

Curriculum Vitae

Eline Scheerlinck was born in Gent on January 9, 1986. She completed a BA (2005) and MA (2008) in Linguistics and Literature: Latin and Greek at Ghent University, with specializations in Italian language and culture, and in the study of material texts such as papyri and inscriptions. In 2014, she obtained a doctorate in Linguistics and Literature at Ghent University, with a dissertation entitled “An Orient of Mysteries. Franz Cumont’s views on “Orient” and “Occident” in the context of Classical Studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” At Leiden University, she completed an ResMA Classics and Ancient Civilizations: Egyptology, with a focus on Greek, Demotic, and Coptic Papyrology. From 2017 to 2023 she pursued her PhD in Coptic and Greek Papyrology at Leiden University, within the ERC project “Embedding Conquest: Naturalising Muslim Rule in the Early Islamic Empire (600-1000)”, and under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Petra Sijpesteijn and Dr. Edmund Hayes.