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Protective interventions by local elites in early Islamic Egypt

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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 μπνουτε documents”, in which he discussed Coptic texts which bear the *eis plogos (mpnoute) ntootk* formula. His main argument is that the λογος μπνουτε 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 $\pi\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma \mu\eta\nu\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon$ 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 (μνηνοϋτε)* documents”,¹⁹⁴ or documents in which a *logos mnpoute* 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) nttook* 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 letters*²¹¹

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.Schutzbrieft* 66 = *P.Mon.Epiph.* 265; *P.Schutzbrieft* 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 Hesekeiel 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.KölnÄgypt.* 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*.

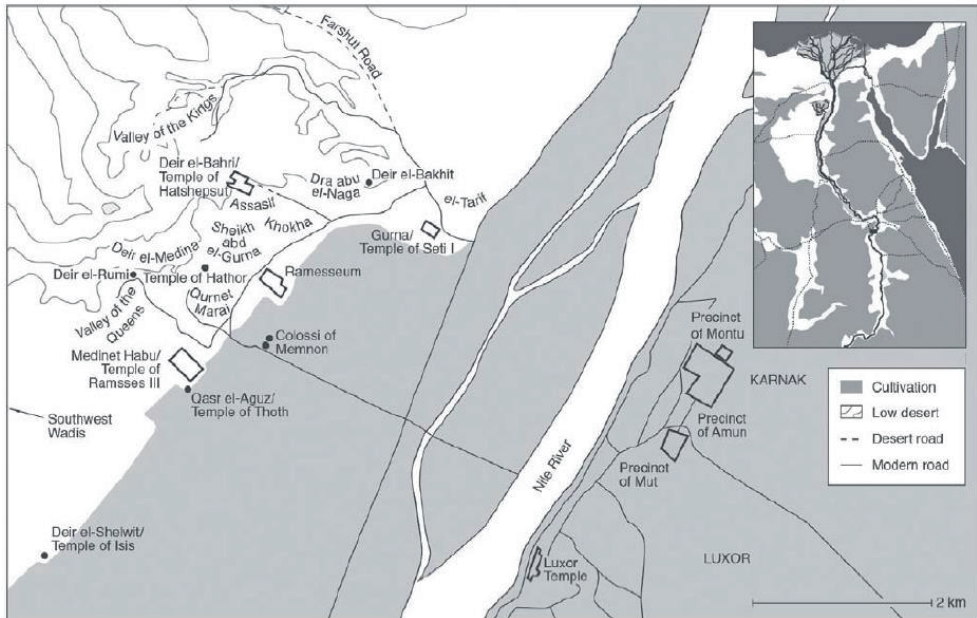


Figure 2: Map of the Theban region (M. Wachtal, © E. R. O'Connell). From: O'Connell & Ruffini, *Social Networks of late Antique Western Thebes*.

²²⁶ Müller, "Andreas," 223.

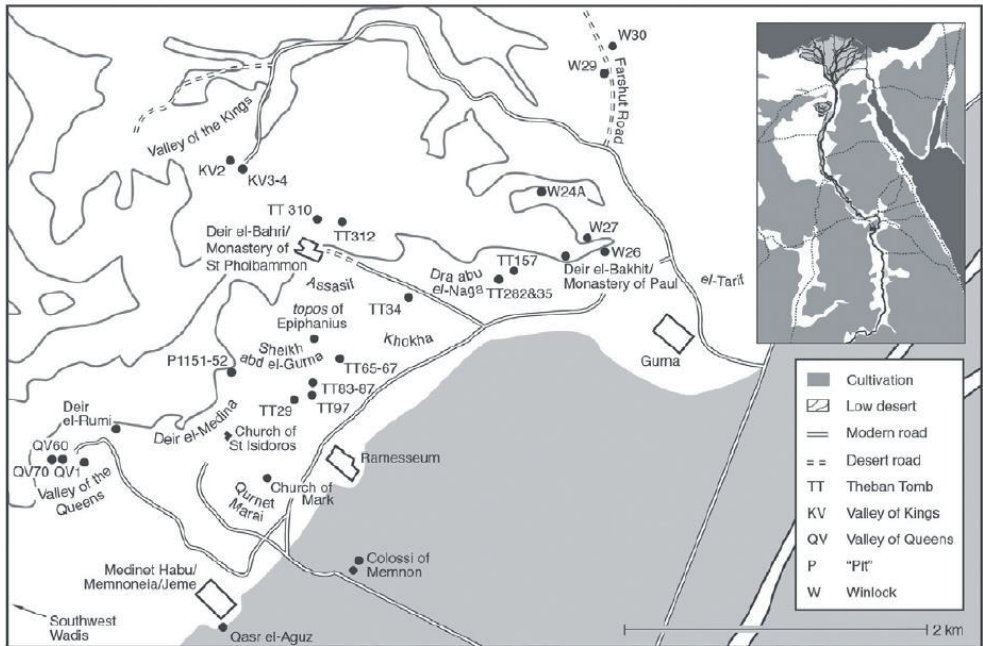


Figure 3: Map of sites in Western Thebes known to have been reused in Late Antiquity (M. Wachtal, © E. R. O'Connell). From: O'Connell & Ruffini, *Social Networks of late Antique Western Thebes*.

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 *εις πλογος μπινουτε ντοοτκ* formula and is written in the conjunctive, in the second person.²⁴⁹ Most often *νρεϊ εζοϣν επεκνι* “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 mpnoute ntootk*: “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: *νρεϊ εζοϣν | επεκνι*.

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|ρεϊ εβολ επεκνι ν|εμοοκ*: “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: *νροϣωνε εβολ*.

²⁵⁴ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2224: *νρεϊ νρεωκ | ετεκρηακ*: “come and go to your work.” O.Crum.VC 64: *νρεϊ εεραϊ επεκνι νρε ζωε επεεκα|μοϣκ*: “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 is 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: $\chi\epsilon$ $\epsilon\eta\epsilon\eta\epsilon\eta\epsilon\eta$ $\eta\epsilon\theta\theta\theta\theta\gamma$ | $\eta\alpha\kappa$: “that we will not do you harm” (literally, “that we will not do evil to you”).

²⁵⁷ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2239: $\chi\epsilon$ $\epsilon\eta|\epsilon\eta\eta\alpha\eta\alpha\eta\epsilon$ $\mu\mu\theta\kappa$: “that I will not prosecute you”.

²⁵⁸ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2250 + *SB Kopt.* V 2251: $\chi\epsilon$ $\eta\eta\epsilon|\eta\chi\eta\theta\gamma\kappa$ $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\gamma$: “that we will not ask anything of you”.

²⁵⁹ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2240: $\chi\eta\eta\epsilon\eta\kappa\alpha\gamma$ $\eta\alpha\mu\alpha\alpha\epsilon$ $\mu\theta\kappa$ $\epsilon\lambda\alpha\gamma$ $\eta\alpha[\omega\theta]$: “that we will not harass you (for) anything”.

²⁶⁰ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2292: $\chi\epsilon$ $\eta\eta\epsilon\lambda\alpha\alpha\gamma$ $\eta\eta\omega\mu\epsilon$ $\theta\theta\eta\eta$: “that no man will arrest him”.

²⁶¹ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2240: $\chi\eta\eta\epsilon\eta\kappa\alpha\gamma$ $\eta\epsilon\eta$ $\eta\epsilon\theta\theta\theta\theta\gamma$: “that I will not let harm be done to you”.

²⁶² *SB Kopt.* V 2240: $\epsilon\omega\eta\kappa$ $\eta\eta[\eta\theta\gamma\tau\epsilon$ $\eta]|\eta\alpha\eta\theta\kappa\eta\alpha\tau\omega[\eta]$ $\tau\alpha\eta\eta\eta\theta\epsilon[\eta\epsilon$ $\epsilon\eta\epsilon\eta\theta\eta\theta\kappa$] | $\eta\alpha\kappa$ $\eta\eta\theta\kappa$ $\tau\epsilon\eta\theta\theta\mu$: “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: $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\upsilon\epsilon\ \epsilon\ \tau\acute{\rho}\omicron\mu\pi\epsilon\ \omicron\upsilon\gamma\acute{\alpha}\epsilon\ |\ \epsilon\lambda\lambda\upsilon\epsilon\ \eta\pi\alpha\rho\gamma\mu\alpha$: “(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 $\epsilon\ \tau\acute{\rho}\omicron\mu\pi\epsilon$ (“in”) and $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\upsilon\epsilon$ (“on account of”).²⁶⁴ E.g., a protector can promise not to “ask” or “prosecute” a protectee $\epsilon\ \tau\epsilon\iota\omicron\mu\pi\epsilon$, “on account of this year” (*SB Kopt.* V 2262) or $\epsilon\ \tau\acute{\rho}\omicron\mu\pi\epsilon\ \tau\eta\eta\varsigma$, “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: $\epsilon\ \tau\epsilon\iota\omicron\mu\pi\epsilon$: “in this year”

²⁶⁴ E.g. *SB Kopt.* III 1368: $\epsilon\ \tau\epsilon\iota\omicron\mu\pi\epsilon$, on account of this *exagion*. $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\upsilon\epsilon$ and $\epsilon\ \tau\epsilon\iota\omicron\mu\pi\epsilon$ 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: $\omega\delta\ \kappa\epsilon\tau\omicron\mu\pi\epsilon$ “until another (*i.e. next*) year”.

²⁶⁶ E.g. *SB Kopt.* V 2244: $\epsilon\ \mu\eta\tau\epsilon\ \pi\epsilon\varsigma\delta\eta\mu\omicron\varsigma\iota\omicron\upsilon$: except for your (money) tax; *SB Kopt.* III 1368: $\eta\delta\ \omicron\upsilon\gamma\eta\eta\omega\epsilon\ |\ \eta\delta\omicron\lambda\omicron\kappa(\omicron\tau\tau\iota\eta\omicron\varsigma)$: “except for $\frac{1}{2}$ *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 ΕΨΔΑΖΤΗΚ”. 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: ΝΤΕΕΙ ΕΖΟΥΝ 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 *meizonas*, 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 μπλᾶωδανῆ | ἀγῶ ἐπρὰν μπτῖμε τηρᾶ (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 *archimandritēs* 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 (*pronoètēs*) 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 *pronoètēs* 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*.

