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CLERICAL AUTHORITY IN LATE ANTIQUE EGYPT: A PAPYROLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE*

1. INTRODUCTION

THE STATEMENT THAT CLERGY WERE REGARDED as figures of authority in late antique and early medieval world is unlikely to raise any doubts. Since the Christian religion permeated all spheres of public and private life from the fourth century onward, those who enjoyed a privileged relationship with God were thought to have access to a powerful form of symbolic capital that set them apart from the masses of ordinary believers. Clerics¹ covered most of the spiritual needs of the community, such as the organisation of cult, dispensation of sacraments and blessings, catechetical instruction, and spiritual advice. In Egypt, a well-defined clerical network is documented in papyri and ostraca from the fourth century onward, and church titles had become an integral element of self-presentation and

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¹ The present text is concerned with clergy below the episcopal level, in particular with presbyters, who are, by far, the best-documented group in the papyri. I do not touch upon the position and functions of bishops which is a relatively well-studied issue, both with regard to Egypt and Empire-wide (see, i.a., WIPSZYCKA 2015; RAPP 2005; MARTIN 1996).

a distinct identity mark by the fourth century.² The practical circumstances in which most of the papyrological documents were created provide a peculiar insight into the activities of clerics beyond the religious sphere.³ Clergy are attested exercising power, authority, and control in secular contexts in an array of formal, semi-formal, and informal activities.

At first glance, this stands in contrast to what is said about the roles assigned to religious specialists in literary and normative sources. Imperial legislation and canonical rulings attempted to delineate the scope of clerical power and authority with the declared intention to minimise distractions from divine service and protect clerics from ‘soul-staining’ occupations (in particular trade).⁴ The literary sources, focused overwhelmingly on bishops, depict their subjects almost exclusively as paragons of Christian virtue and champions of orthodoxy (or whichever brand thereof was embraced by the authors and their intended audiences). However, the everyday practice as revealed by the documentary sources should not be interpreted as blatantly disrespectful of regulations and expectations expressed in the ‘grand narratives’ of imperial and ecclesiastical origins. Laws promulgated in Constantinople or at church councils could not account for all the diverse realities in which the clerics operated; moreover, as products of discourse that originated with members of higher rungs of the state and church hierarchy, they were imbued with a more advanced sense of a distinct clerical identity separated from the social performance of a layperson. On the other hand, the authors of literary

² The designation *presbyteros* (lit. ‘elder’) in the fourth-century documents has sometimes been interpreted as referring to village elders rather than priests (see CHOAT 2006: 61–67). While the lack of background information in most of the cases cited by Choat may suggest caution in interpretation, it is likely that in the context of the well-established fourth-century church in Egypt these *presbyteroi* should indeed be seen as priests.

³ For the value of papyri for the study of lay occupations of clerics, see LUIJENDIJK 2017: 104.

⁴ See, e.g., C. 1.3.2; *C.Th.* 12.1.1, 1.11, 1.16; 16.2.8, 2.10, 2.14, 2.15, 2.36; *Nov. Val.* 35.4; Ps.-Basil 87 (trade); Ps.-Athanasius 49 (‘any trade wherein is theft’, i.e., most likely, commerce); C. 1.1.4; *Nov. Val.* 3 (imperial service); Council of Chalcedon, Canon 3; Ps.-Athanasius; Council of Carthage [419], Canon 16 (administration of lay estates); Council in Trullo, Canon 9 (ban on ‘unlawful’ trades, without specification).

and para-literary texts could not be bothered to inject their edifying projects with a sense of pragmatism that would undermine their moralistic, yet essentially non-prescriptive purpose.⁵

The positioning of the functionaries of the dominant religion as authority- and power-wielders in the lay sphere seems inevitable when regarded from a broader historical perspective. A closer observation of the various contexts extraneous to the religious sphere that papyri bring to light shows, however, that this positioning was not a simple matter of status transfer from one area of social life to another; therefore, questions arise about the nature and foundations of the position of clergy in the late antique Egyptian society. In particular, the present paper shall touch upon matters of convertibility and efficiency of the religious capital, and its interactions with other forms of capital that religious figures could simultaneously possess.

2. CLERICS IN VILLAGE REPRESENTATION: FORMS OF INVOLVEMENT, FUNCTIONS, MOTIVATIONS

Numerous late antique documents from Egypt emanate from representatives of rural settlements of the hinterland: villages (*komai*) and hamlets (*epoikia*). Most of these texts are related to taxation; others are records of transactions and agreements concluded on behalf of village communities, and petitions concerning communal matters. In all of them, clerics – mostly presbyters, rarely deacons – are a regular, although hardly permanent, fixture until the end of late antiquity, as shown in the meticulous overviews by Georg Schmelz (2002: 309–318) and Lajos Berkes (2017). While Schmelz treats clerical participation in village leadership as part of

⁵ One notable exception is a para-literary text of Egyptian provenance known as the *Canons of Pseudo-Athanasius*, preserved in Arabic and Coptic (ed. RIEDEL & CRUM 1904). The text – most likely a work of an anonymous bishop living in the first quarter of the fifth century – is heavily grounded in the rural reality of the Egyptian *chora* and displays surprising leniency in its discussions of agricultural lay occupations and income sources of the clergy. For an overview of the text, see WIPSZYCKA 2018–2019.

his broader discourse on the people of the church at large, Berkes views clerics as just one group among many who were active in administration and representation of rural communities, and his assessment of their performance set against this more general background underscores the limitations of their agency: ‘Es ist auch hervorzuheben, dass die Kleriker als Mitglieder der Dorfgemeinschaft wegen ihres Status oft das Dorf vertraten, aber nicht die Verwaltung übernahmen’ (Berkes 2017: 204). Further on, he writes: ‘Demgemäß ist es auch hervorzuheben, dass die Leitung der Dörfer auch in der Spätantike stark von der lokalen Elite bestimmt wurde und nicht nur die Priester bzw. “heiligen Männer” das Dorfleben bestimmten – obwohl ihrer Bedeutung in der ruralen Gesellschaft kaum zu viel Wichtigkeit beigemessen werden kann’ (Berkes 2017: 228). These pronouncements clearly emphasise the clerics’ ‘status’ as an objective and decisive factor in their social performance, and the implicit distinction between local elites on one side and ‘priests and “holy men”’ on the other. A close reading of the relevant documents, however, allows us to nuance both the meaning of ‘status’ in diverse local contexts, as well as mark the points where various labels attached to social groups overlapped, preventing easy categorisations.

Clerics occupied positions both among bodies of representatives with a determined scope of legal and fiscal capacities (*koina*, colleges of *protokometai*),⁶ as well as in less formalised circumstances, often determined by the current needs of a community or an interest group. There is only one documented instance where the ecclesiastical institution itself may plausibly be seen as actively participating in a network of fiscal control through its clerics; this unique occurrence, however, is attested in the highly irregular context of the ongoing Arab invasion in 639/40.⁷ The doc-

⁶ Numerous settlements of Egypt were headed for fiscal and administrative purposes by colleges of officials with a limited term of office. Although the pattern of rural administration was coherent throughout the country, there were regional variations in the number of officials, their designations, and some aspects of their functions; for a detailed overview of documentary sources on this matter, see BERKES 2017.

⁷ *W. Chr.* 8 (Arsinoites, 639–640) is a receipt issued to the pagarch of Arsinoiton Polis by the representative body of the Fayumic village of Kaminoi, introduced as follows (ll. 5–10): [οἱ ἀπὸ] κώμης Καμί[νω]ν τοῦ Ἀρσινόιτου νομοῦ δι’ ἡμῶν [τῶν πρ]εσβυτέρ[ων --] Ἀνοῦπ

ument in question shows presbyters involved in handling requisitions – most likely destined for the army – ordered by the Alexandrian bishop Cyrus.⁸ Amidst the crisis, the bishop, who at the time wielded extraordinary, formalised civil authority, may have decided to involve the clerical network in securing critical supplies (Wipszycka 2015: 167–169). This situation, however, is without precedent or sequel in the extant documentation – as was the exceptional position of Cyrus. Otherwise, participation in administration and fiscal control was one among the many individual activities pursued by clergy outside their vocation.

There can be little doubt that clerics (mostly presbyters, very rarely deacons) who bore formal designations (*meizon*, *protokometes*, etc.)⁹ were involved in local administration. Village officials were no honorary magistrates, but functionaries with personal responsibility (also financial) for the efficient and timely collection of taxes; accordingly, the associated nomenclature was unlikely to have been used as honorific labels. Such an active profile is clear in our best-documented case of a magistrate-priest, Biktör of Aphrodito. Biktör co-signed a receipt for *annona* grain with fellow *protokometai*, who also happened to be his close family members

πρ[---]γενομένου καὶ αὐτοῦ πρεσβυτέρ[ου κ]αὶ Φῖβ πρεσβυτέρ[ου υἱοῦ Π]οῦσι καὶ αὐτοῦ πρε[σβ]υτέρου καὶ Ἰωάννου[ν ---] καὶ Ἠλίας υἱοῦ Νειλάμμωνος καὶ [Φ]ῖβ υἱοῦ Σαραπίωνος καὶ Πτο[λε]μαιος υἱοῦ [Παπ]νουθίου καὶ Γερωντίου [υἱοῦ] .λ[---] υἱοῦ Αὐνῆ καὶ Πλῶ υἱοῦ Σαραπ[ί]ωνος καὶ Φο[ῖβ]άμμω[ν]ος υἱ[οῦ] Βίκτορος καὶ Νεφερά υἱοῦ Χιλέου καὶ Παμουτίου υἱοῦ Μηῆ καὶ Ἀκώους υἱοῦ Παύλου πρεσβυτέρου καὶ Φῖβ υἱοῦ Ἰωάννου. As only the three first individuals have the title of presbyter directly attached to their name, it is likely that we are dealing with a mixed, clerical-lay college headed by three priests.

⁸ *W. Chr.* 8, ll. 12–14: τὴν τιμὴν τῶν δοθέντων παρ' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν π[α]ρ[ὰ] τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς εἰρημένης ἡμῶν κώμης εἰς διαφόρους διανομὰς γενομένας κατὰ κέλευσιν τοῦ δεσπότου ἡμῶν Κύρου τοῦ ἁγιοστ[ά]του καὶ θεοτιμήτ[ου] πάπα, '(...) the price of the [goods] delivered by us on behalf of the *koinon* of this our said village towards the various requisitions made by order of our lord Kyros, the most holy and reverend *papas* [bishop of Alexandria – J.W.]'. The requisitioned goods included raw hides, wool, blankets, radish oil, hay, and sheep.

⁹ *P. Oxy.* XVI 2058 (Oxyrhynchites, 6th cent.): Kyriakos, presbyter and *meizon* of Spania; *P. Cair. Masp.* III 67286 (Aphrodito, 542/3 or 543/4), *P. Cair. Masp.* III 67323 (Aphrodito, 541): Biktör, presbyter and *protokometes* of Aphrodito; BL Or. 6201 A2 (Hermopolites, 731?): Petros, presbyter and *ape* of the *epoikion* 'The Gate of Hobn'; *CPR* X 127 (Arsinoiton Polis, 584): Aioullos, presbyter and *eirenarchos* of the *epoikion Strategiou*.

(*P. Cair. Masp.* III 67286),¹⁰ took a loan of three solidi in the very same company (*P. Mich.* XIII 669 [529 or 544¹¹]), was addressed by an underling of the local patron, *comes* Ammonios, on matters of village administration (*P. Cair. Masp.* III 67323 [541]),¹² and – last but not least – travelled to Constantinople with his uncle Apollos. The purpose of this journey is not explicitly stated in the preserved loan contract that is our only trace of this rather spectacular undertaking (*P. Cair. Masp.* II 67126 [541]), but scholars tacitly agree that it was most likely related to Biktor and Apollos' duties as village headmen, and their role in the ongoing strife for Aphrodito's fiscal independence from the pagarch in Antaiopolis.¹³

Other examples may follow of clerics engaging in administrative and fiscal matters. Ioannes, *πρεσβύτερος τοῦ ἀρχαγγέλου*, is witness to a formally reported obstruction of construction works in Thmoinausiris (*P. Vindob.* G 5168 [6th c.]; ed. Harrauer & Pintaudi 2009–2010: 83–85, no. 6). In a late (713) receipt for a fiscal overpayment return, the deacon Petros, *ἀπὲ* of the *epoikion* of 'The Gate of Hobn', is reported to have delivered two solidi as a fiscal payment on behalf of his settlement (BL Or. 6201 A2; ed. Schenke 2014¹⁴). Clerics feature also in letters addressed by

¹⁰ Recent reedition in FOURNET 2020: 138–141. The *ammona* grain of Aphrodito is said to have been measured and loaded onto the ships of the Metanoia monastery *δ(ιὰ) τῶν πρωτοκομη-τῶν τῆς [αὐτῆς κώμης] δ(ιὰ) Βίκτορος πρεσβυτέρ[ου καὶ] Ἀπολλῶτος καὶ [αὐ] Σενουθίου*, 'through the *protokometai* of the said village, through Biktor presbyter, and Apollos, and Senouthios' (ll. 1–2). Apollos and Senouthes were, respectively, Biktor's paternal uncle and cousin.

¹¹ The latter date is more likely in view of the chronology of Biktor's other attested activities.

¹² Ammonios requested his subordinate to address *πᾶσι τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς κώμης καὶ τοῖς ἐξ-πελλε[υταῖς διὰ τε] τὴν σὴν θαυμασιότητα καὶ Σενοῦθιν Ἀπολλῶτος καὶ [τοὺς ἄλλους] πρωτοκωμήτας τῆς αὐτῆς κώμης*, 'all the people from the village and tax collectors through your excellency and Senouthes son of Apollos and [other] *protokometai* of the same village' (ll. 4–6); a closer inspection of the document allows to restore Biktor's name in place of *τοὺς ἄλλους* (RUFFINI 2017: 21 n. 71, citing personal communication by Jean-Luc Fournet).

¹³ On this document, see KEENAN 1992.

¹⁴ Notably, the individual mediating between Petros the *ape* and Rashid, the pagarch of Shmun (Hermopolis), is a cleric as well, as he introduces himself as *ἰωάννης πτελαχ(ιστος) η̅πρε(σβύτερος) πρε η̅πμακαρ(ιος) βικτωρ πρωτῆ τῆ γλῆς ἡ̅ροβι* 'Ioannes, the least presbyter, son of the blessed Victor, the man of the place "The Gate of Hobn"' (transl. Schenke).

outsiders to village representatives about fiscal and administrative issues.¹⁵ Since it is rather counterintuitive to think that the senders, who clearly wanted things done, would address individuals deprived of agency, in such cases the clerics must have acted at least as vital communication channels for their settlements.

The intermediary position of village officials between their communities and fiscal authorities was a particular form of representation – one in which the representatives were not necessarily acting in the interest of those whom they represented, but rather operated as facilitators of necessary transactions. Clerics, however, feature also in instances of what we could call ‘proper’ representation, where the will of a community or a part thereof was expressed before a third party. In this role they are featured early on, in a badly preserved declaration addressed by the inhabitants of Kellis to the bureau of the *dux* of the Thebaid (*P. Kell.* I 24 [352]). The list of at least thirty-three signatories to this document opens with a presbyter and two deacons, followed by other male villagers listed by their names and patronymics.¹⁶ The content of the document is obscure; it appears that the signatories distanced themselves from unspecified misdeeds of their fellow villager and wished to protect another compatriot from further harm. The absence of lay titles associated with village leadership suggests that the document records a concerted action of a semi-formal group: while their voice is the voice of their community, or at least of a part thereof, the initiative does not seem to result from a formalised procedure.

Similar arrangement is found in the sixth-century petition addressed to Empress Theodora by the inhabitants of Aphrodito (*P. Cair. Masp.* III 67283 [540–545]).¹⁷ The petition, which deals with transgressions of high-ranking fiscal officials, was signed by fifty-one men; the signatories’ list

¹⁵ *P. Ryl.* IV 708 (Hermopolites, 7th cent.): Zollo[---] *presbyteros* and the *protokometai* of the village Senombo; *P. Stras. Copt.* 13 (Hermopolites, 6th–7th cent.): presbyter Iakob, the *protokometai*, and the comarchs of Telke and Phoka.

¹⁶ *P. Kell.* I 24, l. 11: *Ἀρχήλαιοι Παμῆνις πατρ[εσβύτ]ερος καὶ Πκουρ[...]; διάκονος κ[αὶ Χ]ῶλ[ο]ς ἄλ[λο]ς.*

¹⁷ For the date, see FOURNET 2015: 256 n. 10.

opens with ten presbyters of churches of Aphrodito, including six *katholikai* (p. 2, ll. 1–10). Two other clerics – Georgios, deacon and landowner (*ktetor*), and Palos, presbyter and steward (*oikonomos*) of the church/monastery of Apa Hermauos – sign further down the line, among officials, notaries, landowners, and heads of professional associations who constitute the majority of the list. Even though the subject of the petition – the fiscal status of Aphrodito – was a public matter of an incomparably greater weight than a denunciation of one villager's misdemeanour, also here no explicit mention is made of the administrative and fiscal institutions of the village.

Local presbyters and deacons play a prominent role in a sworn declaration concerning rights to the use of water involving Fayumic village communities of Karanis and Thanesamen (*P. Haun.* III 58 [439]). Although it is unclear how many of the representatives of Karanis listed in the document's opening were presbyters,¹⁸ the intention to underscore the role of the local clergy in this deposition which was expected to end what was likely a prolonged strife for a crucial resource is perfectly clear.

In a different vein, a local college of clergy co-signed an acknowledgement of the rights of the monastery of Apa Phoibammon to an area in the Western Thebes where the monks had established themselves under the leadership of Abraham, the well-known bishop of Hermonthis (*P. KRU* 105 [Jeme, end of 6th cent.]).¹⁹ In the document, the 'whole village' acts 'through the pious presbyters and Papnoute the honoured *lashane*'²⁰ to safeguard the possession and use of the area for the monastic commu-

¹⁸ The opening lines (2–7) run as follows: *Αὐρήλιοι Τιμόθεος Παπεί και Ψαμμαῦ Πεκυσίου και Οὐενάφριος Λεωνίδου και Ἀτήσιος Παύλου και Καλάων {ις} Ἰσίωνος και Ὁλ Ἀήειν και Οὐενάφριος Σάμβε και Σερῆνος Ἰσιδώρου και Παπνούθιος Ἀμαεῖ και Ὁλ Ἡρωνος και Ἀπφοῦς και Σεραπίων πρεσβυτέροις και Παειηούς και Σαβίνος και Ἰσὰκ και Σωκράτης και Ἀσῆμ διακόνους και λοιποῖς μικροῖς και μεγάλους τῶν ἀπὸ κώμης Καρανίδος.* The confused grammar of the text led to various interpretations concerning the identity of the men and the distinction between senders and recipients of the document; the discussion is summarised in SCHMELZ 2002: 310–312.

¹⁹ Lines 27–36, with signatures of seven presbyters and two deacons; another deacon signs in line 38, after the *lashane* Papnoute.

²⁰ Π. 24–25: ἀνον πτιμε τηρη ριτη νεγλαβεστ(α)τ(οc) πρεcβ(γτεροc) μῆ παπνογτε πτιμι-οτ(α)τ(οc) νλαωανε.

nity.²¹ Documents from late Byzantine and early Arab Jeme indicate that this was not the standard pattern for the village, which was normally represented by lay officials.

It appears that clerical authority was especially called upon in acts where unanimity was a factor desired to back up a request, achieve a particular outcome, validate a collective act aimed at another community, or legitimise a decision. The image of social unity – real or only projected to the world outside – was enhanced by the prominent involvement of the local clergy, who could thus appear to grant their blessing to an enterprise. *P. KRU* 105, in particular, reveals a clustering of social and religious expectations implied in the rhetoric of the document. The reference to charity that is present in the document and permeates the broader Phoibammon documentary dossier²² indicates that the monastery could be conceived as a channel through which materialities flowed to the needy (much to the spiritual benefit of the possible lay donors; see Wegner 2021: 163–164). In this perspective, the facilitation of the monastery's continued existence, along with its charitable mission, could be understood as a soul-profiting act through which the clergy fulfilled a pastoral duty.

However, while the concerted action of clergy and lay representatives of Jeme, and the social cohesion it intended to represent seems unproblematic, especially given its religious undertones, the same cannot be said of the Aphrodito petition (the Kellis document is poorly preserved, and its context is unknown). The petition used to be seen by scholars as a representative 'snapshot' of the male village elite of Aphrodito (Gagos & van

²¹ For possible circumstances in which such an act of recognition could be considered necessary (e.g. conflict of authority within the Phoibammon community or the emergence of a competing monastic establishment in the same location), see WIPSZYCKA 2022: 354–355.

²² See *P. KRU* 108 (Jeme, 7th cent.), another donation act where the people of Jeme donate a land parcel to the monastery 'for our needs and the needs of the poor of our *kastron*' (εἰς[εἰς]τῆς[τῆς] καστρίδος καὶ τῆς καστρίδος πτωχῶν ἀνάγκης), as well as the testaments of the superiors of Apa Phoibammon, which never fail to mention the care of the poor as a vital element of the superior's service (*P. Mon. Phoib. Test.* 1 = *P. Lond.* I 77, ll. 37–38; *P. Mon. Phoib. Test.* 2, ll. 126–127; *P. Mon. Phoib. Test.* 3, ll. 9–10; *P. Mon. Phoib. Test.* 4, ll. 64–66). WIPSZYCKA 2022: 351 underscores the function of the phrase πτωχῶν ἀνάγκης ἀνάγκης in line 9 of *P. KRU* 5 as a conventional formula utilised in compliance with the contemporary Christian rhetoric.

Minnen 1994: 10 & 13). A more recent reading underscores the notable absences of members of known families and associations from the list of signatories and suggests an interpretation of the text as an expression of village factionalism, marked by rivalry between prominent families with access to posts related to tax collection (Ruffini 2017: 46–47). The ‘factional’ interpretation presents us with a conundrum: to accept it would mean to acknowledge that the clergy of the vast majority (if not all) of Aphrodito’s most important churches were ready to validate the interests of one village faction. To understand the mechanisms that could stand behind the political alignment of clerics in contexts of rural leadership, it is necessary to provide more context from further documents. The intention here is not to answer why each cleric who signed the petition did so (particularly since only one of them is known otherwise), but to point at mechanisms through which clerics became embroiled in local power struggles between factions and individuals.

The first of the signatories of the Theodora petition, presbyter Biktor of the ‘holy *katholike* church of the village of Aphrodite’ (Βίκτω[ρ] ἐλεεινὸς) πρεσβ(ύτερος) τῆς ἁγίας κα[θολι]κῆς ἐκκλησίας κώμης Ἀφροδίτης), is none other than the aforementioned *protokometes* of Aphrodito active in the 540s (see above, pp. 287–288). In addition to his position as the presbyter of what was most likely the most prominent church of the village, Biktor also cut a worldly and politically active figure. Elsewhere, we see him networking with the family of one Ioannes son of Makarios, another presbyter and a landowner of reasonable means.²³ Biktor, together with his cousin and fellow *protokometes* Senouthes, represented the three children and heirs of Ioannes in a dispute with Psaios and Talous, a couple who accused Ioannes of appropriating a land parcel without paying its due price of thirty-six solidi.²⁴ We learn that the conflict took a dramatic turn, with Psaios and Talous loudly denouncing Ioannes’ dishonesty ‘in the

²³ In the Aphrodito fiscal register (*P. Aphrod. Reg.*), Ioannes is among the highest contributors; see ZUCKERMAN 2004: 233. He is also attested as owner of agricultural land leased out to other individuals, including Biktor’s own father, Besarion (*P. Ross. Georg.* III 33 [522]; *P. Cair. Masp.* I 67114 [511/2 or 526/7]).

²⁴ *P. Mich.* XIII 659 (527–547); on this document, see GAGOS & VAN MINNEN 1994; RUFFINI 2017: 56–58; for an exhaustive legal analysis, see WOJTCZAK 2016a.

Holy Church', perhaps the one where Ioannes served as presbyter. The mention of loud accusations raised against a cleric in the church is without parallel in our documentation; its uniqueness, however, indicates that we are not dealing with a rhetorical *topos*.²⁵ Giovanni Ruffini, following Traianos Gagos and Peter van Minnen, is convinced that Ioannes' church was the same *katholike* where Biktor is attested serving in the petition to Theodora (Ruffini 2017: 57). Neither shaming Ioannes in front of his own congregation, nor the recourse to the court of the *praeses* availed Psaios and Talous: their case was dropped and the settlement had to wait until after Ioannes' death. In its course, Psaios and Talous were awarded fourteen additional solidi to cover the real value of the land which exceeded the original thirty-six solidi, and were pronounced free of any fiscal liability encumbering the land. The heirs of Ioannes had their proprietary rights confirmed, and the financial liability was taken off their shoulders.

The roots of Biktor's involvement in the case could lay in his private business transactions. A land lease dated to 511/2 shows his father, Besarion, leasing land registered in the name of one Psaios, from 'the most pious Ioannes son of Makarios'; the parcel in question could be the same as that mentioned in the later settlement.²⁶ The engagement of Besarion's son in the efforts to clarify the holding's ownership could stem from his desire to secure a more stable business arrangement. A fiscal aspect of the case may also be indicated by the simultaneous involvement of Senouthes as the co-representative of the defendants, and Apollos – father to Senouthes and uncle to Biktor, and fellow *protokometes* to them both – as witness to the settlement.²⁷ Biktor, moreover, participated in the dispute

²⁵ *P. Mich.* XIII 659, ll. 42–44: πολλάκις ἐκβοήσεσι κεχρηῆσθαι κατὰ τὴν ἁγίαν ἐκκλησίαν κατὰ Ἰωάννου τοῦ τῆς εὐλαβοῦς μνήμης, 'many times they resorted to loud complaints in the Holy Church against Ioannes of blessed memory'. Marzena Wojtczak recognises in this act an attempt to weaponise social pressure against the debtor, while allowing for the possibility that Psaios and Talous were intent on acquiring witnesses for possible court proceedings (WOJTCZAK 2016b: 37–38).

²⁶ *P. Cair. Masp.* I 67114 (511–512?); the landholding identified in WOJTCZAK 2016a: 279, with n. 18.

²⁷ *P. Mich.* XII 659, ll. 304–306: Ἀὐρήλιος Ἀπολλῶς Διοσκόρου ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς κόμης Ἀφροδίτης εὐρεθεὶς ἐν Ἀ[ντινόου] μαρτυρῶ τῇ διαλύσει ἀκούσας παρὰ τῶν θεμένων, μαρτυρῶ

as a representative of one of the parties, and this partisanship aspect may further point to his private interest in the resolution.

The significance of Biktor's position as the successor of Ioannes in Aphrodito's *katholike* in this case cannot be reliably gauged, even though the benefits that the settlement brought to the church by re-establishing the peace and giving a belated closure to a controversy attached to the name of its priest must not be underestimated. If Biktor represented the children of Ioannes as the late presbyter's former colleague, his partisanship may have resulted from a persisting bond formed within a local clerical network. While it is possible that restoring peace to the church and its congregation, as well as clearing the name of his predecessor, could motivate Biktor, his role in the case results from intersecting motivations of which none can be plausibly judged as prevalent.

As a member of Aphrodito's leading family, Biktor was entangled in a factional strife that defined the political life of his village, quite apart from his clerical status. The number of documents from Aphrodito may create the impression of this village's society as exceptionally litigious or violent, and Biktor's position within it as particularly precarious; that was, however, hardly the case. A sixth-century document from the village of Spania in the Oxyrhynchite nome (*P. Oxy.* XVI 2058) offers further insight into the consequences of clerical entanglement with rural structures of power. The document is an inventory of property stolen from the household of one Kyriakos, presbyter and *meizon*,²⁸ and his unnamed brother. The catalogue (which includes stocks of meat, wine, and olive oil, several domestic utensils, as well as items of gold and glass, topped off with an alabaster table) is followed by a list of people expected to cover Kyriakos' losses in cash.²⁹ In one scholar's words, 'a cross section of the

δὲ καὶ [τῇ καταβολῇ τοῦ χρυσίου] τῶν δεκατεσσάρων νομισμάτων, 'I, Aurelius Apollos son of Dioskoros from the same village of Aphrodito, having found myself in Antinoopolis, bear witness to the settlement having heard from the parties, and I also bear witness to the payment of the fourteen solidi'.

²⁸ Local designation of a village headman, typical of Oxyrhynchites (BERKES 2017: 67).

²⁹ *P. Oxy.* XVI 2058, ll. 36–37: † γνώσι(ς) τῶν κτητόρ(ων) Σπανίας ὀφειλόντων πληρῶσαι τὴν γεναμένην βλάβην ἐν τῷ οἴκ(ω) τοῦ μείζ(ονος) Κυριακοῦ πρε(σβυτέρου), 'list of the landowners of Spania obliged to repay the loss that has befallen presbyter Kyriakos, the *meizon*'.

community took part in the theft or thefts, including landowners, craftsmen, merchants, entire families and individuals identified as *presbuteroi* and deacons' (Venticinque 2016: 94). Two of the implicated men – Apion the *meizon* and Germanos ἀπὸ μειζόνων – were Kyriakos' colleague in office and his direct or indirect predecessor. At two solidi, they were among the highest contributors, paying half as much as was demanded from Spania's entire association of fullers. The seven clerics on the list were expected to compensate Kyriakos for sums ranging from $\frac{1}{3}$ to 2 solidi.³⁰

We do not know the basis of these calculations: the sums may represent how heavily particular individuals and groups were believed to have been implicated or reflect their perceived profit gained from the theft. The document is undoubtedly a product of a factional struggle between a local official, his colleague in office, and a throng of villagers, including a group of local clerics.³¹ The sum of two solidi demanded from one among the latter placed him on a par with the village officials and suggested similar level of engagement – perhaps not mere embroilment, but a leading role alongside contemporary and former leaders of Spania. Although the account, produced on Kyriakos' behalf, need not be an accurate reflection of 'how things really were', it is still a testimony to the perceived strength and structure of the opposition. The document indicates that members of the clergy were capable – or at least were perceived as such – of active involvement in power struggles, also against one of their own fold.

3. ABRAHAM, PISENTIOS, AND THEIR CLERGY: POLICING MORALS IN DENSE RURAL NETWORKS

In rural environments fraught with tension, group solidarity (spontaneous or imposed vertically by clergy of most prominent churches of a

³⁰ Paanis presbyter: $\frac{1}{3}$ sol. (l. 46); Sarapion presbyter: 1 sol. (l. 57); Aeion presbyter: 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ sol. (l. 66); Aphouas presbyter: 2 sol. (l. 75); Pamouthis presbyter: unknown sum (l. 114); Sansneus presbyter: 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ sol. (l. 123); Phoibammon deacon: 1 sol. (l. 133).

³¹ As well as clerical families; line 117 lists Amon son of presbyter Sarapammon, from whom two solidi were demanded; Phoibammon, son of 'the deacon' (l. 121: Φοιβάμμωνος υἱοῦ τοῦ διακόνου) – perhaps the homonymous cleric from line 133 – was charged for $\frac{1}{3}$ solidus.

location), common practical interests, or a genuine conviction that support granted to a party might work toward peace and prosperity could all play a role in what we may call the political orientation of clergy. The image of clerics squabbling over property and backing village factions is far removed from the ecclesiastical narratives on pastoral duty and ministry. This bleak vision is somewhat counterbalanced by two collections of documents dated to the late sixth – early seventh century, namely the dossiers of the bishops Abraham of Hermonthis and Pisentios of Koptos³² – two hierarchs who never resided in their respective cities but ruled their dioceses from monasteries in the Western Theban region.³³ These collections of letters written by and to the bishops offer fascinating insights into another brand of clerical involvement in the exercise of power, authority, and control under close episcopal supervision.

An exposé of how Abraham envisaged the role of his clergy in the village communities is found in the preserved appointments of the supervisors of churches in the diocese of Hermonthis: the clerics were to look out for and prevent neglect among their flock (ἀρι πνα νγῆτκ ἐνκαταφρονησις ἐτηροῦν ἡπμα ἐτμμάγ νγκωλύ ἡμογ ἐτμμάγ), admonish them (νγῆτσω νάγ), and punish disobedient laypeople and clergy with exclusion from the Holy Communion that could be lifted only by the bishop (πῆτ-ναπατσωτμ δε νσωκ ρηνηκληρικος η νλαικος νοχρ ριβολ ἡπρωα φαντφειναι).³⁴ The correspondence of Abraham and Pisentios reveals the reality which their clerics were forced to confront. Clerical interventions which

³² Briefly on the dossiers and editions of their documents, see the discussion and bibliography in BOOTH 2018. In recent years, important work on the diocese of Hermonthis has been carried out by Frederic Krueger (see KRUEGER 2019; 2020a; 2020b; 2020c); see also DEKKER 2018 and DEKKER 2020.

³³ It is possible that Abraham and Pisentios operated from rural monasteries rather than their nominal sees due to their anti-Chalcedonian affiliation; their respective sees would have been simultaneously occupied by their Chalcedonian counterparts and rivals (WIP-SZYCKA 2015: 345; BOOTH 2017: 171–180).

³⁴ KRAUSE 1956: nos. 19–25 (with general commentary on the documents' formulary at 94–100). See also *O. Crum* 73, a circular letter listing transgressions liable to exclusion from communion (marriage between kin, baseless repudiation of one's wife, breaking an engagement by the female party, leaving one's husband to become engaged to another man, hostility toward another person, fornication).

the bishops ordered or of which they were informed (either by clerics themselves or by third parties) were related to marriage issues, adultery, abduction and rape of young girls,³⁵ feuds between individuals,³⁶ or boundary disputes.³⁷ Before resorting to exclusion from communion, clerics were expected to appease or admonish the members of Christ's flock – and were themselves duly threatened with exclusion in case of non-compliance with the bishop's orders.³⁸

In their efforts to bring peace to communities, clerics must have been constantly aware of the presence and agency of lay officials. In one case, the parents of a raped girl were willing to meet with the rapist in the house of a presbyter only in the presence of the village headmen (*P. Pisentius* 54). One letter mentions two village officials (*archontes*) writing to Pisentios concerning the deposition of their local archdeacon (*P. Pisentius* 9). Far from being unquestioningly obedient, the villagers engaged in their own power play with the bishops and their representatives, sometimes to the detriment of the latter: in the village of Toimamen, the people rebelled against Abraham, threw his clerics in the canal, and, much to the bishop's indignation, brazenly snorted in his face when asked about their reasons.³⁹

³⁵ Examples: *P. Pisentius* 18 ter: a presbyter excommunicates a man who failed to reconcile with his wife; *P. Pisentius* 18 and 18 bis: clerics' report concerning rape and repudiation of a girl and the bishop's order to excommunicate the rapist; *O. Mon. Epiph.* 161: order for excommunication of a woman who left her husband; *P. Pisentius* 19: a presbyter informs Pisentios about a scandal involving an unfaithful fiancé; *P. Pisentius* 1: *lasbanou* of a village inform Pisentios about the arrest of rapists; *P. Pisentius* 41: a cleric informs Pisentios about an affair.

³⁶ Examples: KRAUSE 1956: no. 52: a presbyter ordered to investigate a dispute; KRAUSE 1956: no. 55: order to investigate an act of physical violence and determine the instigator (ⲛⲓⲟⲣⲡⲓ ⲁⲓⲟⲩ ⲛⲁⲗⲁⲥ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉ); KRAUSE 1956: no. 58: a cleric requested to mediate in place of an earlier unsuccessful arbitrator.

³⁷ KRAUSE 1956: no. 56: presbyters Ananias and Isaak requested to make a second attempt at settling a boundary dispute between Pkake and Psoch (most likely two individuals).

³⁸ E.g. KRAUSE 1956, no. 55 (ll. 7–9: ⲉⲕⲧⲏⲗⲟⲕⲓⲛⲁⲗⲉ ⲉⲣⲁⲱⲃ ⲕⲣⲓⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲡⲓⲁ, 'if you do not examine the thing, you are excluded from the communion'); similarly, see nos. 56 & 58 (possible exclusion from the clergy?). A particular case is KRAUSE 1956: no. 89, where presbyter Papas declared that he would accept exclusion from the clergy, should he meddle with a court case.

³⁹ KRAUSE 1956: no. 76, ll. 2–7: ⲉⲓⲥ ⲛⲣⲙ [ⲛ]ⲧⲟⲓⲙⲁⲛⲛⲏ ⲁⲅⲁⲣⲉ ⲛⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ ⲁⲅⲧⲁⲕ [ⲉ]ⲛⲕⲁⲛⲱⲛ ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧ ⲁⲅⲛⲉⲗ ⲛⲕⲗⲏⲣⲓⲕⲟⲥ ⲉⲡⲓⲟⲣ ⲛⲧⲉⲣⲓⲗⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲗ ⲛⲕⲗⲏⲣⲓⲕⲟⲥ ⲉⲡⲓⲟⲣ ⲁⲅⲱⲕ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ

Clerical and lay authorities, however, could also collaborate. A missive of Abraham ordered presbyter Patermoute and one Kyrikos (possibly a layman) to seize a man, compel him to pay a fine of four measures of wine, and deliver him to the village headmen (Krause 1956: no. 57). Pisentios, in turn, was informed by the *lashaniou* of Pallas about the arrest of rapists, preceded by a concerted effort of a *lashane* and a presbyter to persuade the men to release the victim (*P. Pisentius* 1). Too close collaboration between the clergy and lay functionaries could encroach upon the episcopal jurisdiction: in one letter Abraham discusses the case of one 'son of Petros', excluded from communion by a cleric named Psan and subsequently delivered to the *lashaniou* to prevent him from participating in the Eucharist (Krause 1956: no. 51). This hasty handover was likely frowned upon by the bishop, who was the sole authority entitled to handle the cases of excluded individuals.⁴⁰

Both Abraham and Pisentios headed meticulously micromanaged networks of power, authority, and control, in which clerics were the main informants and enforcers.⁴¹ This resulted in an otherwise undocumented level of activity of clerics as a controlling force among the local populations. Backed by the bishops' authority, the clerics policed the morals, mediated in disputes, or championed lawful litigation. Through them, the bishops wielded the dreaded weapons of exclusion from the Eucharist and interdict as means of pressure exerted upon individuals and entire communities. In particular, the documents reveal the intricate construction of Abraham's clerical network. It appears that to ensure efficiency

ΝΟΥΑ ΕΞΡΑΙ ΧΙΩΔΙ, 'Look, the people of Toimamen defied me. They lambasted my canons, they threw the clerics into the canal. When I asked them, "Why did you throw the clerics into the canal?", they snorted at me'.

⁴⁰ Thus KRAUSE 1956: 216: 'In der Übergabe an die Laschanen, ohne dass der Bischof den Ausgeschlossenen gehört hatte, liegt demnach eine Schuld des Psan und seiner Leute'.

⁴¹ It is interesting to observe differences in main preoccupations of the two bishops. While Abraham seems more interested in conflict resolution and maintaining social cohesion, the dossier of Pisentios touches upon matters of sexual transgression, marital unfaithfulness, and scandalising behaviour. The discrepancies seem too consistent to result only from the state of preservation of the two dossiers and are most likely linked to the distinct personalities of the bishops.

and legitimacy of his agents' actions, he implemented diverse safeguards against transgression and non-compliance. Ordination requests and statements of commitment⁴² as well as declarations filed with the bishop by excluded or deposed clerics willing to rejoin the fold⁴³ often featured guarantors whose role was to ensure the subject's compliance with the conditions of his appointment or reinstatement. These guarantors were most frequently other clerics, but also family members of the subject (who were often clerics themselves), unidentified laypersons, and, in one case, a *lashane*. Such an arrangement engaged diverse social connections in maintaining clerical discipline and fostered mutual responsibility among its participants. Excluded and excommunicated clerics could be informed about their punishment by a fellow cleric.⁴⁴ Performed in this manner, the procedure could act as a deterrent for the mediating clergy through their direct involvement in their colleagues' fall from grace. Notably, while directing much attention toward reconciliation within lay communities, Abraham fostered the same spirit among his clergy, insisting on conflict resolution (including through secular institutions of justice⁴⁵).

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⁴² *O. Crum* 36 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 1; 29 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 6; 31 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 7; 32 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 10; 37 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 12; 38 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 13; 45 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 14; Ad. 9 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 16; KRAUSE 1956: nos. 11 & 15; *O. Brit. Mus. Copt.* II 7.

⁴³ *O. Brit. Mus. Copt.* II 9; *O. Crum* 81 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 83; Ad. 41 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 84; 300 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 86.

⁴⁴ *O. Crum* 55 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 71; Ad. 8 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 74. A particular case is *O. Crum* 60 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 75, a circular letter addressed to 'the entire clergy' (ἡ ἀποκλήρος τῆς ἐκκλησίας) informing them about the exclusion of two disobedient presbyters.

⁴⁵ *O. Crum* 55 = KRAUSE 1956: no. 71, where presbyter Ioannes is to be excluded from the clergy (ἀποκλήρος) until he goes to court with two men. Promoting concord between the bishop and his flock and, just as importantly, between members of the priesthood united in executing the bishop's will may be interpreted as a strategy of legitimisation of power; see URCIUOLI 2017: 320: 'The overall effect is to efface the arbitrary character of the accumulation of both material and symbolic resources that is necessary for the construction of asymmetrical religious power'.

4. MODES OF CLERICAL POWER AND AUTHORITY: WITHIN AND BEYOND THE INSTITUTIONS

The groups of documents analysed above display significant discrepancies. While the dossiers of Pisentios and, in particular, Abraham, present a fragmented but coherent image of religiously sanctioned networks of control, the other group of documents is composed mostly of disjointed cases unified by overarching themes of possession and utilisation of material and social capital in cases of individual or collective agency. What follows is, therefore, not an (inherently futile) attempt at forced comparison, but rather an exploration of the multi-faceted social experience of clergy in the late antique Egyptian reality and the contradictions within it.

As mentioned above, the key term applied in discussion of clergy in the papyri is 'status' – a supposedly defining force in clerical social performance which, however, remains a somewhat phantom notion. This 'status' is to be understood as a quality bestowed upon clerics by the very fact of their ecclesiastical affiliation; it implies that clergy possessed a certain brand of capital that transcended the ecclesiastical domain, impacting other areas of life. With all the necessary reservations, I believe that it is useful to look at this claim from the perspective offered by the so-called field theory as expounded in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and subsequent social scientists and historians.

In social sciences, a field can be defined as 'a relatively autonomous domain of activity that responds to rules of functioning and institutions that are specific to it and which define relations among the agents' (Hilgers & Mangez 2015: 5). The field is maintained and perpetuated by selection and conservation methods, and the goings-on within it can be defined as relations between agents whose position is defined by the volume and structure of the capital⁴⁶ they possess (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 108–109). Different forms of capital may be differently valued from field to field, and the convertibility of any given form of capital becomes

⁴⁶ 'Capital' understood as in the tripartite division into economic (money, assets), cultural (education, knowledge, and skills), and social (obligations, connections, and access to networks) capital discussed in BOURDIEU 1986.

a question, as an individual's agency is rarely limited to only one field (Bourdieu 1986: 252–255). An objection may be raised that the application of this theory is feasible only for societies that were more diversified and specialised than the late antique one. On the one hand, however, the present attempt does not seek to achieve a rigid model-based analysis, but to make sense of disparate traces of past human relations by a careful and selective application of a useful thought framework; on the other, it may be argued that within the world of late antiquity, the Christian church came as close to emerging as a field as was then possible. Religious capital – commonly recognised as a valid form of cultural capital⁴⁷ – can therefore be understood in the late antique Egyptian context as approaching the definition of a field-specific institutionalised resource and problematised as such in the context of papyrological documentation.

The power of religious capital was contingent upon the monopolisation of religious goods, which was a process that was closely intertwined with the emergence of the Christian religious field (Urciuoli 2017) and clerical professionalisation. As mentioned above, the religious monopoly wielded by ordained clergy was comprehended as the foundation of a distinct clerical identity as understood by ecclesiastical and lay lawgivers (see above, p. 284). In the period discussed, the inherent 'otherness' of the cleric, which emerged most prominently only in the medieval West, was not yet universally embraced. However, the Western Theban documentation (the dossier of Abraham in particular) points to a conscious effort at enforcing a power structure based on a network of religious specialists whose authorisation to act relied on a series of field-specific requirements.⁴⁸ Once acquired through the ordination act, the religious authority of a cleric could be harnessed by the bishop to various tasks of social

⁴⁷ For the religious field, see BOURDIEU 1991; for spiritual and religious capital, see VERTER 2003.

⁴⁸ Ordination documents from the dossier of Abraham oblige the appointees to learn by heart an indicated part of the Scriptures, to be aware of the 'regulations and canons' (ἐντολὴν καὶ κανὼν) of the church, and to adhere to a strict observance of fasts and rules concerning sexual purity within regular marital relations.

regulation, and the clerical monopoly on ‘the goods of salvation’ (Verter 2003: 157) could become a punitive tool, as the bishops ordered, and their clerics enacted, the withdrawal of sacraments from individual or collective transgressors.⁴⁹ That the process of authorisation (and re-authorisation in the case of excluded clerics applying for reinstatement) took place predominantly within the confines of the church is reinforced by the predominantly clerical identity of the guarantors. However, the intrusion of extraneous individuals – lay family members and fellow villagers – into the process shows that the closing-off of the ecclesiastical organisation was not yet in effect.⁵⁰

The documentation shows that the organisationally dispensed religious capital and the monopoly on key symbolic goods did not always suffice to safeguard the position of clerics. Although lay resistance is hardly a recurrent theme in the Pisentios and Abraham dossiers, the instances we do find point to a certain level of vulnerability to contradiction or open violence, as well as a tendency toward collusion with lay authorities in what might constitute an abuse of power. Such perturbations were a direct result of a very tight entanglement of the clergy with the lay society which was inescapable in an ecclesiastical institution that had not yet

⁴⁹ Thus constructed monopolistic religious field, according to GRUSENDORF 2016: 2, ‘removes power from the hands of the layman and places it in the hands of professionals who dispense a form of morality that can only be received from qualified individuals who have been sanctioned by the religious field itself’.

⁵⁰ In fact, in the early church an impeccable opinion among laypeople could be envisaged as prerequisite for ordination, and the ordination itself could be conceived as a public act (see Canon 6 of Theophilus of Alexandria: ‘The laity should be present [at ordination – J.W.], and the bishop should address them to see if they, too, can also testify in his [the candidate’s – J.W.] favour. Ordinations are not to be carried out in private’; after RUSSELL 2007: 87). Outside the dossier of Abraham, a trace of this custom is found in a document (*P. Giss.* I 55 [Thebaid, 4th–5th cent.]), a letter to a bishop where the transfer of a deacon into a new diocese is explicitly declared as contingent upon his impeccable opinion among the clergy of the place where the deacon has settled and ‘the village’, that is the local community (ll. 9: ἐπεὶ οὖν μαρτυρεῖται παρ[ὰ] τῆς κώμης[ς] αὐτο[ῦ] καὶ παρ’ αὐτῶν τῶν κληρικῶν ὡς ἀνεπίλημπτον βίον ἔχων, καταξίωσον κελεῦσαι ἀχθῆναι ὡς διάκονον. ‘since his village and the same clerics bear witness to him living an impeccable life, may you please order [him] to be introduced as a deacon’).

devised a formalised training path,⁵¹ imposed mandatory celibacy, and – perhaps most importantly – was not in a position to demand exclusive involvement from its members.⁵²

If the documents from the two Theban bishops' dossiers show mostly the religiously sanctioned social activities of the clergy that would fall under the umbrella of pastoral duty, the somewhat haphazard collection of mostly Middle Egyptian documents where clerics emerge as village representatives most often records circumstances of a decidedly worldly nature. If we remove the church titles of most of the priests active in the sphere of fiscality and administration, we are left with a historical record where, based on the actors' behaviour alone, we are unable to distinguish between a cleric and a layman. The diametrically different scope of clerical activities attested in the two groups of documents are, to an extent, the result of discrepancies in the typological composition of the sources. However, one may justifiably wonder whether the involvement of the priests in private matters of their congregation members was as high as it is attested in the Theban dossiers without the level of micromanagement and supervision enabled by the cancelling of the distance between a city-dwelling bishop and rural clergy.

The fact remains that in the frequent instances where clerics were involved in village administration, religious capital does not seem to have played any role in their performance. Administrative duties required different forms of capital – material assets and social connections – that remained firmly in the hands of village elites. Biktor of Aphrodito is, first

⁵¹ See FINKE & DOUGHERTY 2002: 106: 'Clergy without seminary training [...] often possess less in common with other pastors than they do with their own parishioners. Their primary source of social capital remains within the local congregations'. Although made in reference to modern ministers of various Western Protestant denominations, this remark is entirely valid for the late antique church, where clerical training was not institutionalised and often took place in a family environment, as was the case with lay trades.

⁵² In late antiquity, income derived from church service was rarely sufficient to sustain the clerics and their families, hence the continuous pursuit by clergy of economic occupations before and after ordination (for an overview of sources, see SCHMELZ 2002: 203–254). Economic means are especially vital for the fields to convert individuals into their permanent agents (LAHIRE 2015: 79). For the impact of economic factors on the professionalization of clergy, see SCHÖLGEN 1998; UNDERWOOD 2018.

and foremost, a prime example of an individual from an affluent and well-connected family;⁵³ in most of the documents that record his activities the title of presbyter is but an additional element of personal identification. He or presbyter Kyriakos of Spania, with his eighty-six-solidi worth property stolen from his house, were firmly entrenched within the elite strata of their respective villages, and it is as members of these elites that they participated in the administration and fiscal control over their fellow villagers. When Biktor supported the children of his late colleague, the entrepreneurially minded presbyter Ioannes, in a dispute over property ownership, his motivations were most likely entrenched in group solidarity of the propertied, possibly strengthened by economic interest. Aphrodito's elite priests and their families were wielders of social capital understood as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1986: 248). Their enhanced connectivity was, moreover, an extension of their economic status. The problem of the church's structural inability to challenge the socio-economic status quo, attributed primarily to the phenomenon of lay patronage,⁵⁴ could in many cases result from the overlap between religious personnel and local elites, even without any involvement of external patrons. Although obviously no judgement can be passed on the personal piety or religious competence of Biktor or Ioannes, their position as priests of Aphrodito's most important church cannot help but suggest a reversal of a process in which religious capital may be 'mistaken for a competence within a naturalised social order' (Verter 2003: 159).

One of the defining characteristics of social capital is the collective character of its bestowal: an individual acquires it based on a consensus

⁵³ Biktor's paternal uncle, Apollos, was connected through a work relation to a local patron, *comes* Ammonios; his cousin, Dioskoros (the eponymous figure of the main Aphrodito archive), established and maintained multiple local and supra-local ties in his capacity as a notary and a village headman (see RUFFINI 2008: 152–160).

⁵⁴ Particularly for Egypt, see RÉMONDON 1972; see also URCIUOLI 2017, 332: 'The symbolic and material support provided by the "great laymen" to the structures ruled by the religious hierarchy was rewarded by pastoral teachings and training in which the social order is barely questioned'.

worked out by a group in response to the individual's acceptance of the aims and priorities of the group (Grusendorf 2016: 4). In Aphrodito's case, these aims and priorities were those of the circle of a faction of village leadership related through business or kinship to the notary Dioskoros and his family (which included Biktor the priest). As both group goals and individual levels of group compliance may change over time, the relational character of social capital may turn it into a volatile asset. The case of Kyrikos of Spania may be an example of an individual's social bankruptcy (or, alternatively, a conflict between capital-bestowing groups). It is evident that an ecclesiastical position, on one hand, did not shield Kyrikos against the imminent harm, and, on the other, did not deter his colleagues from inflicting it.⁵⁵

The bleak image that emerges from this section of our evidence may add to our understanding of the roots of failures and challenges that we see dispersed in the correspondence of Abraham and Pisentios. Is it, however, possible to detect echoes of the successful clerical interventions recorded in the Theban dossiers – instances where ecclesiastical authority prevailed over the unruly – in the 'worldly' records from elsewhere? Tracing a pattern of religious capital making an impact on circumstances outside religion would be more important than isolating discrete cases; it appears, indeed, that such a pattern may be found among the cases of 'proper' village representation by clergy in petitions and declarations. Here, religious capital and the related authority derived from the ecclesiastical institution are harnessed by communities and groups to validate, sacralise, or guarantee collective acts. Such acts consisted in the efficient exercise of agency; as such, they played out in the generalised field of power,⁵⁶ where actors were individuals occupying positions of dominance

⁵⁵ Organisationally based dispensation of religious capital, based on clear rules and boundaries between those 'in' and those 'out', was more stable than the fickle and relational mechanisms of bestowal of social capital. In a long historical perspective, this fact may have been vital for the success of the large-scale overhauls of ecclesiastical structures, such as the Gregorian reform and the developments in the aftermath of the Council of Trent.

⁵⁶ Sometimes characterised as a meta-field, owing to its all-encompassing, transcendental character (HILGERS & MANGEZ 2015: 8–10).

in different fields. It is here that the religious capital of the clerics could contribute to a power play that involved rural communities, officials, other religious institutions, or even royalty. The ultimate convertibility of the religious capital of a village cleric was therefore an essentially communal phenomenon.

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Abstract: The article presents a new edition and translation of *P. Mert. II 81*, offering textual corrections based on available high-resolution images. The palimpsest document is a letter from Epoeiris to Demetrios (whom she calls ‘son’, most likely in an affectionate, non-literal sense) discussing a dispute involving a priest. Epoeiris relates she has been engaging in persistent oracular consultations seeking divine guidance for Demetrios, which demonstrates how oracles were used in everyday decision-making in Roman Egypt. The letter provides insights into kinship terminology, social relationships, and ritual practices. The newly restored text clarifies episodes of family negotiation, possibly personal debt, and the handling of sensitive affairs through temple oracles.

Keywords: oracular inquiry, Roman Egypt, private letters, kinship terminology, documentary papyri, palimpsest, family relationships.

Lajos BERKES & Anton KISTOL

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of Jesus' apocryphal letter to Abgar and the other is a tax receipt from Djeme, dated to 717 AD.

Keywords: Dnipro Museum, Coptic ostraca, Egypt, apocrypha, tax receipt.

Jelle BRUNING

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Keywords: slavery, slave trade, sale contracts, Egypt, Arabic papyri.

Katarzyna DE LELLIS-DANYS, Grzegorz OCHALA,

✉ Aleksandra PAWLIKOWSKA-GWIAZDA

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Abstract: First editions and re-editions of six Coptic and Copto-Greek ostraca from the collections of the Warsaw National Museum and the University of Warsaw. Five objects come from the Polish-French excavations at Edfu (Egypt) in 1930s, one from the Polish works at Faras (Nubia), and one is most likely of Middle-Egyptian provenance. The pieces from Edfu represent the well-known types of texts on potsherds known from other publications of the material from this site. They include receipts and accounts connected with deliveries of wine and crops. The text from Middle Egypt is an addition to the collection some 170 ostraca of the so-called *etmoulon* type. The ostrakon from Faras is the only literary text in the lot, preserving the beginning of Psalm 1. The edited ostraca are also studied from the perspective of their materiality, presenting the characteristics of vessel forms and fabrics used for their production.

Keywords: Coptic and Copto-Greek ostraca, Edfu, Faras, Middle Egypt, *etmoulon* ostraca, wine, literary ostraca, Psalms, materiality.

Giulio IOVINE

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Keywords: archive of Ammon, late antique Egypt, Egyptian priesthood, petition, court proceedings.

Adam ŁUKASZEWICZ

An inscription from Hermopolis 145

Abstract: Hermopolis was an important cultic and administrative centre of Graeco-Roman Egypt. During three seasons (1987–1990) a Polish-Egyptian archaeological expedition directed by Marek Barański carried out excavations in the city's Great Basilica. The inscription under discussion is one of the results of these excavations.

Keywords: Hermopolis, archaeological works, Greek inscription, Hermes.

Gabriella MESSERI

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Abstract: First edition of a wine account extending over six columns. Columns i–iv (iv is lost) record the sale of vintage wine and columns v–vi payments to the parties involved (intermediaries, administrators, camel drivers, and donkey drivers) made with the profits from the sale of wine. The vineyards are located in the area of Karanis. The account was most likely written in 194 CE using the back of the land administration register SB XII 10892 edited by Anna Świderek in *JJP* 16/17 (1971) and republished by the author *JJP* LIV (2024).

Keywords: wine account, wine production, wine prices, land transport, Karanis (Arsinoites).

Radosław MIŚKIEWICZ

Diocles' Law (Dem. 24.42) and the problem of the validity of laws in Athens in the late fifth century BCE 179

Abstract: The article examines the significance of Diocles' Law (Dem. 24.42) for the growing problem of (in)validity of laws in the Athenian legal order in the late fifth century BCE. Diocles' Law should be understood as part of the broader set of vital principles that constituted an 'evolving law reform' aimed at consolidating laws and strengthening the rule of law and democracy after deep constitutional crises. This study reconstructs the factual and legal background to which specific clauses of Diocles' Law refer (sections 2.1–2.4; ἐν δημοκρατία, κυρίου εἶναι, the archonship of Eucleides, ἀναγεγραμμένοι).

More broadly, it outlines the challenges the Athenians faced at that time, and the measures they took to address them, arising not only from the two oligarchic coups d'état, but also from mounting problems in their legal, constitutional, and judicial order. The article also argues that an analysis of Greek legal language – and its manoeuvrings as seen in Andocides' *On the Mysteries* – confirms that issues of the validity (κυρίως εἶναι) of laws must be distinguished from those concerning their application (χρησθαι). Even though the latter also played a role at the time, especially due to the *caesura* marked by the archonship of Eucleides (403/2), the central argument is that Diocles' Law was enacted to impose order specifically on the validity of laws at a very particular historical moment. This law was relevant retrospectively to 'the scrutiny of the laws', with the vital involvement of ἀναγραφεῖς τῶν νόμων from the beginning of their work in 410, and, more broadly, to future law-making. In addition (section 3), the article eventually identifies the principle of 'legal certainty', which underpinned the introduction of Diocles' Law, and formed a key part of Athenian legal culture at the end of the fifth century BCE.

Keywords: Diocles' Law; validity of law; application of law; classical Athens, law reform, law-making, the scrutiny of the laws, legal certainty, law consolidation.

Anna PLISECKA

The stick and the carrot: Notes on P. Col. VI 123, ll. 6–8 237

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Keywords: ἀπόκριμα, ἰδία, imperial edict, amnesty, petition.

Jakub URBANIK

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Abstract: This article presents a new hypothesis regarding the function the so-called *Petition of Dionysia* (*P. Oxy. II 237* = *P. Dionysia*). The study re-examines the papyrus' structure and its procedural context, focusing on its newly deciphered mysterious beginning (col. i) by Constantinos Balamoshev. The findings suggest that *P. Dionysia* be not the original petition but rather a copy, possibly official, produced during its administrative processing. I conjecture that the document represents a late procedural stage, possibly including the governor's final decision and subsequent requests for execution.

Keywords: Dionysia, juristic papyrology, Roman administration of justice, court/judicial procedure, Roman Egypt, local law, Reichsrecht, Volksrecht.

Joanna WEGNER

Clerical authority in late antique Egypt: A papyrological perspective 283

Abstract: Papyrological sources from late antique Egypt attest to a variety of non-religious contexts in which clergy below the episcopal level – mainly presbyters and deacons – exercised authority in rural settlements. These contexts include formal and informal representation of village communities, mediation in conflict, and policing of the morals. While these phenomena have already drawn the attention of scholars, they were often viewed strictly as an outcrop of the religious authority wielded by the clergy. The present contribution is an attempt to nuance this perspective by taking into consideration the diverse socio-economic factors which contributed to the social standing of the clergy. It uses Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, with its subsequent reiterations, as the main theoretical framework and builds on the concepts of capital accumulation and convertibility between social fields in order to arrive at a multifaceted analysis of the clerics' position as fully integrated members of rural societies.

Keywords: late antiquity, Greek and Coptic papyri, clergy, institutional church, authority, field theory, forms of capital.

Marzena WOJTCZAK & Jakub URBANIK

To sell or to have sold? Hypotheke-praxis and dikaia time in P. Budge 311

Abstract: A tiny archive composed of the famous Coptic arbitration protocol *P. Budge* and three associated Greek documents, a settlement of claims, a sale, and a loosely connected marriage document, bring forward a fascinating controversy of the tormented times between the Persian and the Arab conquests of Egypt. Its settlement testifies to the operative force of law, legal awareness of its users, and dispute-resolution strategies in an environment of intrinsic legal plurality. A new text edition, providing an in-depth study of this material, delving into the dispute resolution method, rhetorics, and proper reconstruction of the events, is presently in the works. Before it is published, we would like to present here an aspect of this matter, closely connected to the very origin of the dispute, viz. our hypothesis on the nature of the security provided by the borrower, the widow Thekla, to her creditors, the consorts Philemon and Thekla. This central matter of the *P. Budge* controversy witnesses the profound legal awareness of its parties. Operating within the legal framework provided by Roman law, and without attempts to transgress it, the law-users of seventh-century Edfu managed to bend and form it to serve best their needs, creating a flexible form of security,

fitting the circumstances of Thekla-the-Widow and the creditors couple. It is amazing to see how, even at the dusk of its domination of Egypt, the Roman legal *forma mentis* was so strongly present in this inherently plural society.

Keywords: Edfu, arbitration, late antique Egypt, securities, *hypothèque-praxis*, *dikaia time*, legal practice, *apotage*, *hypothekimaia asphaleia*.

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