

Liebeschuetz, W.

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THE PAGARCH: CITY AND IMPERIAL ADMINISTRATION IN BYZANTINE EGYPT*

The administration of the Roman Empire, even the post-Diocletianic Empire depended on the fact that the bulk of administration was done not by imperial officials but by the authorities of self-governing cities. The cities were governed by a hereditary oligarchies, the *curiales*, who staffed the city council of every city in the Empire.¹ In the course of the 4th century the councils were gravely weakened and became incapable of performing their traditional role.² This development represents a crisis in the administrative history of the Roman Empire. Lack of evidence about municipal government during the 5th and 6th centuries hinders the historian seeking to find how the crisis was overcome. It is only in Egypt that we can watch the working of "post-curial" institutions in any detail.

In the last centuries of Byzantine rule in Egypt the principle of local autonomy is represented by the *pagarch*.³ This official appears as the leading man in the city territories of Egypt. His position was kept independent of the imperial governor or duke⁴ by the fact that he was not appointed by him but by the praetorian prefect of the East with confirmation by the emperor.⁵ Governors must have influenced appointment.⁶ But since pagarchs held their office

* This paper originated as a communication read to the 14th International Congress of Byzantine Studies at Bucharest in September 1971. Dr K. Treu supplied references to prayers for the pagarch and family.

¹ A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City*, (Oxford, 1940); J. Lallemand, *L'administration civile de l'Égypte* (Brussels, 1964).

² See my *Antioch* (Oxford, 1972), 186—92.

³ A general survey G. Rouillard, *Administration civile de l'Égypte byzantine* (Paris, 1938), 52—62; see also R. Rémondon, *Papyrus Grecs d'Apollonos Ano*, (Cairo, 1953).

⁴ On changing administration of Egypt see J. Karayannopoulos, *Die Entstehung der byzantinischen Themenordnung* (Munich, 1959), 61ff; R. Rémondon, *Le P. Vind. inv. 25838 et les commandants militaires en Égypte au IV^e siècle et au V^e, Chr. É. XL* (1965), 180—97.

⁵ Justinian, *Ed. XIII*, 12; 25.

⁶ Appointment of *pagarch* by *praef. Augustalis*: John Nikiu (henceforth cited J. N.) 97, 3; by Emperor Phocas: J. N. 107, 4; 107, 26; by Nicetas representing Heraclius: J. N. 107, 15.

for long periods, if not for life,⁷ while governors changed much more frequently,⁸ the pressure a governor could exert on a pagarch in office was very limited. A pagarch was often a local man,⁹ a big landowner,¹⁰ with honorary or retired rank in the imperial service. The office might become hereditary. He was evidently not an easy man to depose. Moreover while a governor might propose the deposition of a pagarch, the actual dismissal required the decision of the praetorian prefect and emperor.¹¹

We have no detailed account of the appointment of a pagarch. As a result we cannot form a clear picture of the relations between the official and the other great landowners of the city. The analogy of *defensor*,¹² *curator*,¹³ and corn-buyer,¹⁴ suggests that a man was picked by the notables of the city meeting together with the bishop and that the governor would put the name before the central authorities for the formal appointment.

The pagarch's basic function was financial. He was responsible for the collection of imperial taxes from villages and estates of the city territory that were not specifically exempted from his authority.¹⁵ He appears to be the successor of the *exactor civitatis* in the role of director of taxation.¹⁶ Under him individual councillors, *curiales*, continued to collect some of the taxation.¹⁷

⁷ Menas, *pagarch* between 553 and 567, was the ninth *pagarch* of Antaeopolis (P. Cair. Mas. 67002, II, 18 of 567). If, as is argued by me in *B.Z.* LXVII (1974), *pagarchs* were instituted by Anastasius (491—518), this suggests an average length of office of not less than 4 years. Since some *pagarchs* held the office concurrently the real average is probably considerably greater. Papas, whose correspondence was published by R. R é m o n d o n, was *pagarch* for at least ten years. The "most illustrious Patricia" (P. Lond. 1660, 7) surely inherited the pagarchate; so did Flavius Christophorus and Theodoracius sons of *pagarch* Apa Cyrus (S.B. 9749—51; 55; 76—7 of 642—3 A.D.)

⁸ L. Cantarelli, *La serie dei prefetti di Egipto pt. 3* (A.D. 395—642) in *Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei*, Ser. 5 (1909), 385—440. H. Hübner, *Der Praefectus Aegyptii* (Munich, 1952) adds little to prosopography. See also J. Maspero, in: *B.I.F.A.O.* X (1912), 143 and A. H. M. Jones, *L.R.E.* 883.

⁹ So the Apion family (Rouillard, *op. cit.*, 204, n. 1); Papas of Apollonopolis (R. R é m o n d o n, *op. cit.*, p. VII). Perhaps Julianus (cf. P. Cair. Masp. 67,060 and P. Lond. 1661, 5).

¹⁰ E.g. Colluthus (J. Maspero in *R.E.G.* 441—53), but not *pagarch* in home-town. See also the "prefect" Theodosius J. N. 95, 3—5. Prayers for pagarch and his family: Wessely, *Stud. Pal. Pap.* XV, No. 251 b; Pleyte-Boeser, p. 127—9.

¹¹ *Ed.* XIII, 12: 25.

¹² *C.J.* 1, 55, 11 (505).

¹³ *Nov. Just.* CXXVIII, 16 (545).

¹⁴ *C.J.* 1, 4, 17 (491—503).

¹⁵ References in Rouillard, *op. cit.*, 97 whose interpretation is followed.

¹⁶ J. D. Thomas, *The Office of Exactor in Egypt, Chronique d'Égypte*, XXXIV (1959), 124—40.

¹⁷ P. Cair. Masp. 67045—7; 67060; 67326—7.

There even is evidence that they were still doing this in early Arab times.¹⁸ But the precise role of these councillors in the financial organisation of the city is not yet clear. Certainly the pagarch was not a councillor himself, and he did not work under the supervision of the city council as the *exactor* had done.¹⁹ The pagarch's duties must have involved much negotiation with leading tax payers,²⁰ but there is no evidence that a pagarch ever had, or was expected to have, dealings with any formally organised collective body. Evidently the notables who dominated the cities from the 5th century onwards were completely successful in avoiding corporate responsibility for taxes or any other aspect of civic life of the kind that had burdened the *curiales*. They had their say in emergency such as a foreign invasion.²¹ Normally they remained in the background and left administration and relations with imperial officials to the pagarch.

The pagarch also had far greater coercive power than his curial predecessor. He could back his orders not only with local policy (*paganoi*), with men drawn from the provincial *officium*, or the private power of powerful men, but also with soldiers.²² He might confiscate property or inflict imprisonment.²³ A punitive visit of the pagarch might bear resemblance to a hostile invasion. Such authority on the part of a city, as opposed to a provincial, official implies significant decentralisation of the traditional power of a Roman governor.

Such decentralisation was paralleled — if not indeed made possible — by dispersal of the units of the army as garrisons throughout the cities of Egypt. Many units — whether originally *limitanei* or *comitatenses* had remained in the same station for many generations and formed strong local ties. In some communities they are likely to have formed a considerable proportion of the population. Many soldiers had part-time civilian jobs.²⁴ Garrisons were commanded

¹⁸ Johnson-West, *Economic Studies*, 323; R. Rémondon, P. Apoll. 76; *P.E.R.F.* 566.

¹⁹ Old system well exemplified by E. Boswinkel, *Ein wiener Papyrus mit bezug auf die exactores civitatis*, *Actes du Xe congrès international de papyrologues* 1961 (Warsaw, 1964), 117—20.

²⁰ P.R.G. IV, No. 6, P. Lond. 1356 (both under Arabs); also Makrizi *Hitat* 1, 77, 5, 77, 5 (ed. Wiet. I, 323).

²¹ J. N. 97, 11 (obscure); 107, 19; 115, 10.

²² P. Cair Masp. 67002 (great man and "soldiers"), 67021 ("soldiers" and "pagans"); 67024, 37 (*ibid.*, 45 shows that *officiales* were involved). P. Kond. 1674, 78 ("pagans"). P. Lond. 1677, 26. P. Lond. (1435, 117, Arab rule).

²³ Confiscation: P. Cair. Masp. 67002, P. Lond. 1677. Arrest: P. Apoll. 18; 37; 39; 42 (all Arab. rule). More general authority P. Cair. Masp. 67003; 67005; perhaps 67313; 67322. Pagarch's jurisdiction: A. Steinwenter, *Studien zu den koptischen Rechtsurkunden aus Oberägypten* = C. Wessely, *Studien zur Palaeographie und Papyruskunde* XIX (Leipzig, 1920 repr. Amsterdam, 1967), 6—18.

²⁴ Jones, *L.R.E.* 660—63 based on P. Monac. and P. Lond. V, 1719—37.

by a tribune. These were appointed in theory by the emperor, in practice no doubt by the duke. We have little biographical information. Such evidence as there is suggests that like pagarchs, tribunes belonged to the landowning aristocracy.²⁵ It is not clear whether they were normally natives of the city in which their unit was stationed. The tribune's position was in many ways parallel to that of the pagarch.²⁶ He was the military as the pagarch was the civil head of each city.²⁷ When the two co-operated — or when the two posts were combined²⁸ — the arrangement comprised a degree of local power very rarely found in Roman provincial administration earlier.

There is no evidence for pagarchs outside Egypt and even at Alexandria his functions were in all likelihood performed by the *vindex*.²⁹ The position of the pagarch in the provincial cities of Egypt is incompatible with the enhanced powers which *defensores* appear to have been given by Justinian.³⁰ We also lack evidence that his regulations concerning the *pater civitatis* were observed there.³¹ It looks as if the municipal arrangements of Anastasius and Justinian were of more limited application than the sources suggest.³² It is likely that the regulations were made necessary by local developments such as the weakening of city councils, the power of citizens outside the curial class and the dispersal of the army and that these developments took different shape in accordance with varying local conditions. The imperial government merely recognised and regulated these changes. It was unwilling or unable to restore the former uniformity of provincial administration.³³

The reforms were to some extent successful. The treasure left by Anastasius and the campaigns on which Justinian spent it witness to the restored strength of the Empire. But the history of Justinian's wars dragging on endlessly because

²⁵ J. Maspero, *Organisation militaire de l'Égypte byzantine*, (Paris 1912, 95). The important paper of R. Rémondon, *Soldats de byzance d'après un papyrus trouvé à Edfou*, *Recherches de papyrologie* I (1961), 43—93, besides much else "rehabilitates" the pagarch Menas and the tribune Florentius. Domentianus the last tribune (and pagarch) of Arsinoe was brother-in-law of the patriarch of Alexandria (J. N. 109, 10), therefore presumably a landowner.

²⁶ With some overlapping e.g. receipts (P. Cair. 67040; P. Gen. II, 95 — or violence P. Cair. Masp. 67009).

²⁷ C. Kunderewicz, *Les topotérètes*, *J. Jur. Pap.* XVI (1962), 33—50; *P.W.* IV A2 *s.v.* *tribunus civitatis*.

²⁸ Regularly at Arsinoe (J. Maspero, *Organisation militaire*, 140—1). John Nikiu simply refers to "prefects" of individual towns but in some cases he mentions a civilian as well as a military leader.

²⁹ Ed. XIII, 13ff. On vindices: Jones, *L.R.E.* 457; *P.W.* 22, IX, A1 *s.v.* *vindex* (2).

³⁰ Ed. XV, 16.

³¹ *Pater* in Egypt: *P.R.G.S.* III, No. 46; *P.R.K.F.* 67; 176; but he was important in Asia Minor: H. Gregoire, *I.G.C.* 101, 219, 264, 270, 307, 309.

³² Vindices are known only from Alexandria, Antioch, (*Chron. Pasch.* 626, A.D. 532), Tripolis and Anazarbus (Sev. Ant. *Ep.* 1.9., 27).

³³ D. Claude, *Die byzantinische Stadt* (Munich, 1969), 114ff.

the Emperor could not finance large enough armies to finish them shows that the restoration was incomplete. The same impression is created by Justinian's reorganisation of Egypt by means of the famous *Edict XIII*.

The administration of Egypt was not performing its primary function:³⁴ the taxes were not coming in. If the revenue was collected — and it looks as if tax-payers paid a great deal — it failed to reach its destination. The various officials concerned handled matters in such a way that it was impossible to find out what had happened to the taxation.³⁵

Justinian's cure was to simplify administration and to strengthen the governors by combining military and civil authority in the hands of "dukes" each responsible for two of the Egyptian provinces. The new official would have greater coercive power as a result of his being able to give orders to soldiers directly and he would not be obstructed by the patronage of a rival military commander.³⁶

The reader of the edict may well doubt whether its object was achieved. A large part of the edict is taken up with threats against various officials. The Emperor evidently could not rely on the men who would have to carry out the law. He anticipates dishonesty at every level.³⁷ The various collecting departments will obstruct each other by granting (no doubt corruptly) exemption from taxes due to other branches of the administration.³⁸ He anticipates that officers and men will refuse to enforce the demands of the tax collectors.³⁹ Bishops, especially the bishop of Alexandria, will enable tax payers to escape their obligations.⁴⁰

The later history of Egypt justifies the Emperor's fears. John, Bishop of Nikiu's *Chronicle* includes an account of the troubles of Egypt at the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century.⁴¹ There is no time for a full account of the "Aikelah rising", the overthrow of Phocas or the Arab invasion, but some general observations can be made. The military effectiveness of the army of Egypt was very low.⁴² The same is true of the civil administration.

³⁴ R. Rémondon, *P. Hamb. 56 et P. Lond. 1419*. Notes sur les finances d'Aphrodito du VI^e siècle au VIII^e, *Chr. É.* XL (1965), 401—30, analyses in detail the tax registers of Aphrodito and reveals a steady rise in the level of tax demanded.

³⁵ *Ed. XIII, praef.*

³⁶ Rouillard, *op. cit.*, 36ff., see also n. 3 above.

³⁷ E.g. *Ed. XIII*, 6; 9; 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7; 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11; 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10; 28.

⁴¹ Chronique de Jean, évêque de Nikiou, text and translation by M. H. Zotenberg, in: *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la bibliothèque nationale*, Vol. 24 (Paris, 1883). English translation by R. H. Charles (London, 1916). A new commentary is needed.

⁴² J. Maspero, *Organisation militaire*, 114—32; R. Rémondon, *Recherches de papyrologie I* (1961), 143—93; also J. Jarry, *B.I.F.A.O.* (LXII) 1964, 174—206.

Important decisions are made by the local "prefects". Nikiu's language is ambiguous but most of the "prefects" are probably garrison commanders.⁴³ Some may be pagarchs. Perhaps the two offices were now frequently — not universally⁴⁴ — combined. The local element in decision-making was increased by the fact that at this time civilians did have a part in the defence of their cities.⁴⁵ It is likely that the importance of the circus factions in the last decades of Byzantine rule is linked with this development.⁴⁶ The consequence of this breakdown of overall military and civilian administration was that Egypt was lost to the Arabs.

Much work remains to be done on Byzantine Egypt. There is need for the reconstitution of dispersed archives, for more local studies like that of R. R é - m o n d o n on the finances of Aphrodito, and for investigations of the social background of the holders of various offices such as dukes, pagarchs, or tribunes. This would be worthwhile not only for its own sake but to illuminate wider areas of Byzantine history. Some of the most striking phenomena of the last unhappy period of Byzantine rule can be found elsewhere too.⁴⁷ Fuller understanding of what went wrong in Egypt must help us to recognise what were the essential elements in the measures that enabled the Eastern Empire to recover.⁴⁸

[Leicester]

W. Liebeschuetz

⁴³ J. M a s p e r o, *op. cit.*, 135—48.

⁴⁴ Pagarch? mentioned separately at Busiris (J.N. 97, 5; 97, 16); Sebennytos (Samnoud) *ibid.*, 107, 26—7.

⁴⁵ J.N. 107, 46; 120, 24 (Alexandria); 115, 10 (Antinoe); 97, 7 force of rebellious pagarchs? in Aikelah rising.

⁴⁶ First mentioned by J.N. in connection with Aikelah rising: 97, 4. Both factions support Heraclius' generals: 107, 25; 107, 46. Support rival generals during Arab invasion: 119, 3—9.

⁴⁷ Cf. the localisation of the army and the position of the tribune in the Italy of the Exarchate: L. M. H a r t m a n n, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der byzantinischen Verwaltung Italiens* (Leipzig, 1889), 56—62; *idem*, *Geschichte Italiens* (Gotha 1897—1903), Vol. 2, 1, 120—35. With the position of pagarch cf. that of numerarii in Visigothic Spain as in *epistola de fisco Barcinonensi* (of c. 593). Mansi X, 473ff.

⁴⁸ See J. K a r a y a n n o p u l o s in *Die Entstehung der byzantinischen Themenordnung*, (Munich, 1959) and the problem raised by it.