

PAPYRUS DOCUMENTATION IN EGYPT
FROM JUSTINIAN TO HERACLIUS

In a stimulating paper delivered to the Eleventh International Congress of Papyrology (Milan 1965), Roger Rémondon analyzed the state of our papyrus documentation for the fifth century of our era.¹ On the basis of a compilation of a list of dated documents he constructed graphs of their chronological distribution, both for all of Egypt and for four nomes which are the source of the bulk of the documents in question. For perspective, he began his graphs with 360 and ended them with 540. This collection of material served him as the basis for a brilliant discussion of the changes in Egyptian society which brought about the state of our documentation which, he insisted,² was not merely a matter of the chance of finds.

At the completion of our work on Byzantine chronology, it seems to us useful to gather similar information for the period from where Rémondon left off (540) to the end of Byzantine rule in Egypt at the Arab Conquest (641), in order to see whether any preliminary conclusions may be drawn. The graphs below set out the results of our collections.³

1 "L'Égypte au 5e siècle de notre ère: les sources papyrologiques et leurs problèmes," *Atti dell'XI Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia*, 1965 (Milano 1966) 135-48, plus a table.

2 Rémondon (*supra*, n.1) 137, 147-48.

3 The computations are based on those documents dated by consulate, regnal years, Oxyrhynchite eras, or some combination of these criteria, as listed in our *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* (Stud.Amst. 8, Zutphen 1978) 104-28 (for the consulates), 41-42 (for the Oxyrhynchite eras); and our *Regnal Formulas in Byzantine Egypt* (BASP Suppl. 2, Missoula [Mont.] 1979) 45-73 (regnal dates), and incorporating the addenda and corrigenda to *Chronological Systems* which are given in *Regnal Formulas* 74-79. Documents datable not to one year but to a reasonably narrow range are listed in the most natural decade (papyri dated to 542-566 are listed under 551-560 as a midpoint; those for 591-602 are under 591-600). We have not

In all, we count some 388 datable documents in this century, a substantial number. Over this 101-year period, the average per year is thus 3.84; by comparison, the period 360-400 yielded for Rémondon 3.45 per year, the period 501-540, 3.4 per year, and the notably sparse fifth century, only 1.53 per year. The overall density of documentation is thus comparatively high.

It can be seen, however, that the two regions of Egypt distinguished in our graphs, Arcadia and Thebais, differ rather greatly. In the Thebaid, there is a very large concentration in the Antaiopolite and Antinoopolite Nomes in the period 541-570, then virtually nothing in either nome for the remainder of Byzantine rule. It is clear that we are dealing here with a phenomenon created largely by the archives of the *protokometai* of Aphrodito, centered around Dioscorus. We are unable to say, however, to what extent this bulge does reflect actual conditions in these nomes; very likely it exaggerates them considerably. In the Hermopolite Nome, on the other hand, a bulge in the period 551-560 stands out from a modest but relatively steady level of activity which lasts right up to the Persian invasion but recovers only modestly in the last decade of Byzantine rule after Heraclius' recovery of Egypt in 629. The Thebaid as a whole seems to be in decline after 570, and even the addition of the documents from places which provide less material (Hermonthis, Syene, Apollinopolis, Panopolis, This) would merely shift the curve upward without altering its fundamental shape.

included *any* documents dated solely by the indiction, even where it is reasonably sure which cycle is referred to, and for this reason no documents of the Persian period are included in our counts. Rémondon (*supra*, n.1) 147-48, argues convincingly that documents without an exact date would be distributed in much the same way as the exactly dated ones. We have similarly omitted from consideration documents where a date rests solely on prosopographical grounds.

In the province of Arcadia, on the other hand, the picture is rather different. Herakleopolis maintains the relatively steady but very low level of activity already remarked upon by Rémondon for the fifth century,⁴ while its dominating neighbor, Oxyrhynchos, undergoes great fluctuation. Except for the plunge in the latter part of Mauricius' reign and under Phocas, however, the Oxyrhynchite enjoys sustained activity right up to the Persian conquest. Afterward, there is no recovery; Oxyrhynchos virtually disappears from the datable documentation altogether. The Arsinoite Nome produces rather little until Mauricius, on the other hand, enjoys a revival which then declines somewhat before the Persian invasion, but undergoes a second revival after the recovery of Egypt. We possess substantial quantities of documents from after the Arab conquest of Egypt of which the provenance is the Arsinoite, even though many are not precisely datable, suggesting that the recovery is not a fluke. Arcadia as a whole is thus considerably more productive than the Thebaid, with the peaks in the Oxyrhynchite and the Arsinoite evidence being staggered sufficiently to keep activity at a rather high level until the Persian invasion. It is, however, noteworthy that never does Arcadia come near the peaks produced in Thebais by the effects of the archival masses of the 541-570 period.

The overall distribution both for individual nomes and for Egypt as a whole is strikingly irregular; for almost all of the nomes we have ragged curves, with sharp peaks and low valleys. The contrast to the graphs in Rémondon's article on the fifth century is very noticeable: most of his curves are relatively flat, with only gentle rises and falls, and for Egypt as a whole there is very little deviation from the overall path leading from the heights of the late fourth century to a trough in much of the fifth, picking up again late in the century and rising

4 Rémondon (*supra*, n.1) 138.

in the sixth. One does not find in the period 541-641 a similar overall pattern discernible.

What consequences are to be drawn from these differences? First, Rémondon noted (p.144) that the sparse and even distribution of documents in the fifth century was closely connected with the well-nigh complete absence of archives (the publication of the archive of Taurinos in *BGU* XII is a step toward filling that gap) and that the high terrain at either end was produced mainly by just such archival material. It is manifest that the presence of archives, which produce the peaks in our graphs, is also a cause of the gross unevenness from decade to decade.

Secondly, Rémondon pointed out that the archives which were responsible for the growth of the documentation in the late fifth and early sixth centuries belonged to the types of organs and individuals characteristic of the new order which emerged in the fifth century, as the municipal aristocracy was extinguished and power and wealth tended to concentrate in the hands of the military, of high imperial administrators, and of ecclesiastical bodies. Certainly the Apions are responsible for much of what documentation is not connected to the *protokometai* of Aphrodito and, as Rémondon remarks, these complex organizations of a private or independent nature tended (like the municipal governments and bureaucracies of the fourth century) to generate paperwork.

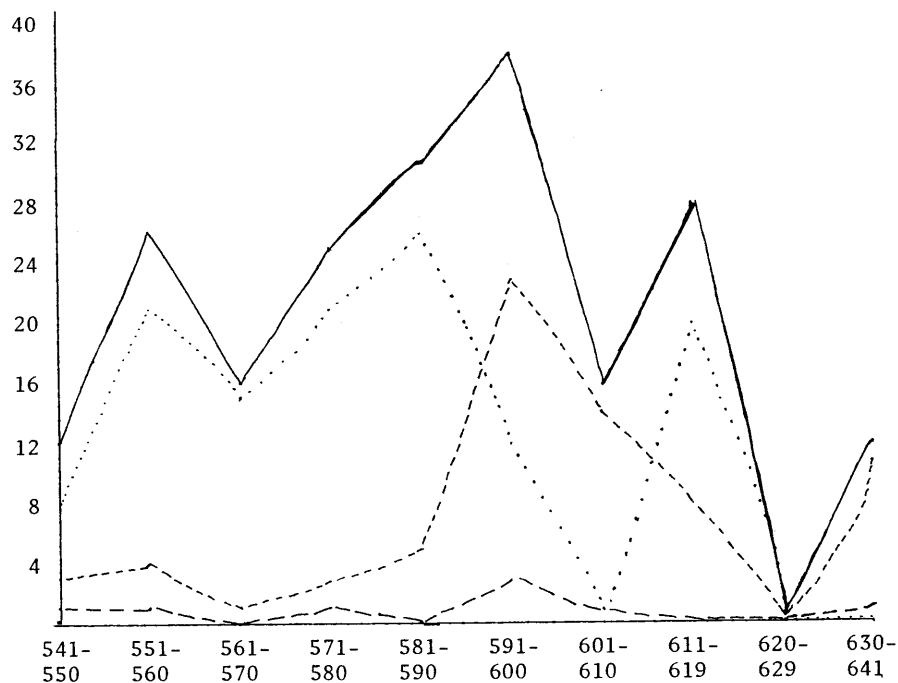
In sum, the distribution of documentation in the last century of Byzantine rule corresponds approximately to what one would expect from a continuation of the trends, both social and documentary, of the preceding century and a half, in which Egyptian society was largely reconstructed on a new— but not less paper-producing— basis.

Columbia University
University of Amsterdam

Roger S. Bagnall
K. A. Worp

Graph 1: Lower Egypt (Arcadia)

- Number of documents from the Oxyrhynchite Nome
- Number of documents from the Arsinoite Nome
- Number of documents from the Herakleopolite Nome
- Number of documents from all of Arcadia



Graph 2: Upper Egypt and Total for Egypt

- Number of documents from the Antaiopolite Nome
 - - - - - Number of documents from the Antinoopolite Nome
 - . - . - Number of documents from the Hermopolite Nome
 * * * * * Number of documents from the entire Thebaid
 ————— Number of documents from all of Egypt

