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The Power of the Written Word (and its Limitations)

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Abstract: The paper offers a comparative insight into ancient administrative cultures. Using a comparative approach to documentation from three distinct periods of the history of Egypt and the Ancient Near East, from the Iron Age Near East, through Late Antiquity to the early Islamic period, we show how data derived from ancient administrative documents can be juxtaposed, despite their different linguistic and historical backgrounds, in order to highlight aspects of the material that do not necessarily attract attention when a more strictly synchronic approach is adopted. From a methodological point of view, we will use selected text corpora (clay tablets and papyri) for case studies that throw light on the overarching historical questions we wish to address. The two main topics are the importance of the written word in administrative contexts (contributions by Lucian Reinfandt, Heather D. Baker and Sven Tost), and the degree to which central governments mobilized the societal surplus of labour and produce through direct administrative interference at the source, or, indirectly through processes that systematically "outsourced" the task of resource extraction, thereby easing the burden placed on the central government's administrative resources (contributions by Michael Jursa and Bernhard Palme).

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This panel offers a comparative insight into ancient administrative cultures. Using documentation from three distinct periods of the history of Egypt and the Ancient Near East, from the 9th century BC to the 9th century AD, we show how data derived from ancient administrative documents can be juxtaposed, despite their different linguistic and historical backgrounds, in order to highlight aspects of the material that do not necessarily attract attention when a more strictly synchronic approach is adopted. From a methodological point of view, we will use selected text corpora (clay tablets and papyri) for case studies that throw light on the over-arching historical questions the panel wishes to address.

Our two main topics are the importance of the written word in administrative contexts and the degree to which central governments mobilized the societal surplus of labour and produce through direct administrative interference at the source, or, indirectly through processes that systematically "outsourced" the task of resource extraction, thereby easing the burden placed on the central government's administrative resources.

Orality and literacy in early Islamic administrative practice (Lucian Reinfandt)

The first century of Muslim rule was a period of language contact in administration. From literary sources we know that the situation was widespread in the Umayyad caliphate, and this is confirmed by the papyri from Egypt. Accordingly, it is Egypt about which we are best informed. In this province, Arabic, Greek and Coptic were used as languages of administration. This parallel language use was thanks in part to the slow and only gradual pace of Arabisation of Egypt's population, but also because the Arab-Muslim government was careful to keep alive existing, and well-functioning, institutional structures (and their languages). The double and even triple use of languages is attested by papyri from the 7th and 8th centuries that either bear these different languages on one and the same document, or separately but related to one and the same administrative procedure.

The evidence is patchy, however, throwing spotlights only on single moments in this long century. A few dossiers are the exception, the most extensive being that of Basilius, a Christian pagarch (or head of district) in the Middle Egyptian town of Aphrodito. Between 709 and 711 he received several dozen letters from the Muslim governor of Egypt, Qurra ibn Sharik, ordering him to pay taxes in cash and in kind and to keep other matters in order.[1]

[1] Bell 1910.

Interestingly, these letters were sent as pairs, as it seems, one in Greek and one in Arabic. Attached to the letters were tax demand notes (*entagia*) that were destined to be copied in the pagarch's office and displayed in the villages and to be read by, or to, the villagers. These *entagia* are bilingual as well, but they contain the Arabic and Greek text on one single leaf. Basilius' letters in response to the governor are not preserved, and other official documentation in Arabic from the 7th century is very patchy, but it is a common assumption, going back already to Bell, the first editor of the Qurra material, and still maintained today, that the letters were sent together, the Greek one for the pagarch, to be read by him or his clerks, with the Arabic counterpart serving as a mere emblem of power.[2] Greek was the language of the local elites, and Arabic was the language of the Muslim rulers of Egypt. It is evident that the Arabic and the Greek letters emanate from the same circles and address the same types of administrative concerns, but they do so using a strikingly different wording and format. Given the overlapping subject matters, the generally made assumption that such letters were sent as pairs from the governor in al-Fustat to the pagarch in Aphrodito is reasonable. However, if the accidents of preservation had provided us with such a pair, which it has not, it would be evident from a structural comparison of the extant letters that the Greek letter and the Arabic letter of a putative pair were neither duplicates nor even translations from one another. In the following, the differences will be shown between the Greek and Arabic letters. It will be argued that the reasons lie in the different uses of these letters, before addressing, at the end of my presentation, the more general implications of this philological observation, namely: the role of the oral and the written in early Muslim administration; the reach of the state; and the potential of state structures for the resolution of conflict.

Two exemplary letters may illustrate the basic differences between the Greek (P.Lond. IV 1362) and the Arabic (P.Cair.Arab. III 151). Most strikingly, there is a difference in length, the Greek letters being longer by tendency than their Arabic counterparts and containing more textual information. But they are also different in more structural respects. Thus many of the Greek letters, as does the one at hand, contain itemisations at the bottom, which is something the Arabic ones never have: "In the 8th ind.: – Cloven palm-trunks 12. Branches 1000. In the 9th ind.: – Cloven palm-trunks 9. Branches 1500. Total: – Cloven palm-trunks 21. Branches 2500." (P.Lond. IV 1362r) On the other hand, the language of the Arabic letters seems more ceremonial in character and designed for an oral presentation, as becomes evident from frequent textual recourses ("as I have already said before..." and the like) and appeals in the text and a typical paratactic syntax, while the Greek letters represent

[2] Bell 1910: xlii; Bell 1945: 532–3; Richter 2010: 214–5; Richter 2013: 125.

matter for reading. To put it simply: both the Arabic letters and the Greek letters conveyed orders, but only the Greek letters make a consistent effort to convey all of the information that is required to execute the order.

What is more, it seems that the letters were written for different audiences, the Greek letters being produced for Christian, 'Egyptian' recipients and the Arabic letters for Muslim ones. This becomes evident from the fact that the Arabic letters are dated according to the Hijra and the Greek letters according to indictions: "And Yazīd has written it in Jumādā II of the year ninety-one." (P.Cair.Arab. III 151r) "Written the 26th Mesore, 9th indiction." (P.Lond. IV 1362r). It also becomes evident by the fact that the Arabic letters have distinct Islamic formulae, but not the Greek letters: "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful! From Qurra ibn Sharīk to Basil, administrator of Ishqawh. I praise God, besides whom there is no god (…) And hail to him who follows the guidance." (P.Cair.Arab. III 151r) Moreover, address lines follow different patterns, those in the Greek letters always mentioning the sender by his administrative title of governor, while the readers of the Arabic letters did not have to be reminded of this detail; also, the Arabic letters regularly mention the name of the scribe, while the Greek letters never do so: "Qurra ibn Sharīk, Governor, to Basil, administrator of the village of Aphrodito (…) Written the 26th Mesore, 9th ind." (P.Lond. IV 1362r) "From Qurra ibn Sharīk to Basil, administrator of Ishqawh... And Yazīd has written it in Jumādā II of the year ninety-one." (P.Cair.Arab. III 151r) On the other hand, the Greek letters regularly mention the name of the courier, something that never happens in the Arabic letters. This seems to have been more than simple convention, but rather specific information aimed at different recipient groups: addressees of the Arabic letters had to know about who was the scribe, while addressees of the Greek letters had to know about who was the courier: "Brought by Abū Ṣafwān the courier." (P.Lond. IV 1362v) There are some more small details from which we can draw conclusions about the functional uses of the letters. Greek letters contain little Arabic dockets on the top right of their recto that mention the recipient of the letter, while their Arabic counterparts seemingly had no need of that: (Greek) "Concerning articles for the palace of the caliph." (Arabic) "To the administrator of Ishqawh concerning the cost of the palm-trunks for the palace of the caliph." (P.Lond. IV 1362r)

On the other hand, both Greek *and* Arabic letters often contain dockets also on their verso, and beneath the address line, that mention the name of the courier and the subject of the letter; but in contrast to the Greek letters where these dockets on the verso are exclusively written in Greek, the Arabic letters have them mostly in Arabic. (Greek) "9th Toth, 9th ind. Brought by Abū Ṣafwān the courier; concerning arrears of articles for the palaces of the

caliph." (P.Lond. IV 1362v) (Arabic) About Hishām ibn Umar, concerning the fugitives. (P.Cair.Arab. III 151v)

The Arabic dockets on top recto of Greek letters seem to have been a means of control for an Arabic secretary in the pagarch's office, while the Greek dockets on the verso seem to have been a means of control for the Greek-reading secretary in the same office when receiving the letter from the hands of the Arabic courier. It seems that neither of the two groups of secretaries in the pagarch's office in Aphrodito, the Greek and Arabic scribes, could read, or was willing to read, the respective other language. Related to this may be the different social status of the Greek and Arabic scribes in the governor's chancery in al-Fustat, which is evident from their personal names: while the Greek scribes were free-born indivuduals, the scribes of the Arabic letters were mostly slaves who were particularly loyal and trustworthy towards their Arab masters.[3]

We do not have very much preserved in Arabic from other offices in this early period of Muslim rule. An exception are the tax demand notes (*entagia*), which seem to have been in a bilingual Arabic-Greek format through the 7th century and of which a considerable number have been found from Egypt and Palestine.[4] These serve a welcome comparative material for us. Their format is different from the letters, the Arabic and Greek texts being written on one and the same sheet and in a script different from the letters. The specific script was not only easier to read, but made the writings immediately recognisable as what they were, namely tax demand notes. Interestingly, the script is identical with the script of the dockets on the letters, which may hint at a certain pragmatic relation. Unlike the letters, the Greek part of the tax demand notes is a direct translation of the Arabic part, with one exception: again the name of the scribe is mentioned in the Arabic but never in the Greek part. It seems that here the Greek part was the essential text and the Arabic part a mere emblem of domination, but again the fact of who had written the Arabic document was indispensable information.

The evidence, when taken together, suggests to a scenario as follows: tax demand notes had a single addressee—the villagers and tax payers—while the letters were directed to different addressees who were not only in need of a different degree of information but also different modes of information transmission. If I am not mistaken, the Greek letters from Qurra ibn Sharik were directed at the pagarch *and his staff* (for later treatment of the case), while the Arabic letters were designed for the needs of a herald, presumably the courier himself, who presented the governor's concern orally to the pagarch and with a certain room

[3] Ragib 1996: 7.

[4] Cf., e.g., for bilingual Arabic-Greek *entagia*: P.Ness. 60 (Nessana, 674 AD); P.Ant.inv. 62.227 (Antinoe, 694 AD).

for manoeuvre in negotiation. What does it mean for our understanding of the administration of the Umayyad caliphate?

The administration of complex political entities with a large territorial extent, such as the caliphate, was in need of written documents. In the pre-Islamic era, the oral had dominated the written in certain key areas of Arab culture, but we can be sure that in matters of administration the Arabs had had recourse to written documents as well, at least in centres of trade (such as western Arabia and especially the city of Mecca). However, they could not match the more developed administrative cultures of Roman and Sasanian origin that were in place in the lands conquered by them. Also, the spread of Arabic in the new empire was slow, as we can see from Egypt, and, more important perhaps, the active interaction between the language milieus of Greek and Arabic long remained on a low level. Both factors in tandem gave rise to a double-track administration with two vertical lines of communication, one oral and the other written.

There is in fact a strange paradox in our understanding of papyrus documents: on the one hand we assume that administrative writings were causative for, or at least related to, actual events. We seem to do this by, perhaps unconsciously, transferring modern ideals of bureaucracy onto the administrative systems of the ancient world. On the other hand we do not mind if the writings on papyrus apparently lack key characteristics that are indispensable for documents of modern administrative practice. The latter demands that there is *no* administrative action without a writing (*Aktenmäßigkeit*); that the underlying administrative channels (*Behördlicher Instanzenzug*) are evident from the documents alone; and that related administrative measures are displayed on the same document that is accessible to all participants involved, while duplicate records are to be avoided *or* or are to be marked as such. In short, the documents are expected to fulfil expectations of rationality (in a Weberian sense), but in fact, the letters from the chancery of Qurra ibn Sharik do not conform to these expectations. It is rather argued here that the Arabic letters were conceived in a different manner from the Greek ones. They were presented in a different, oral and declamatory way and were intended to convey administrative needs in a generalizing fashion, assuming that details would be fleshed out orally. The Greek documentation on the other hand took pains to provide the said details in writing. We have therefore to face the conclusion that there were in fact two parallel administrative mentalities at work in the Umayyad province of Egypt, one being bureaucratic and the other one being of a patrimonial nature.

The papyrological evidence from the first century of Muslim rule in Egypt makes evident a parallel use of Arabic and Greek in Egyptian administration. Arabic was the

language of domination but had the role of a *partial* language only in the administrative sector. By this, it served its purpose and gave considerable flexibility to the Muslim governor, because parallel to the bureaucratic channel, he could send a courier who negotiated orally and perhaps achieved results that were different from the written order, but better than any failure of the mission. But eventually the Arabs modified this two-track convention around the year 700 AD, first by establishing Arabic as the sole language of administration; and second by subsequently exchanging during the 8th century the former Egyptian elites in the middle and lower levels of administration by an Arabic-Muslim personnel.[5] In retrospect, we can understand this period of double-track administration, with one string in Greek and one string in Arabic, as a transitional phase of gradual penetration of conquered territories with the own domination and administrative system.

Conclusions may be as follows: (1) Given the weight of orality in the system we reconstructed, it is not clear whether, or to what extent, the available documentation ever formed the basis for administrative procedure. In other words, we cannot be sure that the documents reflect actual procedure. During the first century of Muslim rule, the production of Greek administrative writings from Egypt outnumbered that of Arabic writings, and we know from the Qurra letters how much the local chanceries relied on written documents.[6] The use of written documents in general permeated daily life among the Greek (and Coptic) speakers to a much greater extent than among the Arabs. Since the majority of the Arab population did not learn Greek, as it seems, interlingual encounters between Arabs and Egyptians were reliant on oral contact and the use of interpreters and other negotiators. Only in the course of the 8th century, when Egyptian officials were exchanged by Arabs, was the role of oral encounters eclipsed by written letters. Now the letters also increasingly used rational arguments instead of the emotional appeals still prevalent in the Qurra ibn Sharik letters. Thus, in the course of the 8th century, the reliance on written documentation was gradually permeating those lower hierarchical levels that for a century had been dominated by (Arabic) oral negotiation.

(2) The oral negotiation was patrimonial in character. It was effective in the case of well-defined vertical hierarchies but often failed in the case of under-defined 'lateral' hierarchies. The lack of bureaucratic means of addressing conflicts that were not amenable to a resolution on the basis of social mechanisms was a persistent grounds for tension. As we will see time and again in this panel, the reliance on written documentation is an indicator for the ability of a political body to deal with intra-administrative conflict on lateral levels. The

[5] Sijpesteijn 2007: 453.
[6] Cf., e.g., P.Ross.Georg. IV 1+P.Lond. IV 1382.

communication with local elites was a gradual process only, starting with contacts between the Muslim governors and a few Christian *duces* on the high-level of the administration who passed on his orders during the 7th century (Foss 2009). Only around the beginning of the 8th century did the Muslim governors start communicating directly with the many more middle-level pagarchs, which already signified an increase of the Muslim presence in, and control of, the province, but was still oral.

(3) The long-term use of oral negotiation in Muslim-Christian relations reveals the nature of Arab provincial domination. For about a century of Muslim rule, Christian elites especially in the south of Egypt managed to retain a political vassal status rather than being part of the Muslim-dominated bureaucratic machinery.[7] Both sides benefitted from the partnership. The Arabs were provided with labour for the important agricultural production and with an administrative apparatus able to handle the complicated procedure of taxation, while the cost and effort of territorial control was limited to a minimal presence of their own personnel in the peripheries. The non-Muslim local elites, in return, benefitted from imperial financial and political support;[8] but they did not have to give up sovereignty. Rather, Christian pagarchs were on principle in alliance with their local population against the Muslim lords.[9] Communication with the local elites was a communication with vassals and thus a high-level matter and of an oral nature. In fact, analysis of the Qurra ibn Sharik letters has shown how *un*successful the Muslim governor was in dominating the powerful local landholding elites of the Egyptian hinterland (Papaconstantinou in press). We may imagine a scenario as follows: the Christian pagarch, when receiving a letter from the governor, had to weigh up how urgent the order was. Was the Muslim governor in al-Fusṭā ṭ powerful enough to remain in office for a longer time, or would he be swept away soon? If the governor was a powerful, the local pagarch was well advised to obey his orders, even if that was against the interest of his compatriots in Aphroditō . If the governor was weak, however, any obedience towards the Muslims would have endangered the pagarch's own standing at home.

(4) Arab 'administration' of Egypt during the first century of rule was *in principle* dictated from a position of military strength,[10] but it had *in fact* a more diplomatic character. Vested interest of regional and imperial dignitaries was balanced and counter-balanced at imperial centres, here: the provincial capital al-Fustat, the governor playing the role of a mediator. In this network of reciprocal relations, orders by the governor did not necessarily

[7] P.Lond. IV 1343.
[8] Fisher 2011: 73–4.
[9] Brett 2010: 545.
[10] Fisher 2011: 74.

have an impact on their own but needed the additional support of a skilled courier who was negotiating orally. This is a very common phenomenon observable from early medieval Europe.[11] It should not be too surprising if it had been the case during the early Muslim era as well.

The cursory analysis of Arabic and Greek official letters from early Islamic Egypt has shown a multi-purpose use of language and of the 'oral and written' in an emerging state, in the case at hand: the caliphal empire. Any real assessment of the evidence is meaningful in the long view, however. A promising step should be a comparison with the situation in the Ancient Near Eastern and in the Graeco-Roman world, which is the next steps to be taken.

Neo-Assyrian Letters and Administration (Heather D. Baker)

Introduction

In the Neo-Assyrian empire, letters were an important tool of administration.[12] The surviving epistolary record consists almost entirely of letters written on clay tablets in cuneiform script in the Akkadian language (in both Assyrian and Babylonian dialects). The majority of extant administrative letters comes from the 7th century BC Assyrian capital, Nineveh. For the most part these letters comprise correspondence between the king and his officials, especially the provincial governors, but we also have a smaller number of letters exchanged between officials, whether of equal rank or superior/subordinate. Much of the corpus of letters from Nineveh (and now also those from later 8th century BC Kalhu) has been published in modern editions in the series State Archives of Assyria (Helsinki), arranged according to the functions of the correspondents, whether officials, scholars, or priests, as well as by king's reign.

Language, literacy, and writing medium

The letter corpus is monolingual. Although Aramaic was widely spoken within the Neo-Assyrian empire, the extensive, symbiotic relationship between the Aramaic and Akkadian languages, going back at least as far as the mid-9th century BC,[13] can only be sketched in outline thanks to the loss of the perishable materials (papyrus, leather, wood) on which

[11] Köhn 1986; Thorau 1998.
[12] For an overview see now Radner 2014.
[13] Millard 2003: 231.

Aramaic documents and letters were typically written. Thus, vast amounts of perishable written documentation have not survived. (It should be stressed that the extant cuneiform record itself represents a small remnant of the original material, owing to the accidents of survival and recovery.)[14] Pictorial representations of pairs of cuneiform and alphabet scribes working together hint at this lost dimension of the administrative system.[15] The choice of medium depended largely on language, but content was also a consideration: for example, writing boards were particularly suited for compiling long lists of people, inventories, etc.[16] To some extent the uses of writing boards can be reconstructed, thanks to the references to them in contemporary official letters and other sources, but no comparable information is available for the Aramaic documentation. While Aramaic epigraphs representing notes of identity were sometimes appended to the (generally private) legal documents,[17] no such overt interplay between Akkadian and Aramaic is found in the official letter corpus. Fales (1987) has been able to trace the influence of Assyrian epistolographic forms on the Aramaic letters from 5th century BC Elephantine, which suggests that there was a close connection between the two traditions already in 7th century BC Assyria, as we might expect. In spite of this it seems that the Assyrian administrators themselves communicated primarily in the Assyrian language.[18] In a well-known letter, SAA 17 2, king Sargon II insisted that a certain official from Ur write to him in Akkadian, in response to the official's request to be permitted to write to the king in Aramaic on letter-scrolls. This particular instance highlights the status of Akkadian as the language of rule. It is worth noting at this point that also in Babylonia, from the 6th century BC on, we observe a clear difference in the social status and background of Akkadian scribes vis-à-vis Aramaic scribes.[19]

The letters from officials are written in the name of the sender. In contrast to the contemporary legal documents, no scribe is ever named as writer of a letter. The level of literacy was higher than has generally been assumed, and it appears that at least an elementary level of literacy was usual for Neo-Assyrian officials, so that some of the official letters may actually have been written by the senders themselves.[20] However, since officials normally had

[14] Parpola 1986: 236.

[15] E.g. the relief BM 118882 from the Central Palace of Tiglath-pileser III, see Reade 1992: 35, no. 45.

[16] See, e.g., Postgate 2003: 133–6 on writing boards and their uses in Middle Assyrian administration.

[17] Fales 1986.

[18] Parpola 1987: xv–xvi.

[19] This is evident from the fact that, in contrast to the cuneiform scribe (*ṭupšarru*), the alphabet scribe (*sepīru*) was not known by a family name, a characteristic that distinguished members of the traditional Babylonian urban élite. For a detailed study of the interplay between Akkadian and Aramaic in 1st millennium BC Babylonia see Beaulieu 2006.

[20] Parpola 1997.

at least one scribe in their service, the writing of letters cannot automatically be attributed to the named sender. Sometimes letters can be associated with a particular sender on the basis of script, orthography, phrasing, etc., but the identification of a particular 'hand' in this way still does not permit us to determine whether it belonged to the sender himself rather than to a particular scribe in his service.

In earlier periods of Mesopotamian history the intermediate role of the messenger/scribe is referenced in the opening formula of the letter, for example: "To X (= recipient), say: thus (speaks) Y (sender)" (Old Babylonian). Here the imperative "say" is addressed to the messenger and this formulation is thought to reflect the oral background to the transmission of messages.[21] We may cite also an Old Babylonian term for "letter," *unnedukku*, a loanword from Sumerian (unadug) going back to the 3rd millennium that means literally "say to him". By the first millennium BC this feature had been dropped, and both Assyrian and Babylonian letters are framed as direct communications between sender and recipient, regardless of whether a scribe was involved either in writing the letter or in reading it aloud upon delivery. In fact, although the Assyrian king was literate,[22] letters were certainly read out to him (probably by the palace scribe in his role as head of chancery):[23] "Whoever you are, O scribe, who are reading (this letter), do not hide it from the king, your lord! Speak for me before the king, so Bel (and) Nabû may speak for you before the king" (SAA 16 32 r. 17–22). The presence of such intermediaries meant that those who were not among the king's regular correspondents, but who wished nevertheless to petition him in writing, were concerned to use their connections at court so as to ensure that their appeals actually reached the ears of the king.

Letter format and content

Letters were of a more-or-less standardized size and shape, which may reflect a common element in the educational background of scribes and officials. This standardisation of form resulted often in unused space or, more rarely, in the use of a continuation tablet. A clay envelope protected the letter inside, but since this had to be broken upon receipt, few

[21] Charpin 2010: 126f.
[22] Livingstone 2007.
[23] Luukko 2007: 231.

examples have survived.[24] As seals were of necessity impressed upon the envelope, the seal impressions too are almost always lost.

The tone of the letters is typically matter-of-fact, even terse. 'Personal' argumentation is not a common feature of the administrative letters proper, although it does feature in the petitions, as we might expect. Given the widely varying contents, only rather broad categories of letters can be distinguished. Nevertheless, within the body of the letters some standardization is evident in the use of stock phrases and in the ways of organising and presenting issues in writing that can be seen to reflect a common mindset shared by the officials who corresponded with the king.

The royal seal

The king's missives bore the royal seal, which lent it authority and validity.[25] In fact the word for "(royal) seal," *unqu* (*ša šarri*), came to be used for the sealed royal letter itself. Such letters took precedence over commands relayed orally via a third party: there are attested instances of officials refusing to act until they had received direct royal confirmation of an order that has been passed on to them verbally by a third party. For example, one official questioned the authenticity of a sealed royal order that came to him, since it did not resemble the thousand sealed orders that he claimed to have in his possession (SAA 15 125:2′–r. 5).

The letter corpus also reflects a perception of "state affairs" as distinct from the ruler's personal interests. This is indicated both by the delegation of royal authority to officials, who might be issued with an exemplar of the royal seal, and by the frequent references in officials' letters to orders issued "by/from the palace".[26]

In some instances it seems likely that what is translated as a "sealed royal order" (*unqu ša šarri*) did not actually take the form of a letter but of a document. For example, when an administrative letter refers to a grant of tax-exemption (on land) made by sealed royal order,[27] the *unqu ša šarri* here is likely to have taken the form of a land grant document rather than a letter.[28] One of the principal functions of writing in Mesopotamia was to provide proof of title

[24] Radner 1995: 71 with p. 76, n.17.

[25] On the king's seal see Radner 2008: 488–94.

[26] Cf. Postgate 2014:9 on the role of the palace as seat of government and as an abstract authority in the Middle Assyrian period.

[27] As in SAA 19 39: 10–11.

[28] Cf. the extant land grants published in SAA 12.

to property,[29] especially real estate, and this was typically documented (in Assyria and Babylonia) via legal contracts (e.g. sale documents), and occasionally (in Assyria only) via royal grants.

Letters and their role in administration

Within the Neo-Assyrian administration, letters served various purposes: to report information; to issue commands; to report on actions taken in fulfilment of commands and on problems encountered, as well as simply "keeping in touch" (as indicated by letters simply reporting that all is well). We also find petitions addressed to the king concerning alleged injustice suffered by the sender, as well as occasional denunciations. The reports from officials that were not direct responses to the king's own messages have been subdivided into two broad categories: (a) routine reports, and (b) acute reports clustering around specific incidents,[30] especially military crises.

An efficient postal system ensured timely delivery of letters throughout the empire.[31] Regular correspondents of the king generally identify themselves only by name, without mentioning their title. When fuller details are given, this may be an indication that the sender was not an habitual correspondent of the king.

In contrast to the Early Islamic period, we do not have any indication that letters formed the basis for administrative procedure. Nor – in contrast to Late Antiquity – were letters used as a routine channel of communication between the population at large and officials (although all Assyrian subjects had a right of appeal to the king, as well as access to the courts).[32] Rather, the official correspondence for the most part represents personal communication between individuals situated relatively high-up within the system, dealing on an ad-hoc basis with matters that had arisen recently or were in the process of unfolding. Once those events had passed, the letters had no enduring validity or interest – that is, officials did not need to retain a copy as proof of an action taken or an obligation fulfilled. However, they presumably kept the letters they received for the sake of reference – viz. the provincial official mentioned earlier, who claimed to have 1,000 of the king's sealed missives. This is also clear from the fact that officials frequently quote from earlier missives. The letters from officials stationed away from the capital were clearly archived in the palace,

[29] Van de Mieroop 1997.
[30] Parpola 1987: xix.
[31] Parpola 1987: xiii–xiv.
[32] Postgate 1980.

where they were eventually discovered. The king's own letters to those same officials must represent archival copies kept in the palace, since the originals would normally have remained in the provincial towns where the recipients were based.

There is no extant evidence of the use of letters (or other forms of writing) to disseminate royal decisions across the entire empire at one time, as in the promulgation of a royal edict,[33] although it is conceivable that certain events necessitated this, such as notice of a forthcoming loyalty oath ceremony.

The interplay between oral and written communication

In the official correspondence, the authors of letters frequently refer to another official who is (or soon will be) present at court, and they exhort the king to question that individual about the matter at hand.[34] Such references reveal the value attached to eyewitness testimony, and they illustrate the procedure by which the king used oral and written information in reaching a decision.[35] Similarly, provincial officials often relayed in their letters the contents of verbal reports delivered to them by messengers sent by officials under their jurisdiction.[36] The words of messengers and of other officials are reported to the king in the style of verbatim accounts, and often a correspondent cites earlier questions or orders from the king himself.[37] These latter cases served as an aid for orientation, especially when a single letter dealt with several different matters.

The interplay between oral and written communication depended to a large extent on practical considerations, especially physical proximity to the king. Although provincial governors would be expected to make periodic visits to the capital where they would speak with the king in person, letters played a vital role especially in the administration of the provinces simply by virtue of the distances involved. Conversely, the lack of any extant letters exchanged between the king and the palace scribe may be explained by the latter's close personal attendance upon the king.[38] Thus, as a means of communicating information, written and oral communication were interchangeable, depending on the circumstances—with the proviso that a written royal order took precedence over a royal command relayed orally by

[33] Cf. Kleber 2010 on royal laws in Achaemenid Babylonia.
[34] E.g. SAA 15 68 r. 1–5.
[35] For a detailed study of decision-making by the Neo-Assyrian king see Radner 2011.
[36] E.g. SAA 15 69 r. 11–16.
[37] E.g. SAA 15 90: 3–7.
[38] Luukko 2007: 231.

a third party. Not infrequently, official correspondents appealed to the king to obtain oral testimony in support of their own written accounts, by questioning in person an individual who had first-hand knowledge of the events at issue.

Written commands of the king could be passed on orally by an official to his own subordinates or to other officials who needed to be informed: "As to what the king, my lord, wrote me in the sealed order, I and Issar-duri, the royal bodyguard, told them every word that was in it and let them hear the sealed order [which] came concerning them." (SAA 5 105: 4–9) In this case the sender then reports in his letter to the king what the men said in response, once the letter had been read to them. The following letter illustrates several of the key issues under discussion:

SAA 1 45 (letter to the king [Sargon II] from the treasurer Ṭab-šar-Aššur):

(1)To the king, my lord: your servant Ṭab-šar-Aššur. Good health to the king, my lord!
(4)A cohort commander of the Chief Eunuch delivered me the king's sealed message in the city of Anisu on the 27th.
(7)The messenger of the commander of the fort came to me in Anisu; I asked him about the news, and he told me this: "The city of Birate and the whole land of Habhu are well; everybody is doing his work."
(13)All is well; the king, my lord, can be glad.
(r 1)On the 28th I shall be in the city of Ieri.

This letter illustrates: (1) the efficient functioning of the postal system, enabling royal missives to reach the treasurer while he is on the move. The intensity of correspondence is reflected in the fact that the official sees fit to report on his movements on a day-by-day basis; (2) the authority of the king's sealed message (*unqi šarri*), and (3) the oral testimony of a subordinate whose report is then relayed in summary fashion, in writing, to the king.

The character of the Assyrian official correspondence

In characterising the Assyrian official correspondence, it is clear that supra-personal validity is not really in question. Several features of the administrative letters speak against this, including: the ad hoc nature of the contents; the habit of referring to the correspondent by name without normally identifying his office; the combining of several issues within one and

the same letter; the lack of a date, and above all, the fact that the same orders and reports could just as well be transmitted orally, if circumstances permitted. The clear differences here compared with the Arabic correspondence discussed in the preceding paper may also reflect the fact that many administrative acts were recorded not in letters but in other formats, such as administrative documents and legal contracts. This, in combination with the important role of oral testimony, indicates that the Assyrian administrative letters should not be seen in isolation, as a self-contained system, but rather viewed as only one element in a complex network of interlocking and overlapping channels of communication.

A point of contrast: the Neo-Babylonian letters

When we compare the Neo-Assyrian letters with the slightly later Babylonian administrative correspondence, some crucial differences emerge. A brief summary has to suffice here.[39] In general terms, the Neo-Babylonian documentation is considerably more voluminous than the Neo-Assyrian—in fact, it is one of the very best documented periods in Mesopotamian history. Literacy was quite widely spread among the urban upper classes,[40] albeit with varying degrees of competence, and record-keeping was even more widely disseminated, with the result that written documentation permeated daily life to an extent comparable with the Greek papyri from Egypt, as discussed by Tost in the following section. As for the Babylonian letters, there must have existed a Babylonian royal correspondence encompassing provincial administration and internal affairs, comparable to the Neo-Assyrian corpus, but very little of this has been recovered.[41] Rather, the Babylonian administrative letters derive from the temple sphere, dating mainly from the 6th and early 5th centuries BC.

In Babylonia, the evidentiary force of the letter practically eclipsed the role of the messenger, since letters served as crucial and independent physical evidence of administrative action. This is probably a function of the fact that the extant correspondence is set on a lower hierarchical plane within the administrative system, compared with that from Assyria. In this respect the Neo-Babylonian letters are closer to the Arabic evidence discussed in the previous section by Reinfandt. As for rhetorical strategies, when subordinates wrote to their superiors they typically supported their demands with rational arguments, rather than by emotional appeals. However, it is striking that letters exchanged between officials who were not in a

[39] The account presented here is based on the findings presented by Jursa and Hackl (in press [2014]).

[40] E.g. Baker 2004: 16, who noted 149 different individuals attested as writers of 214 tablets from the Nappāḫu archive which had the name of the scribe wholly or partly preserved.

[41] Jursa 2014a.

clear-cut superior/subordinate relationship but rather on a horizontal plane within the administrative hierarchy, in different departments, often backed up their senders' demands with the threat of a higher authority. This reflects a lack of clarity in the definition of their respective obligations and responsibilities towards one another, compared with those towards their immediate superiors. Such under-defined "lateral hierarchies" and their tendency to generate tension and conflict appear to be a common feature of ancient administrative systems, a theme that will be taken up in the following sections.

Orality and Literacy in Administrative Contexts in Late Antiquity (Sven Tost)

As we have just learned from the previous speakers, comparison of the Early Islamic and the Iron Age Near Eastern cultures reveals a sharp distinction regarding the importance of the written word in administrative contexts. Whereas Early Islamic rule, not only for reasons of tradition, laid a particular stress on the principle of oral communication flows, the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian regimes in contrast stood in a centuries-old tradition of writing practices in Ancient Mesopotamia that tended to substitute oral negotiation processes by means of written communication. It seems quite natural that these states and their administrative bodies were looking to derive benefit from it by deploying an efficient system of script-based information exchange between the imperial centre and its peripheries, represented by the king and his officials, in order to perform governmental control in the empires' provinces. In their way of exploiting the potential of written documentation, the Iron Age administrations of the Near East bear an undeniable resemblance to their subsequent Hellenistic and Roman successors. But there are nevertheless fundamental differences between the Ancient Near Eastern and the Mediterranean empires' recourse to the written word. In what follows, I will try to illustrate this fact by referring to two main characteristics that distinguish the Greco-Roman, in my particular case the Late Antique bureaucratic state from its earlier counterparts in the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian periods:

First, its purposive-rational action that manifested itself in the circulation of a variety of canonized text types that aimed at a proper functioning of the administrative machinery as well as a smooth execution of public tasks.[42] For that reason, administrative letters and documents were primarily goal-oriented, being largely detached from maintaining any personal contacts and thereby establishing a system of regularity that provided a reliable

[42] Palme 2009 presents a general view of documentary papyri, both for official as well as private use; with regard to administrative letters and their linguistic particularities see also Tost (in press [2014]).

frame of reference. Second, the extension and intensification of this principle by passing it on to almost the entire population, with the result that each individual was more or less reliant on asserting and demanding a recognition of rights and titles or making requests, but also meeting the state's requirements by submitting a piece of writing. In contrast, the state was put in a position to expand and reinforce its control mechanisms within the scope of its own interests, including the maintenance of revenues, public safety and order. This latter theme will lead to the second part of our presentation addressing the 'reach' of the state as it relates to the density of administration.

It has already been stated that Early Islamic administration appears to have been characterised by the Arabic-speaking elite's struggle for communicating and asserting targets and specifications to subjects in the newly conquered territories that had been acquainted with bureaucratic procedures set out in writing for hundreds of years. For the Greek, Roman and Later Roman periods, the reliance of the state and its administration on written communication as well as on records can be considered a given, as can be demonstrated best, but by no means exclusively, on the basis of the Greek papyri from Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine Egypt. In comparison to other written sources from the Ancient Classical World, they contain by far the widest range of textual evidence, not only in terms of the amount of various types of documents, but also with regard to their coverage of several social strata and different environments. Although their remains fail to shed light on every single aspect of daily life, whether it be either a result of accidental preservation or the simple consequence of the fact that at least some practices did not enter into the written documentation, they nevertheless prove the very high degree of 'embeddedness' of reliance to written documentation in wide sections of ancient societies.

Such a statement admittedly contradicts the mainstream opinion that assumes that vast majorities of ancient populations were illiterate. Indeed, even papyrologists tend to be noncommittal in this respect by pointing to the uneven and therefore problematic distribution of source material that, apart from a number of village archives from the area of the Fayum Oasis, the broad fertile basin in the west of Nile valley, reveals a clear indication of an urban-rural divide.[43] All the data furthermore appear to be mostly restricted to the private and public activities of a mostly Hellenized local elite in a few Middle Egyptian cities.[44] On the other hand, there are in fact several hints that the phenomenon of literacy, at least occasionally, occurred and developed independently of socio-cultural and socio-economic circumstances

[43] Bagnall 1993: 5.

[44] See generally Bagnall 1993: 240–51.

such as ethnicity and language, milieu and class affiliation, profession, wealth and public functions. Although personal names in general tend not to offer a truly reliable criterion for ethnic identity, it should however be pointed out that bearers of both Greek and Egyptian, later on also Christian names, whether villagers or city residents, equally turn out to have left self-penned documents.

At the same time, there are paradoxically indeed examples of officials who, in spite of their administrative duties and public activities, were apparently not able to write anything on their own, if we would like to place our trust in the literal sense of a typical concluding phrase like "I, personal name, have written for him/her, personal name, since he/she does not know letters". Such is the case in this public medical report issued by a public physician who had been accompanied by a subaltern police official: "(…) To Aurelius Kyros, son of Philammon, the current night-*strategus* of the most illustrious city of Hermupolis, from Aurelius Plusios, son of Hermodoros [- - -] public physician (…) (and) Aurelius Papnuthios, son of Herminos, servant (= subaltern officer), both from the said city (…) therefore we have submitted to your reasonableness the written document of this report for your information, and, in answer to the formal question we have given (our) assent. Pharmuthi [- - -] (hand 2) Aurelius Plusios, public physician, I report as it is written above. (hand 3) Aurelius Papnuthis, son of Herminos, the above mentioned, I attented as it is written above. Aurelius Phibion, son of Phibis, from Hermupolis, I have written for him upon request, since he does not know letters".[45] Both had to sign the document in order to confirm the result of an examination. The latter, however, was not able to subscribe on his own, so that he therefore had to ask someone else to countersign the document in his name. In fact, it is quite hard to discern the true meaning of such an expression, since we cannot be really sure whether it refers to the fact that the person in question was either totally illiterate or at least capable of reading. Elsewhere the person concerned was at least able to subscribe the document, though with difficulty, but still unable to write a more elaborate text by himself, since such a task demanded writing practice as well as the knowledge of appropriate stock phrases.[46]

We may easily find support for this latter assumption in a series of cases where likewise untrained writers had made an honest attempt at drafting small-format business and short private legal documents including receipts, sales on delivery or credit, loans of money

[45] P.Lips. I 42 (391). For editions of papyri and their abbreviations see the Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets: http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/clist.html.

[46] See, for instance, the declaration of consent submitted by a deacon named Aaron in SPP III^2 64, line 5 (ibid., plate XLV).

or in kind, notes of debt, etc.[47] There is also a significant number of writing exercises by both professional scribes and untrained writers, thus suggesting that basic skills of literacy were probably much more common than it is generally assumed. One of the most prominent examples in this respect is Petaus, the village secretary of Ptolemais Hormu in the Arsinoite nome in the reign of emperor Commodus. The present papyrus proves that, although he held an office unquestionably entailing a great deal of paper work, he nevertheless even had to practice his own signature – an effort, as we can see, that clearly issued a challenge to him.[48]

This means, in effect, that we may have to make a distinction between reading and writing capabilities and the degree to which each was exercised. In this way, any kind of estimation or quantifiable approximation must remain far from certain, since the Egyptian conditions during the Greek and Roman periods were furthermore shaped by the country's complex multilingual background that experienced the use of three languages (Egyptian, Greek and Latin), not to mention the aggravating fact of various scripts:[49] the traditional hieroglyphic writing continued to exist, though it was almost exclusively used for inscriptions; its cursive counterparts, Hieratic on the one hand and the subsequent Demotic on the other, were either confined to literary contexts or served rather practical purposes, but were both to be replaced by Greek. From the beginning, Latin in contrast played only a marginal role since it mainly related to utterances on behalf of the Roman central government represented solely by its officials within the higher ranks of judicial and military authorities, whereas subordinate units and individuals as well as the majority of soldiers continued to make regular use of Greek; the overall situation did not even change in the light of an increased application of Latin terms and titles in the wake of the Roman Empire's provincial reorganization at the end of 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century AD. The final emergence of a new indigenous script, that is to say Coptic, in the course of the 3rd century AD initially resulted primarily from the need to translate the Bible into the native Egyptian language and its six main dialects respectively. And it is by no way a surprise that, in doing so, the Coptic script was based on the Greek alphabet, while the Coptic language had adopted a substantial number of Greek loan words. This latter aspect, in conjunction with the gradual disappearance of Demotic during the 1st century AD and the comparatively late occurrence of Coptic, moreover its even later use in more mundane texts such as private letters and legal documents, clearly points to the fact that even locals clearly drew on Greek more often than expected,

[47] There are several examples of small-sized documents written by barely or half-literate persons in part 1 and 2 of the corpus edition of SPP III[2].

[48] P.Petaus 121 (182–187).

[49] See generally Bagnall 1993: 230–40; 255–60.

arguably in order to maintain their correspondence and to keep their records. Thus, bilingualism – meaning Egyptian as spoken, but Greek as written language – may well be considered to have been the norm, even in a rural population's everyday practice. And it is beyond doubt that both the Ptolemaic and the Roman state certainly had a determining influence on this development.

From the state's point of view, all various forms of correspondence and records were above all ubiquitously employed to exercise control and express legitimacy of rule. In this way, instructions of the central government, including legislative, judicial and administrative announcements, were sent in written form to the provincial as well as local authorities in charge, thus expressing the Roman emperor's or his governors' intentions and expectations.[50] Delivery happened to be effected by means of the *cursus publicus*, the permanent postal service reserved exclusively for purposes of the state.[51] Most of these administrative letters will have remained within the internal sphere of the bureaucratic machinery where they were either forwarded to all the subordinate units or copied in an official register or diary before being filed in one of the public archives.[52] Only a few of them were publicly displayed, since such a procedure required an explicit order according to the extraordinary necessity of reaching a wider audience.[53] Beyond that, practically any kind of decision-making, whether by higher or lower authorities, even records of city council meetings, had to be set out in writing in order to be transmitted to the relevant administrative departments, thus providing either explicit directives for urgent measures or a more general guideline for any future activity.[54] Remarkable formats including recognizable characteristics such the use of stylized handwriting as well as habits of attaching seals were reserved for originals drafted by the governor's chancellery.[55] They are altogether lacking in copies that circulated among the local

[50] E.g., SB VI 9253 (c. 307), P.NagHamm. 143 and 144 (first half of 4th cent.), P.Laur. IV 169 (354), W.Chr. 469 (after 380/382), P.Sijp. 23 (396), P.Oxy. IX 1186 (4th cent.), P.Flor. III 292 (543/544) and 293 (544/545), SB V 8028 (before 550).

[51] Holmberg 1933; cf. Cod.Theod. 8, 5.

[52] See, e.g., P.Panop.Beatty 1 and 2 (298 and 300) as well as PSI X 1125 (after 302) providing examples of official diaries; cf. also P.Flor. I 33 (305–311) revealing that public archives were at least occasionally checked.

[53] See, e.g., P.Oxy. XXXIV 2704 (292), P.Cair.Isid. 1 (297), P.Oxy. XLVI 3303 (c. 300/301), P.Oxy. XXXI 2558 (c. 303/306); cf. P.NYU II 40 *recto* (early 4th cent.?).

[54] See, e.g., an extract of legal proceedings before the governor in P.Sakaon 34 (321) containing his decision or the copy of a report of proceedings for debt P.Oxy. XVI 1877 (c. 488) that had been produced exclusively for senior police officials as can be seen from the single line on its reverse side.

[55] E.g., CPR XXIII 24 (318), SB VI 9598 (427/428 or 442/443), P.Cair.Masp. I 67030 (531 or 546?) and III 67280 (538/539?), cf. also the use of red ink serving as a kind of distinctive feature in the fragment of P.Bodl. I 130 (4th cent.).

government area,[56] since the communication channels as well as the documents' authenticity were free of doubt.

Also individual officials were apparently supposed to keep official diaries registering all their administrative actions and to have also separate copies of all the outgoing and incoming letters made. P.Panop.Beatty 1 and 2, for instance, display extracts of the record of official correspondence sent or received by the *strategos*, the head official of the Panopolite nome. P.Panop.Beatty 1, comprises most of the outgoing letters to presidents of local city councils, representatives of the financial provincial authorities and military personnel during the period of September 298 concerning preparations for the arrival of emperor Diocletian.[57] As can be proved on the basis of the preserved parts, on some days no less than 17 letters had left the office. The names and signatures of persons who issued the letters in question reveal that at least six writers appear to have been involved in drafting them.

To a certain degree, this aspect anticipates the second function of correspondence within the administration, since all the civil servants in return also needed written communication and documentation for the purpose of self-assurance. After receiving an instruction or order by their superior, they were committed to giving detailed information by reporting on the actual state of affairs, results of inquiries, progress of work or its completion.[58] This pattern even occurred within the narrowest environment, that is the correspondence between officials at the same hierarchic level who furthermore worked literally next door, which again indicates the 'systemic' regularity of written communication flows within the administrative context.[59] As a natural consequence, the process of documentation became an essential part of administrative procedures requiring the strict adherence to standards and formalisms, as the present example may illustrate: "Hephaestion also called Ammoninus, royal scribe of Nesyt, acting as *strategus*, to Hephaestion also called Ammoninus, royal scribe of the said nome, most dear friend, greeting. A copy of the application presented to me by Eudaemon son of Psois and Tiathres, of [- - -], and subscribed

[56] E.g., P.Oxy. VIII 1101 (367/370).

[57] See, for example, P.Panop.Beatty 1, col. III, ll. 53–65: "To the President. With regard to the supplies of the annona ordered to be stored up in various places for the auspiciously impending visit of our ruler the Emperor Diocletian, the Senior Augustus (…) Year 15/14/7, Thoth 16th. By Leon, servant. Signed. To the magistrates of Panopolis. What has been written jointly to myself, to you, and to the postmasters (…) I have enclosed in this my letter and bring to your notice, in order that with all speed you may act accordingly. Year 15/14/7, Thoth [- - -] By Leon, servant. Signed. To the postmasters. In the same form and date on the same subject. By Leon, servant. Signed. To the *catholicus*. The monthly account of money and of the annona, and also the table of letters and memoranda of my business for the month Mesore in the past 14th and 13th year of our lords Diocletian and Maximian the Augusti (…)".

[58] E.g., P.Oxy. XIX 2233 (350) and CPR XXIII 32 (450).

[59] Cf. CPR VIII 21 (3rd–4th cent.).

by his excellency the *idiologus* Claudius Apollonius, about authorizing a change of name, is herewith forwarded to you, dearest friend, in order that you may take note and perform your part. Goodbye. The 3rd year of the Emperor Caesar Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus, Hathyr".[60] Hephaistion (also known under the Egyptian name Ammoninos) functioning as the royal scribe of the Nesyt nome in the eastern the Delta while simultaneously holding the office of the *strategos* in same district in 194 wrote a letter to no one else than himself in order to fulfil both his official capacities according to regulations. In doing so, he did not even fail to use polite phrases by addressing himself.

The logistical advantage of disseminating information systematically and comprehensively in writing that had evidently been exploited to the full is clear. Its transmission was not dependent on the trustworthiness of an individual person delivering a written or oral message. Rather, it had to rely on the efficiency of the bureaucratic network as a whole. Its highly formalized, impersonal, double-checked and finally archived and therefore 'checkable on demand' manner of issuing circulars, copies of orders, requests, replies and reports turned out to be applicable regardless of physical or social distance, not to mention other complications potentially resulting from a more direct transfer of information that ran the risk of incompleteness or was susceptible to personal ties. It led to a high density of internal correspondence that established the state's monopoly on the exercise of force and created considerable cohesion between the centre of power and its periphery.

Such procedures are completely unparalleled in either of the bodies of evidence that have been discussed so far, the massive corpora of written Ancient Near Eastern documentation notwithstanding. Not even in the Ancient Near Eastern writing cultures do we come across similar evidence for the systematic archiving and copying of letters at lower levels of the administration. In Greco-Roman Egypt, but probably also elsewhere, the state's bureaucratic government is strongly linked to a certain kind of 'papyrological habit' resulting from a development that originated in the Hellenistic period and had finally become a process with its own dynamics. The documents' routine character is also clear from the apparent lack of the need for verbatim quotes of earlier missives that are more or less indispensable in the Ancient Near Eastern correspondence, which on these grounds alone was more sporadic and less standardized. The fact that there is no indication of any kind of sealing in most of the inner-administrative texts from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt that explicitly proved the authenticity of a missive, as in the Ancient Near Eastern tradition or in the European Middle Ages, points in the same direction.

[60] SB XVIII 13175, col. V, ll. 1–11 (194).

The state's and even the society's high degree of bureaucratization in the Ptolemaic and the Roman periods is also particularly evident from the way in which the population at large became an integrated part of bureaucratic processes. First of all each individual was called upon to submit routine declarations concerning his/her family status and property in the capacity of a person paying taxes.[61] Apart from that, he or she was also expected to address his/her concerns and requests to the public authorities by presenting a piece of writing.[62] As a result, and as far as we can deduce from the evidence of Greek papyri, the recourse to written documents seemed to lie in almost everyone's vital interest, especially as regards the acquisition and protection of rights of private ownership and other titles. But in doing so, even the large numbers of petitions of victims of crimes or other persons in distress that were sent to police officials and judicial authorities reveal, apart from their individual content of narrative parts, a highly formalized structure that reflects the public administration's demand for a compliance with specific written formalities. We may assume that otherwise the frequently mentioned principle of 'petition and response' would have been doomed to failure from the very beginning. In contrast to private letters and documents, all kinds of official correspondence mirroring the interaction between the state and an individual called for the involvement of professional scribes who were familiar with the layout and wording of such texts.[63] In this sense, the nature of the bureaucratic routine seems to have been disseminated even among the empire's subjects. This pattern appears to be entirely alien to the Ancient Near Eastern tradition of script-based administration.

Conclusion to section 1

To sum up: While both the Ancient Near Eastern and the Ptolemaic, Roman and later Roman administrative systems and their mechanisms of internal communication were grounded in a long established tradition of employing the written word, they nevertheless show considerable differences. Whereas the Ancient Near Eastern officials' correspondence with the king or with their peers appears to have also been strongly influenced by the vagaries of personal relationships and circumstances, and by the necessity of maintaining personal contacts within the administrative system, the Late Antique administrative correspondence turns out to be of an exclusively 'systemic' and more impersonal character. Documentary evidence shows that

[61] See generally Bagnall and Frier 1994.

[62] Kelly 2011.

[63] The are several examples of writing exercises left by either prospective or experienced professional scribes; cf., for instance, SB IV 7434 (3rd cent.).

information flowed in both directions, since nearly every order or decision by the Roman emperor or his local representatives had to be copied and forwarded to all the administrative units and subdivisions at the lower levels, just as conversely the latter were expected to report their compliance with the orders received by returning written acknowledgements. As a result, regardless of physical proximity or distance, communication by writing was taken for granted, or perhaps even regarded as a *conditio sine qua non*. The evidence from the early Islamic World on the other hand exhibits a different picture that results from the grafting of structures grounded in a fundamentally oral culture onto a pre-existing substratum of administrative procedures inherited from Late Antiquity. The strong manifestation of written communication and documentation that had been established primarily in order to accompany and supervise each single administrative act, but that ultimately compelled even the local population to participate in the bureaucratic machinery, illustrates the 'reach' of the (Later) Roman state that will be examined in more detail in the second part of this presentation.

The reach of the state: Iron Age Mesopotamia and the Roman Empire in Comparison

In the second part of the panel, we focus on the contrast between Ancient Near Eastern and Late Antique administrative practices with respect to a State's effort to secure access to the resources of the population at large. Some Iron Age administrations of the Near East made ample use of mediated resource extraction through entrepreneurial (or quasi-'liturgical') middlemen in their core areas and through local patrimonial elites in the imperial periphery. This practice imposed considerable limitations on the role and reach of centralized bureaucratic administration. Conversely, while tax-farming and the like are widely attested in the Greco-Roman world, there is much more evidence for direct administrative action and bureaucratic control reaching in capillary form down to the level of local communities and productive cells. While in the Ancient Near East the state administration's ability to monitor obligations efficiently (Moses Finley's 'police function' of bureaucracy) is beyond doubt, the evidence does not suggest great capacity for central planning or accurate forecasting. By way of contrast, the Imperial Roman and Late Antique administrative systems appear to have had a higher capacity for central planning based on accurate forecasts of production and revenue: the reach of the state was far longer.

Resource extraction and administration in the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian Empires (Michael Jursa)

This part of the presentation discusses resource extraction (taxes and labour) in the two Mesopotamian empires of the Iron Age.[64] In their heyday of the seventh and sixth centuries BC, the great Mesopotamian empires – the Neo-Assyrian empire and its successor, the Neo-Babylonian empire, were nothing if not successful in the extraction of resources from their subject population (and their neighbours). Their military successes prove this as much as the huge public building programmes initiated by the kings of Assur and Babylon whose effects are visible in most of the old cities in the respective core areas of their empires. The Assyrian king Sargon had himself built a new capital from scratch, while the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar is associated with a sequence of extraordinary building projects which transformed the urban landscape of Babylonia and whose echo in Graeco-Roman and Biblical sources is with us to this day: suffice it to name the tradition of the tower of Babel and the hanging gardens (Jursa 2014b). The ability of these empires to harness an impressive workforce and to extract an impressive amount of resources for the purpose of conspicuous building activities and the like is obvious, however, the way this was achieved is not.

In Assyria in the late eighth and the seventh century, internal resource extraction was based on two pillars: taxation of agricultural income, and labour services levied on parts of the population (e.g., Postgate 2011). In addition, there were some indirect taxes on transactions of various types: sale taxes, harbour dues, and the like. Agricultural taxes amounted to ten percent of the cereal crops and twenty-five percent of the straw. The latter was crucial for the Assyrian army, which depended heavily on its cavalry and therefore needed an ample supply of fodder – the straw tax amounts to a tax for the benefit of the military. It is sometimes assumed that these taxes were levied on all types of land, that there was a general income tax. However, the documentation that we have does not support this conclusion; the reality seems to have been far less well-organized and uniform than our wish to generalize would have it. In fact, we most often hear about this form of tax in the context of tax exemption grants made to members of the elite and even to entire cities, in particular populous religious centres in the heartland.

The extraction of tax seems to have been in the hands of provincial governors and sometimes specially appointed officials; it was thus managed directly by the state, but there is little we can say about the general efficiency of the system. Remarkably enough, there was a limited degree of public borrowing in cases of special need. The king took loans from merchants, but, predictably perhaps, could be somewhat reluctant to repay them: “nobody will

[64] Detailed references for the following can be found in Jursa 2011 and Jursa and Moreno Garcia (in press).

pay back your loans until the work on the city of Dur-Sharruken is finished". And so a merchant complains: "my father was much in debt to Huziru and two other persons. After my father's death I paid half of his debts, but now (the creditor's) sons are telling me: 'Pay us the debts that your father owes to our fathers.' As soon as the construction of Dur-Sharrukin has been finished, let the king my lord reimburse my house so that I can pay my debts to these people."[65] Corvée labour and military service (the latter being essentially a specialized form of the former) was tied to land-ownership, but details elude us. It is known that service obligations could be commuted into money payments under certain conditions, as is typically the case in an at least partly monetized economy, but the crucial issue of how widespread the service obligations were, and how disruptive for the overall structure of the economy, cannot be answered. Service periods were long (over a month per year), which would suggest that only a small fraction of the population would be serving at any given time. As expected in a tributary empire, coercion played an important role: the labour-force required to cultivate the Assyrian countryside was boosted by considerable numbers of deportees who were forcibly resettled in different parts of the Assyrian empire following the conquest of their homelands. Prisoners of war, including specialists, were also allocated to service in the royal household and in the households of the élite. Contingents of conquered peoples could also be incorporated into the military, viz. specialised units comprised of specific ethnic groups such as Arameans, etc. The Assyrian state archives give us a good insight into these processes through the correspondence that deals with the construction of Sargon's capital, Dur-Sharrukin: "Concerning what the king, my lord, wrote to me: "Assign all the Samaritans under your command to labour duty in Dur-Sharrukin", I subsequently sent word to the sheikhs, saying: "Collect your carpenters and potters; let them come and direct the deportees who are in Dur-Sharrukin" (Parpola 1995: 54) "The king's word to the governor of Calah: 700 bales of straw and 700 bundles of reeds, each bundle more than a donkey can carry, must be at hand in Dur-Sharrukin by the 1st day of Kislev. Should even one day pass by, you will die" (Parpola 1995: 52). It is quite clear that the empire's power of coercion through brute force, especially in its periphery, considerably eased the burden on the bureaucratic apparatus in the centre that was required for the mobilization of the internal workforce. This does not mean that work always proceeded smoothly and without mishap: the opposite was the case. "The governor of Babylon will, perhaps, write to the king, my lord: 'The citizens of Babylon have thrown lumps of clay at me,' but that is a lie. Because the captains had been told to ready their war-chariots they imposed heavy silver dues on the citizens of Babylon, Borsippa

[65] All quotes from Parpola 1995: 53f.

and Cutha, and indeed collected them. The citizens of Babylon, poor wretches who have got nothing, set up a wail and protested. Then the governor imprisoned some of them on the pretext: 'You threw lumps of clay at my messengers.'" (SAA 10, 348). Or "The king has assigned additional men to the work on the canal but there are no overseers. The governor of Talmusa is incapable of leading them. He says: '3000 men are too many for me, this way we cannot do the work' ... Let the king my lord hold the lack of overseers responsible for the fact that I must spend a full month on the work" (Parpola 1995: 56f.). Overall, archival documents such as the letters just cited serve as an excellent corrective to the boastful statements of the Assyrian royal inscriptions. While the latter extol the kings' virtues and unceasing success not only as conquerors, but also as patrons of massive building activities, the preserved records of administrative practice often speak of a lack of material resources and of mis-assigned, badly supplied and understaffed personnel. The general approach to the issue of resource mobilization was based on highly personalized obligations in the official sphere (implying that the officials involved had to bear a considerable risk). More emphasis was laid on improvised ad-hoc solutions to pressing issues than on procedural rules, bureaucratic accountability and the predictability of official demands.

At all times the empire actively sought resources from beyond its borders, in the form of more or less forced gifts from client kingdoms, in the form of tribute, of booty and the spoils of war, and through outright conquest. During the heyday of the Assyrian empire, it was common practice to remove the elites of conquered territories from their positions of power, rather than to co-opt them, and to replace them by an Assyrian administrative apparatus. There was an obvious interest in maximizing the resources that could be extracted from a newly acquired province, but in general an effort seems to have been made to keep local economic structures intact. In any case it is probable that the relative inefficiency of internal resource extraction was offset for a long time by these resources from outside the empire. It has been suggested that the empire was doomed to failure the moment it could no longer expand, after having found its match for instance in Egypt which it could not govern, even indirectly, for more than a few years. While such a deterministic model is certainly oversimplified, it does have the merit of pointing to the crucial importance of the exploited imperial periphery for the relative prosperity of the imperial core: the two stand in a dialectic connection to each other.

The Neo-Babylonian empire was easily as exploitative of its imperial periphery as its Neo-Assyrian predecessor, in fact it may have been even more so, at least in some instances (Jursa 2014b with further references). Archaeological survey in the Judean Highlands, in

Galilee and in other parts of Israel and Palestine indicate a general and massive reduction of population density and settlement size in the early sixth century, as an obvious result of the repeated campaigns of the Babylonian army in the area – campaigns that led also to the siege and conquest of Jerusalem, to the end of the kingdom of Judah and to the Babylonian exile. While the empire thus displays in its periphery the typical 'rapacious' behaviour associated with a 'tribute state' according to the model for early state types that was created by Richard Bonney and W.M. Ormrod (e.g., Bonney and Ormrod 1999), it had a stronger leaning towards a domain and taxation state according to the same model, and it appears to have been more bureaucratic and rule-bound than the Assyrian empire. We have already referred to the fairly well-developed and stable, if steep, administrative hierarchies in the administration of the core of the empire: accountability and control were exercised by means of explicitly formulated rules of administrative procedure. Officials, bound to the king and the state by an oath of office, were expected to justify themselves vis-à-vis their superiors for bureaucratic failure with reference to a specific, 'official' code of conduct.[66] This code of conduct foresaw penalties that, while sometimes severe, were distinct from penalties meted out for misconduct of a non-administrative nature: what we see here is the development of a specific body of administrative law.

Notwithstanding these innovative traits, also in the Neo-Babylonian empire there was only a fairly minimal administration. The tasks of the bureaucratic apparatus in the imperial core were limited not so much by using the shortcut of direct coercion, as in the Neo-Assyrian case and in the case of the Neo-Babylonian imperial periphery, but by enfranchising individuals with aspects of state administration.

In the imperial core, in Babylonia, direct taxation of agricultural revenue was limited to a 3.3 % tax on the agrarian income of the temples. These temples were large institutional households which disposed of large estates and a dependent workforce. They served as the focal point of urban identity as the seat of the principal deities for whom they had to organize the elaborate rituals and offering ceremonies with all due attention to the regularity of cultic practice. The urban elite, in particularly the priestly class, had an enormous vested interest in the upkeep of the temple institutions and of their religious and ideological superstructure. Economically, on the other hand, the temples were for all effects and purposes part of the state apparatus, and in principal the royal administration could call on their resources more or less at will. By and large, however, there was an obvious need to balance the interests of the state and the temples, which is emphasized by the presence of royal officials working as

[66] Wells (in press [2014]); Jursa (in press).

temple administrators side by side with locally recruited priests. The king also brought in clients or protégés as contractors who undertook to manage the temple's estates in return for the payment of a fixed rent. This type of arrangement served the double purpose of reducing the burden on the royal and temple administrations, which did not have to worry about extracting rents and dues from numerous dependent farmers, and of strengthening the king's control over the temples' resources in general.[67] While these measures all aimed at bringing the temple institutions into line with general royal policy through administrative control, acts of royal euergetism in the temples helped to co-opt the local elites, especially the priests, and thus contributed to the stability of the state (Waerzeggers 2011).

Contrary to a common misconception of the Babylonian socio-economic structures, the temples, notwithstanding their undeniable importance, did not dominate economic life in first millennium BC Babylonia. In the cities, the households of propertied private families – urban notables including, but not limited to, the priestly class – had considerable weight. The wealth of this, the most prosperous class of city dwellers, was not taxed directly. Private landowners paid only indirect taxes for the use of water and for transport and harbour use. Money taxes were levied on various commercial transactions, such as land and slave sales. These dues and taxes were often collected by private contractors who had received a corresponding commission, sometimes at least by competitive bidding against competitors, from the state. The latter allowed the contractors to aim for a profit, but also required them to bear the risk of these undertakings. As in the case of the contractors undertaking temple business, the state limited its income to less than the theoretical maximum, but on the other hand, it benefited from the fact that it could expect a fixed income paid by the contractor rather than the uncertain tax intake from the actual taxpayers – and the state was also spared the need to set up an extensive bureaucratic apparatus for the purpose of tax collection: all it needed to do was monitor the contractors. This system of tax farming often involved a chain of contractors and subcontractors all of whom expected to profit from these arrangements. It thereby added considerable weight to the burden producers had to shoulder.

The main burden laid by the state on society consisted of the levying of manpower for labour and military service. In contrast to the Neo-Assyrian period, the available information is very detailed, especially for the lower levels of the administrative hierarchies that were involved in the organization of corvée labour. The main weight of these services was placed on owners of urban or agricultural land – in any case, on households of a certain standing. These households were grouped into tax units of normally ten families. Together, they were

[67] On these matters see most recently Janković 2013.

obliged to provide one labourer at any given time – the annual service periods varied from a month to all-year service. These labourers were normally hired from among the ranks of the non-landowning population. Similar arrangements can be found in the context of the organization of military service: commutation in money payments on all levels and the hiring of substitute men was the rule. Two texts will be discussed here as an illustration (they can be used here even though they incidentally date to the early period of Persian rule over Babylonia: at that time, taxation structures were structurally still identical to those of the Neo-Babylonian empire).

The theoretical choice members of tax units had between serving in person and hiring men to do service for them is shown by one text that lists the members of a tax unit and their financial contributions. It concludes with the statement that "one mina of silver (500 grams)..., the wage of one hireling for six months, is at the disposal of so-and-so, the head of the tax unit" (BM 42633 // 42444; Jursa 1999: 219f.)): money had been pooled by the members of the tax unit to pay for half a year of service of an outsider, who was to be sent to Susa, where the Achaemenid king Darius was undertaking huge construction works, drawing on the resources of the entire empire.

In another text (BM 42352+) half a mina of silver, 250 grams, is paid as a share of two men in the military and corvée service owed by their tax unit. The silver is said to be intended "for digging a canal in Elam (south-western Iran), for year 17 (of Darius), (a task) which the men of Ubāru [the recipient of the payment] execute at the behest of the governor of Babylon." (Jursa 1999: 151f., van Driel 2002: 243) This tax thus financed a Babylonian work-gang employed in far-away Elam. This arrangement is one step removed from the personal hiring of a substitute by the person or persons theoretically obliged to do labour or military service, but on the other hand it is quite clear that the payment was not a simple monetary tax that was paid in cash to the Achaemenid treasury. On the contrary, the tablet shows that the extraction of taxes and labour services was based on a decentralised, 'local' form of organisation. Sipparean tax units were assigned a certain task by the governor of Babylon, who was also responsible for the city of Sippar. The Sipparean tax unit responded and set up, and paid for, a labour gang led by one of their own: The man Ubāru, the recipient of the payment, who went to Elam in person was a well-known Sipparean priest.[68] The governor of Babylon must have received his directions in a general form from the highest levels of the Achaemenid administration, but apart from this necessary step the entire organisation was in Babylonian hands, and the tax money circulated primarily among Babylonians. No record of

[68] Jursa 1999: 64.

the pertinent transactions would have reached the royal administration, and the corresponding burden on the bureaucratic apparatus was minimal.

In general terms, the system of taxation and corvée in sixth century Babylonia was geared towards extracting resources only from households that could produce more than a minimum surplus: especially the urban elites were placed under considerable tax pressure. Demands made on those households that came within the focus of the royal administration were heavy: long service periods and service in distant places required the pooling of the resources of more than one household, hence the formation of tax units. On the other hand, this opened up the way towards commutation of service obligations in money payments and the important role of hired labour: the Babylonian corvée system, such as it was in the sixth and fifth centuries, could not have functioned without the existence of a labour market of sorts. Targeting propertied households with particularly heavy demands and forcing them to provide the funds that paid for the actual labour which normally came from within the ranks of the landless population, the state administration could dispense with the difficult bureaucratic tasks of levying labour services from the population at large: the system achieved a maximum effect with a minimum of investment. Labour services required from the general population would have been much more costly to extract and could in any case not have been as heavy as those required from the tax units of propertied landowners on an individual basis, because of the otherwise destructive disruption of the economic life of the strata of the population that produced little more than what was needed for mere survival.

In conclusion, vertical hierarchies within the state administration were steep, and the dense central network of bureaucratic control had a short reach. On its margins semi-autarchic state institutions of secondary rank (e.g., temples) managed jointly by local elites, royal officials and private franchise holders (tax-farmers etc.) who were dependent on networks of patronage substituted for the lack of direct state control. The imponderabilities of resource mobilization by force, especially in the Assyrian case, or through the contract-based delegation of obligations to outsiders, as in the Babylonian case, reduced the potential of the bureaucratic apparatus for planning and forecasting. The power of the state extended to the level of individual households more often than not in a mediated (and indirect) manner only. Both in the Neo-Assyrian case and in the Neo-Babylonian case, central control over state resources was certainly patchy. This must have limited the mobilizing power of the state. Furthermore, the state seems to have targeted preferably those sectors of the population that could dispose of a significant economic surplus and thus were able to bear considerably heavy burdens: the population at large, on the other hand, whose livelihood was little above

subsistence levels, was subject to indirect taxation on transactions and transport, but it was mostly spared direct taxes. Heavy corvée obligations were placed on prosperous households, which then were forced to commute them into money payments or to hire substitute workers, thereby diluting their impact and indirectly spreading them over an entire community or at least a larger number of households.

The Reach of Roman Government (Bernhard Palme)

In his second book of Annals of Roman History, the historian Tacitus coined the famous phrase of the *arcana imperii* regarding the hidden military power behind the civil façade of the Principate. Modern historians like Arnold Jones and Fergus Millar kept wondering about yet another *arcanum* of Roman imperial rule: how could an extremely minimalistic bureaucratic apparatus so successfully run an empire of such enormous territorial extent? Until the end of the third century AD, there was no professional civil service; the governors of the provinces had only a few dozen detached soldiers as staff of their *officium*, and although our sources do not allow exact calculations, it is clear that the professional administrators of the Roman Empire were hardly more than a few thousand men. Even if Diocletian really had doubled their number – as he is accused by Christian authors such as Lactantius – it would still have been a tiny administrative apparatus for an empire of 60 million (or so) inhabitants.

In Egypt the papyrological evidence, in combination with the other sources, affords a relatively detailed insight into the institutions of the imperial government, their development and their functioning. As a peaceful and productive country, Egypt was of the highest importance to the empire on account of its reliable generation of tax income, especially in the form of grain. Each year Egypt had to send approximately 8 million artabae to Constantinople in the sixth century, and it was hardly less than what had to be sent to Rome in earlier centuries[69]. The smooth administration of the country and a loyal administration and military lay in the vital interests of the imperial government. Consequently, the papyri show us a highly elaborate system of fiscal administration, but they provide much more information about the local levels than about the higher, central instances. The papyrological evidence offers rich information about dozens of officials and functions which dealt with the estimate of tributes, the precise assessment of the actual sums demanded, the collection of the taxes payable in money or in kind, the settlement of accounts, control and forwarding of the tax

[69] Justinian, Ed. XIII 8 (539): at a ratio of 1 artaba = approx. 39 litres the total volume will be approx. 312,000,000 litres.

return, recovery of outstanding debts and the control of the population. To put it in a nutshell, the mere fact of central authority's forward planning at the local and regional level and its supervision of the execution of such tasks in written form already reveal both the nature and the range of Roman state bureaucracy. Control and mobilization of resources generated a set of canonized administrative documents, reflecting highly formalized bureaucratic procedures. The Roman administration of Egypt, with its strictly organised hierarchy and precisely prescribed official procedures, adopted some structures from the Ptolemaic administration system, but step by step it created a new machinery for itself. The tightening and standardization of administrative channels, the recourse to compulsory public service, and above all the efforts to control the population, its status, its financial circumstances and place of residence, at the same time enforced the formalisation of the official paperwork.

Of essential significance for every inhabitant of Greco-Roman Egypt (and the whole empire) was his legal and fiscal status. Especially for the privileged classes (Roman citizens and specific groups of *peregrini*) it must have been a major concern that their status was well documented from the official side and thus easily transferred on to the next generation, because in general status depended on birth. Taxes and other contributions and services were levied differently on the various groups (Romans, Hellenes, Aigyptioi), defined more on a legal than an ethnic basis. Registration of the inhabitants and their property was the most important precondition for as complete a counting as possible of the fiscal objects as well as the fiscal subjects. Under the Romans this happened through the "house-to-house-declaration" adapting the model of the census of the Roman citizens. Every head of a household, who was mostly at the same time the house owner (and often a woman), had to submit such a document. The enforcement of the provincial census, conducted every 14 years, was among the responsibilities of the district and local authorities. It required an enormous bureaucratic effort from both the officials and the population because every person had to present himself before the authorities of his home area. It was also a measure to control and regulate people's mobility. Already some time before the registration began, the provincial administration had to ensure that all inhabitants who were staying outside their home-districts returned to their home town. So-called "reintegration edicts" do not contain the enforcement of the census itself, but order only corresponding measures by calling for the submission of the declaration (with personal presentation) and resumption of field works. Roman authorities were able to trace every single person, as the so-called "orders to arrest" reveal. Quite stereotypical in formulation, these documents addressed to village officials sometimes concern official inquiries about one (or more) people for an institution or court, sometimes they are practically

warrants of arrest: "From the *beneficiarius* on duty to the headsmen of the villages of Teruthis. Deliver up to the officer sent by me Pachoumis, son of Pachoumis, whom you have today arrested and brought to your village though he is a citizen" (P.Oxy. I 65 = Sel.Pap. 232). On the other hand, a unique letter of the *praefectus Aegypti* Subatianus Aquila orders the release of a condemned man to the quarries: "Subatianus Aqulia to Theon, *strategos* of the Arsinoite nome, greeting. Niger, son of Papirius, condemned to the alabaster quarry for five years by his Honour Claudius Julianus, now that he has completed the term of his sentence, I [hereby] release. Goodbye" (SB I 4639, 209 AD). Apparently, Roman authorities kept the files of every single prisoner and were able to remember when his time of punishment was over.

Throughout antiquity, Egypt's most significant taxes were on land, which generally had to be paid in wheat. Moreover, innumerable tax-receipts testify to money taxes on various commercial transactions and a poll-tax, which – quite tellingly – was called "census tax" and extended to all male inhabitants between 14 and 64 years. Only Romans and citizens of the Greek poleis were excepted. Similarly well documented are the measures taken by the administration to control the tax objects. Owners of landed property and farm buildings had to announce that fact by written "property returns". Tax offices used to check all dates declared by the taxpayer by autopsy. Individual tax payments as well as fiscal debts were recorded in registers. Also related to the fiscal administration are registers of landowners and lists of taxpayers, partly extensive. Ordinary people had not only to place their tax payments into public service but also their labour-force and property. Since the Pharaohs, the Egyptians had to do compulsory work to maintain the irrigation system. In the papyri especially work on dikes and ditches, newly organised in the early years of Roman dominion, is very well documented. Every man of "Egyptian" status had to work five days (a *penthemeros*) of every year on the irrigation canals and dams. Afterwards he received confirmation of this. Compared to similar coercive works in other ancient empires, five days appears to be a relatively short time and a light burden. Indirectly this also indicates that a sufficient labour force was available and hence a very high percentage of men were reliable. Besides work on the irrigation system there were no services required from the government. Building projects, it seems, were financed by the state and carried out partly by free manual labourers, partly by the military. Typically, the workforce at the quarries of the Eastern Desert – well documented in hundreds of ostraca – comprised an instructive mixture of entrepreneurs and hired labour, slave labour and activities of soldiers.

The Roman administration tried to achieve as complete as possible a survey of property-holdings by the centralisation of archives at the local level. Individual property returns were required, and the data were from time to time revised. An edict of 89 AD reveals with exceptional clarity the governor's concern about updated information and at the same time the shortcomings of the bureaucracy on the local level: "Proclamation of Marcus Mettius Rufus, *praefectus Aegypti:* Claudius Arius the *strategos* of the Oxyrhynchite nome has informed me that neither private nor public business is receiving proper treatment owing to the fact that for many years the abstracts in the property record-office have not been kept in the manner required, although the praefects before me have often ordered that they should undergo the necessary revision (…)" (Sel.Pap. II 219). Besides the possession of estate, also the property of animals had to be declared. The original declarations, reports and accounts of the public sphere additionally had to be forwarded to the central archive in Alexandria and guaranteed the governor a capacity for central planning. Although the papyrological evidence is fragmentary, it seems as if especially the fiscal administration wrote down every single action. The canonized documents provided a mass of precise data on practically all persons and their property to the Roman administrators and taxmen.

The 'secret' which made such an elaborate administrative system with such extensive paper work possible, in spite of the very small number of professional administrators, was an increasing extraction of labour resources from large parts of the population: In the course of the first century AD the male population of Egypt was increasingly burdened with compulsory services (liturgies). Virtually all public jobs at the local level including the collection of taxes, security and transport services had to be done for a certain period (up to three years) without payment. Corresponding to their wealth, people were obliged to perform liturgies with different degrees of financial burden, since administrative expenses had to be covered out of one's private pocket. From the second to the fourth centuries the liturgical service was an elaborate system, as specific types of files and documents demonstrate. Tax collection was mainly done by liturgical officials, while tax rent – widespread in the Ptolemaic kingdom – was limited to indirect taxes by the end of the first century AD. The intensified control of private landownership in about the same decades is probably related to the assignment of further responsibilities to the population in the form of compulsory public services. As the liturgists came from the same area, this all had a very local character. Roman rule was established and executed by co-optation and co-operation of local elites and, as a second step, practically all the propertied population.

Since 200 AD, Alexandria and all the Egyptian towns had installed city councils (*bulai, curiae*) and thereby had also become legally cities with an autonomous administration. In the course of the third century, however, city administration started to replace the former district administration, which by the mid-fourth century ceased to exist. As elsewhere in the empire, the city councillors (the local propertied elite) took over the administrative responsibilities and risks for the *civitates* and their tax income. Late antiquity saw of a series of profound social and economic changes that significantly manifested themselves in the papyrological documentation as well. The Roman system of control of fiscal objects and subjects successively gave way to new forms of interaction between the state and its subjects, and the bureaucratic control of property.

The Diocletian fiscal reform implemented the system of *capitatio* and *iugatio* which imposed a tax on farmland as well as on the human and animal labour force. The canonized types of administrative texts used in the High Empire disappear, but the reach of government was ensured by other measures and documents. Still the most important taxes were required in kind (grain), but sometimes conversion into money (*adaeratio*) was allowed. Again, numerous tax receipts testify to payments in order to feed the army and the civil servants. According to the norm, Egypt was subdivided into a growing number of small provinces. Clearly this entailed an intensification of imperial administration, though the *officia* were still not very large. The office of the *dux et praefectus Augustalis*, which was formed by combining a military and civilian office, contained, according to Justinian's Edict XIII (539 AD), 600 officials. If these figures are extrapolated, then for the whole of Egypt we arrive at hardly more than approximately 2,000 *officiales* in a population estimated at 4,75 million. The military system saw substantial changes as well. Since 376, the provision of recruits had been a duty of the *civitates,* that is, a responsibility for their city councils. The provision of recruits had been a *de facto* tax since then, while the actual service was performed by a hired substitute. The establishment of more or less professional bureaucrat and soldier families had already begun in the 4th century. The result of this development was the formation of a distinct group in the population, from which most of the local civil servants were drawn and which squared up the offices amongst themselves based on a network of personal contacts. A close intertwining of state power and personal interests was thus unavoidable. As a parallel development, members of the curial class attempted to escape the increasingly onerous burdens and responsibilities imposed on them by the city council by entering the imperial service. It was the provincial élite who attempted to preserve their wealth by entering into state service, which brought with it tax privileges. The fifth and sixth centuries witnessed the

polarisation of society, particularly of the local councillors' class, into those who were progressively impoverished and those who became richer. Whereas until the beginning of the fifth century the latter owned the lion's share of landed property, a new élite of landowners consolidated itself in the second third of this century. Previous research took the view that the consequence was an increasing usurpation of state power on the part of private landlords, which resulted in a gradual feudalisation. It perceived a clear disappearance of imperial power in favour of the influence of local *potentates*, who established an intermediate level between imperial central power and the local population. In the 6th century they finally held the reins of power in their hands. The family of the Apions were a classic example of the social and economic rise of an Egyptian land-owning dynasty, whose history can be traced over at least seven generations from the mid-fifth century to the early seventh century. Their extensive estates covered two fifths of the arable land in the Oxyrhynchite and Cynopolite. But the Apion family was an exceptional phenomenon. Recent research shows clearly that there were large local differences. Subsequently, *pagarchs* (heads of districts), who around the mid-5th century replaced the former city officials under not yet quite clear circumstances, became the most important local authority in the course of the sixth century and were responsible for at least the collection of taxes. Towards the end of the sixth century and in the seventh century they appear as the most powerful officials at the local level.

An inseparable intertwining of state power and the personal power of local potentates inevitably resulted when great landlords took over the office of the *pagarch*, as the aforementioned Apions. Great landowner and pagarch: this was nothing short of a stereotype in Egypt from the mid-sixth century into the early Arab period. It is symptomatic that in the papyri it is hardly possible any more to determine whether such pagarchs acted as state officials or as private landowners. Their privately hired armed guards assisted with tax collection; the prisons, just like the postal service, were privately financed; even in respect of the terminology there was no difference between rent and tax payment: both were called *phoros*. Quite often, state and private power appear to be combined in an office holder, although in other cases they seemingly represent opponents. As in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, a lack of clarity in the definition of the respective responsibilities of various administrative bodies was deliberately maintained also by the Late Roman government in order to facilitate control of the competing officials. Local economic power and the 'home advantage' due to social connections and old-boy networks could temporarily turn a *pagarch* into the rival of the local garrison commander or even the governor. Occasionally local potentates could assert their own interests successfully by acting in opposition to the representatives of the

government. Highly instructive are the complaints directed by the emperor Justinian in AD 551 to the *dux Thebaidos* about an earlier rescript which has apparently been largely ignored: "(ll. 13–20): (…) and that concerning this matter they previously obtained from us a dicine letter addressed to your excellency (sc. the *dux*), but the intrigues of that person (sc. Theodosius *magnificentissimus*) were of more avail than our orders, so that the petitioner had the trouble of undertaking a second journey and of a prolonged delay. We therefore decree that now at least your excellency shall give proper effect to the divine letter about this question (…)." (P.Cair.Masp. I 67024 = Sel.Pap. II 218)

More recent research has successfully challenged this kind of 'feudal' model and has pointed out that the great households did not usurp state power but rather were burdened with it by the state. In many cases the landlords thus replaced the cities' administrative bodies. With the decrease in the municipal administration and the liturgical system, the imperial government relied increasingly on those landowners of the provincial patriciate and of the Church, whose estates and influence grew. They did not work against the government, but rather with its approval and sanction. In this way, the Later Roman state 'outsourced' a good part of its business to private hands and called upon those social strata which were economically in a position to perform these duties also as „munera de longue durée". We may therefore resume that the Late Antique bureaucratic state was more flexible than its reputation suggests without abandoning its claim of final authority even in the empire's peripheries. By the mid sixth century, most governors came from the local elites. Finally Justin II. conceded in his Novella 149 (AD 569) that governors may be nominated by the aristocracy and the bishops of a province, but the formal approval of the emperor was required, Despite political and military setbacks, the Later Roman provincial administration remained efficient in as much as it was able to ensure the maintenance of public safety and legal order and to raise sufficient taxes to support the capital of Constantinople and the army. It is proof of the efficiency of this administration and the 'reach' of the state that, despite all the political and military disturbances, it outlived even the empire's retreat from Egypt and was adopted, without fundamental changes, by the Arabs within the next three or four generations (as Lucian has demonstrated in the first paper of this panel).

Conclusion to section 2

The defining characteristic of Ancient Near Eastern administrations, as represented in the Iron Age empires, seems to be the general interest in minimizing administrative effort and

maximizing output, either by relying heavily on constraint and the use of violence, esp. in the imperial periphery, or by targeting in particular propertied sectors of the population with heavy tax and corvée obligations. The propertied landowners who were taxed were forced to 'redistribute' these obligations by involving other strata of society through commutation of service and the hiring of substitute labourers. Another means of reducing the scope for direct bureaucratic supervision was heavy reliance on contractors, such as tax and income farmers.

In comparison, the bureaucratic apparatus of the (later) Roman state, whose small size is often emphasized, still appears to have had an impressive reach: it did clearly aim at drawing directly on the ressources of society at large, by taking head-taxes (absent in the Ancient Near East) and by levying corvée services essentially from the entire male population. A comparison between the Egyptian *penthemeros* and the much longer service periods required from taxed households in the Neo-Babylonian period is revealing: the total of labour extracted may not have been very different in relation to the overall labour force, but state duties were far more evenly spread in the Roman case – obviously requiring a much more far-reaching, 'capillary' approach to administration than in the Ancient Near East. In the Roman empire, the co-opting of peripheral elites was crucial for achieving this level of control and efficient resource mobilization, again in clear contrast to the Near Eastern empires which rarely, if ever, had a similar offer to make to the elites of their imperial periphery, relying instead on a constant level of violence. In Late Antiquity we note an even wider spread of obligations towards the state. Social distinctions were observed only in that they determined the form in which obligations were discharged (*munus personale* vs. *munus patrimonii*); neither the church nor the provincial aristocracy or their estates were exempted.

Conclusion

In this panel we have compared data culled from Ancient Near Eastern sources dating to the first half of the first millennium BC with Late Antique and early medieval sources Islamic sources, and with documentary sources from the heyday of the Roman empire and from Late Antiquity. Given the setting of this panel in the context of the APA meeting, the Ancient Near Eastern and Islamic data were presented as essentially synchronic snapshots whereas we have made an effort to take into account diachronic change in the case of the Roman & Late Antique data. This comparative approach throws into sharper relief the basic character of the administrative systems and mentalities that are reflected in our various bodies of sources. In every case, we have seen minimalistic administrative structures with well-defined and steep

vertical hierarchies. A major shibboleth lies in the degree to which 'lateral' hierarchies are articulated: this reflects the integration of different branches of the administration and can serve as proxy data for the general level of bureaucratization and rationalization of government. Here, the Roman empire displays a greater degree of complexity than the earlier and later comparanda. We have also seen a similar pattern in our analysis of administrative documentation: the independent weight given to Late Antique administrative correspondence, and the impersonal officialese in which it is phrased, stand in sharp contrast to the letter files of the Neo-Assyrian royal archives, where the letter is neither more nor less than a substitute for oral communication. In the early Islamic period, on the other hand, we have made a case for Arabic administrative letters to be mere cribs, or points of departure, for subsequent face-to-face negotiation: this is a corpus far removed from the officialism of the Roman correspondence. The latter, however, finds a close comparison in the Late Babylonian letter corpus, which does reflect an equally standardized and impersonal bureaucratic routine: it would be misinterpreting our work, therefore, if it were taken to suggest a neat division between the patrimonial Near East and the much more bureaucratic Roman systems of administration. A proprium of Roman administration, however, does consist in this state's particularly long reach: no Ancient Near Eastern empire could ever have aspired to levy poll taxes on a grand scale, or to make do with short, but society-wide, corvée obligations. They managed to extract a significant surplus by targeting propertied strata of the population, and by extortion, especially in the periphery. Without wanting to downplay the role of coercion also in the roman empire, it seems that the much more capillary reach of the Roman state was owed to its ability to co-opt peripheral non-roman elites in the undertaking of resource mobilization: none of the Ancient Near Eastern empires made this kind of offer, and their approach was rather that of targeting, rather than co-opting, propertied elites.

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