

LOCAL MAGNATES, BUT MOBILE

Office and Elite Integration in Late Antique Egypt

I. BACKGROUND

My PhD project, entitled “Fiscalité, Local Politics, and Social Control in Byzantine Egypt. The Case of the Pagarchy,” investigates the character and the “reach” of the late Roman state by retracing the doings and dealings of high fiscal officials in the cities of Egypt—the **pagarchs**. These men are a promising case study for several reasons:

- 1) they are situated at the **critical juncture** of the imperial, the provincial, and the local sphere;
- 2) they stem from a **variety of backgrounds**;
- 3) the papyri show their **public and “private”** agenda in great detail.

The late Roman empire and its actors thus can be followed as part of a “**state network**,” where both the public and the “private” realm form an indispensable unity.

II. THE TWO LAYERS OF PAGARCHY

Pagarchs were always notables, yet there is a **wide spectrum in rank**: while some did not exceed the rank of *lamprotatos*, many others did, and indeed all major rank epithets are attached to pagarchs, reaching even as far as *paneuphemos* and *hyperphyestatos* (fig. 1).

Our evidence is biased here as the papyri from the Fayum and from the Apiones archive (due to their focus on the large estates) yield next to no information about pagarchs below the rank of *endoxotatos*. The Aphrodite papyri and documents from various contexts provide a more balanced picture of pagarchs with whom people would actually come into contact, and there are a number of *lamprotatoi* among them.

<i>paneuphemos</i>
<i>hyperphyestatos</i>
<i>endoxotatos</i>
<i>megaloprepestatos</i>
<i>peribleptos</i>
<i>lamprotatos</i>

Fig. 1:
Approximate hierarchy
of 6th- and 7th-century
rank epithets attached
to pagarchs listed in descending order

III. QUESTIONS AND MODELLING

The pagarchs thus offer a snapshot of a provincial aristocracy and they in particular enable us to follow **models of elite integration** in Byzantine and early Islamic Egypt. While the pagarchs of the 8th century are frequently Muslim outsiders, Byzantine pagarchs are believed to be generally of local origin. However:

- 1) Do these men (and women) form a closed elite of **local magnates**?
- 2) Is this an elite **focused on the imperial center**?

Comparative prosopographic patterns allow for a rather **dynamic** perception of these elites (fig. 2).

IV. IMPERIAL AND REGIONAL FOCUS AMONG ARCADIAN ELITES

The most prominent local magnates with an **imperial perspective** are certainly **the Apiones**: Strategios II (early 6th c.), Apion II (mid-6th c.), and Apion III (early 7th c.) are known to have been involved in the Oxyrhynchite pagarchy, though never personally, as they apparently saw their center of activity in Constantinople. The pagarchy in this case served as a means to tie these imperial magnates to local issues and make them responsible for the imperial cause.

Strategios “Paneuphemos,” pagarch in the Fayum in the early 7th century, was of equal rank to Apion II and III (*hyperphyestatos kai paneuphemos patrikios*). He was close to the emperor as well, e.g., he mediated at a church meeting in Alexandria on Herakleios’ order. Yet Strategios appears to have conducted his public and private business in Egypt on his own, and thus shows a clear **regional focus**. He would clearly serve as one of Herakleios’ foremost local right-hand men in Egypt.

V. MOBILE BUREAUCRATS IN THE THEBAID

Local bureaucrats from the lower ranks used the pagarchy in order to **advance their career**, supposedly through performing the pagarchy in lieu of higher-ranking elites, and they were rather flexible.

Menas, e.g., a *lamprotatos skrinarios*, was pagarch for a female magnate in Antaiopolis in the mid-6th century, but later rose to the rank of *peribleptos* and took office in the provincial governor’s bureau at Antinoopolis.

The *lamprotatos* **Kollouthos** (2nd half 6th c.) also followed a career in the provincial bureau (as *exkeptor*) and was pagarch in Antinoopolis. However, he maintained strong ties to the village of Aphrodite in the Antaiopolite and also had certain authority there (as pagarch?).

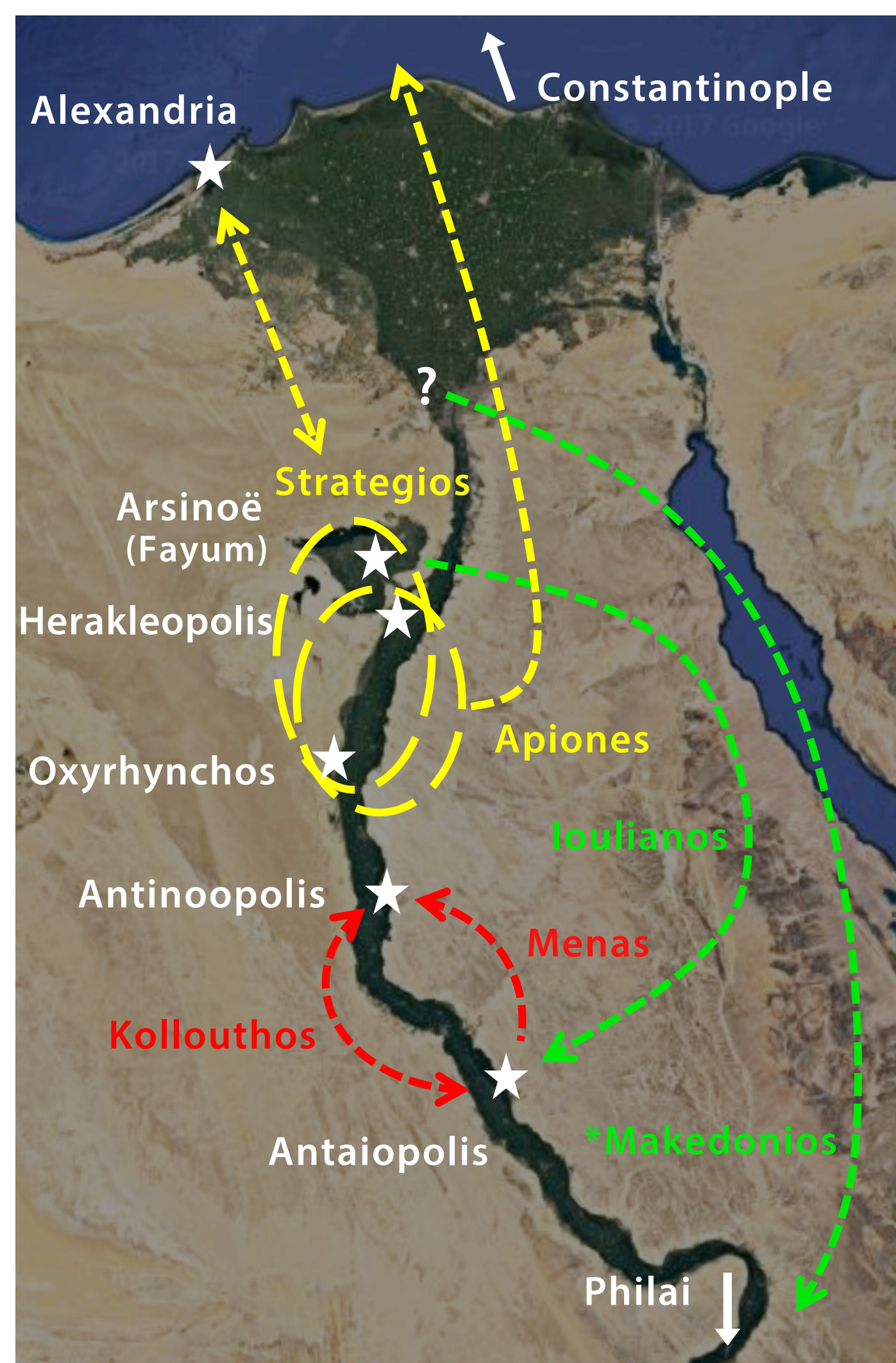


Fig. 2: Some Byzantine pagarchs
and their areas of activity

VI. OUTSIDER PAGARCHS?

The last years of the 7th century witness the first pagarchs of apparently Arab origin, and their mobility is more pronounced: a number of them were pagarchs in at least two nomes, which is generally explained by the fact that these men did not stem from the class of local magnates as the Byzantine pagarchs did. There are, however, **Byzantine precedents** for outsider pagarchs.

Apart from mobile lower-tier bureaucrats like Menas and Kollouthos, there are also pagarchs like **Ioulianos**—probably the dominant magnate in Antaiopolis at his time—who originally was **an outsider** from Arsinoë in the Fayum. Even a literary text, the Coptic *Life of Aaron*, has a certain **Makedonios** explain his first coming south to Philai as a result of his being pagarch there: it is striking that a 7th-century hagiography which is supposedly set in the 4th century is able to present **the pagarchy as the reason for moving to an entirely unfamiliar area**.

PhD project:

“Fiscalité, Local Politics, and Social Control in
Byzantine Egypt. The Case of the Pagarchy”

Advisers:

Sabine R. HUEBNER (Basel); Bernhard PALME (Vienna)

Contact:

Matthias STERN

matthias.stern@unibas.ch

unibas.academia.edu/MatthiasStern