

Egypt as a province in the Islamic caliphate, 641–868

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The Muslim conquest of Egypt followed naturally from that of Syria.¹ The sources for the early Muslim conquests are extremely problematical, and it would be wrong to be too categorical about specific details.² The Arabic sources are generally agreed that the first attack was launched from southern Palestine at the end of 18/639 or the beginning of 19/640. The leader and inspiration for this expedition was ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ as a member of the powerful Umayyad clan. The force he led was very small, perhaps 3,500–4,000 troops, but as the conquest progressed they were joined by further reinforcements, notably 12,000 led by Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām, a senior companion of the Prophet ‘Amr, however, remained in command.

The invasion force headed southwest along the eastern fringes of the desert to the Byzantine stronghold of Babylon (Old Cairo). Here they besieged the garrison of the fortress, which surrendered after some seven months in Rabi‘ II, 20/Easter 641. Alexandria, not Babylon, was the Byzantine capital and, after securing his position ‘Amr marched through the Delta to attack the city. Divisions among Byzantines and the loss of so much territory seem to have led to a spirit of defeatism among the defenders. At the end of the year 30 (November 641) a treaty was made in which the Byzantines agreed to give up the city by Shawwāl 21/September 642. This meant the end of serious resistance: it was now up to the small army of

¹ The best discussion of the conquest in general remains A. J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt*, which should be consulted in the second edition, P. M. Fraser (ed.), (Oxford, 1978); see also D. R. Hill, *The Termination of Hostilities in the Early Arab Conquests* (London, 1971) and V. Christides, “The Conquest of Egypt,” “*Misr*,” *Elz*.

² In addition, to the general sources discussed below, two works deal with specifically with the conquests, the Coptic *Chronicle* of John of Nikiou, which survives only in an Ethiopic translation, and the anonymous *Futūḥ Bahmasā*, which contains information on the conquest of the Fayyūm and Upper Egypt, largely neglected by other sources. For these problems in general see A. North in L. I. Conrad (ed.), *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition* (Princeton, 1994).

conquerors to establish a working government over the rich lands they had so swiftly acquired.

Our understanding of the history of Egypt in the two centuries which followed the conquest is restricted by the nature of the sources at our disposal. The affairs of Egypt do figure in the general chronicles of the Muslim world, the most important of which is the *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), but the references are usually short and sporadic and, while they sometimes contribute details not found elsewhere, they would not allow us to reconstruct the general history with any conviction.

Fortunately for the historian, whether medieval or modern, a local historical tradition developed early in Muslim Egypt. The first major figures seem to have been Ibn Lahī'a (d. 790) and al-Layth ibn Sa'd (d. 791).³ Their works have now been lost but, along with other early authorities, they form the basis of the first surviving book, the *Futūh Miṣr* of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 871).⁴ This is a collection of traditions about the conquest and early settlement of Egypt with additional material on north Africa and Spain. The material was collected for legal rather than historical reasons, but it nonetheless provides a wealth of information about the conquest and settlement.

The most important source for the period, however, are the two works of Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Kindī, the *Kitāb al-Wulāt* or *Book of Governors* and the *Kitāb al-Qudāt* or *Book of Judges*.⁵ As their titles imply, both these works deal with the history of rulers rather than being a more wide-ranging account of the whole country, but al-Kindī was a meticulous chronicler and his work, though sometimes dry, provides the basis for the reconstruction of the Muslim political system of the period. Subsequent historians of Egypt were largely dependent on Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam and al-Kindī for their accounts of this early period and offer little which is new.

While they are in many ways excellent, these Arabic accounts have a very limited focus, and their interests are almost entirely confined to the activities of the ruling group in the capital, Fuṣṭāt, with occasional references to Alexandria. To understand anything of life outside this charmed circle, we have to look at Christian sources.

Of the Christian sources, the most useful for this period is the *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, usually ascribed to Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa', Bishop of Ashmūnayn. In fact this is a composite work, and

³ On whom see R. G. Khoury, "Al-Layth ibn Sa'd (94/713–175/791), grand maître et mécène de l'Égypte," *JNES*, 40 (1981), 189–202.

⁴ On this see the English introduction to his edition of the Arabic text by C. C. Torrey (New Haven, 1922).

⁵ On this see the English introduction to his edition of the Arabic text by R. Guest (London, 1912).

Sawīrus probably translated earlier biographies from Coptic to Arabic and edited them. The biographies of the patriarchs are vigorously partisan, hostile alike to the Muslims and to Christians of other sects. Their chronology and detail are often confused, but they do give us a wholly different perspective, including the opinions of taxpayers, and there is more material from Alexandria, where the patriarchs usually resided.

In the aftermath of the final Byzantine surrender of Alexandria in 22/642, the most important decision facing 'Amr was the settlement of the victorious troops. There is an old tradition that 'Amr himself wished to establish Alexandria as the capital but the Caliph 'Umar intervened to forbid this. He argued that the Arabs should not establish a city on any site which was separated from Medina by water and, of course, the Nile ran to the east of Alexandria.⁶ Like many anecdotes about the second caliph, this must be treated with some caution, yet we can be certain that in Egypt, as in Iraq and initially in Syria, the Muslims did not settle in the existing administrative centres but in new towns on the edge of the desert. The Muslims may also have been concerned to avoid the Mediterranean coast, where there was always a danger of Byzantine raids.

The site eventually chosen was just north of the Roman fortress of Babylon, at a site which came to be known as Fustāt possibly in memory of the fact that 'Amr's tent had been pitched on the site during the Arab siege.⁷ The settlement of the site began with the foundation of the mosque which, though much altered, is still known as Mosque of 'Amr. Around this were settled the *Ahl al-Rāya* or People of the Standard, men from Quraysh and the *anṣār*, or other Companions of the Prophet, who formed the elite of the army. *Khittas* (parcels of land) were then allotted to or acquired by tribal groups. The vast majority of these early settlers came from the south Arabian or Yemeni tribes; of these Azd, Ḥimyar, including Ma'āfir, Kinda, including Tujīb, and Lakhm seem to have been the most important. Members of these South Arabian tribes formed the *jund* of Egypt. They were to dominate the political and intellectual life of Muslim Egypt for the next two centuries, and it was from their ranks with the *wujūh* (notables) were drawn. By contrast, the north Arabian (Qays) Bedouin, so powerful in Syria, were hardly represented at all.

Muslim settlement seems to have been confined to Fustāt, though troops were sent out for periods of duty in Alexandria and probably other areas as well. Fustāt was their *miṣr* and it was here that the *dīwān* which recorded their names was housed. In the years following the conquest there was continuing immigration of Arabs who came to join friends and relatives. The

⁶ W. Kubiak discusses the tradition in *Al-Fustat: its Foundation and Early Urban Development* (Cairo, 1987), 58, n.4.

⁷ For the early history of Fustāt see A. R. Guest, "The Foundation of Fustat and the Khittas of that Town," *JRAS* (1907), 49–83, and Kubiak, *Al-Fustat*.

army of the conquest is said to have numbered 15,500.⁸ By the Caliphate of Mu'awiya (41–60/661–80) the number of names on the *dīwān* had allegedly reached 40,000,⁹ but thereafter the register was effectively closed and only with difficulty could further names be added to it. As in other provinces of the early Islamic state, the members of the *jund* whose names appeared in the *dīwān* and who received the 'atā' or monthly pay were fiercely jealous of their privileged position. They were determined to protect their status from encroachments either by caliphs who wished to acquire a larger share of the revenue for themselves, or from fellow Muslims trying to acquire a position on the *dīwān*. Much of the political agitation and violence in the first two centuries of Muslim Egypt was concerned in one way or another with these issues.

The most important figure in the political life of the province was the governor or *wālī*. He was in charge of leading the prayers in the mosque on Fridays – at which the *khuṭba* was pronounced and the name of the caliph proclaimed – and of making sure that the *kharāj* (tax) was collected. Sometimes these two functions were divided and separate officials placed in charge of taxation. In theory the powers of the governor were absolute; in practice they were more limited and differed from one individual to another. Some, like Maslama ibn Mukhallad al-Anṣārī (47–62/667–82) or the Umayyad 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān (65–86/685–715) enjoyed long terms of office and were effectively viceroys. Others held the position for much shorter periods, a tendency which became more pronounced in the early 'Abbāsīd period (132–193/750–809), when governors were changed much more frequently. In these circumstances, a governor on a short-term appointment who was an outsider to the province had very little opportunity to establish his position.

The governor did not have an easy task. On one hand he had to keep the confidence of the caliph by keeping the province peaceful and forwarding as large a proportion of the revenue as was practical to Damascus or Baghdād. On the other hand, he also had to satisfy the demands of the *jund* of Fustāt who constituted the only military force at his disposal, and who reacted violently if their pay was not provided. From 107/725–26 on there were also repeated rebellions of the Copts, protesting at over-taxation. Caught as they were between the various conflicting pressures, it is hardly surprising that some governors lost their jobs fairly quickly.

After the governor, the most important figure in the political administration was the *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*. This official was in charge of maintaining law and order and of leading the *jund*: it is also probable that he was responsible

⁸ Muhammad ibn Yūsuf al-Kindī, *The Governors and Judges of Egypt*, ed. R. Guest (London, 1912), 8–9.

⁹ *Futūḥ Miṣr*, ed. C. C. Torrey (New Haven, 1922), 102. Kubiak, *Al-Fustat*, 79.

for paying the *'atā'* to those whose names were on the *dīwān*, which provided opportunities for patronage and building up a following. The *ṣāhib al-shurṭa* in Egypt was almost always a local man, chosen by the governor from the *wujūh* of Fustāt and the office often ran in families. The most conspicuous of these local dynasties was the family of Mu'āwiya ibn Ḥudayj al-Tujībī. Mu'āwiya himself seems to have been in the original army of conquest, and some held that he was a companion of the Prophet. In the civil wars which followed the murder of 'Uthmān, he played an important part in securing Egypt for the Umayyads. His son 'Abd al-Raḥmān and grandsons 'Abd al-Wāḥid and 'Abd Allāh served as *ṣāhib al-shurṭa* and as *qādī*. Their influence seems to have been unaffected by the 'Abbāsīd Revolution. 'Abd Allāh became *ṣāhib al-shurṭa* in 143/760 and held office for nine years until 152/769, when he was appointed governor (a rare example of a local man holding this office). On his death three years later his status was inherited by his son Hāshim and then by his grandson Hubayra, both of whom served as *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*. The family remained one of the most important in the province until most of them were massacred in the civil wars of the year 200/815.

The family of Mu'āwiya ibn Ḥudayj held office through five generations and were leading figures among the *wujūh* of Fustāt for a century and a half, but they were not exceptional. The families 'Amr ibn Qaḥzam al-Khawlanī, 'Assāma ibn 'Amr al-Ma'āfirī and 'Ulayy ibn Ribāḥ al-Lakhmī are other examples of the tightly knit oligarchy which dominated Egypt in this period. Their power was based on their property, the support they could command from the *jund* and their knowledge of the country and its administration, which was indispensable to an incoming governor.

The third major figure in the life of the community was the *qādī* or judge. In the Umayyad period these were usually chosen by the governor from the leading families of Fustāt, and it was not unknown for the same man to serve as both *qādī* and *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*. In the early 'Abbāsīd period this slowly began to change: *qādīs* were chosen from the *fuqahā* and were increasingly specialists. The caliphs began to take a more active interest in their appointment, and in 164/780 al-Mahdī appointed Ismā'īl ibn al-Yasa' al-Kindī, who was not only an outsider from Kūfa in Iraq but also followed the law school of Abū Ḥanīfa which was then completely unknown in Egypt; this was a clear attempt to assert central authority.¹⁰ Despite this, however, most *qādīs* were respected local men, at least until the reassertion of caliphal control by 'Abd Allāh ibn Tāhir in 211/826.

In the years which followed the conquest the Muslim community in Egypt was involved in two major developments, expanding Muslim rule in north Africa and responding to the major political upheavals in the rest of the

¹⁰ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 371.

Muslim world. There was also a problem they did not have to face: rebellions among the local population. The reasons for this absence of local resistance are something of a puzzle. It seems clear that the local Monophysite Copts, whether or not they had actually aided the Muslim invasion, saw Muslim rule as no worse or more oppressive than the rule of the Chalcedonian Byzantines. More important, perhaps, was the fact that Muslim rule intruded little into the everyday lives of most native Egyptians. The Muslims lived apart from them, they did not take possession of houses or fields. Of course, they did collect taxes, but so had their predecessors, and the tax collectors with whom most people came in contact were the same sort of local officials who had collected taxes for the previous administration. Very few Copts seem to have converted to Islam at this early stage. It was only when tax collection became harder and conversion increased in the later Umayyad period, that Coptic revolts broke out for the first time.

After the conquest 'Amr was accepted as governor by the Caliph 'Umar. After 'Umar's death, however, the new Caliph 'Uthmān dismissed him in 25/645 and replaced him by 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'd ibn Abī Sarḥ, who had previously been sub-governor of the Ṣa'īd (Upper Egypt). 'Uthman was determined to centralise the administration of the caliphate, and a semi-independent ruler like 'Amr would want to keep all the resources of the province for himself and his followers. 'Abd Allāh was to be his agent in this and he set about reforming and tightening up the financial administrative system the Muslims had inherited from the Byzantines.¹¹ As a result of this he was unpopular among many in the province. He successfully drove off a Byzantine counter-attack on Alexandria in 25/646, and he began the development of a Muslim navy which defeated the Byzantines at the Battle of the Masts off the coast of Lycia in 34/654.¹² 'Amr had led the first Muslim expedition to Tripolitania, and Ibn Abī Sarḥ followed this up with a major expedition which resulted in the defeat of the Byzantines near Subaytila in 27/647. The Muslims withdrew after the Byzantines had paid very substantial sums in tribute. In 31/651–52. Ibn Abī Sarḥ led an expedition south to

¹¹ The literature on the fiscal administration of early Islamic Egypt is extensive: for introductory discussions see H. I. Bell, "Organisation of Egypt under the Umayyad Khalifs," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 28 (1929), 278–86; A. Grohmann, *From The World of Arabic Papyri* (Cairo, 1952); K. Morimoto, *The Fiscal Administration of Egypt in the Early Islamic Period* (Tokyo, 1981); G. Frantz-Murphy, "Land tenure and social transformation in early Islamic Egypt," in T. Khalidi (ed.), *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East* (Beirut, 1984), 131–39; J. B. Simonsen, *Studies in the Genesis and Early Development of the Caliphate Taxation System* (Copenhagen, 1988). For a recent bibliography of the papyrological literature, see Butler, *Arab Conquest*, xlv–liv, lxxvi–lxxxiii, and the succinct overview in Christides, "Islamic Egypt".

¹² For the development of Muslim naval power, largely based on Egyptian evidence, see A. M. Fahmy, *Muslim Sea Power in the Eastern Mediterranean from the 7th to the 10th Cent.* (London, 1950).

Nubia. The Muslims were unable to conquer the country and a treaty was made between them and the Nubians, known as the *baqt* (from the Latin *pactum*). According to this, there was to be peace between the two peoples, and the Nubians were to send gifts of slaves while the Arabs responded with gifts of food. The treaty effectively established the southern frontier of Muslim Egypt at Aswān. With only occasional interruptions, relations remained peaceful throughout the early Islamic period.¹³

Ibn Abī Sarḥ's determination to forward revenue from Egypt to the caliph in Medina provoked opposition among the Muslims, who felt that it was theirs by right of conquest.¹⁴ Matters were made worse by the arrival of more Arab settlers which put further pressures on local resources. This resentment finally exploded in Rajab 35/January 656 when the governor was out of the country on a visit to Medina. It was led by one Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa who openly rejected the governor's authority. He was supported by a party drawn mostly from those groups which had participated in the first conquest but now found that their monopoly of wealth and power had been undermined. Like Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa himself, these were not important tribal leaders. According to the well-known story, some 400 of these protestors set out to demand redress from 'Uthmān. They accepted his assurances but on their journey back they intercepted a messenger who was carrying the caliph's orders to Ibn Abī Sarḥ, then at Ayla (modern 'Aqaba), to deal with them. Furious at this apparent deceit, they returned to Medina and played a leading role in the siege and murder of 'Uthmān in 35/656.

Meanwhile in Egypt Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa was opposed by a group of pro-'Uthmān notables led by Mu'āwiya ibn Ḥudayj al-Tujībī and including Maslama ibn Mukhallad al-Anṣārī, soon to be governor, and 'Amr ibn Qaḥzam al-Khawlanī. When news of the caliph's murder reached Fuṣṭāṭ, the 'Uthmānī party took the oath of allegiance to Mu'āwiya ibn Ḥudayj and came out in open opposition. In Ramaḍān 36/February 657 the two sides fought at Kharibtā, between Fuṣṭāṭ and Alexandria. The 'Uthmānī party was victorious but was unable to take Fuṣṭāṭ. The next month, Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān came from Syria and captured some of the leading insurgents, including Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa, by a ruse and transported them to Syria where they were soon killed.

At this stage 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib was still generally accepted as caliph, but his attempts to establish his power in Egypt were dogged by difficulties. His first governor, Qays ibn Sa'd al-Anṣārī, was dismissed in 37/late 657 because he was suspected of preparing to defect to Mu'āwiya. The next governor was one of 'Alī's most devoted supporters, Mālik al-Ashtar, but he died at

¹³ See P. Forand, "Early Muslim Relations with Nubia," in *Der Islam*, 48 (1972), 111–21, updated with full bibliography by V. Christides "Nuba," *E12*.

¹⁴ For the revolt in Egypt see M. Hinds, "The Murder of the Caliph 'Uthman," *IJMES*, 3 (1972), 450–69.

Suez before he was able to enter the province. ‘Alī then appointed Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, son of the first caliph, who took office in 37/early 658. He attempted to take strong measures against the pro-‘Uthmānī party at Kharibtā, burning their houses in Fuṣṭāṭ and imprisoning their families, but this inevitably drove them to seek the support of Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān in Syria. In response Mu‘āwiya despatched ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, who had long sought to regain his old position in the province he had conquered, with a Syrian army. In Ṣafar 38/July–August 658 a bloody battle was fought at al-Mussannāh, between Fuṣṭāṭ and ‘Ain Shams. ‘Amr’s forces were victorious and soon after they took Fuṣṭāṭ: Mu‘āwiya ibn Ḥudayj personally ordered the execution of Abū Bakr’s son.

Egypt was now firmly attached to the Umayyad cause. Until his death at the ‘Īd al-Fiṭr 43/January 664, ‘Amr was undisputed ruler of the province. It is said that he was allowed to keep all the surplus revenue, after the payment of the *‘atā*’ of the *jund* and other expenses, for himself.¹⁵ His ascendance was also a triumph from the *wujūh* of Fuṣṭāṭ, confirming them in their position. The affair shows how the Sufyānid regime attracted and relied on the support of local Muslim notables in the provinces and was prepared to confirm their privileged status in return for political support.

‘Amr did not, however, establish a hereditary governorate. On his death the caliph appointed his own brother, ‘Utba ibn Abī Sufyān. During his short governorate, he seems to have tried to increase the Muslim presence in Alexandria: 12,000 *jund* were sent there and a Dār al-Imāra was constructed. However, the commander complained that they were too few and that he felt threatened, presumably by the the local Christian population.¹⁶ He in turn was succeeded for a short while by one ‘Utba ibn ‘Āmir, who had been the Prophet’s muleteer. In 49/669 he in turn was replaced by a local notable, Maslama ibn Mukhallad al-Anṣārī, who had petitioned Mu‘āwiya for the job.

Maslama was to remain governor for the rest of Mu‘āwiya’s caliphate. Unusually for a member of the *anṣār* (people of Medina), he had long been a leader of the Umayyad party. We have little information on his long governorate apart from the names of his *aṣḥāb al-shurṭa*; his extension of the mosque of ‘Amr, and the absence of incident in the Arabic chronicles or of vigorous complaint in the Christian sources probably point to a period of peace and calm. On the main political issue of the day, Maslama remained firmly loyal to the Umayyad cause: when Mu‘āwiya died in the spring of 680, he had no hesitation in having the oath of allegiance taken to his son Yazīd, threatening the only objector, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, with death by fire.

¹⁵ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

Maslama's own death in 62/682 was followed by renewed signs of conflict and discontent in the province. The main issue was one which was to recur throughout the early Islamic period. The *wujūh* and *jund* of Egypt wanted a governor chosen from their own ranks who would make the safeguarding of their interests his priority. The new Caliph Yazīd appointed Sa'īd ibn Yazīd al-Fihri from Palestine. Despite the fact that he continued his predecessor's *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*, 'Ābis ibn Sa'īd al-Murādī, in office, he was met with vigorous opposition from 'Amr ibn Qaḥzam al-Khawlānī, a leading member of the *wujūh*, who remonstrated with him that there were a hundred young men as good as he in Egypt. As a result the new governor was generally unpopular.

In 64/683 Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya died, and the caliphate was immediately claimed by Ibn al-Zubayr in Makka. He attracted the support of the Kharijites in Egypt (who appear for the first time at this stage) and they pledged their allegiance to him. In return he dispatched a new governor, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Utba al-Fihri, supported by many of the Kharijites who were with him in Makka. The governor, Sa'īd ibn Yazīd, simply retired, but the *ashraf* of Egypt would not accept this Khariji-dominated regime, and when the Umayyad Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam was proclaimed caliph in Syria at the end of 64/summer 684, they secretly began to make approaches to him.

Marwān and his supporters, among them his son 'Abd al-'Azīz, immediately set out for Egypt. The governor imagined that the Egyptians were behind him and ordered the fortification of Fuṣṭāṭ and a trench was dug whose traces could still be seen in al-Kindī's time, three centuries later. He also sent a fleet and armies to oppose 'Abd al-'Azīz at Ayla, but the army retreated and the fleet was dispersed by a storm.

When Marwān arrived at Fuṣṭāṭ there were one or two days of fierce fighting and then a group of the leading figures in the city arranged a capitulation. Ibn Zubayr's governor was to be allowed to leave with his possessions. In Jumādā I 65/December 684 Marwān entered the Egyptian capital and settled there, building a palace for himself. A few leading members of the *jund*, including al-Akdar ibn Ḥamām, the *sayyid* of Lakhm, refused to abandon their oath of allegiance to Ibn Zubayr, and around eighty of them were executed. This in turn provoked widespread discontent and some 30,000 of the *jund* gathered outside Marwān's residence to protest, but they were soon dispersed.

Before he returned to Syria, Marwān made arrangements for the government of Egypt. He appointed his son 'Abd al-'Azīz as governor, and according to the accounts in al-Kindī, gave him careful instructions to rule in cooperation with the leaders of the *jund*. Marwān's takeover of Egypt marked a major victory in the struggle between the Umayyads and Ibn Zubayr, but it was also a victory for the *jund* of Fuṣṭāṭ and its leaders: it was

not a Syrian takeover and no significant numbers of Syrian soldiers came to settle. The local elite retained its privileged position and, as a sign of this continuity, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz appointed as his first *ṣāhib al-shurta* ‘Ābis ibn Sa‘īd al-Murādī, who had also served all of the three previous governors in that capacity. When ‘Abd al-‘Azīz left the province to visit his brother, ‘Ābis unilaterally decided to increase the *‘atā* of the *jund* and when the governor returned he had no choice but to acquiesce in the decision.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān was to remain governor for twenty years until his death in 86/705, a period which coincided almost exactly with the caliphate of his brother, ‘Abd al-Malik. He was the most important figure in the history of Umayyad Egypt and ruled as a virtual viceroy. Relations with his brother were unusually cordial but the caliph does not seem to have interfered in the internal affairs of the province at all, while ‘Abd al-‘Azīz sent 3,000 Egyptian soldiers to help in the final siege of Ibn al-Zubayr in Makka. The only source of tension seems to have occurred over the succession, when ‘Abd al-Malik wanted his brother to take the oath of allegiance to his son al-Walīd but ‘Abd al-‘Azīz refused, hoping apparently to leave open the possibility that his own son al-Aṣḡagh would succeed.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s reign was a period of almost uninterrupted peace. The governor spent most of his time in Fuṣṭāṭ visiting his brother in Syria on two occasions and making four trips to Alexandria. He extended the mosque in Fuṣṭāṭ and built a large palace. When the plague struck in 70/689–90 he left the capital and established a new government center at Ḥulwān.¹⁷ This was also a period of Muslim expansion in the Maghrib, and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was determined that this enterprise should be controlled from Fuṣṭāṭ and that the booty taken should be brought there rather than to Damascus. In around 74/694 ‘Abd al-Malik had sent a large Syrian army under Ḥassān ibn Nu‘mān al-Ghassānī to the Maghrib but, after winning a number of victories, he was dismissed by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and replaced by the governor’s nominee, Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, who was to complete the conquest of north Africa and command the Muslim invasion of Spain.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s long governorate came to an end in the spring of 86/705. It seems that he had been grooming his son al-Aṣḡagh for the succession.¹⁸ He hoped no doubt to make Egypt into a hereditary appanage for his branch of the Umayyad family, but the son predeceased his father by a few months. Though this plan failed, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s descendants seem to have continued to live in the province and to have made an attempt to seize control in early ‘Abbāsīd times.

The caliph was determined to assert his right to select a governor and he

¹⁷ For his role as a builder see al-Muqaffa‘, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, ed with English trans. B. Evetts, *Patarologia Orientalis*, 296–7.

¹⁸ Noted in Sawirus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 304–5 where al-Aṣḡagh is said to have been very grasping towards the Copts.

appointed his own son, ‘Abd Allāh, with instructions to remove all traces of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s administration. He dismissed all the officials, including the *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn Ḥudayj, who was placed in charge of the garrison (*murābiṭa*) in Alexandria, a position of honor but well away from the capital. He also made another important change: in 87/706 he ordered that the *dīwāns* be compiled in Arabic rather than in Coptic, while the Copt in charge was dismissed and replaced by a Syrian from Ḥimṣ. In this way the Egyptian administration was brought into line with a practice which had been introduced by ‘Abd al-Malik in Syria, and it is clear that Arabic was increasingly widely used. It also meant that Copts who wanted a post in the administration now had to learn Arabic and this in turn may have encouraged conversion to Islam. Christians however, continued to be influential; in the governorate of Qurra ibn Sharīk, for example, one Theodore seems to have been in charge of the administration of Alexandria, though not, of course, of leading the Muslims in prayer,¹⁹ and as late as the reign of al-Ma’mūn a Copt, Iṣḥāq ibn Andūna al-Sayyid, was *ṣāhib dīwān al-sultān*.²⁰

‘Abd Allāh’s short governorate was marred by a severe famine, the first recorded under Muslim rule. Many people blamed the food shortage on the governor, accusing him of corruption. The Copts saw him as grasping and oppressive, increasing the taxes and decreeing that the dead could not be buried before their taxes were paid.²¹ Whether it was because of complaints about his conduct or simply because the new Caliph al-Walīd (86–96/705–15) wanted to appoint his own man, ‘Abd Allāh was dismissed in 90/709 and replaced by Qurra ibn Sharīk al-‘Absī.

In some ways Qurra is the best-known of all the Umayyad governors of Egypt. In a sense this is by chance, since it is from his period of office that the richest collection of administrative papyri survive,²² but both Christian and Muslim chronicle sources also suggest that the administration was becoming increasingly efficient at collecting taxes and dues. Qurra is also said to have reorganised the *dīwān* (*dawwana al-dīwan*)²³ which may mean that he added new names to it. For al-Kindī, however, his main achievements were the rebuilding of the mosque in Fustāt on the caliph’s orders and irrigating an area of desert near the city at Iṣṭabl.²⁴

¹⁹ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 311–12, 326. There is no mention of this in the Arabic sources.

²⁰ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 591.

²¹ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 307–10.

²² In addition to the general works listed in n. 7 above, see N. Abbott, *The Kurrah Papyri from Aphrodito in the Oriental Institute*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilisation 15 (Chicago, 1938), and Y. Ragib, “Lettres nouvelles de Qurra ibn Sarik,” *JNES*, 49 (1981), 173–88.

²³ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 65.

²⁴ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 63–6.

Qurra died in office in 96/715. Perhaps because of a concern for experience and administrative efficiency, the new governor was not an Umayyad grandee but a local man. ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Rifā‘a al-Fahmī had succeeded his uncle as *ṣāhib al-shurṭa* in 91/710. He was now appointed governor in his own right, the first, but by no means the last, occasion on which such a promotion was made.²⁵ Sawīrus²⁶ paints a picture of increasing fiscal oppression at this time, the most marked feature of which was a regulation that all travellers had to carry an official passport (*sijil*) presumably to prevent them from escaping taxation and forced labor. The author claims that this policy had a very damaging effect on the economic life of the country and virtually brought trade to a standstill. The papyri from Qurra’s rule also show the authorities making strenuous efforts to control the free movement of people, with drastic penalties for local officials who did not arrest and return fugitives.

In 99/717 the Caliph Sulaymān was succeeded by his cousin ‘Umar, son of that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān who had been governor of Egypt. The Egyptian sources support the picture given elsewhere of ‘Umar as the originator of major reforms. Al-Kindī notes that he took advice about the appointments of a governor and enquired who in Egypt was the most suitable man. Two names were mentioned, those of Mu‘āwiya ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn Ḥudayj and Ayyūb ibn Shurāhbīl, whom the caliph chose. For the Muslims in the *dīwān* ‘Umar’s accession meant an increase in salaries on the caliph’s orders, and the numbers in the *dīwān* were also to be increased by 5,000. Various pious measures of Islamization were also decreed: wine shops were to be closed and the stocks destroyed. Money was set aside to pay the debts of Muslims who had fallen on hard times and Christian village headmen (*mawāzīt*) were to be replaced by Muslims. From the Christian point of view too there were benefits, and churches and monasteries had their fiscal privileges confirmed. But Christians also found themselves under pressure to convert and the poll tax was made a universal obligation.²⁷

As elsewhere, ‘Umar’s death meant a reversal of most of these policies. The new caliph, Yazīd II, appointed a new governor, Bishr ibn Ṣafwān al-Kalbī, an Umayyad supporter from Syria, who appointed his own brother Ḥanzala as *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*; the salary increases for Muslims and the fiscal immunities of churches were both cancelled. When Bishr was sent to Ifrīqiya as governor in 721, Ḥanzala was appointed to succeed him.

As usual, the accession of a new caliph meant a new governor and when Hishām in turn succeeded in 105/724 he began by appointing his brother

²⁵ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 321, has Qurra succeeded by one Usāma.

²⁶ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 322–5.

²⁷ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 235–6. The classic discussion of Umar’s fiscal policy is H. A. R. Gibb, “The Fiscal Receipt of Omar II,” *Arabica*, 2 (1955), 1–16.

Muhammad. The new governor arrived in Egypt to find the plague raging, took one look and resigned his office, retiring to his estate in al-Urdunn. After this failed attempt at family government, Hishām decided on a major change in the administration of the province. He appointed ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Ḥabḥāb, not as governor but as *ṣāhib al-kharāj* or head of taxation.²⁸ Until his transfer to north Africa in 117/734 ‘Ubayd Allāh was the real ruler of Egypt: when the governor al-Ḥurr ibn Yūsuf quarrelled with him in 108/727, ‘Ubayd Allāh simply wrote to the caliph, who dismissed the governor; his successor soon suffered the same fate.

The Christian sources used by Sawīrus saw Hishām as a just, if strict, ruler. He is described as “God fearing after the manner of the Muslims.” He was especially praised for allowing the restoration of the Jacobite Patriarchate of Antioch and for ordering that receipts should be given for the payment of taxes so that none might be unfairly treated.²⁹ Ibn al-Ḥabḥāb is given a less good press. He conducted a major cadastral survey of the country, measuring lands, counting beasts and obliging all men to wear numbered badges. His cruelty to the aged Patriarch Alexander is recorded with all the pathos of a martyr’s agony.

‘Ubayd Allāh was appointed to increase the tax revenues of the province. This he did by increasing the *kharāj* by a *qirāt* (or an eighth of a *dīnār*) per *dīnār* collected.³⁰ This move provoked a violent reaction in 107/725–6. For more than eighty years since the conquest the Coptic population, certainly still the overwhelming majority in Egypt, had peaceably borne the burden of taxation. Now, because of this most recent increase and the fact that tax-gathering was increasingly in the hands of the Muslims, not their own people, revolts began. These seem to have been leaderless and without any developed political programme. They never came near to overthrowing Muslim rule, but they tested the military ability of the *jund* and could destroy a governor who had lost the confidence of the local militia. This first revolt was centered in the Eastern Hawf and was put down with great loss of life.

The governor, meanwhile, remained responsible for conducting the prayers and leading the *jund*; some of these were local notables, including ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Rifā‘a (108/726), who had been a previous governor, and his brother al-Walīd (108–17/726–35). Politically the most important event was the transfer of a number of Qaysī Arabs to the Sa‘īd, beginning in 109/727–28. As already mentioned, most of the Arabs in the *jund* came from south Arabian tribes. Under Umayyad rule, and particularly since the battle

²⁸ On ‘Ubayd Allāh see N. Abbott, “A new papyrus and a review of the administration of ‘Ubayd Allah ibn al-Ḥabḥāb,” in G. Makdisi (ed.), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb* (Leiden, 1965), 21–35.

²⁹ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 327–28.

³⁰ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 340.

of Marj Rāhiṭ (65/684) when the Umayyads, supported by the Yemenis, had defeated their Qaysī Syrian rivals, a major rivalry had developed between Qays and the Yemen which threatened to tear the Umayyad state apart.

During the reign of Hishām there was a large scale migration of Qaysīs into north Africa and, later, Spain. The transfer of Qaysīs to Egypt is said to have been suggested by ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Ḥabḥāb. The caliph agreed to it on the condition that they were not permitted to settle in Fustāt, presumably because he realised that their presence would provoke a confrontation with the locals, and that their *dīwān* should be transferred to Egypt. Ibn al-Ḥabḥāb arranged that some 3,000 of them be recruited in the Syrian desert and they were settled in the Eastern Ḥawf: money from the tithes was given to them to buy horses and camels and they made a living by carrying food to Suez, presumably to go by sea from there to the Ḥijāz. Other Qaysī bedouin followed from Syria until there were some 5,000 at the end of Hishām’s reign.

The purpose of this move is obscure, but Ibn al-Ḥabḥāb probably wanted to relieve pressure on the resources of Syria and to provide a counter-balance to the monopoly of power held by the *jund*. It marks an important stage in the Arabization of the province because, for the first time, Arabs settled in considerable numbers outside Fustāt and Alexandria.

This period of comparative stability was brought to an end with the death of the Caliph Hishām in 125/743, and there followed almost a decade when the growing weakness of the Umayyad caliphate led to intense rivalries and open hostility in Egypt. The governor at the time was Ḥafṣ ibn al-Walid al-Ḥaḍramī, a member of a well-established local family who had previously served as *ṣāhib al-shurṭa* and briefly as governor. He seems to have been determined to reestablish the position of the *jund* of Fustāt. His first action was to expel all the Syrians who had drifted into Fustāt, which he only accomplished by the use of force. Next he raised a new military force in Egypt of 30,000 men recruited from the *maqāmiṣa* and the *mawālī*: exactly who these were is not clear, but it is likely that they were recruited among the non-Arab Muslims of the country, perhaps as a counter to the Qaysīs. This new force was known as the Ḥafṣīya, after the governor who had raised it.

When the pro-Qaysī Caliph Marwān ibn Muḥammad established his power in 127/744 there was an immediate reaction: Ḥafṣ resigned and the caliph ordered that the Ḥafṣīya be disbanded. He appointed a new governor, Ḥassān ibn ‘Atāhiya. These measures provoked a violent response, the Ḥafṣīya refused to disband and the *jund* of Fustāt besieged the new governor’s house. In the end Ḥassān and the *ṣāhib al-kharāj* were obliged to leave the country and the unwillingly Ḥafṣ was restored.

Marwān could not afford to let Egypt slip from his grasp. In 128/745 he dispatched a large force of Syrian troops and a new governor, Hawthara ibn

Suhayl al-Bāhili, described as a Bedouin Arab well known for his eloquence.³¹ Some of the Egyptian *jund* and the Ḥaḥṣiya wanted to resist him but Ḥaḥṣ was unwilling to lead them and after some negotiation, Ḥawthara entered Fustāt. He immediately began a purge of the opposition leaders, including the commander of the Ḥaḥṣiya and Ḥaḥṣ himself. He also set about recruiting 2,300 more troops from the Umayyad *mawālī* and Qays to bolster his position. There was a marked contrast between this brutal takeover and the much lighter hand shown by Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam when he took over the province in 65/684.

Meanwhile, the Umayyad caliphate was collapsing rapidly under the onslaught of ‘Abbāsīd armies from the east. In Jumādā I 131/January 749 Ḥawthara was ordered to go the Wāsiṭ to help Ibn Hubayra resist the invaders. His successors in Egypt were unable to prevent many Egyptians from declaring their support for the ‘Abbāsīds in Alexandria, the Ḥawf and Aswān. As far as we can tell, these ‘Abbāsīd supporters were all Egyptian Arabs, not Khurāsānīs or other ‘Abbāsīd supporters from the east. In Shawwāl 132/May–June 750 the Caliph Marwān himself arrived, hotly pursued by ‘Abbāsīd forces led by Šāliḥ ibn ‘Alī and Abū ‘Awn. He and his supporters attempted to establish control over the province but time was not on their side, and in Dhū’l-Ḥijja 132/August 750 he and many of his followers were killed at Būšīr.

*Egypt under the early ‘Abbāsīds, 132–193/1750–809*³²

At the beginning of 133/Summer 750, Šāliḥ ibn ‘Alī and the ‘Abbāsīd troops entered Fustāt and a new era had begun. The most striking characteristic of early ‘Abbāsīd administration in Egypt is its continuity with the Umayyad period. As before, the governors were mostly outsiders, chosen from among the leaders of the Khurāsānī military or minor members of the ‘Abbāsīd family on short-term postings, while the *aṣḥāb al-shurṭa* continued to be chosen from the leading families, the *wujūh*, of Fustāt, families such as the descendants of Mu‘āwiya ibn Ḥudayj al-Tujībī, ‘Amr ibn Qaḥzam al-Khawlānī and ‘Assama ibn ‘Amr al-Ma‘āfirī remained as important as they had in Umayyad times. There was no attempt to settle large numbers of Khurāsānī troops in the province and the ‘Abbāsīds ruled in cooperation with the local elite.

The first governor of this province was Šāliḥ ibn ‘Alī ‘Abbāsī, an uncle of the first two ‘Abbāsīd caliphs. He may have hoped to establish a position in Egypt as ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān had done: he was certainly ruthless in

³¹ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 89.

³² For Egypt under the early Abbāsīds see H. Kennedy, “Central government and provincial elites in the early ‘Abbasid caliphate,” *BSOAS*, 44 (1981), 26–38.

hunting down ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s descendants in the province. However, after the defeat of his brother ‘Abd Allāh’s rebellion in 137/754, he turned his attention to Syria, which became the base for his branch of the dynasty.

He was succeeded by four leading members of the Khurāsānī military in turn, Abū ‘Awn (137–141/755–758), Mūsā ibn Ka‘b (141/758–9), Muḥammad ibn al-Ash‘ath (141–2/759–60) and Ḥumayd ibn Qaḥṭaba (143–4/760–762). They all used local men as *ṣāhib al-shurṭa* to maintain contact with the local *jund*. Ḥumayd is said to have brought some 20,000 soldiers with him, but it seems that these were in transit to Ifrīqiya where Muḥammad ibn al-Ash‘ath was now in bitter conflict with the Ibādī Kharijites. Among them was al-Aghlab ibn Sālim, whose descendants were to be independent rulers of Ifrīqiya through the third/tenth century until the Fāṭimid conquest of 296/909.

The next governor, Yazīd ibn Ḥātīm, held the post for eight years, longer than anyone else in the early ‘Abbāsīd period. He was a member of the famous Muhallabī family of Baṣra and he and his brother Rawḥ were also to play an important role in the government of Ifrīqiya. He was one of the Caliph al-Manṣūr’s inner circle, and may have been appointed to secure Egypt in the event of an attempted takeover by the ‘Alids. Al-Manṣūr was always aware of the history of the Umayyad Caliphate, and he would have remembered how crucial the control of Egypt had been to both Mu‘āwiya and ‘Abd al-Malik when they were establishing themselves as caliphs.

The main ‘Alid rebellions were led by Muḥammad the Pure Soul in Medina and his brother Ibrāhīm in Baṣra in 145/763. It seems that a member of the ‘Alid family had arrived in Fuṣṭāṭ when Ḥumayd ibn Qaḥṭaba was governor and he had failed to take any action against him. Al-Manṣūr became aware of this and dismissed Ḥumayd. There was no established pro-‘Alid party in Egypt and the ‘Alid leader, ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh, attracted little support in the province, apart from that of some descendants of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān, the Umayyad governor, who saw it as an opportunity to re-establish their position, and a handful of discontented members of the *jund*. The rebels planned to take over the mosque in Fuṣṭāṭ and summon the people to their cause, but the plot was soon betrayed to Yazīd, who sent his *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn Ḥudayj, to deal with it. There was a short struggle and the conspirators fled, trying to seek refuge in the city. In the end, there were only thirteen deaths, a marked contrast with the battles and bloodshed in Baṣra and Medina at the same time; the alliance of the governor and the local *jund* kept the province secure. This incident shows how the local elite was now bound to the new ruling dynasty. As for ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad, he escaped and his fate was uncertain, but according to one source he was concealed by a leading member of the *wujūh*, ‘Assāma ibn ‘Amr, and died in hiding. ‘Assāma himself was taken to Baghdād and

imprisoned but was released on the accession of the Caliph al-Mahdī and returned to Egypt. His exploits do not seem to have affected the status of his family in the province.

Yazīd ibn Ḥātim was removed from office in 152/769 and the Caliph al-Manṣūr seems to have decided on a new policy for the government of the province. With the appointment of ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Ḥabḥāb as financial controller in Umayyad times, the caliphs had been trying to increase the revenue yield of the province. In 141/758 the governor Muḥammad ibn al-Ash‘ath had been asked to sign a *damān*, a guarantee that he would be responsible for any shortfall in the revenue from the province. When he refused to do so, the financial administration was entrusted to one Nawfal ibn al-Furāt, who removed the *dīwāns* from the governor’s palace. From the appointment of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn Ḥudayj al-Tujībī in 152/769 until the arrival of ‘Īsā ibn Luqmān in 161/778, the governors were chosen from among the members of the local *wujūh* families, but they were not given charge of the financial administration, which was entrusted to officials sent out from Baghdād; clearly the Caliph intended to break the stranglehold that people of the *dīwān* had on the revenues while continuing to rely on the *jund* for security purposes.

By and large, al-Manṣūr’s measures seem to have secured the peaceful government of the province. Under his son, al-Mahdī (158–69/775–85), there were renewed attempts to increase the revenues but his financial demands, coupled with the appointment of unsuitable outsiders as governors, resulted in a major rebellion against the government. The trouble began when one Dihyā ibn Muṣ‘ab, a descendant of the famous Umayyad governor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān launched a rebellion in the Ṣa‘īd. He is said to have claimed the caliphate for himself, but this was essentially an anti-tax movement. The governor, a minor member of the ‘Abbāsīd family called Ibrāhīm ibn Šāliḥ, failed to respond effectively and was unceremoniously sacked in 167/784. In his place the caliph sent Mūsā ibn Muṣ‘ab al-Khath‘amī. He had already served as governor of al-Jazīra, where his ruthless taxation policies had led to widespread unrest. He attempted to implement a similar agenda in Egypt, raising taxes on the land and imposing taxes on the *sūqs* and riding animals. He soon alienated all sections of Egyptian society. In the Ḥawf, Qaysī and Yemeni Arabs put aside their ancient feuds and combined against him. They made contact with the *jund* of Fuṣṭāt, who were infuriated by the new taxes on their urban properties and who promised not to fight for the governor. In Shawwāl 168/April 784 Mūsā led the *jund* out to meet the Ḥawfī rebels. As agreed, the *jund* and its leaders abandoned him to his fate, he was killed and the *jund* returned to Fuṣṭāt without striking a blow. There was no clearer indication of the limits of the caliphal government, which simply could not function without the cooperation of the local elite.

The caliph responded by sending a new governor, al-Faḍl ibn Šāliḥ al-‘Abbāsī, with a large army of Syrian soldiers. In a fierce battle at Buwīt, Diḥyā and his supporters were defeated. Diḥyā himself fled to the western oases where he took refuge with the Kharijite Berbers, but they accused him of favoring the Arabs over them and abandoned his cause, leaving him to be killed by the governor’s troops. By the time al-Faḍl ibn Šāliḥ left the province the next year, order had been restored.

The accession of Hārūn al-Rašīd in 170/786 inaugurated a period of rapid turnover of governors, few lasting more than a year. In the twenty-three years of his reign, there were twenty-two changes (in contrast to only eight in the twenty-two years of al-Manšūr’s reign). Since almost all the governors were outsiders – members of the ‘Abbāsīd family or court functionaries who brought few troops with them – they were heavily dependent on the *šāhib al-shurṭa* and the local *wujūh* to enforce their authority. The government in Baghdād, dominated until 187/803 by the Barmakids, was largely concerned with revenues and seems to have been constantly frustrated by the poor yields from Egypt. Various stratagems were tried: in 176/792 a special investigator, ‘Umar ibn Mihrān, was sent in disguise to investigate corruption, and his report survives in the accounts of Iraq-based sources such as those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Jahshiyārī,³³ but not the Egyptian al-Kindī. In 183/799 and 185/801, the governor, al-Layth ibn al-Faḍl, was ordered to bring the revenue to Baghdād in person.

Apart from the lack of will in Fuṣṭāṭ, the main obstacle to increasing revenue was the persistent refusal of the Arab settlers in the Ḥawf to pay anything and the reluctance of the *jund* in Fuṣṭāṭ to force them to do so. In 186/802 for example, the Hawfis rebelled in protest at what they claimed were corrupt surveyors who had shortened the measuring rods, and threatened to march on Fuṣṭāṭ. A force of 5,000 *jund* was sent against them but, faced with the enemy, all except 200 deserted without striking a blow. Despite being heavily outnumbered, the governor drove the rebels back; the capital was saved but the Hawfis still refused to pay. In the administrative chaos after the fall of the Barmakids in 183/803, Hārūn seems to have been prepared to allow large-scale tax-farming, one Maḥfūz ibn Sulaymān giving a *damān* that he would collect taxes from the Ḥawfis without using any troops. History does not tell us if he was successful.

The final years of Hārūn’s reign saw increased tensions in the province. This was partly a reflection of the widespread insecurity of the period. The Ḥawfī Arabs continued to defy the governor. On occasion Egypt was effectively cut off from Baghdād by unrest in Syria. In 190/806 there was a

³³ Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, *Ta’rikh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901), iii, 626–28; al-Jahshiyārī, *Wuzarā’* (ed. El-Sakka), 217–20; see also Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, 116, for documentary confirmation.

rebellion in the Aqaba area, and in 193/809 money being sent to Baghdād was intercepted by the people of Ramla in Palestine who took it as their *'aṭā'* which had not been paid. When the governor al-Ḥasan ibn al-Takhtākh left office in 194/810 he had to go through the Ḥijāz because of the disturbed state of Syria.

The death of Hārūn al-Rashīd in 193/809 made matters much worse. He was succeeded by his son al-Amīn, who was almost immediately challenged by his own brother, al-Ma'mūn, governor of Khurāsān. This dispute meant that there was an alternative focus for loyalty to which dissidents could turn. The succession war fought out in Iran and Iraq provided the occasion for the outbreak of a prolonged struggle for power in Egypt.

The political situation in the province had been changing in the last decade of Hārūn's reign. The monopoly of military power enjoyed by the *jund* of Fustāt was being challenged by newcomers. The failure of the *jund* to suppress the Ḥawfī rebels led the caliph to send troops from the *abnā'* (troops of Khurāsānī origin resident in Baghdad, who formed the backbone of the early 'Abbāsīd armies), and when al-Layth ibn al-Faḍl was appointed governor in 183/799 he brought with him a force which included al-Sarī ibn al-Ḥakam. Al-Sarī is said by al-Kindī³⁴ to have been a man of no importance when he arrived in the province, but he soon established himself as one of the leaders of the *abnā'*.

The other groups of Arabs in Egypt also sought to challenge the power of the traditional *wujūh*. The most successful of these was 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn al-Wazīr al-Jarawī. He seems to have had his power base among the Yemeni tribes of Lakhm and Judhām in the northern part of the country, and in 190/806 he had been one of the commanders sent against the rebels in Aqaba.

Between the death of Hārūn in 193/809 and the reestablishment of the authority of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn by 'Abd Allāh ibn Tāhir in 211/826, Egypt was the scene of a prolonged power struggle between these groups. The events are complicated by a number of factors: the attempts of outsiders, like the 'Abbāsīd al-Faḍl ibn Mūsā ibn 'Īsā and his family in 198–99/814–15 to establish themselves in the province, the takeover of Alexandria by a group of Andalusī exiles³⁵ in 199/815, and the constantly shifting political groupings as individual leaders sought to build up their power base.

Several clear trends do, however, emerge from this confusion. Governors continued to be nominated, first by al-Amīn and then, after his death in 198/813, by his brother al-Ma'mūn, but their authority was minimal and they were no more than one player in the complex power politics of the country. By 197/813 Egypt had effectively been divided between 'Abd al-'Azīz al-

³⁴ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 148.

³⁵ These Andalusīs seem to have left Spain because of discontent with the authoritarian rule of the Umayyad Amīr al-Ḥakam ibn Hishām (180–206/796–822).

Jarawī who had taken control of the north, from Shaṭanūf 30 km north of Fustāt to Faramā, with intermittent control of Alexandria, while al-Sarī ruled the south, from Fustāt to Aswān.³⁶ Both collected the *kharāj* for themselves and acknowledged Caliphs and pretenders to the throne as they wished. A *ṭirāz* of 197/812–13 survives with an inscription saying that it was made by al-Sarī and al-Jarawī on the orders of al-Faḍl ibn Sahl, al-Ma'mūn's wazīr.

The losers in this complex struggle were the old-established *wujūh* and *jund* of Fustāt. For reasons which are not clear, they seem to have been unable to sustain their power or produce leaders who could challenge al-Sarī and al-Jarawī. In 200/816 most of the leading members of the Banū Ḥudayj, the most distinguished of the old *wujūh* families, perished when their palace in Alexandria was attacked by a mob of Andalusī and Lakhmī tribesmen, an event which seems to have meant an effective end to their power. In 204/819 al-Sarī had a number of the senior leaders of the *jund* drowned in the Nile "because he was afraid of them."³⁷ The failure of the old *jund* to establish themselves in power, or even to retain their existing status, marks a major break in the history of early Islamic Egypt. The tightly knit group of *wujūh* who had dominated it since their ancestors had come in the armies of the first conquest was now broken, and it was left to others to struggle over the spoils.

Both 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jarawī and al-Sarī died in 205/820, but their conflicts were inherited by their sons, 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz and 'Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Sarī. Neither was able to achieve any permanent advantage over the other. It was this divided and war-ravaged country which 'Abd Allāh ibn Tāhir entered in Rabī' I, 211/June–July 826 as governor of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Ma'mūn. It was not the first time al-Ma'mūn had attempted to restore the province to 'Abbāsīd control: in 206/822 he had sent Khālid ibn Yazīd ibn Mazyad. However, despite the support of 'Alī ibn Jarawī, he had been completely outmaneuvered by 'Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Sarī and was forced to leave the province in humiliation. Ibn Tāhir was in a much stronger position, having just restored Syria and Palestine to 'Abbāsīd rule. He came with a large military force and brought ships from Syria to help in the amphibious warfare in the Delta.

Ibn al-Jarawī immediately approached him with gifts, and 'Abd Allāh appointed him in command of the ships. Ibn al-Sarī decided to resist but at the same time sent a messenger to the caliph to request an *amān*. The surrender document was negotiated by al-Sarī's secretary Muḥammad ibn Asbāt, and witnessed by the most prominent *fuqahā* of the province. He was

³⁶ Sawīrus, *History of the Patriarchs*, 428. Al-Jarawī's takeover of the Delta area is described in al-Kindī, 151; for the final establishment of al-Sarī's control of Fustāt, *ibid.*, 161–62.

³⁷ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 171.

then given 10,000 *dīnārs* and sent to the caliph in Baghdād. He never returned to Egypt but lived peacefully in Sāmarrā until his death in 251/865. It remained only to subdue Alexandria where the Andalusīs were still holding out. ‘Abd Allāh sent a large force against them and accepted their surrender on condition that they abandon the city and take no-one or nothing with them. Most of them sailed to Crete, which they conquered and used as a base for raids on the Byzantine Empire.

The conquest of Egypt by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Tāhir marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of the province. It was still ruled by governors but, after 213/829, these ceased to be appointed directly by the caliph. The western provinces were entrusted to “super-governors,” members of the ruling family or leading figures in the Turkish military establishment. These seldom visited the province but remained in the capital. From there they sent governors to conduct the administration and send the revenues directly to them. From 213/819 until his accession as caliph in 218/833 the super-governor was al-Ma’mūn’s brother Abū Ishāq (the future Caliph al-Mu’taṣim). When he became caliph he appointed one of his trusted Turkish soldiers Ashinās, who held office until his death in 229/843, when he was succeeded by another Turk, Ītākḥ. In 235/849, as one of a series of moves to reduce the influence of leading Turks, al-Mutawwakil removed Ītākḥ, whom he had arrested, and replaced him with his own son, al-Muntaṣir, who remained as “super-governor” until he in turn became caliph in 247/861. There is no evidence that Ashinās, Ītākḥ or al-Muntaṣir ever visited Egypt during his term of office.

Instead, they appointed governors from the ruling class of the Sāmarrā caliphate. They were Arabs, Turks or Armenians by descent, but all of them were outsiders. Terms of office were longer than under Hārūn and three or four years were not uncommon. They continued to appoint *aṣḥāb al-shurṭa*, but these were no longer members of the local elite but soldiers of Turkish or eastern Iranian origin and, like their masters, incomers to the province.

The army ‘Abd Allāh had used to subjugate Egypt was composed of two elements, members of the *abna’* of Baghdād, many of whom took service with the Tahirids at the end of the civil war in Iraq, and Iranians or Turks from further east. Alexandria, for example, was governed by Ilyās ibn Asad ibn Sāmān Khūdā from Samarqand, after its conquest. Few of these troops were Arab in origin and none of them were Egyptians. From now onwards Egypt was to be ruled not by a native Muslim elite but by outsiders from far to the east.

‘Abd Allāh ibn Tāhir governed Egypt for seventeen months. In this period he restored peace and found the resources for a major enlargement of the mosque in Fustāṭ. In 212/827 he left for Iraq, leaving his second-in-command, ‘Īsā ibn Yazīd al-Julūdī to govern the province. In 213/829 there was a reorganisation of the high command of the caliphate: ‘Abd Allāh ibn

Tāhir went east to succeed his brother as governor of Khurāsān and at the same time the western provinces were entrusted to the overall supervision of the caliph's brother, Abū Ishāq.

The new regime seems to have been very oppressive in its early stages. The effective exclusion of local people from power, combined with heavy tax demands, assured widespread rebellions in the Ḥawf and Delta regions. As often before, the problems began with the refusal of the Ḥawfis to pay the *kharāj*. Abū Ishāq's new governor, 'Umayr ibn al-Walīd, was entrusted with the task of forcing them to do so. In 214/830 he led an army against them. At first things went well and the Ḥawfis, the Yemenis led by 'Abd al-Salām ibn Abī'l-Māqī and the Qaysīs led by 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥulays al-Hilālī, were forced to retreat; they laid an ambush, and the governor and many of his men were killed. His successor, 'Īsā al-Julūdī, was obliged to fortify his dwelling in Fuṣṭāṭ.

At this stage Abū Ishāq himself decided to take matters in hand, and arrived in Egypt with 4,000 of the much feared Turkish troops he was using to establish his power. This time the Ḥawfis were soundly defeated and their leaders captured and executed. Nonetheless, as soon as he left, trouble began again. By 216/831 there was a general rebellion of Arabs and Copts combined against the government, an unprecedented alliance of local interests. They chose as their leader one Ibn 'Ubaydūs, a descendant of 'Uqba ibn Nāfi', one of the original Muslim settlers in Egypt and conqueror of much of north Africa. They were opposed by al-Afshīn, one of al-Mu'taṣim's most senior commanders who had come to Egypt to try to recover the treasure allegedly hidden by Ibn al-Jarawī. Afshīn now set out through the Delta and won a series of victories over the opposition there. Everywhere his progress was followed by execution. In Alexandria, which seems to have been the last stronghold of the old elite, the *ru'asā* (chiefs), led by a descendant of Mu'āwiya ibn Ḥudayj, were driven out and their influence destroyed. The military power of the new regime was irresistible, and the Egyptians were forced to accept this alien domination.

In Muḥarram 217/February 832 the Caliph al-Ma'mūn visited the province in person. Apart from Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam when he was consolidating his power, al-Ma'mūn was the only reigning caliph to do so during the two and a half centuries in which Egypt was part of the caliphate. He only stayed for forty-nine days but his visit seems to have marked something of a turning-point. He accused the governor of concealing the true state of affairs from him and of allowing his tax collectors to oppress the people. For Sawīrus, al-Ma'mūn was a just ruler who respected the Christians and put an end to many abuses, but he was sometimes overruled by the evil genius of his brother al-Mu'taṣim. At the same time Afshīn extinguished the last of the revolts: among the Copts, the men were killed and the women and children sold into slavery, while Ibn 'Ubaydūs al-Fihri was taken and executed. After

this, open resistance effectively ceased and no further rebellions are reported in the next quarter of a century.

When al-Mu‘taṣim became caliph in 218/833, he completed the destruction of the early Islamic order. He ordered that all the Arabs be dropped from the *dīwān* and that their ‘*aṭā*’ be stopped.³⁸ The influence of the *jund* of Egypt had long been in decline, but this move finally destroyed its economic foundation and marked the end of the system that had been in operation since the time of the conquest. There were protests and small-scale disturbances among the Lakhm and Judhām, led by Yaḥyā ibn al-Jarawī. They claimed that the payments were “our right and our *fay*’ (i.e. the booty acquired at the time of the conquest),” but they were speaking the language of a vanished age and their protest cut no ice with the ‘Abbāsīd government of the third/ninth century.

The governors themselves do not emerge as distinctive personalities, though al-Kindī notes, perhaps with sadness, that ‘Anbasa ibn Ishāq al-Dabbī (238–42/852–56), besides being respected for his justice and the tight rein he kept on his tax officials, was the last Arab governor of Egypt and the last to lead the people in prayer in the mosque in Fustāt.³⁹ It was also during his period of office that the Byzantines began to raid the Egyptian coast again. They took Damietta and captured many Muslims and non-Muslims in 239/853. After the raid was over, the Caliph al-Mutawwakil ordered that the city be fortified.

This assertion of political control from Sāmarrā was matched by the ideological control represented by the *mihna*, or inquisition, which aimed to force all officials and *fuqahā* to acknowledge the createdness of the Qur’ān. This inquisition was not vigorously enforced under al-Mu‘taṣim but with the accession of al-Wāthiq in 227/842, the *qādī*, Muḥammad ibn Abī’l-Layth al-Khwārazmī, was ordered to take stern measures against anyone who refused to accept the doctrine of the created Qur’ān. This led to resistance by several leading religious figures supported by popular sentiment which can, perhaps, be seen as an expression of local opposition to ‘Abbāsīd autocracy. When al-Mutawwakil reversed this policy in 235/850, the unfortunate *qādī* was imprisoned and publicly cursed.⁴⁰

This period of comparative peace was brought to an end by a rebellion in 248/862. The rebellion seems to have begun as a protest by the ‘Alids against the punitive measures taken against them by the Caliph al-Muntaṣir. On previous occasions the ‘Alids had attracted little support in the province, but it seems on this occasion as if their grievances touched a chord in other sections of the population. The chaos in Sāmarrā, where one caliph followed

³⁸ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 193–94.

³⁹ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 200–2.

⁴⁰ For the *mihna* in Egypt and the popular reaction see al-Kindī, 449–67.

another in rapid succession after the assassination of al-Mutawwakil in 247/861, meant that government control weakened rapidly throughout the caliphate at this time.

The rebellion began among the Banū Mudlij, led by Jābir ibn al-Walīd, in Alexandria, but they were soon joined by the surviving remnants of the old *wujūh* and many others, both Christian and Muslim. Soon most of the Delta was in the hands of the rebels, tax collectors were driven out and the leadership was assumed by an 'Alid pretender, Ibn al-Arqaṭ. The governor, Yazīd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Turkī (242–253/856–867) struggled to contain the rebellion, but it was difficult, even after substantial reinforcements of Turkish soldiers under Muzāḥim ibn Khāqān arrived from Iraq. It was not until Muzāḥim himself took over as governor that Jābir ibn al-Walīd was finally induced to surrender. Shortly after Muzāḥim's death at the beginning of 254/868 news arrived of the appointment of Aḥmad ibn Tūlūn as the new governor. Probably no one at the time realized it, but a new era in the history of Islamic Egypt had begun.

The years since the arrival of 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir (211/826) had seen the total domination of the political and military life of the province by Turkish soldiers. Not only were the governor and his army Turkish, it was even the Turkish *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*, Azjūr who ordered the Imām and congregation of the great Mosque in Fustāṭ to abandon their ancient practices and adopt new ways introduced from the east. A Persian, armed with a whip, stood by to make sure they did as they were told.⁴¹

The event is symbolic of the way in which the Muslim population of Egypt had become a subject group which had lost control of its own destiny. The reasons why Egypt did not develop a native political elite at this time, as for example happened in much of Syria, the Jazīra, Yemen or the Maghrib, are not clear. The slow pace of conversion and the determination of the *wujūh* and *jund* of Fustāṭ to maintain their exclusive position must have played a part: the Muslim elite could maintain itself against the Copts, but not against the powerful and effective Turkish military organization of the third/ninth century, determined to capture the resources of the country for their alien masters. The collapse of the early Islamic system left a power vacuum. In the rest of the Islamic world, ambitious warlords were rejecting the authority of the strife-torn Sāmarrā government. It was only a matter of time before some ambitious Turkish soldier decided to exploit the resources of Egypt to establish his own autonomous rule.

⁴¹ Al-Kindī, *Governors and Judges*, 210.