THE DOCUMENTARY BACKGROUND TO THE HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHS OF PS.-SAWĪRUS IBN AL-MUQAFFA\' 
CA. 750–969 C.E.

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The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria of ps.-Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa\' is a composite text.\(^1\) At the level of formal organisation, it consists of a series of biographies loosely sewn together, with very little redactional work to smooth it out as a piece of historical writing. When one turns to the individual biographies, he finds an array of eyewitness accounts, often expressed in the first person, and references to particular fiscal and administrative measures affecting the relations between the Coptic patriarchate and the Muslim governors of Egypt. In the latter case, particular details often correspond to the types of data found in the papyri.\(^2\) In what follows, an attempt will be made to identify the types of ecclesiastical documents that circulated in Egypt, and to compare their form and content with the genres of papyri that survive.

Historians of taxation in early medieval Egypt have frequently used ps.-Sawīrus\' work as a framework text illustrating the overall impact of the governors' policies on the Christian communities. Even the casual reader can see that it is a very different type of compilation than, for example, Kindī's biographies of the governors of Egypt.\(^3\) It is a unique historiographic feature of the situation that the parallel lives of the most important figures in the Muslim and Christian leadership are both recorded, but each according to differing canons: Muslim khabar vignettes with isnāds and the Christian hagiographic tradition replete with miracles and protestations of the piety of particular patriarchs.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Edited and translated by B. Evetts in the Patrologia Orientalis series (\(=\) HP 1/3 and 1/4). See also the somewhat superior text edited by C.F. Seybold (\(=\) HP Hamburg). For the later patriarchs, see HP 2/1 and HP 2/2. On textual questions, see: den Heijer 1989. The translations in this article are normally my own adaptations of those of Evetts and of the team that edited the Cairo edition of ps.-Sawīrus (\(=\) HP 2/1 and HP 2/2).

\(^2\) My earlier views are summarised in Trombley 2004b.

\(^3\) Kindī (d. 350/961), Governors and Judges of Egypt.

In historiographic terms, the papyri are linking texts that permit the historian to test the accuracy of these witnesses.

In what follows, I will look at the documentary background of ps.-Sawīrus’ patriarchal history for the period immediately after the Abbasid revolution in Egypt, that is, between ca. 750 and 969. Because of the limited aims of this paper, it will be necessary to identify some of the more interesting data, and to reserve the rest for future discussion in light of the Islamic sources and archaeological data. It is important to bear in mind that exact correspondences do not always exist between ps.-Sawīrus’ statements and documents. It is a matter of reconstructing the social, economic and cultural situations to which both refer.

Ps.-Sawīrus contains an important first person report by a member of the Coptic clergy dealing with the arrival of the Abbasid army and the final overthrow of the Umayyad caliph Marwān II in the mid-eighth century, during the patriarchate of Michael I (in office 743–67). The report contains many ‘I’ passages in its account of Marwān’s alleged arrest of the Coptic patriarch Michael and certain members of the Christian clergy at Fusṭāṭ. It also gives a running commentary on the movement of captives from Fusṭāṭ to the west bank of the Nile at Giza, in accordance with Marwān’s reputed scorched earth policy in the face of the Abbasid invasion. This policy included the burning of grain storehouses, the destruction of large numbers of Nile river boats, the enforced transfer of the Christian population across the river, and the food shortages it endured there.

Ps.-Sawīrus also mentions the attempt of Marwān to retain the allegiance of an amīr at Alexandria named al-Aswad, who had under his command many of “the Muslims who were fighting the Romans” (al-muslimūn yaqāṭilīn al-rūm) and who had recently conducted a launching of naval vessels (marākīb al-ustūl) into the sea. At first sight this is an indication that the raiding fleet which was such a prominent feature of the Qurra and Aphrodito papyri was still in existence ca. 750 C.E., although perhaps on a reduced scale. It is otherwise difficult to explain

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3 Useful is Morimoto 1981. Patriarchal dates have been verified from Grumel 1958: 444f.
7 The use of ships and boats of all sizes on the Nile is frequently reported in the Greek papyri of the Umayyad period; see Trombley 2004b: 209–16.
8 HP 1/3: 149 [403] and 159 [413].