Andreas Kaplony, Daniel Potthast, and Cornelia Römer (eds.)

This volume contains eight contributions from a much larger conference held in Vienna in 2009 under the auspices of the International Society for Arabic Papyrology. The Society’s remit is wider than its name suggests, as it brings together scholars working on documentary evidence of any sort – and in any language – pertaining to the history of Arabic-speaking areas throughout the Middle Ages. The conferences it has sponsored, and the subsequent publications, have played a crucial role in disenclaving the evidence for the medieval history of Middle Eastern societies from the strictly defined disciplinary areas based on language and religion, which had long upheld a very fragmented view of the period and region. This publication is no exception: the variety of the subjects treated testifies to the openness of the approach.

Of the eight articles, five are editions of new texts, and three are technical discussions of documents or groups of documents. In Chapter 1, Werner Diem publishes ‘Three Remarkable Arabic Documents from the Heidelberg Papyrus Collection.’ The adjective is not misused. The first of these, which Diem dates – palaeographically – to the first half of the first century (in other words to the third or fourth quarter of the seventh century AD) contains two draft commercial letters, which involve several people as well as debts transferred and possibly distributed to third parties. The second is a service letter to the postmaster of Ushmūn. The third one, a ninth-century letter by a merchant to his wife, contains an unusually high proportion of dotted letters. Diem interprets this as the author’s wish to facilitate the reading for his wife, who would have had less familiarity with written texts. Chapter 2 contains a description of the Coptic texts from Madīnat al-Fayyūm, and the edition of a sample of four of them from the collection in the Louvre, by Anne Boud’hors and Florence Calament. A very interesting and useful introduction gives a clear exposition of the state of our knowledge on the Fayyumic dialect, historically, linguistically, and geographically, in particular highlighting the difficulties arising from the lack of standardisation and the overall semantic uncertainty. The four texts edited are three private letters concerning various transactions, and one contract whereby a mother provides her son’s labour for one year. The latter document complements a series of similar contracts from the Fayyūm in the Vienna collection, which involve the labour of a third party.1 In Chapter 3

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1 Published by Walter Till, *Die koptischen Rechtsurkunden der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek* (Vienna 1958), as nos. 169–174b.
Wadād al-Qādi returns to the passage on Umayyad stipends registers found in Abū Zurʿa's Tārīkh. She examines the procedures followed when stipendiaries died, and the practical documentary implications of recording their death and its date, as well as bringing the payments to a halt. Chapter 4 by Alain Delattre, examines taxation at the monastery of Bawīṭ in Middle Egypt on the basis of the extant papyri from the site – an evidential base that has grown impressively in recent years. Intriguingly, there is much more evidence for the poll tax than for the land tax. If the author is right in his interpretation of a now-lost document, the total amount of taxes paid by the monastery in the eighth century was considerable, reflecting a very large community.

Ayman Shahin publishes three Arabic writing exercises in Chapter 5. This is a very welcome topic as Arabic lags behind Coptic and Greek for the publication of such texts, and a better understanding of how the language was taught would help clarify such issues as bilingualism and Arabicisation. The author links these exercises with the more formal adab al-kātib literature, which sets out the principles for successful official secretaries and document writers. This is an interesting connection, although it is clear from parallels that the acquisition of writing was not restricted to professionals, and thus such exercises could come from a variety of contexts. The following chapter by Johannes Thomann, is an impressive detailed analysis of a tenth-century astrological ephemeris. His study of contemporary parallels shows that at that time Egypt was lagging behind the state of the art, in a discipline for which it had been ahead of the game for centuries. In Chapter 7 Jacques van der Vliet makes the connection between a recently excavated leaflet from an account book in al-Naqlūn, and the manuscript BL Or. 13885, an eleventh-century collection of 34 paper folios bound together in modern times. He suggests that the new leaflet belongs to the London manuscript, whose origin was therefore also al-Naqlūn. The identity of the two hands is perhaps less obvious than the author suggests, but the formal similarity of the pages and the organisation of the information certainly show that the two come from the same production centre. This confirms the suggestion made already in 1954 by Adolf Grohmann regarding the origin of the London manuscript [162, n. 23].

Finally, in the last chapter Alia Hanafi publishes two very interesting Arabic documents. The first of these is an account of herbs that were clearly used for medicinal purposes, which also contains the prices of the commodities, although this is not always easy to exploit as the quantities are sometimes missing. The second papyrus is a census of individually owned palm trees with, on the verso, names followed by sums, presumably tax payments. Unfortunately the document is not complete, and the individuals on the verso and the recto are not the same.