

# Building women's social capital in Late Antique Egypt: business owners and civic administrators

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*Women as a social category have been the subject of numerous recent studies considering their lived experience in the Late Antique and Byzantine Mediterranean. However, their representation in the narrative sources continues to shape modern reconstructions of women's agency within their social and economic contexts, often with unsatisfactory results. Building on the twentieth-century sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's model of social capital, this article will use the documentary papyri from Egypt to suggest a paradigm in which the agency of individual women can be viewed and incorporated into micro-historical narratives of the patriarchal society of Late Antiquity.*

**Keywords:** women; gender; economy; civic administration; agency

## Introduction

In the course of my doctoral studies at the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham, I had the pleasure of sitting in on Leslie Brubaker's postgraduate seminar on gender in Byzantium not once, but twice. As might be expected within a field shaped by the feminist turn in Byzantine historiography – in which Leslie has been a trailblazer – the theme of narrative and normative constructions versus the reality of lived experience was an ever-present undercurrent. Much of our information regarding Late Antique and Byzantine women, as in other ancient societies, has been mediated by elite men. For, as Leslie reminds us, 'the relationship between those who hold power and those who do not is, normally,

\* Many thanks to Jessica Varsallona, Flavia Vanni, Grace Stafford, Caroline Humfress, and the anonymous reviewer who provided helpful comments and critique on various drafts of this article; any mistakes, however, remain my own. All dates are CE unless otherwise noted.

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DOI: [10.1017/byz.2023.38](https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2023.38)

defined by those in power.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the sources were typically reproducing contemporary idealized patriarchal social relations, with male authors circumscribing the boundaries of ‘acceptable’ female behaviour.<sup>2</sup> But of course, narrative subordination is not the same as an absence of real agency.

Since the 1990s, a growing number of publications have situated women within the legal, social, and occupational frameworks of Late Antiquity and Byzantium,<sup>3</sup> each contributing another aspect to the larger picture of women’s place within the hierarchical structure of society. These studies have generally treated women as a collective,<sup>4</sup> but this has been by necessity: with rare exceptions, the sources contain too little information to discuss the agencies of individual women. A model of social capital, however, devised by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, provides a small opening for historians to begin to consider women as individuals and their agency within communities. Bourdieu’s paradigm holds that social interaction is not based purely on self-interest but on the social reproduction of power encompassing ‘capital and profit in all their forms’.<sup>5</sup> In this context, social capital refers to the advantages derived from connections within social networks or institutions, expressed through notions of trust and reputation, and founded on an individual’s social position.<sup>6</sup>

Various models of social capital have already been used to shed light on how the relationships within certain networks and institutions facilitated interaction and expressions of agency in Imperial Rome and Late Antiquity: take Jinyu Liu’s study of

1 L. Brubaker, ‘The Age of Justinian: gender and society’, in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge 2005) 427–47 (428).

2 The central argument of E.A. Clark, ‘The Lady Vanishes: dilemmas of a feminist Historian after the “linguistic turn”’, *Church History* 67.1 (1998) 1–31. On the perpetuation of patriarchal narratives in Late Antiquity, see B. Stefaniw, ‘Feminist historiography and uses of the past’, *Studies in Late Antiquity* 4.3 (2020) 260–83.

3 The literature here is extensive, but for bibliographies of these foundational works, see Brubaker, ‘The Age of Justinian’; K. Cooper, ‘Gender and the Fall of Rome’, in P. Rousseau (ed.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Chichester 2009) 187–200; A.C. Kelley, ‘Searching for professional women in the mid to late Roman textile industry’, *Past & Present* 258 (2023) 3–43.

4 Studies of certain imperial or religious figures have sought to create histories of individual women, but still treat them as irregular, and therefore non-representative, cases: see n. 2.

5 P. Bourdieu, ‘The forms of capital’, in J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Westport 1986) 241–58 (241). The bibliography of social capital theory is large, but Bourdieu is often contrasted to two other leading theorists, James Coleman and Robert Putnam: see A. Portes, ‘The two meanings of social capital’, *Sociological Forum* 15.1 (2000) 1–12; M. Siisiäinen, ‘One concept, two approaches: Bourdieu and Putnam on social capital’, *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology* 40.2 (2003) 183–204, and M. Alpino and H. Mehlum, ‘Two notions of social capital’, *The Journal of Mathematical Sociology* (2021), doi.org/10.1080/0022250X.2021.2004597.

6 On the debate regarding the identification of individual and communal benefits, and the degree to which they can be integrated see D. Gelderblom, ‘The limits to bridging social capital: power, social context and the theory of Robert Putnam’, *The Sociological Review* 66.6 (2018) 1309–24.

business associations (*collegia*), or Philip Venticinque's work on large estates.<sup>7</sup> In both of these cases, the aim was to examine the processes by which groups or networks enabled the accumulation of social capital and its conversion into economic capital.<sup>8</sup> These studies have highlighted the complex mechanisms of social cohesion and exclusion dictating structural hierarchies, to both the advantage and detriment of the wider society. Yet women have generally been dissociated from these mechanisms in the Late Antique world by virtue of their apparent exclusion from the commercial and administrative functions of society. The 'normative' tradition of these institutions as exclusively male remains deeply embedded in the historiography.<sup>9</sup>

However, using Bourdieu's model to isolate individual cases of women building and reinforcing social capital – drawn from Egypt where the papyrological evidence gives a depth of insight into the everyday lives of women rarely found elsewhere in the ancient world –<sup>10</sup> we begin to see new layers to the relationship networks that governed Late Antique society. In this article, dedicated to Leslie, I will propose a paradigm through which the production, accumulation, and expression of social capital by Late Antique women to exert agency on their own social environment can be analysed.<sup>11</sup> I will focus on two categories of women whose roles (and titles) have been traditionally associated

7 J. Liu, 'Group membership, trust networks, and social capital: a critical analysis', in K. Verboven and C. Laes (eds.), *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World* (Leiden 2016) 203–26; P.F. Venticinque, 'Wealth, profit, and social capital in the Greek magical papyri', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 59 (2019) 415–36. See too (but without explicit theoretical engagement) Venticinque, 'Risk management: social capital and economic strategies on Late Roman estates in Oxyrhynchus', *Historia* 63.4 (2014) 463–6.

8 Each relied on different models, and therefore definitions, of social capital. Liu uses the network based theories of, amongst others, Nan Lin and Bo Rothstein (reconceptualizing Putman), referencing N. Lin, 'Building a network theory of social capital', in N. Lin, K. Cook, and R.S. Burt (eds.), *Social Capital: theory and research* (New York 2001) 3–29; B. Rothstein, *Social Traps and the Problem of Trust* (Cambridge 2005). Venticinque looked to the notion of human capital in J.S. Coleman, 'Social capital in the creation of human capital', *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (Supplement) (1988) S95–S120.

9 Discussed with bibliography in C. Humfress, 'Institutionalisation between theory and practice: comparative approaches to medieval Islamic and Late Roman law', in J. Hudson and A. Rodriguez (eds.), *Diverging Paths? The shapes of power and institutions in medieval Christendom and Islam* (Leiden 2014) 16–29, esp. 27–8.

10 The applicability of the Egyptian papyri to other parts of the Mediterranean is discussed in T.M. Hickey, 'Writing histories from the papyri', in R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (Oxford 2011) 495–520. Cf. A. Kaldellis, 'The study of women and children: methodological challenges and new directions', in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London 2010) 61–71. On the historiography of ancient women through the papyri, see Bagnall, 'A century of women's history from the papyri', in R. Ancona and G. Tsouvala (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford 2021) 95–122.

11 The issue of periodization creates an ambiguity in the terminology used to describe Egypt in the centuries before the Arab conquest (Late Roman? Late Antique? Coptic? Byzantine?). For clarity, I will use Late Antique to refer to Egypt between the fourth to seventh centuries. See the editor's introduction to R.S. Bagnall (ed.) *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700* (Cambridge 2007) 1–17.

with men: business owners and civic administrators. While these were women of means (often dismissed in academic literature as exceptional and therefore irrelevant),<sup>12</sup> they were far from the imperial elites whose lives have been studied to a greater extent. Ultimately, these women's demonstrations of social capital illustrate their ability to exert agency within the patriarchal system (and institutions) of Late Antiquity, working from within rather than outside the norms of gender hierarchy.

### Women expressing social capital

Bourdieu's social theory is based on the intersection of three foundational concepts that define interaction within a given society: field, capital, and habitus. The field is the relational space in which agents (either individuals or groups) struggle to maintain or change social power dynamics. There is no single field; rather, different arenas of social activity take place in different fields (here economic, social, cultural, and symbolic/religious).<sup>13</sup> The women in my case studies were thus negotiating their place within various fields simultaneously. These fields also defined different forms of capital that could be gained. Bourdieu's forms of capital – though independent – are often accrued in tandem to determine an individual's place within the social hierarchy.

The amount of social capital an individual possesses is in direct relation to the size of their network and ability to mobilize resources.<sup>14</sup> The habitus is the system of social rules, behaviours, and knowledge that allows an individual to mediate between field and capital; this, again, is not singular.<sup>15</sup> Social factors such as status and gender dictated which habitus a woman in Late Antique Egypt embodied. While, as with any modern theory of contemporary society or economy, application to the past cannot be done with exact parallels, I will make a case for the use of social capital as a tool for the better understanding of the reality of Late Antique women's lives. These were women who were neither smashing the patriarchal structures of their society, nor were they exempt from them; rather, their navigation of these structures demonstrates 'female' agency from within.

In this paradigm, women's attempts to claim recognition and honour through expressions of social capital in Late Antique Egypt can be understood as the result of multi-layered processes of social hierarchy and reproduction. The means of social capital expression for women, as will be seen, take on different significance from those for men. For much of the twentieth century, the situation of Late Antique women as portrayed in the contemporary legal codes was assumed to have been representative of their social reality. Legally women were confined to the home, subordinated by first

12 Stefaniw, 'Feminist historiography', 270–2.

13 P. Bourdieu, 'Droit et passe-droit. Le champ des pouvoirs territoriaux et la mise en œuvre des règlements', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 81/82 (1990) 86–96.

14 Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 249.

15 P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge 1977) 72; P. Bourdieu and L.J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago 1992) 18.

their father or legal guardian, and then their husband.<sup>16</sup> They could own property and enter legal contracts, but for many legal actions were supposed to be represented by a man.<sup>17</sup> While these laws only applied to Roman citizens (expanded by Caracalla in 212), jurists wrote of similar restrictions in provincial Egypt,<sup>18</sup> intended to subsume female autonomy, in appearance if not reality. This reflected a larger ideology of family and hierarchy entrenched in Roman society, which became a cornerstone of early Christian discourse.

The patriarchal structures of Christianity did nevertheless afford women the opportunity to express and reproduce social capital within their communities, through acts of patronage. While this is well known of elite urban women in Constantinople,<sup>19</sup> it was true for rural women as well.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of donor inscriptions bearing titles and ranks for women on Late Antique churches in the provinces of Palaestina and Arabia (sometimes with male relatives, sometimes without) were undisguised declarations of self-identity and reciprocal recognition in the local environment, such as we find also in the Latin West. Women were therefore able, through expressions of their social capital, to insert themselves into the dialogue of cultural competition society relied on to structure itself.<sup>21</sup> Expressions of patronage were not restricted to

16 A recurring theme in J. Beaucamp, *Le Statut de la femme à Byzance, 4e–7e siècle*, vol. I (Paris 1990); A. Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1996).

17 Kelley, 'Searching for professional women', 38–9.

18 J.E. Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: a sourcebook on marriage, divorce and widowhood* (London 2002) 34–7. On women and citizenship, see E.A. Hemelrijk, 'Roman citizenship and the integration of women into the local towns of the Latin West', in G. de Kleijn and S. Benoist (eds.), *Integration in Rome and in the Roman World* (Leiden 2014) 147–60. On Egyptian citizenship, see V. Marotta, 'Egyptians and citizenship from the first century AD to the *Constitutio Antoniniana*', in L. Cecchet and A. Busetto (eds.), *Citizenship in the Graeco-Roman World: aspects of citizenship from the archaic Period to AD 212* (Leiden 2017) 172–94.

19 E.g. A.L. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: image and empire* (New York 2002) 93–106; L. James, 'Making a name: reputation and imperial founding and refounding in Constantinople', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 60 (2012) 63–72; E. Demirtiken, 'Imperial women and religious foundations in Constantinople', in M. Sághy and R.G. Ousterhout (eds.) *Piroska and the Pantokrator: dynastic memory, healing and salvation in Komnenian Constantinople* (Budapest 2019) 175–94.

20 V. Vuolanto, 'Male and female euergetism in Late Antiquity: a study on Italian and Adriatic church floor mosaics', in P. Setälä et al. (eds.), *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Empire* (Rome 2002) 245–302; C. Römer, 'Female "donors" in eighth-century Egypt', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 60 (2012) 121–8; M. Whiting, 'Female patronage in Late Antiquity: titles and rank of women donors in sixth- and seventh-century Palaestina and Arabia', in L. Dirven, M. Icks, and S. Remijns (eds.), *The Public Lives of Ancient Women (500 BCE–650 CE)* (Leiden 2023) 291–318.

21 C.J. Goddard, 'Euergetism, Christianity and municipal culture in Late Antiquity, from Aquileia to Gerasa (fourth to sixth Centuries CE)', in M.D. Gygas and A. Zuiderhoek (eds.), *Benefactor and the Polis: the public gift in the Greek cities from the Homeric world to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2021) 297–329; D. Reynolds, 'Competitive piety: rural patrons in Byzantine Arabia and Palestine, c.500–c.630', in A.C. Kelley and F. Vanni (eds.), *Approaching Social Hierarchies in Byzantium: dialogues between rich and poor* (London, forthcoming). J. Ashkenazi, 'Family rural churches in Late Antique Palestine and the competition

inscriptions. In the sixth century Anicia Juliana, for example, was gifted her famous *Dioskorides* by the people of the Honoratae (a suburb of Constantinople) after constructing a church to the Virgin Theotokos in their quarter; her portrait in the manuscript appropriated imperial imagery, acknowledging her own lineage.<sup>22</sup> Her social capital, founded in her wealth and family, was used to the benefit of the community of the Honoratae, who then reflected it back to her through a high-status manuscript bearing her (quasi-imperial) image.

Such patronage allowed women to strengthen the social bonds on which they relied for position and security. But these examples also highlight that the intersection of gender and wealth/status differentiated levels of agency, as well as the variety of mechanisms available to women to inflect their subordinated status and participate in the power dynamics of their local communities. We can perceive similar, though sometimes less overt, expressions of social capital amongst the women of Late Antique Egypt. While we do not see the kind of self-declaration found in the examples above, it is visible through the recognition of others and in their own expressions of patronage in both religious and secular settings.

### Women business owners

Despite the image of the ideal *matrona* confined within the home which was promoted by the central administration, women were active in the commercial markets of the Roman and Late Antique Mediterranean. Their well-known contributions to the service sector – as, for example, wet-nurses, midwives, and prostitutes – were framed within the feminine tropes of mother or whore.<sup>23</sup> But they were active in manufacturing and retail as well, with much of our evidence coming from Egypt.<sup>24</sup> While these roles gave women a measure of autonomy and economic agency, the evidence generally remains too scant to determine the impact women’s occupational lives had on the wider society. There are, however, some notable exceptions. The few instances we have in the papyri of women owning and managing their own businesses demonstrate how they could leverage their economic situation to attain prominent positions within their local communities.

in the “field of religious goods”: a socio-historical view’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69.4 (2018) 709–27 uses a similar model of Bourdieu.

22 L. Brubaker, ‘The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana’, in A. Littlewood, H. Maguire, and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds.), *Byzantine Garden Culture* (Washington DC 2002) 189–214 (211); G. Nathan, ‘The Vienna Dioscorides’ dedicatio to Anicia Juliana: an usurpation of imperial patronage?’, *Byzantine Australiensia* 17 (2017) 95–102.

23 S. Dixon, ‘Exemplary housewife or luxurious slut?: Cultural representations of women in the Roman economy’, in E. Marshall and F. McHardy (eds.), *Women’s Influence on Classical Civilization* (London 2004) 56–74.

24 Kelley, ‘Searching for professional women’, 6–7 for sectors ‘outside textile production.’

The first example comes from the village of Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis, located in Egypt's Western Desert. Kellis had been established as part of the oasis development begun in the first century, during which new irrigation systems had brought marginal land into cultivation to maximize agricultural output.<sup>25</sup> (The site was ultimately abandoned at the end of the fourth century.) Kellis was also home to a sizeable Manichaean community whose members maintained close economic links with the Nile Valley. During the excavations in the 1990s, a block of three houses dating to the fourth century was uncovered and found to contain an extensive collection of papyri and ostraka written in both Greek and Coptic relating to members of this community.<sup>26</sup> One of the houses, seemingly owned by the Panmour family, contained several documents detailing a textile weaving and tailoring business owned by a woman named Tehat (possibly alongside a male kinsman named Hatre),<sup>27</sup> herself probably a relative.<sup>28</sup>

Tehat and her business have been dated by Teigan's prosopography of Kellis papyri to the mid-350s.<sup>29</sup> One of her frequent correspondents was a man named Horion, whose letters often contained orders for clothing items; it is also highly probable that she was the author of a set of texts that read like reports of the textile workshop.<sup>30</sup> Within these documents, Tehat relayed instructions to employees, recorded payments and wages, and detailed the varied and complex *chaîne opératoire* of Late Antique textile production. She notably also gave instructions to a male employee,<sup>31</sup> establishing her authority within the business. Not only does Tehat's workshop appear to have been successful, it seems to have afforded her a privileged place within the local Manichaean community,<sup>32</sup> evidenced through her own charity and patronage.

Manichaean social structure was founded on relationships of reciprocity between the ascetic elect – holy men and women with divine knowledge – and the catechumens who materially supported them in exchange for spiritual guidance and

25 R.S. Bagnall, *An Oasis City* (New York 2016) 29–30.

26 G.E. Bowen, 'The environment within: the archaeological context of the texts from House 3 at Kellis in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis', in A.A. Di Castro and C.A. Hope (eds), *Housing and Habitat in the Ancient Mediterranean: cultural and environmental responses* (Leuven 2015) 231–41 (231).

27 *P.Kell.Copt.* 18.

28 Bowen, 'Environment within'; H.F. Teigen, *The Manichaean Church in Kellis* (Leiden 2021) 68–70, 79.

29 Teigen, *The Manichaean Church*, 57.

30 *P.Kell.Copt.* 44, 46–8; Teigen, *The Manichaean Church*, 68. Teigen and Brand identify the Tehat (ⲧⲉⲁⲧ) in the Coptic documents with the That (Ⲑⲁⲧ) recorded in the fourth-century accounts of the estate of Faustianos as having (or being given?) a measure of cotton 'for weaving'; more cautious is R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book (P. Kell. IV. GR. 96)* (Oxford 1997) 66. In Kelley, 'Searching for professional women', I did not make the connection between the two but on reflection accept Teigen and Brand's identification.

31 *P.Kell.Copt.* 44, 4 and 6.

32 The wider social context in Kellis has been somewhat skewed by the wealth of material found in House 3: C.A. Hope and G.E. Bowen, 'Houses, households, household activities', in Hope and Bowen (eds.), *Kellis: a Roman-period village in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis* (Cambridge 2021) 15–56 (43).

enlightenment.<sup>33</sup> We can see these relationships play out in the documents from Kellis, with a surprising emphasis on the prominent role of women within the community.<sup>34</sup> This has typically been attributed to business interests in the Nile Valley (many in Aphrodito) and the consequential periodic absence of the men,<sup>35</sup> as well as their roles as catechumens, or ‘gift-givers’.<sup>36</sup> This, however, diminishes the economic and social agency displayed by these women in the texts.<sup>37</sup> I will therefore suggest an alternative social mechanism functioning here.

Gift-giving was a central tenet in Manichaean theology and social ideology in the doctrinal texts, with catechumens obliged to sustain the elect through alms provisions of food, above all, but also of other everyday necessities.<sup>38</sup> It is in this context that Tehat’s social importance within her community, and its relationship to her business activities, becomes apparent. In *P.Kell.Copt.* 18, Horion asked Tehat to instruct her employees to weave a cowl for a ‘double-fringed gown’ for a presbyter named Saren.<sup>39</sup> In *P.Kell.Copt.* 58, neither the sender or recipient have been preserved, but the handwriting and proximity to *P.Kell.Copt.* 18 in the archaeological matrix strongly suggests that it too was written by Horion to Tehat;<sup>40</sup> the same Saren possibly appears in this document as well.<sup>41</sup> Here, Horion reported that Saren had sent along fabrics and cowls, to be made into jerkins which Saren would pick up himself.<sup>42</sup> There are conflicting interpretations of these passages. Franzmann and Teigan portray the provision of garments to Saren as an indication of Tehat’s role as a catechumen, providing alms-gifts to an elect.<sup>43</sup> Brand, on the other hand, suggests that Saren was in

33 For Manichaean theology and transmission, see S.N.C. Lieu, ‘Manichaeism’, in S.A. Harvey and D.G. Hunter (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford 2008) 221–36.

34 I. Gardner, A. Alcock, and W.-P. Funk (eds.), *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis Volume II: P.Kellis VII (P. Kellis Copt. 57-131)* (Oxford 2014) 13–14. For widows and alms-giving, see D. Caner, *The Rich and the Pure: philanthropy and the making of Christian society in early Byzantium* (Oakland 2021) 123.

35 Teigen, *The Manichaean Church*, 93; M. Franzmann, ‘The Manichaean women in the Greek and Coptic letters from Kellis’, in M. Scopello (ed.), *Women in Western and Eastern Manichaeism* (Leiden 2022) 83–100, at 89–90. This dynamic is indicated by the letters from Makarios in the Valley to his wife Maria in Kellis, requesting various things be sent to him and complaining of her epistolary neglect. See *P.Kell.Copt.* 24–26.

36 E.g. M. Franzmann, ‘Tehat the weaver: women’s experience in Manichaeism in fourth-century Roman Kellis’, *Australian Religion Studies Review* 20.1 (2007) 17–26.

37 M. Brand, “‘You being for us helpers, and worthy patrons...’ (P.Kell.Copt. 31): Manichaean gift-exchange in the village of Kellis’, in Scopello (ed.), *Women in Western and Eastern Manichaeism*, 102–16 (103).

38 M. Brand, *Religion and the Everyday Life of Manichaeans in Kellis: beyond light and darkness* (Leiden 2022) 168; Brand, ‘You being for us’, 103.

39 *P.Kell.Copt.* 18, 21–23.

40 Gardner, Alcock, and Funk (eds.), *Coptic Documentary Texts II*, 20.

41 For the reconstruction of this name, see Gardner, Alcock, and Funk (eds.), *Coptic Documentary Texts II*, 25 n. 21.

42 *P.Kell.Copt.* 58, 21–23.

43 Franzmann, ‘Tehat the Weaver’; Teigen, *The Manichaean Church*, 229. Earlier in *P.Kell.Copt.* 58, Horion refers to a cowl he had given ‘to the brothers’, which may also refer to alms to the elect.



a commercial relationship with Horion and Tehat, acting as an intermediary to the Nile Valley.<sup>44</sup>

In particular, Brand questions why Saren would be sending fabric to those who were supposed to be providing him with alms, reasoning that he was perhaps cooperating with lay partners in textile production to sustain himself, as many Christian monks did.<sup>45</sup> While Saren may have been engaged in such economic activity, what we know of textile production does not support this conclusion. It seems to have been common practice for a client to provide their own materials when ordering garments from a weaver.<sup>46</sup> If these were not offered by the client, they were procured by the weaver through more informal networks (as portrayed in the documents): there is no evidence that materials were provided by professional intermediaries for individual orders.<sup>47</sup> If Saren was anything more than an unofficial middleman, his role was unique within the corpus of Egyptian papyri. Might it instead be that Saren had received material alms from one source, to be worked by another, as part of the catechumen's obligations to the elect? The dispersed nature of the textile industry would suggest this is a possibility;<sup>48</sup> and as we shall see, appeals from the elect could veer into outright demands.

Tehat did not only provide garments as part of her charitable obligations. In a highly fragmentary papyrus, *P.Kell.Copt.* 43, probably written by Tehat, she appealed to her son to provide food as charity. The text itself indicates (hypothetical) orphans and a widow as recipients rather than a member of the elect,<sup>49</sup> although terms invoking 'aleness' were also frequently used to refer to the elect and could suggest Tehat was describing official almsgiving within the church, and particularly the *agape*.<sup>50</sup> The exact meaning of *agape* in the Manichaean papyri is unclear, but in Kellis the references can be read as 'part of a process of charitable redistribution, in which

44 Brand, *Religion and Everyday Life*, 178; Brand, 'You being for us', 108.

45 E. Wipszycka, 'Resources and economic activities of the Egyptian monastic communities (4th-8th century)', *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 41 (2011) 159–263; E. Wipszycka, *The Second Gift of the Nile: monks and monasteries in Late Antique Egypt*, tr. D. Jasiński (Warsaw 2018) ch. 14.

46 M.G. Parca, 'The Textile industry in Egypt in the Greek and Roman periods', in E.D. Maguire (ed.), *Weavings from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt: the rich life and the dance* (Urbana-Champaign 1999) 20; K. Droß-Krüpe, 'How (not) to organise Roman textile production. Some considerations on merchant-entrepreneurs in Roman Egypt and the ἰστωνάρχης', in M. Mossakowska-Gaubert (ed.), *Egyptian Textiles and their Production: 'word' and 'object'* (Lincoln NE 2020) 128–38 (131).

47 See Droß-Krüpe, 'How (not) to organise', 131 n. 23. This is in contrast to agents working for large estates and monasteries.

48 Kelley, 'Searching for professional women', 21–37.

49 *P.Kell.Copt.* 43, 8 and 18 for orphans, 20 for widows.

50 Teigen, *The Manichaean Church*, 229–30. Augustine also wrote that Manichaeans were prohibited from providing charity for anyone other than the elect, perhaps confirming Tehat's entreaty as a reference to religious charity. See M. Franzmann, 'Augustine and Manichaean almsgiving: understanding a universal religion with exclusivist practices', in J. van Oort (ed.), *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity* (Leiden 2013) 37–49 (42–3). Brand, however, is cautious of the veracity of Augustine's polemical views on the Manichaeans: 'You being for us', 113–14.

individuals donated part of the harvest'.<sup>51</sup> Tehat was also probably the author of a couple of documents recording the collection of *agape* contributions. In one, a *maje* of olives and a half *maje* of grapes are received from a woman named Theodora for the *agape*,<sup>52</sup> and in the other, the author instructs a similar offering of lentils and lupines be made in her name.<sup>53</sup> Tehat's contributions also appear in the *Kellis Account Book*, records of the estate of Faustianos for the years 361 to 364. While the contents of her *agape* are not listed in this case,<sup>54</sup> of the fourteen disbursements listed in the account book there is only one other named individual associated with the *agape*, also a woman.<sup>55</sup> Women were evidently performing an important role within the wider religious community.

The importance of local patronage relationships in Kellis is made clear in a letter addressed to a woman named Eirene.<sup>56</sup> *P.Kell.Copt.* 32 was written by a Manichaean elect, whose name is no longer preserved, to Eirene, whom he addresses as 'daughter of the holy church' along with a series of honorifics, including 'catechumen of the faith'.<sup>57</sup> The conflation of kinship and patronage language at once emphasized Eirene's exalted social station as a patron within her immediate community as well as her subordinate spiritual position in relation to the elect. The unnamed elect instructs Eirene to 'do the work and mix the warp until I come',<sup>58</sup> suggesting that, like Tehat, Eirene may have been involved in commercial textile manufacture. We thus have two examples from Kellis where a woman's economic capital enabled her to express her social capital through her role as a catechumen or religious patron and reproduce her social position through the recognition of an elect and the wider community.

One more woman business owner who leaves a relatively extensive document trail lived in the village of Jeme on the west bank of the Nile near the city of Thebes in Upper Egypt at the end of the seventh century/beginning of the eighth.<sup>59</sup> Jeme was constructed around the ruins of the mortuary temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu, excavated by a team from the University of Chicago in the late 1920s and

51 Brand, *Religion and Everyday Life*, 195.

52 *P.Kell.Copt.* 44.

53 *P.Kell.Copt.* 47.

54 KAB 106; Bagnall (ed.), *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book*, 92.

55 Identified as Tanour. KAB 940; Bagnall (ed.), *Kellis Agricultural Account Book*, 134. It is possible this is an indication of gendered divisions in charity, as the provision of food could be connected to women's domestic roles.

56 On the identity of Eirene, see I. Gardner, A. Alcock, and W.P. Funk (eds.), *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis Volume 1* (Oxford 1999) 24.

57 *P.Kell.Copt.* 32, 1-3; Gardner, Alcock, and Funk (eds), *Coptic Documentary Texts 1*, 214-15. On the dependency of this relationship, see Brand, *Religion and Everyday Life*, 130-2.

58 *P.Kell.Copt.* 32, 32-3.

59 This of course postdates the conquest of Egypt, but the social and administrative continuity that defined the early Islamic period makes it a relevant example.

1930s.<sup>60</sup> Within the basement of House 34, excavators found a trove of ostraka recording several generations of moneylenders within a single family. The central figure of the archive was a woman named Koloje who appeared as a moneylender, agent, and parent of a moneylender.<sup>61</sup> The ostraka allow a partial reconstruction of her family tree; her father was named Hllo and her paternal grandmother was Katharon. She was married to Manase, and together they had a son named Pecosh who would go on to have his own son, also named Manase.

Of the six known members of the family, only Koloje, Pecosh, and Manase the younger were declared moneylenders. Katharon was probably also involved in the business;<sup>62</sup> at the very least, she seems to have been a securities keeper in partnership with another money lender or pawnbroker.<sup>63</sup> Koloje, however, lent cash and foodstuffs to both men and women at interest, and in her own name. It is perhaps notable that Koloje lent cash to women and goods to men,<sup>64</sup> suggesting that not only could women exert their own economic agency, but they could assist other women in so doing. Hllo and Manase (her husband) were only ever mentioned in passing; although both appear to have been alive when many of the documents were written, they were not involved in Koloje's business, which she passed down to her son. The social standing of Katharon and Koloje seems to have been directly related to their occupations and the social capital that came with having the economic capital to lend to others. Katharon's address to Jacob in an ostrakon held in the Louvre, AF 12310, is devoid of the overtures typically found in such correspondence, indicating a level of social superiority; and her own lack of patronym or identifying information in another Louvre ostrakon, AF 12309, suggests she was well known within the local community.<sup>65</sup> Katharon was also part of a wide business network, extending all the way north to Fustat (over 600 km away);<sup>66</sup> maintaining such long-distance relationships would have required a basis of trust based on social position, the foundations of social capital.<sup>67</sup>

60 Much of the documentation regarding find spot was destroyed in Germany during World War II, making the relationships between texts difficult to understand. T.G. Wilfong, 'Archive of a family of moneylenders from Jême', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 27.1 (1990) 169–81 (169).

61 The documents in Koloje's archive, totalling thirty ostraka, are undated.

62 *O.Med.Hab.* 98; Wilfong, 'Archive of a family', 172 n. 14.

63 S. Bacot, 'Avons-nous retrouvé la grand-mère κολοχε', in S. Emmel et al. (eds.), *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit*, 2 (Wiesbaden 1999) 241–7. Another woman from Jeme, Tsia, also appears as a securities keeper in *SB Kopt.* 3.1306 (in which Katharon also appears) and *O.Crum* 472; a Tsia also writes to the monk Frange (see n. 73 above) requesting assistance after she was charged with theft, but if this is the same Tsia, she spans three generations of Koloje's family. For other women moneylenders, see T.G. Wilfong, *Women of Jeme: lives in a Coptic town in Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor 2002) 129–32, and A. Papaconstantinou, 'A preliminary prosopography of moneylenders in Early Islamic Egypt and South Palestine', *Travaux et Mémoires* 16 (2010) 631–48.

64 Wilfong, *Women of Jeme*, 132, and 128 for the extent of Koloje's network.

65 Bacot, 'La grand-mère κολοχε', 241–4.

66 AF 12309; Bacot, 'La grand-mère κολοχε', 242.

67 On trust in long-distance trade, see A. Haour, *Outsiders and Strangers: an archaeology of liminality in West Africa* (Oxford 2013).

Likewise, Koloje seems to have been highly regarded and trusted within her wider community; she was a frequent business partner of Daniel, son of Kalapesios,<sup>68</sup> and her network may have stretched into the religious field. A letter from the monk Frange (well-known from his own archive)<sup>69</sup> sent to his ‘brother’ Theodoros regarding the monk Moses, who was ill, extended greetings to ‘my God-loving sister Koloje and Pecosh’.<sup>70</sup> Frange was not an inhabitant of Jeme but clearly had occasion to cross paths with certain members of the community. Such an extension of Koloje’s network, with a member of the anchoritic monastic community no less,<sup>71</sup> may be further indication of her exalted social position. Koloje also appears to have been able to submit legal testimony in her own name without further witness.<sup>72</sup> In *O.Med.Hab.* 93, an anonymous oath of a moneylender declaring that they had not tampered with a gold necklace left as surety, bears a striking resemblance to the necklace in *O.Med.Hab.* 72 which was relinquished to Koloje, presumably after the owner, Mariam, was unable to repay a loan of two solidi.<sup>73</sup> If this is indeed a declaration by Koloje, her ability to testify to her own trustworthiness would be a further indication of her social capital.

The women business owners discussed here illustrate several ways in which women were building and wielding social (by way of economic) capital to exert agency in their own lives. As was the case with Tehat and Eirene, Koloje and Katharon leveraged their economic capital to increase their social prestige and power across boundaries, which was itself converted into increased economic, spiritual, and social capital. These women prospered by successfully exploiting the patriarchal structures they were required to work within, navigating the ideology of familial expectation to advance their own interests.<sup>74</sup> Of note is how little marital family structure seems to have mattered to these women’s social positions: for Koloje’s it is her natal family (through Katharon) that provides a basis for her social capital; and Tehat’s son (probably) participates in her expressions of charity. Her business and charity were also conducted without reference to a husband, living or dead. But while these were

68 *O.Med.Hab.* 52, *O.Med.Hab.* 66, and *O.Med.Hab.* 151.

69 A. Boud’hors and C. Heurtel, *Les ostraca coptes de la TT 29: Autour du moine Frangé, vol. 1 Textes* (Brussels 2010).

70 *O.Med.Hab.* 139. The use of familial terms in Coptic letters could symbolize either family or spiritual relationships; without a clearer genealogy for Frange, it is impossible to know for certain if he was addressing Koloje as his spiritual or his biological sister; see Wilfong, *Women of Jeme*, 70–1, and n. 4. However, given the context, as well as the address to Theodoros and Moses, I incline to the former.

71 Could they have had business together? Frange was involved in several productive activities, including textile production. See A.C. Kelley, ‘Finding a common grave? Early Christian funerary textiles from Egypt in context,’ in Kelley and Vanni (eds.) *Approaching Social Hierarchies*.

72 For women’s legal ability to testify and act as a witness, see J. Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4e-7e siècle)*, II (Paris 1992) 21–31.

73 Wilfong, *Women of Jeme*, 122–3.

74 Pecosh’s business network, for example, seems less extensive than those of his mother or great-grandmother. Wilfong, *Women of Jeme*, 129.

women of means, they were not necessarily the elites, even within their own local communities. Their ability to participate in the performance of social capital was, therefore, due to their own engagement in the process of reputation-building. We can, however, see similar social processes for women of the landed elite as well.

## Women as civil administrators

The women of the provincial elite circles of Late Antique Egypt were of a completely different economic status compared to the women business owners discussed above, and therefore existed in a different habitus. Yet they were still able to wield social capital to their benefit. This is particularly true within the context of the Late Antique tax system. Tax-paying women would not have been rare, given that women were allowed by law to own and manage their own property; within the papyri there are many examples of women paying taxes on assessed land, although it was at a level far lower than that for men.<sup>75</sup> As in the cases from Kellis and Jeme, these were women whose economic position afforded them societal advantages. However, those whose landholdings enabled them to take on certain titles related to the civic administration of taxes were rarer, and illustrate a different level of social capital available only to certain Late Antique women.

Egypt's size, agricultural conditions, and depth of natural resources made it a disproportionate contributor to the empire's coffers,<sup>76</sup> and the complex tax system was facilitated by the regular census of the population.<sup>77</sup> It was not, however, static. Over the course of the second century, and then again in the fourth and fifth centuries, the collection and liability of taxes in Egypt underwent transformations. Whereas tax farming had previously been conducted by collectors (*publicani*) brought in from Rome – who took responsibility for any shortfall – liability shifted to the community itself and any shortage would be carried over to the following year, to be paid by the local landowners.<sup>78</sup> As a result, collecting became more of a preoccupation for municipal governments and elites. By the fourth century, the collection of taxes in Egypt relied on a liturgical system overseen by local officials,<sup>79</sup> and by the sixth

75 See e.g. R.S. Bagnall, 'Village landholding at Aphrodito in comparative perspective', in J.-L. Fournet (ed.), *Les archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodite cent ans après leur découverte: histoire et culture dans l'Égypte Byzantine* (Paris 2008) 181–90; L.S.B. MacCoull, 'Taxpayers and their money in sixth-century Egypt: currency in the Temseu Skordon Codex', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8.1 (2015) 97–113.

76 P. Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge 2006) 11.

77 W.G. Claytor and R.S. Bagnall, 'The beginnings of the Roman provincial census: a new declaration from 3 BCE', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 55.3 (2015) 637–53; A. Jördens, *Statthalterliche Verwaltung in der römischen Kaiserzeit: Studien zum praefectus Aegypti* (Stuttgart 2009) 62–94.

78 Jördens, *Statthalterliche Verwaltung*, 287–9, 315–7; K. Droß-Krüpe, 'Not Paying Taxes in Roman Egypt', in K. Schönhärl, G. Hürlimann, and D. Rohde (eds.), *Histories of Tax Evasion, Avoidance and Resistance* (London 2023) 71–83, esp. 75–6, 78.

79 R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 133–4, 157–8; C. Zuckerman, *Du village à l'empire autour du registre fiscal d'Aphroditô (525/526)* (Paris 2004) 123.

century, these roles were being performed by the families of the large estates in a ‘permanent institutionalization of the liturgical role’.<sup>80</sup> From the fifth-century, the provinces of Egypt were divided into smaller administrative and fiscal units known as *pagi*.<sup>81</sup> The pagarch was responsible for assembling the taxes paid by the cities and villages within their unit (often in kind or copper coinage) and purchasing gold on the market to deliver to the imperial fisc (after deducting their fee).<sup>82</sup>

Some villages were able to bypass these regional officials altogether, collecting and transmitting taxes assessed autonomously through the privilege of *autopragia*; such was the case for the town of Aphrodito, granted *autopragia* by the Emperor Leo I (r. 457–474).<sup>83</sup> The role of tax collection and deposit into the imperial fisc in this case fell to the *syntelestēs*, a title which appears in the papyri from the sixth century.<sup>84</sup> While it was usually used for men, there are three instances where it appears in relation to a woman named Sophia – the wife of the village headman Dioskoros, son of Apollos – dating from the later decades of the sixth century.<sup>85</sup> Apollos and Dioskoros were both important individuals in the local administration and had been instrumental in maintaining Aphrodito’s right of *autopragia*, appealing directly to the authorities in Constantinople in 540 and again in 547/548 when the regional pagarchs tried to assume control of the village taxes.<sup>86</sup> In 565, Dioskoros was forced to leave

80 Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 159–60 (160); J. Gascou, ‘Les grands domaines, la cité et l’état en Égypte byzantine’, *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 (1985) 1–90 (13–18).

81 J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, ‘The origin of the office of the Pagarch’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 66.1 (1973) 38–46; R. Mazza, ‘Ricerche sul pagarca nell’Egitto tardoantico e bizantino’, *Aegyptus* 75.1/2 (1995) 169–242.

82 Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 158; Zuckerman, *Du village à l’empire*, 79–81, 132; MacCoull, ‘Taxpayers and their money’, 98.

83 Referred to in *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67019 (548/549). On Aphrodito’s fiscal status, see Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 103–5.

84 See Gascou, ‘Les grands domaines’, 49–52. Liebeschuetz disagreed with Gascou’s characterization of the *syntelestēs*, noting its generic use in legal codes, but acknowledged the role may have had greater significance in Aphrodito: J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, ‘Civic finance in the Byzantine period: the laws and Egypt’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 89.2 (1996) 389–408 (395–7).

85 *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67111 (585), 8; *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67325 fol. 4r, 10–12 (585); and *P.Strasb.gr.inv.* 1633 (587/588); see G.R. Ruffini, *Life in an Egyptian Village in Late Antiquity: Aphrodito before and after the Islamic conquest* (Cambridge 2018) 150; J.-L. Fournet, ‘Archive ou archives de Dioscore? Les dernières années des “archives de Dioscore”’, in J.-L. Fournet (ed.), *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte. Histoire et culture dans l’Égypte byzantine* (Paris 2008) 17–30. Apollos, Sophia’s father-in-law, also has the title of *syntelestēs* in *P.Lond.* 5.1844 (500–525), *P.Flor.* 3.283 (536) and *P.Ross.Georg.* 3.36 (537); and Dioskoros in *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67118 (547), *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67251 (549), and *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67303 (553).

86 For Apollos and Victor, see *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67126 (541); L. Vanderheyden, ‘The figure of Apollos, father of Dioscorus, in the light of Coptic letters from sixth-century Aphrodito’, in S.R. Huebner et al. (eds.), *Living the End of Antiquity: individual histories from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt* (Berlin 2020) 119–28 (121). For Dioskoros, see *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67283 (547); *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67032 (551) and 67024–67025 (c. 551, rescript); J.-L. Fournet, ‘Des villageois en quête de lettres officielles: le cas des pétitionnaires d’Aphrodité (Égypte, VIe s. apr. J.-C.)’, in S. Procházka, L. Reinfandt, and S. Tost (eds.), *Official Epistolography and the Language(s) of*

Aphrodito and move to Antaiopolis to become a notary after being charged a large fee in gold by a local bishop. In this position, he prepared several petitions against the Antaiopolite pagarch Menas (discussed further below), claiming he had personally been responsible for damaging lands owned by Dioskoros' family and committing various acts of treachery against the people of Aphrodito.<sup>87</sup> While these petitions seem to have done little to damage Menas' reputation,<sup>88</sup> Dioskoros' role in the affair suggests he was held in high enough esteem locally to spearhead collective action within the community.<sup>89</sup> Dioskoros had returned to Aphrodito by 573, but seems to have died before 585, when Sophia is first attested to as *syntelestria*.

Sophia appears in the archive of Dioskoros as a taxpayer in several guises. In the 550s, there were several receipts issued for tax payments to Sophia in the name of her grandfather, Kornelios,<sup>90</sup> and another individual named Pbēkios (possibly a family member although that relationship remains uncertain).<sup>91</sup> In the three documents where she had the title *syntelestria*, she was leasing plots of land with no mention of her husband or any other male relative, including her son Petros. Perhaps more importantly, she appears to have been the first person in her natal family to hold this title.<sup>92</sup> While it is probable that she inherited this designation from her husband, she also inherited the social position it brought with it.

There is one other possible example of a *syntelestria* from the sixth century. In a lease agreement included within a marriage settlement between Rachel, daughter of Phoibammon, and Besarion in 566,<sup>93</sup> the text begins with an invocation of the title and appears to refer to Rachel.<sup>94</sup> Seeing that Rachel was unmarried, and that her

*Power* (Vienna 2015) 255–66; J.-L. Fournet, 'Les Égyptiens à la capitale ou Quand la papyrologie s'invite à Constantinople: édition comparée des *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67024-67025', *Travaux et Mémoires* 22 (2018) 595–633. For his first trip to Constantinople, see G.R. Ruffini, *Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt* (Cambridge 2008) 156–7, n. 60.

87 *P.Lond.* 5.1677 (ca. 568–570) and *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67002 (567). *P.Lond.* 5.1674 (c. 570) and *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67021 (ca. 567) record similar accusations against Menas.

88 M. Stern, 'Local magnates, but mobile: elite dynamics in Byzantine provinces', in Huebner et al. (eds.), *Living the End of Antiquity*, 33–47 (38–9).

89 See E. Buchanan, 'Rural collective action in Byzantine Egypt (400-700 CE)', in A. Nodar and S. Torallas Tovar (eds.), *Proceedings of the 28th International Congress of Papyrology* (Barcelona 2019) 591–9.

90 *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67325 III-VIII (ca. 550–560).

91 *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67325 VIIv, 8-9. Pbēkios is also known from a list of tax contributors within Dioskoros' archive, *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67288 IVr, 16. On making tax payments in another's name see M. Mirković, 'Count Ammonios and paying taxes in the name of somebody else in the Cadastre from Aphrodito', in T. Gagos (ed.), *Proceedings of the 25th International Congress of Papyrology* (Ann Arbor 2010) 565–72.

92 Ruffini, *Life in an Egyptian Village*, 150.

93 *P.Michael* 42a and b (566).

94 D.S. Crawford, *Papyri Michaelidae* (Aberdeen 1955) 86, 89. According to Ruffini, an unpublished papyrus at the British Library, P.Lond.inv. 2843, from 551, refers to a different Rachel with the title *syntelestria*. G.R. Ruffini, *A Prosopography of Byzantine Aphrodito* (Durham 2011) 523.

father did not bear the title in documents, her identification as a *syntelestria* is interesting and perhaps suggests that women were able to take on titles independent of inheritance, although this remains speculation. Regardless, there were many advantages to the village being able to collect and remit their own taxes to the provincial treasury, avoiding expenses that would have otherwise been paid to an outside official, and performing the functions imparted prestige on both the individual and the family. While the fiscal administration of the village of Aphrodito was outside the norm of Late Antique Egypt, women can be found performing similar functions in important urban centres.

From the sixth-century papyri of Oxyrhynchos and Antaiopolis, there are two intriguing instances in which women appear in the papyri as pagarchs.<sup>95</sup> The office of the pagarch was an innovation in the fiscal administration of Late Antique Egypt, established as part of the reforms undertaken by Anastasius I (r. 491–518) as the civil governance of Egypt weakened and was further consolidated under imperial control.<sup>96</sup> While there may have been some juridical obligations,<sup>97</sup> the primary function of the pagarch was fiscal, collecting the imperial taxes from the villages and estates within the territory of a city.<sup>98</sup> However, as generally the case in the previous centuries,<sup>99</sup> much of this work was probably delegated to others.<sup>100</sup> Appointment to the pagarchy was locally determined, independent of the provincial governor. Justinian's (r. 527–565) *Edict XIII* attempted to put an end to this; lamenting corruption in tax collection within Egypt, Justinian sought to reorganize its fiscal administration, including measures to punish incompetent or underperforming pagarchs, mitigating the autonomy of the Egyptian aristocracy and bringing them under imperial control.<sup>101</sup> Whatever effect this might have had was probably short-lived. As the central administration in Egypt continued to decline, the dominance of the provincial elites progressed nearly unchecked.<sup>102</sup> It is in this context that women are found performing administrative functions.

95 These figures are discussed in Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme* II, 8–13; all these women were styled Flavia. See J.G. Keenan, 'The name Flavius and Aurelius as status designations in later Roman Egypt', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 11 (1973) 33–63; continued by Keenan in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 13 (1974) 283–304 and 53 (1983) 245–50.

96 Liebeschuetz, 'Origin of the Office' and 'The pagarch: city and imperial. administration in Byzantine Egypt', *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 18 (1974) 163–8 (163); Mazza, 'Ricerche sul pagarca', 177–80, 199–201.

97 M. Stern, 'Der Pagarch und die Organisation des öffentlichen Sicherheitswesens im byzantinischen Ägypten', *Tyche: Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 30 (2015) 119–44.

98 Liebeschuetz, 'Origin of the office', 164.

99 Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 157–8.

100 The famous Apion family was assigned 'pagarchic responsibility' over several generations in the papyri, but the family themselves were largely based in Constantinople, managing their Egyptian properties and affairs through representatives. Stern, 'Local magnates', 35–6.

101 *Edict XIII*, premium and XIII.12, ed. R. Schoell and W. Kroll, III (Berlin 1895) 780, 786–7.

102 J. Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: gold, labour, and aristocratic dominance* (Oxford 2001) 100.



A draft agreement between the pagarchs of Antaiopolis and a third party to collect a portion of the taxes due from the village of Phthla, dated to *ca.* 553 and contained within the archive of Dioskoros, named the two pagarchs as Ioulianos and Patrikia,<sup>103</sup> who was addressed through her *dioikētēs* (fiscal official) Menas. It can therefore be assumed that until his own appointment as pagarch in 566,<sup>104</sup> references to Menas as pagarch in the documents were through his position as Patrikia's representative. The text's first editor presumed that the inclusion of Patrikia was a technicality, noting that 'as it is not very likely that a woman would be specially appointed pagarch it may well be the case that she held the office by succession to her father'.<sup>105</sup> This has been a frequent explanation of female office holders, but as Ruffini has noted this is based on an assumed lack of women's agency in Roman and Late Antique Egypt.<sup>106</sup> In the papyri, however, Patrikia clearly held social and political importance.

In the same draft agreement, Patrikia was also given the title of *endoxotatē*. Traditional Roman ranks – for example *clarissimus/lamprotatos*, *spectabilis/peribleptos*, and the highest grade, *illustris/illoustrios* – continued into the fourth century, but were reorganized over the course of the fifth century.<sup>107</sup> *Clarissimus/lamprotatos* began to function as a title and came to encompass everyone serving imperial functions, as well as their spouses and children, while the rank of *illustris/illoustrios* gave way to *gloriosissimus/lendoxatos* as the highest rank; one which, crucially, could be shared with spouses (though not with children).<sup>108</sup> As such, it was used for imperial office holders and those amongst the highest imperial senatorial ranks. In the context of Patrikia's pagarchy, it suggests recognition of service in her own right, and that it was Menas' role in the documents as her representative that might have been the technicality.<sup>109</sup>

Dioskoros' treatment of Patrikia in his writing is intriguing. Whereas Ioulianos and Menas were, as Ruffini notes, 'the chief villains in Dioskoros' complaints against regional authorities' in the 540s and 560s (right after Menas assumes the Antaiopolite pagarchy),<sup>110</sup> Patrikia was spared Dioskoros' ire. She served as pagarch alongside Ioulianos, who tried to rescind Aphrodito's *autopragia* several times, and appears to

103 *P.Lond.* 5.16606, 6–7. On the dating, see Ruffini, *Life in an Egyptian Village*, 161 n.53.

104 *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67002.

105 H.I. Bell (ed.), *Greek Papyri in the British Museum: Catalogue, with Texts vol. V* (London 1917) 22.

106 Ruffini, *Life in an Egyptian Village*, 162.

107 J. Haldon, 'The fate of the late Roman senatorial Elite: extinction or transformation', in J. Haldon and L.I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East VI: elites old and new* (Princeton 2004) 179–234, (187–90).

108 Haldon, 'Late Roman senatorial elite', 189; Whiting, 'Female patronage', 300.

109 Compare the examples in Whiting, 'Female patronage', though there may be regional variation.

110 Ruffini, *Life in an Egyptian Village*, 84. Ioulianos is the offending pagarch in Dioskoros' entreaty to Theodora (*P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67283) while Menas was accused of treachery in *P.Lond.* 5.1674 and 1677, and *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67002 and 67021.

have been at least partly responsible for Menas' promotion in the 560s.<sup>111</sup> But rather than attack her, Dioskoros went out of his way to compliment her; when she married an otherwise unknown man named Paulos in either 566 or 567, Dioskoros dedicated a poem to her praising not only her lineage but her wisdom (or skill, the term *noarōteran* is somewhat ambiguous).<sup>112</sup> How wise or skilled was she to have supported a figure such as Menas? Clearly the position of pagarch itself did not shield one from critique, or even outright hostility. The relationship between Patrikia and Dioskoros must therefore have been shaped by her own social prestige, and what Dioskoros thought she could do for him; he was certainly not above acting the sycophant in search of political advantage.<sup>113</sup> Her political position as a former pagarch with the capital to aid the elevation of her official made her, if not an ally for Dioskoros, at least a potential source of patronage and protection.<sup>114</sup> She certainly served such a role for Menas. But Antaiopolis is not the only place we find a female pagarch performing social patronage due to her position.

In Oxyrhynchos, a woman named Anastasia, a contemporary of the Apions and herself a landholder (although on a much smaller scale), appeared in several documents with the titles of *endoxotatē* and *illoustris*.<sup>115</sup> Valentinian I (r. 364–75) decreed that certain imperial positions would be granted the title *illustris/illoustrios*, and by the sixth century among those using the title were provincial fiscal officials.<sup>116</sup> *Illoustrios* appears in the Egyptian papyri for the first time in a land lease in the archive of Dioskoros, dated to 550, in which Ioulianos, the same individual sharing the pagarchy with Patrikia above, was described as *endoxotatos illoustrios kai pagarchos*.<sup>117</sup> We see the same titles in a papyrus that may (depending on its reconstruction) make explicit reference to Anastasia as pagarch;<sup>118</sup> a deed of surety from Apollos son of Phoibammon declaring that a member of the *coloni* would

111 Menas was not from the same stratum of the aristocracy as Patrikia and would have relied on relationships with those above him to advance his career: Banaji, *Agrarian Change*, 163.

112 *P.Aphrod.Lit.* 4.35, 15. For the meaning of *noarōteran*, see J.-L. Fournet, *Hellénisme dans l'Égypte du VIe siècle: la bibliothèque et l'œuvre de Dioscore d'Aphrodité II* (Cairo 1999) 636. Note that this date corresponds to the first of the documents related to Dioskoros' dispute with Menas.

113 Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 96–114.

114 Ruffini, *Life in an Egyptian Village*, 163.

115 T.M. Hickey and B.J. Haug, 'The dossier of Flavia Anastasia, Part One: document prescripts', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 48 (2011) 99–112. The full dossier remains to be published but may reveal further details of her titles and social standing.

116 Haldon, 'Late Roman senatorial elite', 187, 223.

117 *PSI* 4.283.

118 For the connection between the honorific *illoustrios* and the pagarchy, see J. Gascou, 'La Détention collégiale de l'autorité pagarchique dans l'Égypte byzantine', *Byzantion* 42 (1972) 60–72; N. Gonis et al. (eds.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Volume LXIX* (London 2005) 213 n.5. For the variety of titles found related to pagarchs, see Stern, 'Local magnates', 40 n. 42.

remain in their village, addressed to an *endoxotatē illoustria* in 588 and probably referring to Anastasia, mentions the period of the addressees pagarchy.<sup>119</sup>

As with Patrikia, Anastasia's public functions were represented through a *dioikētēs*, in this case another Phoibammon, named on the deed of surety.<sup>120</sup> In SB 6.9368, he also appeared on a receipt addressed to Anastasia for work conducted on a public bath issued by the attendant Victor; such public munificence has been suggested as an extension of the function of the pagarchy,<sup>121</sup> although Anastasia was not herself named as such in the fragmentary remains of the receipt. Still, the act of public munificence would have been a public declaration of position. Beaucamp largely dismissed the cases of Patrikia and Anastasia, noting the degree of separation between the women named and the invocation of the pagarch title, concluding that assumption of the pagarchy by women reflected obligations tied to estates with large landholdings (*munera patrimonalia*) with no real authority;<sup>122</sup> yet, as Bagnall noted, tying the aristocracy to financial obligation was the very point of these offices.<sup>123</sup>

The fact that women were able to assume these titles from the fifth century, something not seen in earlier periods, suggests that their presence is more than a mere technicality, even accounting for the changing relationships between the aristocracy and the civic administration. There is nothing in the documents themselves to indicate that the women were any more or less involved than their male counterparts when considering the conventions of men representing women in the legal sphere.<sup>124</sup> And women tax collectors may have had some historical precedent. In the year 187, a former tax farmer (*ascholeō*) in the Oxyrhynchite nome named Sarapias, daughter of Sarapion, was repaid a land-tax debt from when she actively held the role through her agent Tetoëus;<sup>125</sup> in 255, a woman named Usia Ptolemais collected the *annona militum* tax (she is identified as an *apaitētēs*) through a representative named Thonis.<sup>126</sup>

Both of these women were performing these duties before the changes to the administrative state put more of the financial onus on the large estates, and it seems probable they were selected for the role because 'they offered the state a greater

119 *P.Oxy.* 44.3204, 4. For the reconstruction of Anastasia's name, see Gascoü, 'Les grands domaines', 77. Her father is also described as *endoxotatos* in the same line, further indication that civic obligations had become tied to aristocratic households.

120 *P.Oxy.* 44.3204, 7.

121 Compare the case of Gabrielia in *P.Oxy.* 36.2780 (553), a receipt for a public bath attendant's salary in which Gabrielia bears the titles of *logistēs*, *proedros*, and *patēr tēs poleōs*.

122 Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme* II, 9–18.

123 R.S. Bagnall, 'Women, law, and social realities in Late Antiquity: a review article', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 32.1/2 (1995) 65–86 (71).

124 V. Vuolanto, 'Public agency of women in the later Roman world', in J. Rantala (ed.), *Gender, Memory, and Identity in the Roman World* (Amsterdam 2019) 41–62.

125 *SB* 18.13914, found in the Small Oasis; P.J. Sijpesteijn, 'A female tax collector', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 61 (1985) 71–3 (as *P.Mich.inv.* 3759).

126 *P.Princ.* 2.50, found in Oxyrhynchos. On Usia's Latin name, see P.J. Sijpesteijn, 'Another female tax collector', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 64 (1986) 121–2.

protection against loss of revenue'.<sup>127</sup> And yet they also acted through male agents. This can perhaps provide a model for Sophia, Patrikia, and Anastasia. Their economic capital, through their estates, made them financial protectors of the municipal finances and afforded them the opportunity to assume the pagarchy and associated obligations, enabling them to extend their social capital through both private (Sophia and Patrikia) and public (Anastasia) largesse. While the degree to which they were engaged with the functions of their titles is difficult to determine, indirect evidence would suggest that they were hardly passive actors.

## Conclusions

The accumulation and expression of social capital, in ways determined by both their economic and social status (*habitus*), allowed these women to exert agency between fields (as defined by Bourdieu) which at the time would have been traditionally male: religion (Tehat and Eirene), economy (Koloje and Katharon), and municipal politics (Sophia, Patrikia, and Anastasia). Tehat and Eirene used their munificence to further their social position through religious expression; Koloje and Katharon further embedded themselves in secular financial networks through small-scale lending and borrowing (and enabled other women to do so as well); and Sophia, Patrikia, and Anastasia each contributed to the self-governance and sustenance of their local communities through the offices they held. The cycle of social reproduction therefore gave these women the chance to exert agency within their social spheres and the wider patriarchal structures of society.

In her study of female munificence in the late Roman West, Emily Hemelrijk identified several factors which influenced women's expression of social capital through acts of benefaction, including the desire for public honour, local pride, religion, and pressures of familial traditions within hierarchies founded on social competition.<sup>128</sup> We see many of these same social mechanisms at play in Late Antique Egypt. While these individual cases cannot make an overall case for the social agency of women in general, they do illustrate that within certain contexts, women were using the tools available to them to negotiate their social place. I would suggest two additional factors based on the papyri here discussed: the importance of natal family and social cooperation.

On the first point (and with the possible exceptions of Sophia and Eirene), the intersection of family and social capital – founded on economic attainment – and the subsequent benefits/obligations this rendered seem to have been largely based not on marriage, but on birth. Even in Sophia's case, it was clear the position of her natal family gave her official standing outside of her marriage. The intersection of family

127 S.R. Llewelyn, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity Volume 8: A review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1984–1985* (Grand Rapids 1997) 48.

128 E.A. Hemelrijk, 'Female munificence in the cities of the Latin West', in Hemelrijk and G. Woolf (eds.), *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West* (Leiden 2013) 65–84 (77).

and status also affected how social capital could be built and expressed; the women who were business owners prospered outside their expected roles within a family business, while the title-holders were only eligible because of the expectation of their familial ties (also true for men). Yet it was the ability of these women to exert their social capital that enabled them not only to achieve inclusion but to take on positions that afforded them public agency. When it comes to social cooperation, the most obvious instance would be Koloje, assisting women in wielding a certain level of economic autonomy. But we can see elements of this for several of the other cases as well. Both Tehat and Eirene were serving communal functions through their interactions with the elect, and Sophia's role would have been instrumental in maintaining Aphrodito's independence. Anastasia's support of the public baths was likely tied to her title but was no less for the benefit of the local community. The public cooperative nature of their social capital expressions thus served to reinforce their position within the social hierarchy in a cycle of capital building.<sup>129</sup>

The basis of this cycle for each group of women, however, was economic capital: wealth-accumulation gave these women the ability to manoeuvre within the constraints of their social contexts. A corollary would be to consider how social status and capital dictated legal representation in the documents through both male and female actors, perhaps an avenue for future micro-historical studies of women and their lived realities through the papyri.<sup>130</sup> But in the examples of Tehat, Eirene, Koloje, Katharon, Sophia, Patrikia, and Anastasia, we see women simultaneously negotiating the patriarchal system in which they functioned while also defying the narrative subordination of agency in which men perhaps thought they should exist.

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129 Compare male displays of competition: see n. 24.

130 See Bagnall, 'A century of women's history', 121–2.