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Communication between the Prefect of Egypt, the Procurators and the Nome Officials

Until very recently this was a subject which had scarcely been discussed, despite the mass of papyrological evidence which exists. In 1989, however, Professor Eck published a discussion on 'Die administrative Informationsstruktur' during the first three centuries of the Empire, which included several valuable comments on communication within Egypt¹; and in 1993 Mrs Strassi published a very useful article dealing with precisely this topic². She makes it clear that her remarks only deal partially with the subject and that there remains a great deal more work which could be done. In what follows I have attempted to add to what Mrs Strassi wrote and in some ways to try and approach the topic from a different standpoint, but in general what I have to say is to be understood merely as complementing what Mrs Strassi has already said. Furthermore, like her, I do not claim to be producing a comprehensive study of this subject; my remarks are no more than a preliminary to such a study. The only way to produce such a comprehensive study would be to take into account *all* papyri from the Roman period – a vast undertaking. Even were this done, there is no guarantee that the material collected would give us answers to the questions we should like to pose. Indeed, it is my impression that the evidence is such that it tells us directly very little about methods of communication within Egypt.

The problem we must seek to address is the means by which the central administration, the prefect and the procurators, communicated their instructions to the nome officials, above all the strategoi. Before we proceed further there is one general introductory point which needs to be stressed. The spread of the evidence with which we shall be concerned is very uneven, both in time and space. The unevenness of the evidence in space is only too well known. Very few papyri survive from the Delta so that hardly anything is known of the administration in Lower Egypt; in addition not many papyri of the Roman period which are relevant for

¹ *Werner Eck*, Zur Durchsetzung von Anordnungen und Entscheidungen in der hohen Kaiserzeit: Die administrative Informationsstruktur, in: *Giornate pisane. Atti del IX Congresso della F.I.E.C.* 24–30 Agosto 1989. II = *StIt* 85 = 3a s., 10 (1992) 915–939, esp. 931–936.

² *Silvia Strassi*, Problemi relativi alla Diffusione delle Disposizioni amministrative nell'Egitto romano, in: *ZPE* 96 (1993) 89–107. Cf. also *eadem* in: *Proceedings of the 20th International Congress of Papyrology*, 23–29 August 1992 (Copenhagen 1994) 504–507.

our purposes have survived from the Thebaid. Our picture is almost wholly confined to Middle Egypt, since this area embraced the Arsinoite, Oxyrhynchite and Hermopolite nomes, which between them account for almost all the papyrological evidence which has survived from the Roman period. The unevenness of the spread of evidence in time is perhaps less well appreciated. Although many papyri survive from the first century of Roman rule, it is a curious and regrettable fact that scarcely any of them tell us anything about the administration of the country. The picture we have of the administration does not really begin before the reign of Trajan, although thereafter the evidence is fairly substantial until the end of the third century. What I have to say, therefore, relates essentially to the second and third centuries AD.

The prefect was based in Alexandria, as were most of the Roman procurators, in particular the *iuridicus* (δικαιοδότης), the *dioiketes* and the official in charge of the ἴδιος λόγος. The strategoi, on the other hand, were based in the metropoleis of the nomes. At the time in which we are interested, there were probably some fifty nomes throughout Egypt, about half of them in the Delta and most of the rest along the Nile valley. Special mention needs to be made of the epistrategoi, since they were unlike the other procurators in that they were responsible for a section of Egypt only, not for the whole country. During the Roman period their number increased first to three and, probably, later to four³. The one of whom we hear most is the epistrategos of the Heptanomia, since he was responsible for Middle Egypt.

There must of course have been considerable communication between the prefect's office and the offices of the other procurators based in Alexandria. But we should hardly expect to hear anything of this, in view of the nature of our evidence, and to the best of my knowledge we do not have any relevant evidence. It might be thought that we should be likely to have evidence for communication between the Alexandrian-based officials and the epistrategoi, since the epistrategoi did not reside in Alexandria but within the area of Egypt for which they were responsible. Thus the epistrategos of the Heptanomia is likely to have resided at Antinoopolis (once the city had been founded), which was the only true πόλις in his area, although Hermopolis, the largest town, is certainly another possibility⁴; and numerous papyri do indeed survive from both Hermopolis and Antinoopolis. But we do not have the records of the epistrategos' office or anything resembling them. Proof that communication between prefect and epistrategos did take place is to be found in a papyrus of AD 154 (BGU II 372 = W.Chr. 19). This contains an edict of the prefect ordering persons away from their officially recognised abode, their *idia*, to return home forthwith. The prefect says (lines II 5–6) that he has communicated this information to τοῖς κρατίστοις ἐπιωτρατήγοις καὶ τοῖς σ[τ]ρατηγοῖς and to the soldiers he has sent into the nomes to carry out his orders.

³ See J. David Thomas, *The epistrategos in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt*, Part 2: *The Roman epistrategos* (Opladen 1982) Chapter 3 (henceforth cited as *Thomas*, *Roman epistrategos*).

⁴ See *Thomas*, *Roman epistrategos*, Chapter 6.

Furthermore, there is one surviving example of a copy of a letter from the prefect to the epistrategos of the Heptanomia, P. Oxy. XLVII 3341, which dates from the first decade of the third century; but to the best of my knowledge it is the sole surviving document of its type and the content is almost wholly lost.

Before we discuss *written* communication between prefect and procurators with the nome-based officials we ought to recognise that communication could also take place through personal contact. What I mean by 'personal contact' is this: the prefect, as is well known, travelled through the districts in Egypt every year to conduct a *conventus*. In addition he made regular inspection trips throughout the nomes. On such trips he would of course meet the nome officials in the various metropoleis; and we can be sure that all the strategoi, together with the appropriate epistrategos, would be required to be present at the *conventus* for the relevant districts. The most interesting document I know of which relates to this problem is P. Oxy. XVIII 2182, a letter from the strategos of part of the Arsinoite nome to the acting-strategos of the Oxyrhynchite, which dates from AD 165. The letter starts εἰ παρῆς τοῦ λαμπροτάτου ἡγεμόνος ἀπειλουμένου τοῖς στρατηγοῖς περὶ τῆς τοῦ σείτου κατακομιδῆς, 'If you were present when the prefect threatened the strategoi concerning the transport downriver of the grain'⁵. The letter is dated 24 Pharmuthi = 19 April and the most natural interpretation of the words quoted is that they refer to the previous *conventus* (according to Wilcken's careful analysis the *conventus* for the Heptanomia took place between late January and mid April)⁶. We may compare the recently published P. L. Bat. XXV 41, from an unknown high official to the strategoi of the Arsinoite: the writer contrasts orders he has given δι' ὑπομνημάτων with those given δι' ἐπιστολῆς, presumably meaning by the former expression orders pronounced verbally, probably at the *conventus*, and noted in the minutes. Later on in P. Oxy. 2182 (lines 17–19) the writer returns to the point I referred to just now: καὶ διὰ γραμμάτων πολλάκις καθολικῶς καὶ κατ' ὄψιν τοῖς στρατηγοῖς τὸν ἡγεμόνα ἡπειληκέναι, words which are slightly misinterpreted by the editors. The correct translation has been supplied by Katzoff, who rightly points out that the contrast is not between καθολικῶς and κατ' ὄψιν but between διὰ γραμμάτων and κατ' ὄψιν, so that the meaning is 'both in frequent letters of general circulation and in person'⁷. These 'letters of general circulation' are one of main things we need to discuss in this paper.

⁵ This form of words ('if you were present') is no doubt used because the writer is sending his letter to an acting-strategos who may not have yet been in office at the time the threat was issued.

⁶ See Archiv 4 (1908) 415–420; also *Giuliana Foti Talamanca*, *Ricerche sul Processo nell'Egitto greco-romano I: L'organizzazione del 'Conventus' del 'Praefectus Aegypti'* (Milano 1974) 52–78.

⁷ The editors translate 'both generally and individually to the strategi by means of letters'; see *Ranon Katzoff*, in: *Studies in Roman Law in Memory of A. Arthur Schiller* (Leiden 1986) 124.

Direct communication in person was of course only a small part of contact between the Alexandrian-based high officials and the nome strategoi. Orders, reports, etc. must have been communicated for the most part in writing, whether from Alexandria to the nome capitals or vice versa. There must have been a huge amount of such material, although not a great deal of it seems to have survived or rather what has survived tells us little or nothing about the means whereby it was transmitted. Our best evidence in fact lies outside the Roman period⁸; I am referring to the two Beatty Panopolis papyri, P. Beatty Panop. 1 and 2, which date from the reign of Diocletian, AD 298 and 300 respectively. By then the organisation had changed: the prefect no longer controlled the southern part of Egypt, which was under its own *praeses*, the *praeses Thebaidos*; and the Thebaid was divided into an Upper and a Lower section each under its own procurator. So the large register of correspondence addressed to the strategos of the Panopolite nome preserved in the second of the two Beatty Panopolis papyri all comes from the procurator of the Lower Thebaid. I cannot believe, however, that the pattern of communication had changed significantly and I regard it as legitimate to use the evidence of these papyri to illuminate the situation in the Roman period. A close parallel to P. Beatty Panop. 2 is P. Oxy. XIX 2228, although that too may come from the reign of Diocletian. It is dated simply to a year 2, which could be as late as AD 285, but year 2 of the previous reign (AD 283) or an even earlier date cannot be excluded⁹. In addition we do not know the official position held by the sender, Aurelius Mercurius. A few other papyri from the Roman period may be parts of official registers of correspondence, but are either so uncertain or so fragmentary as to be of no real help for our present purposes¹⁰.

In the Roman period communications from the prefect or one of the procurators to strategoi of the nomes, including communications from epistrategoi, can, with a few exceptions, be divided into two broad categories: those addressed to a strategos of a single nome, and those addressed to strategoi of several nomes¹¹. The former category is certainly the larger of the two; but its evidence is usually unlikely to help us much with the questions with which we are here concerned, and I have made no attempt to examine all documents which fall into this category. What I have attempted to do is to take into consideration all documents in the second category, those in which a communication is addressed to the strategoi

⁸ Throughout I use the term 'Roman period' in the way in which it has traditionally been used by papyrologists, that is to say of the period from the Roman conquest of Egypt up to the accession of Diocletian.

⁹ The editors (note to line 32) suggest either 283 or, less probably, 285 because of the prices mentioned in the papyrus. This is perhaps insufficient reason to exclude the second year of a reign somewhat earlier in the third century.

¹⁰ BGU I 8 and P. Achmim 8 are the most substantial; cf. also P. Oslo III 82, P. Oxy. XX 2285 recto, P. Phil. 4, P. Prag. II 122 and 123, PSI VII 792. P. Amh. II 137 and PSI X 1125, which both date from the reign of Diocletian, also belong in this category.

¹¹ It is unusual to come across a letter addressed to strategoi of just two or three (named) nomes; there does, however, seem to be an example of this in P. Bub. I 1, col. V; cf. also P. Oxy. 2184 and 4069 referred to in note 13 below.

of several nomes. Again, these can be subdivided into two types: (1) those addressed to all the strategoi of a particular area of Egypt, usually the Heptanomia; and (2) those addressed to strategoi of a number of nomes which are 'listed below' (ὑπογεγραμμένοι). Special mention should be made of P. Oxy. LV 3781. In this papyrus the words describing the addressees are badly damaged, but it seems almost certain, as the editor says, that the scribe first put an abbreviated form of στρατηγοῖς Ἰ Νομῶν, i.e. he assumed that the letter was being sent to all strategoi of the Heptanomia (and only to these strategoi); he then deleted the zeta and corrected it to τῶν ὑπογεγραμμένων (again abbreviated), i.e. he realised that the communication was not going simply to all strategoi of the Heptanomia but either to more or to fewer strategoi¹².

Before we proceed further a brief word is in order on the diplomatic form of these communications. In virtually all cases the prefect or the procurator gave simply his name, gentilicium and cognomen only, followed by στρατηγοῖς (with or without the addition of the royal scribes, called either βασιλικοῖς or βασιλικῶς γραμματεῦσι – the inclusion or omission of γραμματεῦσι seems to be without significance); there then followed either the description of the area concerned, e.g. Ἑπτὰ Νομῶν καὶ Ἀρσινόιτου, or alternatively τῶν ὑπογεγραμμένων νομῶν. Since these are ἐπιστολαί, the writer includes χαίρειν and a greeting at the end; this is usually ἐρῶσθαι ὑμᾶς εὐχομαι, though prefects often use βούλομαι instead of εὐχομαι. From the Roman period I have noted some 8 or 9 examples of the second type, i.e. using the expression τῶν ὑπογεγραμμένων νομῶν¹³, as against 17 which are addressed to strategoi of a specified area¹⁴. Of these 17, 11 are certainly from the prefect; but only two or three of the former type, those addressed to strategoi of τῶν ὑπογεγραμμένων νομῶν, are known to be from the prefect. It may well be, however, that the number from the prefect is slightly higher in both categories. Since the sender never included his title, we often cannot be sure of his office. In the case of prefects we usually know because we know his name, but even here there can be doubts; and in the case of procurators there are numerous examples where the office of the writer is uncertain. P. Oxy. 2228, to which I have already alluded, shows this problem most clearly: we simply do not know the office held by the writer – prefect, epistrategos, dioiketes and katholikos,

¹² In the republication as no. 29 I in P. W. Pestman, *The New Papyrological Primer*², the explanation of line 2 given in the note ad loc. to P. Oxy. 3781, has been incorporated into the text.

¹³ BGU XIII 2211, P. Iand. VII 140, P. Oxy. III 474, XIX 2228, XLII 3029, LV 3781, SB XIV 11612, Archiv IV 122 = SB XVIII 13175, and (probably) P. Prag. II 122; cf. also P. Oxy. XVIII 2184 (strategoi and royal scribes of νομῶν τινῶν) and P. Oxy. LX 4069 (a letter sent to ἡμεῖς τε καὶ στρ(ατηγοῖς) ἑτέρων νομῶ[v].

¹⁴ BGU I 8 II = W. Chr. 170, 15 II, II 484, 646 = W. Chr. 490, P. Aberd. 16, P. Berl. Zill. 3, P. Oxy. VIII 1100, IX 1185, XII 1408, 1409, XX 2265, XXXIV 2705, XLVII 3364, PSI X 1148 (PSI Corr. I) = SB XIV 11935, P. Würzb. 9, SB XIV 11342, 11651; similar are P. Amh. II 137 and P. Oxy. I 58 = W. Chr. 378 from the reign of Diocletian.

have all been suggested¹⁵. Particularly interesting is the letter from Claudius Herennianus to the strategoi of the Heptanomia, P. Oxy. XXXIV 2705 (c.AD 225): the writer was so concerned to make sure that the recipients knew his official position (he was in fact a *iuridicus* serving as acting-prefect) that he added at the end [τ]αῦτα γράφω διέ[π]ω[ν τ]ὰ '[κα]τὰ τ[ῆ]ν ἡγεμονίαν ἐκ θείας κελεύσεω[ς].

What we should like to know in respect of the two categories referred to above is whether a communication intended for all the nomes of the Heptanomia, for example, was sent out in a single copy from Alexandria, to be copied out in the office of each strategos when he received it; or whether the letter-carrier took with him sufficient copies to supply all the nomes to which he was making a delivery. The latter seems more likely, and it is perhaps suggested by the evidence of BGU I 15 II and II 484: in these texts we have circular letters from the prefect to the strategoi of the Heptanomia, but in each case one nome is specifically excluded from the list¹⁶. Would it be legitimate to argue that these texts imply that the scribes in the prefect's office in Alexandria needed this instruction so that they would know how many copies of the letter to make? An alternative explanation could be that the letter-carriers needed to know which strategoi they could miss out when making their deliveries.

We should also like to know whether the letter-carrier went by a fixed route or not. Did he, for example, proceed straight to Antinoopolis with a single copy of a letter from the prefect, which was copied out there and thence distributed to all the nomes in the epistrategia? These are questions to which, so far as I can see, the papyri give us no clear answer, especially as communications intended for strategoi of all the nomes in a specific area never mention the individual nomes for which they are intended¹⁷. This is understandable: it was obvious from an address such as 'to the strategoi of the Seven Nomes and the Arsinoite' precisely who was to receive a copy of the communication. It does, however, seem to me most unlikely that a messenger coming from Alexandria with, say, a prefectorial letter, would proceed first to Antinoopolis, which lay towards the southern end of the Heptanomia. He would surely deliver first to the first relevant nome which he came to, in this case the Letopolite¹⁸. Either he would then go on to each of the remaining nomes and deliver a copy, which assumes that he left Alexandria with an

¹⁵ The editors assumed the prefect, but see *Alan Bowman*, *BASP* 6 (1969) 35–40, *Thomas*, *Roman epistrategos* 168–169, and *Dieter Hagedorn*, *YCS* 28 (1985) 209–210.

¹⁶ BGU 15 II is addressed to στρ(ατηγοῖς) Ἑπτὰ Νομῶν καὶ Ἀρσινόιτου χωρὶς Αὐάσεως and BGU 484 to στρ(ατηγοῖς) καὶ βασιλ(ικοῖς) ἐπιστρ(ατηγίας) Ζ Νομῶν καὶ Ἀρσινό(ι)του χωρ[ις] Ἡ[ρα]κλεοπολ(ίτου); in the latter case the Heracleopolite is excluded because the prefect is sending to the strategoi of the rest of Heptanomia a copy of a letter which he has already sent to the strategos of the Heracleopolite.

¹⁷ The only exception to this rule which I have noted is P. Beatty Panop. 2.1–10; it appears that this letter was addressed to all nomes of the Lower Thebaid, and yet the names of the nomes were specifically mentioned at the end of the letter (contrary to the practice elsewhere in this papyrus).

¹⁸ For the Letopolite as a nome administratively in the Heptanomia and not in the Delta see *Thomas*, *Roman epistrategos* 24–25; see further below.

appropriate number of copies, or he took only one copy which it was the responsibility of each strategos to copy out and then pass on to the next nome.

There seems to me to be no way of proving what actually happened, but the evidence of P.Beatty Panop. 2 does suggest there was a regular route by which the post travelled. Of communications from the procurator of the Lower Thebaid sent to the strategos of the Panopolite nome several are specifically said to have reached him via the strategos of the Antaeopolite nome, the nome immediately north of the Panopolite; see, e.g., line 43, ἄλλων δύο [sc. ἐπιστολῶν] κοινοθεισῶν ἀπὸ διαπομπῆς στρατηγοῦ Ἀνταιοπολ(ίτου)¹⁹. This makes good sense, since the residence of the procurator, whether it was at Antinoopolis or Hermopolis at this period²⁰, lay to the north, further down the Nile from Panopolis. Something similar may have been the case in P.Oxy. XIX 2228: in line 5, at the start of a new entry, the editor suggests ἀπὸ(?)] τοῦ Ἀρσινοίτου. I wonder whether we should rather read στρατηγῶν Ἀρσινοίτου, with either just διὰ to precede, or, as in P.Beatty Panop., ἀπὸ διαπομπῆς, i.e. the letter has been sent on to the recipient, the strategos of the Oxyrhynchite nome, by the strategos of the Arsinoite. If so, does this imply that this was the normal route for communications reaching the Oxyrhynchite? Although it is not the most obvious route geographically, it is quite conceivable that a messenger would have travelled in this direction, perhaps along the Bahr Yusuf. In P.Beatty Panop. 2, however, we do hear of one letter delivered to the strategos of the Panopolite via a different route, namely via the strategos of the Thinite, which lay to the south of Panopolis (line 27). If we can ignore this as perhaps just an accident (how often does post go astray these days?), we can deduce that there was a regular route for delivery of communications, which proceeded south along the Nile valley²¹.

There is one route for communication which we can in normal circumstances rule out, or so it seems: communication via the epistrategoi. One might well have expected the prefect and the Alexandrian-based procurators to have sent their letters to the nome strategoi for a particular epistrategia via the relevant epistrategos. It seems clear that this did not normally happen. Letters from prefects and procurators are addressed to the relevant strategoi and presumably were delivered to them directly. Only in one case is there evidence for the intervention of the epistrategos: P. Iand VII 140 of AD 151. This papyrus consists of a proclamation by the strategos that he is publicly displaying an edict of the prefect concerning the citizens of Antinoopolis; he states that he has received the edict appended to a covering letter from the epistrategos. The covering letter is also to be publicly displayed and so forms part of the strategos' proclamation. The letter begins (lines 7–9) [Ἐρέννιος Φιλώτας στρατηγοῖς τῶν ὑπογεγραμμένων νομῶν χαίρειν. τοῦ πεμφθέντος μοι ὑπὸ τοῦ λαμπροτάτου ἡγεμόνος περὶ τῶν Ἀντιγό[ω]ν

¹⁹ In view of this and similar entries in P.Beatty Panop. 2 we can now confidently assert that P.Oxy. XIX 2228.26 had such an entry, restoring ἄλλων β [κομ]ισθ(εῖσῶν) δι(ά) [.

²⁰ See Skeat's discussion in the introduction to P.Beatty Panop, pp. xix–xx.

²¹ Cf. the editor's note ad loc.

[διατάγματος τὸ ἀντίγραφον ὑ]πέταξα. A good deal of the text is restored, but it was well edited by Curschmann and his supplements are mostly convincing. It is, however, perhaps worth pointing out that, while the restoration in line 7 is certain and that proposed for lines 8–9 must give the approximate sense, the actual wording may well have been different; in particular the words τοῦ πεμφθέντος μοι are restored in line 8, so that the text as it survives does not actually prove that the prefect sent his edict first to the epistrategos. The diplomatic of the letter of the epistrategos is normal, that is to say he uses his name but no title and includes χαίρειν at the start; he therefore ends his letter with a greeting (in line 11). What is remarkable is that the strategos goes on to repeat the list of nomes in his proclamation; one would not have expected him to have copied out this part of the epistrategos' letter since it presumably had no relevance for the inhabitants of his section of the Arsinoite nome for whom the proclamation was intended. After the nome list there follows the prefect's edict, only very poorly preserved. Why the epistrategos was involved in this particular instance, contrary to the normal practice, is unknown²². Possibly it was because the edict concerned the citizens of Antinopolis, who were in some ways the special responsibility of the epistrategos of the Heptanomia²³. At any rate this text is so far unique. And yet we cannot believe that the prefect would regularly send instructions to the nome strategoi without at the same time informing the relevant epistrategos²⁴.

Probably the most interesting papyrus in this connection from the Roman period is P. Rylands II 78 of AD 157. A good deal of its first column is lost so that it is not clear what exactly is happening. But it is certain that what we have is part of a long letter to a strategos of a nome in the Delta, referring to a series of communications. The first part of the papyrus lists entries in the dative, which appear to record the addressees of these communications, together with a brief description of the content of the communication; it is remarkable that the first name preserved is that of a prefect (line 3). In line 17 the writer states διεπεμψάμην κατὰ [τ]ὸ ἔθος. It is noteworthy that the verb is the same as that used in P. Beatty Panop. 1.45, where the strategos says of a batch of letters τὰς μὲν δι[ε]πεμψ[α]μην τὰς δὲ κατέχω παρ' ἐμαυτῶ²⁵. In the introduction to the Rylands text the editor remarks that the words just quoted imply that the passing on „of such packets of letters from one official to the other was a customary proceeding“; this is surely right and so gives a clear indication that this was a regular occurrence. Unfortunately we do not know where the writer was based nor even his official position.

²² It is rather different that in P. Oxy. XVIII 2182 the epistrategos backs up in writing instructions already given verbally to the strategoi by the prefect (cf. lines 11 and 27); cf. SB XIV 11651.

²³ Cf. *Thomas*, Roman epistrategos 103–109; see also *Strassi*, (op.cit. in n. 2), n. 13 on p. 96.

²⁴ It is possible that this could happen in matters of taxation, in which the epistrategos was not normally and perhaps not ever concerned (cf. *Thomas*, Roman epistrategos 164–171); but it is inconceivable that it could be the normal practice for the prefect to ignore the epistrategos in matters which would certainly have concerned him.

²⁵ Cf. the use of the noun διαπομπή in P. Beatty Panop. 2.43 (quoted above).

I have little doubt that he was strategos of a neighbouring nome. The text has a second section of special interest for us (lines 17–25). The addressee has complained that he had failed to receive a bundle of letters and the writer says in reply: 'The packet of letters ... I gave ... to the overseer at the *statio* of Basilios, where I conjecture that the packet has remained, since there was no letter-carrier there from your nome to deliver it to you'²⁶. This papyrus, then, is good evidence for some sort of regular postal service for official correspondence in the middle of the second century, apparently using regular *stationes*, and for the existence of ἐπιστολαφόροι 'letter-carriers'²⁷. The only text known to me which is at all comparable is P.L.Bat. XXV 49, which unfortunately is too fragmentary to take the discussion any further.

We might hope for more enlightenment from communications of the second type mentioned above, those sent to strategoi τῶν ὑπογεγραμμένων νομῶν. These ought all, of course, to list the relevant nomes; but the texts are usually only very fragmentarily preserved, so that the list of nomes is either only partially preserved or lost altogether. Sometimes we cannot be sure whether the list was included at all, or whether it was omitted in the copy we possess. Again, our best evidence comes from the Beatty Panopolis papyri. It might seem at first sight that the list in P. Iand. 140, which follows the copy of the epistrategos' letter, would be more helpful, but a good deal of the list is restored²⁸. I have argued elsewhere that the editor was perhaps mistaken to start the list with the Hermopolite and that the nome to be supplied is more likely to have been the Letopolite²⁹. The point unfortunately is crucial and cannot be settled: if Ἑρμοπολίτου is right, this would imply that the letter went first to Hermopolis, perhaps because the epistrategos was resident there; if Λητοπολίτου is right, it strongly suggests that the nomes were listed in an order running from north to south. Support for my suggestion of the Letopolite can be found in an Oxyrhynchos papyrus published in 1988 (P. Oxy. LV 3781 of AD 117), which lists at the foot of a prefectorial letter the nomes to which it is to be sent and which begins with the Letopolite; there follow the Memphite, Arsinoite (restored), Aphroditopolite, Heracleopolite, Oxyrhynchite, Small Oasis, Cynopolite and (probably) Hermopolite, before the papyrus breaks off³⁰. P. Oxy. 3781 and P. Iand. 140 are the only texts from the Roman period addressed to strategoi of 'the undermentioned nomes' in which substantial

²⁶ ὃν δὲ λέγεις [μὴ κομίσασθαι ἀπόδε]σμον ἐπιστολῶν προπεμφθέντα ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ... ἔδω(κα) ... τῷ εἰς τὴν Β[α]σιλίου στατίωνα ἐπιτηρητῇ, παρ' ᾧ στοχάζομαι αὐτὸν μεμενηκέναι μὴ ὄντος ἐκεῖ τινος ἐπιστολαφόρου ἐκ τοῦ ὑπὸ σοὶ νομοῦ τοῦ δι[α]κρο[μ]ιροῦντός σοι αὐτὸν κατὰ τὰ κελευσθέντα.

²⁷ For the ἐπιστολαφόροι see below.

²⁸ The editor restores the date at the start of line 12 (correctly) and then the following list: Ἑρμοπολείτου Μ[ε]μφε[ί]του Ἀφροδείτο[πολείτου] Ἡρακλε[ο]π[ολείτου] Ὀξύρυγχ[ε]ίτου Ὡάσ[ε]ω[ς] Ἀρσι(νοείτου) Κυνοπ[ολείτου].

²⁹ In Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Papyrology (Toronto 1970) 466–468.

³⁰ Cf. also SB XIV 11620, a list of nomes beginning with the Letopolite and continuing with the Memphite and other nomes of Middle Egypt.

lists of nomes are preserved. No other document in this category from this period is of much use for our purpose³¹.

Of the very few relevant papyri which are not addressed either to a single strategos or to a group of strategoi as I have defined it, the most interesting is P. Flor. II 278 (= ChLA XXV 779), a collection of letters of a military nature addressed to strategoi of a number of nomes in the Delta and Middle Egypt; the date is the early third century. The papyrus as it survives contains portions of 22 letters, of which 12 concern us here. They are all to do with the supply of camels and each is addressed to a different strategos. As the number to be supplied normally varies slightly, most letters are written out in full; but where the content is exactly the same as the previous letter, we get only the title of the addressee together with that of the person delivering it (always a military officer in this text), plus the words τῷ αὐτῷ τύπῳ καὶ χρόνῳ. It is noteworthy that the same messenger can deliver letters to more than one nome³². Unfortunately there is nothing else comparable surviving from the Roman period. The nearest parallel I have noticed is P. Oxy. XLVII 3343 of the early third century, which contains copies of two apparently identical letters, insofar as both survive, sent by the prefect to two different strategoi (of the Prosopite nome and of the Oxyrhynchite respectively). It has the column number 26 at the head and so came from an extensive roll. These examples are, however, very unusual; communications are usually addressed either to one specific, named strategos, or to a group of strategoi. One of the Beatty Panopolis papyri does provide something of a parallel from the Diocletianic period for the pattern to be seen in the Florentine text: numerous letters in P. Beatty Panop. 1 do not record the full wording but merely say of the content τῷ αὐτῷ τύπῳ καὶ χρόνῳ (see lines 279–331). These are all letters to liturgical officials from the strategos, and indeed the whole papyrus is a record of outgoing correspondence from the strategos. Presumably the Florentine papyrus also consists of copies of letters kept in the office of the person who was sending them out. We do not know what office he held, although it cannot have been that of prefect or epistrategos³³.

P. Iand. 140 has one other feature of interest for our purposes. In line 9 the epistrategos says he is attaching a copy of the prefect's edict ἵν' ἕκαστος ἐγλαβὼν αὐτὸ δη[μ]οσίᾳ ... [προθῇ]. Curschmann translates 'damit jeder ihn abschreiben und öffentlich ... anschlagen lasse', which is no doubt the correct idea: ἐγλαβὼν αὐτό means, I think, that the epistrategos is expecting each strategos to take a copy of the edict. There are several occurrences in the papyri of the verb ἐκλαμβάνω referring to copying something from a register, though usually with the additional idea of making an extract from a longer document³⁴; e.g. in P. Oxy.

³¹ Only small sections of the lists remain in BGU 2211 and P. Oxy. 3029; in the other texts (cf. n. 13 above) the lists are either lost or were never included.

³² Thus letters VI, VII, IX and X are delivered to 4 different nomes by the same *ordinatus*.

³³ Since both these officials are referred to in the letters.

³⁴ See the note to P. Köln III 162.6–7: „ἐκλαμβάνω in der Bedeutung ‚eine Abschrift nehmen‘ impliziert die Vorstellung, daß dabei ein Auszug aus einem größeren Zusammenhang gemacht wird“.

XLIII 3099.ii.12–13 an applicant to join the gerousia says he is appending his accreditation ἐγλαβὼν ἐκ τῆς ἐπὶ τόπων δημοσίας βιβλιοθήκης); similarly an applicant for the corn dole speaks of ἀντίγραφον ἐγλαβὼν ἐκ τῆς ἐπὶ τόπων βιβλιοθήκης, which is explicit (P. Oxy. XL 2919). The usage in P. Yale I 61 is similar: the strategos reports an order from the prefect that copies of petitions sent to him together with his *subscriptiones* are to be posted for three days in Arsinoe ἵνα οἱ βουλό[υ]μενοι τὰ διαφέροντα ἑαυτοῖς ἐκλαβὴν δύνωνται, so that anyone who wants can make a copy of those which concern him'. In P. Iand. 140, however, it seems fair to claim that the meaning must be simply 'making a copy', with no idea of copying out a mere extract. Can we argue from this that the epistrategos sent only one copy of the edict with his letter, presumably to the strategos mentioned first on his list, and that this strategos was expected to take a copy and then pass the letter with the edict on to the next one on the list? It would seem to be a cumbersome way to proceed. There is nevertheless some evidence for a similar thing happening at a lower level. In P. Oxy. XII 1409 of AD 278 the strategos of the Oxyrhynchite nome refers to a letter from the dioiketes sent in common (εἰς κοινόν) to the strategoi and dekaprotoi of the Heptanomia. He is passing on the letter to the dekaprotoi in his nome; obviously, as we should have expected, the letter has been sent only to the strategos and it was his job to see that it went on to the other addressees in his nome, the dekaprotoi. This he is here doing, instructing the dekaprotoi (lines 4–5) ὅς δ' ἂν πρότερος ὑμῶν κομίσῃται ... τοῖς [λοιπ]οῖς μεταδότω. In other words it is clear that the strategos sent out only one copy which was to be passed on from one recipient to the next. It is doubtful, however, whether we can argue by analogy that a similar practice will have prevailed in the case of letters going to strategoi of different nomes; and this papyrus does not tell the dekaprotoi to take a copy – it only tells them to read the instructions and pass them on.

Communication was of course a two-way process. There must have been a mass of documentation proceeding from the nomes to official departments in Alexandria. There are numerous references to monthly reports of this kind, and some tax-reports, for example, were apparently required to be submitted as often as every five days. A list of reports which needed to be submitted is to be found in the fragmentarily preserved P. Heid. IV 310 (second century), though it is not entirely clear from the papyrus whether these reports were to go simply to the nome officials from the village officials, or whether they were destined to be sent to the central officials in Alexandria. We do, however, know of a liturgy for the conveying of records to Alexandria to be deposited at the office of the *idios logos* and/or of the *eklogistes*³⁵; and in a Leipzig papyrus (P. Lips. 123 of AD 136) officials in charge of archives at Alexandria acknowledge receipt from a strategos of four rolls of his reports covering a period of three to four months. We also hear in two Oxyrhynchos papyri (P. Oxy. XVII 2116 and LI 3615) of an official called the

³⁵ See the documents quoted in the note to P. Heid. 310.1–3. Add now P. Mich. inv. 2785, published by P. J. Sijpesteijn, in: ZPE 108 (1995) 201–203.

ἐπιτηρητῆς ἡγεμονικῶν ἐπιστολῶν καὶ ἄλλων³⁶. In P.Oxy. 2116 he acknowledges receipt from tax collectors of records sent in to him; it is remarkable that these records cover as short a period as five days and yet are submitted in no less than six copies (lines 9–11).

Another question we should like to be able to answer is how did these communications get from Alexandria to the nomes and vice versa? Was there a regular postal service? The presumption must be that there was, but I know of no clear evidence for it in the Roman period. Normally when one wishes to know about any aspect of the administration of Egypt one turns first to Wilcken's *Grundzüge*, still invaluable even though it was written as long ago as 1912. On the postal service, however, he has only three pages and, worse still, most of these three pages deal with the postal service in the Ptolemaic or Byzantine periods³⁷.

No document has turned up from the Roman period to give us information comparable to that provided by P.Hibeh I 110 = *W.Chr.* 435 for the third century BC. This text is a record from a postal station somewhere in Middle Egypt³⁸, which records the day and the hour when letters arrived there by carrier either from the north, in effect from the king or one of his high officials, or from the south, in which case they were destined for the king or an official in Alexandria. It is therefore quite certain that in the early Ptolemaic period there existed a well-organised postal service for the transmission of official documents (which is usually considered to have been taken over from the Persian postal system which so impressed Herodotus). It is worth pointing out that such a service did not exist for non-official post, either in the Ptolemaic or Roman periods; private letters often have statements like 'I am writing you this letter because I have just learned that someone is travelling to your town'. But as regards official, government post, it is clear that something similar to the Ptolemaic system existed in the Byzantine period, including what Wilcken called the 'Schnellpost', the ὀξύς δρόμος; although most attestations come from the fifth century and later, there are several references to it as early as the fourth century³⁹. I find it very hard to believe that something comparable did not exist in the Roman period as well. Whether there were regular deliveries from Alexandria to the nome metropoleis or whether the prefect and procurators sent special messengers as and when required we simply do not know. Again, our best evidence comes from the Beatty Panopolis papyri, texts which tell us a good deal that is relevant for our present purpose. In the space of just over two months the strategos of the Panopolite nome received some 50 communications from his procurator alone. We also have in most cases not only

³⁶ For the correct reading in P. Oxy. 2116.2 see P. Oxy. 3615, introd. Cf. the ἐπιτηρητῆς τῶν ἐπιστολῶν attested in the papyrus published in *Archiv* 4 (1908) 123 (now = SB XVIII 13175), with Wilcken's comment in note 6 on p.127.

³⁷ *Grundzüge* 372–374.

³⁸ Probably in the Memphite nome: see *Fritz Uebel*, *Die Kleruchen Ägyptens* (Berlin 1968) 38 note 1.

³⁹ E.g. P.Oxy. VI 900, XXXIII 2675, LI 3623 and PSI X 1108 are from the 4th century.

the date when the letters were written but also the date when they were received⁴⁰. It is remarkable that several of them were received on the next day and some even on the same day, a distance of nearly 200 kilometres (i.e. to Panopolis from either Hermopolis or Antinoopolis). Skeat says this must have entailed well-organised relays of horses, a point to which we shall return in a moment.

Two substantial Oxyrhynchos papyri published in 1994 (P. Oxy. LX 4087–8) deserve mentioning, both of which date from the fourth century. They are records of accounts from two *mansiones* of the *cursus publicus*, one at Oxyrhynchos and the other at Takona, a village in the north of the Oxyrhynchite nome. This is the only text I know of which is at all similar to the Hibeh papyrus from the early Ptolemaic period. In all cases the entries refer to a stay of men and animals for two nights at Oxyrhynchos and one night at Takona, and give the rations issued. The direction in which the men are travelling is also recorded, usually either to or from the Thebaid; in all cases where we have any clear information the men appear to be military but none is specifically said to be a messenger or letter-carrier. This is typical of the information we get from the papyri generally. These Oxyrhynchos texts clearly have some relevance to the questions I am discussing in this paper, but they do not give us the precise, specific information which we should like to have; indeed, the word for ‘animals’ used in these two papyri, κτήνη, does not even enable us to decide whether the text is referring to horses or baggage animals⁴¹.

Who were employed as messengers? There were officials called ἐπιστολαφόροι attested in the Roman period, as we saw in discussing P. Ryl. 78. Wilcken thought, no doubt rightly, that they corresponded to the βυβλιαφόροι known from the Ptolemaic period⁴²; probably too they were the same people as the γραμματηφόροι who first make their appearance in the reign of Diocletian⁴³. The ἐπιστολαφόροι must, as their name implies, have been letter-carriers. There are examples where the word may be used of a private person charged with carrying a letter⁴⁴; but what concerns us is the use of the word to mean a public official, employed by the authorities to carry official communications. As the Rylands papyrus implies, this use was certainly known by the middle of the second century.

⁴⁰ See Skeat's discussion in the introduction to these papyri, pp. xx–xxv.

⁴¹ Nor are we much helped by the evidence of P. Oxy. XLII 3052 from the first century AD: this refers to stages in a journey south from Alexandria, possibly as far as Oxyrhynchos; but the editor is probably correct to regard it as a purely private journey and so it cannot be regarded as supporting the existence of official staging-posts for the delivery of government mail.

⁴² See Grundzüge 374. To the evidence for ἐπιστολαφόροι cited in the note to P. Ryl. 78.24 and P. Petaus 84, intro. note 1, add O. Oasis, p. 82, P. Berl. Leihg. II 46, P. Kellis I 54, P. Landliste G 134, F 342, P. Oxy. LIX 3993, and SB XIV 11594. These texts prove that the term ἐπιστολαφόρος for a letter-carrier was in use until at least the middle of the 4th century.

⁴³ P. Beatty Panop. 1.61. Fourth-century references include P. Oxy. LI 3623, PSI X 1108, SB XIV 11881, and there are several further occurrences in texts from the fifth century on.

⁴⁴ E.g. P. Mich. III 217, P. Flor. III 371; however, the word may well be referring to public officials who were in these instances being employed by private persons in a non-official capacity; cf. P. Oxy. LIX 3993.9n.

Shortly after this date, in AD 185, we learn from a Petaus papyrus that the office was a liturgy (P.Petaus 84). The editors think that the liturgist was responsible for carrying letters between the strategos in Arsinoe and the villages in a section of the nome. This is no doubt true, but I see no reason why he should not also have been responsible for conveying letters outside the nome, even as far as Alexandria (and of course in the reverse direction); indeed, this seems to me to be what the Rylands papyrus implies⁴⁵. We also have evidence in an Oxyrhynchos papyrus for this liturgy: in P. Oxy. XLIII 3095 of AD 217/8 a man agrees to perform a liturgy for another person appointed εἰς ἐπιστολαφορίαν, his job consisting of the διαπομπή μηνιαίων καὶ ἐπιστολῶν καὶ ἄλλων διαφερόντων τῇ αὐτῇ λειτουργίᾳ. There are, however, other persons employed as letter-carriers for whom we have some evidence. The strategoi seem normally to have used their ὑπηρέται for this purpose⁴⁶, but it seems that the prefect (and no doubt the procurators too) could press into service anyone under their command as the need arose. They often used military officials as letter-carriers; cf. the *princeps* in P. Oxy. XIX 2228.22⁴⁷. Several of the messengers attested in the Beatty Panopolis papyri are military. Particularly interesting is the letter from the strategos in P. Beatty Panop. 1. 389–391, in which he acknowledges receipt from a cavalryman of two letters sent by the *praeses* (there are a number of instances in the papyri of recipients confirming in writing their receipt of letters); although the letters have reached him, their condition left a good deal to be desired since they were βεβρωμέν[ας] ὑπὸ μύων καὶ λελωβημένας. The *commentarensis*, who is attested as a letter-carrier in P. Beatty Panop. 2.76 and 109, appears to have made no less than three journeys between the procurator's office and Panopolis in the space of six days⁴⁸.

We do not even know whether the postal service operated on land or on water or both. Skeat, as I have said, assumes the use of horses⁴⁹, but there are references in the Panopolis papyri to the use of small, fast boats for the postal service – ἀλιάδες, cutters⁵⁰. There are also references in the fourth century to a liturgical position called ἀλιαδίτης ἥτοι γραμματηφόρος, described by Oertel as a Briefträger zu Schiff (?)⁵¹. Certainly along the Nile valley water transport would often be much easier than transport by land, and sometimes quicker too, since when travelling by water one could call more easily at towns on both banks of the river. But contrast the letter mentioned in P. Beatty Panop. 2.176, which came by cargo

⁴⁵ Cf. the editor's note to P. Ryl. 78.24; see also TAPA 99 (1968) 262, note to lines 9–10.

⁴⁶ See *Strassi*, (op.cit. in n. 2), 102–105. See now also *Silvia Strassi*, Le funzioni degli ὑπηρέται nell'Egitto greco e romano (Heidelberg 1997) 47–48.

⁴⁷ Not necessarily in the service of the prefect; for a *princeps* serving in the office of a procurator see P. Oxy. LV 3818.5–6, with note ad loc. For military personnel as messengers see *Eck*, (op.cit. in n. 1), 928–930, and the collection of material by *Strassi*, (op.cit. in n. 2), n. 35 on pp. 103–104.

⁴⁸ See the note to P. Beatty Panop. 2.109.

⁴⁹ See above; cf. also P. Hamb. I 9, intro.

⁵⁰ P. Beatty Panop. 1.60 and 252.

⁵¹ Die Liturgie 262–3: in addition to the reference he gives see now PSI X 1108 and P. Oxy. LI 3623.

boat and took 26 days to arrive. And it cannot be denied that relays of fast horses would normally go faster than boats. It is also worth noting that Bärbel Kramer has been able to indicate from a number of Leipzig papyri dating to the later fourth century the route used by some *officiales* travelling along the Nile in the Thebaid with a circular letter from the prefect. They seem to have proceeded south along one bank of the river and then returned north by the other bank⁵².

Might it be possible to advance a little further in seeking to answer the problems posed in this paper by distinguishing letters which are copies from those which are originals? Again it is very doubtful whether we can get any useful information in this way. In any case, although it is sometimes clear that a letter is a copy, it is much harder to establish that a letter is an original. I can think of only one certain example: a text published in 1910 by Zucker which is well known to palaeographers as a splendid example of the chancery hand⁵³. At the foot, in a very curvilinear scribble, are the words ἐρῶσθαί σε βούλομαι, which have almost certainly been written by the prefect himself to authenticate the document. Elsewhere it is not normally possible to say whether a document is an original and palaeographers would certainly not always be in agreement⁵⁴. At the very least answering this question would mean examining photographs of all relevant papyri, and even then it would be a matter of individual judgement whether a document was likely to have originated in the prefect's office or the office of a procurator, rather than being a copy made in the office of the recipient, e.g. the strategos. So such an enterprise would be very time-consuming and at the end of the day probably not very productive.

In commenting on the papyrus published by Zucker, Wilcken remarked that it suited the idea that there was a 'Reichspost' as we know it for the Ptolemaic period, and which certainly too in the Roman period „die Beförderung der Briefe des Präfekten übernahm“⁵⁵. This is a conclusion with which we should all, I imagine, agree. Otherwise this exercise has turned out somewhat disappointing. The questions to which we should like to have answers are clear, and the mass of evidence surviving from Egypt might, we may well have thought, provide us with these answers. In so far as I have progressed to date in my researches I have to report that these answers do not seem to have emerged. In some respects we do have a clearer picture than that which Wilcken formed in 1912, but in general the sum of our knowledge on the topics discussed in this paper is less than we might have hoped.

⁵² Archiv 32 (1986) 33–35.

⁵³ SB I 4639; now = no. 54 in P. W. Pestman, *The New Papyrological Primer*².

⁵⁴ The editors of P. Oxy. XIX 2228, for example, comment that they do not agree with the editor of PSI 1125 in regarding the latter as an original document written in Alexandria, rather than a copy made locally in the office of the strategos.

⁵⁵ Archiv 5 (1913) 437.