

THE TERM «μεζοτερος» MEZOTEROS THROUGH THE COPTIC DOCUMENTS

BY

Walaa Abd El-Rahman

Lecturer at Faculty of Archaeology/ Cairo University, Egypt

ABSTRACT

[AR]

المصطلح «ميزوتيروس» من خلال الوثائق القبطية

ذخرت الوثائق القبطية بالكثير من المصطلحات الهامة التي اختلفت أصولها ما بين أصول يونانية وقبطية (مصرية قديمة) وعربية؛ حيث عاصرت تلك الوثائق حقبة تاريخية مختلفة، وإنطلاقاً من ذلك تسعى هذه المقالة إلى تقديم دراسة وافية موجزة تغطي الجوانب اللغوية والحضارية للمصطلح «μεζοτερος» «ميزوتيروس» الذي استخدم في العديد من الوثائق القبطية كلقب رسمي يعبر عن مسمى وظيفي لمسؤول إداري يتبع السلطة الحاكمة تتمركز مهامه وأنشطته داخل حدود القرية، ويمكن إعتباره حلقة الوصل بين السلطة الحاكمة وبين المواطنين، ويقع عليه عبء الإتصال المباشر بأهالي القرية، فقد تعددت وتنوعت مهام الميزوتيروس التي من خلالها يمكن إلقاء الضوء على بعض الجوانب المالية والقانونية والإدارية للمجتمع القبطي في ذلك الوقت، فهذه المهام تقدم دليل على الأنشطة اليومية بمستوياتها المختلفة داخل القرية، ويمكن تقسيم مهام الميزوتيروس بشكل أساسي إلى مهام تتعلق بتنفيذ قرارات السلطة الحاكمة مثل: جباية الضرائب العينية والنقدية وتجنيده أهالي القرية وإصدار خطابات الحماية وخطابات الضمان، ومهام أخرى تتعلق بتسيير شؤون أهالي القرية مثل: تلقي شكاوي أهالي القرية وفصل النزاعات وتسوية الميراث بين المواطنين وإبرام العقود، ويلاحظ أن جميع مهام الميزوتيروس تندرج تحت نطاق مهام وأنشطة دنيوية متعلقة بالأمور الحياتية اليومية بالقرية فقط، وأنه لم يشارك في أي أنشطة دينية مطلقاً، وتتطرق المقالة إلى مناقشة قضية ترادف مصطلح الميزوتيروس مع مصطلحات أخرى وطرح ما خلصت إليه الدراسة، بالإضافة إلى محاولة حصر جميع الأقباط الذين تقلدوا هذه الوظيفة، والتعرف على كيفية إختيارهم وتعيينهم. وتحقيقاً لذلك يتبع البحث منهجية التحليل اللغوي الدقيق جنباً إلى جنب مع التحليل الحضاري للوثائق القبطية (المنشورة حتى الآن) المتعلقة بالميزوتيروس، والتي أمكن تحديد تاريخها بالقرن السادس وحتى القرن الرابع عشر الميلادي.

[EN]

Coptic documents are replete with many important terms written in Greek, Coptic (ancient Egyptian), and Arabic. These documents are from different historical eras. Based on this, the article seeks to provide a brief comprehensive study covering the linguistic and social contexts of the term «μεζοτερος», which was used in many Coptic documents as an official title of an administrative official affiliated with the ruling authority. His duties and activities are concentrated within the village, and he can be considered the liaison between the ruling authority and the citizens. The burden of direct contact with the village people falls on him. The roles of a «μεζοτερος» were many and varied, and can highlight some of the financial, legal, and administrative aspects of Coptic society at that time. These roles oversee different aspects of life, providing evidence of various day-to-day activities within villages. The function of a «μεζοτερος» can be basically divided into tasks related to implementing the decisions of the ruling authority including collecting in-kind and money taxes, recruiting the village people, issuing letters of protection and letters of guarantee, and other tasks related to managing the village affairs. These miscellaneous tasks consist of receiving complaints from the village people, settling disputes, settling inheritances between citizens, and settling contracts, all of which fall within the scope of worldly tasks and activities related to village daily life. However, the «μεζοτερος» did not participate in any religious activities at all. This article discusses the issue of synonymizing the term «μεζοτερος» with other terms, and attempts to identify all Copts who have assumed this profession in order to find out how they were selected and appointed. To achieve this, the research will provide careful philological analysis of Coptic documentary texts (the hitherto published), related to the term «μεζοτερος» which dates from the 6th until 14th AD centuries.

KEYWORDS: Higher authority, local official, village, protection, guarantee, tasks, taxes.

I. INTRODUCTION

In general, Coptic documents are an invaluable source, providing snapshots of Egyptian life. Studying these snapshots together can allow us to better understand the events and interpersonal relationships that shaped Coptic society. The Coptic documents in this study varied between letters of a semi-official nature either from the villagers or addressed to them as letters of protection: guarantees, sales and leases contracts, inheritance settlement and dispute, and taxes. This group reveals the official activity carried out by *μειζότερος*, whether administrative, financial or legal, which prove that the Islamic government¹ kept Byzantine organizational administrative structure and left the management of villages in the hands of the local rural elites.² One of the most important reasons for choosing the research topic is that there is no previous study that talks about *μειζότερος* in the Coptic texts, although some studies have dealt with this title in other historical periods. These studies are:

1. Steinwenter's *Studies on the Coptic legal documents*³ study deals with Lashane, Duke, Dioiketies, and Protokomities, but did not address the function of Meizoteroc. However, it referred to Meizoteric when talking about the previous functions and mentioned that this title is sometimes equivalent to the titles Lashane and Protokomities. But this study relied mainly on Greek texts rather than Coptic ones.
2. The article written by GHADA MOHAMMAD⁴ sheds light on the function of al-Mazut through Arabic documents. However, this study is far removed from this research in time and in the nature of the documents considered here.
3. Lajos Berkes's *Village administration and village community in Egypt from Diocletian to the Abbasids*⁵ discusses the village in general.

Berkes dissects the evidence for the terms used in late antique Egypt to describe a community such as: *πρωτοχωμηται, μεζότεροι, μείζονες*, and the Coptic terms *ⲗⲁⲱⲁⲛⲉ*, *ⲁⲡⲉ*. It must be noted that this study is based mainly on Greek documents not only in Egypt, but also in the rest of the Byzantine Empire. The research used the word al-Mezoteros as an English translation of the Coptic title *μειζότερος* in the singular form, while using the word Al-Mawazit in the plural.

The research is divided into four parts: the first part covers the linguistic background of the term *μειζότερος*. The second part discusses the issue of synonymizing the term

¹ Wickham argues that Arabic administration was characterized by a high degree of continuity regarding the Roman financial system, for more: HAYES & SCHEERLINCK 2020: 3-14; «Procedures of Protection. Coptic Protection Letters and Village Life», <http://journals.openedition.org/anisl/7173>, accessed on (02/05/2023).

² For more information on acts and mechanisms of administration in the villages of the countryside of Egypt after the Arab conquest: SIJPESTEIJN 2013: 49-113.

³ STEINWENTE 1920: 40-50.

⁴ MOHAMMED 2021: 949- 982; «al-Mazut (Sheikh of the village) in Egypt in the era of governors in light of Arabic Papyrus (21-254 AH/641-868 AD)», https://bcps.journals.ekb.eg/article_205976.html, accessed on (02/01/2023).

⁵ BERKES 2017: 53-180.

μειζότερος with other terms. The third part deals with the roles and attributions of μειζότερος. The fourth part includes the names of the Copts who held this office and attempts to explain how they assumed this position. The research concludes with the most important results.

II. THE LINGUISTIC ASPECT OF THE TERM «μειζότερος»

The Coptic word μειζότερος is a term of Greek origin μειζότερος⁶, and is a title indicating an administrative position in which one of top officials is appointed. The usage of this title in documentary sources generally dates back to the beginning of the 4th century until the 14th century AD. We find this title widespread in Greek, Byzantine, Coptic, Arabic and Egyptian Nubian documents.

This office was not limited to Egypt, but was widely spread throughout the late Roman and Byzantine Empire. The position is documented in the Western Roman Empire and its successor states as well as in Byzantium with the title «maior domus». The titles μειζότερος and maior domus referred to the same office holders⁷. The Coptic title μειζότερος and its equivalent Greek title μειζότερος also occurs in medieval Nubian sources dating from 7th to 14th century AD⁸. There is another Greek title, μείζων, mentioned in some papyrus studies⁹ and which is treated as a synonym for the title μειζότερος¹⁰. «The term 'μείζων' dates back to the beginning of the 3rd century AD and is derived from the classical comparative form of the adjective 'μέγας', meaning 'the greatest'»¹¹. Both words μειζότερος and μείζων acquired special meaning in the Egyptian administrative language as early as the 3rd until the 4th century AD. During this time, the words were used in papyri as a form of politeness to address any superior official without referring to a specific individual. It is only a designation for officials and was not a position in the hierarchy of village administration¹². During the Byzantine era, it is clear that the word μείζων began to mean «village head»¹³. On the other hand, the word μειζότερος is sometimes understood as a synonym for the village board μείζων, but sometimes the word μειζότερος has its own meanings, as this term is polysemantic. The word could also refer

⁶ LIDDELL & SCOTT 1986: 2448, *FD* 2002: 509.

⁷ BERKES 2017: 120.

⁸ *SB KOPT* 2006: vol.3, N^o.1645; *I.LIPS. KOPT* 2013: N^o.58; *Dbmnt*, N^{os}.515, 634-635.

⁹ LIDDELL & SCOTT 1986: 2448.

¹⁰ STEINWENTER 1920: 41; BERKES 2017: 53.

¹¹ GIRGIS 2010: 124; BERKES 2017: 53.

¹² ROUILLARD 1928: 69; BERKES 2017: 82.

¹³ The first reliably datable document that shows title μείζων used to designate a village official is a collection of eleven Arsinoï land declarations from the year 302. Village officials were present as witnesses to declarations, and this meaning continued until 8th century AD. Meanwhile, μείζων is used for the head of the village, and a member of the village board in the late seventh century and the beginning of the eighth century. This is evidenced in a papyrus containing a tax record in which a sum of money was paid by the μείζων «the village head». BERKES 2017: 54, 63.

to the head of a village, leader of bucellary¹⁴ and manager of a large estate. Therefore, it is likely that both titles μειζότερος and μείζων were not synonymous¹⁵.

It is clear from the Coptic documents that the Greek title μείζων was not used. Instead, the term μειζοτερος was used to express a function related to the ruling authority, as it refers to an employee or official in the village¹⁶ who is identified as «a village head - Omdah»¹⁷. It should be noted that the term μειζοτερος was also used as an adjective and not as a job title. However, its use as an adjective is uncommon only appearing in only one document, as follows¹⁸:

«ΘΟΛΟΚΟΤΤΙΝΟΣ ΝΟΥΟ ΔΥΩ ... ΒΩΚ ΕΜΜΑ ΠΜΙΖΟΤΕΡΟΣ Μ... ΜΗ ΠΝΕΖ ΝΤΕΤΗΔΙΟΙΚΕΙ ΜΜΟΥ» «this solides of wheat... to go to the place, what is preferable... (wheat) and oil fix them. «Meanwhile the common and basic usage of the term μειζοτερος is as a masculine title for a male profession. This title is always written before the name and mentioned in Coptic documents with the masculine definite article preceding it¹⁹. When used for plural instances, there is no article that precedes the title²⁰. The title is also used in Coptic documents dated between the 6th -14th centuries AD, appearing in multiple forms and abbreviations [TABLE 1].

¹⁴ The association between μειζότερος and bucellary is questionable, although the study of some texts proves this connection in some cases. In one of the papyri (dated to the 6th-7th century), the μειζότερος is asked to send wine through νεώτερος «bucellary», and in another papyrus (also dated to the 6th-7th century), καθοσιωμένος μειζότερος is mentioned, while the title καθοσιωμένος is known to have been applied to military and civil officials who are organized on a military basis. HORNICKEL 1930: 18; FIKHMAN 1970: 132; FIKHMAN 2006: 47.

¹⁵ BERKES 2017: 53, 57.

¹⁶ FD 2002: 509; GIRGIS 2010: 124.

¹⁷ SAID 2012: 13.

¹⁸ REVILLOUT 1902: 42, N^o.58, L.6.

¹⁹ For example: ΑΠΑ ΚΟΛΛΟΥΘΕ ΠΜΕΙΖΟΤΕΡΟΣ. P LAUR 1984: N^o.198.

²⁰ For example: ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΩΝ ΜΕΙΖΖ. ST 1922: N^o.432.

Provenance of Documents	μειζοτερος in complete forms (singular)	μειζοτερος in abbreviated forms (singular)	μειζοτερος in plural form	μειζοτερος in compound title
The Coptic documents from Egypt	μεζοτερος ²¹ μειζοτερος ²² μῖζοτερος ²³ μιζοτερος ²⁴ μεσοτερος ²⁵	μειζο ²⁶ , μειζοτερ ²⁷ , μηζοτς ²⁸ μ ^ε ²⁹ μειζο ³⁰ μειζω ³¹	μειζζ ³² μηζζ ³³ ,	
The Coptic documents from Nubian	μειζοτερος ³⁴	μειζ ³⁵ μειζ ^ο ³⁶ μιζο ³⁷ μῖζω ³⁸		αρχιμηζοτερο ³⁹ , προτομηζιτερος ⁴⁰ προμῖζω ⁴¹

[TABLE 1]: Forms and Abbreviations of Title μειζοτερος © Done by the researcher

There are many titles associated with the Copts Mawazit, which varied between honorary, religious, and functional designations, which could shed light on their social status. The following shows all titles of the Coptic Mawazit in Coptic documents [TABLE 2].

²¹ Omh 1952: N^o.150.

²² BM 1905: N^o.1051; P. RYL. COPT 1909: N^o.305; P LAUR. V 1984: N^o.198, L.2, 9.

²³ CPR 1895: vol.2, N^o.XCIX; CPR 1959: vol.4, N^o.189c; ERNŠTEDT 1959: N^o.3.

²⁴ REVILLOUT 1902: 42, N^o.58, L.6.

²⁵ P.RYL. COPT 1909: N^o.178; ERNŠTEDT 1959: N^o.14

²⁶ REVILLOUT 1880: 101-107; KRU 1912: N^o.37; BM 1905: N^o.423; TILL 1954: 118.

²⁷ BM 1905: N^o.1160.

²⁸ CPR 1895: vol.2, N^o.XCVIII; CPR 1959: N^o.15.

²⁹ ERNŠTEDT 1959: N^o.23.

³⁰ P.LOND 1910: vol.4, 438, N^o.1494; TILL 1958: 191, N^o.32; MACCOULL 1997: 125-135; TM: N^o.19920.

³¹ STERN 1884: 152-159; ERMAN & KREBS 1899: 270-277; KRU 1912: N^o.10; TILL 1964: 102-104; MACCOULL 2009: 78-81; CROMWELL 2017: 143-144.

³² ST 1922: N^o.432; TILL 1939: N^{os}.22, 27-28; CALAMENT 2003: 42; HASITZK 2006: N^o.1368; TM: N^o. 83719.

³³ KRU 1912: N^o.12.

³⁴ VLIETI 2002: 186, L.3-4; SB KOPT 2006: vol.3, 165, N^o.1645; TM: N^o.101499, DBMNT: N^o.626.

³⁵ P. QI 2014: vol.4, N^o. 89; BERKES 2017: 119; DBNT: N^o. 2832; GIOVANNI 2012: 231; TM: N^o. 371326.

³⁶ RICHTER 1999: 297; SB KOPT 2006: vol.3, 150, N^o.1602; RICHTER et Al. 2013: N^o.58; TM: N^o.110998; DBMNT: N^o.566.

³⁷ KRALL 1900: 237; TM: N^o.141669; DBMNT: N^o.634.

³⁸ DBMNT: N^o.635, TM: N^o.141670; KRALL 1900: 239; BERKES 2017: 119

³⁹ GIOVANNI 2012: 51; P. QI 2014: vol.4, N^o. 95; BERKES 2017: 119; DBNT: N^o. 2837; TM: N^o.371331.

⁴⁰ P. LOND 1910: vol.4, N^{os}.445,449; DBMNT: N^{os}.630- 631; TM: N^{os}.86137- 86138.

⁴¹ DBMNT: N^{os}.635; TM: N^{os}.141670; KRALL 1900: 239; BERKES 2017: 119.

Title	Meaning	Sort of title	Publication
ἀρχιεπισκοπ	Chief of priests	Religious title	REVILLOUT 1880: 101-107; <i>BM</i> 1905: N ^o .423; <i>KRU</i> 1912: N ^o .37.
απα	Father ⁴²	Honorary and monastic title	REVILLOUT 1880: 101-107; <i>BM</i> 1905: N ^o .423; <i>P. RYL. COPT</i> 1909: N ^o .178; <i>P. LOND</i> 1910: vol.4, N ^o . 1494; <i>KRU</i> 1912: N ^o . 37; BÜRG 1958: N ^o .32; <i>P LAUR</i> 1984: vol.5, N ^o .198.
αμιρα ⁴³	Amir	Functional title	<i>KRU</i> 1912: N ^o .12.
Δηκαριτ	Ruler	Functional title	<i>KRU</i> 1912: N ^o .12.
Προστατης	Superior ⁴⁴	Functional title	<i>P LAUR</i> 1984: vol.5, N ^o .198.
Χοεις	Lord ⁴⁵	Honorary title	<i>BM</i> 1905: N ^o . 1160; <i>KRU</i> 1912: N ^o .12; ERNŠTEDT 1959: N ^o .14; <i>P LAUR</i> 1984: vol.5, N ^o .198.
Μακαριωτ	Blissed ⁴⁶	Religious title	<i>KRU</i> 1912: N ^o .12.
Κυρις	Master ⁴⁷	Honorary title ⁴⁸	<i>BM</i> 1905: N ^o . 3; ERNŠTEDT 1959: N ^o .3; <i>P LAUR</i> . 1984: vol.5, N ^o .198.

[TABLE 2]: Titles associated with the Copts Mawazit © Done by the researcher.

After the Arab conquest of Egypt (641 AD)⁴⁹, the Arabs translated the title μεζοτερος into «Mazut»⁵⁰. In Arabic Papyri the forms of the this title are «Mazut - Mazuta - Mawazit (pl.) »⁵¹. This term was used to refer to «Chief of village, judge»⁵², and it was used in the papyri of the ruler «Qurra bin Sharik»⁵³, where it can be translated as «the owner of village»⁵⁴.

⁴² For more information see: WIPSYKA 1994: 23–56; EISSA 2014: 115-124.

⁴³ Often the Pagarch, it is Arabic title for a senior official, see: CROMWELL 2017: XXII.

⁴⁴ *FD* 2002: 693; SAID 2010: 128.

⁴⁵ *CD* 1939: 787.

⁴⁶ *FD* 2002: 496.

⁴⁷ *FD* 2002: 453.

⁴⁸ Title of respect, is held by a high-ranking official such as the manager and notary, see: SAID 2010: 139.

⁴⁹ Al-Kindī mentions that the Umayyad Caliph Omar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (8th century) decreed that the Copts Mawazit were to be removed and replaced by Muslims from the pagarchies, but the Akhmim declaration disapproves this opinion, since out of 54 witnesses only 2 were Muslim, while the rest are Copts, 22 of whom were Mawazit, see: SCHUBERT & SIJPESTEIJN 2014: 140.

⁵⁰ MOHAMED 2021: 952.

⁵¹ MAĞAWRT 2000: 797.

⁵² KAMAL 1968: 71; SAID 2010: 132.

⁵³ Qurra archive is one of the greatest resources for the study of the administrative, economic, and linguistic reality of the life in Egypt during the early 8 century, see: CROMWELL 2017: XII; and for more the ruler Qurra bin Sharik see: AHMED 1992: 88,89,90.

⁵⁴ GASIR 2004: 146.

III. THE ISSUE OF SYNONYMIZING THE TERM ΜΕΙΖΟΤΕΡΟΣ WITH OTHER TERMS

The opinions of researchers differed and varied on this aspect, so this study attempted to insight and understand most of these opinions. Some of the points that can be clarified from these different perspectives are as follows:

- There is one hypothesis that the term *μειζότερος* is synonymous with each of the following titles: *λαψαπνε*⁵⁵– *μειζων– πρωτχωμητης- διοικητας*. In fact, all of these titles are closely related to village administration. Naturally, they were identical in some roles and responsibilities, but they certainly differed in career progression within the state's administrative structure, and their use differed from one historical era to another. Furthermore, their use may also have differed from one geographical region to another.
- Most opinions⁵⁶ based their hypothesis on studying these titles in Greek and Byzantine documents, which contain a lot of evidence that these titles were synonymous⁵⁷.
- «Some researchers have generalized their hypothesis concerning the synonymy of interpreting the term 'meizoteroc' in Coptic documents».
- «*μειζότερος*» did not appear in Coptic documents as a synonym for any other title except in two documents:

The First Document

A guarantee document from Aphrodite (Kom Ishqaw) in which the *μειζότερος* guarantees villagers who were recruited to work as sailors for the ruling authority⁵⁸. In the fourth line, the name Apa Kuros is mentioned with title *λαψαπνε*: «† ἀποπ ἀπα κυρος πωε ππμακαριος σαμουηλ πλαψαπνε», and was later rewritten at the end of the document, lines 43 and 47, in Greek, with title *μειζότερος*: «Απα Κυρος Σαμουηλ μειζ^ο».

The Second Document

A guarantee document from Aphrodite in which two *μειζότερος* were guaranteeing a sailor⁵⁹. In the third line⁶⁰, the name Kolothe is mentioned with the title *λαψαπνε*: «κολλουθε πωε πουαλεντιος πλαψαπνε», but was later rewritten at the end of the

⁵⁵ Crum mentioned that this title is sometimes equivalent to that of *πρωτχωμητης*, and sometimes to that of *μειζότερος*. CRUM & EVELYEN 1924: 176.

⁵⁶ For more about these opinions, see: STEINWENTER 1920: 36-45; ROUILLARD 1928: 69-70; MIBLER 1970: 10 ff; SCHMELZ 2002: 296-309; BERKES 2017: 53-92; PAPCONSTANTINOU 2020: 153-158.

⁵⁷ Berkes stated that there is great difficulty in distinguishing between the nature and functions of the various village officials mentioned in these documents. This difficulty is perhaps increased by a tendency to use some of them in both a narrow broad senses. BERKES 2017: 2.

⁵⁸ *P.LOND* 1910: vol.4, 438, N^o.1494.

⁵⁹ *P.LOND* 1910: vol.4, N^o. 1499.

⁶⁰ There is a missing part that may have included the name of the other *Mezoteroc* with title of *Lashane* as well.

document, lines 19 and 21, in Greek, with title μειζοτερος: «πατερομου^θ μηνα μειζ^ο απο εποικ^ο βονν^ω κολλονθο^υ ουαλεντιο^υ μειζ^ο απο εποικ^ο Σακοορε».

Many Coptic scholars⁶¹ favored the hypothesis that the title μειζοτερος was synonymous with the Coptic title λαωαπε perhaps based on what was stated in the two documents P. Lond. Nos. 494, 1499.⁶² However, by studying the Coptic documents related to μειζοτερος, the research suggests⁶³ that this term is not synonymous with title λαωαπε. What was stated in the two documents can be attributed to an error by the writer «Theodore», who wrote these documents. Both documents include the same subject, and their Provenance is «Aphrodite». Perhaps the scribe «Theodore» thought that the word μειζ^ο was an abbreviation for μειζων which was equivalent to the title λαωαπε in Greek documents⁶⁴. But in fact, the word μειζ^ο is an abbreviation for the title μειζοτερος, and the Copts did not use the title μειζων in their documents. This opinion is reinforced by the fact that no other Coptic document bearing this synonym was found.

Finally, it can be said that the term μειζοτερος in the Coptic documents was clear and explicit, referring to the village official or its mayor. The term μειζοτερος differs from what it was in the Greek and Byzantine documents, and it was not synonymous with any of the terms (λαωαπε– πρωτχωμητης– διοικητας).

IV. THE ROLES AND ATTRIBUTIONS OF AL-MEZOTEROS

Understanding these roles require a careful and systematic analysis of Coptic documents concerning the term μειζοτερος. These texts describe tasks involved in for managing daily life matters in the villages, implementing the decisions of the ruling authority, and managing the village affairs. These roles can be divided as follows:

1- al-Mezoteros as a Ruler

- al-Mezoteros is considered one of the members of the ruling authority, as by the 7th-8th century AD, some Copts holding this office assumed the rule and emirate of large administrative regions. This evidenced by the following document⁶⁵: «επιτ λεσπονη ημων αργαμα γιογ ερλ εγκλη αμια πολισε ρμωντ χανηλ διηκαιτ καστρον μμνονιον μμηζζ,», «Under our lord Argamah son of Al-Majid, the Pagarch⁶⁶ of the region of Ermont (and) Khael, the Diokitis of Kastron Memnonia the Mawazit».

⁶¹ P.RYL.COPT 1909: 92; STEINWENTER 1920: 41-42; CRUM & EVELYN 1924: 176; RICHTER 1999: 296; FD 2002: 509.

⁶² This is confirmed by Crum statement that the JKôw papyri make μειζοτερος the Greek equivalent of λαωαπε. P.RYL.COPT 1909: 92.

⁶³ Another suggestion is that the town Aphrodite (the source of these documents) may have considered the Coptic title μειζοτερος to be a synonym for the Greek title λαωαπε. (?)

⁶⁴ Jenniffer mentions that title μειζων is equivalent of title λαωαπε. CROMWELL 2017: XXII.

⁶⁵ KRU 1912: N^o.12.

⁶⁶ Pagarch is major district administrator. CROMWELL 2017: XXIII.

- Al- Mezoteris was referred to as one of the rulers in the oath formula that is used as a guarantee for the document, as follows:⁶⁷ «ΕΙΩΡΚ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΠΑΝΤΩΚΡΑΤΩΡ ΜΠΟΥΖΑΙ ΝΗΧΙΟΟΥΕ ΕΤΑΡΧΗΧΩΝ» «swear by the Almighty god and by the peace of our lords who rule us».
- Al- Mezoteris ruled over a body of leaders of small villages that fell within his jurisdiction. Each district was divided into a group of small villages, and al-Mezoteris was in charge of the chiefs who managed these small villages. He was able to give orders to these subordinate chiefs who had to obey him, as in the example⁶⁸: «ΝΕΤΗΒΑΥΟΝ ΝΑΠΗΥΕ ΝΤΚΟΥΪ ΝΝΕΜΧΗΥ ΝΕΥΤΟΔΜΑ ΕΥΣΖΑΪ ΝΠΕΥΧΟΕΙΣ ΔΥΩ ΝΠΡΟΣΤΑΤΗΣ ΠΚΥΡΙΣ ΑΠΑ ΚΟΔΔΟΥΘΕ ΠΜΕΙΖΟΤΕΡΟΣ» «Your servants, the superiors of small Nemjêw, who dare to write to their master and patron, lord Apa Colluthus al-Mezoteris».

2- al-Mezoteris as an Administrative Official

- al-Mezoteris had an important and prominent role in implementing the decisions of the ruling authority with regard to recruiting the villagers who are obligated to serve in the navy⁶⁹. Additionally, they were responsible for supplying the ruling authority with these sailors as per its needs for forming the naval fleet and participating in the annual naval expedition that was carried out by the ruling authority⁷⁰. This important role of Mezoteris is evident in his being the link between the ruling authority and the people of the village. Therefore, he had to identify these villagers and communicate with them, which is evidenced by a letter written on a papyrus dated to 9th-10th century AD and addressed to the al-Mezoteris from one of the persons who evaded service in the navy. This letter confirms that he will perform the tasks entrusted to him, as follows⁷¹: «ΠΕΥΤΟΔΜΑ ΕΥΣΖΑΙ ΝΠΕΥΧΟΕΪΣ ΠΜΕΣΟΤΕΡΟΣ ΧΕ ΝΤΕΤΝΕΜΤΧΟΕΪΣ ΧΔ, ΕΡΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΚΑ ΤΕΤΝΕ ΧΟΕΙΣ ΟΟΥΝ ΧΕ ΤΝΕΚΕΔΕΥΕ ΝΑΪ ΝΖΩΒ ΠΑΪ ΖΩΒ ΠΑΪ ΧΕ ΟΥΜΡΕ ΝΝΕΕΥ ΕΥΖΜ ΠΧΟΪ ΤΕΤΝΕΜΤΧΟΕΪΣ ΑΦΙΒΑΔΕ ΜΟΝ ΧΙΝ... ΝΕΕΒ», «His slave dares to write to his master Mezoteris, you lord, hello, god bless you, lord know what you order me (any) work that work if he does not become a sailor in the ship, you lord (do not) doubt for ever since sailor».
- He was responsible for guaranteeing the villagers who were recruited to work as sailors for the ruling authority. He also had to promise to pay a fine if they did not perform their forced labor⁷². We find, for example, a guarantee document from Aphrodite, written on papyrus dated to the 8th century.

⁶⁷ KRU 1912: Nos.10,12.

⁶⁸ P LAUR 1984: vol.5, N^o.198.

⁶⁹ The naval duty is better known in the Coptic and Greek texts from Aphrodito, for examples: P. Lond vi 1910: Nos.1494, 1496, 1499, 1500-1501, 1504-1505; BÜRG 1958: Nos.32-33, 34-35.

⁷⁰ The annual Cruise was the raiding expedition sent yearly under the era of the Umayyad khalifate against the Empire of Byzantine and its dependencies. BELL 1926: 275.

⁷¹ ERNSTEDT 1959: N^o.14.

⁷² For example: P. LOND VI 1910: Nos.1494, 1499.

- This document was addressed by four senior village officials⁷³ of three fields located west of town Jkow through the pagarch Basilius to the governor Qurra. They assert their responsibility for sending three sailors to the north to take part in the annual naval expedition. Additionally, they promised to pay a fine should any of the three flee their duty⁷⁴, as follows⁷⁵:

«+ ἀνον ἀπα κύρος πῦε ππακαριος σαμοῦηλ πλαῦανε μῆ ἀπολλῶ πῦε ηῤηρακλῖος πρῦποδεκτ, μῆ δαγειτ πῦ νῖωρᾶννης μῆ φοιβαμμῶ πῦε ηῤεωγιος ηῤωμ τῦομτε πκοιε ηεμῆτ ᾗκῶυ ἐνσρᾶι ηῤλημοσιος λογος ητοι πηχοεις πανευφημῶς κορρα περφῦεστατος ησυμβουλος ριτοοτηῦτη ητοτη πενδοξοτ ηχοεις πκυρ, βασιλειος ρηποῦῶῦ ηηποῦτε πιλλο, ἀῦῶ παγαρ ητᾗκῶυ μῆ ηεσεποικιον ἀῦῶ μῆηεσεπιδιας μολογει τποῦῶῦ τηῦτωρε τηκῆνδῦηεῦε ᾗετη ἀῦῶ τῆο ηεῤῥῦη ἀῦῶ τῆο μῆηαιᾗεσθαι ηπεπροσωπον ηηεεῤ ἐηατηπεδιαςηη ηαι ἐηηᾗῦ ῶηᾗρ ηεῤραη ηητη ἐβολ σαπεσῆτ ητιεῤῥῦητηκη ρομολογεια ηαι ἐητηοοῦ μμοοῦ ἐρητ ρῶς ηεεῤ καραβη...+ ᾗνω ἐῤῥῦητ Ἀπα κυρος Σαμοῦηλ μῆιζο Ἀπολλῶ...», «We, Apa Cyrus son of the late Samuel Al-Lashane, Apollo son of Heraclius, the tax -collector, David son of John, and Phoebammon son of Gogeos, men of the three fields west of Jkow, we write to the financial officer namely, our lord, the all-famous Qurra (bin Sharik), the wonderful governor through you, our glorious lord, master Basilius, by the will of God, the wonderful pagarch of Jkkow, with its farms and fields Greeting Greetings, we agree, desire, and guarantee, and we are responsible, and we go surety, and are liable for the persons of these sailors, being among in our fields. We will present their names to you at the end of this document of guarantee. We send them northward as sailors ... the assurance of Apa Cyrus, Samuel al-Mezoteros, and Apollo».

- Many Coptic documents⁷⁶ indicate that al- Mezoteros was responsible for preventing escape attempts, which the villagers resorted to in order to evade tax burdens⁷⁷ and forced labor. This role is evident through the issuance of protection letters⁷⁸ [FIGURE 1]

⁷³ One of whom was al-Mezoteros, mentioned at the beginning of the document as Al-Lashani, the Greek section at the end of document provides with whose name twice with the title of al-Mezoteros.

⁷⁴ The possibility of flight was a severe one, with the evidence presenting that conscripts would undertake what all measures they could to avoid serving, whether flight or substituting payment for physical service. CROMWELL 2017: 91.

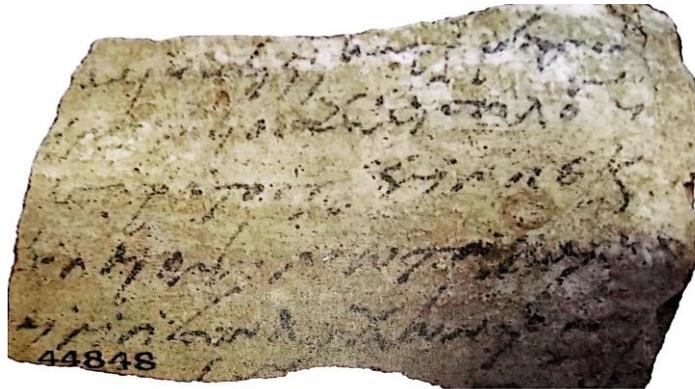
⁷⁵ P. LOND VI 1910: 438.

⁷⁶ ST 1921: N^o.432; TILL 1939: 88, N^{os}.22, 27, 28; CALAMENT 2003: 42; SB KOPT. 2006: vol.3, N^o. 1368; TM: N^o. 83719.

⁷⁷ The phenomenon of the flight of peasants wishing to escape taxes is well documented in Egypt throughout its history. The central power has constantly tried to stop these tax evaders but the inhabitants of Egypt have apparently continued to flee periodically. To bring them back to their homes, they were given a protection letter, armed with this document, which generally drawn up by the local authority. With this letter, fugitives can return home without risk. DELATTRE 2007: 173.

⁷⁸ So far, about 140 of these documents - known as the «protection letters» - have been published, which included the actual documents promising protection and other documents related to them, such as letters requesting the issuance of a protection letter. In the villages dating to the late antique and early Islamic

that enable the fugitives to return and confirm that no action will be taken against them. For example⁷⁹: «+παρ, γεωργιος ς αρων μειζζ... πευρζαι η̄ερημιας η̄βασιδειος μ̄νηεψηρε χεεις π̄λοφ μ̄πνοϋτε η̄τοοτκ η̄τοκ η̄φει ε̄ροϋη επεκη̄ι η̄τοϋωηζ ε̄βολ χενπενερ πεθοοϋ η̄ακ χεακπωτ οϋδε η̄ενπαραγε μ̄μοκ ρ̄ι πειεζαγιη μ̄νηεψηρε», «From Georgios and Aaron Mawazit they write to Jeremiah (son) of Basilius and his children, here you have the assurance by god to you, come home and show yourself , for we will not harm you for your running away and we will not sue you for this tax and your children».



[FIGURE 1]: Part of protection letter issued by μειζοτερος .CROMWELL 2017: PL. 9.

- al-Mezoteros's main responsibility was to maintain direct communication with the villagers in all administrative matters. This is evident from the letters that were sent directly to al-Mezoteros from the citizens. It can be said that al-Mezoteros was the liaison between the villagers and the ruling authority and is responsible for receiving their letters⁸⁰, as seen in the following examples:

«ΤΑΔΣ ΠΠΕΝΧΟΕΙΣ ΠΚΥΡΙΣ ΑΠΑ ΚΟΖΛΛΟΥΘΣ ΠΜΕΙΖΟΤΕΡΟΣ ΡΙΤΗ ΠΕΦΔΑΥΟΝ ΝΑΠΗΥΕ ΠΤΚΟῩΙ ΠΝΕΜΧΗΥ»⁸¹ «Give it to our master, lord Apa Colluthus al-Mezoteros, from his servants, the chiefs of small Nemjêw», «πεφτολμα εφςζαι η̄πχχοε̄ις π̄μεσοτερος χε η̄τετ̄ηεμ̄τχοε̄ις ρ̄α,»⁸² «His slave dares to write to his master Mezoteros, you lord, hello».

- Coptic documents clarified the tasks carried out by al-Mezoteros in the management of the village's affairs, which included receiving the complaints from the villagers. An example of this is found in a letter written on a papyrus, which is a shepherd's complaint to the village's Mezoteros:⁸³ «+ τ̄αδς η̄παχοεις π̄κυρ, σαραπιων μ̄η π̄βοηθος

periods, local authorities, such as village officials or monastery abbots (one or two lashane (s), meizoteros , dioiketes or an Apa), could issue documents that afforded a measure of protection to their recipients. DELATRE 2007: 173-178; CROMWELL 2017: 119,120; SCHEERLINCK 2020: 15-30.

⁷⁹ ST 1921: N^o. 432; TILL 1939: N^{os}. 27-28; SB KOPT. III 2006: N^o. 1368.

⁸⁰ P.RYL.COPT 1909: 143.

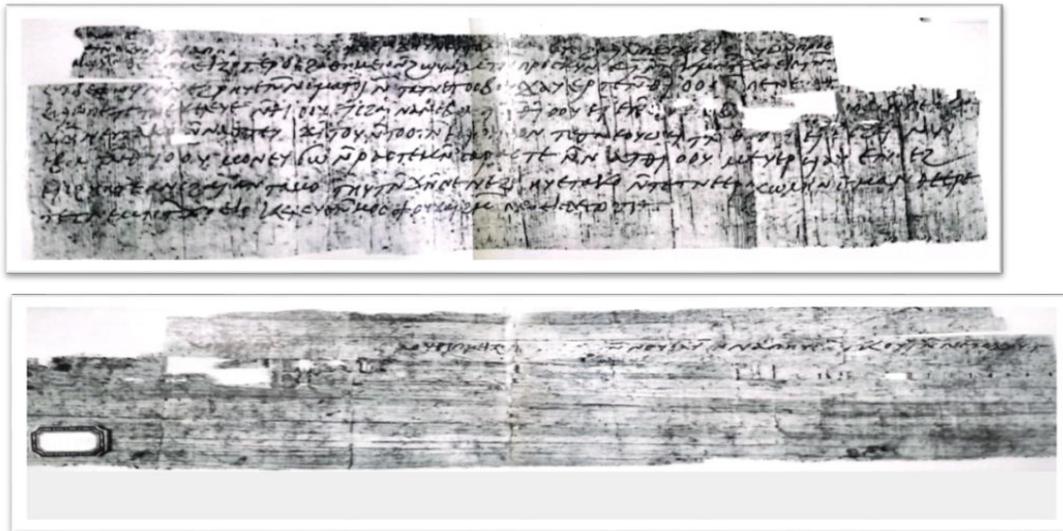
⁸¹ P LAUR.V 1984: N^o.198.

⁸² ERNŠTEDT 1959: N^o. 14.

⁸³ BM 1905: N^o. 1160.

ΖΙΤΗ ΓΟΥΝΘΟΣ ΠΥΘΟΣ», «Give it to my master the lord Sarapion and the assistant officer of Jonatheus the shepherd».

- al-Mezoteros was responsible for providing food for the fighting soldiers, [FIGURE 2] so he ordered the heads of small villages to plant and harvest crops which will eventually be sent to him. This is evidenced from the following text:⁸⁴ «ΝΕΤΗΒ ΔΥΟΝ ΝΑΠΗΥΕ ΝΤΚΟΥΪ ΝΝΕΜΧΗΥ ΝΕΥΤΟΛΜΑ ΕΥΣΖΑΪ ΝΠΕΥΧΟΕΙΣ ΔΥΩ ΝΠΡΟΣΤΑΤΗΣ ΠΚΥΡΙΣ ΑΠΑ ΚΟΛΛΟΥΘΕ ΠΜΕΙΖΟΤΕΡΟΣ ΖΑΘΗ ΜΕΝ ΝΖΩϞ ΝΜ ΤΗΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΕΙ ΝΤΕΚΜΗΤΧΟΕΙΣ ΤΗΤΑΜΟ ΔΕ ΜΜΟΚ ΕΤΒΕ ΦΩϞ ΝΝΕΖΡΗΥΕ ΝΝΕΜΑΤΟΙ ΝΤΑΤΝΕΤΟΟΒΟΥ ΧΑΥΕΡ ΤΕ ΝΘΪΟΥ ΝΠΕΝΕ..Θ ... ΕΩΥΠΕ ΤΕΤΗΚΕΖΕΥΕ ΤΗΘΪΟΥ ΕΪΣΖΑΪ ΝΑΝ ΕΒΟΛ ΤΗΘΪΟΥ», «Your servants, the superiors of small Nemjêw, who dare to write to their master and patron, lord Apa Colluthus al-Mezoteros, before everything we obey your lordship, and inform you about the crops of the military, that you sealed because the time has come to harvest them... If you order us to harvest them, write to us and we harvest them».



[FIGURE 2]: Letter mentions μειζοτερος was responsible for providing food for the fighting soldiers
LAUR 1984: PL.CXXXI.

3- al-Mezoteros as a Financial Official

The study of Coptic documents clarified that al-Mezoteros's financial tasks are focused entirely on taxation and not on other fiscal activities. He was responsible for many financial affairs related to village taxes⁸⁵, and so had a prominent role in its collection.⁸⁶ His role as a financial official can be summarized through the following points:

⁸⁴ P LAUR.V 1984: N° 198.

⁸⁵ There are many documents: CPR 1895: vol.2, 85, N°s. XCVIII, XCIX; BM 1905. N°. 1051; OMH 1952, N°. 150; CPR 1958: vol.4, N°.15; ERNSTEDT 1959: 61, N°.23.

⁸⁶ In the 7th - 8th century under the Umayyads the village with its Mezoteros was an autonomous community which played a major role in tax collection, and this remained until the end of the 8th century (under the rule of the Abbasid state). MORIMOTO 1981: 197.

- al-Mezoteros was specifically responsible for collecting the Embolē tax⁸⁷. This role is revealed through a tax receipt dated to 7th century, which mentions that al-Mezoteros had received the Empolē tax⁸⁸ with another cash tax⁸⁹. We also find a letter written on an ostracon dated to the 7th-8th century, including a person named Kira writing to a person named Peter who lives in a far area from him. The letter mentions that Peter asked Kira to send him wheat, while Kira told him that he would send him what he needed after al-Mezoteros comes and takes the Embolē from him⁹⁰ [FIGURE 3].

«ΤΑΔΑC ΜΠΕΤΡΟC ΔΙΤΗ ΚΥΡΑ ΔΚΘΔΑΪ ΝΑΪ ΘΑΝCΟΥΟ ΕΡΨΑΝ ΠΜΕΖΟΤΕΡΟC ΒΩΚ ΝΑΨ ΕΨΤΑΔΟ ΕΒΒΑΔΗ⁹¹ ΨΑΪΤΗΝΝΟΥ ΝΑΚ ΝΤΕΚΤΗΝΝΟΥ ΠΚΑΜΟΥΔ ΝΤΑΤΑΔΟ ΝCΟΥΟ ΝΑΚ», «Give it to Peter from Kira, you wrote to me about wheat, when al-Mezoteros goes away having loaded Empolē, I shall send to you and you may send the camel, and I shall load (it with) wheat for you».



[FIGURE 3]: Letter written on ostraca mentions *μειζότερος* had received the Empolē tax
OMH 1952: PL.IV.

- al-Mezoteros participated in the collection of taxes that were paid in money, such as the gold tax imposed on the citizens, which the village supervisor had to collect and hand

⁸⁷ The Embolē is one of the main taxes imposed during the early Arab period, and it was usually paid in kind, which it was of course corn, often wheat, and rarely barley, and it was devoted to both Arab settlers and for the Arab immigrants in Fustat who were working in the navy fleet, whereas, they were receiving annual allowances of money and corn. *P. LOND IV* 1910: XXXIX; *BAL* 1954: 42.

⁸⁸ In one Greek documents Al-Mezoteroc is referred in context with Embolē wheat delivered from the village of Tokona (*P.Oxy.* XVI 2021). BERKES 2017: 92.

⁸⁹ Many parts of document are missing. *CPR* 1895: vol.2, 85, N^o.XCVIII; *CPR* 1958: vol.4, N^o.15.

⁹⁰ *OMH* 1952: N^o.150.

⁹¹ The meaning of the word *εββαλη* is unknown, and it was not mentioned in any of the specialized linguistic dictionaries, whether Coptic or Greek. Therefore, the research suggests two possibilities:

- This word represents one of the unrecognized written forms of the word *εμβολη* due to the closeness of the phonetic pronunciation between the two words, which caused confusion between the letters. This is one of the linguistic features that occur frequently in writing Coptic documents, in addition to relying on the context of the text; as it includes a request for a shipment of wheat and that the meizoteros goes to load a specific shipment. (The researcher adopted this possibility)

- Word *εββαλη* is just a Coptic writing of the Arabic word «papari», which is written in Coptic piper meaning «the pepper». TILL 1951: 84, N^o.113a.

over. It seems that it was an exceptional tax as it was only mentioned in one document, as follows:⁹² «+ ἀνοκ ἀβραζαμ πμειζότερος ψεζαι ηπσαζ φοιβαμμων προνοντης ηκρηρες ξε διπληροϋ ητοοτκ ζαπεχρϋςικον ηπκωμηκατικον», «I Abraham al-Mezoteros writing to the teacher Phoibamon the superintendent (of the village of) Kreris, I received from your hand regarding the gold tax of the locals' tax».

- al-Mezoteros was responsible for collecting taxes in kind, which is shown in a letter written on a papyrus dated 8th century AD from Arsinoy. al-Mezoteros was mentioned as one of the officials who have to collect taxes in kind. His name is written in Greek⁹³.

4- al-Mezoteros as a Legal Official

- al-Mezoteros was responsible for adjudicating disputes and inheritance settlements among citizens, as in the following example⁹⁴: «ειςζαι ηταμεριτ μμααυ ειλιαβετ τυεερε ζωως ηπμακαρ, επιφανειος τεσμααυ μαρια ηναβραζαμ πεσζαι πωηρε ηθεοδωρος ζμπεικαστρον ηουωτ χαιρεη ηπειδη ηηησαπεηκοτκ ηπαμακαρ, ηειωτ λουζλα αυω ηητρομπε ταϊ εβδομης αρχ ετωοοη τεηου αηηαγε ημμε ητο ταμεριτ μμααυ ειλιαβετ αιπροσελθει ερο ηηηημωτωτ αθανασιος ηηβικτωρ ηλαωω, ηζουη ηπαθλοφορος ημαρτυρος αββα κυριακος ηπεικαστρον ηουωτ ερε ηθεοφελ^ε, αηα βικτωρ παρχηπρεσβ, αυω ημειζ^ο...», «I am writing to my dear mother Elizabeth, the daughter of the late Epiphanius, too, and her mother Mary and Abraham, her husband the son of Theodoros, in the same court, greetings after the death of my father Loula in this seventh year, the beginning of what happened now, I have been in justice with you my dear mother, Elizabeth, in front of the illustrious Athanasius and Victor the Lashanes in the sanctuary of the victorian martyr Abba Kuriakos located in this same town, in the presence of the most reverend Abba Victor, chief priest and al-Mezoteros».

- The legal duty of al-Mezoteros is evident because he is one of the officials of the higher authorities and representatives of the judicial body in the court that Coptic citizens used when signing legal contracts, as in the following sales document:⁹⁵ «επι τοις λαμπρωτ αθανασιον δαυειδ ηηνα υιου μακαριωτ πααμ μειζ^ω καστρ^ο μεμνωνιου + αηον ζαχαρια ηηεφραημ ηησοφια ηημαρια ηηηακοημ ηωηρε ηημακ, ψατη αυω ηηειρε ηπροσωποη ηηηκεσηη αυω ηηρηματιζε ζαροου ηηζωβ ηηη αηον ηηρηη ...επειεφραφοη ηηπρασις ηηαηπαραβα ηημοϋ», «Among the illustrious Athanasius, son of David and Mina son of the late Paam al-Mezoteros, the Kastron of Memnonia. + We Zacharias, Ephraim, Sophia, Maria, and Takum, the children

⁹² BM 1905. N^o.1051.

⁹³ ERNŠTEDT 1959: N^o. 23.

⁹⁴ REVILLOUT 1880: 101-107; BM 1905. N^o. 423; KRU 1912: N^o. 37.

⁹⁵ STERN 1884: 152-159; ERMAN & KREBS 1899: 270-277; KRU 1912: N^o.10; TILL 1964: 102-104; CROMWELL 2017: 143-144.

of the late Psate. Whereby we also represent our siblings and act on their behalf in all matters...to write on our behalf the sale document without transgression».

- It seems that al-Mezoteros had a role in settling contracts, especially lease contracts. A papyrus dated to 7th-8th century AD includes a lease contract, but unfortunately it is incomplete. Crum mentioned that the beginning of this document is: «from ...the deacon, son of Dorothe of Shmoun, to Apa Taurinis, relating to a former lease», and he mentioned also that Taurinis is the Mazut, the follow is the rest of the Coptic text⁹⁶: «Δωροθε...μεσοτερος...Χεπιδη ακρυμη ουμιθεωσις παι...»
- al-Mezoteros is the legal official who receives citizens' guarantees as one of the legal measures taken by the state to ensure the performance of compulsory services and reduce village abandonment. The following is a guarantee contract for a villager's attendance⁹⁷: «Αποκ ζερμινε πυε νηανονπ πρωμ ηθωνε ζμ πτωϋ ηϋμουν τρολις ειςζαι ηκρυρις γεωργε πμζοτερος εφονηρ ζη βαβελων ξε τιενγγηγα ηακ ηπεπροσωπον ηπαδαου πυε ηηωζαηης πρωμ βογσιρε ζη πιτωϋ ηουωτ ξε», «I Hermia the son of Anup, a man of the village of Tone in the nome of the city of Shmun, I am writing to Lord George al-Mezoteros, who lives in Babylon. I guarantee for the person of Palau son of John a man of Busire in the same nome».

V. THE COPTS WHO WERE EMPLOYED AS ΜΕΙΖΟΤΕΡΟΣ IN THE COPTIC DOCUMENTS

The following table includes the names of Copts who held the position of μειζοτερος according to Coptic documents. The entries are arranged chronologically, knowing that there are many documents in which the title μειζοτερος is mentioned without the person's name [TABLES 3 & 4].

Name	Date of document	Document Type	Provenance	Publication
(?)	6 th -7 th Century AD.	Letter	Thebes	<i>RYL.COPT</i> 1909: N°. 305
Κοζζλοϋθε	7 th century AD.	Letter	Ashmunein	<i>P LAUR</i> 1984: N°.198.
ηιορταηης	7 th century AD.	Tax receipt	Unknown	<i>CPR</i> 1895: vol.2, N°. XCVIII; <i>CPR</i> 1958: vol.4, N°. 15.
ταϋριηος (?)	7 th -8 th Century AD.	sale contract	Thebes	<i>RYL.COPT</i> 1909: N°.178.
(?)	7 th -8 th Century AD.	Letter	Thebes (Medinet Habu)	<i>OMH</i> 1952: N°.150.
αργαμα χζηλ	8 th century AD.	House sale contract	Thebes.	<i>KRU</i> 1912. N°.12
Αρωη	8 th Century AD.	Protection letter	Thebes	<i>ST</i> 1921: N°. 432; <i>TILL</i> 1939: N°.s. 27, 28; <i>TILL</i>

⁹⁶ *P.RYL.COPT* 1909: 92

⁹⁷ *ERNSTEDT* 1959: N°. 3.

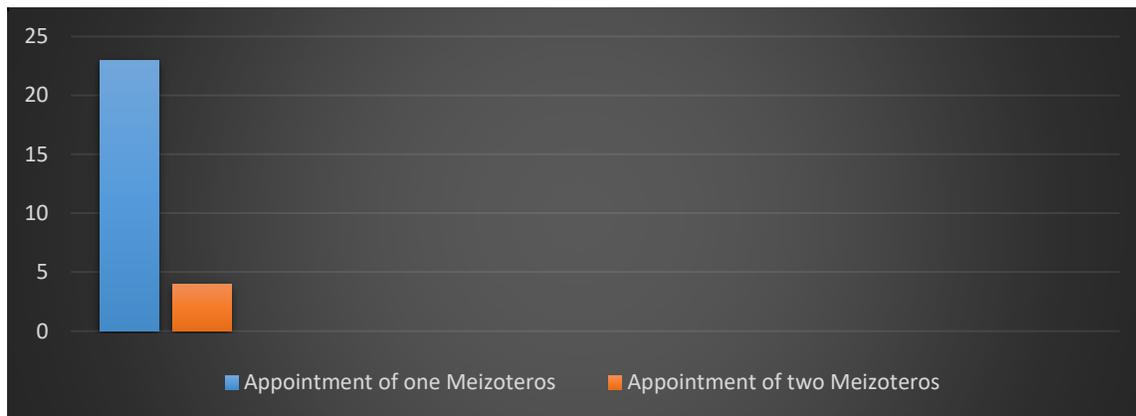
Γεωργιος				1964: 228; <i>SB KOPT. III</i> 2006: N°. 1368.
Βικτωρ	8 th century AD.	Inheritance Settlement Deed	Thebes (Djême)	REVILLOUT 1880: 101-107; <i>BM</i> 1905. N°. 423; <i>KRU</i> 1912. N°. 37.
Γεωργε	8 th century AD.	Guarantee Contract	Unknown	ERNŠTEDT 1959: N°.3.
	8 th century AD.	Tax receipt	Thebes (?)	<i>CPR</i> 1895: vol.2, N°. XCIX; <i>CPR</i> 1958: vol.4, N°. 189c.
Κολλονθο Πατε	8 th century AD.	Guarantee Declaration	Aphrodite	<i>P.LOND</i> 1910: vol.4, N°.1499.
Κυρος	8 th century AD.	Guarantee Declaration	Aphrodite	<i>P.LOND</i> 1910: vol.4, N°.1494; <i>BÜRG</i> 1958: N°.2.
Μηνα	8 th century AD.	Land sale contract	Thebes	<i>KRU</i> 1912: N°.10.
Σενουισ	8 th century AD.	Letter	Fayoum	ERNŠTEDT 1959: N°.23.
?	8 th century AD.	Protection letter	Thebes	TILL 1939: N°.22.
?	9 th -10 th Century AD.	Letter	Unknown	ERNŠTEDT 1959: N°.14.
αβραζαμ	O.D	Declaration by receipt of tax	Ashmunain	<i>BM</i> 1905: N°.1051.
Σαραπιων	O.D	Letter	Unknown	<i>BM</i> 1905: N°.1160.
?	O.D	Letter	Thebes (?)	REVILLOUT 1902: N°.58.

[TABLE 3]: Coptic Mawazit in Coptic documents from Egypt ©Done by the researcher

Name	Date of document	Document Type	Provenance	Publication
Επεφανιος	6 th -8 th century AD.	Epitaph	Qasr Ibrîm (Aethiopia)	RICHTER 1999: 297; <i>SB KOPT</i> 2006: vol.3, N°. 1602; <i>L.LIPS.KOPT</i> 2013: N°.58; <i>TM</i> : N°.110998; <i>DBMNT</i> : N°.566.
Παυλος	8 th -9 th Century AD.	Epitaph [FIGURE 4]	Kalabsha (Northern Nubia)	VLIET 2002: 186, L.3-4; <i>SB.KOPT</i> 2006: vol.3, N°.

To talk about how Copts assumed this official position and to understand its nature, we must study the documents in depth. Below are some points that can shed light on this aspect:

- 1- By studying the titles associated with the Mawazit Copts, which varied between honorary, religious, and professional titles, it can be clear that their social status was discernable. These titles indicates that they were selected from the ranks of trusted men among the village elites, as well as from among the clergy, as evidenced by the appointment of one Mawazit Copts to the position of head priest of the church, prominent religious position.⁹⁸ Additionally, many of them were titled with $\alpha\pi\alpha$.⁹⁹
- 2- One Meizoteris was appointed to manage each village, but sometimes we found a few villages that had several Meizoteris, who were appointed to manage the same village at the same time. But the prevailing rule in the state's administrative structure was to appoint one Meizoteris for each village [CHART 1].



[CHART 1]: Appointment of μειζοτερος in Villages © Done by the researcher.

- 3- There was an assistant employee who worked with Al-Mazut to help him with the administrative matters of the village, such as receiving the complaints of the villagers, as seen in this example¹⁰⁰: « $\alpha\pi\alpha\kappa \dots \pi\epsilon\tau\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota \eta\pi\alpha\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma \pi\kappa\upsilon\rho, \varsigma\alpha\rho\alpha\pi\iota\omega\eta \pi\mu\epsilon\iota\zeta\omicron\tau\epsilon\rho \epsilon\iota\pi\rho\sigma\kappa\upsilon\eta\epsilon\iota \eta\tau\epsilon\kappa\mu\eta\tau\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma \mu\eta\pi\alpha\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma \pi\beta\omicron\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma \epsilon\pi\epsilon\iota\lambda\eta\dots + \tau\alpha\delta\varsigma \eta\pi\alpha\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma \pi\kappa\upsilon\rho, \varsigma\alpha\rho\alpha\pi\iota\omega\eta \mu\eta \pi\beta\omicron\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma \chi\iota\tau\eta \gamma\omicron\upsilon\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma \pi\omega\omicron\omicron\varsigma$ », «I ... his written to my master the lord Sarapion Al-mazut, I bow down to your majesty and my master the assistant, as ... Give it to my master the lord Sarapion and the assistant of Jonatheus the shepherd».

⁹⁸ KRU 1912: N°. 37.

⁹⁹ REVILOUT 1880: 101-107; BM 1905. N°.423; P. RYL.COPT 1909: N°.178; P. LOND IV 1910: N°. 1494; BÜRG 1958: N°. 32; P LAUR.V 1984: N°.198.

¹⁰⁰ BM 1905. N°.1160.

- 4- The research suggests that there is a hierarchy among the functions of the *μειζοτερος*, based on the below evidence:
- The use of the title *αρχιμειζοτερο*¹⁰¹ «chief of Meizoteros», in one of the Coptic documents suggests the hypothesis that there is a hierarchy within the *μειζοτερος προεωυιον*.
 - In Coptic documents, there appeared to be a diversity and difference in the administrative borders that fell under the jurisdiction of the Coptic *μειζοτερος*, administration. This indicates a difference or variation in authority levels from one *μειζοτερος* to another. We find some who ruled entire district¹⁰², while another managed a group of villages¹⁰³. Each in turn was headed by a *μειζοτερος*, meaning that they were indeed of lower status than *μειζοτερος*. Most of the Mawazit are assigned to manage one village¹⁰⁴. Finally there were some who managed a farm within the village.

VI. CONCLUSION

To achieve the research aims, the study reached many results, which can be classified into linguistic and social conclusions as follows:

First: Linguistic aspects: *μειζοτερος* is a functional title of Greek origin, which is used to express an official administrative position restricted only to men in all historical periods, whether Greek, Byzantine, Coptic or Arab, It was held only by those who were responsible in the administration of the state. As it was a purely functional title, and no one ever held it as an honorary title.

- This title is always written after the proper name and preceding with the definite article in a masculine form. It is only mentioned without article when the title is pluralized.
- The linguistic use of this title in Coptic documents dates back from the 6th until the 14th centuries, though it was more common in the 8th century AD, which indicates that the *μειζοτερος* function was of great importance during this period.
- The research identified all the linguistic derivations and written forms of this term, and the common form is *μειζοτερος*.
- The Copts Mawazit held many titles that varied among functional, honorary, and religious titles, which reveal their social status.

Second: Civilization Aspects: The tasks of the *μειζοτερος* is divided into those related to implementing the decisions of the ruling authority, and others related to managing the affairs of the villagers. These are tasks and activities related to daily life in the village,

¹⁰¹ GIOVANNI 2012: 51; P. QI IV 2014: N°. 95; BERKES 2017: 119; DBNT: N°. 2837, <http://www.dbmnt.uw.edu.pl/database/details/2837> accessed on (9/9/2023); TM: N°. 371331, www.trismegistos.org/text/371331 accessed on (9/9/2023).

¹⁰² KRU 1912: Nos.10, 12.

¹⁰³ P LAUR 1984: vol.5, N°.198.

¹⁰⁴ ST 1921: N°.432; OMH 1952: N°.150; CPR 1958: vol.4, Nos.15, 189c.

which can shed light on some of the financial, legal and administrative aspects of the Copts, as follows:

Administrative roles

Recruiting the villagers who are obligated to serve in the navy, guaranteeing the villagers who were chosen to be recruited to work as sailors for the ruling authority, preventing villagers from leaving, receiving complaints from the villagers, and providing food for the fighting soldiers.

Legal roles

Adjudicating disputes and inheritance settlement among citizens, concluding contracts, and receiving citizens' guarantees

Financial roles:

Collecting the Embolē tax, collecting kind taxes, and collecting money taxes.

- It is clear from the preceding tasks that this profession is more administrative than financial or legal, and indicates that the Copts had a highly centralized administrative structure.

- The μειζοτερος function did not have any religious or ecclesiastical activity in churches or monasteries, and was limited to purely daily life tasks.

- The ruling authority appointed one μειζοτερος to manage each village, but sometimes several μειζοτεροςω ωερε απποιντελ to manage the same village at the same time. Nonetheless the prevailing rule in the state's administrative structure was to appoint one μειζοτερος for each village. Sometimes the ruling authority appointed an assistant employee to work with the μειζοτερος to assist him in administrative matters of the village.

- There was a hierarchy for μειζοτερος function, which is following:

- 1- Head of a town.
- 2- Head a group of villages.
- 3- Head of a village.
- 4- Head of a farm in a village.

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