

THE STRONG ARM OF THE LAW? POLICE CORRUPTION IN PTOLEMAIC EGYPT*

Abstract: Given the broad powers granted its officers, the Ptolemaic law enforcement system ought to have been plagued by official abuses. Yet there are few indications that police misbehavior was a serious problem. Villagers complained about police misbehavior, but many complaints are suspect, highlighting “abuses” that look like proper procedure, and the fact that such complaints were often sent to police officials suggests that people trusted them. Insubordination in the ranks seems to have been uncommon; reprimands to subordinates from police administrators are few; and government circulars and decrees concerning corruption are often too vague to provide firm conclusions about the extent or even the types of police wrongdoing.

On September 14, 109 BCE, a cobbler named Petermouthis from the Egyptian village of Oxyrhyncha petitioned the *stratēgos* Ptolemaios concerning a brazen instance of official abuse: Dionysios, the local police chief, had come to town with a number of accomplices and set upon Petermouthis’ workshop (*P.Coll. Youtie* I 16 [Arsinoite, 109 BCE?]).¹ The offenders grabbed the cobbler and dragged him through the streets with great cruelty, only releasing him after they had taken four silver drachmas, 1300 bronze drachmas and even the shirt off his back. They also compelled another man to arrange an additional payment of 44 silver drachmas (in Petermouthis’ name) at the bank. Not wanting these acts to go unpunished, Petermouthis asked Ptolemaios that the offenders be transported to another official, probably for reprimand. Unfortunately, at this point in the narrative the document breaks off, along with our knowledge of the case.

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¹ Abbreviations for editions of papyri are cited after Oates, Bagnall, et al. (2006). The *Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden Ägyptens* (www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~gv0/gvz.html) provides dates and provenances for papyri, where possible. On the Ptolemaic *stratēgos* and his subordinates, see Van ’t Dack (1948); Bengtson (1964–7) vol. 3; Hohlwein (1969); Mooren (1984). See n. 4, below, for more on police chiefs (*archiphylakitai*).

Documents like Petermouthis' petition suggest that the Ptolemaic *chôra* was rife with criminals and crooked cops. Complaints of police misbehavior are well known: unnecessary violence in searches, seizures and investigations; unauthorized requisitions of goods; arbitrary detention and denial of release; and mistreatment at tax time. Administrative slip-ups were occasionally a problem for law enforcement officials, and insubordination among officers sometimes affected police work. Even the king and queen of Egypt addressed the issue of corrupt law enforcement practices from time to time in royal decrees. But surprisingly, only a few scholars have approached the subject of official corruption in Ptolemaic Egypt.² The consensus is a very general one: that the Ptolemaic administration was plagued by corruption, with law enforcement no exception. But the evidence for this claim is complex and more limited than one might have thought. Occasional abuses may have occurred, but nothing suggests that a culture of corruption existed among the officer corps. In this paper I argue that corruption within the ranks of the Ptolemaic police system was minimal and that the system was for the most part reliable and effective.

Given the wide distribution of the Ptolemaic police system and the great autonomy of its officers, this is surprising. A broad spectrum of officials from different spheres policed the countryside.³ Military and security personnel provided some police protection, but the lion's share of law enforcement fell to the *phylakitai*, supervised by *archiphylakitai* (essentially police chiefs) in the towns and villages of the *chôra* and by *epistatai phylakitôn* (police commissioners of a sort) at the nome level.⁴ The *phylakitai* and their supervisors were the natural points of contact for victims of crimes, as well as for a central government looking to enforce law and order in the Egyptian countryside. These officials performed a number of functions. They investi-

² On official corruption in Ptolemaic Egypt, see Crawford (1978); Peremans (1982). On official corruption and violence in Roman (and Byzantine) Egypt, see Baldwin (1963) 258–9; Davies (1973) 204–5; also Bagnall (1989); Hobson (1993); Alston (1994). To my knowledge, no survey of police corruption in the Roman province of Egypt has appeared.

³ Bauschatz (2005) provides the most recent and comprehensive discussion of police and police work in Ptolemaic Egypt. See also Lesquier (1911) 260–4; Berneker (1935) 78–9; Kool (1954); Bouché-Leclercq (1963) 56–62; Héliès (1986); Thompson (1997).

⁴ *Phylakitai*: Lesquier (1911) 261–2; Kool (1954); Bevan (1968) 163–5; Thompson (1997) 962–5; Bauschatz (2005) 27–34; *Chrest.Wilck.* I pp. 411–16; *P.Tebt.* I 5 pp. 51 n. ad 188, 550–1; *P.Hib.* II 198 pp. 97–104. *Archiphylakitai*: Engers (1909) 73–85; Kool (1954) 43–66; Handrock (1967) 49–50, 118–19; Bauschatz (2005) 34–9; *O.Oslo* 2 p. 13 with n. *Epistatai phylakitôn*: Van 't Dack (1949) 40–4; Kool (1954) 67–85; Bauschatz (2005) 38–46; *P.Hamb.* IV 272 pp. 175–6 n. ad 2. For a brief survey of officials from other spheres of the Ptolemaic administration with police powers, see Bauschatz (2005) 52–61; for policing and security along the borders and trade routes of the Ptolemaic empire, Hennig (2003).

gated crimes (visiting crime scenes, examining evidence, sealing homes, questioning witnesses and confiscating property), processed offenders (arresting, detaining and prosecuting), provided protection (guarding state infrastructure as well as private individuals), and even collected tax revenue for the central government.⁵

Law enforcement machinery extended throughout the Egyptian *chôra* and was present at every administrative level, from the village to the nome. The roadblocks to the successful completion of police business occurring in such a wide-ranging system ought to have created an environment in which certain types of corruption could flourish. Breakdowns in communication between officers in remote regions should have been responsible for much of this. Police orders were generally written on papyrus and sent, via desert roads connecting small settlements, through the agency of letter carriers or police officers, to officials in other administrative areas. Recipients were often not addressed by title and were sometimes identified only by their first name and perhaps a patronymic. Given these constraints, we might expect delays and errors. In addition, time was of the essence for both the completion of police business and the delivery of commands. On the surface, the Ptolemaic system of official correspondence, though perhaps expedient for its time, seems prohibitively slow. Without a doubt, problems with inter-official communication were responsible for occasional delays in police work.

That the system functioned so well is also surprising in light of the broad powers enjoyed by police officers. By empowering law enforcement officials to confiscate goods, collect tax arrears, provide crowd control and arrest and detain offenders, the Ptolemies granted

⁵ Visiting crime scenes: e.g. *P.Enteux.* 65 (Magdola, 221 BCE); *PSI* IV 393 (Philadelphia, 241 BCE); *SB* XVIII 13160 (Moeris, 244 or 219 BCE?). Examining evidence: *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59379 (?) (Philadelphia, ca. 254–251 BCE); *P.Enteux.* 70 (Magdola, 221 BCE); *P.Petr.* III 28,E (Sebennytos?, 224–218 BCE). Sealing homes (and other buildings): e.g. *P.Mich.* XVIII 779 (Mouchis, after 192 BCE); *SB* XIV 12089 (Herakleopolite, 130 BCE); *ZPE* 141 (2002) 185–90 (Herakleopolite, 137 BCE), two documents concerning the same instance. Questioning witnesses or receiving witness testimony: e.g. *P.Enteux.* 86 (Magdola, 221 BCE); *P.Petr.* II 32,2a (Arsinoite, 217 BCE); *SB* X 10271 (Magdola, 231 or 206 BCE?). Confiscating property: e.g. *P.Cair.Zen.* IV 59620 (Arsinoite?, 248–239 BCE); *P.Enteux.* 28 (Theogonis, 218 BCE); *UPZ* I 5, 6 and 6a (Memphis, 163 BCE), three petitions concerning the same instance. Arrest, detention and transport of offenders: e.g. *BGU* VI 1248 (Syene, 137 BCE?); *P.Lille* I 3 (Magdola, after 216–215 BCE); *P.Ryl.* IV 570 (Krokodilopolis, ca. 254–251 BCE). Conducting trials: e.g. *P.Cair.Zen.* II 59145 (?), 256 BCE); *P.Hib.* II 233 (?), III BCE); *P.Tebt.* I 43 (Alexandria, 117 BCE). Protecting agriculture: e.g. *BGU* VIII 1851 (Herakleopolite, 64–44 BCE); *Chrest.Wilck.* 331 (Kerkeosiris, 113 BCE); *P.Cair.Zen.* I 59136 (Arsinoite, 256 BCE). Protecting people: e.g. *C.Ord.Ptol.*² 62 (Memphis, 99 BCE); *P.Petr.* II 1 (Arsinoite, III BCE); *P.Tebt.* III.1 786 (Oxyrhyncha, ca. 138 BCE). Collecting tax arrears: e.g. *C.Ord.Ptol.*² 53 (Kerkeosiris?, 118 BCE); *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59407 (Philadelphia?, III BCE); *P.Tebt.* III.1 764 (Tebtynis, 185 or 161 BCE?).

them a kind of monopoly on violence.⁶ Brutality between villagers was not tolerated and was generally brought to a halt when police were alerted and involved.⁷ Villager assaults on officials were usually met with immediate arrest and imprisonment, but the same was not always the case when the roles were reversed.⁸ The reasons for this are not difficult to imagine. Police work often necessitated a physical element, and the degree to which intimidation and force were employed depended on the nature of the operation being carried out and the level of cooperation on the part of the offending party. Police often had to take decisive, physical action to solve crimes. Without a doubt, the behavior of Ptolemaic law enforcement officials could sometimes be characterized as abuse. But from whose point of view?

Before we consider the evidence for police corruption in Ptolemaic Egypt, a point of terminology must be clarified.⁹ I will discuss

⁶ Though it is impossible to quantify, there was certainly a higher level of tolerance for official violence against villagers in Ptolemaic Egypt than in most modern societies. The Ptolemaic state was determined to have its financial needs met and empowered its officials to employ almost any means necessary to meet them. As a consequence, villagers sometimes suffered physical abuse at the hands of local officials when cooperation was not full or payment was not offered. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the inhabitants of the *chôra* were not without recourse when physical abuse became excessive or even life-threatening. On official violence in Roman Egypt, see Bagnall (1989); Alston (1994). To my knowledge, no comparable study of the Ptolemaic period exists.

⁷ A pair of documents from the archive of Dioskourides, *phrourarchos* of Herakleopolis in the middle of the 2nd century BCE, demonstrates that the agents of this official were quick to respond to public disturbances. In the first text (*P.Diosk.* 1 [Herakleopolite, 154 BCE?]), a petition to Dioskourides, a man recounts that an agent of the *phrourarchos* had come to his home and arrested two brawlers. In the second (*P.Diosk.* 6 [Herakleopolite, 146 BCE]), another petition to Dioskourides, a pair of men asserted that they had been attacked several times, and described the arrest of a number of the offenders, which was carried out shortly after one of the scuffles by an agent of the *phrourarchos*. See Bauschatz (2005) 57–9 for a summary of the police duties of *phrourarchoi*, the heads of Ptolemaic garrisons. For an overview of the office and the archive of Dioskourides, as well as further bibliography, see *P.Diosk.*

⁸ For instance, in *P.Tebt.* I 15 (Kerkeosiris, 114 BCE) it was reported that two men had attacked an *epistatês* and that one of them had been captured and imprisoned while the other had escaped. In *BGU VIII* 1780 (Herakleopolite, 56 or 50 BCE?) an accused party being transported for examination orchestrated an attack upon a *hypostatêgos* which was only stopped by the intervention of a *machairophoros* and an *ephodos*. On *epistatai*, see n. 21, below. On the police functions of *machairophoroi*, see Bauschatz (2005) 60 for attestations and additional bibliography. On *ephodoi* and their superiors, see n. 27, below.

⁹ I append here an additional clarification. The reader will notice that I employ a number of modern technical and legal terms to designate the officials who policed the Ptolemaic *chôra* (“cops,” “law enforcement,” “police”), the individuals they apprehended for wrongdoing (“criminals”) and the behavior of both groups (“criminal,” “illegal,” “lawful,” “legal,” “unlawful”). Admittedly, many of these terms are inadequate and/or inaccurate when applied to the situation in Ptolemaic Egypt. For example, it is certainly anachronistic to talk of the existence of professional “police” forces before such organizations were introduced in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries of our era. Nevertheless, I have chosen to refer to the “police” of Ptolemaic

two types of police abuses in this essay. First, I will examine instances in which police employed their considerable powers of searching, seizing, arresting and imprisoning to break the law. I will call this form of corruption “mistreatment.” After briefly discussing some of the impediments to the quick completion of police business, I will then touch on another type of corruption: occasions when police took no heed of official orders or deliberately disobeyed them, or “insubordination.” I will close with a consideration of a handful of royal decrees that highlight police corruption of both types.¹⁰

Let us begin with mistreatment. At first glance, there appear to be many indications that mistreatment of civilians by police was widespread. Most allegations of such abuses come from petitions, perhaps our best source for the mechanics of Ptolemaic policing. Petitions provided the inhabitants of the Egyptian countryside with a fast, reliable method of inviting police action.¹¹ They demonstrate that the Ptolemaic populace had easy access to law enforcement. After a crime had been committed, a victim sought out a local scribe, presented a condensed account of events and sent a written request for action to an official at the village level or higher. For the most

Egypt because of the many similarities between the duties of the officials so identified and those of many modern police officers (see above). In addition, for the purposes of this essay I employ the terms “crime,” “criminal” and the like as synonyms for “offense,” “offender” and related words (“evildoer,” “evildoing,” “wrongdoing”). The reader may object that many, if not most of the instances of wrongdoing described in this essay are in fact torts (that is, civil wrongs) and not crimes, and that my use of the terms “crimes” and “criminals” to describe private offenses and offenders is thus misleading. But while this is true from the standpoint of the modern English legal system, the distinction between the two types of offenses was decidedly less clear-cut (if it existed) in Ptolemaic Egypt. Finally, I have chosen to employ a number of terms to describe Ptolemaic society that imply the existence of a body of law (“breaking the law,” “illegal,” “lawful,” “legal,” “unlawful” and the like) in spite of the fact that, as far as we know, there was no universal code of law in Ptolemaic Egypt to enforce or break. In using these terms I do not mean to imply that officials attempted to uphold and offenders sought to violate a written code of law. Rather, I employ the terms to describe the maintenance of public order (“lawful,” “legal,” et al.) or violations of it (“breaking the law,” “illegal,” “unlawful,” et al.). Thus, when I speak of those who “break the law,” I mean those who disturb the established order by committing offenses against members of the society in which they live. Those who act in a “lawful” fashion, on the other hand, are responsible for restoring order after such offenses have been committed and, to some extent, for preventing such offenses from occurring in the first place.

¹⁰ The reader may object that my use of the term “corruption” to encompass both types of abuses is misleading, as “corruption” suggests not only official dishonesty, bias and abuse, but also (and primarily) financial wrongdoing and even bribery. Yet as will become clear, most of the alleged police wrongdoing discussed in this essay is financial in nature. Further, in several cases police officials appear to have expected, demanded or received bribes from villagers.

¹¹ Ptolemaic petitions in general: Hombert/Préaux (1942); di Bitonto Kasser (1967, 1968 and 1976); Parca (1985). Petitions to police: Bauschatz (2005) 65–102.

part, petitioners seem to have known whom to contact for specific forms of redress. If the appropriate official was not known, a petitioner might appeal to a local official and ask that the right man be notified.¹² The people who submitted petitions came from all segments of Ptolemaic society. Evidently, the social limitations imposed by sex, ethnicity, age, social status, profession and even literacy level did not prevent petitioners from writing appeals. Even the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society were effective petitioners.¹³

Petitions are central to our understanding of the Ptolemaic law enforcement system, but for a number of reasons they must be handled with care. To begin with, petitions are heavily biased documents. In his or her appeal, a petitioner had the opportunity to present the facts of an incident exactly as he or she saw them, without any objection or cross-examination from the accused. As a result, a petition provides us with only one side of a story. In addition, petitions are rhetorical documents, in which descriptions of *pathos* are central. The writers of petitions clearly understood that detailed accounts of pain and suffering were important ingredients for successful claims. Doubtless some petitioners, seeking to evoke as much pity as possible in the recipients of their appeals, magnified the extent of their suffering, invented additional abuses or even lied outright about the mistreatment they alleged. A final limitation of the petitions as evidence for police corruption is their scope. They protest wrongdoing by individual officers and their accomplices, but do not indicate that police organized themselves into groups for extortion, theft and the like. Such institutionalized corruption, though well-known today, seems to have been for the most part foreign to the Egypt of the Ptolemies. Though there are indications that police sometimes operated in groups for nefarious purposes, there are virtually no complaints of organized, conspiratorial, systematic extortion.¹⁴

To begin with, police officers were occasionally accused of theft and confiscation. Police were sometimes alleged to have misappropriated money, produce, animals or other goods.¹⁵ In one case, it was

¹² Addressees in petitions to police: Bauschatz (2005) 82–6. Petitions to officials with instructions that the recipient notify the appropriate official(s) or take the correct action: e.g. *P.Heid.* IX 422 (Tinteris, 158 BCE); 433 (Herakleopolite, 161–155 BCE); *P.Tebt.* I 41 (Kerkeosiris, 105–90 BCE).

¹³ Bauschatz (2005) 81–2.

¹⁴ A handful of royal decrees and circulars seem to call attention to widespread extortion by police officials: *C.Ord.Ptol.*² 30–1 (? , 183 BCE); 34 (Oxyrhynchus?, 186 BCE); 53 (Kerkeosiris?, 118 BCE); 55 (Tebtynis, ca. 118 BCE); *P.Hib.* II 198 (Arsinoite?, after 242 BCE); *P.Mil.Congr.* XVII pg. 29.10–13 (? , 100–99 BCE). Yet royal edicts did not necessarily reflect confirmed instances of law enforcement wrongdoing. On the decrees listed here, see below.

¹⁵ Money: e.g. *P.Cair.Zen.* IV 59753.70–4 (? , III BCE), in which the writer noted that he had been discovered hiding a ship by some *rhabdophoroi* and paid them a drachma,

reported that an assistant to the *stratêgos* had been extorting wine (ZPE 141 [2002]: 182–4 [Herakleopolite, 138 BCE]); the offender was to be arrested and tried. Elsewhere a swineherd who had been detained by an *archiphylakitês* on his way home reported that the policeman had confiscated some pigs (P.Cair.Zen. V 59819 [Krokodilopolis?, 254 BCE]). Another man complained that his grain had been stolen from a pair of threshing floors and asked that a *halônophylax* and his associates be arrested as suspects (P.Oxy. XII 1465 [Oxyrhynchite, I BCE]).¹⁶ We also see occasional charges of wrongful arrest and/or imprisonment. In at least six cases, petitioners claimed that police officials had made unjust arrests and carried out unwarranted detentions.¹⁷

likely under compulsion; P.Coll.Youtie I 16 (Arsinoite, 109 BCE?), where an *archiphylakitês* and his subordinates seized four silver drachmas and 1300 bronze drachmas from a man; P.Enteux. 28 (Thegonis, 218 BCE), in which a man accused a *phylakitês* of illegally taking possession of a cup and 12 drachmas and only returning the cup. Produce: e.g. P.Enteux. 55 (Magdola, 222 BCE), where a petitioner alleged that an offender acting in conjunction with a *genêmatophylax* had illegally sown his allotment and subsequently confiscated the produce; P.Erasm. I 1 (Oxyrhyncha, 148–147 BCE), in which a man complained of extortion of rent by a *phylakitês* and an *archiphylakitês*; P.Princ. III 117 (Theadelphia, 55–54 or 4–3 BCE?), a *hypomnêma* concerning a grain deposit disagreement between a petitioner and a *thésaurophylax*. Animals: e.g. BGU III 1012 (Philadelphia, 170 BCE), where a man charged that an *archiphylakitês* had confiscated a number of *probata* without cause; P.Cair.Zen. III 59312 (Arsinoite, 250 BCE), a list of pigs with a note that the agents of a *phylakitês* had stolen one; SB XVI 12468 (Arsinoite?, III BCE), in which a man accused a *phylakitês* of confiscating a donkey laden with sacks of grain and bread. Other goods: e.g. UPZ I 5, 6 and 6a (Memphis, 163 BCE), three accounts of a series of raids on a temple by a number of religious officials and (in one instance) a subordinate of the *epistatês*; ZPE 141 (2002) 185–90 (Herakleopolite, 137 BCE), two documents concerning a raid, arrest, home sealing and confiscation of a pickled goose and two pillows, among other things, by the agents of an *archiphylakitês* acting without official sanction. On *rhabdophoroi*, see n. 19, below; on *genêmatophylakes* and the *genêmatophylakia*, n. 32, below; on *thésaurophylakes*, see Bauschatz (2005) 56.

¹⁶ As their title suggests, *halônophylakes* guarded threshing floors. They likely played an important role in the successful completion of the *genêmatophylakia*, the annual guarding of crops, though *halônophylakes* occur in only a few Ptolemaic texts and the form *halônophylax* only once: P.Bingen 33.3 (? , III–II BCE): ἀλωνοφυλοῦ [ca. ?] Θοτορται; P.Cair.Zen. IV 59745.85–7 (Philadelphia?, 255–254 BCE): Πετεμιν Ι Ἄραβι ἀλωνοφυλακοῦντι (Pheros [88] is likely also a *halônophylax*); P.Col. IV 74.12 (?) (Philadelphia?, 248 BCE): [ca. ?]νοφύλακα; P.Oxy. XII 1465.7–8 (Oxyrhynchite, I BCE): Σαραπίωνα Ι ἀλωνοφύλα[κ]α. For more on the *genêmatophylakia*, see below, n. 32.

¹⁷ P.Coll.Youtie I 16 (Arsinoite, 109 BCE?); P.Enteux. 84 (Ghoran, 285–221 BCE); P.Hib. II 203 (? , 246–221 BCE); P.Mich. XVIII 773 (Oxyrhyncha or Krokodilopolis, ca. 194 BCE) and 774 (Oxyrhyncha, ca. 194–193 BCE), the same case in both texts; P.Ryl. IV 570 (Krokodilopolis, ca. 254–251 BCE); P.Tebt. III.1 777 (Tebtynis, II BCE). In P.Cair.Zen. III 59475 (Philadelphia, III BCE) a *phylakitês* arrested a man and another *phylakitês* after the two gained possession of a runaway horse that had been locked up by the local police. The arrest seems to have been the result of a mistake, not bias. It should be noted that many more petitions detailing complaints of wrongful arrest and detention survive. Those not mentioned here contain accusations against officials from other spheres of

These petitioners depicted their arrest and imprisonment as arbitrary. As one might expect, alleged victims regularly maintained their innocence in letters to officials complaining of these practices.¹⁸ One petitioner requested an investigation into charges that a police chief had wrongly arrested one of his slaves (*P.Hib.* II 203 [?, 246–221 BCE]). Elsewhere a man complained that a tax farmer and a *rhabdophoros* had unjustly arrested and whipped him, extorted a lump of silver and a necklace from him, and detained him for one night (*P.Mich.* XVIII 773 [Oxyrhyncha or Krokodilopolis, ca. 194 BCE] and 774 [Oxyrhyncha, ca. 194–193 BCE]).¹⁹ In a final case, a man who had been placed in prison by an angry relative with the cooperation of a *phylakitês* was denied release by a *desmophylax*, even after the relative had requested that he be set free (*P.Enteux.* 84 [Ghoran, 285–221 BCE]).²⁰

Unjust arrests could involve physical abuse, often outlined in grim detail by petitioners. In a fragmentary letter, for example, a prisoner complained of the unjust arrest he had suffered at the hands of the Kerkesouchan police, who had acted with *bia* and *hybris* in bringing him in (*P.Ryl.* IV 570 [Krokodilopolis, ca. 254–251 BCE]). In the case of the cobbler from Oxyrhyncha, the offending officials were alleged to have executed the arrest “with every form of mistreatment and *hubris* and blows” (*P.Coll.Youtie* I 16.15–16 [Arsinoite, 109 BCE]: μετὰ τοῦ παντὸς ἰ σκυλμοῦ καὶ ὕβρεως καὶ πληγῶν). According to another

government or do not specify the titles or administrative domains of the offending parties. See e.g. *BGU* VIII 1821 (Herakleopolite, 57–56 BCE), in which a man complained that he had been unjustly arrested by a tax official and some accomplices; *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59368 (Memphis?, 241 BCE), a letter detailing the unjust arrest and detention of a *chortophylax* by an *oikonomos*; *SB* XX 14708 (Theadelphia, 151 BCE), a petition describing the arbitrary jailing of a man at the hands of a corrupt *kômachês*. On *phylakes* with duties in the realm of law enforcement (among these *chortophylakes*), see Bauschatz (2005) 52–6; on *oikonomoi*, n. 33, below; on *kômachai*, Berneker (1935) 127–30; *P.Yale* I 53 pp. 156–61.

¹⁸ Nevertheless, detainees sometimes admitted that they had erred and asked for forgiveness. In *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59495 (Philadelphia?, III BCE), for example, two swineherds sought pity from Zenon for their wrongdoing, owning up to their guilt while encouraging him to remember that everyone makes mistakes (2–3: ὧν γὰρ ἡμάρτομεν τ[ε] τιμωρήμειθα· οὐθεὶς γὰρ ἀναμάρτητός ἐστιν). In *P.Polit.Iud.* 2 (Herakleopolite, ca. 135 BCE), a prisoner requested that he be freed from the *phylakê* since he had learned his lesson and had already spent enough time wasting away in detention (6–11: τυγχάνωι καταξίως ἰ νενουθετημένος, ἰ καὶ πεῖραν φυλακῆς ἰ εἰληφῶς ἰκανᾶς τε ἰ ἡμέρας κατεφθαρμένος). On Zenon, see n. 35, below.

¹⁹ On *rhabdophoroi*, see Bauschatz (2005) 59–60. The *rhabdophoros* in these texts, a certain Menelaos, is not given a title, but his designation as *ho kata polin* (773.11–12; 774.12–13) makes the identification likely; compare *PSI* IV 332.11 (Philadelphia, 257 BCE): ῥαβδοφόρῳ τῶι κατὰ πόλιν.

²⁰ Among the duties of *desmophylakes* were the receipt and release of prisoners and the receipt of bail payments: Bauschatz (2005) 118–19 and 121.

petition, when a launderer disputed payment by an *epistatês* for a cloak (*himation*) the launderer had been asked to wash, the *epistatês* beat and stomped him and handed him over to the village police (*SB* XX 15001 [Krokodilopolis, 217 BCE]).²¹ Later, the *epistatês* returned with accomplices, administered an additional beating and scattered the launderer's merchandise over the floor of his shop.

Occasionally police officers carried out complex, multifaceted sting operations. These offensives against homes and possessions were often perceived as unjust. They seem to have followed a predictable series of steps. An invasion of a house or other building typically came first, followed by an assault on the inhabitants, a search for valuables, and then departure, generally with goods and/or people in tow. The story of the cobbler from Oxyrhynchus is a good example (*P.Coll.Youtie* I 16 [Arsinoite, 109 BCE?]). In a similar incident, a number of police officials arrested some farmers, sealed a home, confiscated items and departed, all without official sanction (*ZPE* 141 [2002] 185–90 [Herakleopolite, 137 BCE]). In a final case, an agent of a temple *archiphylakitês*, a number of *phylakitai* and an accomplice illegally searched the temple for weapons allegedly hidden there (*UPZ* I 5, 6 and 6a [Memphis, 163 BCE]).²² Finding nothing, the police left the scene; but the accomplice returned later, in what looks like a surprise inspection, accompanied by an agent of the *epistatês*, for additional searching and confiscation.²³

On the surface at least, the evidence from petitions for mistreatment of civilians by police seems damning. But is it conclusive? To begin with, procedures employed in "illegal" confiscations and those sanctioned by the government for the payment of tax arrears are similar. In one case, a petitioner complained to an *epistatês* that an *archiphylakitês* had appropriated some of his taxable livestock and enclosed them in the home of one of his officers (*BGU* III 1012 [Philadelphia, 170 BCE]). Elsewhere a man noted that he was being hounded by an *archiphylakitês* for the return of some government seed as well as his crops, which had been wrongly confiscated by another official

²¹ *Epistatai*: Lavigne (1945); Van 't Dack (1949) 39–44, (1951) 20–3 and 46–7, and (1989); Wolff (1970) 171–6; Bauschatz (2005) 46–9; *P.Enteux*. introduction. These officials, the highest-ranking representatives of the central government in the towns and villages of the *chôra*, had direct supervision over the *archiphylakitai* (and thus by extension the *phylakitai*) in their administrative areas: Bauschatz (2005) 48–9.

²² *Archiphylakitai* were found in villages, the regions around villages, *merides*, toparchies, nomes and even temples: Bauschatz (2005) 37.

²³ See also *BGU* VIII 1855 (Herakleopolite, 64–44 BCE), a petition concerning an instance of breaking and entering by a group of men including an *archephodos*. The raiders broke down the door to the petitioner's house, mistreated his mother and took a dovecote. The petitioner characterized the invasion and assault as violent (*βίαιον*, 18) and requested that the activities of the offending officials be brought to a halt, but never indicated that there was no justification for the raid. For more on this text, see below.

(*BGU VIII 1836* [Herakleopolite, 51–50 BCE]). Yet *archiphylakitai* and their subordinates were regularly employed for the collection of debts to the crown.²⁴ The extraction of state debts from debtors unwilling or unable to pay must occasionally have involved unpleasant action and even prompted petitions. One wonders how many complaints of wrongful confiscation by police officials were written out of spite or resentment at a legal (though physical) seizure of assets by the government. To a subsistence farmer the line between just and unjust extraction could be blurred.

Similar doubts arise when we reconsider cases in which villagers complained of unfair arrests or imprisonments.²⁵ Many crimes could lead to imprisonment in Ptolemaic Egypt, but incarceration was often the result of debts.²⁶ Petitioners sometimes claimed that they had been dragged away or locked up even though they owed no debt, taxes or otherwise. One prisoner complained that he had been arrested by a tax official and accomplices even though he owed the crown nothing (*BGU VIII 1821* [Herakleopolite, 57–56 BCE]). Another asked for help in securing release from prison, where he had been sent unjustly on a charge of debt, though he had already paid the crown its due (*P.Cair.Zen. III 59496* [Krokodilopolis, 248–241 BCE]). Even the cobbler from Oxyrhyncha may not have been the innocent he sought to appear (*P.Coll.Youtie I 16* [Arsinoite, 109 BCE?]). The fact that the *archiphylakitês* and his accomplices extracted a large amount of money from him—and in such a brazen manner—suggests that he had defaulted on a debt to the state. In many, if not most cases, police seem to have arrested people believed to be state debtors under orders and with just cause. But because of slow (or no) communication between officials, mistakes were sometimes made and the wrong people arrested. In any case, violence was certainly employed from time to time to bring in those thought to have defaulted on debts. Corruption may not have been a huge factor in such arrests. Yet we generally cannot be certain about the veracity of claims of unjust arrest for debt, and petitions containing such claims must accordingly be handled with caution.

The evidence for police raids provides both the best examples of alleged police mistreatment of civilians and some of the finest instances of dedicated police work. Without question, these operations could involve violence against people and property: breaking down doors, seizing and arresting individuals and confiscating goods. Yet, as we have just seen, routine police business involved the same sorts of activities. Petitioners who complained of police raids were careful

²⁴ Bauschatz (2005) 170–3.

²⁵ On imprisonment in Ptolemaic Egypt, see Taubenschlag (1959); Hélmis (1986); Ambaglio (1987); Marcone (1999); Bauschatz (2005) 114–26.

²⁶ Bauschatz (2005) 114–15.

to submit graphic accounts of events. But though they often proclaimed their innocence, they rarely demonstrated conclusively that they were without fault or blame. In one case, a man claimed that a group of men, including an *archephodos*, had broken down the door to his house, mistreated his mother and seized a dovecote (*BGU VIII 1855* [Herakleopolite, 64–44 BCE]).²⁷ The writer requested that the petitioned official bring in and try the offenders, to ensure that they attempted nothing violent in the future and would receive the proper punishment. But the details of the raid are puzzling. Why would so many officials have carried out such a brutal operation solely for the purpose of taking a birdhouse and beating up an old lady? The petitioner seems to have withheld information. For one thing, he does not say that the police had no right to seize the property. Could this have been a government-sanctioned operation to obtain payment for a debt? Perhaps someone had accused the petitioner's mother of having stolen the dovecote, necessitating a police investigation and confiscation of the allegedly stolen goods.²⁸ Alternatively, the dovecote may have been stolen by someone else and deposited in the petitioner's house for safekeeping.²⁹ Or perhaps it was stolen property that had been purchased unawares by the petitioner, who will then have thought he was in the right, even if he was not. In addition, it seems likely that government agents bent on extortion would have taken more than a large birdhouse. Would such a prize have merited the time and effort to assemble a team of officials and coordinate a raid? The evidence not supplied in this case, and in a handful of others like it, raises questions about the information furnished by the petitioner.³⁰ Not all police raids were necessarily the actions of

²⁷ *Archephodoi* appear in only three Ptolemaic texts: *BGU VIII 1855.7–8* (Herakleopolite, 64–44 BCE); *P.IFAO II 4.3–4* (Arsinoite, 103 BCE); *P.Tebt. I 90.i.1* (Tebtynis, I BCE). See Bauschatz (2005) 56–7.

²⁸ Requests for confiscation of stolen/borrowed property: e.g. *BGU VIII 1761* (Herakleopolite, 50 BCE), in which a man detailed the illegal occupation of his house and confiscation of his crops by an offender and requested that the stolen produce be impounded; *P.Cair.Zen. II 59145* (?), 256 BCE), where a woman who had been robbed asked Zenon to have an *archiphylakitês* investigate and return the stolen items, which had been found; *P.Enteux. 42* (Magdola, 221 BCE), in which a man complained that a villager had not returned the hoes and money he had borrowed and asked that the *epistatês* compel the accused to hand them over.

²⁹ Harboring of stolen goods: e.g. *P.Hib. I 34* (Oxyrhynchite, 243 BCE) and 73 (Oxyrhynchite, 244–243 BCE), where an *archiphylakitês* illegally (?) held a stolen donkey in his home; *II 198.86–92* (Arsinoite?, after 242 BCE), a royal decree specifying that those who harbored rowers who had run away from the royal fleet were to be penalized; *SB VIII 9792* (Hermoupolis Magna, 162 BCE), in which a petitioner related that one of his stolen donkeys had been discovered in a temple along with the thief (?) and asked that the thief be detained and the animal returned.

³⁰ See also, e.g., *P.Cair.Zen. II 59275* (Arsinoite, 251 BCE), a petition from a man who had been arrested and had his home sealed and his meat confiscated by a number of tax officials, likely because of a failure to pay his taxes (though he does not

corrupt officials; many were likely legitimate, if sometimes violent, operations designed to obtain missing, owed or stolen property.

Further evidence for the need to closely scrutinize reports of police mistreatment of civilians comes from the fact that alleged victims sometimes complained about police officials to other police officers, often those with supervisory powers over the offending parties. One petitioner complained to an *epistatês* that an *archiphylakitês* had wrongly confiscated some of his flocks and handed them over to one of his officers (*BGU* III 1012 [Philadelphia, 170 BCE]). *Archiphylakitai* regularly answered to *epistatai*; this victim, quite reasonably, complained to the offender's superior.³¹ Some petitions went over the heads of the town or village police. In the example of the cobbler, the alleged victim wrote to the *stratêgos* concerning the violent extortion of the *archiphylakitês* (*P.Coll.Youtie* I 16 [Arsinoite, 109 BCE?]). The petitioner may have had no recourse for his complaint in the immediate vicinity and been obliged to contact a provincial official. Elsewhere, another petitioner likewise wrote to the *stratêgos* to complain that he had been cheated by a *genêmatophylax* and an accomplice (*P.Enteux.* 55 [Magdola, 222 BCE]).³² He asked that the *epistatês* send the accused for examination before the *stratêgos*. The picture is clear: when law enforcement officials misbehaved, other law enforcement officials were called on to provide justice. Petitioners would not have complained to police officers about the abuses of other police officers unless they felt some general confidence in the police system.

After all, they had the option of reporting police misbehavior to civil or financial officials. In the case of the launderer attacked by the *epistatês*, the alleged victim filed his complaint with the *oikonomos*, a financial officer (*SB* XX 14999 [Krokodilopolis?, 217 BCE]).³³ In another case, a grain transport official wrote to the *epimelêtês* to complain that an *archiphylakitês* had improperly arrested a number of shipbuilders

say as much); *P.Mich.* XVIII 779 (Mouchis, after 192 BCE), where a man requested that the *phylakitai* arrest or seal the home of an *oikonomos* who had extorted a large sum of money from him (perhaps as an overdue tax payment; see also *P.Mich.* XVIII 778); *UPZ* I 5, 6 and 6a (Memphis, 163 BCE), three petitions detailing a pair of searches for weapons carried out in a temple by an agent of the temple *archiphylakitês*, some *phylakitai* and other accomplices. The petitioner portrayed the searches (especially the second) as violent and unjust.

³¹ *Epistatai* had many police duties, a number of which overlapped with those of the *phylakitai* and their superiors. See n. 21, above, for more on these officials. For the administrative ties between *epistatai* and *archiphylakitai*, see Bauschatz (2005) 47–9.

³² *Genêmatophylakia* and the *genêmatophylakes* who ran it: see e.g. Bauschatz (2005) 148–52 and 158–66; *P.Mich.* XVIII 769 pp. 99–103; *P.Tebt.* I 27 pp. 105–14.

³³ *Oikonomoi*: Berneker (1935) 94–102 in general; Bauschatz (2005) 152–8 on the relationship between *oikonomoi*, *archiphylakitai* and *epimelêtai* (on whom see the following note).

(*Chrest. Wilck.* 166 [Arsinoite, 218 BCE]).³⁴ Sometimes petitioners appealed to other important people. The man who complained that a *phylakitês* had wrongly arrested his brother-in-law wrote to the well-known and well-connected Zenon of Kaunos for redress (*P. Cair. Zen.* III 59475 [Philadelphia, III BCE]).³⁵ Elsewhere a farmer complained to the king and queen that an *archiphylakitês* and a *phylakitês* had attempted to extract rent from him illegally on two separate occasions (*P. Erasm.* I 1 [Oxyrhyncha, 148–147 BCE]); the petitioner asked that the sovereigns contact the village *epistatês* to arrange a trial.³⁶ There was no official appeals procedure. Petitioners seem to have contacted whomever they thought might secure full, fast satisfaction, be it police, civil, financial or other. The fact that petitioners bothered to submit such grievances to government agents suggests that they expected to receive justice. That even a handful of complaints of police misbehavior found their way to law enforcement officials suggests that the police force, though surely containing a few bad seeds, for the most part upheld the law reliably. People endured abuses at the hands of the policemen who served them, but not on a regular basis.

Yet corruption in the ranks of the Ptolemaic police was not limited to instances of brutality directed at villagers. As with any large organization, breakdowns occurred in the administrative machinery of law and order in Ptolemaic Egypt. Miscommunication was occasionally a problem, leading to delayed or denied justice for victims of crime. In a few cases, police were slow to act on official orders or took no action whatsoever. In one instance, a superior took an *archiphylakitês* to task for failing to act expediently on orders concerning a quantity of timber (*P. Tebt.* III.1 747 [Tebtynis, 243 BCE]).³⁷ In another, a petitioner noted that the recipient of his complaint, a *stratêgos*, had previously ordered an *epistatês* to transport an offender for trial (*SB XXIV* 16295 [Oxyrhyncha, 199 BCE]). The *epistatês*, however, had not taken action, so the petitioner requested that the *stratêgos* give the order to send the accused a second time and in a more forceful manner. A final example preserves an instance of multiple counts of

³⁴ The *epimelêtês* was an upper-level official with authority in certain areas of financial administration: Berneker (1935) 90–4.

³⁵ On Zenon and the archive of documents associated with him, see Rostovtzeff (1922); Pestman (1981); Orrieux (1983, 1985); Clarysse and Vandorpe (1995).

³⁶ See also, e.g., *P. Cair. Zen.* V 59819 (Krokodilopolis?, 254 BCE), a letter from a swineherd to Zenon, in which the former detailed his three-day detention by an *archiphylakitês* and the resulting loss of three of Zenon's pigs; *P. Ryl.* IV 570 (Krokodilopolis, ca. 254–251 BCE), a petition to Zenon from a man who alleged that he had been unjustly arrested by the *phylakitai* of Kerkesoucha; *SB XX* 15001 (Krokodilopolis, 217 BCE), an appeal to the king concerning abuses suffered at the hands of an *epistatês* and his accomplices.

³⁷ The *archiphylakitês*, Patron, is not given a title in this text, but the identification is secure. See n. 52, below.

official inaction (*SB XVI 12468* [Arsinoite?, III BCE]). A man en route to visit a prisoner had had his donkey confiscated by a *phylakitês*. He had submitted a petition to a police official about the theft, but did not receive a summons, so he went to an *archimachimos* for redress.³⁸ Yet not even this had produced satisfactory results, and the victim was compelled to write again to the official originally petitioned to urge the *archimachimos* to return his property.³⁹

Police inaction and slow response seem to have been serious issues. Government agents occasionally ended their instructions to subordinates with threats of punishment for inaction or improper action. In one case, for instance, an official was ordered to bring a policeman into another administrative district and told not to do otherwise (*SB VI 9104* [Arsinoite, 195 BCE]). In another, an *oikonomos* commanded an *archiphylakitês* to make an arrest and assured him that he would be doing wrong if he failed to follow orders (*P.Heid. VII 393* [Arsinoite/Memphite, III BCE]).⁴⁰ Elsewhere, an unknown official forwarded instructions concerning the harvesting of trees for the king, exhorting the “man in charge of the police” (τὸν ἐπὶ τῶν φυλακίτων, 14) not to disregard the orders, but to make their execution a priority (*SB VI 9215* [Oxyrhynchus, 250 BCE]). In a final case, an official was asked to prevent a *phylakitês* from becoming entangled in unnecessary business and to compel him to remain sober, insofar as he was able (*BGU III 1011.iii.4–9* [?, II BCE]). Clearly, police were not immune from bad behavior or the bad reputations connected with it.⁴¹

³⁸ The official petitioned in this case is nowhere given a title. *Machimoi*: scholarship on these officials and their supervisors (*archimachimoi*) is extensive; see Goudriaan (1988) 121–5; Oates (1994); and especially *P.Yale I 33* pp. 86–91, where a very detailed account of the attestations for and duties of, as well as previous scholarship on, *machimoi* is given.

³⁹ See also, e.g., *P.Enteux. 85* (Magdola, 221 BCE), where a petitioner noted that he had previously submitted a complaint to the *stratêgos* concerning the distribution of some grain, and that the *stratêgos* had subsequently ordered the competent *epistatês* to take action, but the *epistatês* had done nothing; *P.Mich. XVIII 779* (Mouchis, after 192 BCE), in which a petitioner related that after a previous petition to an agent of the *dioikêtês* concerning extortion (*P.Mich. XVIII 778*), an *archiphylakitês* had been instructed to bring in an offender, but had not done so; *P.Princ. III 117* (Theadelphia, 55–54 or 4–3 BCE?), where a woman noted that after she had been cheated by a *thêsaurophylax*, she had submitted a petition to the addressee (a *stratêgos*) who in turn ordered the village *epistatês* to bring in the accused. The *epistatês* had arrested the *thêsaurophylax*, but had taken no steps to transport him.

⁴⁰ Neither the *oikonomos*, Zephyros, nor the *archiphylakitês*, Dikaïos, is given a title in the document. For the identification of Zephyros, see *P.Heid. VII 393* pp. 43–4; for Dikaïos, *P.Heid. VII 393* pp. 45–6; *Pros.Ptol. 4562*.

⁴¹ It was not exclusively their superiors who developed bad impressions of undisciplined police officials. Sometimes an unpopular policeman might find himself the object of ridicule: *P.Köln IX 367.2* (Arsinoite or Herakleopolite?, II BCE): ὁ κεκολλοπευκῶς Διονύσιος ὁ ἀρχ(ι)φ[υ(λακίτης)].

We are especially well-informed about the activities of a certain police official known only as Ptolemaios, who was regularly reminded that he was to follow orders and not foul up.⁴² He is given a title in none of the texts in which he appears, but the scope of his duties (extracting rent payments, running errands, transporting people) and the officials from whom he received instruction (including an *archiphylakitês* and an *oikonomos*) led the editors of *P.Hib. I* (p. 194) to suggest that he may have been a *phylakitês*.⁴³ The official instructions that reached him regularly included forceful language. We see him threatened with having to pay for any inaccuracies detected in the agricultural accounts entrusted to him, told not to drag his feet in accomplishing business, scolded for harassing a taxpayer, encouraged not to do other than as he was instructed and, in one instance, upbraided for poor conduct in the village and threatened with punishment for his actions.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the evidence that Ptolemaios was not the most responsible of police officers, though overwhelming, is all circumstantial. Indeed, it may provide more information about the management style of commanding officers than the poor work habits of subordinates.

The reasons behind instances of official inaction are usually impossible to determine, but sensible explanations can occasionally be offered. In one case, for example, a number of *phylakitai* whom an *archiphylakitês* had selected to serve as *genêmatophylakes* failed to

⁴² Ptolemaios appears in the following 16 texts, all of Oxyrhynchite provenance (except where indicated): *P.Hib. I* 51 (245 BCE); 52 (ca. 245 BCE); 53 (246 BCE); 54 (ca. 245 BCE); 57 (248 BCE); 58 (245–244 BCE); 59 (ca. 245 BCE); 60 (ca. 245 BCE); 61 (245 BCE); 62 (Hibeh, 245 BCE); 130 (ca. 247 BCE); 167 (ca. 245 BCE); 168 (ca. 245 BCE); II 240 (? , ca. 250–245 BCE); and *P.Yale I* 34 (250 BCE) and 35 (249 BCE). For a discussion of these papyri, see *P.Yale I* pp. 94–5.

⁴³ The editors of *P.Yale I* later suggested that Ptolemaios was most likely a *kômogrammateus*, citing as compelling indicators his attested police and financial duties and his contact with the *oikonomos* (pp. 94–5). Yet the Ptolemaic police had a number of financial duties in their villages and maintained regular contact with the *oikonomos*: Bauschatz (2005) 152–8. Certainty is impossible, but it seems more likely that Ptolemaios was a police, rather than a civil, official. Extracting payments: *P.Hib. I* 51; 52; 53; 130; 167 (?); *P.Yale I* 35. Running errands: *P.Hib. I* 54; 58. Executing arrests/transfers: *P.Hib. I* 57; 59; 60; 61; 62; 168; *P.Yale I* 34. Ptolemaios received a reprimand from Patron, *archiphylakitês* in *P.Yale I* 35 (see n. 52, below, for the identification of Patron). He was contacted by Zenodoros, *oikonomos* and *toparchês* in *P.Hib. I* 59 and 60, and wrote to Zenodoros in *P.Hib. II* 240 (see *Pros.Ptol.* 553a = 1042 [?] = 1043 for the identification of Zenodoros).

⁴⁴ Inaccuracies: *P.Hib. I* 53.3–4: πειρῶ οὖν ἀσφαλῶς διεγγυᾶν ὡς πρὸς σέ | τοῦ λό[γ]ου ἐσομένου. Foot-dragging: *P.Hib. I* 168 (no line numbers given): καὶ τοῦτο ὅπως μὴ παρέργως ἔσται, ἀλλὰ ἅμα ἡμέραι πάρεχε [αὐτόν]; *P.Yale I* 34.4–6: ἐὰν δὲ | βραδύτερον ποιῆς σαυτὸν βλάτῃς. [ο]ὐ γὰρ σχολάζω μένειν πλείονα | χρ[όνου]. Scolding: *P.Yale I* 35.7–8: σὺ οὖν μὴ ἐνόηχαι [αὐτόν]. Told to follow instructions: *P.Hib. I* 58.11–12: μὴ οὖν ἄλλως | ποιήσῃς; 60.8–9: ὅπως | μὴ ἄλλως ποιήσῃς; 62.16: [ὄ]πω[ς] μὴ ἄλλως ἔσται. Threatened: *P.Hib. I* 59.9–12: [κ]αὶ εἰ μὴ | παύσει κ[α]κοποῦν | ἐν τῇ κώμη[ι] μεταμειλή[σ]ει σοι.

appear for duty, in spite of having sworn their oaths of office (*P.Tebt.* III.1 731 [Ibion Eikosipentarouon/Tebtynis, 153–152 or 142–141 BCE?]). Perhaps the post of *genématophylax* was compulsory and an unwelcome burden on the native Egyptians who were generally recruited to fill it at the worst time of the year.⁴⁵ In other cases miscommunication was likely a factor. Communication between police was sometimes a complex and drawn-out process. It is reasonable to think that in some instances reprimands for not following previous orders were delivered to officials who had never received the orders in the first place, in which case their inaction was an unavoidable consequence of miscommunication. As one might expect, evidence that such miscommunication occurred does not survive.

Inaction and slow response were not the only types of insubordination. Sometimes police officials made misinformed, biased or illegal decisions. In one case, a dispossessed man related that the village *epistatês* had wrongly expelled him and his horse from his home, which had then been occupied by another (*P.Enteux.* 14 [Magdola, 222 BCE]). Elsewhere, a number of liturgy-exempt *hierodouloi* complained that the village *archiphylakitês* had forced them to work at the harvest and to make bricks (*P.Cair.Zen.* III 59451 [Sophtis, III BCE]). The petitioners had been released from liturgical work first by the king and then by the *dioikêtês*.⁴⁶ In a final example, a prisoner complained of unfair treatment at the hands of a *desmophylax* (*P.Tebt.* III.1 777 [Tebtynis, II BCE]). He had given a bail payment to the jailor, but the jailor had been dissatisfied with it and had declined to release the prisoner. As we see here, official bias was sometimes a problem. When necessary, the sovereigns took steps to prevent it.⁴⁷

Law enforcement officials also deliberately disobeyed commands from time to time. In at least three cases, police officers seem to have taken actions directly contrary to what they had been told to do, and in each case the motivations for doing so appear to have been different.⁴⁸ But in no case is the argument for insubordination irrefutable; indeed, it is not clear that police disobedience was much of a problem at all. In the first instance, a prisoner wrote to the king to report that he had been handed over to a *phylakitês* by a relative for misplacing records (βυβλάρια, 7) with which he had been entrusted (*P.Enteux.*

⁴⁵ Bauschatz (2005) 161–2.

⁴⁶ *Hierodouloi*: see Scholl (1985). The *archiphylakitês* in this text is not given a title, but it seems likely that the Leontiskos who compelled the *hierodouloi* to work was the same man as the *archiphylakitês* mentioned in *P.Cair.Zen.* II 59145.13–14 (? , 256 BCE). On Leontiskos, *archiphylakitês*, see *Pros.Ptol.* 4583. On the Ptolemaic *dioikêtês*, see n. 56, below.

⁴⁷ See below for royal decrees concerning police misbehavior.

⁴⁸ *Chrest.Wilck.* 166 (Arsinoite, 218 BCE); *P.Enteux.* 84 (Ghoran, 285–221 BCE); *P.Hib.* I 34 (Oxyrhynchite, 243 BCE) and 73 (Oxyrhynchite, 244–243 BCE), both concerning the same instance.

84 [Ghoran, 285–221 BCE]). The *phylakitês* had in turn handed the petitioner over to a *desmophylax* for detention until the relative ordered his release. The orders had since come, but the release had not. Instead, the petitioner had been accused by the *desmophylax* of being a criminal (κακουργόν, 20–1) and was moved to another prison in another village. Our understanding of the mechanics of this situation is complicated by uncertainty about the position of the petitioner's kinsman, who is nowhere given a title. Was he an official with powers of arrest, or simply an angry relation? It seems odd that the petitioner would have neglected to stress that the offending jailor had disobeyed direct orders from an agent of the crown in a letter to the king seeking release from prison, if his relative was an official. We cannot be certain, but it seems likely that in this case the state's interests in detaining a suspected criminal trumped those of his kin. Though the victim forgave the offender's transgression and requested his release, his intervention was insufficient to halt the police machinery already in motion. It is also possible that the petitioner had in fact been cleared of the charges brought against him by his relative, but that additional unmentioned charges had since been brought, making continued detention necessary. In either case, what we have here may not be insubordination, but proper job performance. The jailor was right to expect instruction from a superior and to ignore the prisoner's kin.

In the second case, a police official (without title, but probably a *phylakitês*) complained that though he had arrested and imprisoned a donkey thief, an *archiphylakitês*, acting against commands from the village *epistatês*, had released the offender before the donkey could be returned to its rightful owner (*P.Hib.* I 34 [Oxyrhynchite, 243 BCE] and 73 [Oxyrhynchite, 244–243 BCE]).⁴⁹ The *epistatês* had issued a *prostagma* stating that the thief was to be forced either to return the donkey to its owner or to furnish the price of the animal, 20 drachmas. But the *archiphylakitês* had freed the man without taking account of these instructions (*P.Hib.* I 34.4: οὐθένα λόγον ποιησάμενος) and removed the donkey to his own home, where he was keeping it. As a result, the *prostagma* of the *epistatês* had come to nothing and the *praktôr idiôtikôn* had to be called in to extract payment from the thief.⁵⁰ Here the case for insubordination is much stronger, though questions remain. We are nowhere informed that the *archiphylakitês* had re-

⁴⁹ The editors of *P.Hib.* I 34 suggested that the complainant in this case, a certain Antigonos, was a *phylakitês*: p. 173.

⁵⁰ The *praktôr idiôtikôn* is attested in only three Ptolemaic texts: *P.Col.* III 54.47–8 (Arsinoite?, 250 BCE?); *P.Hib.* I 34.7 (Oxyrhynchite, 243 BCE); *P.Mich.* I 71.1 (Arsinoite, 246–222 BCE). He was charged with the extraction of certain types of debt, though little more can be concluded about his post. See *P.Hib.* I 34 p. 176, n. ad 7, and *P.Mich.* I 71 p. 150, n. ad 1.

ceived or read the *prostagma* of the *epistatês*. It seems likely that the *archiphylakitês* would have received word of the specifics of the case in question, given the close administrative ties between *archiphylakitai* and *epistatai*.⁵¹ Yet the documents reveal only that the complaining official had knowledge of the *epistatês*' instructions.

Further, in this case the *archiphylakitês* may have been unaware of the *prostagma*. This official, the well-known Patron, was *archiphylakitês* of the entire lower toparchy of the Oxyrhynchite nome.⁵² The jailing and freeing of the donkey thief had taken place in Sinary, a village in this toparchy. No indication of the administrative domain of the *epistatês* who issued the *prostagma* is provided, but given the localized nature of his orders, it seems likely that he was in charge of only the village.⁵³ As a consequence, his orders were perhaps distributed to the police officials in Sinary, including the complainant, but did not reach (and in any event would not have been binding on) higher officials, including the *archiphylakitês* of the toparchy. Perhaps Patron had discovered the thief imprisoned with no record of the reasons for his imprisonment and made the decision to free him. It may have been the case that the arresting officer did not reveal his intentions to other officials (other than the commanding *epistatês*, that is).⁵⁴ The subsequent detention of the stolen donkey can also be explained as proper police procedure. Police officials sometimes temporarily detained goods and animals in their homes and else-

⁵¹ Bauschatz (2005) 47–9.

⁵² Patron (*Pros.Ptol.* 4592 and 4711) appears in at least 13 texts: *P.Hib.* I 34 (Oxyrhynchite, 243 BCE); 73 (Oxyrhynchite, 244–243 BCE); II 236 (Oxyrhynchite, ca. 250–240 BCE); *P.Tebt.* III.1 744 and 745 (Tebtynis, 245 BCE); 746 and 747 (Tebtynis, 243 BCE); 748, 749 and III.2 937 (Tebtynis, ca. 243 BCE); 938 (Tebtynis, 243 BCE); 939 (Tebtynis, 242 BCE); *P.Yale* I 35 (Oxyrhynchite, 249 BCE). For a discussion of these texts see *P.Yale* I 35 pp. 95–7. Patron may also be mentioned in *P.Tebt.* III.1 794 (Tebtynis, before 210 BCE).

⁵³ The *epistatês*, a certain Dorion (*Pros.Ptol.* 663), occurs only in *P.Hib.* I 34.2–3 and 73.1 (no title). He is given no title other than *epistatês* in either text. In cases where geographic domains are appended to the titles of *epistatai*, the names of villages and cities occur most frequently, e.g. *BGU* III 1012.1 (Philadelphia, 170 BCE); VI 1244.38 (Herakleopolite, 225 BCE); 1255.1 (Akanthion Polis, I BCE). *Epistatai* of *merides*, toparchies, nomes, temples and other areas also occur. *Merides*: *P.Enteux.* 73.9–10, 12 (?) (Magdola, 222 BCE) with *P.Enteux.* 22.11, 14–15; 71.7, 11; and 95.9–13; *P.Köln* III 140.1–3 (Arsinoite, 244–242 BCE?; 219–217 BCE?). Toparchies: e.g. *O.Ashm.Shelt.* 42.1–2 (Thebes, II BCE); *P.Lond.* VII 2188.222 (Hermonthis, 148 BCE); *P.Tor.Amen.* 7.1–2 (Thebes, 119–117 BCE). Nomes: e.g. *P.Giss.* 108.11 (Pathyris, 134 BCE); *P.Ross.Georg.* II 10.5–7 (Pathyris, 88 BCE); *P.Tor.Choach.* 5.39–41 (Thebes, 110 BCE); temples: *UPZ* I 69, verso 1–4 (Memphis, 152 BCE); 108.1 (Memphis, 99 BCE). Other geographic regions: e.g. *P.Lond.* VII 2188.137 (Hermonthis, 148 BCE): τοῦ [. . .] ἐπὶ τοῦ τόπου ἐπιστάτου; *P.Petr.* II 25, FrA.5–6 (Ptolemais Hormou, 226 BCE): Ἀρτέμωνος ἰ τοῦ ἐπιστάτου τῶν κατὰ τὴν χώραν; *SB XIV* 12093.8–9 (?; II BCE): τῶν ἰ ἐπὶ τῶν τόπων ἐπιστατῶν.

⁵⁴ If the restoration is right, the petitioner explained that the thief had been arrested quietly (*P.Hib.* I 73.6–9: [ἐγὼ οὖν ἦσιν]χῆρι μὲν κατὰ τὴν [π] γραφείσαν μοι ὑπὸ σοῦ ἐπιστολήν] ἰ ἀπήγαγον [τὸν] Κα[λλίδ]ρομον εἰς τὸ ἐν Σινάρῳ δεσμῶ[ι]τήριον).

where after confiscation and before transport to the proper officials.⁵⁵ As it also seems unlikely that the criminal would have explained the details of his guilt to the *archiphylakitês*, the entire episode can be explained as an instance of failure to communicate. Insubordination was perhaps not a factor.

In a final example, an official involved in state transport of grain reported to the *epimelêtês* that an *archiphylakitês* had arrested a number of shipbuilders and had ignored an order from the *oikonomos* to release them, insisting that he hear first from the *dioikêtês* or the *epimelêtês* (*Chrest.Wilck.* 166 [Arsinoite, 218 BCE]).⁵⁶ In this case, the question of insubordination is complicated by issues of geographic and administrative domain. Herakleides, the *archiphylakitês*, was chief of police of the Herakleopolite nome.⁵⁷ The shipbuilders, however, were from the Arsinoite and had crossed into the Herakleopolite, where the *archiphylakitês* had arrested them. The *oikonomos* who had requested their release was an Arsinoite official.⁵⁸ This raises the issue of whether the chain of command was bound by geography. Could an *epistatês* in the Hermopolite nome give orders to an *archiphylakitês* in the Oxyrhynchite? It seems likely that in this case, at least, the orders of the Arsinoite *oikonomos* were not binding on the Herakleopolite *archiphylakitês* due to their different operational spheres, despite the fact that *oikonomoi* were accustomed to giving orders to *archiphylakitai*. This episode therefore may provide a perfect example of a policeman following the regular chain of command, and does not furnish evidence for insubordination or corruption among law enforcement officials.

The examples cited above do not prove conclusively that disobedience was widespread among the Ptolemaic police, but they do raise questions about the nature of communication among these officials.

⁵⁵ E.g. *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59475 (Philadelphia, III BCE), in which a number of *phylakitai* found and locked up a runaway mare; *P.Petr.* III 32,G (Sebennytyos?, 217 BCE), where cowherds attempted to drive off to the *phylakitai* some cows found grazing on their pasturage; *P.Tebt.* III.1 729 (Tebtynis, II BCE), in which an official (?) of unknown rank gathered a number of cows and sheep, handed them over to the village *phylakitai* and then enclosed them in a temple.

⁵⁶ The *dioikêtês* was one of the chief civil and financial officials of the Ptolemaic state: Berneker (1935) 80–9; Thomas (1978). There were close ties between the Ptolemaic police and officials charged with supervision of the economy. *Oikonomoi*, for instance, sometimes gave instructions to police officers concerning matters of fiscal malfeasance: *Chrest.Wilck.* 166 (Arsinoite, 218 BCE); *P.Heid.* VI 362 (Herakleopolite, 226 BCE) with *Pros.Ptol.* 1047 and *P.Heid.* VI p. 9 n. ad 2; VII 393 (Arsinoite/Memphite, III BCE) with *Pros.Ptol.* 1041a, *Pros.Ptol.* 4562 with add., and *P.Heid.* VII pp. 42–4. *Epimelêtai*, too, had regular contact with the police: e.g. *P.Petr.* II 1 (Arsinoite, III BCE); *P.Tebt.* III.1 731 (Tebtynis/Ibion Eikosipentarouron, 153–152 or 142–141 BCE?); 741 (Tebtynis, 187–186 BCE). For more on the relationship between Ptolemaic financial officials and police officers (especially *archiphylakitai*), see Bauschatz (2005) 152–8.

⁵⁷ Herakleides: *Pros.Ptol.* 4577.

⁵⁸ He was also named Herakleides: *Pros.Ptol.* 1046.

Higher officers communicated with police in villages through letters and official notifications, and doubtless verbally as well. Such communication could prove problematic from time to time. It was important to inform as many people as possible when carrying out police business, so as to avoid conflict with officials who had not been briefed on regional procedure. It was also essential to respect the bounds of one's occupational domain when giving orders to subordinates, as well as to know who these subordinates were. When police were un- or ill-informed, mistakes were sometimes made; but instances of human error or breakdowns in communication, however grievous, are not evidence of corruption.

Thus far, we have focused on individual instances of alleged police misbehavior, primarily those contained in petitions. Our investigation has revealed that corruption was minimal at best. We will now consider a handful of decrees and circulars from the sovereigns that also suggest that police officials occasionally misbehaved. Yet we should not be too quick to conclude that the prohibitions against unlawful requisitions and detentions found in royal edicts reflected the reality of police corruption in Ptolemaic Egypt. Though the king and queen routinely visited the *chôra* for rounds of inspection and to dispense justice, they remained for the most part in Alexandria, leaving the administration of the countryside to government agents scattered throughout the *chôra*.⁵⁹ The decrees they issued concerning police abuses and corruption were likely formulated from data contained in reports and petitions received by officials, as opposed to eyewitness testimony from the officers themselves. The result was a decidedly incomplete view of life in the *chôra*, at two full removes from reality. In this respect at least, the data for police corruption provided by the decrees is even more suspect than that rendered by petitions. But it was not necessarily the case that the king and queen issued decrees as responses to reports of corruption. The sovereigns may have sought to be proscriptive, so as to stem the tide of potential wrongdoing by outlawing the behaviors considered most likely to occur or most deleterious to the functioning of the state.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Sovereigns in the countryside: e.g. *PSI* IV 354 (Philadelphia, 254 BCE), instructions for preparations for an impending visit from the king; *P.Tebt.* I 116, verso 56–8 (Kerkeosiris?, II BCE), a record of payments made to the *machimoi* of the *basilikos grammateus* at the time of the king's visit; *UPZ* I 109 (Memphis, 98 BCE), in which a man noted that a certain Simon had attended an audience of the king.

⁶⁰ It is impossible to tell from the documents themselves whether they accurately reflected the state of life in Ptolemaic Egypt at the time of their composition and likewise whether they addressed contemporary problems. Many ancient royal proclamations, from the Laws of Hammurabi (ca. 1750 BCE) to the Digest of Justinian (530–3 CE), were little more than collections of court decisions and inherited legal knowledge. The legal scholars who composed them generally aimed for completeness, often at the expense of relevance and contemporaneity. One must not overlook the possibility that the same was true of much of the Ptolemaic material.

Yet on this view, too, the decrees reflect a hypothetical society of government lawbreakers, not real life in the *chôra*. Though royal proclamations probably reveal some truth, the amount of legal fiction they contain is impossible to determine. It seems best to accept that these documents provide a kernel of valuable information on official misbehavior, but are imperfect indicators of police crime in Ptolemaic Egypt.

A first example suggests that financial malfeasance was occasionally a problem among *phylakitai* and their superiors (*C.Ord.Ptol.*² 53 [Kerkeosiris?, 118 BCE]). In this decree the sovereigns forbade illegal searches at *phylakai* (22–7) and the confiscation of revenues for personal profit by *archiphylakitai*, *epistatai phylakitôn* and others (138–46), and outlawed arrests by any officials for personal reasons (255–64).⁶¹ In the same document they also remitted the penalties previously assigned to *phylakitai* who had perpetrated fraud in conjunction with the annual *genêmatophylakia* (188–92).⁶² The text suggests that the submission of fraudulent grain accounts, the theft of government produce and revenue and arbitrary arrest were among the most common abuses by police officials. Additional decrees, as well as a number of petitions already considered, show that allegations of such misbehavior were sometimes leveled against police officers.⁶³ But decrees of this sort, especially those containing royal amnesties, were issued regularly at the beginning of new reigns or after periods of strife throughout the Ptolemaic period.⁶⁴ How much faith can we place in what appears to be, for the most part, a formulaic document? Without additional evidence, we cannot conclude that the text was prepared as a response to reports of widespread wrongdoing. The slim evidence from petitions and other sources for crooked police in the *chôra* provides little further support.

A second decree presents interpretive difficulties. Here the sovereigns aimed at a higher target, ordering *epistatai phylakitôn* to avoid

⁶¹ *Phylakai* were multi-purpose buildings in which a number of police and financial officials, as well as prisoners, might be found: Bauschatz (2005) 117–21.

⁶² *Genêmatophylakia*: n. 32, above.

⁶³ On petitions concerning such matters, see above. Decrees: *C.Ord.Ptol.*² 55.10–14 (Tebtynis, ca. 118 BCE), a decree that prohibited a broad spectrum of officials from carrying out arbitrary imprisonments; *C.Ord.Ptol.*² 34 (Oxyrhynchus?, 186 BCE; with supplements from *P.Köln* VII 313), which released *phylakitai* (as well as *archiphylakitai* and *epistatai phylakitôn*) from punishment for the confiscation of crown assets (i.25–7) and forbade officials (among these *epistatai*) from making arrests for personal reasons (ii.10–20).

⁶⁴ See *P.Köln* VII 313 pp. 64–5 n. 7 for a list of Ptolemaic amnesty decrees and Smith (1968) on pharaonic antecedents. Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (ruled 170–116 BCE) seems to have issued a number of such edicts: *C.Ord.Ptol.*² 41–2 (145–144 BCE); 43 (a copy from 135–134 BCE of an original from 145–144 BCE); 53 (118 BCE); 53bis (partial copy of 53, ca. 100 BCE); 53ter (partial copy of 53, after 113 BCE); 54 (ca. 118 BCE); 55 (ca. 118 BCE).

arbitrary judicial decisions and prescribing guidelines for handling specific types of cases (*C.Ord.Ptol.*² 30–1 [?, 183 BCE]). In one section, *epistatai phylakitôn* were told to use their own judgment when punishing those who brought suits without legal basis, but to send those who sued out of a desire for personal profit to the sovereigns immediately (31.11–14). Noncompliant *epistatai phylakitôn* were to be subject to royal punishment (30.3–6). This decree demonstrates that official abuses were not limited to the lowest rungs of the police hierarchy, or at least that the king and queen understood the importance of including police administrators in their prohibitions. But how realistic are the document's mandates? Would an *epistatês phylakitôn* receiving this decree really have been able to differentiate between litigants who made groundless claims (31.11–12: τοὺς μὲν ἰ εἰκῆ ἢ κ[α] ἰ ἀπροσκέπτως ἀνάγοντάς τινας) and those suing because of personal differences or seeking to commit extortion (31.13: τ[οῦ]ς δὲ διαφορᾶς ἢ σεισμοῦ χάριν)? Would there always have been a clear difference? The impression created is that the decree was intended to prevent frivolous lawsuits from tying up the royal court. Yet the language of the document does not permit certainty.⁶⁵ *Epistatai phylakitôn* were advised to take one type of action with regard to litigants making accusations in name, but to send those who brought suits based on suspicions to the sovereigns.⁶⁶ If a quarrel arose against certain individuals who were not present, those individuals (or the quarrelers?) were to be transported (?) by the *epistatês phylakitôn* so that no wrongdoing could occur before the trial.⁶⁷

A third decree, a collection of police regulations, sheds light on punishments assigned to delinquent *phylakitai* (*P.Hib.* II 198 [Arsinoite?, after 242 BCE]).⁶⁸ If a *phylakitês* neglected to hand over a runaway rower from the royal fleet, he was to be sent to the ships.⁶⁹ A *phylakitês* who did not arrest a thief was subject to the same fine as the thief

⁶⁵ The remainder of the decree (31.14–21) contains additional provisions that are difficult to understand owing to lacunae.

⁶⁶ 31.14–17: τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον καὶ ἰ [τοὺς ἐπ'] ὄνομα[τ]ος τὰς προσαγγελίας ποιούμενους τῶν ἰ [ca. 11 τ]ῶν δὲ [κ]αθ' ὑ[πό]νοιαν διδόντων ποιῆσθε ἰ [καταπομπήν πα]ραχρῆ[μ]α.

⁶⁷ 31.19–21: ἐὰν δ' εἰς τινας μὴ παρόντας ὀρισμὸς ἰ γένηται [.] ἰ ε τοὺς ἀνθρώπ[ο]υς, ἵνα μὴ πρὸ κρίσεως ἰ [ca. 15] κακουργ[ί]ας γένωνται.

⁶⁸ On this decree, see Kunderewicz (1965); Lewis (1968); Bagnall (1969); Bauschatz (2005) 110–11, 127 and 144.

⁶⁹ 86–92: κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ [δὲ καὶ το]ὺς να[ύ]τας τοὺς τὸν χαρακτῆρα ἔχοντας κα[ὶ] τ[ο]ὺς [ca. 9] ἰ ἐκ τοῦ ναυτικοῦ οἱ φυλακῖται ἐν[] ἰ [] ἰς φυλα[ca. 6] ἰ ὅσοι ἂν [ῶσιν] ἀλῶσιν ἐπαναγέτωσαν πρὸς [τοὺς . . .] ε[σ]τηκότα[ς] τῶν ἰ φυλακῶν· ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἐπαναγάω[σ]ιν ἐξελεγχθέντες α[ὐ]τοῖ ἰ ἀποστελλέσθωσαν ἐπὶ τὰς ναῦς· ἔνοχοι δ' ἔστωσαν κ[αὶ] οἱ ἰ ὑποδεχόμενοι τοὺς ναύτα[ς] φωρᾶ ἰ βασι[λ]ικῆ.

and was perhaps to be judged by the same judges.⁷⁰ The language of the decree and its penalties are clear. The circumstances of its promulgation, however, are not. In contrast to the previous two examples, there is no indication that the document was issued as a government response to reports of widespread lawlessness. The talionic punishment specified for certain wrongdoers suggests that the decree was in fact a set of guidelines for dealing with hypothetical future offenses based on accumulated legal knowledge. It perhaps provides evidence not of police misbehavior, but of the suspicion that such misbehavior might occur.⁷¹

Overall, police misbehavior in Ptolemaic Egypt seems to have been minimal. Law enforcement officials occasionally employed violence in the execution of police business, but the rough handling that occurred was not always unwarranted. True, police were occasionally slow to act on official orders, even to the point of inaction. This was clearly an issue of concern to supervisors, as suggested by the fact that commanding officers sometimes added exhortations and threats to the ends of their written instructions as a preventative measure to ensure that police business was done in a timely manner. But there was only so much that could be done to ensure that offenders were arrested, debts collected and crimes solved as quickly as possible. The law enforcement machinery of Ptolemaic Egypt was slowed by the delays involved in relaying instructions from one official to the next. Much depended on the expeditious writing, delivery and processing of small scraps of papyrus. In spite of these roadblocks, much (if not most) police business seems to have been completed in a timely and satisfactory manner.

Though police officers seem rarely to have opposed direct orders from their superiors, they did break the law from time to time. Abuses ranging from violence and extortion to arbitrary arrest and detention to judicial bias and the like occurred. Punishment was occasionally administered by commanding officers in cases where proof of wrongdoing was offered. For their part, the Ptolemies may have responded to reports of misbehavior with decrees banning illegal acts among police. These were stopgap measures, to be sure,

⁷⁰ 92–100: ἀγώγ[ιμοι] | δ' ἔστωσαν οἱ τε ληισταὶ καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ κ|ακοῦργοι καὶ οἱ βασιλ|κοὶ | ναῦται πανταχόθεν καὶ μηθεὶς αὐ]τοὺς ἀφαιρέισθω | ἢ ἐν[ο]χος ἔστω αὐ]τ[ὸς] ὁ κωλύ[ων] ἢ ὁ [...]μενος τοῖ[ς] αὐ]τοῖς | ἐπιτί[μ]οις οἷς καὶ ὁ ληιστῆς καὶ ὁ τῆ]ν να]ῦν λελο[ι]π[ώ]ς | κατὰ | τὰ α[ν]τὰ δὲ καὶ οἱ ὑποδεχόμενοι τὰς λεί[ψ]ας (?) παρὰ τ[ῶν] | ληιστ[ῶν] ἢ κακούργου ἢ αὐ]τοὺς ὑπ[ο]δεχόμενοι ἐν[ο]χοὶ ἐσ]τ[ω]σα]ν τοῖς αὐ]τοῖς ἐπιτίμ[οις] κ|αθάπερ ca. ? | γέγ[ρα]πται.

⁷¹ A final decree (*P.Mil.Congr.* XVII p. 29.10–13 [?, 100–99 BCE]) seems to suggest that *potamophylakes* had been misbehaving, but the nature of their abuses is obscured by lacuna: προ[σ]τετάχασι δὲ ca. ? | ποταμοφύλακας καὶ τοὺς ἄλλου[ς] ca. ? | ... ντας ἕως τοῦ νῦν ἀσυκ[ο]φαντήτους καὶ ἀκατηγορήτους καὶ ἀνεπι[λ]λήμπτους εἶναι. On *potamophylakes*, see Bauschatz (2005) 56.

but also the strongest steps the state could take. The Ptolemies did not exert tight control over the law enforcement system that supervised the towns and villages of the Egyptian *chôra*; rather, they handed over the responsibility for village police work to village authorities. As a result, the Ptolemies effectively removed themselves and their agents from the immediate supervision of these authorities. That the police sometimes misbehaved should thus not come as a surprise. If power corrupts, the high degree of autonomy invested in the Ptolemaic police by their superiors must have been responsible for some degree of official wrongdoing.

The question is how much. In determining the extent of this wrongdoing, we should keep in mind that the bulk of the evidence for the misbehavior of police officials comes from personal accounts, usually from people with axes to grind. What appeared an act of abuse to one man may legitimately have appeared a necessary element of his job to another. Home invasions and confiscations were accepted procedure for the recovery of government debts, as was imprisonment. These operations occasionally involved violence against uncooperative villagers and could easily be portrayed by “victims” as instances of abuse or arbitrary behavior. As with so much of the papyrological evidence for life in Ptolemaic Egypt, interpretation of the sources is of the utmost importance. Without the benefit of defense materials from the police officials under attack, it is unwise to conclude that every instance of police abuse detailed in petitions to government officials was genuine. A clear picture of the extent of the problem of police abuse of the subject population is thus perhaps unattainable.

We can say, then, that corruption did exist. But who would have thought otherwise? The preponderance of the evidence reveals that the law enforcement machinery of Ptolemaic Egypt was effective, efficient and reliable. Villagers used the services it provided, and it served the same villagers well. Though they occasionally complained of rough handling by police and other unfair practices—sometimes probably rightly, sometimes probably not—the overwhelming impression is that the Ptolemaic populace trusted the police system. And while it is clear that communications sometimes broke down and police made mistakes, the data do not suggest that police corruption was widespread. This suggests that our views on corruption in the other administrative spheres of Ptolemaic Egypt may need revision. If the Ptolemaic police system was characterized by a high degree of integrity, what are we to think of the civil, military and financial branches of government? Did the nature of the work in these departments allow for more misbehavior? Did these positions attract a certain unscrupulous subset of the population? Or have scholars overestimated the extent of official abuse in the financial,

military and civil spheres of the Ptolemaic state? A reevaluation of the evidence is in order. Though the countryside may have harbored the occasional crooked magistrate, the sands of Ptolemaic Egypt may not have been so lawless after all.

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