

The Ptolemaic Egypt that we know from popular and even scholarly imagination was the American Wild West, rife with criminals and crooked cops. Complaints of police misbehavior are well known: unnecessary violence in searches, seizures and investigations (*e.g. P.Coll.Youtie* I 16); illegal arrests (*e.g. BGU* VIII 1847); unauthorized requisitions of goods (*e.g. P.Enteux.* 55); and mistreatment at tax-time (*e.g. BGU* VIII 1836). Scholars maintain that all spheres of Ptolemaic administration were plagued by corruption, with law enforcement no exception (D. Crawford in *Das ptolemäische Ägypten* [1978]: 195-202; W. Peremans in *Korruption im Altertum* [1982]: 103-133; *etc.*). But the evidence is complex and on close examination very limited. Occasional abuses may have occurred, but there is no data to suggest that a culture of insubordination ever existed among the officer corps. This paper argues that corruption within the ranks of the Ptolemaic police system was minimal and that the system was for the most part reliable and effective.

The majority of allegations of police misbehavior from Ptolemaic Egypt comes from petitions (*e.g. BGU* VIII 1855; *P.Ryl.* IV 570; *SB* XX 15001). These documents are our best source for the mechanics of Ptolemaic policing, but one must handle them with more care than they have received. They are by nature one-sided: petitioners tailored complaints so as to receive the best possible responses. By nature the job of a Ptolemaic police officer could involve force, so it should not surprise us that complaints of police abuses survive. Search and seizure, for instance, could be violent with or without justification. But whether a police search was executed legally or illegally, a petitioner with an axe to grind was likely to portray even the most justified, orderly police operation as abusive. The inherent bias in the petitions demands a critical eye. A complaint is not a fact and scrutiny reveals that many complaints of police wrongdoing were groundless or at least heavily suspect. Moreover, when petitioners complained of police wrongdoing they often did so to the police (*e.g. BGU* III 1012; *P.Enteux.* 55; *UPZ* I 5). The public had a high degree of confidence in the Ptolemaic law enforcement system. Hundreds of papyri reveal that villagers regularly employed the police and trusted them to punish wrongdoing in a timely, thorough and generally lawful manner. Such a high level of faith in the system seems incompatible with widespread corruption. Crooked police were the exception, not the rule.

This surprising conclusion 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 somehow allow for more misbehavior? Did these positions attract a certain unscrupulous subset of the population? Or is it the case that scholars have overestimated the extent of official abuses in the financial, military and civil spheres of the Ptolemaic state? Indeed, the sands of Ptolemaic Egypt may not have been quite so wild.