

In the towns and villages of Ptolemaic Egypt, law enforcement officials investigated reports of crimes, arrested offenders and pronounced sentences at trials. For the most part, police were empowered by the Ptolemaic administration to tend to law and order in their communities without interference from above. But these same officials also served the central government as supervisors of compulsory agricultural work, as a state security force and as a means of revenue extraction and crowd control. This paper demonstrates that Ptolemaic police officers at the village level, not higher officials or hired goons, served in at least three capacities as important middlemen between the inhabitants of the *chôra* and the administration in Alexandria. Their presence put a local face on state activities in Egyptian villages.

One of the most important areas in which police flexed their government-sanctioned muscles was the realm of agricultural supervision. Ptolemaic law enforcement filled important roles in the annual guarding of crops, the *genêmatophylakia*. Police chiefs oversaw the process at the village level, while beat cops and a host of *phylakes* (especially *genêmatophylakes*) assured that revenue was not lost. The officers who gathered (e.g.: *P.Tebt.* II 282A), transported (e.g.: *Chrest.Wilck.* 337) and protected grain (e.g.: *PSI* IV 344) often received direct instructions from higher financial officials (commonly *oikonomoi* and *epimelêtai*), but it was town and village police who made sure that the *genêmatophylakia* proceeded according to schedule. They provided an intimidating presence for the workers, but also a familiar one: in most cases, both workers and supervisors were native Egyptians, often from the same village.

In other situations Ptolemaic police acted as security forces. Cops watched over ships (e.g.: *BGU* VIII 1742) and protected items seized in police searches or raids (e.g.: *P.Hib.* I 34 and 73). Public guards of various sorts defended villages (e.g.: *BGU* VI 1215), temples (e.g.: *P.Brit.Mus.* I 10524), homes (e.g.: *P.Cair.Zen.* II 59292) and a variety of agricultural interests (e.g.: *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59509). Even police administrators (chiefs, commissioners, etc.) seem to have been involved in the recruitment and mobilization of security forces (e.g.: *P.Hib.* II 198; *P.Tebt.* III.1 706; 736). The Ptolemies realized that investing village law enforcement officials with the protection of village interests was good policy. By employing police to fill security roles, the rulers of the kingdom ensured that local security remained a local issue and at the same time effectively worked their way into every aspect of village life.

The protection of state interests sometimes involved coercion. Police officers, often accompanied by or under the command of chiefs, were regularly responsible for extracting overdue rent from the subject population. Many petitions testify to this process and to the persistence (occasionally to the point of oppression) of the police officials employed for such operations (e.g.: *BGU* VIII 1836). Law enforcement agents also provided muscle in other official settings, serving as bailiffs at civil trials (e.g.: *Chrest.Mitt.* 32) and appearing at government auctions (e.g.: *P.Tebt.* III.2 871). But at such proceedings police officials rarely took an active role. Their presence was intended, it seems, as an armed recommendation to private citizens to stay in line, wait their turn, follow the rules and cooperate fully. They acted not only as event security but also as state-sanctioned symbols of law and order.