

In her 2002 article (“Violence by and against women in documentary papyri from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt”) M. Parca discussed a number of instances of violence involving women in Greco-Roman Egypt. Parca’s discussion focused primarily on one-on-one violence, but it is a striking feature of our extant documentation that women are involved in group attacks as well. Women are documented committing assaults as a group (SB X 10239 [Ist cen AD], in which a mother and daughter attack a man’s wife), instigating an assault that was carried out by men (PSI VII 876 [V-VIth cen]) and, more strikingly, being part of mixed gender groups: thus, for example, a woman is named as part of an otherwise male group which committed an assault against a man and his relatives (P.Herm. 20 [IVth cen AD]), and a group of women along with a few men attack a man and his wife in an Iseion (P.Enteux. 80 [IIIrd cen BC]). The participation of women in these sorts of group confrontations requires analysis. Whereas it might be considered happenstance when women are victims of a group of attackers who come to a victim’s home, the participation of women in the attacking party seems to indicate that women had a more than random role in the dispensation of “private justice” in Greco-Roman Egypt.

This paper attempts to investigate the role of women in group assaults. Specifically, it seeks to understand the conditions under which women might participate in group attacks either as a group of consisting solely of women or as a mixed-gender group. Furthermore, it aims to understand these violent acts within the larger context of the dynamics of violence in Greco-Roman Egypt. Working from the assumption that the way in which people fight tends to follow local patterns and reflect cultural preferences, this paper will try to place this feature of fighting in the cultural context of Greco-Roman Egypt and examine the possible cultural “meaning” of the participation of women in group attacks. I take the position that the participation of women in violent confrontations – generally considered a “male” zone – does not come as a result of their different legal status in Egypt compared to the rest of the ancient world, but rather that it reflects a deeper difference in cultural practice, the elucidation of which might bring us closer to a better understanding of Greco-Egyptian culture.

REFERENCES

Parca, M. (2002) "Violence by and against women in documentary papyri from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt" in H. Melaerts and L. Mooren, *Le Rôle et le Statut de la Femme en Égypte Hellénistique, Romaine et Byzantine*. Leuven.