

Recent treatments of petitioning and litigation in Roman and early-Byzantine Egypt have tended to stress the reluctance with which disputing parties approached the authorities, and that requests for official involvement are the result of the failure of unofficial, private mechanisms of dispute resolution (Bagnall 1989; 1996, 161-8; Hobson 1993; Nippel 1995, 105; Jördens 1998, 1-2; 6). However true this may be for the general run of cases, there were certainly some individuals and families that used petitioning and litigation frequently and without any apparent reluctance (cf. Bagnall 1996, 166-8). In this paper, I examine one case-study of such a 'litigious' individual, Aurelius Isidorus, in order to shed light on the sociology of litigiousness in Roman and early-Byzantine Egypt more generally.

I take as my starting point various discussions of the sociology of litigiousness in modern legal systems (e.g., Songer & Sheehan 1992; Galanter 1994; Kinsey & Stalans 2003). Such discussions have sought to understand what are sometimes called 'repeat players' in the litigation game by reference to factors including litigious individuals' wealth, their access to legal knowledge, and their tendency to value abstract legal 'rights'. Modern sociologists are obviously not seeking to describe early-Byzantine Egypt; but their approaches to modern problems at least raise questions that can be asked of the Egyptian evidence.

In relation to Aurelius Isidorus, one can begin with the fact that, like modern 'repeat players', he was a relatively wealthy member of his society. This gave him the means to have petitions written, and the leisure to travel to places where justice was dispensed (Bagnall 1996, 168). It also meant that he tended to be involved in complex transactions of the sort that would give rise to disputes. Moreover, thanks to his liturgical duties, Isidorus was in constant contact with a variety of officials (e.g., *P.Cair.Isid.* 10; 11; 125; 131). This fact helps to explain his evident comfort with invoking official help in his disputes, and his skill in dealing with administrative and judicial institutions. It is also notable that the documents in Isidorus' archive show that there was a family history of using petitions to deal with disputes (*P.Cair.Isid.* 62-64). Finally, his petitions are characterised by an emotive rhetoric stressing the existence of well defined legal rights and the value of the rule of law (e.g., *P.Cair.Isid.* 66, 3; 70, 4). Although these are scribal productions, it would appear that we have a reflection of Isidorus' own rhetoric here: there is a hint of this ideology in a set of notes made by a scribe in preparation for a petition on the basis of Isidorus' oral performance (*P.Cair.Isid.* 71, 10); and the mentions of rights and the rule of law in his petitions are not framed in formulaic language.

The final section of the paper examines parallels between Isidorus' petitions and those in archives belonging to others who are known to have engaged in multiple acts of petitioning and litigation. One finds, for instance, emotive, rights-oriented rhetoric in the petitions of the archives of Satabous, son of Herieus (Soknopaïou Nesos, first century) and Ptolemaios, son of Diodorus (Theadelphia, second century) (e.g., *SB* 1.5235, 14-15; 14.12087; *P.Mich.* 11.617). The archive of Aurelius Sakaon (Theadelphia, fourth century) shows a family history of petitioning and litigation (*P.Sakaon* 31; 36-38). The archives both of Ptolemaios and of Sakaon also show petitioners having other forms of contact with precisely the types of officials whom they petitioned (e.g., *P.Sakaon* 51; *P.Oslo* 89-91). The paper concludes that whilst 'repeat players' like Isidorus might not have been exactly common, they are an identifiable sociological type in Roman and early-Byzantine Egypt.