

**Jean-Jacques Aubert\***

**Policing the countryside :  
Soldiers and civilians in Egyptian villages  
in the third and fourth centuries A.D.**

Recent estimates concerning the strength of the Roman army stationed in Egypt propose a figure of ca. 20,000 soldiers -- slightly more in the fourth century -- for a total population of four to seven million people, and for a superficies of 23,000 square km of usable land (not including inhabited areas)<sup>1</sup>. What that meant in practical terms is hard to figure out. For the sake of example, it is worth noticing that all three figures are somewhat comparable to the situation in Switzerland between 1945 and 1994, where a rotating army numbering ca. 25,000-30,000 (including recruits in basic training) covered a territory of 41,000 square km - more than a third of which is a bare Alpine zone - inhabited by four to seven million people. In spite of the geographical, structural, and functional differences, the comparison suggests that, allowing for an uneven distribution of the troops across the whole territory, there were parts of the Egyptian countryside where the sight of Roman soldiers must have been a rather rare occurrence.

In the second and third centuries, Egypt was occupied by a single legion, *Legio IIa Traiana*, located at Nicopolis in the Delta, shored up by auxiliary troops. The political and military events of the late third century, the repeated popular uprisings at Alexandria under Philip the Arab and his successors, the preparation for a military campaign against the "Indians" by the usurper L. Mussius Aemilianus in 261<sup>2</sup>, the invasion of Egypt by the Palmyrene army in 269-270, and the revolts of Firmus at Alexandria under Aurelian and of L. Domitius Domitianus and Achilleus in the Tetrarchic period must have triggered a series of temporary redeployments to critical areas, and an increase of the overall size of the Roman army in Egypt. Moreover, it seems that the Roman army in the East had a tendency to increase its presence in the desert from the late third century onwards<sup>3</sup>, thus draining parts of the human resources of the territorial army from pacified regions to frontier districts.

Our main source for the distribution of individual units during the fourth century is the daunting *Notitia Dignitatum in partibus Orientis* (ca. 400)<sup>4</sup>, to be checked against, and supplemented by, the papyri. On this basis, it has been suggested that legionary troops

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\* Professor of Humanities (Ingenieurschule Biel) and Lecturer in Classics (Université de Fribourg, Suisse), av. William Fraisse, 10, CH-1006-Lausanne, Suisse.

<sup>1</sup> Army strength and population : Carrié, op. cit. (cf. bibliogr.), 1977, p. 385 and 393 (the higher figure, [Diod. Sic., 1, 31, 8] was accepted by C. Préaux, E. Van't Dack, and D. Bonneau [*ibidem*, discussion of Carrié's paper], but considered excessive by Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, p. 175, n. 152, who suggests [n. 151] a lower figure around 4.2 millions). Superficies : Bagnall, *ibid.*, p. 20 and 333-335.

<sup>2</sup> Oost, op. cit., 1961, p. 11-13, based on *S.H.A., Trig.Tyr.*, 22, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac, op. cit., 1990, p. 161 and 213, regarding the situation in Palestine and Syria ; and Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, p. 146-147 and 174 for Egypt. Attacks by nomadic tribes on the western oases are known through several sources, cf. Price, op. cit., 1976, p. 150, n. 19 (references in *P.Abinn.*, p. 16, n. 3). In the Large Oasis (Lower Thebaid), an *ala I Quadorum* (*Not. Dig. Or.*, XXXI, 56) is attested in ca. 301 (*C.P.R.*, VII, 21, with D. Hagedorn, *Miscellanea Papyrologica*, ed. R. Pintaudi, *Pap.Flor.*, VII, 1980, 104-106, and J. Rea, *Z.P.E.*, XXXI, 1981, p. 281-282), and an *ala I Abasgorum* (*Not. Dig. Or.*, XXXI, 41 and 55) in ca. 309 (*P.Giss.inv.*, 126, cf. J. D. Thomas, *Y.Cl.S.*, XXVIII, 1985, p. 115-125). For the Small Oasis (Oxyrhynchite nome), cf. below (*ala III Assyriorum* attested in the 320s and possibly later, cf. *Not. Dig. Or.*, XXVIII, 33 ; and *ala II Armeniorum*, attested only in *Not. Dig. Or.*, XXVIII, 22, hence possibly a late comer, cf. C. Zuckerman, op. cit., 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Price, op. cit., 1976, convincingly argues for a late fourth-century date of compilation (for the Egyptian lists).

were mostly concentrated in the north and south, the central part of the country, from Antaiopolis to Babylon, being sprinkled with auxiliary troops, with cohorts and cavalry wings alternating along the main road on the east bank of the Nile<sup>5</sup>. The functions of these troops varied accordingly :

-in the north, legionaries were supposed to deter invasion from Asia, keep the Alexandrian population in check, police the volatile Delta, and ensure a safe passage for goods in transit from the Nile Valley (or further away) to the Mediterranean Sea, and vice versa<sup>6</sup> ;

-in the south, the army had the mission of securing the border against potentially hostile neighbors and nomadic tribes, while watching the Eastern Desert roads which connected the Nile Valley with the Red Sea<sup>7</sup> ;

-in Middle Egypt (Nile Valley and Fayum), detachments were stationed along the main roads and in some of the metropolises and villages, policing the countryside and providing protection against occasional raids by nomads from the desert. The *Notitia* mentions two detachments stationed in the western part of the Fayum, a cohort at Narmuthis, and an *ala* at Dionysias. The latter is best known through the archive of its commander, Flavius Abinnaeus, and the excavated archaeological remains of its camp. Both units were probably established in the second half of the third century, and were possibly withdrawn around the middle or in the second half of the fourth. A unit of *cataphractarii* was stationed at Arsinoe from ca. 319 to 359<sup>8</sup>. There is no trace of permanent military presence, as far as I know, in the northeastern part of the Arsinoite nome during this period : in times of crisis troops could be dispatched from Arsinoe or from the legionary camp at Memphis, some 70 km north of there. Soldiers are attested in the Oxyrhynchite nome under Diocletian and Constantine, but from the 320s until the turn of the fifth century they seem to have been stationed in the camp of Psobthis/Sosteos in the Small Oasis<sup>9</sup>. The picture one derives from this brief survey is that of an uneven and occasionally shifting distribution of military units across areas not exposed to serious, definite, external or internal threats : some parts of Roman Egypt were probably seriously undergarrisoned.

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Because military life was considered less and less appealing from an economic point of view, recruits had to be gathered locally and under compulsion. Chronically underemployed in peacetime<sup>10</sup>, soldiers were expensive to support : in addition to

<sup>5</sup> Van Berchem, op. cit., 1952, p. 59-71, commenting on *Not. Dig. Or.* (ed. Seeck 1876), XXVIII (*Comes limitis Aegypti*), XXX (lost, *Dux Libyarum*), and XXXI (*Dux Thebaidos*). That military sites were "connected with the road system rather than local settlement" (in Palestine) has been suggested by Isaac, op. cit., 1990, p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> A detailed analysis of military deployment in Lower Egypt is provided by Price, op. cit., 1976, supplemented by Worp, op. cit., 1991, and Zuckerman, op. cit., 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Bagnall, op. cit., 1977, for the second and third centuries ; and A. K. Bowman, *The Military Occupation of Upper Egypt in the Reign of Diocletian*, *B.A.S.P.*, XV, 1978, p. 25-38.

<sup>8</sup> The military occupation of the Fayum in the fourth century is discussed by Rémondon, op. cit., 1965, p. 134-147. Both Dionysias and Narmuthis are mentioned as military camps in the *Not. Dig. Or.*, XXVIII, 34 and 46, but there is no papyrological evidence for the detachment stationed at Narmuthis after 346 (but see Price, op. cit., 1976, p. 144), and the archaeological remains at Dionysias point toward complete evacuation by or during the last quarter of the fourth century.

<sup>9</sup> List and evidence in Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, p. 174-75 ; and C. Zuckerman, op. cit., 1994, citing *P.Oxy.*, LV, 3793 (ca. 340) ; *C.P.R.*, V, 13, & *P.Rain.Cent.*, 165 (ca. 384-401) ; *P.Oxy.*, XVI, 2004 (early V) and 1884 (504). Commenting on a new reading of *P.S.I.*, IV, 300 in *B.A.S.P.*, XXVII, 1990, p. 86-89, Bagnall suggests that the *ala III Asturum* (read *Assyriorum* with J. R. Rea, *ad P.Oxy.*, LV, 3793, line 9) attested in the Oxyrhynchite nome in 324 may have been there for a short period of time, in connection with the final stage of the war between Licinius and Constantine. Zuckerman remarks that this unit is also attested in another document (*Ch.L.A.*, XVIII, 660, which the editor dates to 319, 320, or 326 rather than 329 on the basis of the imperial titulature).

<sup>10</sup> Price, op. cit., 1976, p. 149-151.

regular pay, supplies (*annona*), and access to facilities, they had to be coddled into obedience by donatives. They nonetheless represented a potential time bomb when finances did not permit commanders to meet their troops' expectations. Thus, provincial authorities had a vested interest in trimming rosters as much as possible without jeopardizing the internal security of the provinces. Cheaper solutions could be found, especially when what was required was mere presence and vigilance rather than military expertise.

From what has been said above, it appears that those areas best known through the papyri may have suffered (or benefited, in some respects) from the absence of permanent military forces, and more so in the fourth century than earlier. This is suggested by the fact that, whereas petitions and declarations addressed to military officers abound in the first three centuries of the Roman occupation<sup>11</sup>, their number decreases sharply in the fourth<sup>12</sup>. Appeals to military officers, mostly decurions and centurions<sup>13</sup>, represent the expectations of the population regarding various forms of police activities assumed by a territorial army. The rarity of such petitions in the fourth century cannot reflect the reality of life, and it would be wrong to assume that Egyptian people suddenly stopped bickering with one another. Actually, we know of many cases where people were reportedly acting like bandits (*lestrikoi tropoi*)<sup>14</sup>. Petitions and notifications were addressed to other officials, mostly civilian magistrates, *eirenarchoi* of the *pagus*, *nyktostratego*i in the metropolises, nome *stratego*i, all the way up to the *praeses* or Prefect of Egypt<sup>15</sup>. This change might be the result of Diocletian's reforms, or even of Philip the Arab's reorganization of village administration half a century earlier<sup>16</sup>. It certainly occurs in proportion to the diminishing role of the military in policing the countryside.

The third and fourth centuries yield occasional instances of petitions and reports addressed, simultaneously or consecutively, to two separate officials, one civilian (*strategos* or *praepositus pagi*), the other military (centurion or *praefectus castrorum*)<sup>17</sup>. At Tebtynis in 216, a woman writes to the centurion Aurelius Julius Marcellinus to report the sudden disappearance of her father and brother during a hunting party. As she suspects foul play resulting in the death of her relatives, she decides to alert not only the said centurion, but also the nome *strategos*, possibly to make sure that her notification would not get (accidentally or intentionally?) lost<sup>18</sup>. The same year, a priest from Soknopaïou Nesos complains about the theft of seven artabae of grain from a storage room located in the hamlet of Pisa in the division of Themistes. As he was out of town at the time, the inhabitants of the place had promised him to make a declaration to the village

<sup>11</sup> Daris, op. cit., 1964, nos. 72-82; Davies, op. cit., 1989; and Hobson, op. cit., 1993, p. 211-212.

<sup>12</sup> Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, p. 169, and n. 112, citing one last instance in 304 (*P.Oxy.*, XVIII, 2187).

<sup>13</sup> Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, p. 162. Decurions are found as sole (a *dekadarchos epi eirenes Herakleopol(itou)* in *P.S.I.*, III, 184 [292] and 222 [III]=Daris, op. cit., 1964, nos. 75 and 81) or joint addressees (together with a centurion in *P.Gen.*, 17 [Philadelphia, 207] = Daris no. 73). Petitions are sent to the *statizon b(ene)f(iciarius) en to Arsi(noite)* in *P.Cair.Isid.*, 62-63 (Karanis, 296): the plaintiffs in a family dispute asked the *beneficiarius* to compel the defendant to deliver some documents to be presented to the *meizon* (= *corrector*), on the basis of which punishment could be inflicted. Cf. also *P.Oxy.*, I, 64 (= *W.Chr.*, 475, III/IV) and 65 (= *Sel.Pap.*, II, 232, III/IV), and *P.Amh.*, II, 80 (Fayum, 232/233, *B.L.*).

<sup>14</sup> Rémondon, op. cit., 1965, p. 138-139, reporting that such a behavior is documented by more than 40 papyri from the Delta, Herakleopolis, Oxyrhynchos, Kynopolis, and Hermopolis between 303 and 362. Cf. also R. S. Bagnall, *Official and Private Violence in Roman Egypt, B.A.S.P.*, XXVI, 1989, p. 201-216; and J. G. Keenan, *Village Shepherds and Social Tension in Byzantine Egypt, Y.C.I.S.*, XXVIII, 1985, p. 245-259.

<sup>15</sup> Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, p. 162, n. 69 (citing B. Kraemer, *Z.P.E.*, LXIX, 1987, p. 155-161) and p. 164.

<sup>16</sup> P. J. Parsons, *Philippus Arabs and Egypt, J.R.S.*, LVII, 1967, p. 134-141.

<sup>17</sup> This practice occurs also in the earlier period, cf. Hobson, op. cit., 1993, p. 201-202, and n. 5, citing *S.B.*, I, 5235 and 5238 (A.D. 12); *S.B.*, I, 5239 and *P.Lond.*, II, 276 (A.D. 15); and *S.B.*, I, 4284 and *P.Gen.*, I, 16 (A.D. 207).

<sup>18</sup> *P.Tebt.*, II, 333 (= *Sel.Pap.*, II, 336=Daris, op. cit., 1964, no. 74). Cf. Davies, op. cit., 1989, p. 180.

policeman, a promise that they had apparently not kept. As a last resort, he turns to a centurion to have two suspects arrested. Simultaneously, he sends a similar letter to the *strategos* of the nome<sup>19</sup>.

This type of double petition is rare, but other instances may exist : I record at least another case more than a century later. In 342, an associate liturgist (*kephalaiotes / kaptonarios*) of Aurelius Sakaon had seized 82 of the latter's sheep as compensation for what he believed to be unpaid taxes in kind. Protesting that he had paid his share in compliance with the order of the *praepositus pagi*, Sakaon petitions both Aurelius Ision, the *praepositus* of the 8th *pagus*, and Flavius Abinnaeus, the *praefectus alae* at Dionysias<sup>20</sup>. Both documents were written on the same day by the same scribe, but the two texts are not completely similar in their details. The wording of Sakaon's request slightly changes from one document to the other : in the former, he asks the *praepositus pagi* to compel the offender to restore him, the plaintiff, in his rights, and to compensate the *sitologoi*(?), before transmitting his written complaint to the *dux* who alone would be entitled to inflict punishment on the wrongdoer. Incidentally, this petition suggests that there was some distinction between civil and criminal jurisdictions. The second document somewhat confuses the issue : Abinnaeus is urged to proceed with the arrest of the wrongdoer in order to induce him to return the stolen sheep. Here again, punishment would be meted out by the *dux* to whom the petition should be forwarded. Obviously, the respective roles of military officers and civilian officials in law enforcement in Egyptian villages did not completely overlap<sup>21</sup>.

A collection of petitions in the Abinnaeus archive (nos. 44-57) illustrates the role of the military in policing the countryside in the Western Fayum. First, they show that the army was supposed to assist imperial and provincial officials in carrying out their duty : a man attached to the administration of the natron monopoly requires the cooperation of Abinnaeus in stopping smugglers, thereby protecting the interest of the *fiscus*<sup>22</sup>. In contrast with local civilian authorities, army units and their commanders enjoyed a geographically unrestricted range of action. In addition, they certainly maintained more frequent communication with one another, thus increasing their efficiency.

Second, the Abinnaeus archive suggests that petitioners, both civilian and military, trusted that the army was normally untainted by local corruption. In one case, a veteran asks Abinnaeus to arrest the *eirenarchos* and other police officers (*demosioi*) of the village of Hermopolis in the Arsinoopolite nome to compel them to turn in suspected burglars : the petition hints at a case of collusion between village police and criminals. In another case, the wrongdoers against whom Abinnaeus is asked to take action are soldiers and Apion, the son of the village *eirenarchos*, Horion. Apion's unruliness and brutality is recorded in several complaints addressed to the same Abinnaeus<sup>23</sup>. Somewhat earlier in the same year (346), a villager's house had been sacked. After investigation, the unfortunate owner reaches the conclusion that the culprits are two sons of Horion, the current *eirenarchos*. As a first step, he notifies Apamon, Horion's predecessor, who was in charge at the time of the crime, and beseeches him to have Horion suspended (?) for a few days pending the defendants' appearance in court. He also announces that on this occasion he would be able to produce a veteran and a priest as witnesses. This seems to be to no avail, as Apamon's progeny happens to be no better than Horion's. This is the

<sup>19</sup> *B.G.U.*, I, 321-322 ; Davies, op. cit., 1989, p. 177.

<sup>20</sup> *P.Sakaon*, 46 and 47 (= *P.Abinn.*, 44), both dated to March 29. Cf. Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, p. 169, who points out that we know nothing about the outcome.

<sup>21</sup> Hobson, op. cit., 1993, p. 214, assumes "that it is the unlikelihood of success which causes petitioners to tell their story simultaneously to two different levels of the system".

<sup>22</sup> *P.Abinn.*, 9 (Alexandria, undated). Cf. also *P.Abinn.*, 3 (ca. 345-347, escort for tax collectors sent by the *dux* and the *katholikos*) ; 11 (undated, escort for the *dux* at Leukogion) ; 17 (undated, reception of an imperial *notarius* acting as a recruiting agent) ; etc. Rémondon, op. cit., 1965, p. 137.

<sup>23</sup> All petitions concern the village of Hermopolis and are dated in the year 346 : *P.Abinn.*, 47 (May 1) ; 48 (June 29) ; 51 (Aug. 26) ; and 52 (three days later). For earlier cases, Davies, op. cit., 1989, p. 178-79, citing *B.G.U.*, III, 908 (Bacchias or Arsinoe, 101/102, *B.L.*) ; *P.Lond.*, II, 342 (Soknopaiou Nesos, June 21, 185, *B.L.*) ; *S.B.*, III, 6952 (195) ; *S.P.P.*, XXII, 49 (Soknopaiou Nesos, 201, *B.L.*) ; and *B.G.U.*, I, 275 (Antinoe, Dec. 21, 215). Cf. also *P.S.I.*, VII, 807 (Oxy., 280, *B.L.*).

reason why the plaintiff ends up petitioning Abinnaeus<sup>24</sup>. The violence promoted by Apamon's and Horion's sons and their associates may have made the year 346 exceptionally rough for the nearby local military commander.

Other such interventions were required when the offenders were powerful people - not necessarily officials - unlikely to be threatened by civilian authorities<sup>25</sup>. There are cases, however, where Abinnaeus is petitioned to do just what civilian police must have been in charge of, and these cases do not present any of the features described above. Once, the principal deacon of the church at Berenice petitions that his robber, a man from Philagris, return the stolen property, nothing more. On another occasion, a woman from the village of Hermopolis complains that her brother has cheated her of her deceased parents' inheritance: she likewise would be content with a fairer distribution of the family belongings<sup>26</sup>. In neither case is retribution sought by the plaintiffs. Abinnaeus's intervention amounts to a mere police measure, and he can hardly be regarded as exercising some kind of jurisdiction. Even then, his judicial activity would not necessarily have been illegal, all known legislation on this matter being introduced later than his period of service<sup>27</sup>.

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The Abinnaeus archive unambiguously shows that military detachments and civilian police often coexisted in one area, the former supplementing, supervising, controlling, or ignoring the activity of the latter. The shortage of soldiers in critical areas is known to have been compensated by resorting to the enrollment of civilian guards and local militias or paramilitary units, paid employees, liturgists, or compulsory workers, who sometimes took their orders from military officers<sup>28</sup>. Thus, a centurion could write to the authorities of some villages of the Arsinoite nome to invite them to establish permanent guards in certain areas, or to bring some suspects to a specific place<sup>29</sup>. This arrangement still rests upon the presence or proximity of military officers. In areas where none was to be found, it was left to civilians to take care of their own security, and it seems that few guidelines, if any, came from above after the departure of a military unit. For these reasons, each community facing security problems or rampant crime had to carry out its own experiments, with various degrees of success. Villagers had several options:

<sup>24</sup> *S.B.*, XIV, 11380 (cf. R. Rémondon, *J.J.P.*, XVIII, 1974, p. 33-37); and *P.Abinn.*, 54, with different characters involved in a similar case, the details of which are unclear because of the fragmentary condition of the petition.

<sup>25</sup> *P.Abinn.*, 50 (from an inhabitant of Narmouthis concerning land located in the village of Magais, July 30, 346). Cf. also *P.Gen.*, 16 (= *Sel.Pap.*, II, 289, Soknopaiou Nesos, Oct. 11, 207); and Davies, op. cit., 1989, p. 181-182.

<sup>26</sup> *P.Abinn.*, 55 (Feb. 11, 351); and 56 (undated).

<sup>27</sup> *Cod.Theod.*, 2, 1, 2 (Milan, July 25, 355); *P.Oxy.*, VIII, 1101 (367-370, B.L.); *Cod.Theod.*, 12, 1, 128 (Constantinople, July 31, 392); 1, 21, 1 (= *Cod.Iust.*, 1, 46, 1, Constantinople, Feb. 12, 393); 2, 1, 9 (Constantinople, Nov. 24, 397); *Cod.Iust.*, 3, 13, 6 (Constantinople, April 27, 413); 1, 46, 2 (Eudoxiopolis, Aug. 27, 416); 1, 46, 3 and 4 (Constantinople, Jan. 28 and Sept. 12, 443). Cf. Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, p. 168-169, nn. 107-109, and 173.

<sup>28</sup> Bagnall, op. cit., 1977, about non-military *skopelarioi* in Upper Egypt from the second to the mid-third century, as opposed to quasi-military *burgarii* in other areas of the empire. Organized in *dekaniai* and operating by shifts, they were performing compulsory labor similar to dike corvées. Local militias are well attested elsewhere, but were mostly used in the defense of cities (for instance, in Syria in the Flavian period), cf. Isaac, op. cit., 1990, p. 37 (*Antiochenses*), 134 (Mesopotamia), and 325-27 (veteran colonies in the East).

<sup>29</sup> *P.Fay.*, 38 (Euhemeria, III/IV)=Daris, op. cit., 1964, no. 70 (who dates the document in II/III), addressed to the elders (*presbyteroi*) and local police officers (*demosioi*) of the village of Taurinos; and *P.Giss.Univ.*, I, 15 (Ars., II/III)=Daris, no. 71, addressed to the komarchs of the village of Suron, with reference to the role of an *archephodos* acting as an escort for someone to be brought to an unknown place.

1. They could set up a local militia : probably created under the reign of Philip the Arab<sup>30</sup>, the *lestopiastai* (thief-catchers) constitute an auxiliary or paramilitary force attested in the Arsinoite, Hermopolite, and Oxyrhynchite nomes until the early or possibly mid-fourth century<sup>31</sup>. Five *lestopiastai* were required -- or sent from elsewhere -- to cooperate with the police (*demosioi*) of Soknopaiou Nesos in the arrest of wanted criminals : led by a *proestos* (perhaps the equivalent of a *praepositus* or *praefectus*), the squad included at least one specialist (*mechanarios*)<sup>32</sup>. Escorts or messengers, they were subordinated to the komarchs, the *praepositus pagi*, or, possibly, the *riparii*<sup>33</sup>.

In the village of Pache (Herm.) a *lestopiastes* promised under oath to the *praepositus pagi* that he would escort a team of six compulsory workers from the village to the quarries at Maximianopolis, deliver them to the foremen, and be responsible for their performance during a two-week period until the arrival of a replacement team. A likely interpretation is that the workers had failed to show up or had run away, and that they had to be brought back *manu militari*<sup>34</sup>. In the Oxyrhynchite nome a drought had caused some land to remain unreached by the flood. The situation called for a new evaluation of the tax assessment. Boundary surveyors were sent over to deal with the matter. Problems must have arisen, and a higher official decided to call them to town. To this effect he wrote a letter to the village authorities to secure the cooperation of the *lestopiastai*, presumably to provide the surveyors with an escort, or to deliver the summons<sup>35</sup>.

*Lestopiastai* were also entrusted with conveying important messages or documents, such as nomination lists for liturgical positions, a function that they seem to have taken over from Ptolemaic and Roman sword-bearers (*machairophoroi*) who are last attested in the middle of the third century<sup>36</sup>.

*Lestopiastai*, or at least their commanders, were on the village payroll : at Theadelphia in 246 (?) they were apportioned 60 dr. out of a total expenditure of 2837 dr. 2 ob. A list of payments preserved on an early fourth-century ostrakon from Karanis shows that they were the recipients of an allowance in kind (wine, meat) and in money, together with a decurion, a chaff collector, bath-guards (?), and individuals with no specified functions<sup>37</sup>. In spite of this, it is likely that the function of *lestopiastes* became liturgical at an early date, if not right away at the time of its creation<sup>38</sup>. Even though the function must have been of rather secondary importance in the village hierarchy, as the few preserved references suggest, *lestopiastai* were recruited among well-to-do villagers. One of them was the president of an association (*synodos*) of/in the village of Thraso in the Arsinoite nome, and is shown hiring a company of actors for a week<sup>39</sup>. Another one

<sup>30</sup> *S.B.*, VI, 9406, frg. 12, ll. 281-315 (Theadelphia, 246 ?, cf. J. D. Thomas, *Z.P.E.*, XIX, 1975, p. 112, n. 12). I doubt that *P.Petaus*, 34 (184 or later, Ptolemais Hormou, Arsinoite) provides an earlier occurrence.

<sup>31</sup> On *lestopiastai*, cf. N. Hohlwein, *Musée Belge*, VI, 1902, p. 159-166 ; O. Hirschfeld, *Kleine Schriften*, Berlin, 1913, p. 613-623 ; Oertel, op. cit., 1917, p. 55, n. 5, p. 270, no. 71, and p. 367 ; Lallemand, op. cit., 1964, p. 166, n. 7 ; Bagnall, op. cit., 1977, p. 68, n. 20 ; and Lewis, op. cit., 1982, p. 37-38. The four men in *P.Oxy.*, VI, 897 (Iseion Zapiton, Oxy., 346) could be *lestopiastai*.

<sup>32</sup> *B.G.U.*, I, 325 = *W.Chr.*, 472 = *Sel.Pap.*, II, 231 (III). Cf. also *S.B.*, VI, 9406 (Theadelphia, 246 ?) and *P.Oslo*, II, 20 (Karanis, late III, *B.L.*), with H. C. Youtie, *C.Ph.*, XXVII, 1932, p. 92-93, and *Scriptiunculae*, I, 1973, p. 334, and n. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *P.Flor.*, I, 2, col. VII (Enseu, Herm., 265) ; *P.Cair.Preis.*, 6 (Prektis, Herm., probably mid-IV, *B.L.*).

<sup>34</sup> *S.P.P.*, XX, 76 (= *S.B.*, I, 2267, early IV). Cf. H. Harrauer-K. A. Worp, *Marginalia zu S.P.P.*, XX, 76, *Z.P.E.*, XXXX, 1980, p. 143-144.

<sup>35</sup> *S.B.*, X, 10556 (undated). Cf. O. Hirschfeld, *Kleine Schriften*, 1913, p. 613-614 (= [1892] 815-816) ; and W. van Rengen, *C.d'E.*, XXXXIII, 1968, p. 335, ad 20.

<sup>36</sup> *P.Flor.*, I, 2, col. VII (Enseu, Herm., 265). On *machairophoroi*, cf. J.-J. Aubert, *B.A.S.P.*, XXIV, 1987, p. 127-131, with *P.Grenf.*, II, 333 (211, assisting a centurion) and Davies, op. cit., 1989, p. 182-183.

<sup>37</sup> *S.B.*, VI, 9406, frg. 12, ll. 281-315 (= *logos komes*), and *O.Mich.*, I, 102.

<sup>38</sup> *P.Ryl.*, II, 289 (described, III), a list of names possibly related to appointments to liturgies.

<sup>39</sup> *P.Mil.*, II, 47 = *S.B.*, X, 10439 (III, *B.L.*).

is called as a witness by Aurelius Isidoros in a complaint to the nome *logistes* against a careless or malevolent cattleman who had let his herd graze in Isidoros's fields : *lestopiastai* were respectable enough for their support to be considered valuable by local farmers involved in litigation<sup>40</sup>.

2. A second solution would have been for harried individuals or even large groups of individuals to take to flight, or to woo, individually or as a group, a rich and powerful local landowner whose numerous staff extended protection in accordance with the employer's will. In 331/332 the majority of the inhabitants of Theadelphia had left the village, fleeing their fiscal and liturgical obligations. Several of them found refuge at the farmstead of one Eulogios in the Oxyrhynchite nome. The remaining taxpayers of Theadelphia, setting out to fetch them, were forcibly prevented from approaching the estate by the combined effort of the landlord and members of his household<sup>41</sup>. In this particular case, the action of the landowner's staff can hardly have been seen as a substitute for military or official protection, but it illustrates the potential importance of private police in the countryside. Numerous *phylakes* in the papyri were undoubtedly private employees attached to large estates, and not necessarily liturgists.

3. A third solution was to develop the civilian police, by reviving an obsolete function or restructuring the existing hierarchy : while *archepodoi* as chief police officers were common in villages from the Ptolemaic to the Roman period, they seemed to have disappeared around the middle of the third century, perhaps a casualty of Philip the Arab's reorganization of village liturgies. In the Oxyrhynchite and Hermopolite nomes, they might have been replaced by the *epistates eirenes*, first attested in 256 and last in 296/297<sup>42</sup>. Among the later documents recording *archepodoi*, only a handful can be securely dated to the fourth century, and all of them concern the Arsinoite nome, and more specifically the village of Philadelphia<sup>43</sup>. This might have been a local peculiarity due to the fact that no permanent garrison was stationed in or near this village located in the northeastern Fayum. Fourth-century *archepodoi* at Philadelphia probably filled some vacuum in the security system of the area.

During the third and early fourth centuries, the position of *eirenarchos* was demoted from nome to pagus level, to finally become a village liturgy<sup>44</sup>. In the Oxyrhynchite nome, and there only, was created around 334 an additional hierarchic level, the *kephalaitotes* or captain of the *eirenarchoi*, a position which survived at least into the 350s<sup>45</sup>. The most durable and general reform took place ca. 346, and saw the introduction of the *riparii* all over Middle Egypt.

\*

Here is the point where we should close our investigation, because this was the last step toward the establishment of a homogeneous civilian system of law enforcement in the Egyptian countryside. This series of reforms can be viewed either as the cause or the consequence of what R. S. Bagnall describes as "the decline in the military involvement

<sup>40</sup> *P.Cair.Isid.*, 79 (Karanis, early IV).

<sup>41</sup> *P.Sakaon*, 44 (Theadelphia, 331/332).

<sup>42</sup> *P.Oxy.*, XLII, 3035 (Mermertha, Feb. 28, 256) ; *P.Oxy.*, XXXIV, 2714 (Aug. 29, 256, Paneui) ; *S.B.*, XII, 11108 (Mnachis, Herm., late III) ; and *P.Oxy.*, XII, 1507 (Terythis, Oxy., late III) ; *P.Oxy.*, XLIV, 3184a and b (Muchintale and Talao, 296/297) ; cf. P. Jouguet, in *P.Thead.* 17, introd. ; Oertel, op. cit., 1917, p. 278-281, no. 78 ; C. A. Nelson, in *P.Turner*, 42, introd. ; Lewis, op. cit., 1982, p. 23-24.

<sup>43</sup> *P.Sakaon*, 93 (314-323), if one reads Ph[il]adelphia instead of [Thea]delphia in line 2 (cf. plate 15 in *P.Sakaon*) ; *P.Princ.*, II, 99 (before the 340s), if *archepous* is a mistake for *archepodos* ; *B.G.U.*, III, 909 = *W.Chr.*, 382 (Aug. 24-28, 359). Cf. J. Nicole, *Archive*, III, 1904, p. 226-231 ; Oertel, op. cit., 1917, p. 275-277, no. 76 ; P. J. Parsons, in *P.Oxy.*, XXXI, 2572-2576, esp. p. 123-124, n. 1-2 ; G. M. Browne, in *P.Mich.*, X, p. 47-51 ; S. Daris, *Stud.Pap.*, XIX, 1980, p. 5-7 ; W. H. Caughran Jr., *Z.P.E.*, XXXXVI, 1982, p. 221-222 ; R. Pintaudi, *Z.P.E.*, XXXXVI, 1982, p. 263-266.

<sup>44</sup> Oertel, op. cit., 1917, p. 278-281 and 283-284 ; Lewis, op. cit., 1982, p. 23-24.

<sup>45</sup> First occurrence in *P.Oxy.*, XIV, 3769.

in petty policework and judging at the local level"<sup>46</sup>. It certainly amounts to a rise in local autonomy.

Are we dealing with a local phenomenon ? Can it be observed elsewhere in the empire during the same period ? Was the whole scheme well thought out from the outset, or should we view it only as a series of quick, *ad hoc*, short-lived responses to a complex and recurrent problem ? The answer to these questions would require a longer study, and the views expressed here are admittedly simplistic and speculative. The central government probably benefited from the gradual change from military to civilian police in the countryside. Insofar as the recruitment of the army was a local affair, each village had to provide the equivalent of one recruit every other year<sup>47</sup>. Military recruits surely had to be young and fit for service, but they did not have to be outstanding in all respects. It is likely that village authorities, who had to select the men who would be sent away to the army, were reluctant to let go their best productive forces and therefore managed to get rid of the most dispensable people. On the other hand, the liturgical system which was developing since the second century put the burden onto the wealthy, or at least the better-off, who were most directly and personally concerned with security problems. By the late third century a minimum property level (*poros*) was no longer a requirement for nominees to a liturgical position, and since age --up to 60 or 70 -- was no excuse, the pool of potential liturgists must have been larger than that of military recruits. The transfer from the army onto civilian communities (villages and towns) of the economic and administrative burden attached to the enforcement of law and order may have represented a reprieve for the imperial treasury. Whether or not the overall security of the countryside improved as a result of this change remains to be established.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Bagnall, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 165 and 173 (quotation). Evidence in Oertel, *op. cit.*, 1917, p. 284-286, no. 81 ; and Lallemand, *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 163-164.

<sup>47</sup> Bagnall, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 175-177.

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