

ELINE SCHEERLINCK

INHERITANCE DISPUTES AND VIOLENCE
IN WOMEN'S PETITIONS FROM PTOLEMAIC EGYPT¹

¹ The author works at Ghent University (Universiteit Gent) and wrote this article with the support of the Research Foundation Flanders who is funding the research project "Orientalism and Franz Cumont: his views on 'East' and 'West' in the context of classical studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century" (FWO-Vlaanderen, project G.0194.09; supervision: Danny Praet). A first, Dutch, version of this article appeared in «Tetradio» 18 (2008), pp. 163-183. I thank Danny Praet, Marc De Groote and Willy Clarysse for their numerous corrections and useful comments.

Abstract

This article uses formal petitions to the king or to officials as a source for our knowledge of women's daily life in Ptolemaic Egypt. In contrast with the use of single petitions as source material, the collection of this corpus permits an inclusive overview of the legal problems women tried to solve independently with an appeal to the authorities. Two problems often recur among the diverse complaints and requests: inheritance disputes and acts of violence. In the first section of this article we look at the documents in which the petitioner complains that the accused claims property that belongs to her by legacy. In the second section we take a closer look at the petitions concerning acts of violence committed against the female petitioner. Although the female petitioners obviously present themselves as victims, these complaints and requests illustrate women's power to gain and protect property and to undertake legal actions without obvious assistance of family members or others.

Keywords

Papyri, Ptolemaic period, petitions

Parole chiave

Papiri, periodo Tolemaico, petizioni

For the study of society and daily life in Graeco-Roman Egypt, formal petitions to the king or officials constitute a fascinating source of information²: the petitions often read as scenes from daily life, narrated from the point of view of one of the protagonists and often sprinkled with colourful details. Such petitions can be used as valuable source material for publications on women's life

² This aspect of the papyri has attracted researchers since long; cf., for example, J.G. WINTER, *Life and Letters in the Papyri*, Ann Arbor 1933; V.B. BALDWIN, *Crime and criminals in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, «Aegyptus» 43 (1963), pp. 256-263; D.W. HOBSON, *The impact of Law on Village Life in Roman Egypt*, in B. HALPERN-D.W. HOBSON (eds.), *Law, Politics and Society in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Sheffield 1993, pp. 193-220; A. BRYEN, *Visibility and Violence in Petitions from Roman Egypt*, «Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies» 48 (2008), pp. 181-200.

and position in Egyptian society³. This article is based on a well-defined corpus of petitions from the Ptolemaic period, all submitted by women⁴. In contrast

³ E.g. J. ROWLANDSON (ed.), *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt. A Source Book*, Cambridge 1998; EAD., *Beyond the Polis: Women and Economic Opportunity in Early Ptolemaic Egypt*, in A.E. POWELL, *The Greek World*, London 1995, pp. 301-322; M. PARCA, *Violence by and against Women in Documentary Papyri from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt*, «Studia Hellenistica» 37 (2002), pp. 283-296; R. BAGNALL, *Women's Petitions in Late Antique Egypt*, in D. FEISSEL-J. GASCOU (éds.), *La pétition à Byzance*, Paris 2004, pp. 53-60; S.B. POMEROY, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt. From Alexander to Cleopatra*, New York 1984.

⁴ I collected this corpus in the context of my Master's dissertation at Ghent University, entitled *Klachten en verzoeken uit Ptolemeïsch Egypte: vrouwelijke onderdanen schrijven aan de overheid (Requests and Complaints from Ptolemaic Egypt: Female Subjects Write to the Authorities)*, under the supervision of Marc De Groote. I examined, on the basis of a corpus of Greek petitions, the situations in which women made use of the administration to solve their legal problems, without explicit mention of male assistance. I focused on the Ptolemaic period, from the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC to the Battle of Actium in 31 BC.

To update the lists of petitions in A. DI BITONTO, *Le petizioni al re*, «Aegyptus» 47 (1967), pp. 5-57 and EAD., *Le petizioni ai funzionari nel periodo tolemaico*, «Aegyptus» 48 (1968), pp. 53-107, I searched the collections of edited papyri for this type of documents. Then I made a selection based on the sex of the petitioner: only those petitions in which women acted as the petitioner were taken into consideration. I consulted the digital databases in [<http://papyri.info>].

In HGV and APIS I searched by type and content, while in DDBDP formulae typical of petitions were entered as search terms (cf. DI BITONTO, *Le petizioni al re cit.*, and EAD., *Le petizioni ai funzionari cit.*). I determined the sex of the petitioners by looking at 1. the name, and 2. gender-marking grammatical elements in the text. References to female petitioners in the secondary literature did not add any documents to the corpus. My selection resulted in a corpus of 71 Greek petitions, by 60 different women. Some were drafts and were never submitted. Twenty-five are *enteuxeis* and *hypomnemata* from the third century BC, 31 are dated to the second century BC and 15 to the first century BC. Most petitions were found in the Arsinoite (31) and Herakleopolite (15) nomes.

The corpus contains the following documents:

BGU 6, 1244; BGU 8, 1813; BGU 8, 1820; BGU 8, 1826; BGU 8, 1827; BGU 8, 1833; BGU 8, 1848; BGU 8, 1849; BGU 18.1, 2731; PDiosk 1 9: J.M.S. COWEY-K. MARESCH-CH. BARNES (Hrsg.), *Das Archiv des Phrurarchen Dioskurides*, Papyrologica Coloniensia, XXX, Paderborn 2003; PDryton 33: K. VANDORPE (ed.), *The Bilingual Family Archive of Dryton, his Wife Apollonia and their Daughter Senmouthis*, Brussels 2002; PDryton 33 b, PDryton 34; PDuk inv. 316, PDuk inv. 698; PEnt 10, PEnt 13, PEnt 20, PEnt 22, PEnt 23, PEnt 24, PEnt 30, PEnt 31, PEnt 33, PEnt 6, PEnt 64, PEnt 69, PEnt 7, PEnt 81, PEnt 82, PEnt 83, PEnt 86; PHamb 4 238, PMerton 1, 5; PPetrie 3, 27; PPolitJud 9: K. MARESCH-J.M.S. COWEY (Hrsg.), *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis (144/3-133/2 v. Chr.)*, Papyrologica Coloniensia, XXIX, Wiesbaden 2001; PPolitJud 10; PRyl 2, 68; PTebt 1, 52, PTebt 2, 283, PTebt 3.1, 776, PTorChoach 3: P.W. PESTMAN, *Il Processo di Hermias e altri documenti dell'archivio dei choachiti. Papiri greci e demotici conservati a Torino e in altre collezioni d'Italia*, Torino 1992; PSI 3, 166; PSI 3, 167; SB 5, 8009; SB 6, 9065; SB 6, 9420; SB 8, 9790; SB 16, 12305; SB 16, 12687; SB 18, 13838; SB 18, 13839; SB 18, 13841; SB 20, 4592; SB 22, 15273; SB 22, 15762; SB 24, 16285; SB 24, 16295; UPZ 1, 18; UPZ 1, 19; UPZ 1, 20; UPZ 1, 17; UPZ 1, 39; UPZ 1, 40; UPZ 1, 41; UPZ 1, 42; UPZ 1, 46; UPZ 1, 47; UPZ 1, 48; UPZ 1, 49; UPZ 1, 50.

with the use of single petitions as source material, the collection of this corpus permits an inclusive overview of the legal problems women tried to solve independently with an appeal to the authorities.

Two problems often recur among the diverse complaints and requests: inheritance disputes and acts of violence.

I.1. Widows and orphans: inheritance disputes in the petitions.

Conflicts concerning inheritance occur frequently in the corpus of women's petitions: in these cases the petitioner complains that the accused claims property that belongs to her by legacy. Most of these inheritances consist of mostly land and/or houses, whether or not farmed or inhabited by the petitioners. The next pages will give an overview of the conflicts concerning inheritance found in women's petitions from the Ptolemaic period⁵. Often the accused is a member of the petitioner's family. In this case the petition results from a family quarrel, where the parties could not sort out their differences within the domestic context and the petitioners turn to the authorities to assert their rights⁶.

Herakleia, the petitioner of *SB* 6 9065 (after 50-49 BC), lost both her husband and daughter, and had difficulties with her brother-in-law Alexandros, who refused to observe the stipulations in the will of his late brother Heliodoros. Herakleia's daughter had inherited her father's immovables but, when she died, these went to Herakleia's brother in law, on condition that he would return Herakleia's original dowry of 2200 silver *drachmai* within 60 days. If he overlooked this, he would lose his rights to the inheritance, in favour of Herakleia. When after 60 days Alexandros had not complied with his late brother's will, Herakleia went to court and in her petition she gives a precise enumeration of all the facts and cites, all documents relevant to her case.

⁵ *SB* 8 9790, important from the perspective of women's economic opportunity in Ptolemaic Egypt, because it presents the first attestation of a daughter inheriting kleruchic land. This petition will not be discussed here because it does not mention an inheritance dispute. It is discussed by W. MÜLLER, *Bemerkungen zu den spätptolemäischen Papyri der Berliner Sammlung*, in *Proceedings of the IX International Congress of Papyrology, Oslo, 19-22 August 1958*, Hertford 1961, p. 191 and J. BINGEN, *Hellenistic Egypt. Monarchy, Society, Economy, Culture*, Edinburgh 2007, pp. 132-140 and, with translation, by ROWLANDSON (ed.), *Women and Society* cit.

⁶ In-laws (*BGU* 8, 1849; *SB* 6, 9065) or stepmother (*PTorChoach* 3), but also their uncle and his wife and children (*PDryton* 33) or even their mother (*UPZ* 1, 18-20).

About 47 BC another widow, Tasemtheus, similarly accuses her in-laws (BGU VIII 1849). The difficulties with her brothers-in-law had already arisen when her husband Horos was still alive. Tasemtheus' dowry had not, as was customary, been paid by her own family, but by her brothers-in-law, while a house belonging to Tasemtheus' father served as a mortgage. Several years later, the brothers-in-law insisted on a division of the house, and at this moment Horos died, apparently intestate, as Tasemtheus does not mention a will. She complains that she had to pay for Horos' funeral and accuses her brothers-in-law of plundering the inheritance of her and Horos' child:

πάντα τὰ τοῦ τέκνου ἀποφερόμενοι | οὐδὲν εἰς τὰ ἀναγκαῖα ἐ-
πιχορηγοῦσι

(ll. 19-20).

«... they take all the child's possessions away and don't give us the highly necessary».

Tasemtheus does not give a specific description nor a price of the things her brothers-in-law have taken from her and her child, she only complains that they do not even supply them with what is strictly necessary. It is uncertain, however, whether Tasemtheus was right to accuse her brothers-in-law, as they paid for her dowry. Now the marriage is over, they probably reclaim the value of this dowry. It is not clear whether the brothers-in-law received (part of) the mortgaged house. In any case, the fact that a priestly court had earlier decided against Tasemtheus' in this matter (l. 23) might indicate that justice was not at this petitioner's side.

Those are the only petitions in which a female petitioner accuses her in-laws of trying to rob her of her late husband's legacy. The violation of a widow's peace could come from other angles. Asia, a soldier's widow, complains that she had been unjustly treated by a certain Poöris, the owner of the house in which her deceased husband had been billeted and where the couple had lived together with him (PEnt 13, 222 BC). Asia tried to close off the part of the house that she and her husband occupied from Poöris' part, by completing the half-finished wall that already divided the living area.

... ἐμοῦ δὲ βουλομένης ἐπισυντελέσαι | τὸν τοῖχον ἵνα μὴ ὑ-
περβατὸν ἢ εἰς τὰ ἡμέτερα ... (ll. 4-5)

«... when I wanted to complete the wall to prevent access to our part of the house ...».

Poöris impeded the works although the wall was Asia's, according to her petition: Poöris did not respect her because her husband has died.

Widows were sometimes left with the debts of their husbands: Arsinoë (BGU 8 1833, 51/50 BC), widow, mother of one child and petitioner to her creditor, the *strategos* Seleukos, had a conflict concerning the payment of those debts with the latter's caretaker.

Even more frequently than widows, women or girls who lost their father came into conflict with persons claiming the inheritance for themselves. The well-known twin sisters Thaues and Taous (UPZ I 18-19-20, 163 BC) pressed charges against their own mother, Nephoris, who had left the girls' father for a soldier, for the attempted murder of their father. The latter managed to escape over water but died shortly afterwards. Having claimed all of her late husband's inheritance, including the monthly rent of two houses, Nephoris drove her daughters away. The girls fled to the temple of Sarapis in Saqqara, where they received help from the *katochos* Ptolemaios, a friend of their father. Ptolemaios helped the girls to draw up several petitions in which they accused their mother and told their dramatic story in detail. There are three different extant versions of this petition in the archive of Ptolemaios, together with petitions on other problems written on behalf of Thaues en Taous.

PTorChoach 3 (after 112 BC) even illustrates a daughter-stepmother conflict within a family of choachytes, mortuary priests in charge of the burial of mummified bodies. Tasemis was born from the first marriage of her father. When Tasemis' father died his second wife snatched away the inheritance for herself and her children. The legacy consisted of two houses, including furniture and cattle, but also the rights to the profits made from the priestly profession. Because the petition is fragmentary it is not clear what Tasemis claims.

A long and complicated family quarrel concerning an inheritance is presented by Apollonia, wife of the cavalry officer Dryton (PDryton 33 and 33bis, the latter being a draft version or copy, 136 BC). The family archive belonging to this couple and their daughters includes two petitions from the corpus, both concerning inheritance difficulties. In the oldest document the petitioner is Apollonia herself, who writes also on behalf of her three younger sisters. She accuses their uncle Kallimedes of grabbing the inheritance of his brother, Apollonia's father Ptolemaios⁷. When Ptolemaios died, intestate, not all of his daughters were of age and as a consequence they needed a guardian to administer their inheritance for them. Kallimedes, without being appointed or even asked,

⁷ The law suit archive known as the "Erbstreit archive" contains documents relating to an inheritance dispute within Apollonia's family. Apollonia and her sisters and Kallimedes and his family are two of the three parties involved. PDryton 33+33 bis (136 BC), however, does not belong to this "Erbstreit archive", but to the archive of Dryton and Apollonia.

acted together with his wife and two sons as their *epitropos*, taking possession of the sisters' house and furniture and stealing the title deeds to Ptolemaios' plots of land.

When all the girls had come of age and had gained official access to their inheritance, their uncle and his family hardly returned any property, even after the intervention of the head of police of the *nomos*. The accused even took an oath, swearing that they had not robbed their nieces, which was contradicted by the girls in their petition:

... προφανῶς ἔνοχοι ὄντες φωρᾶ λείας ἐφημμένοι ἀλλοτρίων καὶ ταῦτ' ὀρφανικῶν (l. 17).

«... obviously being liable for theft of booty, since they claimed property of other people, even of orphans ...».

Two years and several – non-extant – petitions later, while the dispute about the title deeds and the furniture had still not been settled, the uncle and his family, together with an accomplice, stole 13 *artabas* of wheat from the sisters. How this story continued has become unclear by the *lacunae* in the papyrus. Maybe a new petition was sent, followed by the arrest of Kallimedes. The parties then came to an agreement about the inheritance, which Kallimedes would now have been prepared to give back to his nieces. However, the case was still not settled: the purpose of Apollonia's petition was to make sure that her case appeared before the *strategos* Santobithys, who had already been involved and at that time had helped the sisters. Apollonia submitted her petition to the *epi-strategos* Boëthos, the highest-ranking official of the Thebaïs. The latter proceeded in favour of the petition, referring the case to Santobithys, as is shown by the annotation written by a clerk of Boëthos on the verso of the papyrus. It cannot be determined from the other documents in the family archive whether or not Apollonia and her sisters were able to assert their rights to their father's inheritance. When Apollonia had her petition drawn up, she had already been married to Dryton for 15 years. This marriage, Dryton's second, produced five daughters. Dryton made three wills, two on the occasion of his marriages in 164 BC and 150 BC, and one shortly before his death in 126 BC⁸. The last document was very detailed: Dryton divided his property between his children (he had a son called Esthladas from a first marriage). His daughters inherited half of Dryton's property, both immovables and movables, including two female slaves, part of a house and several building lots. The other half went to

⁸ Respectively PDryton 1, PDryton 2, PDryton 3-4.

his son Esthladas. This preferential treatment of the eldest son appears to be a common feature in Egyptian as well as in Greek wills⁹.

Dryton's vineyard, on the other side of the Nile, was bequeathed entirely to his son, wells and appurtenances included. From a petition sent by the five daughters of Dryton (PDryton 34, shortly after 116 BC), more than ten years after their father's death, it appears that half of the vineyard had come into their possession. When and why their half-brother made over the plot is not known. The girls mention the lot as part of their inheritance, together with the two female slaves and the building lots. Since the vineyard was situated on the other side of the Nile, the sisters did not have direct control over it. Moreover, the facts they report in their petition took place in times of unrest, probably caused by troubles concerning the succession after the death of Ptolemaios VIII in 116 BC. The sisters relate how a certain Ariston took advantage of these circumstances and planted the lot partially with vines.

... ἀντιποιεῖται ἀδίκως τοῦ ἐπιβάλλοντος ἡμῖν μέρους (ἡμίσιους) |
καὶ μέρος τι καταπεφύτευκεν ἀμπέλω, κατεγνωκῶς | τῷ γυναικᾶ'ς'
ἡμᾶς εἶναι καὶ ἑτέρῳ τόπῳ κατοικούσας | μὴ εὐχερῶς δύνασθαι
ἐπιβαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν σημαιομένην κτήσιν (Il. 21-25).
«... and he unjustly lays claim to the half share that belongs to us. He
has planted a certain part with vines, despising us because we are not
able easily to go the property referred to, since we live in another place».

Apollonia's daughters asked the *epistrategos* to force Ariston to renounce the vineyard and the plants planted therein, and that he would reimburse them for the fruits he harvested. In this case the petitioners acquired property by inheritance, but one could also inherit the usufruct of a tract of land. In PEnt 64 (221 BC), Ptolema reports how her relative Theodotos bought the usufruct of a palm orchard, but died before he could harvest. Ptolema inherited the usufruct and wanted to reimburse the creditors of Theodotos with the profits from the orchard.

But Neilos, the owner of the orchard, did not allow Ptolema to harvest and

⁹ Cf. PDryton 34, p. 42, with numerous further references. On the other hand, in his second will, drawn up on the occasion of his marriage to Apollonia and before any of their children were born, Dryton already apportioned half of his property to his child from his first marriage and the other half to the possible children from his second marriage. If his marriage to Apollonia would have resulted in only one daughter, she would have inherited half of her father's property. This arrangement does not explicitly favour Esthladas as the eldest son, but divides the legacy equally between Dryton's offspring from his two marriages. I'm grateful to Willy Clarysse for pointing this out to me.

threw her off the terrain. The heiress demands 100 *drachmai* from Neilos, the price paid by Theodotos for the harvest.

I.2. Victims of violence.

Petitioners often used specific terms to refer to violent behaviour on the part of the accused, for example *ekballein* mentioned above. In BGU VIII 1820 (after 55 BC), Makaria accuses her husband of throwing her out of the house. The expression ἐκβάλλειν τὴν γυναικα ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας does not always, however, indicate violence. Whereas the legal terms for violence against the person, *hybris*¹⁰ and *hybrizein*, do not occur in my corpus, petitioners do sometimes use the legal term *bia*¹¹, indicating both violence against the person and against his or her property.

Thaisas (*SB* 22, 15762; 210 BC), the owner of a mill, relates how the baker Petesouchos, with his accomplices, had damaged her equipment:

... τῆ βία χρώ|μενος ἐξέσπακεν μύλον μονόκω|πον ... (ll. 11-13).
«... he violently removed a one handle mill...».

Apollonia and her sisters (cf. *supra*) maintain that their uncle violently stole an amount of wheat from their house (τῆ βία, PDryton 33, l. 19) and Apollonia's daughters talk about the violent manner in which the accused took possession of their vineyard (βιαιότερον, PDryton 34, l. 18). In a fragmentary petition concerning a loan (*SB* 18, 13841; 221 BC), the king was asked to prevent that the woman petitioner was treated unjustly and robbed by the accused, whom she called a violent person (βιαίου ἀνθρώπου, l. 7), who had «driven her out». The words ἐξέβαλέν με, «he drove me out», probably refer to this violent behaviour of the accused.

In the cases mentioned above, the violence that the petitioner had suffered was not the main complaint, which was usually of a material or financial nature. Nevertheless, besides compensation for the material or financial damages, however, the petitioners sometimes requested an additional, unspecified punishment for the inflicted violence.

¹⁰ R. TAUBENSCHLAG, *The Law of Graeco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri, 332 B.C.-640 A.D.*, Warszawa 1955², pp. 435-442.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 442-449, especially p. 443.

...περὶ δ[ὲ τ]ῆ[ς] ἐγβολῆς Διοφάν[την] διαγνῶναι καθότι] ἂν αὐτῶ
 φαίνηται (PEnt 64, l. 12).
 «..., and concerning the fact that he threw me out (of the palm orchard),
 let Diophanes judge as he deems right».

In her discussion of violence by and against women in petitions from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt¹², M. Parca determines four types of violence: physical, verbal, economic and psychological. She gives examples of combinations of these types, including petitions submitted by both women and men. While it is possible to retrieve cases of (combinations of) these four types of violence in women's petitions from Ptolemaic Egypt, many of the inheritance disputes can be seen as examples of economic (and psychological)¹³ violence. The complaints I discuss in the following pages relate strictly to physical and to a lesser extent verbal violence and do not seek financial redress. In these documents the petitioners submitted complaints concerning *hybris*, a serious crime according to Ptolemaic law, which could signify verbal as well as physical violence (cf. *supra* and n. 10). Aggravating circumstances included perpetration at night or endangerment of the victim's life¹⁴.

Taarmiusis (PTebt 2, 283; first half I century BC) submitted a petition on behalf of her mother¹⁵, who was hit so badly that she was in mortal danger. The attacker assaulted her mother at «a late hour» (ll. 6-7: ὀψίτερον | τῆς ὥρας). This probably points to aggravating circumstances.

Pregnancy of the victim was also an aggravating circumstance¹⁶. Tereus (PRyl 2, 68; 89 BC) was five months pregnant when she had an argument in the street with a woman called Tetearmais. This argument, the cause of which is not mentioned, led to physical violence: with an expression that recurs often in this particular thematic group of petitions, Tereus reported that the accused hit her «everywhere she could on my body ...».

¹² PARCA, *Violence by and against Women* cit.

¹³ An obvious example are the twin sisters Taues and Thaous (UPZ 1 17-20), discussed above. PEnt 86 provides an instance of psychological and verbal violence: Tetosiris reports how her opponent in a lawsuit about her house threatened her witnesses into not testifying on her behalf. She does not, however, request a punishment for this behaviour: she only asks the *strategos* that her witnesses will be summoned into court.

¹⁴ See n. 10.

¹⁵ Compare petitions written by men on behalf of their (pregnant) wife, whose life is endangered because of violent treatment; some examples of these documents from the Ptolemaic and Roman period are discussed in S. ADAM, *La femme enceinte dans les papyrus*, «Anagenesis» 3 (1983), pp. 9-19: PTebt 800 (153/142 BC), POxy 315 (37 CE) and PMich 228 (47 CE).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

... ὥστε | διὰ τὰς πληγὰς ἀρρωστήσα|σα κατακεῖσαι
κινδυνεύου|σα τῷ βίῳ (Il. 14-17).
«... so that I am bedridden because of the blows and in mortal danger».

When the life of a victim of *hybris* was endangered, the attacker was held in jail, so that, if the victim died within a certain number of days, he could be punished for murder. This procedure was requested by Tereus in her petition, who also expected compensation from her attacker, in case she survived the assault¹⁷.

Another victim of violence reported in detail how she was attacked by a colleague while weaving.

... καὶ ἐξ ἧς | συνεστήσατο πρὸς με ἀντιλογίας ἐφαλομένη μοι
καὶ | καταβάλλουσα ἐπὶ τὸ ἔδαφος, | ἔτυπεν πληγαῖς πλείσταις,
| εἰς ὃ τῦχοι μέρος τοῦ σώματος ... (PSI 3, 167; 118 BC, Il. 13-18).
«... and after an argument which she started, she jumped on me, throwing me on the floor and she inflicted many blows everywhere she could, to every part of my body ...».

Complaints about *hybris* against family members are absent from the corpus. On the contrary, all attackers are strangers or acquaintances. Moreover, all assaults take place in more or less public places: in the street, on the shop floor, or, as is the case in the two following petitions, in a public bath.

Philista (PEnt 82, 221 BC) was taking a bath when she was injured by Pettechoon,

... πα|ραχέων ἐν τῷ γυναικείῳ [θόλῳ, ἐγβεβηκυίας μου ὥστε
ζμήσασθαι], εἰσενέγκας θερμοῦ τὰς ἀρυταί|νας καστεσκεδάσεν
μου ...
καὶ κατέκαυσεν τὴν τε κοιλίαν καὶ τὸν ἀριστερὸν μηρὸν ἕως
τοῦ γόνατος | ὥστε καὶ κινδυνεύειν με (Il. 2-5).
«... he being bathman in the women's rotunda, and I had stepped out to soap myself, when he brought in the jugs of hot water, he emptied one over me and scalded my belly and my left thigh down to the knee, so as to endanger my life¹⁸».

¹⁷ The petitioner of PEnt 81 (221 BC) requests the same procedure after she was attacked, together with her sisters, in front of her house by a man and two women.

¹⁸ Translation from ROWLANDSON (ed.), *Women and Society* cit., nr. 130.

Philista had already succeeded in capturing Petechon and had handed him over to the local head of police, but still needed to submit this petition to start a legal procedure against him¹⁹.

When Thamounis (PEnt 83, 221 BC) was assaulted in a public bath, her attacker was Thothortais, another visitor of the women's bath in the village of Oxyryncha. After unsuccessfully trying to chase Thamounis out of the bath, she hit her and snatched off her necklace. According to the petitioner Thothortais attacked her because she was «a stranger», *i.e.*, she had moved to Oxyryncha from the neighboring Herakleopolite nome.

... καταγνοῦσά μου ὅτι ξένη εἰμὶ πληγὰς μοι ἐνέβαλεν καὶ πλείους (l. 4).

«... despising me because I am a stranger, she inflicted many blows ...».

The local *komarches*, called to aid by Thamounis after the attack, plotted together with Thotortais and imprisoned Thamounis, only letting her out after taking her mantle and giving it to Thotortais. Thamounis asked to retrieve her mantle or its value, and that the *strategos* would decide on a punishment concerning the violence.

I.3. Conclusion.

Studying women's daily life from the perspective of the petitioners in formal complaints and requests means seeing and hearing these particular women in the role of victim. It has become clear, from the examples discussed in this article, that this point can be nuanced in a twofold way at least.

Firstly, women also appear as wrongdoers, the accused, both in cases of inheritance²⁰ and of violence²¹.

¹⁹ HOBSON, *The impact of Law* cit., for Roman Egypt, calls this «the self-help system» (p. 205): crime victims had a (better) chance of obtaining justice if they helped themselves, by reporting the facts to different officials (p. 215) or, as in this case, by capturing the culprit and handing him over to the authorities. Other examples from the corpus are PEnt 81 and 86, where the *epistates* witnesses the crime but does not intervene, and PEnt 83, where the *komarches* sides with the other party. In general, submitting a petition was not a guarantee for a smooth and quick solution of a legal or administrative problem, as in some petitions from the corpus the petitioner mentions previous petitions to other officials, *e.g.* the petition by Apollonia and her sisters, PDryton 33, and PMerton 1, 5, where Berenike writes for the third time to the authorities, mentioning four different officials concerned in her case.

²⁰ In 3 cases out of 9: UPZ 18-20, PTorChoach 3, PDryton 33, where together with Kallimedes his wife and sons are mentioned as the wrongdoers.

²¹ In 4 cases out of 6: PRyl 2, 68; PSI 3, 167; PEnt 83; PEnt 8, where the victims are attacked by a man and two women.

Secondly, the victims allude to their economic situation as owners, buyers, creditors, heiresses etc., in their complaints, which they submit in order to protect their property rights. When Hediste in PEnt 69 (218 BC) complains that a doctor has started construction works on a building lot that belongs to her, one can also interpret this as an independent legal action of a landowner. Berenike, the petitioner in PMerton 5, owned *polis* land in Ptolemaïs and several women who own slaves occur in the corpus²². These documents thus confirm the image of economic opportunities women in Ptolemaic Egypt enjoyed with respect to the classical *poleis*, especially Athens²³.

This aspect of the petitions becomes clear from the complaints concerning inheritance discussed above. The requests formulated in those complaints are of a financial or material nature, as is the case for almost every document in the corpus: whether they concern dowries, slaves, tracts of land, houses or loans, the petitioners wish to protect their property – this could also simply be the price value of stolen goods²⁴ – or other economic rights by means of a formal complaint or request. Only the exceptional group of six documents concerning violence (*hybris*) feature requests for penal punishment and not explicitly for financial compensation.

Ghent University, Belgium
Eline.Scheerlinck@UGent.be

²² PDiosk 1, 9; PHamb 4, 238; PDryton 34; PPolitJud 1, 9.

²³ Cf. ROWLANDSON, *Beyond the Polis* cit. and POMEROY, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt* cit., ch. 5.

²⁴ PEnt 30 (theft of a mantle), SB XVIII 13839 (breaking and entering and theft of a *chiton*, earrings and toilet articles).