NIKOLAOS GONIS

INCESTUOUS TWINS IN THE CITY OF ARSINOE


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P.Duk.inv. 4911
8.1 x 10.7 cm
Second century

The papyrus preserves the upper part of a declaration submitted to Dios and Apollonios, γραμματείς μητροπόλεως, by a married couple. Physical damage obscures the exact purport of the text, but parallels suggest that it concerned the registration of a child in the parents’ status, compare in particular W.Chr. 211 of 156.2 No date has survived, but we may form some idea about it if Dios and Apollonios are to be identified with known office holders active in the second half of the second century, see further 1 n.

The man and the woman are siblings, in fact twins. Although there is plenty of evidence for endogamous marriages in the early Roman Arsinoite documentation, this is the first time that we hear of such a union between twins. It is also noteworthy that the union very probably produced an offspring.

Brother-sister marriage in Greco-Egyptian context has been the subject of a number of important studies in recent years, culminating in W. Scheidel, Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire: Explorations in Ancient Demography (JRA Suppl. 21: 1996) 9-51.3 But several problems remain unresolved.4

The writing is along the fibres. The back is blank.

[Δ]είων καὶ Ἀπολλονίων
[γ]ραμματείας μητροπόλεως
παρὰ Σαβίνου τοῦ Πτολεμαίου τοῦ Ἰρακ(λ) μητρὸς

Εὑδαυμονίδος καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς Θερμίου οὐσῆς μου
καὶ ὀμοψ(τρίον) καὶ ὀμομητρίον
ἀδελφῆς διδ[1]ήμου μετὰ
κυρίου ἐμοῦ Σαβίνου

ἐπ’ ἀμφότερον τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς
μητροπ(όλεως) ἀναγραφομένων
ἐπ’ ἀμφότερον Γυμνασίου, ἀπὸ[γ]ραφομέθα

1  l. Δίων 2 γρ 3, 9 Σαβίνου 4 Ἰρακ 7 ὁμοὶ 11 μητρὸς

1 The papyrus was purchased from the University of Mississippi in 1988 (formerly P.Miss. 57), and is now held in the Special Collections Library of Duke University, by courtesy of which the image is reproduced here.


3 See also K. Hopkins, ‘Brother-sister marriage in Roman Egypt’, Comparative Studies in Society and History 22 (1980) 303-54; B. Shaw, ‘Brother-sister marriage in Graeco-Roman Egypt’, Man 27 (1992) 267-99; Scheidel, ‘Incest Revisited: Three Notes on the Demography of Sibling Marriage in Roman Egypt’, BASP 32 (1995) 143-55; id., ‘Brother-Sister Marriage in Roman Egypt’, Journal of Biosocial Science 29 (1997) 361-71. In his discussions of incestuous unions Scheidel relies on the evidence from census returns as collected by R. S. Bagnall, B. W. Frier, The Demography of Roman Egypt (1994). His list of ‘additional testimonies of brother-sister marriage’ (Measuring Sex, Age and Death 11 n. 11) is not (and perhaps was not meant to be?) exhaustive, and this suggests that the declarations of birth and death have not been studied systematically (cf. e.g. W.Chr. 211, P.Oxy. XXXVIII 2855).

‘To Dios and Apollonios, scribes of the metropolis, from Sabinos son of Ptolemaios grandson of Herakl..., mother Eudaimonis, and my wife Thermion, being my twin sister by the same father and mother, with her guardian me, Sabinos, both of those from the metropolis, registered in the quarter of the Gymnasion. We register ...’

1 [Δ]έισαι. It is uncertain whether Dios is the same person as the one who appears in P.Stras. VI 528 = C.Pap.Gr. II/1 50.1 [τῷ καὶ] τῷ διέρχονται [μητροπόλεως]. It is also doubtful whether the addressees of this fragmentary notification of death were two. At the start of line 1 the papyrus has [το]τιο; this suggests reading [τῷ καὶ], i.e. an alias, rather than [το]τιο, cf. e.g. C.Pap.Gr. II/1 40.1 (c. 150) Πωλειδίον τῷ καὶ τοίχοι, where a similar abbreviation has been employed. But a declaration directed to a single γραμματέως μητροπόλεως would appear to be an exception; the annotation γραμματέως μητροπόλεως in C.Pap.Gr II/1 24.14 (110), or the census return P.Corn. 16.ii = SB XX 14303.40 (133), whose addressees include a single γραμματέως μητροπόλεως, are not real parallels. The date of P.Stras. 528 also poses a problem. Ed. pr. dated it to the period 161-69; the re-edition placed it in 145-60, but this is impossible. In l. 10 the plate (C.Pap.Gr II/1, Tav. LI) indicates that κυρίον, later changed to κυρίου, is virtually certain (cf. already B. Kramer, P.Stras. 500-800 index, p. 106 = BL VIII 422). κυρίον in combination with Ἀντωνίου in l. 9 suggests that the text either dates to the reign of M. Aurelius and L. Verus (161-69) or to that of M. Aurelius and L. Commodus (176-80).

2 Ἀπολλωνίῳ. Apollonios may well be recognised in the γραμματέως μητροπόλεως who figures in SB XIV 11341.2 of 174. If the identification holds, it is just possible that the Duke papyrus dates to 174.

4-8 For the formulation cf. W. Chr. 211.4-6 καὶ τῷ τῷ [τῷ]ν γυναῖκας οὔτε καὶ ὁμοσυ[τριόν] καὶ ὁμοσμη[τριόν] ν ἀδέλφης Δίδυμης (it might be that the name Δίδυμη was given to her to indicate that she was a twin!).

8 διδύμου. It seems that the scribe first wrote διδυ, and then continued with ὑμοῦ. I am not sure whether the second iota was cancelled.

