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Permission to circumcise

The Journal of Juristic Papyrology 34, 43-49

2004

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Nikolaos Gonis

PERMISSION TO CIRCUMCISE

A RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS before an archiereus concerning an application for permission to circumcise a boy; this was a prerequisite for the boy’s admission to priesthood. Our text narrates that a father introduced his infant son and requested permission to circumcise him, presenting a letter (to the archiereus) from the strategos, who had already received proofs for the priestly origin of the boy. Following consultation with the hierogrammateis, who confirmed that the boy was without blemish, the archiereus granted permission.

Parallels, onomastics, and the reference to the Arsinoite division of Herakleides indicate that the papyrus comes from Soknopaiou Nesos, the provenance of most texts of this kind. The boy to be circumcised may be known from later documents from this village; see below 3-4 n.

The papyrus is complete at the top, left and foot, but has lost the ends of lines; with a single exception (l. 7), all lines may be restored with confidence: the text is very similar to BGU i 82 (18.xi.185). Comparable also are SB vi 9027 (148/171; see BL vii 201), W. Chr. 77 (149), SPP xxii 51 (153; see BL iii 238), SB i 16–17 (156), BGU xiii 2216 (156), 347:1 (= W. Chr. 76 = Sel. Pap. ii 244) & ii (171), and P. Oxy. L 3567.14–25 (252). Such texts could be used as proofs for priestly status; cf. P. Tèbt. ii 291.33–35 (162), and especially P. Oxy. L 3567.
NIKOLAOS GONIS

For a list of documents related to this procedure see Francisca A. J. Hoogendijk & Klaas A. Worp, “Drei unveröffentlichte griechische Papyri aus der Wiener Sammlung”, Tyche 16 (2001), p. 51 n. 12; all of the second-century texts are of Arsinoite provenance, while those of the third and fourth centuries are Oxyrhynchite (the latest is PSI v 354 of 320). On the issue in general, the old study of Ulrich Wilcken, “Zur Geschichte der Beschneidung I: Die ägyptischen Beschneidungsurkunden”, APF 2 (1903), pp. 4–13, remains very useful, even though it was published at a time when only a handful of such documents were available (the most important text published since is P. Tekt. ii 293 = W. Chr. 75 – and that was in 1907).

A kollesis runs c. 2 cm from the extant upper right-hand edge. Blots and spots of ink, apparently of no consequence, are visible on the back.

P. EES 89A/138(α)²

But from their list remove BGU xv 2470, whose association with an application for circumcision, as shown on p. 53 n. 13 of their article, rests on false premises. Another text thought to relate to circumcision is SB xx 14387, but this is very dubious; see Th. Kruse, Der Königliche Schreiber und die Gauverwaltung II (APF Bhft. 11/12), München 2002, p. 730.

² The papyrus was bought by B. P. GRENELL (and A. S. HUNT?) in Egypt, perhaps in 1895/1896, and is kept at the Papyrology Rooms, Sackler Library, Oxford. It is the property of the Egypt Exploration Society, courtesy of which it is published here.
Permission to circumcise (P. EES 89A/138(a))

Translation

Year 26 of Aurelius Commodus Antoninus Caesar the lord, Thoth 1. After Panephremmis, son of Stotoetis, brought forward his son Stotoetis, mother Taphiom, from the division of Herakleides of the Arsinoite nome, and requested permission to circumcise his son on the grounds that he had deposited the proofs of his lineage ... with the strategos of the nome, and after he submitted the letter written about him (= his son), dated to the 25th year, Iulianus enquired of the hierogrammateis whether the child had (any) marks. When they said that he was without marks, Saluius Iulianus, the archiereus and superintendent of the temples, put his subscription to the letter and ordered that the boy be circumcised according to the custom.

Commentary

2. Θωθ α. BGU I 82, which closely resembles our text, is dated to Thoth 21 of the same year.

2-3. Παν[εφρόμμεως Στοτο]ή[τ]ως. The restoration of the name of the father relies on the assumption that the boy to be circumcised recurs in SPP II 3.3.3; see below, 3-4 n. But this is not the only possibility; e.g. Παν[εφρόμ[μεως] would also do (note that the trace before the break would not allow κ, and that not much can be made of the length of the lacuna, since line-length is variable).

If this person is the father of the priest in SPP II 3.3, his mother was Taue-tis, and he was grandson of Satabus; this may be inferred from SPP II 3.3.10, which refers to a brother of Panephremmis, [Στοτο]ή[τ]ως Στοτόη[τε]ως τῶς Σαταβοῦτο[ς] μητρ[ο]ς Ταυ[ε]τής. This Panephremmis son of Stotoetis is not to be identified with Πανεφρόμμεως Στοτοη[τε]ως ἀνήρ αὖ Σαταβούτος πρεβ[ε]βοτ[η]ν | τ[ο|ς] Πανεφρόμ[μεως] μητρ[ο]ς Θαυ[ε]τ[η]ς τῆς Πανεφρόμμεως in BGU II 406.ii.16–17 (ΠΙ), who recurs with his son
Panephremmis in W. Chr. 76.5–6 (171) Πανεφρέμμ|ίς ἔοικ]|εῖ’ | Κ vaccinations | ςτοτήτιος ἀνθ’ ον Σατα[βαύτης δι’ [βιτήρ]ον|υ [ε]π’ [ιε]ρω|οις, and (as priests of the second φιλο[ς] in SPP XXII 96.52–54 (II) Πανεφρέμμ|ίς φιλοτήτιος [ἀνθ’ ον ζ] | Σαταβιβούτης μη[τρός] Θεοτήτιος | Πανεφρέμμ|ίς μη[τρός] Ταφιώ|μοι διο; cf. also P. Vindob. Tandum 25a.2 (II) and SPP XXII 51.6–7. It is probably a coincidence that Panephremmis’ mother is also called Taphiom(is).

3.4. τ[ο]τιν ἐγ μητρός Ταφιώμ. If the name of the father is Panephremmis, it is tempting to identify the son with Αὐρήλιος φιλοτήτις Πανεφρέμμ|ίς ἔοικ in SPP II 3.3.3 of 217, where he is said to be in his thirty-third year of age (= thirty-two years old), and is described as a priest of the third φιλο[ς]; other possible occurrences in P. Amb. II 119.9 (200), CPR XV 46.3 (214/215), and SPP XXII 81.4 (III). He would have been born in 183/184, and in our text he would have been one year old (or, “in his second year”); cf. BGU XIII 2216.23, where a boy candidate for circumcision is said to be ἐτῶν β.

3. αὐτοῦ. There does not seem to be enough space to restore [·]αυτοῦ on the model of other documents of this kind from Soknopaiou Nesos (BGU I 82.3, 347.ü.4, XIII 2216.2, W. Chr. 77.i.12).

4. μητρός Ταφιώμ. This person is most probably not to be identified with the priestess of the same name (Taphiomis), wife of [Onno]phris, in P. Rain. Cent. 58.8 (c.156). On the name Ταφιωμ and its various spellings see my ‘Two Female Ghost-Names’, ZPE 119 (1997), p. 155.

Hoogendijk & Worp, Tyche 16 (2001), p. 57, have argued that in documents of this type “alle Mütter, die namentlich erwähnt werden, sind tatsächlich auch Priesterinnen.” But contrast BGU I 82, in which the father is stated to be a priest, but nothing is said of the status of the mother, though the latter is mentioned by name. Here too the mother of the boy is not said to be a priestess, but this need not be significant: the father is not called a priest, though he certainly was one. Given the chronological proximity of the two texts that make no reference to the priestly function of the parents, we may only be dealing with a caprice of the notary responsible for the records of proceedings. Cf. also next note.


4. Restoration mine. The edition does not indicate a break at this point, but none of the adjacent lines is complete.

5. For the inclusive reckoning in calculating a person’s age, see BL XI 1 (but see already J. M. CARTER, “Eighteen Years Old?”, BICS 14 [1967], pp. 53–55).
5-6. άξιων ἐπιτρέπειν αντίν τον νίον αντίν. This is a somewhat garbled version of the formula, which in BGU I 82.4-5 runs ἀξιων ἐπιτρέπειν αντίν τον νίον αντίν. In view of αντίν in l. 6, νιον αντίν here is not necessary, and may be an influence from l. 3. Alternatively, one may consider whether αντίν is a mistake for αντοίν.

7-8. Τα τοῦ γένους ἄποδείξεις. Such proofs consisted of documents showing that the boy’s family was of priestly origin (copies of a census return, of the registration in the public record office of the nome (ἐκατοκείμενος), and of the boy’s birth declaration), accompanied by a report from the local priests that the evidence was satisfactory. The proofs were summarised in the letter of the strategos to the archiereus (see below, 9 n.), see e.g. W. Chr. 77.i.13ff., BGU XIII 2216.12–20, or P. Rain. Cent. 58.10–22, where such ‘proofs’ are specified.

8. τοῦ τοῦ νομοῦ στρατηγοῦ. BGU I 82.6–7 has τοῦ τοῦ νομοῦ βασιλεία | διάθεν ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς στρατηγίας.

9. ἐπιστολὴ. In this letter, addressed to the archiereus, the strategos will have stated that he had received an application for permission to circumcise with accompanying documents, he will have supplied the details, and will have requested that the applicant and his son be summoned before the archiereus. Such letters concerning applications from priests from Soknopaiou Nesos are W. Chr. 77.i.7ff., SPP XXII 51.1–15, BGU XIII 2216.6–25 (all three embedded in records of proceedings), P. Rain. Cent. 58 (extract of proceedings or copy of letter; see the editor’s introd. (para. 2), and Tyche 16 (2001), p. 53), and FVindob. G 25719 (1991) (copy). Ed. Tyche 16 (2001), pp. 51–57. The heading of this document as restored runs [ἀντίγραφον ἐπιτολὴ | άρτιμιδόν τρατηγον άρατον ήρακ(λίδον) μερίδον]; but given that nothing seems to have preceded the heading, the latter is more likely to have run [ἀντίγραφον ἐπιτολὴ τούτο τοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἰκονίμ]. But there are exceptions; cf. W. Chr. 28.1).
9–10. κε[χρονιμο]νε[μον]ν είς τῷ κε[χρονιμο]ν (ἔτος). Cf. BGU I 347.i–ii, which add the day of the month; also SB vi 9027.17. Given that our text dates from the first day of Year 26, the letter of the στρατηγὸς to the ἀρχιερεύς was certainly written in the course of Year 25.

10–12. SPP XXII 51 does not report on the exchange between the archierus and the hierogrammateis at this point. But the later P.Oxy. I 3567.21–23 (252) is more elaborate: ἐπὶ τῆς μη ἂπηγορευμένης ἂλλο τι ἐπὶ τοῦ καθαρόν καὶ ἀσήμον κτλ.

11. εἰ σμείεια. σμείεια is usually qualified by τανά; cf. BGU XIII 2216.25, SB i 16.15, vi 9027.18. We find τι σμείεια in BGU i 82.8–9, σμείειαν τι in BGU i 347.ii.11–12, and σμείειων alone in BGU i 347.1 (= W.Chr. 76).14. ἐπὶ χολ. I have restored the optative on the evidence of BGU i 347.1 (= W.Chr. 76).14, ii.12, and VI 9027.18–19, but this is not guaranteed; the indicative (plural) occurs in BGU XIII 2216.25, SB i 17.16, and has been restored in BGU i 82.9 (nominative), and SB i 16.15 (plural).

12. Κάλλος Ἰουλιανός. Saluius Julianus is attested as ἀρχιερεύς only here and in BGU i 82. He succeeded Ulpius Serenianus, who was in office again in 192/193.


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