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AN ARSINOITE METROPOLITAN LANDOWNING
FAMILY OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

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It is natural enough that interest in an archive of papyrus documents should focus above all on the central figure and his family, and so it has been with the archive of Aurelius Isidoros. But that perfectly proper construction of a mass of documentation can have the effects of obscuring other elements in it. This paper is devoted to an attempt to rescue from oblivion what I will try to show was a family resident at Arsinoe, of high status, and owning land in Karanis, which it let out to local farmers including Isidoros. The transactions are described in summary form by Boak and Youtie in the introduction to *PCair.Isid.* (pp. 9-10) and in the introductions to individual texts, but they nowhere seem to have drawn them together and seen the various characters as part of a single family.

The pivotal figure is one Serenilla, born to an Antinoite father named Ptolemaios¹. Her landholdings may be calculated from her grain taxes to have been about 19 arouras, mostly of private land, i.e. land taxed at the lower rate². Our documentation for her is concentrated in the first decade of the fourth century: land survey, 300-305; grain taxes, 309; two other documents in 300. Serenilla's date of death is unknown, but she was still alive in 314³. The two documents from 300 shed some light on her management of her landholdings, which were leased out at least in part. A rent receipt to Aurelius Isidoros, one of the two texts, acknowledges payment of 11 artabas as two years' rent for land in the *horiodyktia* of Karanis⁴. The receipt may have been written in her own hand⁵.

¹ Her Antinoite status is indicated in *PCair.Isid.* 112.4.

² For computation of her landholdings from wheat and barley taxes (based on *PCair.Isid.* 9.32,55), cf. a forthcoming article of mine on 'Landholding in Late Roman Egypt: the Distribution of Wealth' in *JRS* 1992; provisionally for the method, see *Cd'E* 52 (1977), pp. 322-36. Her private land computes to about 14.7 ar., her private to about 4.3 ar. These holdings were listed in *PCair.Isid.* 6.188-190, but the amounts are lost there.

³ She appears in *PCair.Isid.* 19, written after 313/4; probably not much after, though, given the closeness of the list to *PCair.Isid.* 9, dated to 309.

⁴ *PCair.Isid.* 112; the rent was for 298/9 and 299/300.

⁵ Which is described by Boak as "a well-practised cursive with the letters written at times regularly and distinctly and at others in a crowded and hasty manner", *EtPap* 2 (1934), p. 15. But it is not clear that the end is preserved, and someone else's subscription could have stood there. Still, there are other examples of similar women writing for themselves, e.g., *PFlor.* I 27 (cf. *BL* 1.136) (Hermopolis?, 4-5c). Aurelia Charite is of rather a different class (*P.Charite*, pp. 9-10).

The other document is more problematical. It is a lease⁶, of which the beginning is lost, of a parcel of grainland which has a rent in wheat. At the end of the terms, we read, [Αύρ]ηλία Σερηνίλλα δι' έμο[υ] Ζωί[λου] υίω μεμί[σ]θωκα ως πρόκειται. This poses the problem that what precedes is in fact written from *lessee's* point of view, not the lessor's, and in the singular, which would be appropriate if Serenilla were the lessee. On the other hand, the other party is four Karanis villagers, and the verb after *their* name is damaged at just the critical place. The editors restored it μεμισθώ[καμεν] and opted for the assumption that Serenilla was the lessee (so her verb was wrong), and that the villagers were the lessors. But is this credible? All of the other documentation concerning the family shows (as is normal with metropolitans owning land in villages) that they were consistently lessors, with villagers as lessees. Why would Serenilla be a lessee of land in Karanis? Confusion in the drafting of leases is not uncommon, and it is easy to see how it could happen. *PCol.* VII 180 is evidently a lease application (although constructed ineptly with όμολογῶ rather than βούλομαι) by Heron (from Karanis) to Patermouthios (from Arsinoe). The statement from the lessee's point of view is followed immediately by the approval of the lessor: Αύρηλιος Πατερμούθις ό προκίμ[ενο]ς μεμισθωκα τῷ Αύρηλίω Ἑρῶνι τὰς προκίμ[ε]νας ἀρούρας κτλ. Then comes the statement of the scribe, from the village, who wrote for Patermouthis. Similarly, *PCol.* VII 179, from the same year as *PCair.Isid.* 101, is addressed to Thermoutharion (daughter of a soldier) by Isidoros. At the conclusion of the provision, Thermoutharion signs, μεμισθωκα κτλ., and Aur. Mikkalos records that he wrote on her behalf. Now if we compare the procedure, we expect that the statement with μεμισθωκα immediately after the provisions will be the lessor's signature, and that the body of the document will have been written by the lessor's agent (it is interesting that the lessee is not expected to bear that expense). Applying that standard to *PCair.Isid.* 101 would indicate that Serenilla was indeed the lessor, with Zoilos her son writing the body of the text (indeed, everything except the signature of the four villagers is written by Zoilos)⁷.

Zoilos was certainly an adult when he represented her in 300, since he was active already as an assistant to the prytanis and exegetes in 296, when he leased 10 arouras near Karanis to Isidoros⁸. That lease relationship

⁶ *PCair.Isid.* 101.

⁷ If this is correct, we must restore μεμισθώ[μεθα] in *PCair.Isid.* 101.15-16.

⁸ *PCair.Isid.* 99.

continued at least until 312, although Isidoros' lease seems to have diminished to 4.5 ar. in the latter part of the period⁹. Throughout this period Zoilos continues as an assistant to the prytanis. A business letter between the two shows that Isidoros maintained a certain amount of wheat belonging to Zoilos, on which the latter could draw as needed¹⁰.

Zoilos's father's name was Apollonios¹¹. Can he be further identified? The name is of course commonplace, but there is in fact one plausible candidate, the veteran Apollonios who also appears in the Karanis tax list as a metropolitan, owning about 28.4 arouras of his own there¹². The argument for identity of the veteran with Serenilla's husband is based on the fact that Serenilla does not appear in the chaff collection account *PCair.Isid.* 10, while Apollonios in that text makes total payments of chaff to the equivalent of 1200 lbs., or enough to cover 48 ar., greatly in excess of his own holdings of 28.4 ar. (as computed from his wheat and barley taxes)¹³, but virtually exactly enough to cover the taxes on his land *plus* that of Serenilla (28.41 + 19.03 = 47.44). It will readily be admitted that this evidence falls short of proof, but the coincidence is remarkable¹⁴.

Serenilla and Apollonios had another child as well, Zoilos' sister Ptolema. She also leased land to Isidoros, as we learn from receipts for rent paid for 313/4 and 314/5¹⁵. Since the amount of rent (and probably of land) is identical to that involved in Zoilos' transactions with Isidoros in the immediately preceding years, the land might well be the same, inherited by Ptolema from Zoilos. Just as possibly, however, they might have shared equally a parcel belonging to one of their parents. Family members who operated their holdings jointly often paid taxes as a group, and precise ownership within the family may not always be clearly visible

⁹ *PCair.Isid.* 117, 118, 120, 121 (309-312), all for 9 ar., probably the rent on 4.5 ar., see *PCair.Isid.* 117 introd.

¹⁰ *PCair.Isid.* 135 (undated).

¹¹ *PCair.Isid.* 99.

¹² Apollonios appears in *PCair.Isid.* 6.234, but the amounts held are lost. His taxes appear in *PCair.Isid.* 9.35,48. For computation of his landholdings from wheat and barley taxes, cf. the forthcoming article mentioned in n. 2.

¹³ *PCair.Isid.* 10.35, 49, 148, 187, 213 add up to 7 sarganai plus 800 dr., equivalent to another sargane. The total of 8 sarganai makes 1200 lbs., and at a tax rate of 25 lbs./ar., the property paid for is 48 ar.

¹⁴ The two also appear together in the tax list *PCair.Isid.* 19, but that tells us nothing more than *P.Cair.Isid.* 9 does.

¹⁵ *PCair.Isid.* 122 (314 and 315). The form of the name there is Πτολεμας, which led Boak and Youtie (p. 9) to be uncertain of her identity with Ptolema. I take the form here to be an erroneous genitive for nominative.

from such payments of taxes or rent¹⁶. Ptolema also appears in earlier receipts of 304 and 306, both times collecting 4.5 art. from Isidoros—just half the amount of the later receipts. In both of these, her husband Ioannes, an ex-gymnasiarch, acts on her behalf¹⁷, while in the receipts from a decade later her son Serenos writes for her. He is the last documented member of the family.

No one will claim that these documents, which were collected and kept by Isidoros, tell us much about this family's life. But they do show clearly how relationships between metropolitan landowners and village farmers might be maintained over a period of some two decades (and perhaps more), with particular plots remaining in the hands of a given tenant for a long time, thus affording the stability so dear to urban landlords. It is particularly interesting to see such a relationship involving one of the largest village landowners—not an abject peasant eking out a meager living on the rented plot, but an entrepreneur of some magnitude, who both farmed a goodly estate of his own and took on substantial leaseholds, obviously far beyond what he could himself work. That Zoilos would keep a credit balance with Isidoros is particularly telling for the durable character of the connection and may well, for all we know, point to some larger role for Isidoros than just that of lessee. If he served as a local manager for these urban landowners, his possession of those documents not directly related to his own relationship with them would be more understandable. Further than this it is difficult to go without more evidence.

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¹⁶ See my 1977 article (cited above, n. 2) for the way this worked in Isidoros' family.

¹⁷ *PCair.Isid.* 114 and 115. Note that Ptolema is said to be illiterate in *PCair.Isid.* 122; but her husband apparently writes for himself in 114 and 115, as a man capable of the gymnasiarchy would be expected to be able to do.

Appendix

List of Documents Concerning the Family of Serenilla

<i>Date</i>	<i>P. Cair.Isid</i>	<i>Document type</i>	<i>Person involved</i>	<i>Footnote above</i>
296	99	Lease	Zoilos	8
300	112	Rent receipt	Serenilla	4
300	101	Lease	Serenilla	6-7
304	114	Rent receipt	Ptolema	17
300-305	6	Register	Serenilla	2
300-305	6	Register	Apollonios	12
306	115	Rent receipt	Ptolema	17
309	9	Tax list	Serenilla	2
309	9	Tax list	Apollonios	12
309	117	Rent receipt	Zoilos	9
310	118	Rent receipt	Zoilos	9
311	120	Rent receipt	Zoilos	9
311	10	Tax list	Apollonios	13
312	121	Rent receipt	Zoilos	9
after 313/4	19	List	Serenilla	3,14
after 313/4	19	List	Apollonios	14
314,315	122	Rent receipt	Ptolema	15
undated	135	Letter	Zoilos	10