

Charite's Christianity

In editing the dossier of Aurelia Charite, Klaas Worp commented that there were no documents in the archive that provide any information about Charite's religion.¹ Citing A. Moscadi's article in *Aegyptus* 50 (1970) at 95-96, he noted that Christians and pagans lived side-by-side in Hermopolis in the early fourth century. Worp's agnosticism was challenged by Johannes Kramer in an article on the meaning of *κοιμητήριον*, a term which occurs in *P. Charite* 40, evidently a letter addressed to Charite by a female correspondent who says *εὔρον αὐτῇ ἐν τῷ κ[ο]ιμητηρίῳ αὐτὰ εἴδολα* (read *εἴδολα*), if that represents the correct phrasing.² Kramer showed convincingly that *κοιμητήριον* occurred only in Christian contexts—is indeed a term of Christian theology, in a sense—and thus must reflect a Christian milieu in which the writer and recipient of this letter operated.³

There remains a lingering doubt, however, already expressed by Worp, that the Charite of *P. Charite* 40 is the woman whose papers Worp collected, for the letter provides no information other than the name itself to link it to the archive. One would therefore like other evidence for Aurelia Charite's own religious affiliation or circumstances. I believe that a strong argument can be offered that the name of her husband, Adelphios, is distinctively Christian. Beginning with the papyri, we find that the name is not common. I find only the following examples other than Charite's husband and his homonymous father:⁴

¹*P. Charite*, p. 9. I am indebted to Jean Gascou for a photograph of *P. Stras.* 770 (inv. gr. 1310), on the basis of which its reading is discussed below, note 4, and to Alan Cameron for discussion of a couple of points.

²Worp did not accent *αὐτῇ*, uncertain whether it was correct or an error for *αὐτά*, cf. note ad loc. On *κοιμητήριον* itself he commented only "addendum lexicis papyrologicis," true at that time (*P. Neph.* 12.20 and 36.2 have since been added) but hardly exhausting the interest of the word.

³J. Kramer, "Was bedeutet koimeterion in den Papyri?," *ZPE* 80 (1990) 269-72. Curiously, he said almost nothing about the epigraphical evidence for this point. Cf. D. Feissel in *Bull. épigr.* 1993, 771, p. 586, reporting and supporting P. Herrmann's rejection (citing J. and L. Robert, *Bull. épigr.* 1980, 513) of G. Laminger-Pascher's attempt to argue that the word is not exclusively Christian in Asia Minor. As Feissel notes, there are no pagan examples, and none before the middle of the third century.

⁴I also omit instances the inclusion of which among this dossier is uncertain (cf. Worp's discussion in *CPR* XVIIA, pp. 8-9). To be rejected outright are the following supposed examples:

P. Bad. IV 84.40: *αδελ()* resolved 'Αδελ(φίου), without basis.

P. Bad. IV 93.46: *αδελ[]* restored as 'Αδελ[φίου], without basis.

P. Vindob. Bosw. 17: *αδελ[]* restored as 'Αδελ[φίου], without basis (corrected by Sijpesteijn, cf. *BL* 7.95).

P. Ross. Georg. V 53 ii.12: *αδελ()*, resolved by the editor in the apparatus as *αδελ(φός)*, is resolved in the index (p. 227; whence Foraboschi, *Onomasticon*) as

P.Corn. 34 verso: Provenance unknown, on reverse of a III (handwriting) account, date unknown: name in a list, purpose unknown

P.Stras. VII 798: Hermopolis, ca 300 (vaguely based on onomastics and offices mentioned). Adelphios alias Dioskourides mentioned in list of names

P.Giss.Univ. III 30: Provenance unknown, IV (III/IV ed. on basis of handwriting but must be IV from large amounts of currency mentioned.⁵) Uncertain reading, mentioned in letter.

P.Herm.Landl. G302/F515: Hermopolis, ca 350 (on basis of prosopography). Adelphios, primipilarius, landowner (116 ar.).

BGU XIII 2332: Arsinoe, 374. Fl. Adelphios, speculator of the office of the praeses of Augustamnica, creditor.

SB VI 9455: Herakleopolis, V/VI (ed., on basis of handwriting). Fl. Adelphios, option, acknowledges receipt of wheat for contubernalli.

P.Lond. V 1907: Hermopolis, VII (ed., apparently on basis of handwriting). Account, with mention of δ(ιὰ) τ(ῶν) γεωργ(ῶν) Ἀδελφίου.

There are no examples securely dated before the fourth century, and indeed none that on the evidence is clearly to be put before the middle of that century. That pattern is at least suggestive of a name coming newly into the onomastic repertory in the mid to late third century. Brotherly (and sisterly) love is of course not a new idea with Christianity, but adjectives and nouns expressing abstract virtues are popular among Christians in late antiquity, and the evidence above is at least consistent with a hypothesis

Ἀδελ(φίου), without basis.

P.Ross.Georg. V 65.12: ἀδελφ() resolved as Ἀδελφ(ίου), without basis.

P.Stras. VII 770 verso 11: The editors read Περῶις Ἀδελφί(ου). The supposed patronymic ends with a phi followed closely by a vertical stroke starting somewhat above line level and descending to about the middle of the round part of the phi. The editors took this to be an iota, hence their resolution. This is not impossible, but when Πανσῖ(ρις) is abbreviated in verso 4, the raised iota is followed by a long horizontal stroke (unless this means ὁμοίως?), and the stroke in question in line 11 is slightly bowed and thickened at its ends. I think, therefore, that it could be taken to be an abbreviation stroke.

In all cases, then, one could resolve or restore ἀδελφός or ἀδελφοῦ without difficulty. A couple of other cases need to be mentioned:

SB III 7244.14: Every letter dotted! Reading too uncertain to consider.

P.Ant. I 44 (4th-5th cent.), a difficult case in which lines 9-10 were read by the editor τῶ ἀδελφῶ [...]. | ἀδελφίω, translated "my young brother" on the basis of the notion that ἀδελφίω was a correction of ἀδελφῶ. In the reedition by Naldini, *Il cristianesimo in Egitto* no. 92, we find τῶ ἀδελφῶ φιλ | ἀδελφίω. The text has no other word divisions, and this one shows incorrect syllabication. It seems to me at least possible that Naldini's reading is wrong, and that the name Ἀδελφίω is to be read in line 10.

⁵See the reedition in Naldini, *Cristianesimo* no. 22. He sees the handwriting as third-century in character, but acknowledges the monetary reasons for a fourth-century date.

that Adelphios is a Christian name. But is there any positive evidence for this view?

If we turn to the literary sources, there is indeed. A search of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* turns up citations to the following authors in the numbers indicated:

Athanasius: 5
Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum: 20
 Epiphanius: 1
 Georgius Monachus, chronographer: 5
 Gregory of Nazianzus: 1
 Gregory of Nyssa: 1
 John of Damascus: 1
 Libanius: 1
 Palladius: 1
 Photius: 3
 Porphyry of Tyre: 1
 Socrates: 1
 Theodoretus: 1

This list certainly is striking; all except Porphyry and Libanius are Christian writers. In Porphyry, the reference (*Vita Plotini* 16) is to a Christian Gnostic teacher (*PLRE* I 13 s.v. Adelphius 1). In Libanius, Adelphios is the addressee of a letter, a high-ranking official who may be identical to a man known to have been a Christian.⁶ The other people referred to include no one not probably or certainly a Christian; there are several bishops of the name in the conciliar acts. We thus find no instances before the third quarter of the third century, and no clearly non-Christian persons. A search of the classical Latin literature on the PHI disk shows no instances of the name.

Epigraphy is also revealing, mainly in its silence. The PHI classical epigraphy files are silent. No instances are to be found in the index to the *Bulletin épigraphique* for 1938-1977, and none in the indexes to the *SEG* for 1976-1990. The name is lacking in the first volume of the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, from the index of names to the *Prosopographia Ptolemaica*, and from all volumes of non-Christian inscriptions that I have consulted. In Pape-Benseler the only instance is the same Gnostic mentioned above. Solin's volumes on Greek names at Rome include only the Gnostic, a Christian gravestone, and Valerius Faltonius Adelphius v.c. et inl. cos. 451 (*PLRE* II 8 s.v. Adelphius 3). The name is lacking in *PIR* but well represented in *PLRE*, where all holders are either demonstrably or pos-

⁶Libanius' correspondent is *PLRE* I s.v. Adelphius 3, perhaps = Adelphius 2.

sibly Christian.⁷ The name appears in a Christian epitaph from Edessa of the third century as the name of one of the children of the deceased woman.⁸

In short, the evidence yields no examples before the middle of the third century, and no persons who are clearly pagan, alongside some demonstrably Christian. It seems to me therefore reasonable at least to adopt the working hypothesis that Adelphios was a name put into currency by Christians in the middle of the third century, which enjoyed some popularity in the fourth and fifth centuries before becoming uncommon, and which was largely used by the wealthier classes, as the papyri suggest.

Charite's husband Adelphios began his public career, as far as we can tell, somewhere in the first decade of the fourth century. He was strategos in 314, later gymnasiarch and perhaps logistes. He is not attested after 322, and Charite outlived him by at least a quarter-century. Although he is likely to have been somewhat older than she, we would probably be near the mark in supposing that he was born somewhere around 280-285. This would push his own father's birth back at least to about 260, and probably somewhat earlier. This chronology is consonant with what we see elsewhere of the introduction of the name and suggests that this wealthy family of Hermopolis was already Christian before the Decian persecution. They did not, by any means, limit themselves to Christian names, even in the fourth century, but to those sensitive to nomenclature the use of Adelphios must have been a sufficiently clear signal.

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⁷There are no examples in Pauly-Wissowa other than those in *PLRE*. The one figure in *PLRE* about whom some doubts have been raised is Clodius Celsinus *signo* Adelphius (*PLRE* I 192), but these doubts are based solely on very dubious interpretation of the conclusion of the Vergilian Cento of his wife Faltonia Betitia Proba, who was a Christian.

⁸Feissel, *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macedoine* 28-29 no. 6.