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Published by: Egypt Exploration Society
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3853846
Accessed: 03-01-2016 16:28 UTC

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A WOMEN’S CLUB IN ANCIENT ALEXANDRIA

BY C. C. EDGAR, M.A.

The inscription reproduced below is on a statuette-base in the Museum of Alexandria. It has been already published by two good epigraphists, by Seymour de Ricci in the Archiv für Papyrosforschung, vol. II, p. 561, no. 98, and by Breccia in his catalogue Iscrizioni greche e latine, no. 170. Both editors read γυναικη in l. 1 as an abnormal nominative, while in l. 3 de Ricci proposes to read ἀρχιέρεα as an accusative (= ἀρχιέρεα). But Breccia, to whom I am indebted for a squeeze of the inscription, agrees now that the following interpretation is altogether more probable.

One of the commonest errors in Greek papyri and inscriptions is the writing of η for ει. If instead of γυναικη α[ and ἀρχιέρεα we read γυναικεία (dative) and ἀρχιέρεια (nominative), the general sense becomes clear and the text may be partly restored as follows:

[ ]γυνακη  γυναίκη
[συνόδος ανέθηκα] ἐκ κοινων χρη-
[μάτων] ἀρχιέρεα
[kai] προσπάτης καὶ Τετίρις
[ L·Κ]άισαρος Παχων α'.
The inscription then is a dedication of a statuette to a certain σύνοδος of women by certain of the office-bearers. The first of these was chief-priestess and had a name ending in –ἀρνη, such as Thermoutharin or Apollonarin. A second, whose name is lost, was president; unless indeed (but this is not so probable) the ἀρχιέρεια was also προστάτης or ἀρχιπροστάτης. Another of the dedicators bore the Egyptian name of Tetiris (Τετά-Ηρ), but her title is not preserved: the only objection to restoring συναγωγής (convener) is that in similar dedications the title of συναγωγής always precedes that of προστάτης. As for the name of the synod itself we know of an Ἀπολλωνιακή σύνοδος, presumably of men (Breccia, op. cit., no. 132); but one cannot venture on the strength of that to restore [Ἁπόλλωνιακή] in l. 1. As the statuette was probably a representation of the deity whom the synod worshipped, a god’s name in the accusative may have stood at the beginning of l. 1: that, however, is uncertain.

The inscription belongs to the reign of Augustus. Many similar dedications are extant, mostly dating from early Roman times. As a rule the statuette is offered to the synod by one of its office-bearers, on the conclusion of his term of office or on some other occasion. It might be a portrait of a benefactor or a distinguished member of the synod (e.g. Breccia, op. cit., nos. 45, 144); but more often it was a representation of the patron-god of the association. What gives a special interest to the present inscription is that it introduces us to an organized synod of women, whereas in all the other inscriptions of this class only men’s names are mentioned.