

AGRW 221 – Story Concerning a Temple for the Egyptian God Sarapis (ca. 200 BCE) || Delos - Southwestern islands

Delos (Southwestern islands, Aegean Islands)

AGRW 221 = IG XI,4 1299 = RICIS 202/0101 (ca. 200 BCE)

Free-standing column found in the courtyard of the building identified as “Sarapieion A,” now in the Archaeological Museum at Delos (inv. no. E 767). Other inscriptions from Delos refer to a group that met in this small temple as “the ones who serve” (*hoi therapeuontes*) the god (IG XI,4 1217 and 1290), a variant on the “therapeutists” attested elsewhere in AGRW. There were at least two other structures dedicated to Sarapis on Delos: Sarapieion B, where several associations met; and, Sarapieion C, the largest one. Only the first, prose part of this inscription (lines 1-28) is translated here; lines 29-94 present a poetic retelling of the same events in hexameter verse.

The priest Apollonios [II] inscribed this according to the command of the god. For our grandfather, Apollonios, an Egyptian from the priestly class, having brought his god with him from Egypt, continued serving (*therapeuōn*) his god according to ancestral custom and, it seems, lived for ninety-seven years. My father, Demetrios, followed him in serving the gods and, because of his piety, he was honoured by (10) the god with a bronze image which was set up in the temple (*naos*) of the god. He lived for sixty-one years.

After receiving the sacred things and performing the services (*therapeiai*) in a diligent manner, the god instructed me through a dream that I should dedicate his own temple of Sarapis (*Sarapieion*), and that he was not to be in rented rooms anymore. Furthermore, he would find the place where the temple should be located, indicating this by a sign. And this is what happened. For there was this place full of manure which was advertised for sale (20) on a small notice on a passage to the market-place. Now since the god willed it, a contract of purchase was completed and the temple was quickly built in six months.

Now certain people conspired against us and the god, and sought a judgment against the temple and myself in a public trial, seeking either punishment or a fine. But the god promised me in a dream that

we would win the case. Now that the proceedings have ended and we have won as is worthy of the god, we praise the gods by demonstrating appropriate gratitude. (Translation by Harland.)

The remainder of the inscription (lines 29-94) is a poetic re-telling and expansion of the incidents above in the form of a hymn. In its description of the temple, the hymn mentions “seats and dining couches” which were installed “for the feast to which the god invites us.”

The hymn also expands on a description of the victory at the trial (lines 77-94) which, the hymn claims, was a result of Sarapis himself paralyzing the opponents as if they were statues that could not utter the charges (translation of lines 77-94 adapted from Nock 1933, 52):

“Cast care from your mind. No human vote will destroy you, for this action affects me myself (i.e. Sarapis) and no (80) man will say that it prevailed against me: so don’t be downcast any longer.” And when the time for the trial came, the whole city along with all the multitudes of strangers from many lands came quickly to the temples to hear divine justice. Then you and your spouse performed that awesome wonder. You paralysed the wicked men who were bringing the action, making their tongues speechless within their mouths, so that no one praised their ability or the evidence which they had to give in support of their case. In truth by divine operation they stood like god-struck images (90) or stones. And all the people in that day marvelled at your power, and you brought great glory to your servant in heaven-established Delos. Welcome, blessed one, you and your consort who are the gods of our temple! Welcome much hymned Sarapis!