

In Roman Egypt, the virilocal joint family household was the ideal form of residence.<sup>1</sup> Under this system, it was customary that upon marriage sons remained in their father’s household while daughters left their paternal home upon marriage and belonged to their husbands’ families. Sons and their wives were thus the main care provider for elderly parents, while daughters were responsible for the practical care of their parents-in-law. Under the ancient demographic regime, however, about 30 percent of all men over the age of 50 did not have a living son.<sup>2</sup> What happened thus to this considerable proportion of elderly couple with only daughters – who took care of them in their old age?

We know that if a father in Classical Athens had only female offspring, adopting a son and marrying him to one of his daughters was a strategy to guarantee the continuity of the family lineage and ensure support for his old age. In other words, adoption of the son-in-law can be seen as the negotiation of an uxori-local marriage in order to ensure a man in the house so as to pass the inheritance and family lineage through the natural daughter to the next generation. For later times we can observe the same strategy - the formal adoption of the in-marrying son-in-law and the assimilation of his legal and social status to that of a natural son - employed in many other regions of the Hellenistic world; and the possibilities of marrying the adopted child to a natural one are discussed in the Roman law codes from imperial and later Roman times and the Syrian *Didascalia*. Moreover, as we have seen above, bringing in a son-in-law in the absence of a natural son (with or without formal adoption) was a family strategy commonly practiced in many other pre-modern societies in which the virilocal joint family system was the dominant cultural ideal of residence.

The rare cases from Egypt for uxori-local marriages and moreover adoptions in general should not be taken, explicitly or implicitly, as evidence that adoption *cum* marriage was not practiced there, especially as several otherwise inexplicable demographic factors point to these phenomena. In fact, in this paper I suggest that our evidence from Roman Egypt for “brother-sister marriage” does not provide us with “a unique case in world ethnography”,<sup>3</sup> as previously suggested, but as the marriage of an adopted son to a natural daughter, a succession and inheritance strategy widespread in the Hellenistic world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. R.S. Bagnall, B.W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt, 2nd edition with addenda*, Cambridge 2006, 61.

<sup>2</sup> See R.P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*, Cambridge 1994.

<sup>3</sup> K. Hopkins, „Brother-Sister Marriage in Roman Egypt,“ *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980), 303-354, at: 304.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Sabine R. Huebner, “Brother-Sister Marriage in Roman Egypt – A Curiosity of Humankind or a Widespread Family Strategy?,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 97 (2007), 21-49.